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Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder



Synopsis

Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867-1957) finished her autobiography, *Pioneer Girl*, in 1930 when she was sixty-three years old. Throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s, she drew upon her original manuscript to write a successful series of books for young readers. Wilder's vision of life on the American frontier in the last half of the nineteenth century continues to draw new generations of readers to her Little House books. Editor Nancy Tystad Koupal has collected essays from noted scholars of Wilder's life and work that explore the themes and genesis of Wilder's writings. *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* sheds new light on the story behind Wilder's original manuscript and examines the ways in which the author and her daughter and editor, Rose Wilder Lane, worked to develop a marketable narrative. The essay contributors delve into the myths and realities of Wilder's work to discover the real lives of frontier children, the influence of time and place on both Wilder and Lane, and the role of folklore in the Little House novels. Together, the essays give readers a deeper understanding of how Wilder built and managed her story. Published over eighty years after its inception, *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography* edited by Pamela Smith Hill gave readers new insight into the truth behind Wilder's fiction. *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* further demonstrates the importance of Wilder as an influential American author whose stories of growing up on the frontier remain relevant today.

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Customer Reviews

Nancy Tystad Koupal is director and editor-in-chief of the Pioneer Girl Project and the South Dakota

Historical Society Press. She received an M.A. in English from Morehead State University in Kentucky and did postgraduate work in American literature at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She founded the South Dakota Historical Society Press in 1997. Koupal is also the editor and annotator of *Our Landlady* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), a collection of L. Frank Baum's satirical newspaper columns.

I loved reading *Pioneer Girl* two years ago and was excited to pick up *Perspectives* while I was in De Smet this summer. *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* is a collection of essays about Wilder's life and works. It is a fascinating collection and very interesting to me. I learned a lot and have a lot of favorite quotes – pretty much the entire book! The essays included how Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane worked together to create the Little House series, why the Little House books have a lasting appeal, how *Pioneer Girl* finally came to print, childhood myths explored, etc. Interesting Tidbits from the book: “Leaning on her daughter's apprenticeship in yellow journalism, Laura Ingalls Wilder felt free to meld genres, molding fact into fiction in ways that she did not acknowledge even to herself, attending to her novels, ‘truth while providing the succor of a fictitious happy ending. That was a feature, she said, of ‘all good novels. It is a testament to the moral complexity of her art that we are still wrestling, decades after the fact, to separate truth from fiction.” • Laura and Rose had a tenuous working relationship. Rose's two most famous books were based on Laura's autobiography that she helped to work get published. After it didn't get published as an adult novel, Rose reworked episodes of it for her adult fiction while Laura wrote her children's books from the source material. “She never glamorized anything; yet she saw the loveliness in everything.” • Illustrator Garth Williams on Laura Ingalls. I was interested to read how his research for illustrating the books helped to solve a lot of the mysteries about place and settings for the books. For example Walnut Grove Minnesota didn't know it was the setting for *On the Banks of Plum Creek* until Williams visited. I read that an author I enjoy, Louise Erdrich started a series with the Birchbark House to tell the Native American side of the story with a little Native American girl growing up in the big woods of Wisconsin and getting displaced by white settlers. I'm reading this book now! It is interesting how the Little House books always describe the land as empty when it was in fact, inhabited by Native American tribes. “Wilder's most devoted fans do not simply identify with Laura

or want to read about her, they want to be Laura. They attend conferences based on Wilder's work. They research the lives of her friends, family, and acquaintances. They buy tickets to Wilder museums, pageants, and plays. They go on literary pilgrimages to the prairie towns and home sites associated with the books. They throw back their sunbonnets, kick off their shoes, and go wading on the banks of Plum Creek. Hmmm... I have done everything in this paragraph except for attending a Little House conference. It felt strange to be so accurately described. Am I a Little house superfan? Overall, *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* is a riveting collection of essays that delve into the many depths of Laura Ingalls Wilder and her classic series of books. This is a must read for any fan of the Little House series. Book Source: Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Homes, De Smet, South Dakota

Speaking as a lifelong reader of all things Little House-related, I can't recommend this book too highly. Following the publication of the peerless *Pioneer Girl, The Annotated Autobiography*, this new book is the perfect appendix, and then some. Edited (superbly) and introduced by Nancy Tystad Koupal, with contributions by William Anderson, Caroline Fraser, Michael Patrick Hearn, Elizabeth Jameson, Sallie Ketcham, Amy Mattson Lauters, John E. Miller, Paula M. Nelson, Ann Romines, Noel L. Silverman, and of course, Laura herself, this collection of scholarly, informative, and compelling essays provide the reader with much invaluable information, lore, facts, and in-depth studies of every nature of Laura's life, the inception, composition and publication of her books, what the back stories are; the realities, myths, and clarification of life out on the harsh, brutal prairies, the nature of pioneer living, and much in the way of psychological, cultural, and societal insights. Much of it is sobering, and even grim, but as always with the Ingalls and the Wilders, their steadfast spirit is a sure testament to their learned toughness and fortitude. Many lessons for living come through these pages. All of the writers here are top-notch, and they hold forth with not only authority, but enthusiasm and passion: they clearly relish their own discoveries and reaching out to the reader. I am grateful to have this book. I think - incredibly, this book pretty much finalizes the Laura Ingalls Wilder saga. It hardly seems possibly that more can be discovered, said, or elucidated upon, and this is the perfect series of conclusions. Of course, this volume would not have been possible without the work of Pamela Smith Hill for being chiefly responsible for the book and research that preceded this one. This is a staggering achievement on multiple levels. Lastly, the heartiest thanks go to Laura herself, for providing this great country with all her stories and work.

South Dakota Society Press brought together a team of nine Laura Ingalls Wilder experts. Each of

the Wilder experts (plus an interview with Noel Silverman of the Little House Heritage Trust) explore different aspects of the Little House author in *Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder*. The individual essays come together and give the reader a better understanding of Wilder's life, career, and more. Wilder's personal and writing relationship with her daughter Rose Wilder Lane are examined. Curious about the Benders in Kansas? That strange episode is addressed, too. This book considers mid-western influences, fairy tales, and so much more! *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* does just what the title states. It explores the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder from different perspectives. It's another excellent resource for any Laura Ingalls Wilder fan from South Dakota Historical Society Press.

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