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Mary Evelyn Thurman
Western Kentucky University

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The Ingalls and Wilder families in Florida

by Evelyn Thurman, Librarian Western Kentucky University

May 19, 1980 I visited Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Huggins at their home in the Geneva (Alabama) - Westville (Florida) Road area. Mrs. Huggins, "Miss Emma", is the granddaughter of Peter Ingalls who was Laura Ingalls Wilders' uncle.

You will remember Pa Ingalls (Laura's father) and his family were visiting his brother Peter and his family in eastern Minnesota, (Wabasha County) when their only son Charles Frederick Ingalls became seriously ill and died in 1876. Efforts to find his grave have not been successful. After the sad task of burying little Freddie who was not a year old, Pa continued the trip of moving his family to Burr Oak, Iowa where he and Ma helped run the Master's hotel.*

Mrs. Sarah Spears, the assistant librarian, at the public library in Geneva, Alabama took me to the Huggins' home. On the way we crossed the beautiful Pea River which joins the Choctawhatchee River near this point.

"Miss Emma" knew we were on our way. When we drove up she came out on their comfortable porch. I sat with her in the swing. A few minutes after we started talking, her tall, stately looking husband came from around the house bringing an extra chair. "Miss Emma" told me she was born November 5, 1905. She is about five feet three inches tall. Even though she recently had a slight stroke she doesn't look her age. She was the youngest child in the Peter Franklin - Mary (Mollie McGowin) Ingalls family. She and her brother Frederick, are the only surviving members of the family. She added that her brother is in a nursing home very ill from two strokes.

Mrs. Huggins told me her grandfather and grandmother Ingalls died before she was born. I asked if she had visited where they lived in Minnesota. She said that she had not.

Mr. Marcus showed me a

small family Bible in which Peter Ingalls had listed the names and birth dates of his family. The opposite page recorded the members of his wife's family. I felt sad when I read, "Mollie Ingalls, Tuesday, Jan. 29 midnight, age 62 years, eight months, 19 days". (My grandmother's name was Mary. She was always called Molly.) Mr. Ingalls' unusual hand writing added beauty to the pages of the same Bible without covers. Mr. Huggins said the children had played with the Bible. Realizing its importance he later put it in a safe place.

As we talked "Miss Emma" showed me an illustrated picture (page 110) of her father in Laura's book: *The First Four Years*. Her father lived with Laura and Almanzo in De Smet, South Dakota before going to Florida to homestead. He and Laura had a joint project of a large flock of sheep. The illustration in Laura's book verifies the fact. Peter Ingalls, Joe Carpenter (another cousin of Laura's) and Perley Wilder (Almanzo's brother) went down the Mississippi River in the Sailing Ship Edith in 1890. They started from Stockholm, Wisconsin, which is about six miles from Pepin.

After some picture taking we followed our new friends to the Mt. Ida Congregational Methodist Church where "Miss Emma's" father saw her beautiful mother and decided he wanted her for his wife. A log church probably stood at the location during the late 1800's. A lovely white church with beautiful dark doors stands there today. "Miss Emma's" parents and brother Alexander are buried in the adjoining cemetery.

On the way back to their home Mr. Marcus stopped at the Riddle's home. "Miss Emma's" mother and father were married by Judge Riddle on the 13th day of September 1891. No one lives in the house today. While I was taking a picture, a relative of the Riddles came by and invited us to

come farther down the road to her home. I am sorry time didn't permit us to accept the offer. Mr. Marcus stated that beautiful Lake Victory also was located down the road.

As we drove back near their home. Mr. Huggins motioned in the direction of the homestead site of Peter Franklin Ingalls. Records indicate there were 160 acres in the original claim site. "Miss Emma" said her father sold 40 acres before he died in 1932.

Mr. and Mrs. Huggins' only son, Gordon, has a pretty brick home on 30 acres of the land. Mr. Marcus proudly spoke of their great granddaughter.

We stopped by the Huggins' house to say "goodby". I found "Miss Emma" to be a very loving person and felt as if I had known her for years. Mr.

Marcus is a typical southern gentleman very helpful in every way possible. Just before we left I took another look at the pine trees in front of their house and thought of Laura's comment about the piney woods of Florida.

I understood Mr. Huggins to think that Laura and Almanzo Wilder lived in the Geneva-Westville Road area. If the climate had helped Almanzo's health as they had hoped one wonders if they would have filed a claim and stayed in Florida.

On our return to Geneva, we passed the Poplar Head Methodist Church where Mr. and Mrs. Huggins are members. Mrs. Huggins told me earlier in the day that she will probably be buried in that church's

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Peter Ingalls while living in De Smet, South Dakota.

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cemetery across the road.

I have been visiting the Ingalls-Wilder homesites for the summers. I have had four articles published - another is being considered. Teachers, librarians, parents and students have asked me to put the articles in book form. I wanted to include this area as it was Laura and Almanzo's home for awhile and, of course, I am always thrilled to meet descendants of the Ingalls and Wilder families.

Editor's Note: Evelyn Thurman's contributions to the LORE in past issues have always been of interest to readers. She made her third De Smet visit this summer during our centennial. Currently, Ev-



Peter Ingalls' daughter "Miss Emma" and her husband.

Wilder News Happenings

Visitors coming through South Dakota this season may be assured of plentiful gas—based on recent year's generous gasoline quotas because of its high tourism rates. Tourism information may be requested by dialing, toll-free, the following numbers: 1-800-952-2217 (in S.D.) and 1-800-843-1930 out of state.

There have been a number of price changes for many of the items on our mail-order list since the last one was printed. If you wish to have the current rates and offerings handy, please write for an updated list, enclosing a long, stamped envelope. One new addition is the quality paper-bound edition of *Rose Wilder Lane: Her Story*. Price for this volume is \$6.95.

The Society appreciates hearing reports of Laura Ingalls Wilder celebrations and programs given throughout the nation. Many of our former visitors and friends are called

upon to share knowledge and research and on-site observations into a tour guide format. Her tentative title is *Ingalls-Wilder Homesites: A Diary of Visits, 1972-1980*. This project has been given a grant by the Western Kentucky University.

This account of meeting Peter Ingalls' daughter leads me to recall all the items we have on display in the Ingalls home from Peter's family and relatives: his hymn book, purchased in De Smet; cousin Edith's Pendleton wool shawl; a cane and small bucket carved by Uncle Peter; his 1854 "Volume of the World" and other pictures and small mementoes.

*The hotel has been restored by the local Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society and is ready for tourists.

upon to share knowledge and material on De Smet, which is certainly now one of America's most prized literary shrines. "Little Town on the Prairie" was included in the recent book *Exploring Literary America*, and magazine and newspaper write-ups are frequent.

Of interest to former visitors is the fact that the old De Smet depot, just north of the City Library is now acquired for use as the City Museum. Restoration will be done and the many exhibits of early De Smet and prairie life will be shown there, adding one more in the network of sites in De Smet. The original depot, where Laura attended a birthday party, burned on Easter, 1905; the current one replaced the original. Another old structure, noted by tourists, is the Kingsbury County Court House. This fine old 83-year old structure is slated for extensive restoration and repair in the coming months. It is a National Historic Site, on the National Register, as are the Surveyors' House and the Ingalls Home.

Vivian Glover, the Society manager, spent several days as hostess to a Wilder exhibit at the First National Bank in Aberdeen. Extensive interest was shown, and over 700 visited and chatted with Mrs. Glover. Earlier, Vivian appeared on a television interview, filmed in De Smet, with the Aberdeen station. Vivian, Mrs. Alma Abrahamson and Mrs. Louise Anderson later shared their Wilder knowledge at a school visit in Alcester, South Dakota. Among their demonstrations were hay-twisting.

Alvilda Sorenson, of Brookings, who is a long time friend of the Society's work, recently entertained 22 fifth graders in her home, who came to learn about Laura Ingalls Wilder.

At present, a Broadway musical is being produced, based on the "Little House" stories. This will be a major New York stage production. Lucy Simon, sister of songstress Carly Simon, is providing music. More news will be forthcoming here.

Random House School Division, 400 Hahn Road, Westminster, MD. 21157 has produced some "Little House" filmstrip kits based on the books, including "The Will and the Way of Laura Ingalls Wilder," a fine biographical film-strip with many on-locale scenes shot in

De Smet. Our school and library readers may find this useful.

Although the Ingalls homes are officially closed in De Smet in the winter, a steady stream of visitors have traveled through and stopped. They were accommodated on specially-arranged tours. Bus tours of school children came this spring, and many calls and inquiries indicate that a large 1981 season is expected. The Western Illinois University Wilder tour is expected, and they will be welcomed as before. The centennial year, 1980, was a record year in numbers visiting the homes. Please try to include De Smet in your travels if you can—and surpass even last year's totals!

Laura Ingalls Wilder articles are forthcoming in the *Americana* Summer issue of *Ideals*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Modern Maturity* and a *Nostalgia* magazine called *The Spinning Wheel*. This editor will be giving a Laura Ingalls Wilder Program at Cary Memorial Library, Lexington, Massachusetts on July 23.

In going through my Wilder collection, I find I have duplicates of the following. If any reader is interested in purchasing these books, please write me c/o 1421 Wexford Dr., Davison, Mich. 48423. Do not send payment with your order! The first responses will be sent the book(s) and billed. Now for the list: *Peaks of Shala*, excellent condition, an account by Rose Wilder Lane of her adventures in Albania, 1923, 349 pp., dedicated to "My mother, Laura Ingalls Wilder. \$20. *Cindy*, by Rose Wilder Lane, 1928, condition fair (corner cut), 1st edition, \$13.50. *Henry Ford's Own Story*, 1917 (Rose's 1st book) mint condition. \$25. *Woman's Day* issues, each with article on needlework by Rose: Feb., 1961, March, 1961, April, 1961, May, 1961, Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec. 1961 & Jan., 1962. Each \$2.50, or the lot, \$20.

W.T.A. P.S. The *Ideals* Company, Box 1101, Milwaukee, Wisc. 53201 included a special feature, written by William Anderson in their Summer 1981 "Americana" issue. The article includes color photos as well as Harvey Dunn illustrative material.