



The **ROCKY RIDGE REVIEW**



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

A MASTER PLAN FOR ROCKY RIDGE FARM PART II: *WHAT ROCKY RIDGE WILL BECOME*

By Daniel Hancock

What will Rocky Ridge Farm become? This is the question for which the master planning process seeks to provide realistic answers, while at the same time exploring the greatest degree of potential. Because it is a historic site, the answer to the question must be grounded in the realities of the past to certain degrees. For instance, it was agreed by the Board and Architects that the creation of historically accurate views and vistas from historically significant structures such as the Farmhouse and Rock House was important. Such a preference means that the locations of the present Museum and Administration Building may be less than satisfactory, especially when faced with the need for expanded facilities. On the other hand, the Association is no longer limited by the rather meager property extents of three acres. With recent property acquisitions, the opportunity for locating a new Museum and Visitor's Center out of sight from the historic Farmhouse—or other historically significant sites on the farm—is very feasible and desirable.

To assist the Architects in answering the question, “What will Rocky Ridge Farm become?” a program, or a list of desirable functions/facilities was compiled. The program for the Master Plan includes the following facilities or sites on the farm:

- 1. Historic Farmhouse and recreated farmyard** – This will include newly reconstructed c. 1913 barn, c. 1935 garage and other outbuildings, a garden, original driveway, and appropriate fencing. Accommodating these changes requires the removal of the present Museum and Administration Building.
- 2. New Museum and Visitor's Center** – This new facility to be located so that access to the Farmhouse is convenient, but out of view. It is programmed to include a welcome and orientation center, small movie theater, gallery space dedicated to pre-1894 Wilder/Ingalls artifacts, gallery space for Wilder artifacts 1894-1957, gallery space for Rose Wilder Lane artifacts, a rotating gallery, environmentally controlled archival storage, a research center, administrative area, café, and bookstore.
- 3. Rock Cottage** – Located north of highway 60 from the Farmhouse, this c. 1928 structure will be restored and updated to accommodate temporary residential uses, such as a writer-in-residence program.
- 4. Almanzo's Walking Trail** – Already opened to visitors, this communicating path between the Farmhouse and Rock House will be further developed and other walking trails created to best show the natural beauty of the farm that the Wilders so loved.
- 5. Old Indian/Pioneer Road** – The impressions of an ancient road still in use until at least 1894 are clearly visible on Rocky Ridge Farm. Worn down by many centuries of Native American use prior to the arrival of settlers, it was also used by the settlers, and was even an alternate route taken by one of the last contingencies of The Trail of Tears. The Master Plan honors the location of the former road by leaving it undisturbed and viewable to visitors from newly created walking trails.
- 6. Orchard** – Although replanting and maintaining all 1000 trees on 20 acres is a formidable task from many aspects (no less now than in 1894) the Master Plan locates the 100 or so trees to best suggest the presence of the Orchard from the Farmhouse.

7. **Rock House and surrounding grounds** – The diligently restored Rock House, Visitor’s Center, and parking will remain much as is, with care taken to preserve the views all around, and particularly to the east, across the low meadow.
8. **Festival Grounds** – A site dedicated to accommodating large scale festivals or events of people and parking for cars. Although the site would appear to be undisturbed for the majority of the time, by discreetly constructing utility hook-ups and reinforcing the soil, events such ranging from old-fashioned stick-ball games to fiddling festivals could be accommodated away from the historic structures, and thereby increasing the potential of Rocky Ridge Farm as a destination for special events.
9. **Tent or RV Camping Grounds** – Also a seasonal or occasional use, the dedication of certain isolated portion of the farm for camping in good weather also increase the potential for visitor traffic to the farm and may even create opportunities for the Association to coordinate volunteer maintenance and improvement efforts.

In the Master Plan documents, which are at this time near completion, all of these program elements are shown on Rocky Ridge Farm. The Master Plan makes provision for both historical structures and sites within the farm which need to be carefully protected and preserved while at the same time providing suitable locations for very necessary improved facilities that will help the Association to better accommodate a greater variety of interpretive activities. In the past, the Association has proven to be a good steward of Laura’s home on three remaining acres of Rocky Ridge Farm. Today, the Association finds itself the trustee of a considerably larger estate—nearly all of original farm. At the same time, even given careful maintenance, the present facilities in many ways stand in need of improvement. With increased acreage comes both increased opportunity and also increased responsibility. The Master Plan for Rocky Ridge Farm is a document designed to guide the Association and Board in a pursuit of a vision for the beloved place of Laura and Almanzo Wilder that is consistent with their own—and, at the same time, provide for the safe and educational visits of many admirers and fans.

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