

The ROCKY RIDGE REVIEW

Winter 1998

Laura Ingalls Wilder - Rose Wilder Lane Home Association, Mansfield, Missouri 65704

ROCK HOUSE OPENING AND ACTOR DEAN BUTLER WERE FEATURES OF 1997 ROCKY RIDGE DAY

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association again hosted a memorable Rocky Ridge Day on October 18. This was the seventh annual literary and historically-oriented observance on the grounds of the Home and Museum. The festivity started with the visit of illustrator Garth Williams in 1991.

The event began Friday evening when the Association hosted an open house at the restored Rock House. The house was full of enthused visitors who enjoyed delicious refreshments, conver-

sation, and the chance to see the magnificent transformation of the former Wilder home.

Assisting in the hospitality and preparations were Alice Ann Hartley, Dr. and Mrs. Barbe, James and Lee Ann Roark and Mrs. Gaylerd Miller. Larry Dennis of the Mansfield Mirror recorded the event with his photography.

The perfect weather, combined with a



Butler with an 'Almanzo' doll.

large number of repeat and newcomer visitors, kept the grounds filled with interested admirers of the Wilder books from early morning until dusk for the activities Saturday.

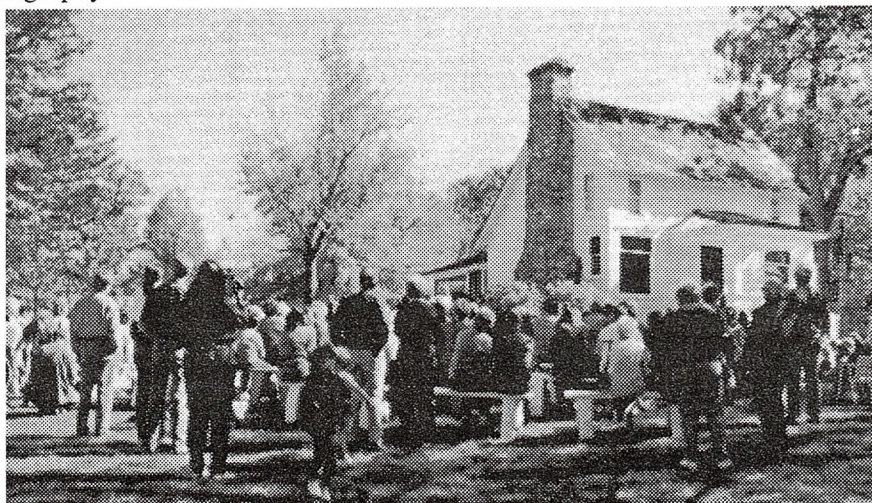
A ribbon cutting ceremony at the Rock House site was a feature of October 18, with founder member Juanita Parker doing the honors. Two Spyres brothers of Mansfield sang "Bless this House" before the doors were again opened for visitors.

Dean Butler, who portrayed Almanzo on the television series "Little House on the Prairie" accepted the Association's invitation to be present, and he graciously answered questions and joined in autographing sessions at the Book Store, along with William Anderson and Abby MacBride Allen.

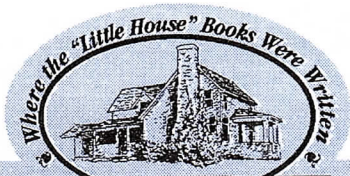
At the usual afternoon program, Mr. Butler spoke of his experiences while a cast member on "Little House", and expressed his pleasure that so many people obviously valued the stories Laura originated on the site. "This is among the priceless pieces of Americana, and you're all a part of it. And it's not just isolated here . . . it's world wide. Laura Ingalls Wilder put human qualities in her books . . . the love of family and simple God-fearing values."



Ribbon cutting ceremonies marked the opening of the restored rock house.



A large crowd was on hand for Rocky Ridge Day.



THE WILDER HOME NEWS FROM THE HOME & MUSEUM

WILDER NEWS

One of the founders of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association, Harland Shorter, died last August 30. Mr. Shorter and his wife purchased the Wilder home and surrounding acres from Laura and Almanzo, and in 1957 they sold their interest in the Rocky Ridge farmhouse to enable tours to begin. Earlier, they farmed the land surrounding the "Rock House", and resided there until 1956. The Shorters were good sources of information about the Rock House property and the Wilders. Sincere sympathy to the Shorter family. ∞

The Coterie Theater in Kansas City produced the play "Little House Christmas at Plum Creek" this season. A reviewer noted that "The message is clear; We don't need 'stuff' to appreciate the important things in life." ∞

For those who like to plan ahead, "Rocky Ridge Day" at the Wilder Home in Mansfield is announced for October 17, 1998. ∞

Mansfield life and history will be incorporated in the upcoming book by Dr. John Miller entitled *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, to be published by University of Missouri Press in April. ∞

Missouri educator David Ingalls is a direct descendant of Peter and Eliza Quiner Ingalls, Laura's aunt and uncle. On his visit to Rocky Ridge Day, he brought along the Ingalls family Bible, surely a part of the household when

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Check pattern on front page streamer is duplicated from flyleaves of original Harper & Brothers editions of the Wilder books and favored by Laura

AUTHOR WILLIAM ANDERSON TELLS HISTORY OF ROCK HOUSE AT RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONIES

Before the ribbon was cut, marking the opening of the Wilder Rock House, William Anderson noted, "...a little history of this house is in order."

Following is that history as he related it:

"This Ozark rock house was a dream of Rose Wilder Lane when she was in Albania.

When leafing through a magazine one day, she saw a picture of an English stone cottage, and it became her dream for her parents here on Rocky Ridge Farm.

That was in the year 1928, and after several years abroad, she returned here to live with her parents. By the summer of 1928, construction of this retirement home for Laura and Almanzo was in full swing.

Actually, this house was modeled after a Sears-Roebuck blueprint. Rose took that plan to Springfield, MO, and a prominent architect, Eugene Johnson, modified the house to her specifications.

Laura and Almanzo were agreeable to moving over to this site on Rocky Ridge Farm, but Laura was adamant; she wanted nothing to do with the planning or building of this house. I think she had had the experience of setting up a new home so many times, that she was willing to let Rose and Almanzo do the honors.

During the fall of 1928, this house was a construction site. Anytime a workman was present, Rose or Almanzo was here supervising the job. The house was a very innovative house for that time. A ceramic tile bathroom was not usual.

Rose was very meticulous about detail. She was constantly phoning or sending wires or letters to Springfield back and forth to the architect. One of the things she could never quite believe is that the chimney was straight, so it was redone several times.

The interior of the house was overseen by an interior decorator from Springfield. The paint was changed several times until the tint exactly suited Rose.

All of the furniture for this rock house came from one of the best department stores in Springfield; so when

Laura and Almanzo moved in, they had not only a brand new house, but a house full of brand new 1928 style furniture. It was quite beautiful on Christmas morning when the Wilders first came to this house. It was their Christmas present.

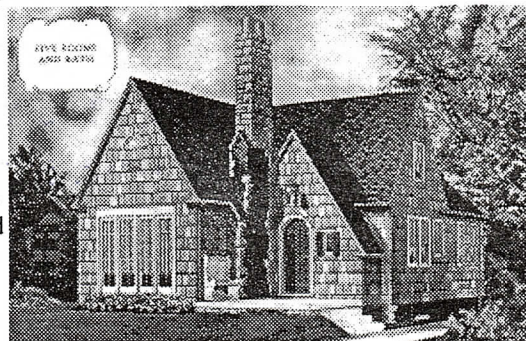
Even the architect in Springfield caught the spirit of Rose's gift to her parents. He wrote that he wished he could see the expression on their faces when she turned over the key on Christmas morning. He predicted that would be a very dramatic moment for the Wilder family.

The old farm house on Rocky Ridge was electrified and modernized to Rose's taste, and with her friend, Helen Boylston, they lived there for several years. Many of Rose's greatest writings were written in the upstairs sleeping porch of the Rocky Ridge farmhouse, including the book, "Let the Hurricane Roar."

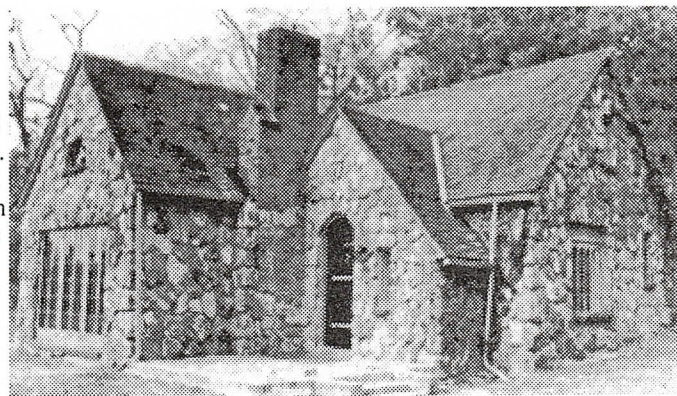
This rock house was paid for through the proceeds of one of Rose's magazine serials, "Cindy", which was an Ozarks story in "The Country Gentleman" magazine, a popular magazine of that time. For this serial Rose received ten thousand dollars. That was a princely sum for any American writer in the nineteen twenties, which attests the fact that Rose was a prominent writer of that era.

The construction project went way over budget and a loan was taken out at the Bank of Mansfield to cover the excess. Almost immediately the depression hit, so Rose was strapped for money. She was a very saleable author, and was constantly at work on short stories and novels and was able to make up the deficit.

Almanzo and Laura were very grateful and comfortable when they moved into the rock house. This place became an Ozarks showplace, and people actually drove up to



Sears, Roebuck house plan, from which the Wilder home was adapted and built.



ROCK HOUSE, cont.

take a look. The Wilders entertained a great deal in this house. Laura invited her bridge club and study club here for meetings. She held a St. Patrick's Day party here and many formal and informal dinners were held here. These were the depression years, and that depression really spawned Laura's writing career.

Rose encouraged her to start writing the Little House books, and four of those books were written here, which adds historical and literary value to the house. "Little House in the Big Woods", "Farmer Boy", "Little House on the Prairie", and "On the Banks of Plum Creek" were all written when Laura lived at the rock house.

By that time the Wilders had retired from farming, but Almanzo the farmer boy was still interested in agriculture. He had a garden, and while living here at the rock house, he first became interested in goats, and started that famous goat herd he's remembered for in this area in the 1930's and 1940's.

Behind the house there is a pathway that the Wilders used going back and forth between this house and the old farm house.

One morning Rose was surprised to see her parents coming through the woods with an old cutter, and Almanzo had attached his mules to this cutter. They still liked their old ways, even though they were living in a very modern house.

In 1936 Rose left Rocky Ridge farm and moved to Columbia, MO where she was researching a book on the history of Missouri, so she lived close to the university at the Tiger Hotel.

During that time period, the old farm house was empty, and the windows were boarded up. This bothered Laura and Almanzo, because they had put so much of their hearts and hands in the building of the old farm house, and as they drove by, they felt quite sad and homesick that the place was unoccupied.

Finally, in 1937, Laura had to admit that she was homesick, and during the summer of 1937, she and Almanzo opened up Rocky Ridge farmhouse, moved the furniture from this house over to the farmhouse, and set up housekeeping back in their original home.

Laura said, very gratefully to Rose, 'You have given me seven very wonderful easy years living here at the rock house', but I think that they were really very happy to get back into their old home place, and that, of course, is where Laura and Almanzo spent the rest of their long lives.

The second half of the Little House series was written at the Rocky Ridge farm house.

Restoration has been done on this rock house to return it to its original beauty, as it was in 1928, and I hope that everyone will enjoy going through these rooms, thinking about the writing of the first Little House books and the years Laura and Almanzo spent here.



ROMINES PUBLISHES

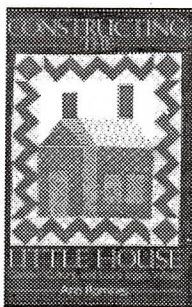
CONSTRUCTING THE LITTLE HOUSE

Ann Romines is a professor of English and director of her department's graduate studies program at George Washington University. Her roots are in Missouri, and her lifelong interest in the "Little House" books now results in this critical volume. With deft scholarship, the author discusses such issues as "A Narrative of Acculturation," "Materialism and the Little House", and "The Novels of Adolescence."

Romines is one of the luckiest of "Little House" scholars; she can say, "I saw her." Indeed, Ann Romines was one of the throngs of Missouri children who lined up to meet Laura Ingalls Wilder in November 1952 in a Springfield bookstore. Her book recounts some of that momentous occasion . . .

"I did my childhood reading in rural Missouri, during the postwar 1950s. Fifty miles from my town, in a white farmhouse visible from the main highway, lived the famous author, Laura Ingalls Wilder. When we drove by with our parents, my best friend and I begged them to slow the car to a near-standstill, so we could look and look, scanning porch and lawn for Mrs. Wilder. But once, when Jimmie's mother took pity on us and offered to drive us to the door so we could knock and say hello (as many children did, and were kindly welcomed), we were shocked. Unthinkable that we should knock at a Little House and speak to an author!"

Then came what promised to be the greatest day of my life. For my tenth birthday present, my grandmother drove me to Springfield, our nearest city, where Mrs.



Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture, and Laura Ingalls Wilder, by Ann Romines, Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1997, 287 pp. Paperback copies available from Little House Bookstore for \$16.95, plus shipping of \$3.00.

ROMINES, cont.

Wilder was scheduled to autograph books at Brown Bookstore. (Such occasions were rare for her; this one, held when she was eighty-five, was to be her last.) In the stolid 1949 blue Chevrolet, the hundred miles to Springfield seemed to take forever. I sat on the edge of the front seat, chattering in high excitement to Grandmother, who always did me the honor of taking me seriously. When we arrived at the bookstore, with its towering dark shelves, Grandmother bought me the last book in the series, the only one I hadn't yet read: These Happy Golden Years. (On the last page was printed, "The End of the Little House Books.") We joined a line of girls I didn't know, city girls as intimidating to me as Laura's nemesis, Nellie Oleson.

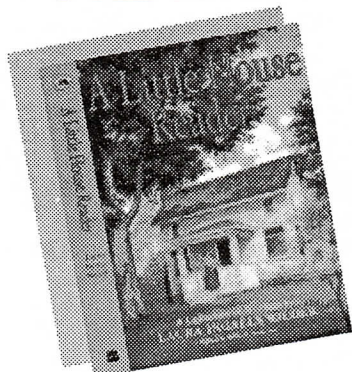
Then I saw her, sitting at a table. Mrs. Wilder! She was tiny as I and my stout grandmother were not. Her hair was pure white and naturally curly (mine was not). Her dress was a rich dark red with a matching velvet hat (Grandmother and I wore navy blue). Grandmother nudged me forward and said, in her sociable voice, "Marjorie Ann loves your books, Mrs. Wilder." The Author smiled and opened my new book. On a blank page she wrote, in a squarish capable hand like Grandmother's. She wrote her name, "Laura Ingalls Wilder."

What did I say? Nothing. Like the young Laura Ingalls at moments charged with emotion and import, I "could not say a word" (LHBW 76), although I was ten and tall, above Grandmother's shoulder. Speechless, I took my book from its author's hand. Grandmother was probably embarrassed by her stony charge, mute among the charming, chattering little girls who filled the store. In the car on the long drive home, I stayed quiet. I was reading voraciously, lost in my last new Little House book.

In the forty years since that birthday, I have not stopped reading. My autographed copy of These Happy Golden Years is spineless, worn, and spotted with mold from a leak in my first apartment. Every few years I have returned to reread the Little House books - sometimes with a child as accomplice, most often alone."

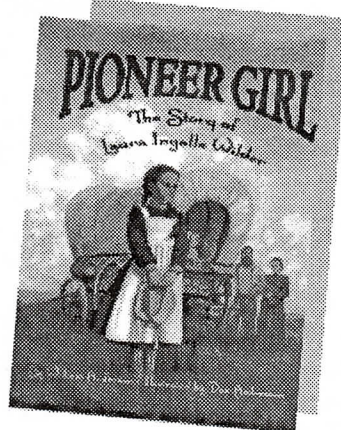
The author has been a regular visitor at the Wilder Home and Museum since its opening. She says, "More than any other place, the Mansfield house and museum fueled my personal and scholarly interest in Wilder. I remember the year the house opened to the public and I at last got a look inside. The Lichtys gave my family a wonderful tour and fed my imagination with their stories of the Wilders. I kept in touch with Mrs. Lichty-Le Count until her death and it gave me great pleasure to be able to mention her in the acknowledgments of this book."

NEW IN THE BOOKSTORE



A sequel to *Little House Sampler*, with more writings by Laura and an emphasis on her life in Mansfield. Illustrated with rare photos.

**TWO
NEW
BOOKS
by William
Anderson
\$15.95 ea.**



Beautifully illustrated with glorious paintings by Dan Andreason.

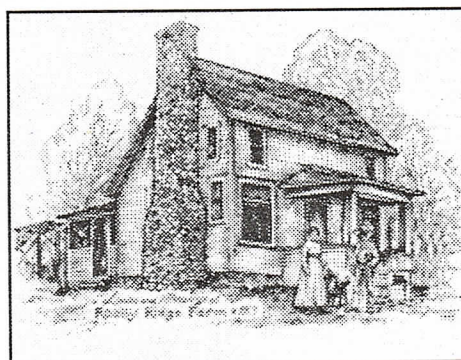
New! By Cheryl Harness

Missouri Author & Illustrator



Color Sketch of Ingalls Family
11x14 (Ready to frame).....\$4.95
or

10 Note Cards, Color Sketch of
Ingalls Family, 5x7.....\$7.50



10 Note Cards, Sketch of Laura
Home, 5x7.....\$5.75

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NEWS...

Continued from page 2 . . .

brought along the Ingalls family Bible, surely a part of the household when Laura and her family stayed with the Peter Ingallses during the summer of 1876. The Board of Directors gratefully acknowledges the offer of exhibiting the Bible. Board member Jane Decker took charge of having the weighty volume restored in Columbia, MO. ∞

Another Board member, William Anderson, presented on the Wilders at the International Reading Association in Springfield, IL in March and will be at the Delta College Children's Literature Festival in Michigan in May. ∞

Tours began at the Home and Museum March 1, 1998. ∞

Lakes Region Travel is running a Wilder Tour from July 10-16, 1998, to include all of the Little House sites, excepting Malone. For more detailed information, write Lakes Region Travel, 619 Mall Germain, St. Cloud, MN 56302, or call 320-252-7472.

A two hour made for television movie entitled "Beyond the Prairie: The True Story of Laura Ingalls Wilder" is being filmed in Utah for possible airing next fall. So far, casting is incomplete, but Richard Thomas ("The Waltons") has been selected for the role of Pa Ingalls. ∞



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Rose Wilder Lane Home & Museum**
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