

(Rev. 8-86)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

1. Name of Property

historic name: Wilder, Laura Ingalls, House

other name/site number: Rocky Ridge Farm

2. Location

street & number: One mile east of Mansfield on U.S. Business Route 60

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Mansfield

vicinity: X

state: MO county: Wright code: 229 zip code: 65704

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	buildings (administration building, 1963; museum, 1971)
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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6. Function or Use

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Historic: Domestic Sub: single dwelling

Current : Recreation and Culture Sub: museum

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

Late Nineteenth/Early Twentieth Century American
Bungalow/Craftsman

Other Description:

Materials: foundation- fieldstone roof wood shingle
walls- wood other chimney-fieldstone
clapboard

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: _____.

Applicable National Register Criteria: B
National Historic Landmark Criteria: 2
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance: Literature

NHL Theme: XIX-Literature
B-Fiction
1-Novel

Period(s) of Significance: 1932-1943

Significant Dates : 1932

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

Beginning at a point 966 feet south and 721 feet west of the northeast corner of the northwest quarter of the Southeast quarter, Section 22, Township 28 N, Range 15 W, then running east 87 feet, then turning and running north 563 feet to south right-of-way line of City Route U.S. 60, then running westerly along said Route 87 feet, then turning and running south to a point of beginning, containing one acre more or less.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundary, based on the warranty deed to the property, includes the house as well as a portion of the land historically associated with Rocky Ridge Farm. Thus, the boundaries comprise the house and land purchased on June 18, 1963 by the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association.

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11. Form Prepared By
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Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Director

Organization: National Coordinating
Committee for the Promotion of History
Street & Number: 400 A Street, SE

Date: January 7, 1990

Telephone (202) 544-2422

City or Town: Washington

State: DC ZIP: 20003

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

The first portion of the Laura Ingalls Wilder House was built by Laura and Almanzo Wilder in ca. 1895. By 1896-97 two rooms were completed. Additions were made during the following years, the final one in 1912. The major part of the construction was done by Almanzo Wilder, using building materials from the surrounding farm, oak for the beams and boards, and fieldstone for the chimney and foundation. According to photographic records, the Wilders had carpenter helpers. Almanzo Wilder, along with another man, finished the living room, although he and Laura finished the kitchen themselves.

The house today is a white frame structure of irregular plan. The walls are clapboarded. Only the original room (kitchen) and one small corner room on the southwest remain one story. There are two primary roof divisions, a north-south ridge roof with an extended eastern slope, intersected by an east-west ridge roof with an extended southern slope. There is a dormer window on the northern slope. Subsidiary roofs include the front porch, a shed roof on the north porch, a ridge roof covering the rear one story section and a small two-slope shed roof covering the one story corner room at the southwest corner.

There are three chimneys. One on the south slope of the primary roof, another on the south slope of the rear secondary roof and the third, the exterior stone fireplace on the north wall, which is centered on the gable end. The chimney in the kitchen no longer extends through the roof; it remains only inside the house.

The front of the house faces west. The main block steps forward to the west. The central entryway has a porch with square wood columns at the corners supporting the three-slope shed roof. The low railing about the porch is sheathed with clapboard identical to that of the house. There are double-hung sash windows on the first and second stories on either side of the entry with a single large pane in each frame.

Recessed from the west facade and projecting to the south are two levels. A southwest corner roofed room of one story and adjoining it to the east, a two story addition. One square window with one light faces west in the corner room. One smaller square window with a single light on the second story facing west is identical to a series of nine aligned on the second story of the south wall at the same level. On the first floor of the south wall there are three sash windows with one over one lights. To the east of this addition and recessed north of the plane of the south facade is the one story original structure, the kitchen. The bathroom contains two south windows with a single pane of glass in each frame. The screened porch at the southeast corner continues across the east (rear) facade.

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On the east end of the house are gabled ends of two asymmetrical ridge roofs each with an extended southern slope. One covers the one story structure, the other the two story addition. The east gable wall of the two story addition has two square windows (continuing the series from the south wall), a rectangular window with one over one light and a door to a balcony which no longer exists.

The north wall has three progressive recessions. The two story section to the west projects farthest north. It has a large stone fireplace with windows on either side at both stories. These windows are double-hung with a single pane of glass in each frame. The center section has a dormer which breaks the North slope of the east-west (rear) ridge roof. The dormer has two sash windows, one over one lights.

The partially screened porch below has a lean-to roof. The eastern-most section is the one story original structure. It has two windows with one over one light on the north wall.

The interior plan reflects the irregularity of the additions. On the first floor are six rooms (the living room has a small adjoining library) and bath. The east side of the living room has a nine foot section partitioned by four and a half foot high wall sections. The library is located in the north half, and the music room is located in the south half. The living room has three windows; including one over one light on the north wall and one over one light on the east wall of the library (west wall of porch). The second floor has a hall and three rooms. The fireplace is faced with three large stones found on the farm. Handhewn oak timber from the farm was used for beams, stairways and paneling.

The home is in excellent condition and has a high degree of historical integrity. The structure and interior decorations are preserved as they were at the time of Wilder's death in 1957.

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HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The Laura Ingalls Wilder House is historically significant as the residence of Laura Ingalls Wilder, famous children's literature author, who began writing at the age of sixty-five while living in this modest homestead. Within the context of the National Historic Landmark Program thematic framework the Laura Ingalls Wilder House has national significance under theme XIX. Literature (B.) Fiction (1.) Novel.

Wilder wrote The Little House Series of children's books which tell of her life on the frontier as her family homesteaded in Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota. The books illustrate the struggles and hardships as well as the joys of pioneer life encountered by Laura as a young girl between the ages of five and eighteen (1872-1885), but do not cover July 1876 to January 1878, an especially unhappy time in Wilder's life. Wilder's books, considered international classics by specialists in children's literature, have been translated into twenty-six languages.

Of the six places Laura Ingalls Wilder lived (Pepin, WI; Walnut Grove, MN; De Smet, SD; Independence, KS; Burr Oak, IA; Mansfield, MO), her house in Mansfield is by far the most appropriate site.¹ Although De Smet was her home for six years, and was the setting for five of her books, the only extant buildings are the surveyor's house where the Ingalls family lived for one year (1879-1880) and the house where the Ingalls' lived after Laura married. The homestead where Laura and her family lived between 1880 and 1885 no longer exists. Her first home with Almanzo Wilder is also gone; the structure burned down a few years after their marriage in 1885. Laura and Almanzo moved to Mansfield in 1894, and Laura lived there until her death in 1957. It was in this farmhouse that she wrote the Little House series. Mansfield is located 50 miles from Springfield, MO. The Wilders purchased forty acres of land containing apple trees and a small spring for \$100 when they arrived in 1894, and named it "Rocky Ridge." Almanzo built a one-room farmhouse between 1894 and 1896, constructed entirely from materials on the farm, such as oak for the ceiling, walls and floors and stones for the fireplace. Over the years, the Wilder's added more rooms, making a total of ten by 1912. Today, their white farmhouse still stands and there is also a modern museum and a gift shop. The museum houses such Ingalls memorabilia as Pa's fiddle, Laura's school slates, journals, and original manuscripts of her books. In addition, Mansfield houses most of the Laura Ingalls Wilder papers and artifacts.²

Laura Ingalls Wilder's first book Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932, and was followed by Farmer Boy (1933), Little House on the Prairie (1935), On the Banks of Plum Creek (1937), By the Shores of Silver Lake (1939), The Long Winter (1940), Little Town on the Prairie (1941), and Those Happy Golden Years (1943). Wilder was no stranger to writing, however; she had previously published columns about farm households and poultry. The Little House books were published at the urging of Laura's daughter Rose, who handled negotiations

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with the publisher and edited the manuscripts.³ Little House in the Big Woods was rushed into publication in 1932; the editors at Harper's hoped it would be the "miracle book no depression could stop." According to literary critic Janet Spaeth, the Little House books provided inspiration for Americans in the 1930's. "When the first of the books was introduced in 1932, the United States was suffering from the Great Depression. The Midwest had experienced a lengthy drought, and city dwellers were generally no better off than the farmers. Little House in the Big Woods was a story of security-- of a family united against outside forces. Each book built hope; despite the Ingalls family's setbacks, there was the metaphorical West, the horizon of hope. This hope sustained a nation of readers undergoing their own trials."⁴ A subsequent edition was published in 1953, illustrated by noted children's illustrator, Garth Williams.

The Little House series is largely autobiographical; recounting stories of Laura's youth on the prairie. Laura Ingalls (1867-1957) was born in Pepin, Wisconsin, the second daughter of Charles and Caroline Ingalls. Her parents and her three sisters, Mary, Carrie, and Grace, all played major roles in her books, as did frontier life and settlement in Missouri, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. One dominant theme throughout the books is the importance of family. The Ingalls' were a close knit family; each book is full of domestic anecdotes. Pa's playing the fiddle in the evenings is a familiar scene. Like many other frontier pioneers, the Ingalls' were almost entirely self-sufficient; they built their own homes, preserved their own food, and sewed their own clothes. The family was almost always in debt, and each of the girls helped to contribute to the household economy. In her books, Wilder provides explicit detail on such tasks as sewing sheets, making a door latch, and feeding livestock.⁵

Despite the strict regional affiliation in the Little House series, the stories still maintain national appeal. Rather than isolate children who live in other areas of the country, the books draw attention to the fact that America is a unique and diverse country, and that each area is an integral part of the total American culture. As the Ingalls' await letters and newspapers on the prairie, Wilder shows the reader the interdependency of settlers and citizens in other parts of the country. Also, Wilder's description of a lavish Fourth of July celebration stresses the characters' strong national identity.⁶ Pa awoke the morning of the Fourth and sang the "Star Spangled Banner," and Laura's description of the celebration in town included a speech on the Declaration of Independence.⁷ The Little House series is not entirely autobiographical. Written for children, the author takes some license to make the story more representative of the overall pioneer experience. Wilder's intention was for children to "understand more about the beginning of things, to know what is behind the things they see--what it is that made America as they know it."⁸

More than fifty years since their original publication, the books still have

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widespread appeal. Children relate to Laura and her sisters even though today's children grow up in a different world; Mary and Laura experienced fits of rivalry much like any other siblings. In Little House in the Big Woods, Laura is jealous of her sister Mary's blond hair. Mary was taunting her, saying that her hair was "lots prettier" than Laura's. Laura was so upset that "she could not speak. She knew golden hair was prettier than brown. She could not speak, so she reached out quickly and slapped Mary's face."⁹ Wilder manages to recognize that being young is not easy, and that all individuals have flaws. Laura's character is not developed as a "model child" but rather as a realistic one. Children of the 1980's regard this child of the 1880's as a peer.¹⁰

As most of the characters in Wilder's books are female, and since the stories are based on actual events, the Little House series provides insight as to the role of frontier women. Many pioneer women were raised in the East, although Laura's Ma had lived just on the fringes of the frontier. As they moved westward, women were forced to modify their lifestyles to become accustomed to the frontier. These women fought to maintain cultural ties to the East, often by bringing relics from their past with them. Wilder refers to Ma's china shepherdess figurine throughout her books as an image of "home." Also, despite the Ingalls family's existence on the prairie, Ma tries to restrict her daughters' un-ladylike activities (ie: helping to stack hay) and promote female propriety, although she eventually realizes that her pioneer daughters require more diverse traits.¹¹

The Little House books have won numerous awards; all except Farmer Boy were Newberry award winners. Little House in the Big Woods was chosen as a Literary Guild Junior Selection even before it was published. In 1977, twenty years after her death, the total number of Little House books sold totaled over twenty million. Their popularity continues today.

¹Donald Zochart, Laura (Chicago, 1976), 249.

²K.C. Summers, "Pilgrim on the Prairie: On the Midwest Trail of Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little Houses," Washington Post (December 11, 1988):E11.

³Barbara Sicherman, ed., Notable American Women: The Modern Period (Cambridge, 1980), 732.

⁴Janet Spaeth, Laura Ingalls Wilder (Boston, 1987), 8, 90.

⁵Sicherman, 732.

⁶Spaeth, 98.

⁷Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little Town on the Prairie (New York, 1953),

64-75
⁸Spaeth, 1.

⁹Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little House in the Big Woods (New York, 1953),

181-3
¹⁰Spaeth, 92.

¹¹Spaeth, 43.