



# The ROCKY RIDGE REVIEW

Summer 1999

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

## THE COOLEYS AND THE WILDERS, TRAVELING MATES TO THE OZARKS AND LIFELONG FRIENDS

By Nancy Cleaveland

*The publication of On the Way Home in 1962 told the story of how the Wilders made the move from De Smet to Mansfield in company with the Cooley family. Many readers have wondered what became of the Cooleys. The following research will answer those questions, and show the family friendship that endured until Rose Wilder Lane's death in 1968.*

When the Wilders and the Cooleys reached Mansfield, the Cooleys moved into a small farmhouse a few miles north of Mansfield. Before school began they moved to town to run a small two-story white frame hotel and lunchroom on the northeast corner of the square. An 1894 printed advertisement read:

**F. M. COOLEY**

**Restaurant and Lunch Room  
Table Supplied with the Best The  
Market Affords - Also a fine line of  
Confectionery, Fruits, Cigars & Tobacco**

By January 1896, the Cooleys had given up the hotel business and purchased a house on Commercial Street. Mr. Cooley became a partner with John Rogers in the dray and water business. They hauled goods to and from the depot and peddled water to homes and stores that had no well or pump, using a tank wagon filled with water from the spring south of town. Frank was also agent for the Waters-Pierce Oil Company, selling mostly kerosene.

The first years in Mansfield were busy ones for both the Cooleys and the Wilders, but there was still time for visiting. In later years, Rose and Paul both wrote of Sunday afternoon visits the Cooleys made to the Wilder farm. Paul and George liked playing in the ravine at Rocky Ridge most of all.

Since there was no Congregational Church in Mansfield, the Cooleys joined the Methodist Church. Until the Methodists built their own building in 1899, services were held at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, west of the George Burney property. The Burneys were well-known and respected in Mansfield; land owned by Mr. Burney and sold as town lots added considerably to the original size of Mansfield. Mr. Burney was agent for the Frisco Railroad so he and Frank Cooley saw a lot of each other, and their two families became good friends.

In December 1897, Frank Cooley came down with pneumonia. He was only 37 years old, but despite treatment by Dr. F. B. Fuson, he died on December 29th, leaving Emma a widow at age 32. Frank was buried in the Mansfield Cemetery.

The next year, Almanzo and Laura moved into town, renting the house two doors down from the Cooley home, where Emma, Paul, and George continued to live. Almanzo took over Frank Cooley's jobs, both in the draying business and as agent to the Waters-Pierce Oil Company. With the Wilders living in town, Paul and George were able to spend even more time with Rose after school hours.

Mr. Cooley had been a member of the national fraternal society, the Ancient Order of United Workmen. The A.O.U.W. provided what was known as "fraternal life insurance," a death benefit paid to a member's family. Emma Cooley received at least \$1000 from this fund, money that enabled the family to keep their home. For a while, Emma ran a small confectionery; she also kept boarders. Paul had a paper route and both he and George worked at odd jobs. Mr. Burney asked Paul to work at the depot after school, as a "flunkey," for a salary of six dollars per month.

Following her husband's death, Emma Cooley became a shrewd businesswoman. Calling herself a capitalist, she made loans with the cash she had and easily made more money by holding mortgages at 8% per year. When a borrower failed to repay a loan on time, Mrs. Cooley had their property seized by the sheriff. She purchased it at public auction and sold it at a profit. Only one person was found to have borrowed money from Emma Cooley,

not repaid the loan until three years after its due date, and not be foreclosed upon. That person was Almanzo Wilder.

As neighbors in town, the Cooleys and Wilders saw each other often. Emma Cooley and Laura Wilder were members of the Methodist Ladies Aid Society. They were mentioned in a long poem published about the history of the Methodist Church in Mansfield. It said, in part, that they were two of the original six members of the Ladies Aid and were "very good workers, honest and truly."

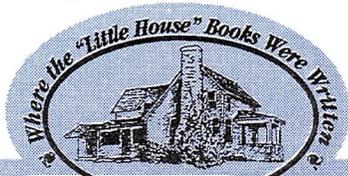
Only one social club in Mansfield seems to have had both Emma and Laura as members - the Interesting Hour Club. This group met at a member's home,

where papers were presented and discussed, followed by refreshments and a social hour. Although they were friends, Emma and Laura seemed to be in different "social circles." At one point, Laura wrote that the only women left in Mansfield were part of what she called "the old group" and were not much fun to be with. Emma may have been in that group.

Mr. Burney and Paul's supervisor urged Paul to quit school at age 16 and go to work for the Railroad full time. He complied. Although he was academically gifted and longed to finish high school, discontent over a teacher's departure and the removal of Latin from the curriculum helped Paul to make his decision. Paul must have felt the need to go to work  
*Continued on page 2 . . .*



*The Cooleys: Emma, Paul, Frank and George.*



## THE WILDER HOME NEWS FROM THE HOME & MUSEUM

### WILDER NEWS

The 1999 season at the Home and Museum has started out in a busy way. By mid-June, 20,000 visitors toured the Museum, historic Wilder Home and Rock House. At the mid-year Board of Directors' meeting it was voted to surface the Museum parking lot and also the approach to the Visitor's Center at the Rock House for the safety and convenience of visitors . . .

On May 15, the Wilder Home and



*Newscaster Cristina King visits with Fun Fair visitors at the Wilder Home.*

Museum was the site of Springfield's Channel 3 TV's "Fun Fair". Three hundred people stopped by the station to pick up free passes to the home and museum . . .

For those who have not seen it, the Home and Museum web

site can be reached by the following address: [www.bestof\\_ozarks.com/wilderhome](http://www.bestof_ozarks.com/wilderhome). Thank you to Association member Nancy Cleaveland, who researched the Cooley family who accompanied the Wilders to Mansfield. The Missouri link of the story appears in this issue; the South Dakota data is in the current *LIW Lore* of the De Smet group . . .

A feature story on Laura and her books appeared in the Los Angeles Times and was reprinted in many other papers. In part it says "She is arguably one of the most influential American novelists. Like Mark Twain, like Harper Lee, like Frank McCourt, she wrote of her childhood, recording past events as a child saw them -- simply,

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

and help his family with finances.

As part of his job, Paul learned to operate the telegraph key at the Depot. During that time, Mr. Burney's daughter Ethel was also learning telegraphy. A wire ran from the Depot straight to the Burney kitchen and when Paul wasn't busy with other obligations, he and Ethel practiced sending and receiving messages to each other. Mr. Burney served as their tutor. Returning to Mansfield after graduating high school in Louisiana, Rose Wilder learned the basics of telegraphy from Ethel and Mr. Burney. Rose was so enamored with it that she ordered a telegraph sounder and key from the Montgomery Ward catalog and began her career as a telegraph operator.

In 1900 the entire Mansfield High School consisted of 29 students, including Paul and George Cooley. A ninth grade had been added, but in 1901 it became apparent that Paul and George, much like Rose Wilder, were capable of going beyond what Mansfield had to offer. All three left the Mansfield school. In September 1901, Paul Cooley quit school and moved to a rented room at the home of banker Noah J. Craig. Mrs. Cooley rented out the house in town and she and George moved to Springfield, where George entered Drury Academy to prepare for college. For the next three years, Emma ran a boys' boarding club called Woodland Cottage.

In 1901, Paul began to advance his business career. He was offered a job as Railroad Agent, first in Osceola, then in Blytheville, Arkansas. He wasn't yet 18 years old so he had to get written permission from his mother in order to draw his monthly salary of \$50 himself. When George started college, Emma moved to Blytheville to live with Paul, and George joined them during summer vacations.

Blytheville was a long way from Mansfield, but Paul and his mother were able to return for occasional visits. Paul often saw Rose when he was in Mansfield, and they sometimes got together with other friends for a visit. In later years, when asked if he had ever "dated" Rose, Paul said that he "supposed he had, but they didn't call it that." They were merely good friends who enjoyed each other's company. Paul thought Rose was one of the smartest girls he ever knew, and the two remained friends until Rose's death. Rose and George Cooley were friends as well, but they both had headstrong temperaments, and their personalities often clashed.

George graduated from Drury College in 1907 and began studying to be a minister at Chicago Theological Seminary the same year. After graduation from Seminary, George entered the Newark Methodist Conference and was assigned to a church in Hope, New Jersey. Emma left Arkansas and moved to New Jersey to keep house for George.

Shortly after Paul had moved to Blytheville, he met Odessa Hollipeter, daughter of the man who ran the sawmill and electric company. Paul soon left the Railroad to become bookkeeper for Mr. Hollipeter, and then he started keeping company with Mr. Hollipeter's daughter. Paul and Odessa were married on Thanksgiving Day, 1909, a marriage that lasted forty-five years and blessed them with two children. Their son William became a Methodist minister, but he lost his life at a young age, the result of a tragic car accident. Paul and Odessa's daughter Marian graduated from the University of Tennessee and became a teacher and a librarian. Marian married Elstner Beall and settled in northeast Arkansas, where she is still living.

George Cooley continued his education at Drew University Theological College and was ordained Deacon in the Methodist Church in 1910, serving at a number of Methodist churches in New Jersey over the next several years. In 1913, he married Ella Cyphers Reed. In 1917, Ella gave birth to a son, Harold, but not long after his birth, she died in the flu epidemic. Emma Cooley had returned to Arkansas to help Paul and Odessa with their children; now she moved back to New Jersey to live with George and to look after baby Harold.

Soon George was assigned to churches on Staten Island, New York; there he met Frances Lauretta Carr and they were married in 1919. Once again Emma changed households, returning to live with Paul. Emma became active in the Red Cross, serving as the first Red Cross secretary in Blytheville.

George Cooley had five sons: Harold, Frank, Arthur, Ralph, and his adopted son Charles. They all grew up in the southern Catskills region where their grandparents had both been born and raised. Two sons followed their father into the Christian ministry. The other three served their country in the U.S. Air Force. Ralph and Arthur are deceased. George's sons Harold and Charles both live in Virginia; Frank lives in Georgia.

George always served at least two, and once five, small Methodist congregations at a time. George was avidly interested in music. As a boy he had studied the violin, but an accident with a pair of scissors forced him to give up the instrument. He occasionally composed songs for youth groups and as a preacher led the singing in his congregations with a strong second tenor voice. Singing around the piano at home was a frequent evening pastime for the family, while Frances Cooley played the piano.

The Cooleys kept in touch with friends they had known in Mansfield - the Wilders, the Burneys, neighbor Carrie Rogers. Paul and Rose continued to correspond. Ethel Burney became a telegrapher, married a railroad engineer, and moved to Springfield; and Paul and Odessa visited them there. Paul and Odessa also visited with the Wilders at Rocky Ridge, where they heard all about Rose's adventures. Emma returned to Mansfield whenever she

## COOLEYS AND WILDERS, cont.

could, sometimes with Paul and Odessa, sometimes alone.

The Cooley and Burney families especially kept in touch. After the Cooleys had moved away, Ethel's father and Paul Cooley's mentor, George Burney, had been elected Mayor of Mansfield, serving from 1911 until 1915. Mr. Burney was Agent for the Frisco Railroad for over thirty-five years, as well.

On Valentine's Day 1924, George Burney and Emma Cooley were married in Paul's home in Blytheville; Mr. Burney had been a widower for several years. George and Emma returned to Mansfield to live in the Burney home. Emma continued Red Cross work in Mansfield and also served as the County Probation Officer for Wright County in 1924. Emma again was an active member of the Methodist Church in Mansfield. She attended Methodist Ladies Aid Society meetings and presented papers at Epworth League meetings. One paper Emma presented was on education, and it asked the question: "If a young person could read just one book a month for the next year, what books would you advise him to read?"

Emma's marriage to George Burney was a happy one, but all too brief. Less than three years after they were married, George Burney suffered a stroke as he was walking back to the Depot after mailing a letter. Two friends helped him into a car and rushed toward the Burney home, but George died before they arrived.

Emma Burney lived in Mansfield on and off for the next fifteen years. She sometimes spent the winter with Paul and Odessa, or granddaughter Marian would spend extended visits with her in Mansfield. Sometimes Emma lived in Wisconsin with relatives. In 1943 she moved to an apartment in half of Paul's freestanding garage. Emma always put the needs of her sons and their families before her own and didn't seem to mind playing "musical families" as she moved from family to family over the years. She wanted to be where she was needed most.

In the early 1950's, George Cooley retired from the ministry and settled near Stevensville, Virginia. Emma died in 1956 while living with George and Frances, and she is buried in the Methodist Church circuit cemetery there.

After his mother died, George decided to drive to South Dakota to see where he had been born almost seventy year before. He asked Paul to go with him and Frances, and Paul was happy to do so. Paul wanted Ethel Morris, now a widow, to join them. Paul had asked Ethel to marry him and she was "taking it under advisement." The trip would give them a chance to see if they got along as well as they had in the old "Mansfield Depot" days.

In De Smet, Paul and George tried to locate the old Cooley farm and the schoolhouse they had attended, but they didn't have any luck finding either. On the ten-day trip in Paul's Studebaker, the two couples logged 3357 miles through nine states. How different this journey was from the one in 1894!

Paul and Ethel were married in 1957 and settled in Blytheville. Paul Cooley had done many things since leaving the Railroad for a career in accounting. Sharp in math skills, he advanced quickly to the position of auditor of the Hollipeter Power Plant, remaining for more than fifteen years after it was sold to the Arkansas-Missouri Power Company. He was also County Auditor for twelve years. Paul's love for the Church was shown in his multiple positions in the United Methodist Church. He served in virtually every position in the Sunday school, was auditor for the church, and then was Treasurer for the Conference for more than fifty years. For eight years Paul served as a lay minister for a Methodist Church west of Osceola. The First Methodist Church of Blytheville celebrated his 70 years as an active member and the Chickasawba Lodge celebrated his 50 years as Master Mason.

Paul Cooley had been interested in painting as a teen but had to abandon the hobby when forced to go to work. Paul took lessons in oil painting after his retirement and painted numerous canvases of scenes he had remembered from his travels over the years. One of these paintings he sent to Rose Wilder Lane and another to Irene Lichty; they are both now part of the collection of the Wilder Museum in Mansfield.

In October of 1966, Paul and George, along with Ethel, made their last trip to Mansfield together to attend special services for the dedication of the new Methodist Church sanctuary. The Cooley and Burney families had each donated a pew, and they sat in them during the services. Those pews, identified by brass plaques, are still in use in the church today.

Rose Wilder Lane called Paul and Ethel early in 1968 from her home in Harlingen, Texas, inviting them for a visit before she left for a trip overseas. Paul and Ethel couldn't make the trip and Rose died in Connecticut on the eve of her expected departure.

George and Frances Cooley continued to live in Virginia after his retirement. For a few years they sought the warmer climate of the Gulf coast in Dunedin, Florida, but they returned to Virginia to enter a Methodist retirement home in Onancock, where George Cooley died in 1973 at age 87. Paul Cooley died in 1981 at age 96.

The publication of *On the Way Home* introduced generations of readers to the Cooleys as "the family that traveled with the Wilders." More recently, in Roger MacBride's Rocky Ridge series, stories including the Cooleys have renewed interest in the family. Once again, questions are asked about the Cooleys' places in the Ingalls and Wilder family histories - "Did it really happen that way?" Hopefully, many of those questions have now been answered.



## WILDER NEWS, cont.

candidly. . . She never won a Pulitzer, she never won a Nobel, she is rarely included in anthologies or superlative lists, and yet more than 50 million people have bought her books; millions more have read them. She has inspired four generations of boys and girls, by showing them that surviving with integrity is its own heroism . . .

The "Long Property", which adjoined the Rock House land was purchased by the Association and the buildings have been removed in order to return the landscape to its original setting . . .

Board member William Anderson spoke at the International Reading Association Convention in March in Grand Rapids, MI; the session was televised on May 15 on C-Span's "Book TV" network . . .

Association president Jean Coday was pleased to welcome award-winning children's biographer Jean Fritz to the Home and Museum. Ms. Fritz is a recipient of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award . . .

In preparation is a two-sided historic marker to be placed at the Rock House locale. This will hopefully be ready for dedication at Rocky Ridge Day . . .

Readers may be interested in the fact that Border's Books has issued three Little House books with the Sewell illustrations in a special edition/treasury. These are only obtainable from Borders, so check your local store . . .

People have wondered about the CBS movie about the Wilders. It was broadcast in Japan in May, and will be seen next fall in the US . . .

Special sympathy to board member Juanita Parker on the recent passing of her husband, Edward. Ed was a founding member of the Association, and served faithfully as treasurer for many years . . .

The 1999 commemorative Christmas ornament is now in and features Laura and Almanzo in a winter scene . . .

The Wilder family Bible, a gift from Ma at the time they married, and Laura's personal Bible have been conserved and restored, and are now back on display. . .

Thanks to Tim Hancock, Mountain Grove, who donated his labor and expertise to repair a leaky area in the front porch and also in the kitchen chimney region. . .

Some recent good words about the Wilder writings came from Laura Bush, wife of Texas Governor George W. Bush. She writes: "*In my youth, my favorite books were from the Little House on the Prairie series. I loved the main character, Laura, because we shared the same name. But perhaps what I loved even more were those special times I spent sitting with my mother's arm around me, listening to her read*" . . .

Although the Museum employees work hard in showing hospitality to the many thousands of visitors, they also take time for  
*Continued on Page 4 . . .*

## CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE AT WILDER HOME A SUCCESS; COME AGAIN IN 1999!

The first Christmas-themed open house at the historic home was a great success, with hundreds of visitors arriving between December 1-15. Lighting on the grounds and on the approach to the house was very effective. Tour guides welcomed visitors, who heard the sounds of Christmas played on the old pump organ. In the living room, a beautiful six foot Christmas tree adorned the corner by the fireplace, decorated with an old-fashioned look. Many of the decorations were made by school children. Refreshments were served in the Director's office, and visitors enjoyed seasonal shopping in the book store.

The Board of Directors voted to continue the tradition again this December. This is your invitation!



## POST CARDS HOME . . . Rose writes from Yugoslavia

Rose Wilder Lane's travels in the early 1920s took her near and far, but she developed a special interest in and affinity for the lands and people of the Balkans. News of the 1999 Kosovo crisis recalls many familiar place names where Rose visited and described for her parents in letters and post cards.

On post cards to Laura and Almanzo, Rose wrote: ". . . these are pictures of peasants and explain themselves. The peasants are the only prosperous people all through Central Europe. Yugoslavia is entirely agricultural; no industries yet developed, though English companies are drilling for oil near Zagreb and on this train is a Bosnian engineer who speaks French and tells me he is building a new railroad through here."

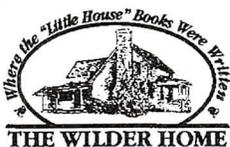
Perhaps the post cards of natives which Rose sent home are of ancestors of refugees seen in current news reports!

*Rose wrote:  
"Don't you think you would create a sensation going to town like this, Papa? I bet this one has a Rocky Ridge of his own, too; he looks it, doesn't he?"*



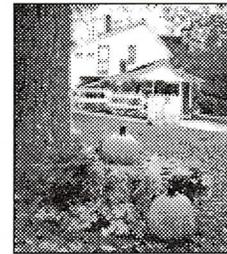
*"A Croation peasant woman. I have bought one of the jackets and will show it to you when I come home."*

**Laura Ingalls Wilder -  
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## WILDER NEWS, cont.

relaxation. The first social event of the tourist season was an outing to breakfast at a nearby B & B in Seymour . . .

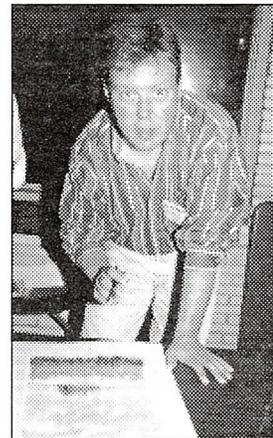


The ninth annual Rocky Ridge Day will be held on the museum grounds from 9:00 - 5:00 on October 16. Plans are shaping up and will include the usual mix of music, performances by the Ozark

Mountain Players, autographing and visiting.

## ARTIST PRESENTS PAINTING

One of the highlights of 1998's Rocky Ridge Day was a painting demonstration by Dan Andreason, illustrator of *Pioneer Girl*, the Rocky Ridge series and other Wilder related works. Dan's skillful hand created a beautiful prairie scene with a log cabin, and "Pa" in the background with a gun over his shoulder. When he finished, he presented the original work to the Home and Museum. It has been framed and now hangs in the Museum.



*Dan Andreason creates*

Thank you for this gift, Dan!