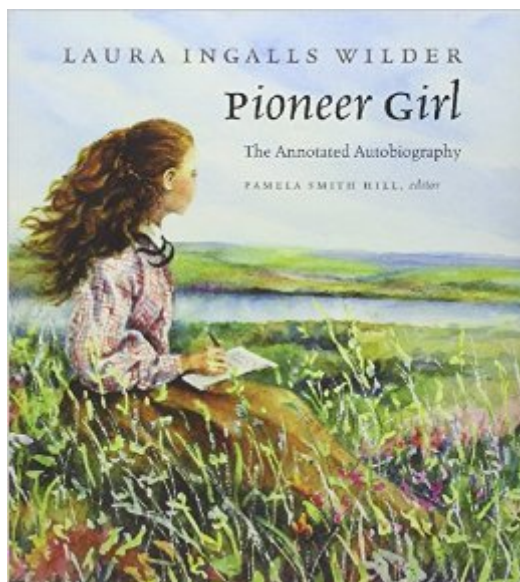


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Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography



Synopsis

Follow the real Laura Ingalls and her family as they make their way west and discover that truth is as remarkable as fiction. Hidden away since the 1930s, Laura Ingalls Wilder's never-before-published autobiography reveals the true stories of her pioneering life. Some of her experiences will be familiar; some will be a surprise. *Pioneer Girl* re-introduces readers to the woman who defined the pioneer experience for millions of people around the world. Through her recollections, Wilder details the Ingalls family's journey from Kansas, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, back to Minnesota, and on to Dakota Territory sixteen years of travels, unforgettable stories, and the everyday people who became immortal through her fiction. Using additional manuscripts, diaries, and letters, *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography* builds on Wilder's work by adding valuable context and explores her growth as a writer. Author of an award-winning Laura Ingalls Wilder biography, editor Pamela Smith Hill offers new insights into Wilder's life and times. In an introduction, Hill illuminates Wilder's writing career and the dynamic relationship between the budding novelist and her daughter and editor, Rose Wilder Lane. Sharing the story of Wilder's original manuscript, Hill discusses the catalysts for *Pioneer Girl* and the process through which Wilder's story turned from an unpublished memoir into the national phenomenon of the *Little House* series. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography* also explores the history of the frontier that the Ingalls family traversed and the culture and life of the communities Wilder lived in. This groundbreaking volume develops a fuller picture of Wilder's life and times for the millions of readers who wish to learn more about this important American author. It contains one hundred and twenty-five images, eight fully researched maps, and hundreds of annotations based on numerous primary sources, including census data, county, state, and federal records, and newspapers of the period. An important historic and literary achievement, this annotated edition of *Pioneer Girl* provides modern readers with new insights into the woman behind the fictional classics *Little House in the Big Woods*, *Farmer Boy*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, *The Long Winter*, *Little Town on the Prairie*, *These Happy Golden Years*, and *The First Four Years*.

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Customer Reviews

This book is absolutely gorgeous, and I was SHOCKED by the size. I had no idea it was going to be the size of a school text book. The paper quality is lovely, and the pictures are wonderful. The cover is beautiful, and not only does it look so much like teenage Laura, it also fits really well with the Garth Williams illustrations we are all familiar with. The information inside is absolute gold. I had no idea that there was anything else I could learn about Laura, as I have read every book written by, for, or about her, but there is so much. It truly gives new insight into what was true and what was fiction in the series. Reading Laura's words is like reading a letter written by my own grandmother, the style of writing is so honest and open. The side-bar information is fascinating. The depth of research that went into every name Laura mentions, every location, and every incident is mind-boggling. I'm even more stunned now at Laura's memory. Although she makes a few mistakes about some names, for the most part, she remembers names of neighbors and details about events that are verified by Hill and the other researchers. It's truly impressive that Laura was able to remember so much detail about her childhood. My absolute favorite little bit from Laura's writing was the story about the mitten she knitted for Baby Carrie. It is one of the sweetest stories I've read, and feels so absolutely true and with emotions that I can even remember feeling as a young child. I still have a bit of the book to go. I'm a speed reader, and it still takes me an hour to get through ten pages. There is just SO MUCH packed onto each and every page that it takes awhile to digest. I've literally been waiting twenty years to read Pioneer Girl, ever since I first found out it existed, when I was about ten years old. Finally reading it is a little stunning.

What an amazing piece of scholarship! I admit, full disclosure, I carry a Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society membership card in my wallet. But this book carries all the LIW studies to a new level. The paper, readability, construction and beautiful cover are all first rate. The contents, though, will blow you away. I've always been at odds with those who claim Rose "ghost wrote" the books.

This volume of Laura's first manuscript proves that she is a writer at heart. Congrats to the Pioneer Girl Project, and Pamela Smith Hill-- your hefty tome was worth your time. The enlightenment your work will bring for generations to come cannot be measured. Thank you for a wonderful book.

More than eighty years after it was written, finally fans of the Little House books have an opportunity to read Laura Ingalls Wilder's autobiography, on which the popular series was based. In a heavily annotated edition, with maps and appendices that enrich the text, here are her memories of her family and their pioneer life from 1869 to 1888 in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakota Territory. Essentially Laura's factual personal history, *Pioneer Girl* was intended for adult readers. She had written for the *St. Louis Star Farmer* and the *Missouri Ruralist*, but that writing had generally been about farming and the rural lifestyle. After her parents and her older sister passed away, Laura began, at age 63, to devote herself to writing the family's experiences in the raw American West. This she did in pencil in six tablets that are transcribed and lightly edited for this edition. *Pioneer Girl* tells the story of Laura's growing up years, from age two to eighteen. Taken by itself, without the annotations, it reads as a rough first draft, with all the immediacy that goes with getting memories down on paper quickly. It is fascinating to hear the Little House anecdotes told from an adult perspective, and to confirm the realities of pioneer life. Laura's voice feels genuine, and the asides to her daughter make it clear that one of her goals was to preserve familiar stories that were part of the family's legacy. The other object was to get the book published, in part because Laura had writing ambitions, but probably more because the Wilders desperately needed money, both parents and daughter having lost their savings in the economic collapse at the beginning of the Great Depression. Where this book becomes complex is in the annotations. There are a great many notes, presented in a sidebar fashion, with much South Dakota history and details about the lives of most of the characters mentioned. That information makes this a longer and somewhat cumbersome read, though history buffs won't mind. The more challenging aspect is that a large proportion of the notes are devoted to comparing this manuscript to the juvenile version presented in the Little House series. There seem to be two intentions here. Firstly, this is a definitive look at the original manuscript and how it was transformed from factual autobiography to juvenile fiction, which will be of interest to scholars and writers, but is perhaps less meaningful to general readers. Secondly, there is evident effort to insist on Laura's authorship and diminish the role that her daughter, Rose Lane, played in producing the Little House books. Lane had always been her mother's editor and typist, fitting that work around her own much-admired writing. She was an important author of her time, with major connections in the publishing world. It is safe to say that the

Little House series would never have been produced without her help“in the editing, in finding an agent, and in facilitating publication. Further, there are strong arguments suggesting that Lane had a larger hand in the writing than this edition of Pioneer Girl acknowledges. To take a deeper look at this, Susan Wittig Albert has published A Wilder Rose, an historical novel based on Lane’s diaries and letters and other documentary evidence, which convincingly demonstrates her participation as her mother’s silent partner in authoring the Little House books. Whether or not a reader is concerned with this controversy, what Pioneer Girl provides is Laura’s unedited and original voice. The writing is not polished or professional, but she is telling her life experience as she recalls it. As always, a true story makes for compelling and engaging reading, and for those of us who grew up with Laura Ingalls as our heroine, Pioneer Girl adds the spice of adult reality to the childhood saga.

by Susan Schoch for Story Circle Book Reviews reviewing books by, for, and about women

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