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Sound Waves

May 2004

Colonial Period Comes to Life (and Print!) with the Help of USGS Scientist Terry Bruns

By [Helen Gibbons](#)
May 2004

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Colonial Period Comes to Life

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It's a scene frozen in time, a snapshot of life in a colonial town about 230 years ago—sort of. Costumed fifth-graders stand like statues—well, almost like statues; there's some shifting and the clatter of a dropped spoon—as a group of first-graders files in to see the display. Once the younger children are seated in the middle of the reconstructed village, they're greeted by fifth-grade "colonists" who say, "Welcome to Landelsburg! 'Tis the year seventeen and seventy-five." That's the cue for the scene to come to life: cobblers begin tapping on shoes in the Boot and Shoemaker Shop, workers at the Bakery urge passersby to sample their baked goods, well-to-do young ladies do needlework in the parlor of the Governor's mansion, and a group of young assistants in the Printing Office resume printing copies of the *Landelsburg Gazette*.



Terry Bruns (right) enjoys a tankard of apple juice while his student assistants print the *Landelsburg Gazette*.



Presiding over the Printing Office—authentically attired in waistcoat, breeches, tricorner hat, and buckled shoes—is **Terry Bruns**, Associate Chief Scientist of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)'s Western Coastal and Marine Geology Team in Menlo Park, CA. A hobby letterpress printer, **Terry** has been assisting in the Landelsburg reenactment since it was first held at Landels Elementary School in Mountain View, CA, in 1993. The printing press he brings to the school each year is a Kelsey Platen press; it's not quite right for Colonial times, but it has the advantage of being portable. "It's actually a type of press that would have been in use during the Gold Rush era," says **Terry**. "A printing press like those used in the colonies in 1775 would be far too heavy to move around to different schools."

The day before each year's Landelsburg reenactment, **Terry** meets with his crew, a group of three or four students assigned to their roles by their teachers, to show them how the press works and how to set type for the *Landelsburg Gazette*. A single-page leaflet, the *Landelsburg Gazette* contains news and announcements typical of the year before the American Revolution. The kids reset some of the type each year, matching the date to that of the reenactment day and tailoring several items to feature their teachers and principal. The student assistants enjoy deciding which teacher's horse will be stolen that year (invariably, it's the principal who's tried for the crime), which teacher's flour mill will be advertised, and which teacher's tavern will host the meeting of the Association of the Sons of Liberty. They also enjoy working the press, and during a typical Landelsburg day, they will print and hand out 800 to 900 copies of the *Landelsburg Gazette*.

Each fifth-grader in the re-created colonial village, modeled after Williamsburg, VA, assumes the role of a citizen of the time and is fully knowledgeable about his or her character's position and responsibilities in the community. The activity is the culmination of several weeks of research. One former student, recalling the day, said, "That was the most fun I ever had in school!" It must be fun for **Terry**, too, who has attended every Landelsburg reenactment to date and also helps out with similar colonial reenactments at four other local schools every year.