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"Throwing Light" on Life at The Wayside

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Abstract

Over the course of these past ten weeks, I have come a long way since I started my internship at the beginning of June at [Minute Man National Historical Park](#). This is my second Brian C. Pohanka Internship; last summer, I lived and worked at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. In Harpers Ferry, I was given a lot of responsibility while working for the education department, but at Minute Man, my responsibilities far exceeded just working with children.

[excerpt]

Keywords

Civil War, Gettysburg College, Minute Man National Historical Park, The Wayside, history

Disciplines

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

“Throwing Light” on Life at The Wayside

This post is part of a series featuring behind-the-scenes dispatches from our [Pohanka Interns](#) on the front lines of history this summer as interpreters, archivists, and preservationists. See [here](#) for the introduction to the series.

By [Alex Andrioli '18](#)

Over the course of these past ten weeks, I have come a long way since I started my internship at the beginning of June at [Minute Man National Historical Park](#). This is my second Brian C. Pohanka Internship; last summer, I lived and worked at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. In Harpers Ferry, I was given a lot of responsibility while working for the education department, but at Minute Man, my responsibilities far exceeded just working with children.

At Minute Man, I constructed two of my very own tours: one was about the opening battle of the American Revolution at the North Bridge on April 19, 1775 and the other was an historic house tour of [The Wayside: Home of Authors](#). Of the two, my Wayside tour was more complex due to the fact that basically EVERYTHING has happened at the Wayside. Built before 1717, it is a witness house to the beginning of the American Revolution, a childhood home of Louisa May Alcott and a major inspiration for her greatest work, *Little Women*, a part of the Underground Railroad network, frequently visited by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in the 1800s, and the first and only home Nathaniel Hawthorne ever owned. I had to fit all of this, plus countless other connections, into a forty minute tour. Also, I somehow had to factor in time for visitors to have a look around and walk through the house, as well as adjust my tour to accommodate large groups and visitors with disabilities.



The Wayside: Home of Authors. Concord, Massachusetts. Photo by author, June 28, 2016

The Wayside has to be both the biggest challenge and my happiest work memory of this summer. I've come to love it like my own home. I have seen it at its worst and best. It has transformed from a "castle dismal" to a welcoming home, hosting a grand reopening in June after being closed for four years. During my work at The Wayside, I was asked to portray Sophia Hawthorne, the wife of Nathaniel Hawthorne, on the Hawthorne's 174th wedding anniversary on July 9th. My supervisor asked my opinion when she needed help deciding the lay-out for an exhibit on the Underground Railroad at The Wayside. I've had a chance to assist my supervisors on a future young adults program that will take place at The Wayside next summer. The program will allow local high schoolers to conduct original and authentic historical research to develop tours for the Wayside through the eyes of children who have lived in the house over the past 300 years. My job was to research what kind of clothing the kids would have worn during specific time periods, spanning from the late 18th to the early 20th century, and to find vendors that the park could use to purchase accurate reproduction clothing for the participating students. My supervisors trusted my professional opinions, research, and abilities to work within a budget and to get the job done before my deadline. Because of this, my internship at Minute Man has become a major milestone in my career path.

Never before have I had so much freedom and responsibility in a workplace. Certain things were expected of me, and to go above and beyond what was asked of me was my own choice. This summer, I was not just working hard to earn credit for an internship; I was working extra hard because I was invested in and in love with what I was doing. I gladly put in the extra work on my own time after hours because I wanted to improve whatever was the task at hand.

Though it pains me to say goodbye to Concord, Massachusetts, I leave with enhanced personal and professional confidence in myself, new friends and experiences, and the knowledge (finally) of how to use a cash register. More importantly, I found a new place to call home. The Wayside has been home to authors whose names I have been hearing for my entire life; the two biggest names I am familiar with would be Louisa May Alcott and Nathaniel Hawthorne. After spending a summer in their house, I feel like I not only understand them better, but I better understand their writings, too. Hawthorne once commented after visiting the home of Sir Walter Scott in Melrose, Scotland: "In a certain way, however, I understand his romances the better for having seen his house; and his house the better, for having read his romances. They throw light on one another." This quote well sums up my experience at The Wayside.

Sources:

The Wayside: Home of Authors. "An Invitation." Exhibit panel, Minute Man National Historical Park, Concord, MA.

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