

## *The Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society Inc of Pepin Wisconsin*

The people in this community take great pride in the fact that Laura Ingalls Wilder was born at Pepin, Wisconsin. The site of "Little House in the Big Woods" is seven miles from the Village of Pepin. Records in the Pepin County Courthouse show that Charles Ingalls acquired the land on which he built his home in 1863. Laura was born February 7, 1867.

The original log house and barn are no longer there. The big woods is gone, too. What once was the big woods is now a modern farming community. A highway winds through the land which was the Ingalls farm, probably following very closely the wagon track which Laura describes in her book. One thing that still remains is the "beautiful lake" about which she wrote. People here admire its beauty just as Laura did on her first visit to Pepin. Both commercial fishermen and sportsmen still catch fish in Lake Pepin just as Pa did in the 1870's.

Pa Ingalls was a restless man. After leaving Pepin, the family spent time in Kansas, Minnesota, and Iowa before settling near DeSmet, South Dakota. It was there that Laura met and was courted by Almanzo Wilder. The Wilders left South Dakota and moved to Missouri in 1894. As a farm wife, Laura's writing career began with articles that were written for farm magazines. Later, her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, encouraged her to write about the family's pioneer experiences. Although her books were an immediate success, her fame as a writer was a complete surprise to Laura. Typical of the honors bestowed upon her was an invitation in 1947 from children in Chicago to appear on a radio program. She was unable to attend, so she wrote a letter to them from her farm home in Mansfield, Missouri. In her letter she said that she and Almanzo were then living on the farm, but were no longer farming. They were caring for their pet bulldog, their Rocky Mountain burro and their milk goats.

Her letter continued, "Sister Mary living at home after graduating from college. She never recovered her sight but was always cheerful and busy with her work, books and music. Carrie married a mine owner in the Black Hills and Grace married a farmer and lived only seven miles from DeSmet." In closing, she gave this advice: "The 'Little House' books are stories of long ago. The way we live and your schools are much different now; so many changes have made living and learning easier. But the real things haven't changed. It is still best to be honest and truthful; to make the most of what we have; to be happy with simple pleasures and to be cheerful and have courage when things go wrong."

Pa died in 1902 at the age of 66 and Ma was 84 when she died in 1924. Mary died in 1928, Grace died in 1941 and Carrie's death occurred in 1946. Laura's husband, Almanzo Wilder, died in 1949. After his death she lived alone at their Rocky Ridge farm. Laura Ingalls Wilder died at Mansfield, Missouri on February 10, 1957. Their daughter, Rose **Wilder** Lane, lived in Connecticut and Texas. She was a journalist and novelist and died in her Connecticut home in 1968.

With respect to the noted author, in September of 1962, the park in the Village of Pepin was named the Laura Ingalls Wilder Park and a historical marker was erected in her memory. In July of 1974, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society, Inc. was officially organized. Through the generosity of the Pepin business community and the present landowner, the society was fortunate in acquiring three acres of land at the original site of Laura's birth. Located on a highway, the land has been used for the development of "Little House Wayside." A log cabin has been built to simulate the original little house. A service road and parking area have been provided. Some trees were planted, picnic facilities have been added, a well with a hand pump provides water and there are public rest rooms.

The most recent challenge of the Society was to acquire a building on Highway 35 in Pepin for a museum. It focuses on the history of Pepin as well as the lore and memorabilia of our beloved author, Laura Ingalls Wilder. Museum open daily May 1st thru November 1st.

We trust that all who come to Pepin through the inspiration of Laura's books will visit Laura Ingalls Wilder Park in the Village, Little House Wayside at the site of her birth and the Pepin Historical Museum. It may not be what you expect, but as Laura said, "Now is now. It can never be a long time ago."

Many members have joined the Pepin Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society, Inc. since its organization in 1974. For those who wish to join, the attached application may be used.

**APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP  
LAURA INGALLS WILDER MEMORIAL SOCIETY, INC.  
Box 269 • Pepin, Wisconsin 54759**

<input type="checkbox"/> Junior Historians (to age 18)	\$3.00	_____		
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual & Family	\$10.00	Name _____		
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	3 Years for \$25.00	Address _____		
<input type="checkbox"/> Canadian & Foreign	\$15.00	_____		
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	3 Years for \$35.00	City _____	State _____	Zip _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime	\$100.00			

Memberships include subscriptions to newsletter. Gifts and dues are tax deductible.