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The Life and Works of Laura Ingalls Wilder

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THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
LAURA INGALLS WILDER

Presented to
the Faculty of Library Science
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Catherine Ilene Hunter
July, 1973

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LAURA, AGE 40



1952



Laura and Almanzo
Winter after they married



Laura and Almanzo Circa 1935

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations used are reproductions of the drawings of Garth Williams from the newly-illustrated and uniform editions of the "Little House Books" published by Harper & Co.

Chapter 1

THE LIFE OF LAURA INGALLS WILDER AS RECORDED IN HER BOOKS

"I was born in the Little House in the Big Woods in Wisconsin..."¹

-So begins an autobiographical sketch written by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Until she undertook the writing of her family's experiences in settling the Midwest, there were no books which really held children's interest while opening their eyes to this period.²

Mrs. Wilder's parents, Charles Philip and Caroline Lake (Quiner) Ingalls (the Pa and Ma of the "Little House" books), were pioneer farmers of English and Scottish descent.³

It was at the insistence of her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, herself an author, who was eager to preserve a record of her mother's early life, that Mrs. Wilder began to write the "Little House" books. She used the real names of her family, relatives, and friends as the characters in her books.

Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932. It describes Mrs. Wilder's life (she was born February 7, 1867), for a period of about one year.

The family, Laura, who was five years old, her older sister, Mary, and baby sister, Carrie, lived with Pa and Ma in the little

¹Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (ed.), The Junior Book of Authors (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1951), p. 299.

²May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books, 3rd. edition (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1964), p. 485.

³Anna Rothe (ed.), Current Biography Yearbook (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1948), p. 677.

house in the woods. It was a sparlely settled country near Lake Pepin in southern Wisconsin.

Jack, their brindle bulldog, helped keep their home safe from wild animals. Sometimes² though, quick thinking on the part of the family saved their lives, as the time when Ma and Laura were doing chores, and they mistook a big bear in the barnyard for their cow.



Laura and Mary helped Ma with the work. They wiped the dishes and made their trundle bed, then they began the work that belonged to that day. Each day had its own proper work. Ma would say:

"Wash on Monday,
Iron on Tuesday,
Mend on Wednesday,
Churn on Thursday,
Clean on Friday,
Bake on Saturday,
Rest on Sunday."⁴

Laura liked the churning and the baking days best. The girls also helped carry hickory chips when they smoked deer meat; they helped Pa make bullets for his rifle; they helped at harvest time, hog butchering time, and cheese-making time.

The family worked hard to provide food, but had a good variety. They had venison, pork, bear meat, and fish; they had a garden and raised potatoes, carrots, beets, turnips, cabbages, onions, peppers,

⁴Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little House in the Big Woods (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 29.

pumpkins and corn; they gathered walnuts, hickory nuts, hazelnuts, and berries; they got honey from bee trees, and maple syrup from the forest. Pa had a field of oats. At harvest time he had a threshing machine come instead of threshing with flails.

On long winter evenings the girls thought they had their best times. Then Pa would play games with them, tell them stories, or play his fiddle and sing. They especially liked a game called "mad dog". They liked the stories about their grandpa and the panther, and grandpa's sled and the pig.

What fun they had when they went to Grandpa's house at the end of the maple sap season to celebrate with a dance! The house was full of people. Pa played the fiddle and called the dances. Once Uncle George did a little dance with Laura. They had all the snow with maple syrup poured on it that they could eat, besides much other food. They stayed all night and went home the next day.

Christmas was an exciting time as the grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins all came to their house. On Christmas morning in each stocking there was a pair of red mittens and a stick of peppermint candy--and Laura had a beautiful rag doll that she liked best of all. She named her Charlotte.

The strict discipline, yet great love of Pa is illustrated by the following incident:

Aunt Lotty had gone, and Laura and Mary were tired and cross. They were at the woodpile gathering a pan of chips to kindle the fire in the morning. They always hated to pick up chips, but every day they had to do it. Tonight they hated it more than ever.

Laura grabbed the biggest chip, and Mary said:

"I don't care. Aunt Lotty likes my hair best, anyway. Golden hair is lots prettier than brown."

Laura's throat swelled tight, and she could not speak. She knew golden hair was prettier than brown. She couldn't speak, so she reached out quickly and slapped Mary's face.

Then she heard Pa say, "Come here, Laura."

She went slowly, dragging her feet. Pa was sitting just inside the door. He had seen her slap Mary.

"You remember," Pa said, "I told you girls you must never strike each other."

Laura began, "But Mary said--"

"That makes no difference," said Pa. "It is what I say that you must mind."

Then he took down a strap from the wall, and he whipped Laura with the strap.

Laura sat on a chair in the corner and sobbed. When she stopped sobbing, she sulked. The only thing in the whole world to be glad about was that Mary had to fill the chip pan all by herself.

At last, when it was getting dark, Pa said again, "Come here, Laura." His voice was kind, and when Laura came he took her on his knee and hugged her close. She sat in the crook of his arm, her head against his shoulder and his long brown whiskers partly covering her eyes, and everything was all right again.

She told Pa all about it, and she asked him, "You don't like golden hair better than brown, do you?"

Pa's blue eyes shone down at her, and he said, "Well, Laura, my hair is brown."

She had not thought of that. Pa's hair was brown, and his whiskers were brown, and she thought brown was a lovely color.⁵

Approximately another year of Mrs. Wilder's life is told in the second "Little House" book, Little House on the Prairie, published in 1935. It tells the story of their moving to Kansas in the Indian country there.

Pa thought there were too many people in the Big Woods, and fewer and fewer animals, so in the long winter evenings he talked to Ma about the Western country. Ma did not care to move in the winter, but Pa said they must go before the ice broke on the Mississippi River.

Pa sold the little house, cow, and calf. He made hickory bows for the wagon box, then stretched white canvas over them. All of their belongings were put in the wagon, except the beds, tables, and chairs. Pa could make new ones when they got to Kansas.

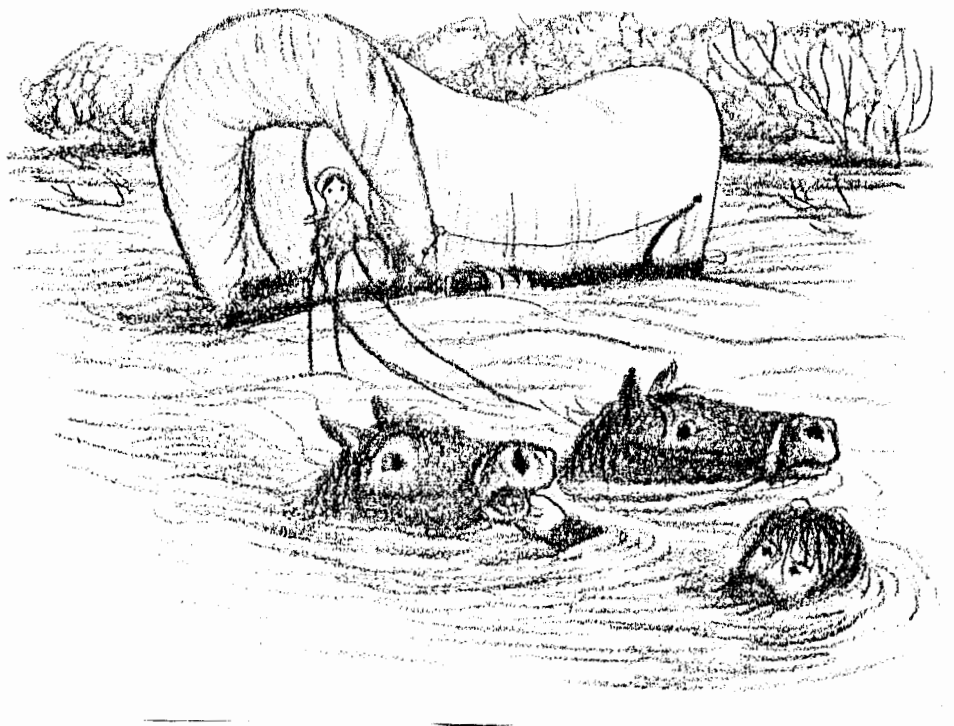
They crossed the Mississippi on the ice, but had to cross the

⁵Ibid., pp. 182-184.

Missouri River on a raft.

Pa traded the tired brown horses for two black western mustangs. He said Laura and Mary could name them. One was named Pet, the other Patty.

Once they had to ford a creek that was swollen. In the middle Pa had to give the reigns to Ma while he jumped into the water to help the horses. The wagon box was water-tight and well-fastened to the running gear, so they all got to the other side, except the dog, Jack. He was not to be found. They were afraid he had drowned.



But the next night, two green lights were shining in the dark beyond their firelight. They were afraid it was a wild animal, and Pa held his gun ready to shoot, but before long they could see it was Jack.

One day Pa came back from hunting and reported seeing plentiful prairie hens, deer, antelope, squirrels, and rabbits.

The next day before noon Pa said, "Whoa!" The wagon stopped, and he said that was where they'd build their house.

They took the bows and canvas from the running gear of the wagon and lived in this until Pa could haul logs from along the Verdigris River and get a house built. Ma helped until a log fell on her foot and sprained it badly. Then one afternoon while Pa was hunting, he met Mr. Edwards, who lived only two miles away on the other side of the creek. They agreed to work together to build each family a house. The Ingalls moved in after the walls were up as they would be more protection from the wolves. Next, Pa made a stable for the horses, then finished the house, and also made a new table and beds. Last he built the fireplace, and put a floor in the house. He also dug a well.

Laura kept asking and wondering when they would see some Indians. One day two came while Pa was hunting. They went into the house and demanded Ma cook cornbread for them, then took Pa's tobacco. Laura was so scared that she thought of turning Jack (who was tied) loose, and when she mentioned it afterward, Pa reprimanded her very severely for even thinking of doing something she was told not to do. Pa thought they should do nothing to make the Indians unfriendly.

One evening they heard a noise which Pa said must be cattle herds going north to Fort Dodge. The next morning a cowboy talked to Pa and asked him to help them keep the cattle out of the ravines among the bluffs of the creek bottom. In return he was to receive some beef, which he did, and they also gave him a cow that was too thin to sell, also her calf that was too small to travel with the herd. After she was tamed, the milk and milk products made good additions to their diet.

When the blackberries were ripe, Ma and the girls picked them to eat, and some were dried in the sun for eating next winter.

There were many mosquitoes that bit them while picking berries.

On still nights they got into the house. Pa kept piles of damp grass burning to make a smudge of smoke to keep some away. They were so bad Pa could not play his fiddle in the evenings, and Mr. Edwards did not come visiting after supper any more.

One day Laura did not feel like playing, and Mary said she ached. They felt cold, but Ma said their faces were as hot as fire. Pa said he did not feel very well himself. Then Ma became ill. They probably would not have recovered had it not been for Jack, who had never liked strangers, but had begged Dr. Tan, who was a doctor for the Indians, and was on his way to Independence. He stayed with them until Mrs. Scott, a neighbor could come take care of them. Dr. Tan said many settlers up and down the creek had fever'n'ague. Everyone but Pa thought eating watermelons had given it to them, since one settler had raised some and everyone he gave some to had the fever. Since Pa had not eaten any watermelon, he thought it must be the night air. They did not know that the mosquitoes had given it to them. While he was recuperating, Pa made Ma a rocking chair from willow branches.

When fall came, Pa cut and stacked some prairie grass for the horses, cow, and calf. He cut wood for the winter. Then he hunted for meat as the days grew cool enough for it to keep. One day while he was hunting, the chimney to the fireplace caught on fire. For awhile, Ma was afraid they could not save the house, but they did get the fire put out.

Fall soon turned into winter, and the days were cold, but there was no snow. As Christmas drew near, Laura was anxious because she knew Santa Claus and his reindeer could not travel without snow. Mary was afraid Santa could not find them in this Indian Territory.

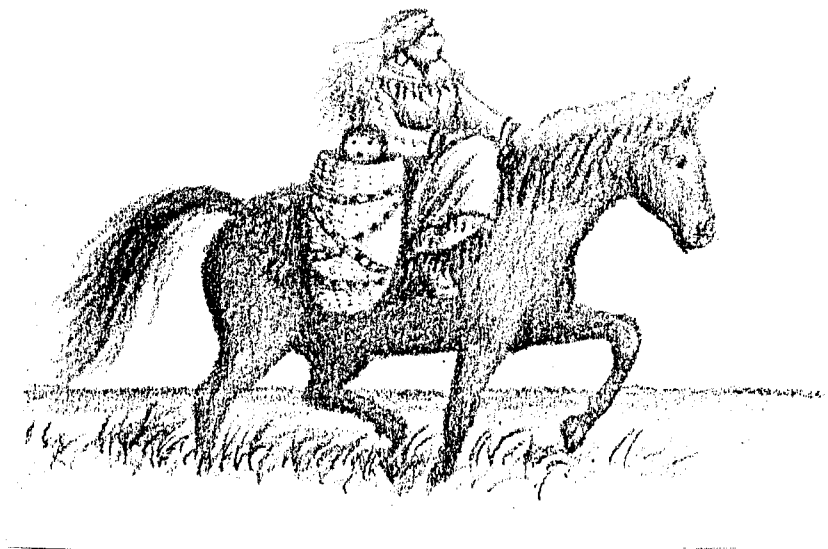
The day before Christmas, it began to rain. Then they knew for sure there would be no Christmas because the creek was too high for anyone to cross. Pa had shot a turkey for their dinner. Mr. Edwards would even have to miss eating Christmas dinner with them, but they agreed they were lucky girls to have the turkey to eat in their nice house, with a warm fire to sit by. And, anyway, Santa would surely come next year. But on Christmas morning when Jack growled, the door latch rattled, and when Pa opened the doow, Mr. Edwards was there. He had swum across the river, and had carried his clothes and some Christmas goodies on his head. Ma had hung up their stockings, intending to put white sugar in them, but now she said she would put what Santa sent to them when Mr. Edwards saw him in Independence the day before. Each girl had a new tin cup, long sticks of peppermint candy, a little heart shaped cake, and a penny. There never had been such a good Christmas!

When spring came, more and more Indians came along the path by the house. Pa decided that he had built their house on a trail the Indians still used, instead of an abandoned one. Night after night they could hear the beating of their drums. When Pa had to go to Independence to trade his furs for a plow and seeds, Ma and the girls stayed close to the house. They did the chores early, so they need not be out after dark.

It was a happy time when Pa got back home. He had the seeds, a plow, and brought Laura and Mary each a comb to wear in their hair. But Pa told Ma he had heard that the government was going to put the white settlers out of the Indian territory. This was not what they had understood the government would do--make the Indians move on West and open Kansas Territory up for settlement.

It was hard work for Pa to plow the prairie sod until a prairie fire burned the grass. They barely had time to plow a furrow around the house and start some backfires.

More and more Indians gathered in their camp, and their drums seemed to beat faster and the yipping grew higher and wilder. Then one night terrible sounds came. It was the war cry. For several nights the war cries grew worse. Pa made more bullets, and kept watch all during the nights. Finally Pa could tell they were quarreling among themselves. Then they could see parties of Indians leaving, some going north, some south, and all was quiet. Pa went to their camp to see if they were all gone. Only a tribe of Osage Indians were left. One of them told Pa that all of the tribes except the Osage wanted to kill the white settlers, but Soldat du Chêne told them that his tribe would fight them if they did. They were afraid of him and all his Osages, so they all went away. A day or two later, the Osage tribe passed by their house. Laura at last saw a little papoose. In fact she saw many Indian children. She even wished she could get one from its mother and keep it.



After all the Indians were gone it seemed so peaceful again as Pa plowed more prairie ground, and Ma, Laura, and Mary planted the seeds. They would live like kings when the garden began to produce! And they would be rich after Pa harvested his big wheat and corn crops!

But their hopes were short-lived. One morning Mr. Scott and Mr. Edwards came and told Pa that soldiers would soon be ordered by officials in Washington to come into the territory and take away all of the white settlers. Pa said he would leave before they had to force him. Mr. Edwards said he would go South. Pa would go North. Mr. Scott said his family would stay. Pa gave him the cow and calf.

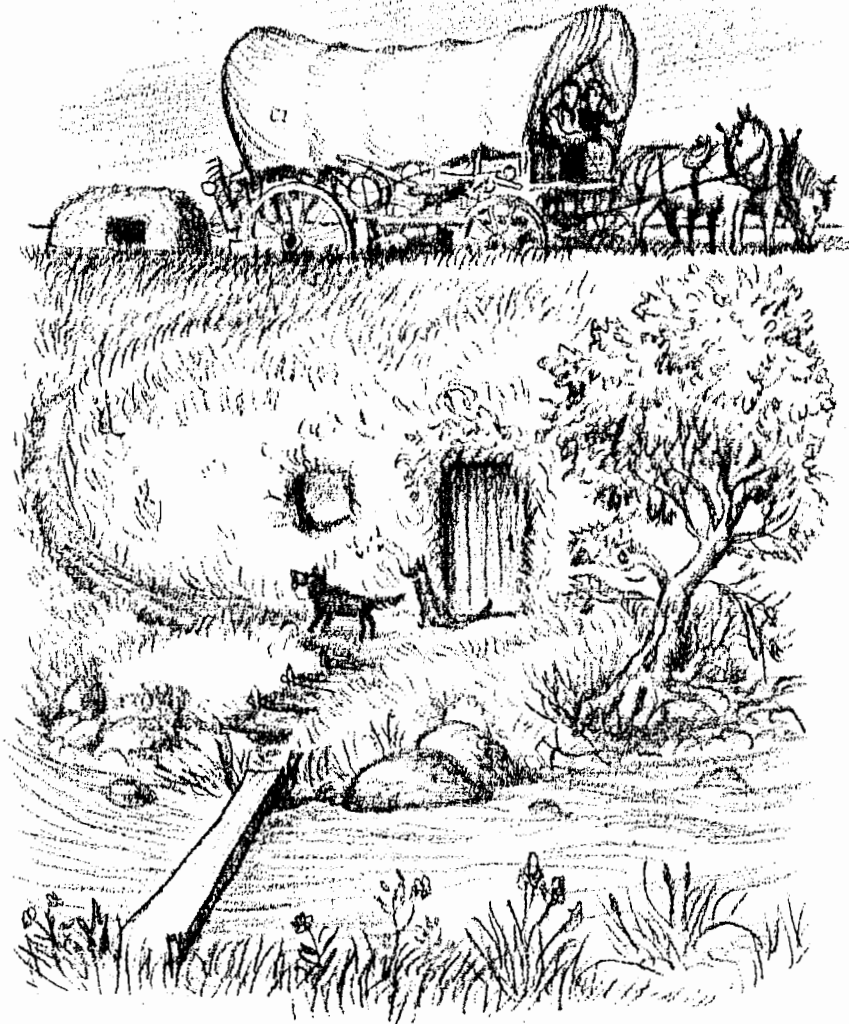
The next morning they put the canvas cover back on the wagon, loaded everything except the plow in it, and left their year's work and their little house behind them on the Kansas prairie, never to see them again.



The next part of Mrs. Wilder's life is told for us in her book On the Banks of Plum Creek. It was published in 1937. Laura was now eight years old. Mary was nine.

For many days the family traveled across Kansas, across Missouri, across Iowa, and into Minnesota. Once when they stopped, Pa heard of a man, Mr. Hanson, who wanted to sell his place and go West. Pa traded Pet and Patty for Mr. Hanson's land, and Bunny, the colt, and the wagon cover for his crops and his oxen. His place was three

miles from town. This home was a dugout on the bank of the creek.



It was comfortable and clean, but they had to get used to living in it, and Pa said he'd build them a house after they harvested their crops. Pa worked for Mr. Nelson, a neighbor to pay for Spot, a cow.

Laura liked the out-of-doors here. She spent much time with Mary playing among the grass and flowers and along the creek, sometimes wading in it. After the wheat was threshed, Laura and Mary played on the straw stack, but were forbidden by Pa twice not to do it any more as they scattered it too much. Later on Laura saved the stack when

Mr. Nelson's cattle threatened to tear it down while Pa and Ma had gone to town. It was on this trip to town that the team of oxen decided to run away. Pa did manage to get them stopped before they got to the river bank. Laura said she liked wolves better than cattle. Pa promised they would have a team of horses before long.

Christmas was almost here again. As they were telling what they wished for, Pa said he'd like horses, but if Santa brought horses that would be all for the family. So they all agreed to only wish for horses. On Christmas morning Laura and Mary had six sticks of candy, Carrie had four sticks and the button necklace Laura and Mary had strung for her, and there were the horses, Sam and David, in the stables.

In the spring, after the wheat was sown, Pa went to town. On his return home his wagon was loaded with lumber for a new house for them. He was to pay for it when his wheat was harvested. Mr. Nelson helped Pa build the new house. It was the best one they'd ever lived in. It had two rooms downstairs, an attic room for Mary and Laura, and a lean-to on the back. The shingles and all the lumber was boughten, so were smooth and even. The windows were of glass. It had boughten doors, hinges, and locks with keys, and a china door knob. Pa also bought a new cookstove for Ma, which was a big surprise.

After they were settled in their new house, Pa and Ma said Mary and Laura should start to school. They didn't want to go, and when they arrived the first day, the boys called them snipes, because they had outgrown their dresses and more of their legs showed than did the other girls. But a girl named Christy Kennedy introduced herself and the others. Nellie Oleson, whose father ran the store, called them "Country Girls." Ma had given them her books for them to study from,

but they had to borrow the teacher's slate. The next day Pa gave them money to buy their own slate. They decided after the first day that they liked school. Laura decided she did not like Nellie Oleson.

When Nellie had a party, the girls were invited. Laura thought she was too selfish with her doll, as she scolded when Laura wanted to touch the dress.

Laura said she'd get even with her. The chance soon came, for Ma said the girls could have a party. Laura invited the girls to go wading, and took Nellie where the blood-suckers would stick to her legs.



The family went to church and Sunday School in town when a home missionary, Reverend Alden started services. Laura already knew the stories the teacher told and the verses they learned. After that, when they could not go to town they had their own Sunday School in their own home.

When Pa needed new boots, he went to town to buy them, but came home with only his old ones. He had met Reverend Alden who told him he needed three dollars more for a new bell in the belfry. Pa gave him the money he had planned to buy the boots with, thinking he would patch his old ones until after he harvested the wheat.

When the wheat was almost ready to harvest, Pa estimated there

would be forty bushels to the acre. At a dollar a bushel, they would be rich! They could pay for the house and have money left over to buy the things they wanted.

But about a week before harvest time, they noticed it began to look cloudy, but the air and wind did not seem like a storm was coming up. It was grasshoppers--millions of them. Pa tried to save the wheat by throwing dirty hay from the manure pile all around the field and burning it, but it was all in vain, there were too many. They ate everything green, including the leaves on the trees. This meant that they would have no money from the farm that year. They even had to save their shoes for winter, so the girls could not go to school any more, because they couldn't walk barefooted on the grasshoppers. When Pa started to plow for the next year's crops, he noticed the grasshoppers were laying their eggs in the ground, and that meant no crops again next year, for they would all hatch out and eat everything again.

When Pa heard that he could get a job if he'd go back East where they did not have the grasshoppers, he started to go back there. They did not get a letter for several weeks from him, because Pa had had to walk three hundred miles before he could find work. He sent them five dollars, and kept the rest for new boots. He stayed as long as the harvest work lasted.

One day Mrs. Nelson and Anna came to visit them. Anna tore their paper dolls, so Ma told Laura to get her doll, Charlotte, that she had kept ever since Christmas when they lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin. Anna pulled the doll's hair and her button eyes, and banged her against the floor. Laura knew her hair and skirt could be straightened when she went home, but Anna would not give Charlotte up. She wanted to take her home. Laura did not want to give up her doll, but Ma said she should give it to Anna since she hardly ever

played with her, and that she should not be so selfish. A little later on when Laura went to Nelson's to see if there was a letter from Pa, she saw Charlotte lying in the barnyard, all frozen in a puddle. Her hair was ripped loose, her yarn mouth was torn, one eye was gone, but she was Charlotte. Laura picked her up and ran all the way home. Ma promised to make her as good as new. They thawed her out, washed her, and replaced missing parts. That night Laura again laid Charlotte in her box.

When Pa got home, they went to town to pay part of the money they owed for the lumber that built their house, new shoes for Mary (Laura had to take Mary's shoes that she had outgrown), material for new dresses, and food supplies for the winter.

That winter the girls did not go to school, but the family went to church every Sunday. Nellie Oleson was always there showing off her fur cape. Laura knew she should not hold a grudge against her, and about the time she thought she had forgiven her, Nellie would turn up her nose at her and flounce her shoulders under her fur cape, then Laura would boil up inside again.

For Christmas that year, Ma and Pa surprised the girls by taking them to church one night. On the way they heard the beautiful music of the new bells Pa had helped buy. Inside the church was a decorated tree with packages all over it. When the names on the presents were read, all three girls had a pink mosquito-bar bag filled with candy and a popcorn ball. Then Mary got blue mittens; Laura's were red. Laura wondered who would get the fur cape and muff to match. Ma's package contained a shawl. Pa's had a muffler. Then Mary received a booklet with Bible pictures from Mrs. Tower. Mrs. Beadle gave Laura a beautiful jewel box. Carrie received a doll and a china dog. The

furs were taken off the tree, but Laura could not hear the name. Then suddenly someone gave them to her. She could hardly believe it! The cape was prettier than Nellie's, and Nellie didn't have the muff to match! Mary received a blue coat that was the right size for her. Later Reverend Alden told that people from the church back East had sent a box for the Christmas tree. The little girls who sent the cape and coat had outgrown them.

The next summer the grasshoppers hatched, the weather was dry, so turnips and potatoes were about all they raised. Pa went East again to work. Ma and the girls had to fight a prairie fire while he was gone, but managed to save their haystacks and house, with the help of Mr. Nelson.

The next winter brought blizzards. At the time when one came, Ma and Pa just managed to get home from town in time. The girls knew they should move all of the wood in the house, and had it finished when Ma and Pa finally got home. Another time Pa had walked to town just before a blizzard. He fell off the bank and stayed three days because he didn't know where he was, although he was only a short way from the house. He had to eat the oyster crackers, and finally the Christmas candy he had bought for their Christmas.

There were no presents that Christmas morning, but they had oyster stew, and they were all safe from the next blizzard that had already started.

The next book, By the Shores of Silver Lake, was first published in 1939. This tells of the family's moving to South Dakota. Laura was now thirteen years old. Carrie was no longer the baby of the family. Baby Grace had joined them.

For the past five years they had fared badly, so when Aunt Docia came one day and wanted Pa to go work for her husband (who was a contractor, working on a new railroad in Dakota) as timekeeper, storekeeper, and bookkeeper for fifty dollars a month, Pa thought he should go. He could also look for a homestead. Ma said they were settled there and wondered how they could move then, as Mary would not be able to move. All but Laura and Pa had had scarlet fever, and Mary was blind, and not very strong yet. Laura hoped they could go.

Pa went to see Mr. Nelson, who bought the farm for two hundred dollars cash. This was enough to pay everything they owed, and a little left. Pa would go the next morning in the wagon. Ma and the girls could come later on the train.

When Pa was getting the wagon ready to go, Laura notice how gray Jack looked, and told Pa he could not walk so far now. Pa was going to make a place for him to ride, but Jack did not want to go. The next morning he had died.



The train ride was new to Ma and the girls. Laura now had to be Mary's eyes. She described the train and passengers so Mary could see them. They went to the end of the line by noon, ate dinner at the hotel there, and waited until Pa met them about sunset. They started toward the railroad camp early the next morning, arriving after dark.

They stayed here only two days, then started out for Silver Lake. In trying to explain to Mary how the land looked, Laura found there were so many ways of seeing things and so many ways of saying them.

Pa had kept it a secret from Ma, so she was surprised to find that Uncle Henry, Cousins Charley, and Louise, were already living here at the camp. They had built a shanty and stable for the Ingalls.

Laura loved the out-of-doors here. She spent as much time outside as she could.

There were exciting and anxious times during the summer: once the men watched all night, afraid horse thieves might take their horses; the day Pa took Laura out where they were building the grade for the railroad; on pay day when the workers demanded their full pay instead of pay for two weeks; when Laura and Lena would go riding on the ponies, and went to milk their cows together.

Just before winter the grade at Silver Lake was finished. The Ingalls would have to go farther West or go back East for the winter, to return next spring to file for a homestead, as their shanty was not suitable for the winter. Laura and Pa wished they could go on West, but Ma would not. She wanted the girls to go to school, and someday for Laura to be a teacher. (Ma had been a teacher before she married Pa.) Laura knew she did not want to teach, but since Mary could not, she knew she must be.

When Pa came home the day Ma and Laura had mended the wagon cover, baked bread, and got ready for the trip, he asked how would they like to stay there all winter in the Surveyor's house. He had at first planned to stay all winter, and had bought coal and food to last until spring. The Ingalls could have them for nothing if Pa would live in the house and be responsible for the company's tools. They decided to stay, knowing there were no neighbors, as far as they knew, nearer than

sixty miles. (By staying here, they were the first settlers in the town of De Smet, South Dakota.)

During the winter Pa hunted for their meat. He found the spot for their homestead. He would file the claim in the spring.

On Christmas Eve it was snowing. Pa had gone hunting, and had the largest rabbit they had ever seen, waiting to be cooked for their Christmas dinner. The house was full of surprises--gifts Ma and the girls had made. After supper they talked about all of their other Christmases. Then Pa got out his fiddle and they all sang.

While they were singing, they heard a strange noise outside. It was Mr. and Mrs. Boast. They had wanted to come before the spring rush of the homesteaders. Mr. Boast had come in the fall and filed his claim, then went back to Iowa for his bride. The Boasts stayed with them on Christmas. The Ingalls even had gifts for them--Ma's best handkerchief for Mrs. Boast and wristlets for Mr. Boast.

The Boasts moved into the surveyor's office until they could get their shanty built in the spring. She had brought popcorn, and shared it with the Ingalls, as well as magazines that she brought. She showed them how to make a whatnot shelf, which made their room prettier.

One Sunday evening while the weather was still bitter cold, the Boasts and Ingalls were singing. The fiddle stopped, and someone outside was singing. It was Reverend Alden and Reverend Stuart. They were on their way to the Huron townsite to start a church. They were surprised to find the Ingalls there, as they thought they were still in Minnesota. The next morning they conducted the first church service in De Smet. They promised to come back and organize a church there.

Mr. Boast told Pa he should be getting his claim filed. Pa planned to go the next morning, but more homesteaders came, and Pa said

they had to keep them as it was too cold yet for them to sleep in wagons. The Ingalls made room for them to sleep and gave them supper and breakfast. Each day more came, wanting lodging and meals. Finally Ma said they should charge twenty-five cents for each person each meal. This they did. Pa finally decided to leave Mr. Boast to help Ma while he went to file the claim. One night while Pa was gone, there were fifteen men sleeping on the floor. They started drinking. Mr. Boast knew they were too rowdy, but was afraid he was outnumbered, so let them stay. After that they decided it was warm enough to sleep in wagons, but Ma kept on serving them meals.

When Pa got to Brookins to file the claim, there was such a long line ahead of him that he stood in line all day. When the office closed, he still hadn't filed it. He intended to get up very early the next morning to get in line, but later decided to go back and stay by the door all night. When he got there, he found about forty others who had the same idea. There was even one who wanted the same land Pa wanted.

Pa told his family how he got his claim:

"They didn't know me from Adam," said Pa, "till a fellow came along and sang out, 'Hello, Ingalls! So you weathered the winter on Silver Lake. Settling down at De Smet, uh?' "

"Oh, Pa!" Mary wailed.

"Yes, the fat was in the fire then," said Pa. "I knew I wouldn't have a chance if I budged from that door. So I didn't. By sun-up the crowd was doubled, and a couple of hundred men must have been pushing and shoving against me before the Land Office opened. There wasn't any standing in line that day, I tell you! It was each fellow for himself and devil take the hindmost.

"Well, girls, finally the door opened. How about some more tea, Caroline?"

"Oh, Pa, go on!" Laura cried. "Please."

"Just as it opened," said Pa. "The Huron man crowded me back. 'Get in! I'll hold him!' he said to the other fellow. It meant a fight, and while I fought him, the other'd get my homestead. Right then, quick as a wink, somebody landed like a ton of brick on the Huron man. 'Go in, Ingalls!' he yelled. 'I'll fix 'im! Yow-ee-ee!' "

Pa's long, catamount screech curled against the walls, and Ma

gasped, "Mercy! Charles!"

"And you'll never guess who it was," said Pa.

"Mr. Edwards!" Laura shouted.

Pa was astounded. "How did you guess it, Laura?"

"He yelled like that in Indian territory. He's a wildcat from Tennessee," Laura remembered. "Oh, Pa, where is he? Did you bring him?"

"I couldn't get him to come home with me," said Pa. "I tried every persuasion I could think of, but he's filed on a claim south of here and must stay with it to keep off claim jumpers. He told me to remember him to you, Caroline, and to Mary and Laura. I'd never have got the claim if it hadn't been for him. Golly, that was a fight he started!"

"Was he hurt? Mary asked anxiously.

"Not a scratch. He just started that fight. He got out of it as quick as I ducked inside and started filing my claim. But it was some time before the crowd quieted down. They--"

"All's well that ends well, Charles." Ma interrupted.

"I guess so, Caroline," Pa said. "Yes, I guess that's right. Well, girls, I've bet Uncle Sam fourteen dollars against a hundred and sixty acres of land, that we can make out to live on the claim for five years. Going to help me win the bet?"

"Oh, yes, Pa! Carrie said eagerly, and Mary said, "Yes, Pa!" gladly, and Laura promised soberly, "Yes, Pa."

Pa started building a store building to sell, as there were many others being started and there was a need for more. But when the surveyors came back, they had to move into it until Pa could get a shanty built on the homestead.

Ma suggested that Laura be a teacher while they lived in town for Carrie and her two little friends across the street, since she and the little girls were rather restless. The girls did not come very long, but Ma thought Laura would some day be a good teacher. Anyway, she had taught the first school in De Smet.

The shanty on the claim was small. Pa would add on to it some day. As they were moving out to it, Laura saw a team of horses trotting side by side in harness.

"Oh, what beautiful horses!" Laura cried. "Look, Pa! Look!" she turned her head to watch them as long as she could. They drew a

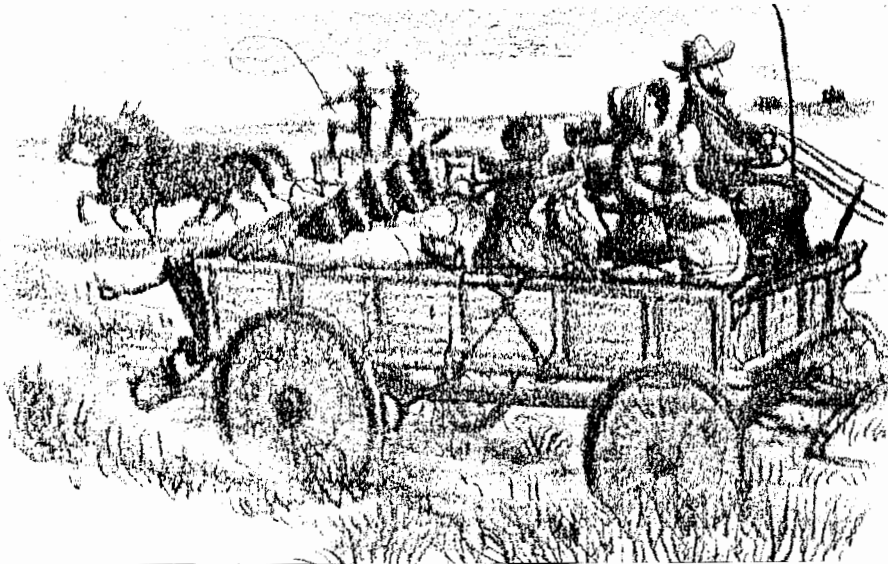
⁵Laura Ingalls Wilder, By the Shores of Silver Lake (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), pp. 236-237.

light wagon. A young man stood up in the wagon, driving, and a taller man stood behind him with a hand on his shoulder. In a moment the backs of the men and the wagon loomed up so that Laura could no longer see the horses.

Pa had turned around in the seat to watch them too. "Those are the Wilder boys," he said. "Almanzo's driving, and that's his brother Royal with him. They've taken up claims North of town, and they've got the finest horses in the whole country. By George, you seldom see a team like that."

With all her heart Laura wished for such horses. She supposed she never could have them.⁶

Soon they were "home" and unloaded the wagon. Laura knew that she would like to live by Silver Lake.



The period covered by The Long Winter, published in 1940, was the year following their move to Silver Lake.

Laura had always liked to help her father. During hay-making time she carried water to him when he did the mowing. She asked if she might help with the loading and stacking. Ma did not like to see women working in the fields, but agreed to it, since Pa did need help, and there were too few homesteaders to trade work. She helped tramp the hay on the hayrack until all of the upland hay was finished. Then

⁶Ibid., pp. 262-263.

Pa thought they should put up a lot of slough hay. While putting it up, they found a muskrat's home. They examined it, and Pa said it would be a long severe winter because the walls of the muskrat's home were so thick.

In October the family awoke to a blizzard, which lasted three days and three nights. Their claim shanty was not built well enough to keep out the cold, and snow sifted in through the cracks.



After the blizzard there was a period of Indian summer. But one day an old Indian came to town when Pa was at the store. He had come to tell the White Man that this coming winter would be a hard winter with seven months of blizzards.

Royal and Almanzo Wilder decided then and there that they would move into town to Royal's feed store rather than stay in Almanzo's claim shanty.

Mr. Boast thought they could stay on their claim, but Pa could hardly wait to get home to get started moving to his store building in town, since he had not sold it yet. Ma and Mary did not mind, but Laura thought she would not like to live so close to so many people.

She wished they had a house like the store out on the claim, but Ma said she was glad they had it in town so the girls could start to school again, which the girls did the next morning after they moved. But because of the blizzards and a short supply of coal, the school was soon closed. They studied, though, whenever they could. Laura always helped Mary learn everything she studied, so she could go to the School for the Blind in Vinton, Iowa.

All winter long until in April, one blizzard followed another with only a day or two of sunshine in between. During those days Ma and the girls would do the washing and hang it out to freeze dry. Pa would go to the claim shanty and haul back some slough hay. After they ran out of coal, Laura and Pa had to twist it to burn in their stove.



At first, on clear days, the men would go out to where the train was stuck in the snow, and clear the track. Each time another

blizzard would come and fill in between the banks before the train could come through. As a result the stores sold all of their food-stuffs, coal, and grain. There was no way possible to get more until spring. The Ingalls family would have had enough provisions for a normal winter, but not this one. Ma very carefully planned the meals, but they used everything up until they only had potatoes, wheat, and tea. The cow did not give much milk, and some always blew out of the pail before Pa could get to the house. They had to grind wheat in their coffee grinder to make bread. This took so much time that one person had to be grinding it all the time during daylight hours. Then the time came when the potatoes and wheat were gone.

Almanzo Wilder had his wheat seed in the back room of the store. He was afraid that if anyone knew about it, Royal would sell it when the town's supply was gone, so he made an extra wall in the back room, and put the wheat behind it to hide it. But Pa outsmarted him, and got a pailful of it from him.

It had been rumored that a homesteader somewhere south of town had raised some wheat that had not been sold. Almanzo Wilder and Cap Garland risked their lives, and took horses and sleds, found the shanty, and persuaded him to sell some wheat to them. This was enough for those in town to buy and get along on until the train brought more.

It was May before the trains came that brought groceries for the townspeople. The Ingalls received a Christmas barrel that Rev. Stuart had sent. They invited Mr. and Mrs. Boast and celebrated Christmas in May.

Little Town on the Prairie, published in 1941, begins with the Ingalls family living once again on their claim. It was the spring

which followed the long winter. Laura loved living there, and being able to be outdoors in the sunshine. She helped all she could outside, while Mary helped inside. Sometimes Mary went walking with Laura.

Pa bought a kitten, and Mrs. Boast set a hen who hatched fourteen chickens for them. Carrie and Grace were to feed, water, and watch them so hawks would not get them.

Laura was offered a job helping make shirts at a store in town for twenty-five cents a day and her dinner. She would rather have stayed at home, but she could help save money to send Mary to college. She worked six weeks.

That Fourth-of-July Pa took Laura and Carrie to the horse races. Almanzo Wilder's horses won the buggy race. There was also lemonade to drink. A politician gave them some firecrackers. They had never had any before.

Blackbirds destroyed their corn crop that year. Laura was afraid Mary would not get to go to college now, but Pa said he would sell the heifer calf. Then with what they had saved already, they would have enough to buy material for clothes, a trunk, and other supplies.

When at last the day came for Mary to make the trip to Vinton, Iowa to the School for the Blind, Pa and Ma went with her on the train. Laura stayed with Carrie and Grace the week while they were gone. They all missed Mary so much, they did the house cleaning so they would keep real busy. Mary did well in school, and wrote them often. The family wrote to her every week.

The Ingalls family moved back into town for the winter again, since Pa still had not sold the store building. They had plenty of everything to last all winter just in case the trains could not get there again, but the winter was a relatively mild one.

Miss Wilder, Almanzo and Royal's sister, was the school teacher for the fall term. Nellie Oleson, Laura's rival in Plum Creek had moved to a homestead at De Smet. She succeeded in turning Miss Wilder against Laura and Carrie. They were even sent home from school one day. Discipline went from bad to worse until the school board visited school one day. After the end of the fall term Miss Wilder went back East. Mr. Clewett was their next teacher.

Laura made good friends in school now, and she rather liked living in town, especially after the people of the community started a literary society. They had spelling matches, charades, music, and negro comedies. There were also birthday parties to go to, and the church conducted a revival meeting. Each night after church Almanzo Wilder asked Laura if he could walk home with her. She wondered why he did it, since she

thought he was at least twenty-three years old, as he was a homesteader.

(He was only nineteen when he filed his claim, but gave his age as Twenty-one.) Laura had always considered him as Pa's friend.



Christmas that year was a very lonesome one without Mary. That afternoon

as they were planning that if Laura could get a teacher's certificate and teach after she was sixteen, maybe next summer Mary could come home, they heard a knock at the door. It was Mr. Boast with a friend,

Mr. Brewster. He wanted Laura to teach for two months in the school in his district, twelve miles from town. He had seen Laura perform at the school exhibition, and decided she was the one to be their teacher. She would make twenty dollars a month and room and board. They soon returned with the county superintendent. He gave Laura an examination in all subjects except history. He didn't need to examine her in that because he said he had also heard her recite history the night before at the exhibition. He borrowed Laura's pen and filled out a third grade certificate for her. Laura was relieved that he did not ask how old she was, for she lacked two months being sixteen.

Laura really did not want to leave home and teach school, but she thought she must, to help with Mary's expenses.

These Happy Golden Years, published in 1943, begins with Laura and Pa driving out to Brewster's. Tomorrow she would be teaching school.

The school house was a claim shanty, which was cold, and not very well furnished. She had five pupils. At first she did not know what to do about Clarence, but after Ma's advice not to pay attention to him, and after they adjusted to her being their teacher, they all did well in their studies.

Laura did not like boarding at the Brewster's. Mrs. Brewster was never friendly toward her, but she decided it was because she wanted to go back East. The thing that made staying with them bearable was that she got to go home every week-end. Almanzo Wilder came each Friday afternoon and gave her a sleigh ride home. Each Sunday afternoon he took her back. She did not like to consider him as her "beau", and even told him once that she rode with him just to get to go home.

Just as soon as her school term was over, Laura started back

to school. She had kept studying so that she was not behind the rest.

It was soon spring, and the Ingalls family moved back out to the claim. Laura was so glad to be home again with the family where there was pleasant talk, happy jokes, studying, and the music of Pa's fiddle.

Laura worked for Mrs. McKee, the town's dressmaker on Saturdays. When it was time for them to move to their claim, Mr. McKee decided he could not leave his job at the lumberyard until they had more money for tools, seed, and stock. Mrs. McKee and daughter, Mattie, would have to live out there alone. She was nervous about it and asked if Laura might go live with them. Pa and Ma consented, so Laura quit school again and stayed with them until Mary came home. Then Mrs. McKee thought she could stay alone, so Laura could be with Mary.

Mary had done so well in school, she seemed so much surer of herself, sometimes even like she was not blind.

The family celebrated the Fourth-of-July at home.

That summer Laura worked in town some more. This time she did sewing for Mrs. Bell.

When fall came, Mary went back to college, and the Ingalls once more moved back to town for the winter. Almanzo bought a new team of horses and broke them to drive. Sometimes he would come by and take Laura riding. At the Christmas tree at church he gave her a gift.

The next March Pa announced that their neighbors were going to build a new schoolhouse just south of their property, and they wanted him to boss the job, so they hurriedly moved out to the claim. They also wanted Laura to teach for three months beginning in April, for twenty-five dollars a month. This time she did well enough on the teacher's examinations to get a second-grade certificate. She

enjoyed this term of teaching very much. The schoolhouse was so nice, and there were only three pupils. With the money she made this term, she bought an organ so Mary would have it to play when she came home for the summer. Ma thought she should spend part of it for clothes, but Laura worked again for Miss Bell on Saturdays, then all day after school was out. This money was spent on clothes.



Almanzo continued to come on Sundays to take Laura riding. Part of the time he broke another team of horses. Then he could only stop long enough for Laura to get in. Then the team would rear, and start running. At the end of the summer they were engaged. Almanzo purchased a ring for her. When Laura went to school the first day, her friend, Ida, also had an engagement ring.

Soon, Almanzo and Royal went to Minnesota for the winter. He left his horse, Lady, with Laura for her to drive while he was gone. However, Almanzo surprised her by coming back at Christmas.

At the end of the last day of school in March, Laura gathered her books, and stacked them neatly on her slate. She looked around the schoolroom for the last time. She would never come back. Monday she would begin teaching the Wilkins school, and sometime next fall she and Almanzo would be married.

Carrie and Grace were waiting downstairs, but Laura lingered at her desk, feeling a strange sinking of heart. Ida and Mary Power and Florence would be here next week. Carrie and Grace would walk to school without her, always after this.

Except for Mr. Owen at his desk, the room was empty now. Laura must go. She picked up her books and went toward the door. At Mr. Owen's desk she stopped and said, "I must tell you good-by, for I shall not be coming back."

"I heard you were going to teach again," Mr. Owen said. "We will miss you, but we will look for you back next fall."

"That is what I want to tell you. This is good-by," Laura repeated. "I am going to be married, so I won't be coming back at all."

Mr. Owen sprang up and walked nervously across the platform and back. "I'm sorry," he said. "Not sorry you are going to be married, but sorry I didn't graduate you this spring. I held you back because I...because I had a foolish pride; I wanted to graduate the whole class together, and some weren't ready. It was not fair to you. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter," Laura said. "I am glad to know I could have graduated."

Then they shook hands, and Mr. Owen said good-by and wished her good fortune in all her undertakings.

As Laura went down the stairs she thought: "The last time always seems sad, but it isn't really. The end of one thing is only the beginning of another."⁷

The Wilkins schoolhouse was exactly like the Perry schoolhouse. The children were obedient and learned their lessons well, and Laura felt like a capable teacher by now. With her first month's salary she bought material for clothes, sheets and pillow cases.

Pa sold a cow and surprised Ma with a new sewing machine. Before this, all their clothes were sewn by hand. Now the sewing went faster for Laura's clothes and for her new home. Mary came home for the summer and there was more sewing for her.

One Tuesday Almanzo came unexpectedly, and asked Laura to go riding as he wanted to talk to her. He told her his mother was coming

⁷Laura Ingalls Wilder, These Happy Golden Years (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 236-237.

to take charge of their wedding, and that she was determined to have a big wedding. Almanzo wanted to get married the end of that week, if he could get their house finished, before she got there, otherwise he didn't think he could tell her "No" any other way. He couldn't afford a big wedding. Laura said her folks couldn't either.

Ma said they couldn't get a wedding dress made in time, so they finished the black one that was already started. Ma wanted them to get married at home, but Laura thought they couldn't have that kind of wedding and not wait for Almanzo's mother, so they planned to go to Reverend Brown's house.

Almanzo finished the house on Wednesday, and came over with the wagon that evening for Laura's things. Pa had gone to town on Tuesday and came back with a new trunk, a present for Laura. She packed her rag doll, Charlotte, all her clothes, and bedding in the trunk. Ma said she should take the quilt she had made when she was a little girl for her bed, and gave her two new pillows, and a new red-and-white tablecloth. When the wagon was all loaded, Pa gave them a cow. That afternoon they made a wedding cake. After supper Pa got his fiddle and sang all the songs Laura had known for the last time.

They were married Thursday morning, then home to a delicious dinner Ma had cooked. It did not taste good to Laura, as she realized she would never come back to this home to stay.

They drove to their new home on Almanzo's claim. The house was finished with siding and painted gray. It had three rooms. Laura went in and looked around while Almanzo took care of the horses. That evening--

Laura's heart was full of happiness. She knew she need never be homesick for the old home. It was so near that she could go to it whenever she wished, while she and Almanzo made the new home in their

own little house.

All this was theirs; their own horses, their own cow, their own claim. The many leaves of their little trees rustled softly in the gentle breeze.

Twilight faded as the little stars went out and the moon rose and floated upward. Its silvery light flooded the sky and the prairie. The winds that had blown whispering over the grasses all the summer day now lay sleeping, and quietness brooded over the moon-drenched land.

"It's a wonderful night," Almanzo said.

"It's a beautiful world," Laura answered, and in memory she heard the voice of Pa's fiddle and the echo of a song,

Golden years are passing by,
These happy, golden years.⁸

After Mrs. Wilder's death, the manuscript for The First Four Years was found among her papers. It was never revised for publication, but in 1968, it was decided to publish it just as she left it.

The events of this book follow Those Happy Golden Years.

Laura would rather have Almanzo do something besides farming, but he had persuaded her to try it for three years, agreeing that he would quit and do anything she wanted him to do if he was not a success as a farmer by that time.

The next morning after their marriage, Manly (this is the only book she does not call him Almanzo) got up bright and early as he was to help a neighbor with threshing. The next day they would thresh for Manly, so Laura had to cook her first noon meal for threshers. She had plenty of food and had it on the table in good time, but she had not cooked the beans long enough, and she forgot to put sugar in her rhubarb pie. But the men joked about it and it made the meal a jolly one.

The horses were not large enough to pull the plow to break so much new sod ground, so Manly bought two large horses and a new sulky

⁸Ibid., p. 289.

plow. Now he could hitch all four horses to the plow and get extra acres plowed for next year's crop.

One day he came home with a pony for Laura to ride. After she got a saddle she and Manly had many pleasant rides together, as he had a saddle pony of his own. One day Laura had to chase some Indians away from the stable to keep them from taking their saddles and ponies.

For Christmas, since the crops had not turned out very well, Manly made handsleds for Carrie and Grace, and bought Christmas candy for all. They decided to buy themselves a present together, so ordered a set of glassware from Montgomery Ward. It included a large oval breadplate.

In the spring Laura found she was going to have a baby. She wanted to name it Rose if it was a girl.

There was plenty of rain, and the wheat and oats grew so well, Manly thought they'd make forty bushels to the acre. Since he was sure of a fine crop he bought a new binder. He cut the oats and was ready to cut the wheat. He cut only a few, then stopped, as it looked like rain. With the rain came hail. Their crop was completely wiped out in twenty minutes.

After the hail, they had to rent the house and land on the tree claim where they were living, and move to his homestead, so he could mortgage it to pay some of the debts they had built up on the house, horses, and machinery.

They moved in August, and started their second year of farming.

In December Rose was born. She was a strong, healthy, and good baby. The next summer when Laura helped Manly with the garden and hay making, they put Rose in a basket, and their St. Bernard dog would watch her.



The season was too dry and the crops were not very good. They only had money to pay all the interest and some of the smaller notes. They had two steers to sell that would bring enough money to buy groceries.

The winter, which was not too severe, passed quickly.

For their next birthdays, Laura invited company for dinner. Laura caught a severe cold, and had a fever, so Ma came and took Rose home with her a few days. When she got worse, the doctor came and said she had diphtheria. Rose escaped the disease, but Manly came down with it. His attack was light, but the doctor ordered him to

stay in bed. Royal, Manly's brother, cared for them, but as soon as they were better, went home, as he was half sick himself. After a few days they fumigated the house and Rose came home. Manly had disregarded the doctor's orders and worked too soon. One morning his legs were numb to the hips. He had a slight stroke of paralysis from over-exertion too soon. Gradually they improved, but he was weakened for the rest of his life.

In the spring the renter left the tree claim, and Manly was not strong enough to farm both places, so when a buyer for the homestead place came along, they sold it and moved back to the tree claim. They sold a colt and bought a hundred sheep with Cousin Peter. Peter was to herd them and also help Manly.

The wheat crop looked good, but for three days a hot wind blew and the wheat grains were cooked in the milk stage. It was all worthless except for hay.

Three years were up. Laura did not think that they were successful years, but Manly thought that with all the increase of livestock they had, if he had a team of oxen, he could plant more acres. Maybe, if he could try it one more year, the crops might be good, so Laura agreed to try it one more year.

That year the wool money was not enough to pay everything that needed to be paid, and the crops were no good because of lack of rain and hot winds. The trees on the claim died, and they could not prove up on that claim, so would have to pay \$1.25 per acre to the government to keep it.

In August a son was born to them. Three weeks later he died of spasms before the doctor could get there. Shortly after that their house burned. They only saved their deed-box, a few work clothes, the silverware, and a few dishes. They stayed at Pa's a few days, then

Mr. Sheldon needed a housekeeper, so they moved in with him until Manly and Peter built another shanty.

The fourth year was up, and Laura again asked if he thought their farming was a success. Manly said they might have had bad luck even if they weren't farming, and maybe next year the crops would be good.

She was still the pioneer girl and she could understand Manly's love of the land through its appeal to herself.

"Oh, well," Laura sighed, summing up her idea of the situation in a saying of her Ma's, "We'll always be farmers, for what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh."

And then Laura smiled, for Manly was coming from the barn and he was singing:

You talk of the mines of Australia,
They've wealth in red gold, without doubt;
But, ah! there is gold in the farm, boys--
If only you'll shovel it out.⁹

After seven years the bank had to foreclose, and take possession of their land. They moved to De Smet where Almanzo did work by the day as a carpenter, painter, storekeeper at noon, and once was on the jury. Laura worked at a dressmaker's shop and saved one hundred dollars. This was to be used as a down payment when they got to the "Land of the Big Red Apple," or "The Gem City of the Ozarks," Mansfield, Missouri.

On the Way Home is a diary that Laura kept in a notebook each day from July 17, 1894 through August 30, 1894, (55 days) of the 650-mile journey.

They and the Cooley family made the trip together. Laura wrote each day what time they started out, about the towns they passed through, the people they met, the crops, rivers, birds, flowers, and

⁹Laura Ingalls Wilder, The First Four Years (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 134.

about the country in general, along with her own little incidentals.

Almanzo looked several days after their arrival in Mansfield until he found a farm he liked. When they went to get the hundred dollar bill from the lap desk where they had carried it all the way, they could not find it. A few days later it was found in a crack of the desk. They made the down payment on the farm and moved to it. This was their home the rest of their lives.

In 1933 Mrs. Wilder published Farmer Boy. This book begins the account of the Wilder family and life on their prosperous farm in the state of New York. Almanzo was nine years old. We follow his life for one year from his first day of school to when he is given his first colt.

Fine horses, good food, and prosperity gave the Wilder children an easier but no happier start in life than the Ingalls girls had.¹⁰

¹⁰Arbuthnot, p. 486

Chapter 2

FACTS ABOUT MRS. WILDER AND HER FAMILY
NOT RECORDED IN HER BOOKS

Many readers of the "Little House" books have wondered about the family during the time elapsed between On the Banks of Plum Creek and By the Shores of Silver Lake. In a letter, Mrs. Wilder's daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, wrote:

...My mother could not possibly have written about everything that happened even in her "growing up" years; another fact is, that although the publishers had accepted my mother's book as she wrote it, they later refused to publish it without changing Mary's and Laura's ages. Their contention was that no child under five had a memory and that little girls so young could not have been doing the things my mother wrote of. My mother and I held out and fought for the facts, but to save the story, Little House in the Big Woods, Mother finally consented to the change in ages and make Mary and Laura two years older than they were. So to make up those years, she omitted the two years, more or less, spent at Burr Oak, Iowa and a short time spent in the town of Walnut Grove. All that my mother wrote was truth although she could not write everything that happened in her childhood.¹¹

Also in November, 1975, a brother, Freddie, was born. He died at the age of nine months. This was while they lived in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, just before they moved to Burr Oak, Iowa. While living in Burr Oak Pa and Ma helped operate a hotel.

Another part of their life that Mrs. Wilder does not mention in her books is the time between The First Four Years and On the Way

Home:

Almanzo needed a complete rest and freedom from worry, so the Wilder family went to Spring Valley, Minnesota to make a long visit at Almanzo's Father's prosperous farm there. From Spring Valley they journeyed by train to Westville, Florida, north of Pensacola, hoping that this mild climate would improve Almanzo's health. But the low climate was not good for Laura, so in August, 1892 the family returned to DeSmet.¹²

¹¹Irene V. Lichty, The Ingalls Family from Plum Creek to Walnut Grove via Burr Oak, Iowa (no publisher given, 1970), pp. 1-2.

¹²William Anderson, Laura Wilder of Mansfield (no publisher given, 1968), pp. 3-4.

William Anderson wrote of their life:

After looking over many farms, Almanzo finally found the right spot--a rough, rocky forty acres of land just one mile east of the town square in Mansfield.

The original purchase had only five acres of cleared land, but a year-round spring and four hundred heeled-in apple trees were among its features. Laura and Almanzo named their land Rocky Ridge Farm. The only building on the place at that time was a one room log cabin, with a rock fireplace, but no window.

Almanzo was recovered from the stroke, but he was still not strong enough to do a great deal of heavy work. He changed work with the neighbors and a log henhouse and stable were built. Laura and Almanzo cleared their land--Laura handling one end of a crosscut saw; Almanzo never could trust her with a sharp ax. Native timber provided fence rails and posts, and the firewood that Almanzo cut sold in Mansfield for 75¢ a wagonload.

In the spring the first crop was planted. Rose helped put in the corn and she picked huckleberries and blackberries for pies. Sometimes Rose walked into town where she sold the berries for ten cents a gallon. Soon they were able to sell eggs and potatoes, and during the second summer a cow and a pig were purchased. Laura's good butter sold for ten cents a pound. Rose helped her mother with the churning. Laura was then walking into town to cook for the railroad officials.

After living in the log cabin for about a year, Almanzo found the time to build a one-room frame house at the top of a sloping hill, surrounded by age-old oak trees. As Almanzo added other rooms to the little house, it served as Laura's farm kitchen, with a big cookstove at one end. Eventually it was completely modern and electrified and once won the title of "most modern Ozark farm kitchen." She was a wonderful cook and housekeeper, but wasn't really fond of either job.

Through the years, Almanzo added other rooms to the house. The parlor, the tenth and last room, was completed in 1912. The parlor fireplace was formed of three huge stones from the farm. This was Laura's idea, but Almanzo thought it was impossible; those stones were more than any man could handle. In the end though, Laura had a fireplace made of three stones. He used materials from the farm--sturdy oak for beams and boards and fieldstones for foundation and chimney. The oak was all hand-planed and finished, because at that time there was no planing mill in Mansfield.

There was time for fun and recreation during those busy years of farming. Laura and Almanzo took horseback and buggy rides over the hills around Mansfield. Rose attended school near Mansfield. Her friends came there to visit after school and on Saturdays. Rose and her mother played along their little creek, tamed squirrels and birds, and picked wild flowers.

Laura found some time for travel, too. When Pa was very ill in May, 1902, she went home to De Smet and was with him when he died. In 1911, she visited Ma and Mary and while there, attended DeSmet's Old Settler's day. In 1915, Laura travelled farthest from home--to the West Coast and she visited the San Francisco World's fair.

The Wilder home was known as a social center around Mansfield and they entertained a great deal. Mr. and Mrs. Wilder were frequent figures at Mansfield gatherings and church socials and often on Saturday evenings they went square dancing with their friends.

Laura and Almanzo's relatives were visitors at the farm, but

it is not known if Pa and Ma, Mary and Grace ever saw Laura's home. Carrie spent some time there about 1910. Great literary figures visited, among them Sinclair Lewis.

Rocky Ridge Farm grew over the years, just as the farmhouse did. Adding from year to year, Almanzo eventually acquired 200 acres of improved land. Many years ago, U.S. Highway 60 cut through the farm and land across the road was sold. The highway was rerouted so that the Wilder home could be preserved. After the farm was divided by the highway, a parcel of land to the east was sold to the Jones family, who built a home on it. The Jones' became good friends of Laura in her last years.

There have been many different buildings on the farm since the log cabin of 1894. There have been three houses there--one of these a rock house, built in English style, with casement windows, which was a gift from Rose to her parents in 1928. She wanted her parents to be living in a more modern house. Laura and Almanzo stayed at the rock house for about a year, but they became homesick and returned to the old home. This house now remains as part of a large poultry farm,

The Wilders planted an orchard, raised hogs and sheep, cattle and goats, and had the best flock of laying hens in the country. Leghorn hens and Jersey cows were the farm's pride. Morgan horses were, of course raised by Almanzo. Laura and Almanzo knew every bird that came to the farm and allowed no hunting, even of rabbits. They fed the quails through hard winters and during ice storms, Almanzo walked all over the farm spreading grain to feed the wild birds. Wild flowers were Laura's favorites over cultivated ones.

Mrs. Wilder's only other writing experience came from twelve years (1907-1919) as Household Editor of the Missouri Ruralist, a magazine for farm families. She also conducted the Children's department for this magazine. It was during her association with the Missouri Ruralist that Laura organized a number of farm women's clubs throughout southwestern Missouri. Laura was a poultry expert and breeder, so many articles on that subject were written when she was Poultry Editor of the St. Louis Star. She contributed numerous articles, mostly of a factual nature, to various newspapers, to the Christian Science Monitor, and magazines such as McCalls, Country Gentleman, and Youth's Companion. Her last magazine article, "Your Best Book Friends," was published in the March, 1954 issue of Country Gentleman. At that time Laura was eighty-seven years old.

For another twelve years, Mrs. Wilder was Secretary-Treasurer of the Mansfield Farm Loan Association, a branch of the Federal Loan Bank, which she had organized. During these years she handled almost a million dollars in Federal loans to Ozark farmers and never was there a bad loan or even a delay in payment.

It was one day in 1932, when Laura was 65 years old, that a letter from Rose came, requesting that her mother write down some of the stories that she used to tell her as a child, so that they wouldn't be lost. "These were family stories and I believed they should be preserved. I also thought that the stories could be used by Rose as a basis for some of her writings," Mrs. Wilder said. A few stories were written down as a brief autobiography and sent to her daughter. Mrs. Lane, realizing the merits of her mother's stories, took them to Harper and Brothers, Publishers. Harper's sent them back with the notation--"These are good, but put some meat on them. The stories were promptly rewritten in a style that appealed to children

and Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932. Mrs. Wilder told an interviewer: "I thought that would end it. But what do you think? Children who read it wrote to me begging for more. I was amazed because I didn't know how to write. I went to 'little red schoolhouses' all over the west and I was never graduated from anything."

Mrs. Wilder wrote her books on lined "Fifty-Fifty" school tablets. She wrote in pencil, on both sides of the paper. "That's the Scotch plus the hungry pioneer; she doesn't waste an inch of the cheapest paper," Rose Wilder Lane said. After finishing a manuscript, Laura went over the job, deleting some parts, adding others. She drew maps of the places mentioned and made helpful little notes to the publishers. Her writing was done whenever she could find the time-- between making beds or washing dishes or any of the other many chores a farm-wife is used to.

Even with her newly-found fame, Laura's life remained unchanged. Every morning she cooked breakfast at seven o'clock, while Almanzo cared for the milk goats, calves, and the Rocky Mountain burro. "Then he (Almanzo) works in the shop where he loves to tinker while I do up the housework and go down the hill to the mailbox for the mail. I take our big brown and white spotted bulldog with me and we go for a half-mile walk before we come back. After that the day is always full, for I do all my own work, and to care for a ten-room house is no small job. Besides the cooking and baking there is the churning to do. I make all our own butter from cream off the goat milk."

"And when the day is over and evening comes we read our papers and magazines or play a game of cribbage. If we want music we turn on the radio..."

By then Almanzo had reached an age when he had retired from active farming. Most of the farmland had been rented or sold. During the summer they raised a garden. Horses were no longer a part of Rocky Ridge Farm, but they still held a warm place in Almanzo's heart. Laura, of course, shared his sentiments. Instead of a horse and buggy, they drove a Chrysler car. Though Almanzo couldn't get automobile insurance because of his advanced age, he drove with Laura at his side "to backseat drive so he can enjoy the landscape without any worry."

In 1939, they attended the annual Old Settler's Day in De Smet and enjoyed seeing the sites of their former homes and visiting old friends. They continued on to the Black Hills and had a pleasant visit with Carrie at her home in Keystone, the little town at the foot of Mount Rushmore.

On October 23, 1949, Almanzo died at the age of 92. He had been in poor health for two years. He had a heart attack in July, 1949 and it had left him nearly helpless. Since there was no help to be hired, Laura had taken care of him all during those weeks. They had been married for over 64 years.

After Mr. Wilder's death Laura lived alone in the farmhouse. She may have been alone, but her many friends called, and children came visiting as early as seven in the morning. And of course, the mail was as heavy as ever. When Laura was by herself, she sat and played solitaire or crocheted fine lace. She was very interested in politics and economics, read widely and followed the stockyard reports and read grain market quotations. Laura dressed very stylishly and was a frequent figure at the Friday Study Club and Mansfield Methodist

Church meetings. She fitted right in, and her keen wit and stories were enjoyed by all. She had a fine sense of humor and how she loved joking and other repartee!

Rose Wilder Lane once gave this delightful word-picture of her mother: "She's the serious wide-eyed girl now almost shyly hidden under a surface quickness and sparkle. She's little, about five feet tall, has very small hands and feet, and large violet blue eyes; I have seen them purple. Baby fine, pure white hair. She wears it short and well-groomed, and moves and speaks quickly, sometimes vivaciously. But her character is Scotch; she holds a purpose or opinion like granite. She has a charming voice, with changing tones and colors in it, and is sometimes witty or fanciful, but this is always a little startling; she is never talkative and usually speaks in a matter-of-fact way. Often she is silent nearly all day long; she is completely self-reliant, is never lonely, has no need of companionship. She speaks only when she has something to say."

Both diabetes and heart failure troubled her during the early 1950's. She passed away at her farm-home on February 10, 1957, just three days after 90th birthday.¹³

The Wilders are buried in the Mansfield, Missouri Cemetery.

Their daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, who died in her Danbury, Connecticut home on October 30, 1969 is also buried in the same cemetery.

¹³William Anderson, Laura Wilder of Mansfield (No publisher given, 1968), pp. 5-10, 21-28.

Chapter 3

PERSONAL STYLE AND POPULARITY OF
LAURA INGALLS WILDER'S BOOKS

Why are Laura Ingalls Wilder's books so popular?

The maturity of the books grows with the children. The first book appeals to children of eight or nine; the last is written for the almost-grown-up girl, who by this time feels that Laura is her oldest and dearest friend. Few other books give children this sense of continuity and progress.¹⁴

Not one book lacks adventure.¹⁵

Here are honest books that any child knows he can believe, without plot, told with action, powerful characterization, and vivid description.¹⁶

Along with frontier history are included the sturdy values characteristic of a truly American way of life. In the "Little House Books" family life is honored and the emphasis is on family unity and joint human efforts in keeping soul and body together. And through it all, a warm sense of comfort and security is projected as young readers are touched by the integrity and sincerity expressed in these stories.¹⁷

Here is a splendid cycle of time and events, chronicled with a simplicity and humor that children heartily enjoy. There are plenty of hard struggles in these books--struggles with droughts, grasshopper plagues, blizzards, food shortages, floods, and fire. But there is fun, too--heavenly days on the sun-soaked prairies, triumphs of ingenuity in cookery or sewing or carpentry, a real glass window achieved unexpectedly, a guest arriving out of nowhere, spirited horses to ride behind, and Pa's old songs and gay tunes to lift the heart. These books are never lugubrious but are filled instead with heart-warming courage and high spirits.¹⁸

¹⁴May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books, 3rd. edition (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1964), p. 485.

¹⁵Doris K. Eddins, A Teacher's Tribute to Laura Ingalls Wilder, (Washington: Department of Elementary School Principals, National Education Association, 1967), p. 8.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷Constantine Georgiou, Children and Their Literature, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 313.

¹⁸Arbuthnot, op. cit., pp. 486-487.

Based upon the author's own life, these books portray the hardships and difficulties of pioneer life in the 1870's and 1880's, and describe the fun and excitement that was a part of the daily living. Throughout the stories, the warmth and security of family love runs like a golden thread that binds the books to the hearts of the readers.¹⁹

When Mary became blind from scarlet fever, many of the duties of the oldest child fell on Laura. She tried to describe the things she saw so that Mary could see them too. No doubt this skill helped her later as an author.²⁰

We adults like the Wilder Books because they add to the child's feeling of security; and so does the child, though he has not analyzed his feelings, or much less given them names. He finds, however, that his unspoken demands are granted. He would be courageous: the Ingalls family is courageous. He desires a happy home: the Ingalls home is happy, and under physical circumstances no more propitious than his own. He needs love and security: he shares in the Ingalls wealth. With his knowing it, the child is furnished a sort of catharsis through his reading of Mrs. Wilder's books. By sympathetically re-living the ordeals of the Ingalls family he acquires a new respect for himself, a new strength, and (too often) an improved set of values with which to face life.

.....
 The material for Laura's books was her own life. If one were to search for years one could scarcely hope to duplicate the wealth of background material furnished "free" to Laura.

.....
 But if Mr. Wilder had never seen a prairie nor heard a wolf howl she would have had a story. The heart of her books is Pa. Charles Ingalls was always busy providing a meager but sufficient living. He was unswervingly honest and just, always loving. Pa's fiddle sang in the little house in the woods, by the side of the covered wagon, in the dugout in Minnesota, and in the Dakotas. When he was gone, "everything was flat and dull." When he was home, "everything was all right." Laura idolized her father, and we are told that Laura's deepest joy in her success as an author was the realization that Pa would not be forgotten.

Only second to Pa came Ma. Ma made a home even when the hearth was a campfire. Her home and her family: Charles, her husband; Mary, (who became blind), Laura, Carrie, and Grace came first in every action and word. Ma's strength of character was the cornerstone of the Ingalls' household. Around Ma, one just had to be good...The abundance of good spills over, reaching the life of every child who becomes familiar with the "Laura and Mary" books.

.....
 Along with his other virtues Pa had a remarkable gift for

¹⁹Charlotte S. Huck and Doris Young Kuhn, Children's Literature in the Elementary School, 2nd. edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968). p. 306.

²⁰Carolyn Kies, "Laura and Mary and the Three R's, Peabody Journal of Education, September, 1966, p. 110.

storytelling...His stories provide interludes of intense excitement. For younger children, with quickly waning interests, they brighten a winter that otherwise might grow too long. For adults, they provide a clue to Mrs. Wilder's ability: she had sat under a master craftsman.

Upon the fine foundation laid by Pa, Laura built a style that is both distinctive and polished. One of the high points of Mrs. Wilder's style is its delicate balance. The interpolation of Pa's stories into more prosaic narrative was but one of the author's means for accomplishing this end. Another was the careful blending of descriptions of pioneer activities with story-type material. Accounts of cheese making, of harvesting grain, and of storing ice were so placed that more exciting episodes might serve as a foil for the largely informative material. Pa goes hunting: we learn how to care for the meat; wolves surround the house at night: we are told how a pioneer could make a door, complete with latch, and without a single nail.

Often the descriptive passages have been broken by bits of conversation. Always, they are made as vital to the story as, in reality, they were to all the Laura's and Mary's of a hundred years ago. Mrs. Wilder deliberately and consciously planned to share her wealth with children, just as does any teacher; but so skillfully did she handle her material that the child has only pleasure in being taught.

Another balance is to be found in the characters themselves. The ever restrained Ma is a foil for the occasionally exuberant Pa; the sometimes naughty brunette Laura is a balance for the obedient blond Mary. Laura's nautiness may indeed be one of the great attractions of the books. It is very satisfying to young readers to see that even good children do not always act that way, and it is a great relief to find out that mothers and fathers love their children even though their behavior may not always be perfect. Mrs. Wilder's ability to preserve Laura as a real little girl with whom not only girls, but boys as well, feel a bond of sympathy is one of the strong points of the series. And there is no hint of preaching: Mrs. Wilder was able to present both the virtues and misdeeds of children without attempting to make them excuses for discourses on morals.

Laura's affection for the out-of-doors and her awareness of it are found on nearly every page...Children cannot fail to love an outdoors that is presented as if it were alive; and they grow in stature as they share the experiences of a little girl who loved wolves better than oxen. It is another mark of Mrs. Wilder's style that her presentation of nature is sympathetic, unsentimental, and in concepts which a child accepts.

Mrs. Wilder's books appeal to children because of their depth of reality. This quality stems, in part, from the autobiographical nature of the books, but is the result also of the author's ability to refrain from sentimentality. Mrs. Wilder's stories are real because they are told with dramatic truth and insight, restraint, and respect.

Not the least of Mrs. Wilder's assets was her ability to maintain a superior prose style. The child who reads these books or has the earlier books read to him cannot fail to get the feel of good

writing. Even a brief examination of Mrs. Wilder's books would reveal several factors leading to the success and beauty of their prose.

First of all, the child is never repulsed by the hint that the writer is "talking down."...In this span of childhood Mrs. Wilder has been able to take the poetry of youthful thought and present it so skilfully that the child knows it is his own, and the adult recognizes it as something that once belonged to him.

Another mark of Mrs. Wilder's style is her fine use of the vernacular. Her conversation is real conversation: terse, as no doubt it was--her biographer gives terseness as a trait of her character--but childlike when children are talking. Much of the characterization of Ma and Pa is developed through conversation. Ma's conversation is a little prim; Pa's occasionally unrestrained. And although Laura often thought about how much Pa's presence meant to her, it was usually Ma who put such mature sentiments into words.

One also notices a characteristic economy in sentence structure. Mrs. Wilder's words came adequately but seldom over-abundantly. Her paragraphs are short and structurally simple. Lack of length, however, does not create a lack of beauty. Just as the young Laura's ears had been pleased by the tune of Pa's fiddle or the song of the dickcissel, so the mature Laura listened with care to the turn of each phrase. The result is simple but beautiful prose.

...But probably the basic element of Mrs. Wilder's style was her ability to sustain the point of view of the child she has been nearly seventy years before. It is never the mature Laura who is afraid of the raging fire or who worries about Pa: it is Laura, the little girl.

This consistency of point of view maintained throughout the series is an accomplishment. Possibly it is a reflection of Laura's love for Pa: at Pa's feet Laura was forever young. And in her recapturing of the spirit of her childhood Mrs. Wilder has left a work of art which should take its place with the best writing our country has ever produced.²¹

²¹Frances Flanagan, "A Tribute to Laura Ingalls Wilder," Elementary English, April, 1957, pp. 204-213.

Chapter 4

AWARDS, HONORS, AND TRIBUTES
TO LAURA INGALLS WILDER

The years following the start of her writing career at 65 were filled with honor and tribute for Laura Ingalls Wilder. Besides a world-wide readership, each year until her death in 1957 brought the shy, white-haired author important awards, medals, and letters by the thousands. Then the tributes took different forms. The towns she had written of--Pepin, Wisconsin; Walnut Grove, Minnesota; DeSmet, South Dakota; and her hometown of Mansfield, Missouri--each initiated Wilder-related projects, which now result in fitting and lasting memorials to her.

The Wilder Trail--termed as such by those who follow the westward routes of the Ingalls family--usually begins in Pepin, Wisconsin. Her first and best known book, Little House in the Big Woods had its setting near this small community on beautiful Lake Pepin, but the location of the "little house" long remained a mystery. Finally, with hundreds of letters and visits from Wilder fans, action was taken by Pepin, and after painstaking research, the first home of their famous native was located seven miles from town. Though no dense forests cover the hills these days, the cabin site is well-marked and a satisfying reward to those who seek it out. Back in Pepin, stops may be made at the public library, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Park and the shores of Lake Pepin, where Laura's Pa drove his family across the frozen ice and thus began their pioneering trek.

Just a half-day's trip west of Pepin is Walnut Grove, Minnesota. Here, On the Banks of Plum Creek, Laura spent some of her happiest childhood days. A stop at the Walnut Grove Tribune will provide visitors with information and directions out to the old Ingalls farm a mile or two north of town. The cordial owners of the Ingalls land have erected a marked trail to familiar points.

If visitors find themselves thoroughly enchanted under the Ingalls spell along Plum Creek, they are often prompted to drive the one hundred miles straight west to DeSmet, South Dakota, the town that formed the setting for six of her books. The town is now prosperous and bustling, and is filled with memories of Laura and her family. First to be visited is the restored Surveyor's shanty where the Ingalls lived their first winter in the Dakota territory. From there, friendly guides conduct the entire tour--the Wilder Memorial on the family homestead, the Silver Lake site, the dozen buildings or locales important in the stories (all marked with plaques), to the cemetery, and finally to the library, which displays Ingalls possessions. Of special interest in town is the family home, journey's end for the Ingalls and built entirely by Pa in the 1880's. Now vacant, the old house will hopefully be acquired by the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society, Inc. and an extensive restoration project undertaken. Another treasure awaits summer visitors to DeSmet--the annual production of The Long Winter, adapted years ago by Hallmark Playhouse for radio use. Performed on an open air stage at the Ingalls homestead site, the starlight performance has attracted audiences from all over the country.²²

²²William Anderson, "Places to Visit," The Calendar, May-Aug., 1972, unp.

Immediately after her death, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association was formed to preserve the Wilder home and show it's treasures to visitors. The Association holds title to five of the original forty acres that Almanzo and Laura purchased in 1894.

In May, 1957 after her death in February, the home was first opened up to visitors. More than five hundred people visited that day. Since then, every season (May through October) sees an increase in number of visitors. They come from all the states and distant countries.

Many articles could not be displayed until the fireproof museum was built adjacent to the home and opened in 1971. Now visitors can enjoy: much of Laura's handwork, the oval glass bread plate bought on their first anniversary, four of the original manuscripts of her books, foreign editions of her books, copies of the first editions of her books, the desk where the \$100 bill was lost, Pa's fiddle, Mary's braille slate, Almanzo's cane collection, Laura's Bible, her silver dresser set, spoonholder, letters, and newspapers with articles about Laura and the family.

In the center of the museum is a gift shop, where books and souvenirs may be purchased. One wing is devoted to the belongings of her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane. These reflect the fascinating past of a woman whose writing career spanned reporting of World War I to Viet Nam in the sixties, with dozens of important books and articles in between.

Visitors are given a tour of the house to view the furnishings which have been kept as near as possible the way Laura left them. One can see Laura's desk where she did her writing, her library, Mary's organ, which Laura helped buy with the money she earned teaching school, the living room with the stone fireplace. Almanzo's handicraft is seen



LAURA INGALLS WILDER HOME AND MUSEUM - OPEN MAY 1 TO OCTOBER 15
MANSFIELD, MISSOURI 65704

in the cupboards he designed for Laura, the rustic beams in the parlor, and the chairs and bedside tables he made. Laura could have purchased more modern furniture, but she preferred the home-made pieces Almanzo made.

These Happy Golden Years won for her the New York Herald Spring Festival Prize. The Harry Harman Award was awarded her by the Pacific Northwest Library Association in Seattle in 1942. This was based on the children's choice. Her books were runners-up for the Newberry Awards in 1933, 1938, 1940, 1941, 1942, and 1944.

The "Laura Ingalls Wilder Award" was established in 1954 by the Children's Services Division of the American Library Association. Its purpose is to honor an author or illustrator for a substantial and lasting contribution to children's literature. Awarded every five years, it makes no requirement concerning the number of books that must be produced, but a body of work is implied, and the books must be published in the United States. It was first presented to Laura Ingalls Wilder herself. In 1960 the award was presented posthumously

to Clara Ingram Judson. Ruth Sawyer received the award in 1965. In 1970 E. B. White received this distinctive honor.

In 1947 Mrs. Wilder was invited to make an appearance in Chicago on a radio program and attend a party--both in honor of her eithtieth birthday. Since Almanzo was in poor health, she could not attend.

In 1949 a new branch library in Detroit, Michigan was dedicated, bearing her name. It was the first library in Detroit to be named for a woman and for a living person.

In 1950 another library honored her. The children's room of the Pomona, California Library was named the "Laura Ingalls Wilder Room."

The St. Louis County Library system has a Laura Ingalls Wilder bookmobile in Normandy, Missouri.

After These Happy Golden Years was published in 1943, Harper & Co. decided that a newly-illustrated and uniform edition of the books was needed. Helen Sewell, a prominent children's illustrator had illustrated the books. She was assisted by Mildred Boyle on the later books. Garth Williams was chosen to illustrate the new edition. In preparation for the job, he decided to obtain first-hand as much information about the people and places related to the books. He started out from New York, and visited the Wilders in Missouri. Then he continued his trip to all of the places she wrote about. He obtained pictures, studied realia in museums, and talked with people. After ten years, in 1953, the new edition was published.

There is a kind of continuity in this edition that one did not get from the earlier books. Laura is definitely the same person in every book, just grown a bit older and taller. Children take in every detail of the pictures and are, in almost all cases, satisfied that they know exactly how everything looked.

Helen Sewell and Mildred Boyle, who did the work for the

earlier edition, may not have included as many illustrations in their books, but they did make a contribution which boys and girls appreciate. Interest is centered on the characters with very little detail in the background. There is here the quality of an old tintype that catches the attention of the reader as surely as does a photographer.

Children who frequent a library that has both the Garth Williams edition and the earlier one are indeed fortunate. They may choose the illustrations that to them seem most believable. There is reason to believe that they are happy with either or both.²³

So delighted by the new editions was Mrs. Wilder, that she wired Harpers saying. "Laura and Mary and their folks live again in these illustrations."²⁴

The "Little House" books and now preserved book-sites continue to keep alive the pioneering era and the virtues of that period--courage, resourcefulness and generosity. And this is what Laura Ingalls Wilder wanted most for her writing to reflect for today's children. She never took her many honors as personal tribute. To her, honors meant not that she had succeeded personally, but for all pioneers, in keeping the past alive. Today, her books and their locales do this for her. Knowing that she had accomplished her task would give Laura a deep satisfaction--no doubt much the same as it was that long ago Christmas Eve when Pa said to Ma, "Look, Caroline, how Laura's eyes are shining."²⁵

²³Eddins, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

²⁴William Anderson, Laura Wilder of Mansfield (No publisher given, 1968), pp. 13-14.

²⁵William Anderson, "Places to Visit," The Calendar, May-Aug., 1972, unp.

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