

## Volunteers year 'round

By Maude Salinger  
Interpretive Specialist  
Lowell National Historical Park, Mass.

They are as young as 3½ and as old as 83. They teach sign language, hand sew historical costumes, catalogue slides, conduct puppet workshops, transcribe oral history tapes, translate brochures into foreign languages, and have advised the park on matters ranging from hydraulics to trolleys. Since January of 1980 these individuals are among the 257 volunteers who have donated a total of 12,808 hours to Lowell National Historical Park, Mass. At minimum wage alone that's worth \$42,906.80.

Lowell National Historical Park's volunteer program was begun as an "experiment" in November of 1979. Its goals were two-fold: to involve local residents in NPS activities; and through their involvement and awareness of the park's mission, to aid the park in preserving and protecting its historical resources. Park Ranger Margie Hicks was appointed to a newly created permanent part-time position as Volunteer Coordinator. At that time, she supervised two local high school students who helped compile statistics and worked on the Park's Visitor Observational Analysis. Since then, the program has blossomed into a successful year-round effort, presently utilizing the talents of 104 individuals who volunteer for one of several different groups: historic drama, historic costuming, photography and graphics, youth advisors, high school interns, and junior rangers.

"It is important to treat volunteers as individuals, not as part of an amorphous group," says Volunteer Coordinator Margie Hicks. "Each volunteer has his or her own reason for volunteering—meeting new people, learning new skills, recognition, helping out the park. The challenge comes in recognizing the reason and trying to meet that expectation, just as should be done with paid employees."

The historic drama group who are mostly of high school age, perform skits and short vignettes based on significant events in Lowell's history. The skits are usually performed outdoors and this year will be part of ranger guided special interest tours.

The costuming group is comprised of about 15 (mostly retired) women



*Historic drama volunteer Karen Leonard, wearing an 1840s mill girl costume designed and sewn by volunteer Anne Welcome.*

who volunteer their time to sew historic costumes for special events, school programs, and the historic drama group. After examining original garments they draft their own patterns or use old tailor's patterns to make reproductions. So far, the group has sewn "two wardrobes full" of clothes including aprons, capes, undergarments, bonnets, shirts, pants and vests.

There is also a contingent of avid camera buffs who take slides and photographs to document park activities and building restoration. Professional graphics volunteers have designed posters for special events.

Perhaps the most unique (and largest) group of volunteers are the junior rangers. This group of 50 Lowell area youngsters, (61 are on a waiting list) ages 11-15, meet every Saturday to assist in a variety of park activities. They are supervised by a part-time Park Ranger George (Sandy)

Shepherd. When joining the program the junior rangers go through an orientation program to learn about the National Park Service and the history of Lowell, and they take a junior ranger pledge which is based on the 1916 Organic Act. Their "uniform" consists of green tee-shirts printed with the Lowell National Historical Park logo and green army caps with the volunteer patch sewn on the front. Once they have joined, the kids can remain in the program until they reach the age of 16.

The junior rangers staff information booths and tables throughout the summer at park sponsored ethnic festivals, lead tours for children, and conduct paper bag puppet workshops for pre-schoolers. They also produce a monthly "Kids Bulletin" which is sent to children in the local area and to other parks. Currently they are working on contacting every national park to find out what kinds of kids programs they offer. (Eighty-one parks have been contacted so far.) If you have a special kids program, please write Jr. Ranger Kevin Garneau, % Lowell National Historical Park, 171 Merrimack Street, Lowell, MA 01852.

"Working with park volunteers is both challenging and rewarding," says Volunteer Coordinator Margie Hicks. "Volunteers have taught me new skills, told me fascinating stories about Lowell's past and brought new perspectives to old ways of doing things. However, the enthusiasm and excitement Lowell's volunteers share about this new park and their city is the best gift. Lowell National Historical Park includes as a valuable resource not only its mills, canals, and history, but also its people—especially these dedicated and skilled volunteers."

Photo by James Higgins.



*Lowell NHP Junior Rangers Rich and Craig Savoie. Together they have volunteered a total of 405 hours.*