



The ROCKY RIDGE REVIEW

2020-2021 Season

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

Rocky Ridge Farm Welcomes Melissa Gilbert



Above: Melissa Gilbert taking in the “On the Way Home” display.

Below: Melissa Gilbert looking at the cards on the table inside the Farm House.



Fictional Laura Ingalls Wilder comes home

By: Ron Schott
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Actress Melissa Gilbert makes first visit to Mansfield

The fictional and real worlds of the late Laura Ingalls Wilder collided on Sunday, Oct. 24 when actress Melissa Gilbert made a surprise visit to the Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Home and Museum in Mansfield. Gilbert, who played the television character Laura Ingalls Wilder in the hit television show, “Little House on the Prairie,” contacted staff a couple of days prior to reserve a private tour in Mansfield as she was traveling from Texas after visiting her grandbaby and family.

“My first thought was is it a prank?,” said Director Nicholas Inman. “I called back and she couldn’t have been nicer.”

Inman said he met Gilbert and her husband, actor Timothy Busfield, when the couple arrived in town at the grave site for the late Laura Ingalls Wilder. “I was really touched about how it affected her,” Inman noted as she needed a moment to step away due to the emotions of being at the site for the first time ever. “It was a special moment for her.”

Inman then led the couple over to the museum.

Side:

Melissa viewing Pa’s Fiddle inside the museum gallery.



Gilbert Cont:

“When she walked into the museum, she was very impressed and had genuine reactions seeing Pa’s fiddle and the presentation aspects on each of the books,” he noted. She also enjoyed seeing the layout and display on the television show.”

Inman said Gilbert told him that her castmates told her positive things about their previous visit(s) to Mansfield.

Gilbert and her husband then went over to the farm house and was surprised that people were allowed to walk through what she called “such a special place.” She also walked through the Rock House.

“She was taken back when she walked into the bedroom and could see the personal effects there,” Inman added.

Inman also said that Gilbert knew many facts about the real Mrs. Wilder. “She would answer her husband’s question before we did,” he said.

Before leaving, Gilbert bought a book from the gift shop. She added that she has a book of her own coming out late next spring and may sign some so the Mansfield location could make money on their sales. She was given a set of hard back books as a gift for her to read to her grandchildren. Gilbert commented that she looks forward to bringing all of her grandchildren back some day.

“People often reflect on how the TV show didn’t follow the books as a mirrored story,” Inman said. “But people can come and we can educate them further on Mrs. Wilder’s life. And it was neat to see those two worlds come together with her visit...To picture her reading ‘On the Banks of Plum Creek’ to her grandchildren, I realized how things have come full circle...This is something we can tell guests. This was a big day for Mansfield.”

As for the staff, Inman said it was obvious they were excited. “It meant a lot to staff members who work hard every day to tell Mrs. Wilder’s story and (Melissa) understood they are also keeping (her) legacy alive,” he noted.

Wilder Home Receives Missouri Humanities Grant

Museum Curator, Tana Redman, was awarded a grant from Missouri Humanities in October of 2020 for the Traveling Tablet Project. The grant, along with a generous donation from Home Pride Bank made the museums’ first digitally curated exhibits possible. The user experiences were designed in house by the curator, with the first three being installed for the 2021 season.

One more tablet with a new guest experience will be added to the gallery in 2022.



Breakfast with Nellie

We were again honored to be included in the April schedule for the annual Missouri Cherry Blossom Festival in Marshfield, Missouri. The annual festival, which focuses on the preservation of American History has organized a fundraiser for the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association for the past several years. These fundraisers have been used to assist in the conservation and preservation efforts of our facility. Specifically, these projects have included the restoration of the Wilder crazy quilt and the refurbishing of several pieces of historic furniture from the farmhouse.

This year, the fundraiser was moved from being a luncheon to a breakfast. The breakfast was titled, “Nellie’s Pancake Breakfast” and was hosted at the Marshfield Assembly of God to a sold-out crowd. Museum Curator, Tana Redman provided an update on the conservation project of 2019 (since the 2020 fundraiser had to be canceled due to COVID 19). Joe Coday, President of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association greeted breakfast attendees on behalf of the association board of directors and Museum Director, Nicholas Inman offered an official welcome.

Following a catered breakfast from Sheila’s Place in Marshfield, Alison Arngrim (Nellie Oleson, Little House on the Prairie) spoke about her many remembrances of her time on the iconic television show and her infamous role as Laura Ingalls Wilder’s arch enemy. Arngrim’s fellow castmates, Charlotte Stewart (Miss Beadle) and Wendi Lou Lee (Baby Grace) were also in attendance at the event, which raised additional funds for the preservation of the sleeping couch from the farmhouse.

“It is always a great honor to be asked to help support the Wilder Home and Museum in Mansfield,” commented Arngrim from the stage. “We are so thankful that they continue to keep the life and legacy of Mrs. Wilder alive. It is such a great place to visit” she added. Arngrim has been a frequent visitor to Rocky Ridge Farm throughout the years and has been involved in the annual spring fundraiser in years past.

Museum staff and several Association board members mingled with guests as Wilder fans from across the nation gathered to honor one of the nation’s premiere children’s authors and to support the ongoing efforts to preserve her personally owned items for future generations of visitors to learn from and enjoy, which is the ongoing mission of the Missouri Cherry Blossom Festival and the reason that the Wilder Home has been included in their roster of activities and organizations to support throughout the years.

Tickets for the 2022 fundraiser will be available soon. Watch Facebook for details.





What Phase II of the Master Plan Looks Like at Rocky Ridge Farm

The current mission of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association is to return the landscaping, buildings, and trails surrounding the Wilder farmhouse to their approximate 1940s appearance.

The removal of the 1970 museum occurred in 2021. Next is reconstruction of the garage, and restoration of the 1935 frame complex planned by Rose Wilder Lane, and used by her parents.

Rose Wilder Lane resided in the Rocky Ridge Farmhouse from 1928 to 1936. That became “The Rose Era.” The Wilders’ daughter transformed the former working farm to “a country estate” as it was termed by the local media. Rose modernized the farmhouse, built several structures, including the Rock House, and landscaped the grounds extensively.

One of Rose’s building projects was essential in 1935, when a winter night’s fire destroyed the garage-utility-building near the farmhouse. She designed a garage for her Nash automobile, and quarters for John and Al Turner. The orphaned Turner brothers were part of Rose’s household. Always a generous soul, she provided a home for the boys during the Depression years, enabling them to attend Mansfield High School.

When the school year finished, the Turners assisted Bruce Prock, the farm handyman, in constructing a three-room complex on the burned-out site. Rose’s plans included an all-purpose room for sleeping and recreation, a workshop, and a garage. In May Bruce, and the boys excavated a basement on the side of the ravine. Rose’s June 4, 1935 diary recorded that she spent \$110 on building materials. By June 22, she noted that “studding of boys’ house up.” Three days later Rose wrote: “Boys worked hard all-day pouring cement [for] final basement wall.” On June 25 she wrote: “final rafter up.”

The Turners learned building trades while participating in the construction job.

On July 19 Rose wrote: “Bruce finished paneling north wall of boys’ house: beautiful.” The following day she moved to Columbia, Missouri to conduct research for a book at the University’s library. Bruce and the Turners proceeded to roof and complete the building project.

The three-room frame building had no official name, but was sometimes called “The Clubhouse” since the Turners hosted parties there. High school students danced, played games, and celebrated birthdays. Simple refreshments were served. In his later years Al Turner spoke fondly of his life at Rocky Ridge, and Rose’s motherly support.

Rose eventually left the farm and moved to New York. The Turners continued their college education elsewhere. Laura and Almanzo Wilder gave up the Rock House, returning to their vacant farmhouse. They re-settled there in 1937. The “Clubhouse” became a place for Almanzo’s woodworking projects and tool storage, until his death in 1949.

When the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home and Museum was established, “the Clubhouse” remained useful. During the 1960s it housed the bookstore operated by curators L.D. and Irene Lichty . When ground was broken for a museum next to the farmhouse in 1970, land space was limited. Plans allowed for only “The Clubhouse” portion to survive when the fireproof museum was built. The garage was razed. Not the best concept according to present historical preservation guidelines, but the idea was accepted 52 years ago. In subsequent years “The Clubhouse” again became a museum shop, and then the Director’s office.



Above: Sunset after the removal of the old museum building.

Right: The plaque that was on the facade of the old museum with the date of 1971, has been saved as part of the site history.

Left: Two sets of initials were found in some cement that was uncovered during the removal of the old building. They read, “ J. T. 6-17-35, J. C. 6-17-35.”

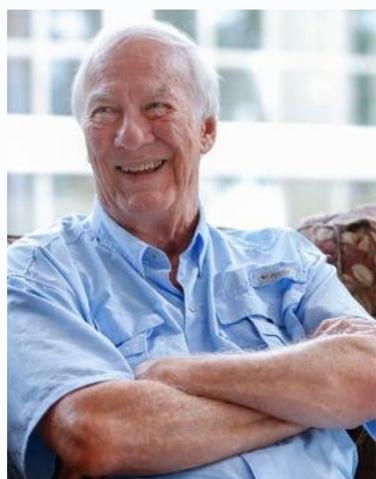


The Laura Ingalls Wilder Children's Literature Festival

The children's literature festival continued virtually for its second year and returned to Mansfield, MO in person for its' third year during November of 2021.

In 2020, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Children's Literature awards were given to Higgins Bond (illustrator), of Tennessee, and Mr. David Harrison (author) of Springfield, MO. The festival itself was held virtually on Facebook, with hundreds of kids viewing the 22 authors that took part in the event.

The festival returned in person at the community center in Mansfield during 2021 where the award honoring illustration went to Chuck Todd from the San Francisco Bay Area. K. D. McCrite who grew up in the Ozarks on a dairy farm received the authors award. There were 15 presenters and 744 children present this past fall.



David Harrison
2021 Outstanding
Author



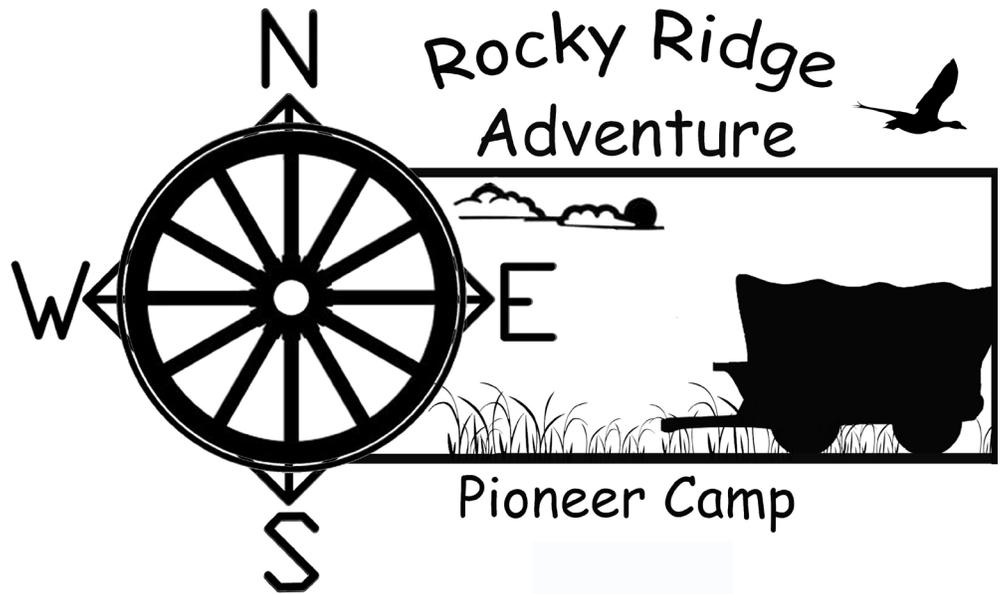
Higgins Bond
2021 Outstanding
Illustrator



K. D. McCrite
2022 Outstanding
Author



Chuck Todd
2022 Outstanding
Illustrator



Pioneer Camp was held again during the summer of 2021.

One session was held this past summer. Most of the kids attending were local or from nearby towns this time. A few were repeat campers.

Campers spent time learning about Mrs. Wilder and her books, exploring the 200 acre property and its' historic structures, and participating in a variety of games and activities. One of which was making their own pioneer journals that they wrote in everyday.

Special guests came to visit with the campers on themed days. Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company came and worked with the group planting their own seeds, making suncatchers, and identifying native plants. Representatives from the Morgan horse group brought out a horse for the kids to learn about and feed.

Additionally, the campers enjoyed a farmer boy day, where we focused on Almanzo's role here at the farm. They toured an exhibit area with period tools and equipment, made tin can lanterns, and even got to make their own ice cream. This sessions campers got to enjoy the new build your own log cabin exhibit with lincoln logs. This was a good team building experience that tested the campers engineering skills.

Pioneer Camp will run for a third season Summer of 2022. Watch social media for the dates and other camp announcements!



Rocky

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On December 29th of 2021, Museum Specialist, Michelle Underwood made a fascinating discovery while cleaning upstairs in the Historic Farmhouse.

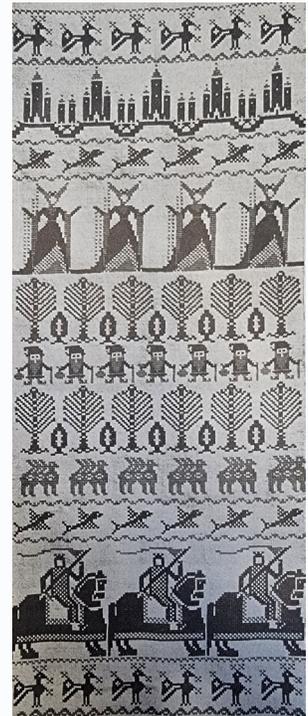
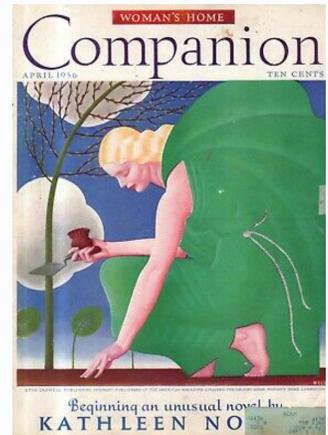
Inside a box, inside a closet, under a pile of old cutouts from magazines and newspapers sat the pattern to the mysterious wall hanging that hangs just downstairs on the wall by the door as you exit the house. For years guests have asked about the wall hanging, and all that was known about it was that it was in the house when Laura passed.

The pattern for the wall hanging titled, “Knights and Ladies Wall Panel” dates back to April of 1936 where it was published in that month's issue of “The Woman's Home Companion” magazine. It is unclear if Mrs. Wilder subscribed to this magazine or not since she had many magazine clippings in her collection, some of which belonged to other local ladies, like Mrs. D.R. Snyder of Macomb. It is highly probable that these magazines were shared during their Justamere events that were held monthly.

What we do know is that Laura would have purchased the pattern sometime after April of 1936 for \$1.00. The kit came with the burlap, red and blue cotton floss, tapestry needle, cross-stitch chart and directions. The pattern was designed by Jessie Herries Stewart from San Mateo County, California.

A new semi-permanent exhibit featuring the find will be on display in the museum gallery starting next season during 2022.

“Medieval castles, armored knights, damsels in distress, bearded gnomes, enchanted forests-- all the familiar ingredients of the ever-beloved fairy tales are combined in this cross-stitched wall panel, designed by Jessie Herries Stewart. It is worked in dull shades of red and blue cotton over the weave of rough burlap. These coarse materials give the panel a sturdy air that makes it appropriate for a game room, a library, or a study at school or college. Its shape is good over a console table in a hall.”



Discovery

2021

Operating During a Pandemic

As we faced COVID -19 at Rocky Ridge, we found ourselves evolving as the pandemic progressed. These progressions brought challenges and forced us to analyze many of our museum policies and procedures. As usual, our staff rose to the occasion and welcomed visitors with the same hospitality that has always been the trademark of our institution.

In the early days of the pandemic, we had to make the difficult decision to temporarily close our facility. During that time, our staff continued to work hard behind the scenes, following CDC guidelines and making necessary adjustments, which would eventually allow us to reopen our doors. When the doors would finally reopen, new guidelines met our visitors for the first time in the history of Rocky Ridge. A staff member was stationed at the front door of the museum and visitors were required to mask and social distance. Masking not only protected our guests and staff, it also prevented us from having to resanitize our historic objects repeatedly, which would have been harmful to our collection of artifacts. Additionally, we did not show the narrated video to our visitors, which would have placed our guests in a small room with closed doors for viewing.

As the season progressed and COVID 19 numbers were receding in Wright County and throughout the nation, the decision was made to make masking optional for our visitors and social distancing was still encouraged. As these changes were made to our daily procedures and life started to return to a semblance of normalcy, we began to see visitors return in larger numbers. These visitors included school groups, tour buses and travelers who had been worried earlier about traveling any distance from home. At the time of this review, international visitors have also started to return to Mansfield.

Now, we begin to prepare for the 2022 season, we are currently planning to resume the showing of the video and the front door station at the museum has been taken down. Although we still see some permanent changes from the pandemic, we are thankful to see our facility fill with visitors, learning, laughter and visiting. We greatly appreciate your patience throughout this unprecedented time in our nation's history and we greatly appreciate the constant support that has been provided throughout this long and difficult journey.

Although we have seen the cancellation of Wilder Day for two years in a row and many of our scheduled events, we remain hopeful that these time-honored traditions will soon return to our calendar of activities.

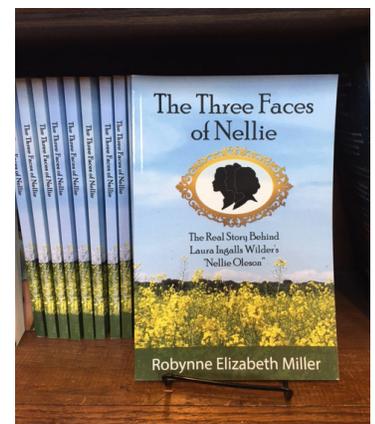
New to the Rocky Ridge Gift Shop



Cozy Zip-up Hoodies



Prairie Tale
by Melissa Gilbert



The Three Faces of Nellie
by Robynne Elizabeth Miller



Laura Ingalls Wilder Home and Museum

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