



The ROCKY RIDGE REVIEW

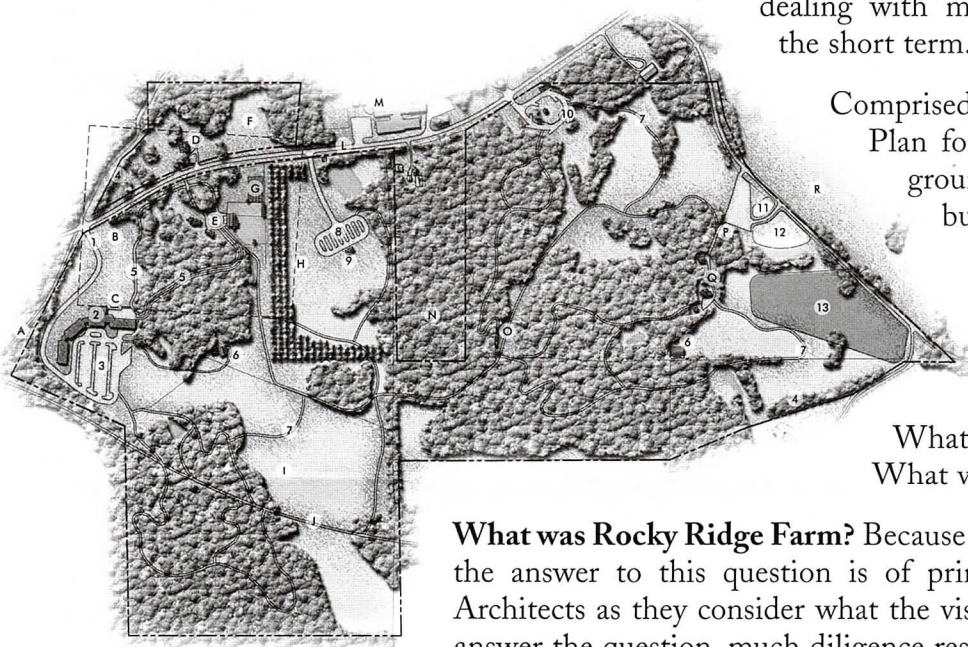


LAURA INGALLS WILDER – ROSE WILDER LANE HOME ASSOCIATION, MANSFIELD, MISSOURI 65704 FALL 2008

A MASTER PLAN FOR ROCKY RIDGE FARM

For the past four years, the Board of Directors for the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home & Museum in Mansfield, have been collaborating with Springfield, Missouri architectural firm Butler, Rosenbury & Partners in the creation of a Master Plan for the entire 170-acre farm.

A Master Plan is a document, typically comprised of text and map-like images that project a vision for the long-range use of a particular building, property, campus, or community. The value of a Master Plan is in helping an organization make sure that all improvements and changes are made with a view towards the intended outcome. Although many Master Plans can be regarded as pie-in-the-sky type planning, when based upon a commonly held vision and mission statement, they help organizations to remain focused on the big picture, even when dealing with minor improvements and changes in the short term.



Comprised of many facets, the emerging Master Plan for Rocky Ridge Farm is by necessity grounded in thorough historical research, but also takes into account present realities, and projected needs for the future. In other words, this particular Master Plan examines the answers to three questions:
What was Rocky Ridge Farm?
What is Rocky Ridge Farm, currently?
What will it be in the future?

What was Rocky Ridge Farm? Because Rocky Ridge Farm is a historical site, the answer to this question is of primary importance to the Board and Architects as they consider what the vision for the future should be. And to answer the question, much diligence research has been done. Many resources have proven invaluable to assist in painting a realistic picture of what the farm looked like and how it functioned during the Wilders' residence there. Hundred of historic photographs taken on the farm were catalogued chronologically and pinpointed on maps of the site. The written accounts left by Laura and Rose brought life to the static images in the photographs by building a greater understanding of how the farm was developed over time. Legal documents played a vital role in showing how the boundaries of the farm changed over time.

Through the course of research, it quickly became clear that the history of the farm could not be understood as a snapshot frozen in time. In particular, it is important to understand that the farm was always changing from the time Laura and Almanzo arrived in 1894 to when Laura died in 1957. And because the changes have continued since 1957 to the present day, it can be difficult to picture today what the farm really looked like at any given period during those 53 years.

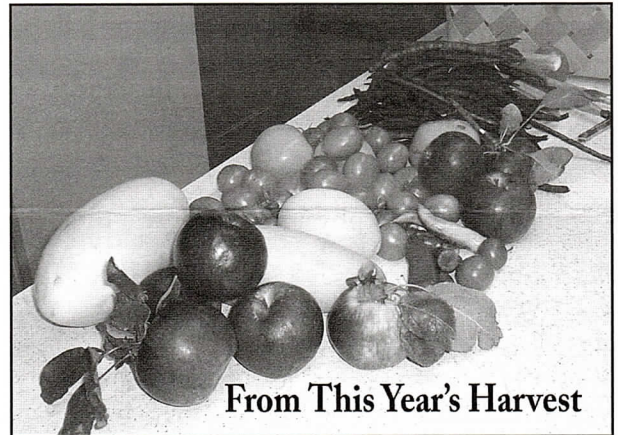
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Because the farm's appearance and function changed many times from 1894 to 1957, seven eras were identified to help understand the story of the Wilders on Rocky Ridge Farm:

1. **1894 to 1897 – Early Rocky Ridge Years.** These first few years on the farm were rough, and were largely comprised of “making-do” with existing conditions and subsistence farming. Beyond that, there was much hard work to build up the farm, but little immediate return. The farm consisted of a few ramshackle log and wood frame buildings, and it was during this time that the 1000 tree, 20-acre orchard was completely planted.
2. **1897 to 1907 – Mansfield Years.** Because there was to be little return on the initial investment to establish a productive farm, the Wilders moved to Mansfield, making their home in rental house. While there they worked tirelessly in town—Laura feeding workers and taking in boarders; Almanzo delivering goods throughout the town and region—and saved as much money as possible to continue developing the farm. In addition, they spent time every day at the farm continuing the work begun during the early years.
3. **1907 to 1913 – Building the Farm Years.** With enough money saved, and the rental house purchased, mortgaged, and rented, the Wilders returned to the farm to begin building it up in earnest. And it was a time of building physical structures: the barn was enlarged from the primitive original log structure to encompass also the first log cabin, and much more besides. In addition, a new chicken coop, carriage house, well house, and other out buildings were constructed. And most importantly of all, the Farmhouse was designed and constructed—a sure symbol of their commitment to the land, and indicator of their first successes.
4. **1913 to 1928 – Rocky Ridge Mature Years.** Because of the building up of the previous era, the function and appearance of the farm remained mostly the same during these 15 years. These were the most productive and profitable years for the farm, and because many innovative practices, Laura quickly became renowned regionally for her descriptive writings in *The Missouri Ruralist* and other occasional publications. Because many of these writings describe practices on the farm, they are invaluable in understanding how the Wilders used the land during this time.
5. **1928 to 1936 – Rock House Years.** Having returned to the farm several times in the 1920's, Rose had completed the construction of a Tudor-style cottage built of Ozark rock for her parents retirement years. It was during these years Laura began writing and publishing the first volumes in the *Little House* series. In addition to adding another significant residential structure to the farm, Rose also was responsible for the demolishing of the large barn, chicken house, and other outbuildings while living in the farmhouse her parents abandoned somewhat reluctantly. The carriage house burned, and a new garage was constructed on its foundations. She built another rock cottage across the newly constructed Coast-to-Coast Highway 60 for hired hand Bruce Prock and family. In addition, she brought electricity and central heating to the farmhouse.
6. **1936 to 1949 – Late Rocky Ridge Years.** Rose having left Mansfield to begin another writing project, her parents returned to the farmhouse, having grown homesick for the home they built and loved. The Rock House was rented, and a newer but smaller barn was built to replace the former log barn. Almanzo kept goats, planted a garden, built things in his workshop, and continued to set the fields to hay, feed, and pop corn as long as his health allowed. Laura continued to write and publish her children's books. Additional acreage was gradually sold off until, in 1948, the entire farm had been sold, and the Wilders retained life-time rights to the house and surrounding acres.
7. **1949 to 1957 – Laura's Golden Years.** Following the sale of the farm and Almanzo's subsequent death in 1949, Laura's world receded in many ways. Gradually, she spent more and more time only in and around the farmhouse. Soon Harland Shorter, the new owner of the adjacent land, primarily used the new barn and remaining outbuildings. She wrote no more stories, but was faithful to respond to myriads of letters and cards. Increasingly shy and retiring by nature, she nevertheless continued to welcome numerous visitors into the farmhouse who wanted to meet the little woman who was, by now, a widely renowned children's author. In 1957, Laura died.

What is Rocky Ridge Farm? Concurrent to historical research, Butler Rosenbury, & Partners accumulated documentation of the farm as it presently exists, including a topographical survey, aerial photograph, legal descriptions of present extents, documentation of existing structures, on-site photography, and visible traces of past uses or structures. This information became the foundation of the base map of existing conditions upon which the vision for future could be tested and developed. Because of the expansion of Association property holdings in past decades from three to approximately one-hundred-and-seventy acres, the potential for a more historically accurate interpretation of the site is dramatically increased. Because of more limited landholdings of the Association in earlier years, some historic structures were lost in order to construct newer buildings, such as the present Administration Building and Museum, in a proximity to the Farmhouse that often makes it difficult for visitors to visualize the farm as it existed when Laura and Almanzo were in their prime years and making a sufficient, if not even successful, living off the land.

In addition to an analysis and documentation of the overall landscape, the function of the different facilities, such as the Museum, was documented and analyzed to see where the deficiencies existed, and also where things are working very well. As a result, certain areas for improvement were noted. Because the Association is privileged to have a large touring population each season, the existing facilities, and their proximity to the Farmhouse leave some things to be desired. The Museum, while on the one hand providing convenient access to the Farmhouse and Administration Building, provides rather cramped quarters for the displays it can accommodate, and leaves many of the historical artifacts without a place for either proper display or storage. Likewise, the Administration Building, which houses the bookstore, administrative offices, bookstore inventory, restrooms, and theater, is a converted residence which isn't intended to accommodate either the volume of or wear and tear associated with high volumes of visitors.



From This Year's Harvest

Once a good understanding of the farm as it currently exists was developed, it was possible to look at the emerging historical research and draw accurate conclusions about how the landscape changed over the decades.

WILDER NEWS

The care and nurture of the buildings and acreage on Rocky Ridge Farm is a never-ending process, and its magnitude is perhaps not readily understood by our visitors. For instance, did you know that 26 acres on the property are mowed each week in season? And that the historic Wilder house is periodically in need of a major exterior overhaul? Right now, labor-intensive work on the caulking between the clapboards is being done, the small balcony off Rose's room is removed for preservation, and the whole house will be ultimately repainted. Jim and Clint Jackson, our top-notch maintenance personnel, do this splendid job. Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company planted and maintained "Laura's Garden" this season. There are several different varieties of heirloom seeds that have produced an abundant harvest of vegetables, melons and flowers. Jean Coday, Director for the past 15 years, was interviewed on the news segment 'Journeys with Josh' on a Springfield, Missouri TV channel. The 35th annual Wilder Days in Mansfield was held on September 12-13. Dean Butler, television's Almanzo Wilder, is producing a DVD entitled "Almanzo Wilder: Life Before Laura". Final filming took place at the Wilder farm near Malone on June 21, when Morgan horses from the Miner Institute were on the grounds. Association Board Member William Anderson was also a guest at the Farmer Boy festival, celebrating the 75th anniversary of publication of Laura's book about Almanzo. He also did presentations about the Wilders at Heritage Hill Living History Museum near Green Bay WI on July 26, and at Junction City, Kansas on October 19. This summer the Association lost two of its dedicated employees. Margie Wynn and Delores (D.D.) Koster. Two leaves on the donor recognition tree in the museum have been added in their honor by her co-workers and Association friends. Attendance at the Home and Museum from opening in March to the end of June has been approximately 10,000. The Association's traveling exhibit continues to be booked at schools and libraries throughout the U.S.

Teacher Emily Ezell of Cowan, TX writes, "We absolutely loved the traveling museum! It was so meaningful to see items that belonged to Laura Ingalls Wilder. Knowing that most of the children will not be able to travel to the homesites, the impact of bringing Laura's things to them can never be measured. Thank you so much!"

JUDY CANTRELL, BOOKSTORE MANAGER, FIRST HEARD OF LITTLE HOUSE BOOKS FROM LAURA HERSELF

For fourteen years, Judy Cantrell has been recommending and selling books by Laura Ingalls Wilder to readers who visit the Home and Museum. Her job as bookstore manager brings her in contact with many who come to Rocky Ridge Farm.

What present day visitors do not know is that Judy visited the Wilder home when Laura was there to personally show guests around.

After attending country school in nearby Norwood, Judy moved to the elementary school in third grade. The Wright County Bookmobile brought books to Judy's class, and of course stressed the Little House volumes. As a fourth grader, Judy heard the books read aloud after lunch. Her teacher read one chapter at a time, and Judy often begged for "just one more story." Then came the day when Judy's class learned they were going to Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield to meet an author—Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Laura showed Judy's class through her farmhouse. She told the students more about Almanzo, his carpentry projects, and the building of the house, rather than dwelling on the books she had written.

"Laura sat in the parlor, in one of the chairs Almanzo made," Judy recalls. "It was 1953, so Laura was 86 then. We gathered around to listen to her talk."

Judy's husband Jim also experienced a visit to Rocky Ridge Farm. His teacher, Mrs. Moles, was a friend of Laura's, so her Mansfield class was also entertained in the Rocky Ridge parlor. The children were served Laura's favorite gingerbread recipe.

MANSFIELD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESERVES LOCAL HISTORY

When visiting the Wilder home on Rocky Ridge Farm visitors are exposed to one family's experience in the Mansfield area. Now, a wider view of community can be experienced at the museum of the Mansfield Area Historical Society.

The Society's headquarters are located on the Mansfield square and the museum is open Monday through Friday from 10-12 and 1-3. Exhibits include artifacts from local families, businesses, and organizations, and give a never-before-seen historical look into life in "The Gem City of the Ozarks."

Be sure to include a stop on the historic town square on a visit to Mansfield.

Visit Us In Mansfield, Missouri or Visit Us Online at www.lauraingallswilderhome.com

Laura Ingalls Wilder -
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