

History Begins at Home

Throughout this series, we've watched as Missourians have explored their heritage. We've visited living history programs; explored historic structures; and re-enacted some of our regions most tragic events. We've looked on as people across the State have come together to examine and explore their history. In this unit, we'll explore some of the things that you, a student, can do to participate in this great adventure. Our focus is on the town of Waynesville, Missouri, where a group of energetic students and dedicated teachers have put together an extensive program of activities and techniques to explore their community. The program is called: History Begins at Home.

Our first stop in Waynesville, Missouri, is the old Pulaski County Courthouse. I think there's something going on inside. Hey, let's go check it out.

So what's happening here, Clinton?

Well, they're examining some witnesses for the trial of Eliza Black, which did not really happen.

Hmm...so what exactly happened? Why is she on trial?

She sold tickets for her balcony for a hanging that took place here in Waynesville. She sold too many tickets and a fight broke out, and nobody got to see the hanging, so she's being tried for fraud.

What do you think this trial has taught you about the history of Waynesville?

Well, it's helped us a lot exploring the history of Waynesville and explaining the history of this old building which was our old courthouse.

Nice, nice. I bet you guys are learning a lot. Boy, what a great class.

This mock trial is just one of the many elements developed by the students of Waynesville to explore their heritage.

Good afternoon. I am William W. McDonald. Most people refer to me as Dub W, because...

Within the History Begins at Home program, students have an opportunity to do first-person interpretation; research primary documents; record oral histories; produce radio programs.

The Civil War in Missouri, was mostly warfare from ambush, in Pulaski County, it was as violent as in any arena anywhere.

And even try their hand at a little historic restoration. It all started with something called salvage archaeology, under an old building on the Waynesville town square.

This is the old stage coach stop. You aren't going to believe what's going on down here. Wow! What are you all doing down here?

Well, under here we look for artifacts, and it'll tell us more about the old stage coach stop's history. After we find an artifact, we'll put it into the bucket, and we'll take it up to be processed.

Oh, great.

We had a father of one of our students that was on the board of the old stage coach stop, and he, they needed some work done under the building, they needed to shore up the building in order to do some restoration work in here, and they knew that we'd been working with our students at an archaeological dig with the University of Missouri, so they asked us if we would be willing to do the archaeology work under the building here. And we thought we start it and find nothing, and we were amazed the first year we dug this with our eighth graders, in that they found many artifacts. So, that kind of spurred our interest as well as the students and it just went from there and has kind of mushroomed into the project it is today.

An essential part of the History Begins at Home program is research with primary documents. At the request of the local judge, students are examining old probate records in the county courthouse and preparing them to be recorded in the State archives.

We're sorting out documents, such as wills, settlements, death certificates; by date and month and year. And, then we sent them to Jefferson City, and they get microfilmed and they save more space when they're microfilmed and people can, if they want to look at something, like their family history or something, they won't have any trouble finding them.

Our research has added much information to the historical record of Pulaski County that people otherwise probably wouldn't have known. In fact, we found, it was one of the most exciting things I think in the whole project, a couple of eighth grade girls, came waving a couple of old cardboard, little cardboard boxes, and we have WW McDonald's probate records. Well, he's the guy that we believe built this building. They had found his probate record, which, told us some wonderful things about the man, and about his family and the names of his kids, and all kinds of stuff that, well, you really wouldn't find any other way.

Along with researching documents, the students also explore their past by recording oral histories. Tapping a rich source of valuable information by interviewing local residents.

Mrs., we understand that some of your relatives were pioneers in Pulaski County. Can you tell us about them?

Yes, I'd be very glad to. I'm fifth generation...

We've gotten into oral histories so that the kids can find out, you know, besides the paper trail, have been able to talk to people in the community about the town, what it looked like back then, so you know, we've been able to get into that with the students as well, which has been fascinating.

As the students continue to gather more information on the history of Waynesville and Pulaski County, they began to take on the challenge of sharing that information with others. Interpreting the history of their region has taken them everywhere, from a broadcast booth to a marble match. But, one of their favorite activities is first person interpretation. Students take on the roles of historical figures, and their knowledge of the past, as well as their acting skills, are put to the test.

These students in Waynesville are all over it. Their program is incredible. We're going to take a whirlwind tour and see the students interpreting different periods in history.

Howdy partner, who might you be?

I am William W. McDonald and I built this in 1858.

Fantastic, it's a nice building.

I'm Isaac Warren. I lived here in 1860 when the stage coach was rolling in, with passengers and mailbags.

Hi, I am Mary Jane McDonald, WW McDonald's first wife. The room we are in was the first one-room log cabin that started this building. If you look at the wall here, you can see the original logs.

My name is Colonel Albert Segal. I was in charge of building the Union Army post here in Waynesville. I am German and most of my men were German. This man sent me a telegram while I was in Booneville, it said "Occupy Waynesville. Keep open the road from Rolla to the Gasconade and clear the surrounding county."

I'm Dr. John Fetsure. I was a surgeon with the Fifth Missouri State Militia during the Civil War. That was a typical operating table; and this was my amputation saw; and these were some of my tools.

It was... was really fun, because you get to be someone else for once, instead of yourself, and then, you get to work with other people like you, and I mean, it's like sort of exciting to know that you're a part of something and it's hard to put into words cause it's like you're being somebody else, you're being a different person, you're telling people about what they went through and it's an opportunity to tell kids about their history that they may not know about.

The programs and activities going on in Waynesville were not developed by scholars or historians. They were developed by individuals interested in their past. The students and teachers of Waynesville. These are the types of activities that can be developed in any community, anywhere in the state. If you're interested in finding out more of your story, get involved. It's your Missouri Heritage.