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THE WILDERS IN LOUISIANA

By Evelyn Thurman

After visiting Laura and Almanzo's last home in Mansfield, Missouri in 1972, I learned that Almanzo's sister, Eliza Jane, (Laura's prairie school teacher and later sister-in-law) lived in Crowley and Lafayette, Louisiana after her marriage to Thomas J. Thayer in 1893.

I wrote my college friend, Doris Phillips, who lives in Lafayette, of my interest in the Ingalls - Wilder homesites. Doris told me she was in school with some Thayers. Her school friends turned out to be Eliza's grandchildren. I was glad to learn that Eliza Jane lived to see all of her grandchildren before she died on June 1, 1930 at Lafayette.

My friend wrote giving the addresses of the Thayer grandchildren. On May 9, 1979, I started on my eighth trip regarding the Ingalls and Wilder families. Upon arrival in New Orleans, I called the home of Walter W. Thayer. I talked with his wife, Elaine, who told me her husband had a stroke on Easter Sunday. (He had a heart attack some months earlier.) When I expressed concern, she told me he was making progress back to normal activities. Elaine is the family member who has done much research on her husband's family. She told me she had sent much information to William Anderson, my young friend, whom I consider a real authority on the Ingalls and Wilder families. (Bill started reading Laura's "Little House" books in the third grade. His research on the families was started about age 12. His extensive research resulted in the publication of the following booklets: The Story Of The Ingalls, The Story Of The Wilders, A Wilder In The West, Laura Wilder Of Mansfield, Laura's Rose; The Story Of Rose Wilder Lane and Ingalls Family Album.) Bill Anderson is a teacher and also editor of the "Laura Ingalls Wilder Lore" which is published by the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society at De Smet, SD. For many summers he worked at De Smet helping the local people with the many tourists who visit the site which is the setting of six of Laura's books.

I told Mrs. Thayer one of my reasons for coming to Louisiana was to locate Eliza Jane's grave. She told me her husband's grandmother's grave was not marked. She was buried by her only son, Wilder W. Thayer. Elaine Thayer said I would find the graves in an old cemetery on Pinhook Road in Lafayette. She was a patient listener so early in the morning. At the end of our conversation, she gave me her mother's telephone number in Lafayette and said I might write her when I got home for more information. I have found the Ingalls-Wilder relatives, as well as local people, willing to help with information regarding the families. A special appreciation is extended to the wonderful people of Louisiana.

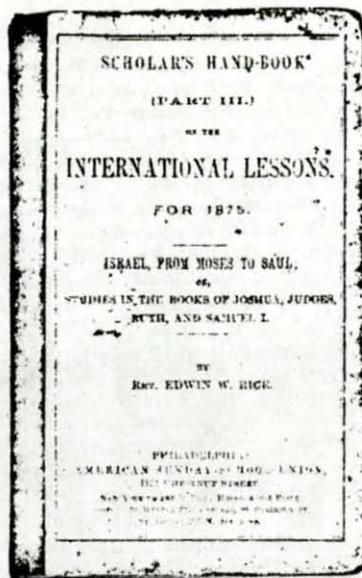
When I arrived in Lafayette, a teacher at the University of Southwestern Louisiana told me the street I should take towards the cemetery. I walked eight or nine blocks in the hot Louisiana sunshine because I arrived on the hottest day of the year! One street was closed for widening so that meant walking through a dusty dirt street. By entering the side of the cemetery, I luckily happened upon the graves right away without knowing where they were located. I found Eliza Jane's son's marker with his inscription;

Wilder W. Thayer
Louisiana

PFC Co. A216 FLD Sig. Bn.
World War I

There was a grave on either side of his grave. Wild strawberries and wild flowers were growing around and over parts of the graves. I did not find out which grave was Eliza Jane's until the next day. The spot was very quiet with no one near - just the birds singing. I felt as if I had almost visited with those pioneers.

About the Author: Evelyn Thurman is a librarian at Helm Library on the campus of Western State University in Bowling Green, Kentucky. She has spent nine years researching the Ingalls and Wilder families. She visited Pepin and Laura's birthsite in 1976 and holds a lifetime membership in our Society.



C. S. Ingalls

Above is a copy of the cover of a book owned by Charles (Pa) Ingalls and his signature as it appeared inside. The book, published by the American Sunday School Union, is now in the possession of Irene Greive of Plainview, Minn.

No record has been found indicating Charles Ingalls was a member of a church in the Pepin area. Churches nearest the Ingalls home conducted their services in Swedish.

Regional Convention

Marie Lund, our Society President, and her husband attended the convention of the Northwestern Region of the Wisconsin Council for Local History on August 9th. It was held in the high school in Clear Lake.

The State Society was represented by Shelton Stromquist, George Miller and Richard Erney. They discussed major questions and current developments.

Representatives from the various affiliated societies gave their progress reports. The Clear Lake Society showed a film of its development.

The afternoon was spent in touring the newly-formed, well-organized museum which is housed in the old school building. There are special rooms for two of Clear Lake's native sons: Burrell Grimes, a well-known baseball player and U. S. Senator, Gaylord Nelson.