Historical Musings

A New Look at Laura Ingalls Wilder: Blog Posts from the Contributors to *Pioneer Girl Perspectives*

In the spring of 2017, the South Dakota Historical Society Press debuted its second Pioneer Girl Project book, *Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder*. The collection of ten essays, along with a contribution from Wilder herself and an introduction by the volume's editor, Nancy Tystad Koupal, followed the 2014 publication of *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, edited by Pamela Smith Hill. That bestselling volume not only generated tremendous public interest but also fresh scholarship on the life and works of the author of the Little House books and her daughter and editor, Rose Wilder Lane.

The scholars we selected to contribute essays to *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* explored new paths into understanding the genesis and themes in Wilder's works. Their writings delve into a range of diverse but interrelated subjects: Wilder's ideas of truth and fact; the influence of time and place on both Wilder and Lane; the real lives of children on the frontier; fairy tale and folklore in the Little House novels; the myths surrounding Wilder herself; the story of *Pioneer Girl*'s long journey into print; and the reasons for the enduring appeal of Wilder's writings.

Curious about the genesis of their own interest in Wilder, we invited those involved in creating *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* to share some personal, behind-the-scenes information, commenting on their work, why they chose the topics they did, or what unexpected discoveries they made in the course of their research. Presented here are their responses, which were originally posted to the Pioneer Girl Project website, pioneergirlproject.org.

Since 2012, the South Dakota Historical Society Press has posted videos, interviews, and blogposts to update readers on the progress of current projects related to Laura Ingalls Wilder and to share discover-

ies made in the course of researching, writing, and editing. To view the entire series of posts or to learn more about the upcoming *Pioneer Girl: The Revised Texts*, visit pioneergirlproject.org.

Stacking Hay, Cover Art with a Story

Posted 30 January 2017 by Jennifer E. McIntyre

The best cover artwork has a backstory about its creation, and in the case of the latest Pioneer Girl Project book, I have a personal connection.

Once the authors for *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* were on board, we had to consider what the book would look like physically. The first decision was obvious; we wanted another original watercolor from artist Judy Thompson, who created *Silver Lake Reflections* for the cover of *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*. We asked her to follow the springtime *Silver Lake Reflections* with a summer painting, and she suggested a haying scene.

This subject is appropriate, as Wilder's *Pioneer Girl* is filled with examples of her own familiarity with stacking hay: "The wild grass, so tall and thick in the sloughs and the blue joint grass on the upland all made good hay. Pa cut and raked the hay. Ma and I helped load it on the wagon and unload and build it into the large stacks to feed our horses and two cows through the winter that was coming."[1]

Though you can still find a few haystacks in the South Dakota countryside, by the time I was helping my dad in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a single person used a tractor to cut, rake, turn, and bale the hay rather than stack it. Technology also helped lessen common problems like spontaneous combustion of haystacks due to summer heat and moldy hay caused by the inability of stacks to repel water during storms.

I am a third- or fourth-generation South Dakotan, depending on which ancestral line you follow. As they did for Wilder, the prairie and lifestyle of Dakota also inform my own childhood experiences, even though I grew up over one hundred years after she did. An image of

1. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, ed. Pamela Smith Hill (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2014), p. 198.

my maternal grandmother, Janice Pflaum, making haystacks with her siblings in the mid-1920s graces the monitor background of my work computer. Much like today and in Wilder's time on the farm, the whole family pitched in to get work done.

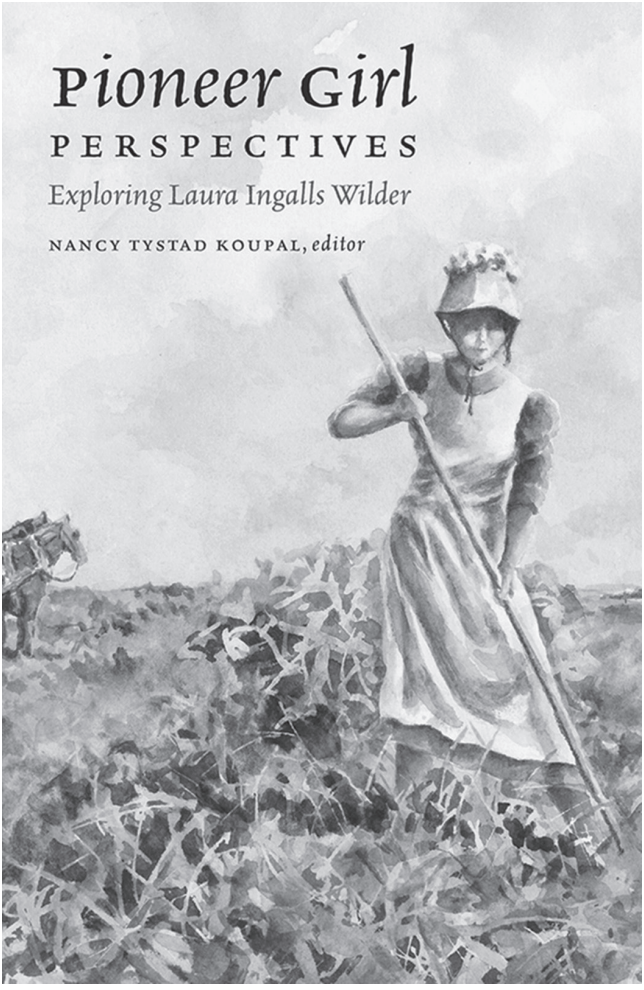
I shared the photograph with Thompson as she researched positioning and other aspects of her painting, such as the long, thin-handled rakes. In addition to my family photograph, we looked into hay stacking during Wilder's time, ensuring accuracy in the figures' clothing and the tools that would have been used.

The final product is *Summer Fields*, a watercolor painting that shows Laura Ingalls as a young pre-teen raking the hay into a stack as her father, Charles Ingalls, loads more onto the wagon. Off in the distance, viewers can see the Ingalls homestead. What a great image to introduce a book that studies Wilder's life and work!

Some Things I Learned While Editing *Pioneer Girl Perspectives*

Posted 6 February 2017 by Nancy Tystad Koupal

- Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about fairies and fairy tales at various times in her career, and her first book reads like a fairy tale.
- The first illustrator of the Wilder books, Helen Sewell, also illustrated *Cinderella*.
- Rose Wilder Lane had an FBI file.
- When Lane left Missouri in 1937, she did not return until her father's death in 1949.
- Wilder's *Pioneer Girl* was rejected many times, not only in the 1930s but also in the 1980s.
- Wilder never supported the passage of woman suffrage and, after it became law, only urged women to vote so that politics would not become unbalanced.
- Lane was a yellow journalist.
- She taught her mother how to be one, too.
- Nobody died in the Little Houses.



Artist Judy Thompson researched the details of cutting hay as she created *Summer Fields* for the cover of *Pioneer Girl Perspectives*.

- Wilder ended most of her books with song.
- The Benders of Kansas were most likely never caught.
- Wilder spent significant portions of her childhood working outside of the Little Houses in order to help support her family.

- Caroline Ingalls also worked outside the home at times to increase family income.
- The Little House narrative is one of interdependence.
- Lane had visions of writing a multi-volume novel based on United States history.
- After 1938, Lane wrote almost no fiction.
- Lane's best-known book is probably the *Woman's Day Book of American Needlework.*
- After Almanzo died, Wilder kept a gun close-by for protection in her farmhouse, where she lived alone.
- Lane went to Vietnam in 1965 as a war correspondent.
- Wilder spent most of her life in southern Missouri, but she immortalized the landscape and values of the upper Midwest (Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota).
- We can always return to the Little Houses where everyone is eternally young and adults behave as they are supposed to.

A Mother/Daughter Story

Posted 13 February 2017 by Amy Mattson Lauters

I have been a fan of Laura Ingalls Wilder since I was a little girl. Like many, I received my first copy of *Little House on the Prairie* when I was five or six from my grandmother, Elsie Mattson, and I continued to receive all of the books, out of order, for varied birthdays and Christmases. Playing "Little House" was a favorite pastime; I lived in northern rural Wisconsin when I was small, and my cousins and I had no shortage of personal experiences to relate to our reading and playing of "Laura's" story. Grandma Elsie was even friends with the real Laura's cousins who lived in the area, and I knew early on that the fictional Laura had a real-life counterpart. That knowledge lent realism to my childhood experiences, and that connection fostered my adult interest in women's history.

But as I grew up and uncovered the story of her daughter, Rose

Rose Wilder Lane, who had her own career as a writer, played an important role in the development of her mother's books.

Wilder Lane, I discovered that I related much better to her than I did to Wilder. Lane was a "modern woman" who left rural America and built a career as a freelance writer in a time when that just wasn't done. Lane defied convention and gained notoriety in a period when women were actively encouraged to stay home. She also faced significant hardships—a failed marriage, the loss of a child, and lifelong struggles with depression—and when it came to public opinion, her "give-a-darn" broke long before her divorce in 1918. Lane educated herself, and she valued intellectual thought. I admired her willingness to speak out for her beliefs. Her tenacity led her to carve out a career that allowed her to support herself, her parents, varied friends, and foster children throughout her life.

In the chapter I wrote for *Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder*, I focus on Lane's story, particularly her later career, her interactions with the FBI, and her less-than-subtle political commentary in the *Woman's Day Book of American Needlework*. My essay reflects on the fact that this extraordinary person was every inch her mother's

daughter. The values that Wilder articulates in *Pioneer Girl* and her early journalistic writings clearly appear as a theme in Lane's work and personal choices.

Rose Wilder Lane was not perfect; she made some poor choices that put her at odds with her mother and, later, with her mother's fan base. Laura Ingalls Wilder was not perfect either, but the lessons each woman's story holds for the contemporary reader remain valuable to women's history in the United States.

We can learn a lot from Lane's story.

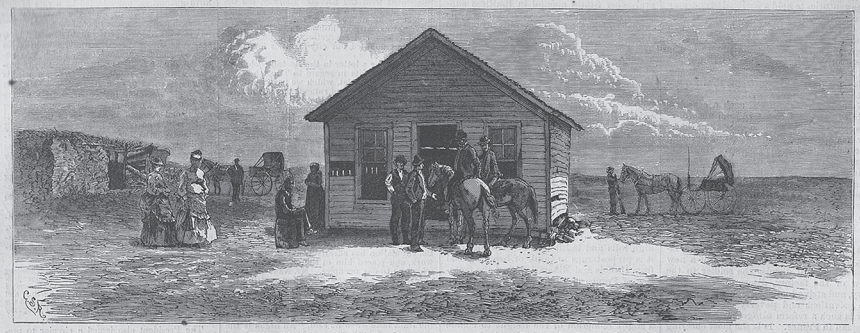
Bloody Benders

Posted 20 February 2017 by Caroline Fraser

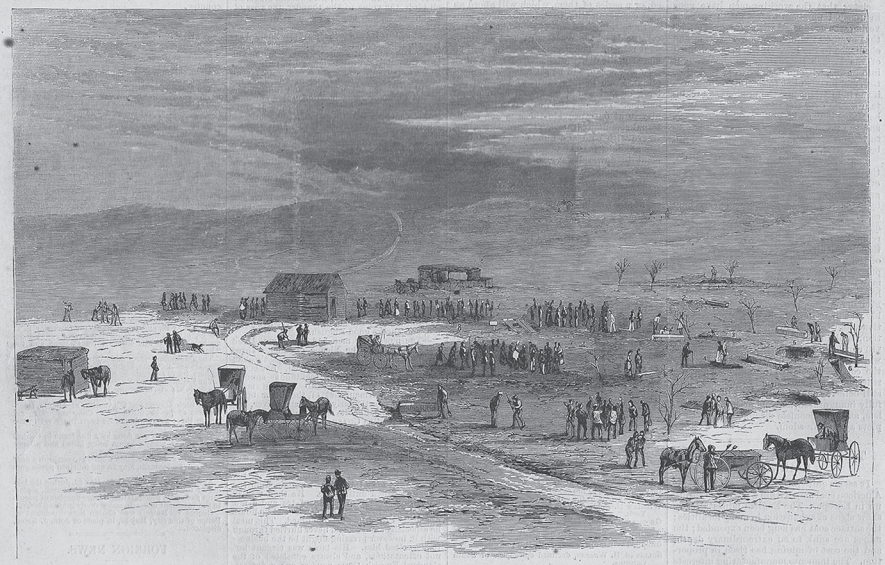
In 2011, when I was working on notes for the Library of America edition of Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books, the one that was the most fun to research and write was about the Bloody Benders. These serial killers in Kansas played a starring role in the most important statement Wilder ever made about her work, the speech she gave at the Detroit book fair. And no wonder: the Benders had it all—murder, mystery, sex appeal.

When *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography* was published, I was thrilled to see that it included, among its other gorgeous accoutrements, a meaty little appendix about the Bloody Benders. Then Nancy Tystad Koupal and *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* offered me the perfect excuse to indulge my morbid fascination with this killer family and delve into the story of why the Benders became something of a touchstone for Wilder and her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane. Why were they always bringing up the Bender account—what did it mean to them? And what does their adding the episode to the *Pioneer Girl* narrative say about their understanding of the difference between fiction and nonfiction?

My essay aims to provide some answers to those questions, but to give you a teaser: Lane's early journalism goes back to a lurid period in the history of newspapers—what used to be called "yellow journalism," named for the "Yellow Kid" comic strip immortalized during the circulation battles between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. Yellow journalists gave rise to both good and bad trends, to investiga-



THE BENDER SHANTY.—[FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE R. GAMBLE.]



1. Grave of Dr. York. 2. Grave of M'Kenzie. 3. Grave of M'Crosity. 4. Grave of Brown. 5. Grave of unknown. 6. Grave of unknown. 7. Grave of Longcore and child. 8. Pit or cellar in which bodies were cast.

SCENE OF THE BENDER MURDERS.—[FROM A SKETCH BY JOHN W. DONLADY.]

THE GRAVE OF DR. YORK.—[FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE R. GAMBLE.]

THE BENDER MURDERS NEAR CHERRYVALE, KANSAS.—[SEE PAGE 486.]

The story of the Bloody Benders and their victims appeared in the 7 June 1873 issue of *Harper's Weekly*.

tive journalism as well as tabloid fodder—they were the pioneers of "fake news."

Lane cut her teeth in the "journalistic kindergarten" of yellow journalism in San Francisco, California. Within weeks of being hired at the *San Francisco Bulletin*, she began churning out fake celebrity "autobiographies." At the same moment, she was teaching her mother the tools of that strange trade. It's an astonishing chapter in their story. The saga of the Bloody Benders dramatizes the editorial struggle between them, a struggle over values represented by truth, on the one hand, and fiction on the other. My essay features new information on the Bender-Ingalls connection and how Wilder and her daughter may have come across the salacious tale, as well as a long-lost letter of Lane's, described for the first time.

A Midwestern Pioneer

Posted 27 February 2017 by John E. Miller

When Nancy Tystad Koupal invited me to contribute an essay to *Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder*, I felt honored. Then I wondered, "Is there something that I can contribute that hasn't already been done?"

Nearly a quarter century ago, while researching my first book on Laura Ingalls Wilder, I, like every serious scholar working on Wilder, visited the Hoover Presidential Library, which houses the major collections of papers on her and her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane. At that time, I photocopied the drafts of *Pioneer Girl* that Lane had typed and sent to her editors in 1930 and 1931 (she switched agents in the middle of the submission process). I culled information from Wilder's memoir of her childhood and used what I found in *Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little Town* and then in the biography *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*. The information contained in those manuscripts was gold for anyone who wanted to know "what really happened" in Wilder's childhood, and those of us aware of the material treated it as the treasure it was. *Pioneer Girl* provided a more detailed, nuanced, and surprising picture of Wilder than we could find anywhere else.

But now is now, and I had to come up with a novel idea for *Pioneer*

Girl Perspectives, or so I thought, but a subject rose to the surface that I had been considering for some time: the idea of Laura Ingalls Wilder's identity as a midwesterner throughout her life. The places she lived in and wrote about are steeped in the identity of the Middle West, and it seemed to me that that fact alone had a significant impact on her life and writing.

Reinforcing this line of thinking was the 2014 publication of a book I had been working on for over a decade and a half, *Small-Town Dreams: Stories of Midwestern Boys Who Shaped America*. It contains twenty-two stories of small-town and farm boys who grew up in the Midwest and whose rural boyhoods significantly shaped their identities and success as adults. The men I wrote about range from Henry Ford, William Jennings Bryan, and Carl Sandburg to Ernie Pyle, Walt Disney, and Sam Walton. My interest in the subject also stems from the fact that I am a small-town boy from the Midwest myself. In addition, the brand-new Midwestern History Association, spearheaded by a former student of mine, is directing major attention to the region. So, I decided to look at Wilder as a midwestern pioneer girl.

My chapter studies midwestern places that shaped Wilder's life, values, thoughts, and actions through her experiences and interactions with the people who lived there. It places Wilder alongside other important midwesterners—Harvey Dunn, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Willa Cather—to deal with concepts of the frontier, land, rural values, cultural patterns, and socio-economic realities that provided the context for her life and writing. In this way, I note the supreme importance of place, in terms of the Midwest as a region, in Wilder's work.

In Search of the Great American Fairy Tale

Posted 6 March 2017 by Sallie Ketcham

> "But the real magic was in the telling."
> —Virginia Kirkus, *Horn Book Magazine*, 1953

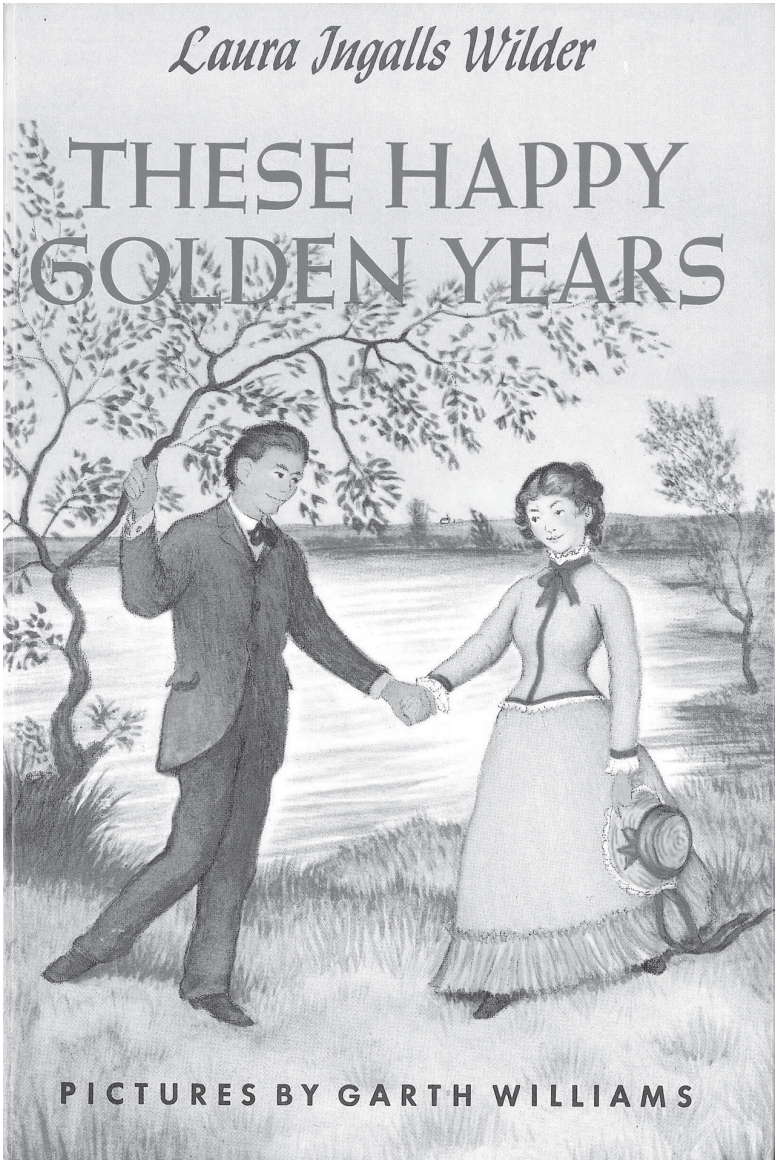
Even though I grew up in Nebraska with a western historian for a mother, I did not read the Little House books as a child—my loss. At the time, I took the lonely plains of my childhood for granted and dreamed

of other, undoubtedly more romantic fields: the Yorkshire moors of the Brontës, the secret gardens of Emily Dickinson, the haunted Black Forest of the Brothers Grimm. But like Laura Ingalls Wilder's New York editor, the legendary Virginia Kirkus—who famously became so engrossed reading Wilder's first novel that she missed her evening train home to Connecticut—when the real and shimmering magic of *Little House in the Big Woods* took hold of me, it did not let go. When I finally turned the last page of *These Happy Golden Years*, I had one overriding, visceral reaction: I know Laura Ingalls; I know this girl.

Like so many readers before me, young and old, I did not want her story to end because I knew how much I would miss her. As a children's writer with a special interest in the history of children's books, I was curious about how Wilder had pulled off this kind of literary alchemy, how she had forged such intense identification between her readers, her heroine, and her heroine's lost world.

Out of the raw material of her own life, Wilder had created something I had never read before: America's Great Frontier Fairy Tale. "Once upon a time," Wilder wrote, "sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs." It was the first line of *Little House in the Big Woods*, and it presaged the highly original, unusual, and evocative artistic decisions Wilder would make as she fused childhood memory, family chronicle, western history, fairy tale, folklore, and her love of the living prairie.

By the time she brought her story full circle, culminating in the happily-ever-after marriage of Laura Ingalls to her storybook hero on horseback, Wilder had executed a remarkable literary feat, irrespective of its historical, cultural, or political significance. Her classic American stories of the western frontier have old-vine roots, deeply entangled in European fairy tale, which Wilder uses to strange and surprising effect. Fairy tale lies at the heart of Wilder's artistic vision; it is central to the wandering hero's journey of Laura Ingalls, not because it is trivial, childish, and superficial, but because it is dark and cautionary, profound and true. Fairy tale is particularly relevant to Wilder's narrative because fairy tale, in its traditional form, preserves and passes down complicated stories of faith, hope, identity, betrayal, struggle, and redemption. It is the charming red apple in Wilder's work, luring the



In *These Happy Golden Years*, Wilder capped her classic series with a happily-ever-after ending.

reader into the heroine's quest for self-realization, existential meaning, and the elusive place called home. It's the "real magic" in the telling.

Laura Ingalls Wilder, Farm Advocate

Posted 13 March 2017 by Paula M. Nelson

Laura Ingalls Wilder's books immortalized her family's efforts to build homes and farms on the nineteenth-century frontiers of Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota. In my small town in southern Minnesota, my grade-school teachers read to us from Wilder's novels almost every day after recess. Her words changed my life. She described the beauty of the prairies, from the tiniest flowers to sweeping vistas and enormous skies. Her words and appreciation of place helped me articulate my love of the grasslands. Wilder's reflections on family, memory, and time (along with its passing) laid the foundation of my personal principles for the study of history: individuals matter; everyone has a story to tell; human nature, personal history and experience, and circumstance profoundly shape the lives of everyone.

Laura Ingalls Wilder began her writing career as a farm columnist long before she became a novelist. Laura and Almanzo settled in the Missouri Ozarks in 1894 and lived on their Rocky Ridge Farm until their deaths. Laura was known regionally as a successful chicken farmer. In 1911, the editor of the *Missouri Ruralist* read her paper on chickens and promptly offered her a job as columnist for the publication. Laura began a long career as an ardent advocate for farm women, their families, and farming as a way of life and a calling.

Wilder wrote her columns during a time of crisis and rapid change. World War I, woman suffrage, the changing roles of women, rapid industrial change, mass migration from the countryside into the big cities, automobiles, radio, mass advertising, and the birth of consumer culture—all posed challenges to traditional ways for farmers and their families. Wilder wrote as a steadying force for her farm audience. She believed that farm wives had the opportunity, more so than in any other occupation, to be full partners in the enterprise, as she and Almanzo were. Some of her ideas might surprise her modern fans. She saw

suffrage for women as an obligation rather than a right and opposed it. She feared the impact of the vote, and of politics generally, on women's most important role, rearing the next generation of children to be good, productive citizens. Wilder did not share the suffragists' belief that women voting would bring wonderful social reforms. In her opinion, women were not a class apart but instead were individuals who would vote according to their personal inclinations. When suffrage became law, however, she urged women to do their duty and vote.

Wilder's columns in the *Ruralist* resonated with her love of the farm. Love of nature, the changing seasons, the birth of livestock, birds, flowers, the rhythms and rituals of farm work animated her days. Even as the mass movement from farms to cities continued, Wilder extolled the beauty in nature to remind women that their most important and primary duty to their communities and the nation was raising the next generation of farmers and citizens.

Wilder and her husband Almanzo, left, are pictured here with neighbors during their Missouri years.

Wilder's vision of farm life continues to be a lodestone for me. Since first hearing a Little House novel, I have frequently dreamed of being a farmer in Wilder's time.

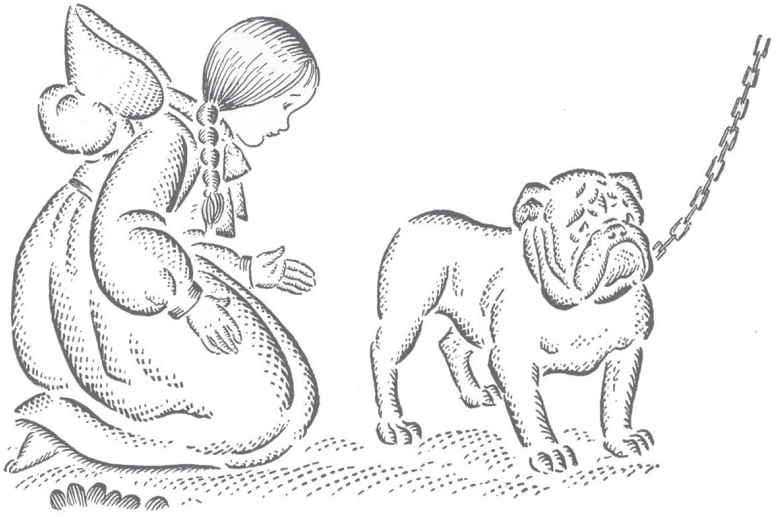
An Avid "Laura" Fan

Posted 20 March 2017 by Ann Romines

Writing my book *Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture, and Laura Ingalls Wilder* in the 1990s was a wonderful and transformative experience for me. It allowed me to return full time to my favorite childhood books, made it possible for me to receive grants that paid for trips to the historic Wilder sites, and gave me permission to spend days poking through Wilder's private papers and manuscripts. It gave my adult self—by then a middle-aged professor of American women's writing—a chance to reconnect with her passionate, partisan childhood self: a girl who was an avid "Laura" fan.

Now that book, published in 1997, is twenty years behind me. I'm still a Little House fan, but as I have grown older and lived through the last years and deaths of my parents and other beloved elders and confronted some of the constraints of aging in my own life, I've begun to notice some details in the Little House books that I did not see earlier. Wilder continues to reveal new nuances for me. Like many mid-twentieth-century American children, I grew up with frequent access to elders, grandparents and others who told stories that transmitted history, culture, and values. Upon rereading the Wilder books, I realized that Laura, Mary, Carrie, and Grace had not—the only active storyteller of the Little House books is Pa Ingalls. In fact, once the fictional Ingalls family leaves the Big Woods of Wisconsin (and the vigorous Ingalls grandparents) behind at the beginning of *Little House on the Prairie*, there are almost no old people in the Ingalls daughters' world. And, despite the dangers and relatively high mortality rate of their frontier lifestyle, they have no direct confrontations with death.

As the 2014 Pioneer Girl Project publication *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, edited by Pamela Smith Hill, confirms, however, Laura Ingalls did confront deaths in her childhood and adolescence. Most notably, she witnessed the death of her baby brother. In *Pioneer*



Helen Sewell depicted Laura with her bulldog Jack in *Little House on the Prairie*.

Girl Perspectives, I explore the reasons why Laura Ingalls Wilder and her collaborating daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, created a "little house where nobody dies."

Of course, as my fellow "Laura" fans will remember, one death does occur in the Little House books—the powerfully fictionalized death of Jack, the family bulldog. That memorable and invaluable scene is at the center of my exploratory essay.

Perspectives of a Working Writer

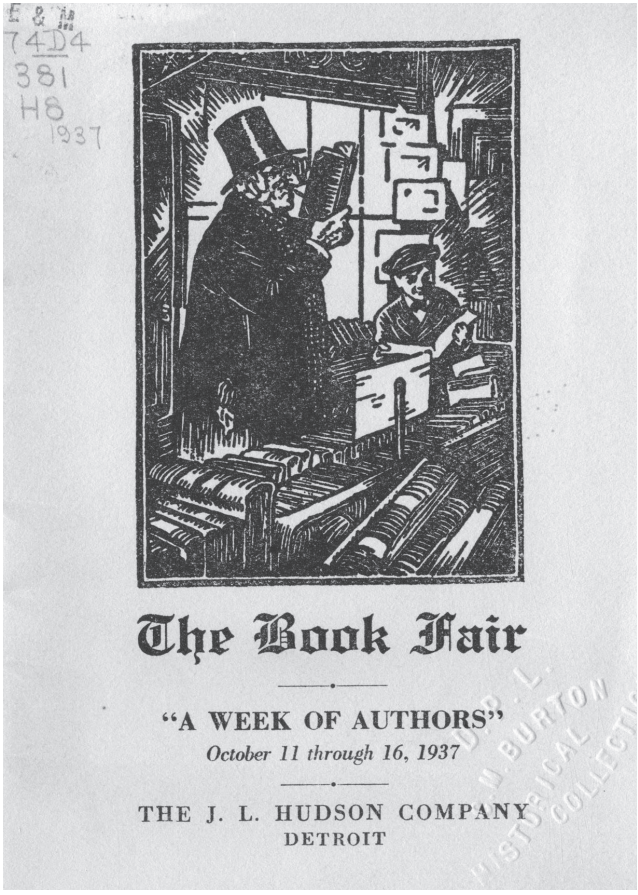
Posted 19 April 2017 by Nancy Tystad Koupal

Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder features the points of view of various writers working in the fields of history, literature, journalism, and children's literature, but the single most important perspective is that of Wilder herself. She is the original pioneer girl who turned a memoir into seven bestselling novels; her thoughts about her achievement are crucial to any exploration of her literary works.

Wilder formally shared insights about her writing on two occasions in the mid-1930s. In 1936, she gave a speech to the Mountain Grove

Sorosis Club entitled "My Work," in which she talked about the importance of words and their meanings and about the problems of memory, among other things. She also told her audience about research she had done, such as checking the temperature at which grasshoppers lay the most eggs.[2] In 1937, Wilder attended a book fair in Detroit, where she told her audience that as she wrote one book after another about her

2. Wilder, "My Work," in Wilder and Lane, *A Little House Sampler*, ed. William T. Anderson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 174–80.



Wilder was one of the authors on the program of the 1937 book fair in Detroit, where she shared her thoughts on writing.

family she came to realize that she had lived on succeeding frontiers and that her books collectively told the story of that epic American adventure. She also shared her plans to carry that theme through future volumes, outlining the books she had yet to write. Between the two speeches, Wilder's Detroit talk seemed the better fit for a book in which so many of the contributors referenced her life on the frontier. And while the document has been published before, the speech has never really been annotated or placed in the context that *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* provides.

We are fortunate to have Wilder's Detroit speech to share with readers seventy years after she gave it. For that, we may have Rose Wilder Lane to thank. When Wilder wrote the speech, Lane was living in New York, where she had contact with Wilder's editor, Ida Louise Raymond, who was also speaking at the book fair. From Raymond, Lane must have learned that the event had been a success, for she immediately began to insist that her mother send her a copy of her talk. When it finally arrived, Lane wrote back that the speech had arrived and "it is fine. No wonder you made a great hit."[3] The handwritten document has been preserved in the Lane Papers at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library. To read more about it, see the opening chapter of *Pioneer Girl Perspectives*.

The Story of the "Diggers"

Posted 24 April 2017 by William Anderson

I was dubious when Nancy Koupal invited me to contribute to *Pioneer Girl Perspectives*. What, I thought, could I possibly add? The comprehensive, incisive essays in *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography* ably tell the origins of Laura Ingalls Wilder's apprenticeship manuscript.

Then Nancy gave me a pep talk. She has done this for lo, these past thirty years, during writing projects and sundry historical-literary affairs. She challenged me to consider the "first diggers"—the fraternity of people who started the initial research on Wilder. One enthusiastic

3. Lane to Wilder, [late Oct. 1937], Box 13, file 193, Laura Ingalls Wilder Series, Rose Wilder Lane Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

Aubrey Sherwood, left, is pictured here in 1983 with his wife Laura and Roger Lea MacBride, Rose Wilder Lane's heir.

old regular in early Wilder studies cheerily told me, "I hope our spades never get rusty."

As a fledgling researcher in the 1960s and 1970s, I was welcomed into that coterie of folk dedicated to Wilder. The "diggers" were scattered throughout the Wilder country in America's heartland and farther afield—even reaching to Japan and Australia. Many of them actively toiled to preserve Little House sites. Aubrey Sherwood, editor of the *De Smet News* and a friend of the Ingalls daughters, was among the most influential, a true mentor to me and countless others.

I had a brief brush with the great Rose Wilder Lane. She answered my letters, vetted my first writing, and lectured me on research technique. She autographed books for me and was incredulous that I had unearthed many of her early writings. She claimed she'd forgotten writing some of them.

How does all this connect with *Pioneer Girl*? Through ongoing involvement with Wilder people and places, some best-forgotten early writing of mine, and continuing research, I was cognizant of *Pioneer Girl*'s existence. The manuscript had its own surreptitious life, long before its 2014 appearance. I was charged to prepare a version for publication during the 1980s. I witnessed others using *Pioneer Girl*, all within an aura of secrecy. It was a dishy slice of literary lore, indeed.

I've told the story from my perspective in the chapter "*Pioneer Girl*: Its Roundabout Path into Print." Writing this history was one more Wilder adventure, locating forgotten files of mine, drawing on long-held memories, and constructing a previously untold tale.

Yes, Laura Ingalls Wilder is still most relevant during this, her sesquicentennial year.

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On the covers: Through posters and other appeals, the American Red Cross called on women to volunteer their talents to aid the Allied effort in World War I. In this issue, Lisa Lindell looks at the war experiences of Brown County women through their letters home, many of which appeared in the Aberdeen newspapers. Artwork by Haskell Coffin (front) and Thomas Tryon (back).