

# Maryland Travels Back in Time 466 Years

---

Hayley Gable

September 2009



For a period of nine weeks every autumn, Anne Arundel County travels back in time to an enchanting era where jousting, sword fighting, Shakespeare and King Henry VIII are all the rage. Home to the country's second largest Renaissance Festival, the 25-acre site in Crownsville, Maryland transforms into an English Tudor Village where high-spirited theatrical performances, bustling pubs, magical craft shops, live jousting events and the colorful costumes of lords, ladies, princesses and pirates are all brought back to life.

The festival, which is now in its' 33<sup>rd</sup> annual year, guarantees variety each season by changing up the show's overall story line. This season's fair goes back in time to 1543; a year where the plague was at its' deadliest height and King Henry's dramatic personal life was the talk of the town. Carolyn

Spedden, Artistic Director of the fair, explains that there is no need to ever make anything up - as the reality of it all, she says, "is truly stranger than fiction."

Preparation for the fair is a year-round project and requires seven full-time staff members, over 550 seasonal employees and several independent craft artisans. "November and December are our quietest months, as we are wrapping up the season and closing down the show. But by late December and early January we are already planning the next season," Spedden said. While the majority of the fair's staff remains to be Maryland locals, many of the crafters and independent entertainers come from all over the country.

The fair's variety of entertainment has grown to several productions this year, including a Shakespeare play, several childrens' shows, a sword-fighting duo and a juggler. "Many people visit us year after year and develop a fondness for certain acts and performers. They most definitely want to see their favorites, yet also want something new. It is a difficult balancing act," explained Spedden. "Every season we compliment our entertainment with some new music and variety shows. A few new faces this year are The Duelists, a sword-fighting duo, Le Jongleur Guy, a juggler, and the musical trio Coeur de Lion. We also have many acts who visit for one to three weekends, so there is always a fresh feel to the show," she said. Two entertainment groups that are back by popular demand from last year are Mutts Gone Nuts and a Scottish group known as Albannach.

Additionally, the fair has become a popular venue for weddings, which are held on the chapel steps. "We have one scheduled virtually every weekend day for this year," Spedden remarked. "They are really popular for people who enjoy the venue or just are looking for a different location, especially those who want a smaller wedding."

Just like the entertainment, the food and beverage selection of each festival is a hugely significant factor. While the event's signature food item remains to be its' ever popular smoked turkey legs, other favored fare includes steak-on-a-steak, fish and chips,

macaroni & cheese on a stick and soup in a bread bowl. Two new food selections for 2009 are Funnel Cake Fries and Crab Pretzels.

On average, the festival draws a whopping 280,000 guests per season. However, even after this past year's tough economic times, the fair is expected to draw just as much of a crowd. "The real beauty of this event is that there is something for every member of the family," Spedden said. "In an age of high-tech and passive entertainment, the Festival offers an experience for all of your senses. You can slow down, relax and take your mind off of your twenty-first century concerns. Everyone could use a trip back to such a carefree time!"

The Maryland Renaissance Festival runs Saturdays and Sundays through October 25<sup>th</sup> and is located on Crownsville Road in Crownsville.

---

© 2010 HAYLEY GABLE. No part of this material may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without written permission from the author.