

Public Abstract

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VOLUNTEER EDUCATORS AND THE CREATION OF PLACE-NARRATIVE IN A CIVIL WAR
HOUSEHOLD

Tour guides at historic sites are increasingly recognized by heritage and place studies as important agents of place creation and re-creation. Guides at Civil War sites repeatedly perform official and vernacular historical narratives for school groups, military staff-rides, and general visitors. The interpretive division at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield in Southwest Missouri relies on a reciprocal relationship with dozens of volunteer educators who make it possible to keep the Ray House, a homestead site used as a field hospital during the Battle of Wilson's Creek, open for visitor tours. Using the analysis of surveys, in-depth interviews, and tour observations, this study was designed to show that volunteers act as important conduits for reinforcing certain cultural heritage identities and promulgating certain national values and popular myths. As the only National Battlefield in a state wrought with violence during the mid-19th century, Wilson's Creek represents history far beyond the events that took place on the 2000 acres of soil within its bounds. These volunteer guides are active in the formation and reimagining of a narrative economy of the Civil War in Southwest Missouri through their personal research and experience by leading tours at the Ray House.