

The ROCKY RIDGE REVIEW

Spring 2001

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

A CUB REPORTER VISITS WITH ROSE WILDER LANE

By Fern Nance Shumate

(Permission to reprint granted by author of article.)

Roaming around the shelves, I encountered a book entitled *Peaks of Shala*, by Rose Wilder Lane. I was enthralled by the tale of an American woman who dwelled among the Albanians for five years and might still have been there, had not a family emergency taken her home. Reading that book, I waded knee-deep in adjectives about the scenery, the people and, in particular, the four-foot-wide silken trousers, cobwebby lace and gay embroidery worn by the women of Albania.

I learned that the author came from Mansfield, Mo., but it was several years before I met anyone from that area. One day my hairdresser happened to mention that she was from Mansfield, and I immediately asked about Rose Wilder Lane. There were, my shampooist said, some Wilders living on the edge of Mansfield, and she thought there was a daughter, Rose, who didn't mix much with the local people and often entertained some rather strange guests.

By this time I had become a newspaper reporter. I became acquainted with N.J. (Noah Jeff) Craig, attorney-banker from Mansfield. He sometimes came to Springfield to represent clients, and I covered some of his cases in court. When I asked N.J. if he knew Rose Wilder Lane, I struck gold.

The Craigs and Wilders had known each other when both families were poor, and they came up in the world more or less at the same time. The families remained close. N.J. offered to take me and a fellow reporter to Mansfield to meet Rose. Looking back, I think he didn't really think I'd take him up on the offer, but I did. He didn't mention it again, but I did, repeatedly. I was obeying a newspaper precept that "No one who says he will call you back does. You must keep calling him."

So my friend and I were taken to Mansfield to meet Rose. She was dwelling in the white farmhouse atop a hill. To my disappointment, there were no Albanian brocades, laces or thin, shimmering drapes. Instead I saw a rather dumpy woman with a round face, straight hair and simple clothing.

Rose had obviously been told that we were cub reporters, so she ran briefly over learning telegraphy at the Mansfield office, getting jobs as a telegrapher in Kansas City and other places



Rose and the dogs at the kitchen door

and eventually going into the newspaper business. She rattled off anecdotes of how she had succeeded, chiefly by accident, in obtaining numerous scoops. Then she reeled off the names of prominent people she had known and did know, including President Hoover, Henry Ford and Eugene Debs. At that time, avant-garde writers dragged in the name of Debs, but I had only a hazy idea about his reason for being famous, so I just let that slide.

I was waiting for an opportunity to inject a question about Albania, but Rose's comments didn't stray from Mansfield. She informed us that she worked every morning in a room above the one in which we were sitting. We all raised pious eyes to the ceiling. She added that she no longer had the strength, energy or desire to write books, but that her mother was still writing. She didn't name The Little House series, but we had a vague notion that was what her mother was writing.

Having felt that she had fulfilled her obligations by talking about her newspaper career, Rose launched into the sad story of the death of her pet dog, which had been struck by a delivery truck on the winding road leading to the hilltop home. The driver said he had not seen the dog, but Rose was convinced it was murder.

On this cheery note, we departed. It just now occurs to me that Rose expected an interview to be printed in our newspaper. Her lecture on how she got her scoops hadn't sunk in. Neither of us reporters thought of writing a line about the visit. I was frankly grumpy, because of the absence of stories of Rose's Albanian days I had never gotten around to asking her about.

Lucille Morris of the *Springfield News-Leader* did interview both Rose and her mother several times, but she got very little information about Albania.

When I went through Mansfield on a horseback trip, I stopped at the white house with the Craigs. Rose had a house guest, Catherine Brody, who was writing a book entitled *Cash Item*, dedicated to Noah Jeff Craig. Rose wasn't present, but Mrs. Wilder was, and I got to meet her.

I never got around to visiting the Wilder-Lane establishment again. I heard that Rose had moved East and Laura and Almanzo had immediately moved back into the white farmhouse.

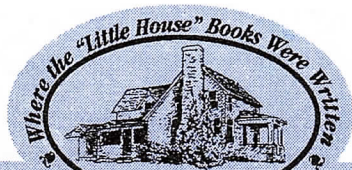
The Little House stories began to get a lot of publicity. Nothing much was heard of Rose, except that she wrote a book about needlework. Then she wrote a book composed of a series of short stories about scandals that had allegedly occurred in Mansfield. The names, of course, had been changed to protect the author.

The friend who told me about it was chuckling. "People were lined up in front of attorneys' offices from here to Kansas City," he said, "wanting to do something to get rid of the book. They were told that the first step would be to prove that they could be positively identified with the characters in the stories before they could prove any damage had been done." So they went back to their homes.

Rose's writing was spasmodic after she moved East. In 1938, she wrote *Free Land*, a pioneer homesteading book very much in the Laura Ingalls Wilder fashion.

The Ozarks has had two famous Roses, both touched by a pixie's wand. Rose O'Neill told me that the smile on her Kewpies was inspired by the one on her mother's face.

Just before Rose Wilder Lane's death, she was planning a return trip to Europe. I wish that she had. I would have bought the book.



THE WILDER HOME

NEWS FROM THE
HOME & MUSEUM

WILDER NEWS

It seems as if the Christmas Open House on Rocky Ridge Farm had just concluded when March 1 arrived and the Home and Museum opened again for the season. With early spring breaks in Missouri schools, visitors started their annual treks to the home of the Wilders. Among many appreciative comments received are these: "Yesterday I toured Rocky Ridge Farm . . . Congratulations to all of you who have worked so hard to preserve this wonderful historic site. I wish all the children who have loved Laura's books could visit her home." And: "Most people want to go to Disneyland, but my dream is to someday visit the Wilder Home and learn more about the woman who taught me the love of reading."

Michigan educator Barb Hawkins has organized Little House tours for the summer of 2001. For more information on her itineraries and dates, contact her through her web site lhsitetours@email.com, or fax her at 810-633-9027. One of Barb's travel-mates on an earlier Wilder tour is Richard Fisher of Ohio. He sends the following ideas to share with Wilder readers: "I enjoy recreating certain Little House events, such as giving -- the simple gifts of the Ingalls' Christmas -- tin cups, peppermint sticks, heart shaped cakes, shiny new pennies and nine sweet potatoes. This past Valentine's Day, I sent two small, foil-wrapped candy hearts to a

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LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE KEEPER, WILLIAM KURTIS, DIES AT 86

The closest 'sister site' of Rocky Ridge Farm is the Ingalls homesite near Independence, KS. There, readers can stand on the open prairie and visit the replica of the Ingalls family's 'little house'. This experience was largely due to the work of Retired Brigadier General William Kurtis, who died in February.

The Little House site was previously farmland owned by the parents of Wilma Kurtis, Bill's wife. Research in the 1960s pinpointed the Ingalls house locale on the rolling land near Independence. The Kurtises cooperated fully with plans to memorialize the site.

Bill Kurtis loved the prairie country, and his own life embodied many of the principles found in the Wilder books. He personally conducted many a tour on the site and regaled visitors with anecdotes and observations on the prairie once settled by Charles and Caroline Ingalls.

While Mr. Kurtis was delighted to share Wilder lore, he was himself a prominent Kansan. He served the U.S. Marine Corps for many years. He son, Bill Kurtis, A&E television journalist noted that "He was symbolic of the greatest generation. He was a self-made man who loved his country and the land."

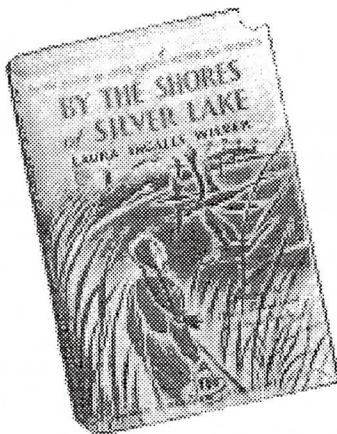
His daughter, state Sen. Jean Schodorf added, "He taught me to appreciate simple things in life -- and to be good to people."

How fortunate that Wilder readers were able to experience some of William Kurtis's influence. We offer sympathy to his wife, children and grandchildren.



ASSOCIATION PURCHASES ORIGINAL ART

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Home and Museum will be able to exhibit another piece of history connected with the Little House Books. In February, relatives of artist Mildred Boyle offered to sell original illustrations from the early edition of ON THE BANKS OF PLUM CREEK. The Association acquired three of these art pieces.



Although Helen Sewell was originally billed as illustrator of the Wilder books as they appeared in the 1930s, Mildred Boyle was heavily involved. Her family states that Mildred's name was first given credit with ON THE BANKS OF PLUM CREEK in 1937, and on all books thereafter. But her hand was evident in all eight books.

Miss Boyle had a long and prolific career, illustrating other books, for magazines and for the Gibson greeting card company.

We are pleased to display her original work and draw attention to the early art of the Wilder books.



Artist Mildred Boyle

SPRINGFIELD LIBRARIAN RECALLS LAURA

By Virginia Gleason

When I became a branch children's librarian at the San Diego, California, Public Library in the early 1950's, my "training" for the new job included more than anything else, as I recall, having me read the popular books about a girl named Laura. As I got to know young Laura, I looked more carefully at the covers and suddenly realized that the books were autobiographical. I read them all.

I had spent several years as a university librarian, but Laura's books and other children's literature of the time like Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry, Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White, and the books by Eleanor Estes, Marguerite Henry, and Holling C. Holling got me hooked on working with books and children. I continued in that role for forty-one more years at the Springfield-Greene County Public Library. I am now retired, but am still excited when I find a good book for young people.

Because Laura's books were used so heavily, we replaced her books over and over again. This will continue to be true for many more generations of librarians serving kids in school and public libraries.

With a sigh, I often tell boys and girls how I almost got to meet Laura Ingalls Wilder.

When we moved from California to Missouri, I learned that Laura was living in Mansfield, a town less than an hour's ride from our city of Springfield. As a children's librarian, I was eager to meet her.

In response to my invitation, she wrote that she was not well enough to come and speak to the children in the library (although we do have a picture of her speaking to children here previously). Therefore, our project for Children's Book Week in 1956 was designed to take messages from the local children to her.

Early in the school year, I visited all of the local schools to invite the boys and girls to come to the public library and add notes on a scroll to send greetings for Laura's ninetieth birthday.

The scroll was easy to make with gold paint, knobs and a dowel from the hardware store.

The children responded so well that I kept adding white shelf paper to the roll so that everyone could have a space to write on the scroll. The children wished her a happy birthday. Many told how much they liked her books. One boy who grew up to be a rock musician said that he would rather read her books than eat.

When it was time for me to deliver the scroll, Laura was a patient at St. John's Hospital in Springfield. To this day, I regret that her daughter Rose would not let me enter the hospital room when I went to present the scroll to Laura. I heard Rose's strong voice proclaim that no one was allowed in the room.

Inches from the door, rather than step in for a memorable glimpse, I gave the scroll to the nurse and turned away sadly, realizing that I had missed the chance of a lifetime to see Laura Ingalls Wilder. She died about two months later -- three days after her ninetieth birthday in February, 1957.

The scroll is owned by the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum at Mansfield. Several years ago we put it on display at the Springfield-Greene County Public Library. Bringing children of their own, grown-ups came by to see the messages that they had written to their favorite author, Laura, many years previously when they themselves were kids.

This is how I ALMOST got to meet Laura Ingalls Wilder.

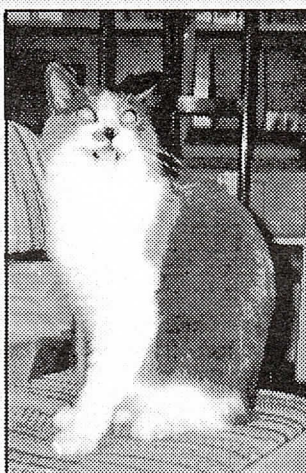
A TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL... A GOOD AND LOYAL CAT

July 4, 1991 - July 24, 2000

On July 4, 1991, this fine gray and white fellow joined us here at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home and Museum. The Curator, Connie Tidwell, and her grandchildren named him "Michael." He was very friendly and sweet, and was soon promoted to the position of "Vice President in Charge of Public Relations." He seemed to like his title.

Michael greeted all of our visitors and loved to claim the lap of anyone resting on a bench. He truly brought out the best in everyone. Young and old alike wanted to pet him and he was one of the most photographed cats in the country. He was never cross with a child no matter how roughly they handled him or wagged him around.

Michael's cozy bed was under the secretary's typewriter table and he was always on the job. He endeared himself to all of the employees and is greatly missed.



WILDER NEWS, cont.

'Laura Friend'. This started me wondering about the history of printed candy hearts. Since the NECCO Company produces this product today, I visited their web site. "Motto hearts" were invented in 1866, the year before Laura was born."

Association employee Darlys Higgins has created a beautiful web site for the Association, which will be updated from time to time. Take a look at www.lauraingallswilderhome.com. You may also visit our on-line bookstore through this web site. Darlys also designed a web site for Board member William Anderson, which shares many of his experiences researching and writing about the Wilders. The address: williamandersonbooks.com. He will be presenting on the Wilders twice in April, at the Port Huron, MI Public Library on April 4, and the JFK Library in Muncie, IN on April 7.

'Laura Ingalls Remembered' will be held at the Hoover Presidential Library on September 3 this year. The Marengo, Iowa Civil War band will play music that Laura knew, and Sarah Utoff will present as Laura, in appropriate costume. The library is located just off I-80 in West Branch, IA.

The Board of Directors has engaged historic architect Philip Cotton of St. Louis to assess needs of the historic properties and buildings. This has evolved into a much larger project, a phased site plan, which, in the future, could re-locate post-1957 buildings, construct a new visitors center, and ultimately return the grounds surrounding the historic house to its original appearance. Much work has

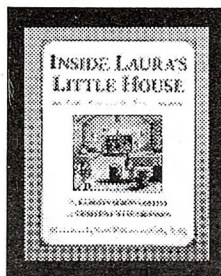


been accomplished and Association members will be apprised as developments are made.

This winter, the kitchen area of the historic home was given some needed

Continued on back . . .

NEW IN THE GIFT SHOP



INSIDE LAURA'S LITTLE HOUSE

The Little House on the Prairie treasury, written by Carolyn Strom Collins and Christina Wyss Eriksson and illustrated by Garth Williams and Cathy Holly, is a book for anyone who has ever loved Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*. Inside its pages you'll find fascinating details about frontier life, as well as crafts, recipes, and songs from Laura's beloved novels.

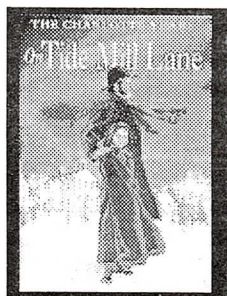
(Hardcover \$24.95)



ON TOP OF CONCORD HILL

The story of Caroline Quiner, the little girl who would grow up to be the mother of Laura Ingalls Wilder, continues with the fourth in the Caroline Years.

(Hardcover \$15.95 -
Paperback \$5.95)

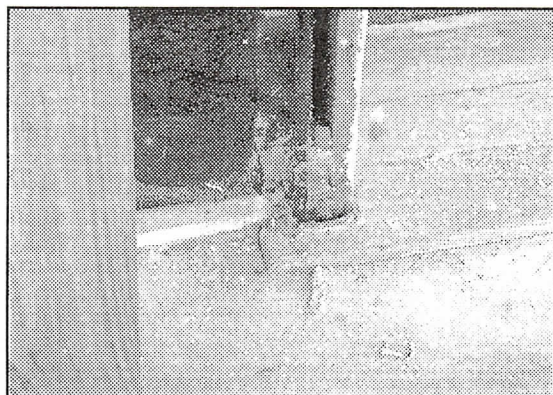
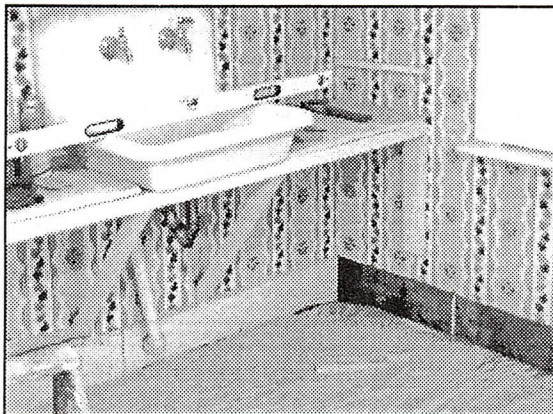


ON TIDE MILL LANE

On Tide Mill Lane is the second book in the Charlotte Years, an ongoing series about Laura Ingalls Wilder's grandmother Charlotte Tucker.

(Hardcover \$16.95 -
Paperback \$5.95)

WILDER NEWS, cont.



attention. The main supports of the kitchen were reinforced, leaving as much of the original material as was possible. The linoleum will be replaced as soon as we can locate a match to the original. One interesting thing that was found during the restoration process was the color of the original kitchen paint, which was a more subtle beige tone rather than the pale yellow first used in the restoration process. The beige matches almost perfectly the center stripe present in the kitchen wallpaper. A grant from the National Park Service provided about half of the cost of this \$20,000 project.



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

If anyone has any photographs of Rocky Ridge under construction and would permit us to have a copy of the photos, please contact Darlys Higgins at 1-417-924-3626.



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