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# FREEDOM AND CONTROL IN LAURA INGALLS WILDER'S DE SMET

JOHN E. MILLER

Faith in the future, the virtues of persistence and hard work, the beneficence and occasional destructiveness of nature, the centrality of family, and the search for community are dominant themes of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books for children; one more theme is freedom.<sup>1</sup> But this freedom is never conceived of as absolute; rather, it is subject to a variety of constraints—external and internal—that interact with it in uneasy tension. The Ingalls family moved west to Dakota Territory in 1879 because of Pa's quest for freedom from the constrictions hemming him in on the more settled frontier. Farther west, he believed, people could exercise greater control over their lives and in so doing fulfill their destinies. People could make a decent living on

a homestead in the West. "The hunting's good in the west, a man can get all the meat he wants," Charles cheerfully told his wife Caroline.<sup>2</sup>

After four years in Dakota Territory, the westering urge had not diminished. Pa's wandering foot began to itch. "I would like to go West," he told Ma one day. "A fellow doesn't have room to breathe here any more." But she was having none of it. She had been willing to come to De Smet, a town on the Chicago and North Western Railroad in central Dakota Territory, but intended to go no farther. "Oh, Charles!" she exclaimed. "I was so tired of being dragged from pillar to post, and I thought we were settled here."<sup>3</sup> The parents' disagreement over the desirability of the settled life versus a continual push toward the edge of the frontier is one of the central tensions providing interest and continuity in the Little House series. Pa yearned for the freedom to be found over the horizon; Ma sought it in settled surroundings. Pa, in many ways, represented the typical frontiersman—willful, self-sufficient, industrious, and above all individualistic. Ma, on the other hand, reflected submissiveness, self-abnegation, and commitment to the larger whole. Yet, such dichotomies can never be neat or complete. Both husband and wife desired freedom in their own

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ways, and both recognized the need for and sought to establish the kind of control over their lives and their surroundings that would enable them to realize their dreams.<sup>4</sup>

Laura closely resembled her father; her older sister Mary resembled their mother. Laura, too, thrilled at the prospect of moving West. Thinking of the Wessington Hills to the west and the mysterious shadow they presented against the sky, she "wanted to travel on and on, over those miles, and see what lay beyond the hills." Laura's discomfort at being thrown among so many people when the family first moved to De Smet reminded her of a passage from the Bible about the wings of a bird: "If she had had the wings of a bird, she, too, would have spread them and flown, fast, fast, far away." Laura's birdlike desire to be free and independent manifested itself in many ways. She loved horses and, though she was frightened a little at first, she enjoyed driving the young frisky colts out over the prairie. Almanzo Wilder won her affections, in large measure, because of the sleigh and buggy rides he offered her. Sometimes it must have seemed that she enjoyed the horses more than she did Almanzo. When storms blew up on the treeless, unprotected prairie, Laura appreciated the safety of the cellar, but "she could hardly bear the closed-in, underground feeling of it." Thus, when she insisted on leaving out of her wedding ceremony the traditional promise to love and obey Almanzo, she was playing out the role stamped indelibly by her character.<sup>5</sup>

Laura admired her sister Mary but could not be like her. Mary's going blind only seemed to accentuate the older girl's patience, self-control, and underlying goodness.

"I wish I could be like you. But I guess I never can be," Laura sighed. "I don't know how you can be so good."

"I'm not really," Mary told her. "I do try, but if you could see how rebellious and mean I feel sometimes, if you could see what I really am, inside, you wouldn't want to be like me."

"I *can* see what you're like inside," Laura

contradicted. "It shows all the time. You're always perfectly patient and never the least bit mean."<sup>6</sup>

Mary, because she was blind, understood that appearances deceive. Her own character was more complex than any broad brush strokes could adequately describe, and likewise every reality that might be adduced in De Smet carried within it its own contradictions. Laura's and Pa's quest for freedom cannot be considered the polar opposite of submission to control. Rather, we must recognize that in the frontier milieu, freedom and control constituted interpenetrating—albeit contradictory—forces that simultaneously pushed people in different directions. After all, when Ma remonstrated to Pa, "I was so tired of being dragged from pillar to post, and I thought we were settled here," his response was, "Well, I guess we are, Caroline. Don't fret. It's just that my wandering foot gets to itching, I guess."<sup>7</sup> He reconciled himself to staying put in De Smet, although the urge to move never completely left him.

Laura understood just how her father felt, for she too accepted the need to sacrifice her own personal inclinations for the good of the family. Nothing appealed less to her than teaching school, but because she realized it was the best and practically only way she could earn money to help send Mary to college, she reluctantly did it. Laura responded to duty just as her father did: "He must stay in a settled country for the sake of them all, just as she must teach school again, though she did so hate to be shut into a school room."<sup>8</sup>

Writing her autobiographical novels fifty years later, Laura Ingalls Wilder clearly understood that the frontier environment entailed a web of duties and obligations for its inhabitants, requirements that for most settlers heavily outweighed the kinds of freedom or independence it facilitated. Efforts to establish control over the environment, over economic conditions, over social interactions, and over personal inclinations were central ingredients in everyone's life. All of these impulses interconnected.

If we endeavor to understand the multitudinous ways individuals attempted to establish control over their lives, we may better understand the frontier agricultural society that is the setting for Wilder's novels.

Wilder's books, though fictionalized for children, have much to teach us about history. The sleuthing of scholars such as Rosa Ann Moore and William T. Anderson has clearly demonstrated how essential were Rose Wilder Lane's editing skills to her mother's success. Without Laura's observational powers and ability of recall, the books could not have been written at all, but without Rose's expert hand in shaping the material, the stories would have remained obscure local tales that would fail to interest New York publishing houses. In the process of collaboration, the stories acquired dramatic tension and literary embellishment. Rose forced Laura to tighten the structure of her books, maintain consistency of tone, dramatize them, and fill them out. As a result, some characters and facts inevitably got distorted. Yet, to an unusual degree the stories and events in the books were based on real experience and the characters were based on real people, whose names in a few instances were changed. When the books depart from history, it is usually through omission rather than invention. Their tales provide us a graphic and detailed picture of many aspects of life on the edge of the frontier in a small railroad town and its environs during the "Great Dakota Boom" of the 1880s.<sup>9</sup> What we have in the novels, therefore, is evidence we can use to test our ideas about what frontier society was like.

Any such enterprise inevitably starts with Frederick Jackson Turner and his *Frontier Thesis*, enunciated at the American Historical Association convention in Chicago in 1893, a year before Laura and Almanzo finally left De Smet to go to Missouri. America's historical development and the features that distinguished it from Europe, Turner asserted, could be explained by the "existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward."<sup>10</sup>

The most obvious characteristic of the frontiersman, in Turner's scheme, was individualism. Here was a supremely self-reliant character, independent in thought and action, and possessing unlimited confidence in the future. Self-reliance and optimism constituted positive features of individualism; it also bred impatience at restraint, suspicion of government, and restlessness under authority. Civilization stifled people. The Turnerian frontiersman opposed all order and restraint, saw little need for education and tradition. He retreated to the family unit, resulting in an atomistic society.<sup>11</sup>

Turner was not the first to stress American individualism. During the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville, individualism's classic explicator, helped to introduce the concept. "Individualism," he wrote, "is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself." The perspicacious French commentator went so far as to observe, "Each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart." Drawing on the Tocquevillian tradition, a noteworthy recent analyst of American society is concerned "that this individualism may have grown cancerous—that it may be destroying those social integuments that Tocqueville saw as moderating its more destructive potentialities, that it may be threatening the survival of freedom itself."<sup>12</sup>

Even though individualism did characterize Americans on the frontier to a large degree, countervailing forces of control were as pervasive, insistent, and ultimately influential on people's behavior. Charles Beard once noted that on a frontier many individuals could be found, but little individualism. Laura Ingalls Wilder's novels illustrate how individualism could be a less important factor in people's behavior in a town like De Smet than their efforts to establish control. Historians have noted the declining force of traditional controls and val-

ues in a frontier social environment.<sup>13</sup> That made it all the more imperative for people to reassert social control. But the term "social control" does not fully encompass the processes that were operating in the West.

On the frontier the first priority was to establish control over the environment and forces of nature in order to insure basic physical survival. Settlers had to bring or obtain food, construct shelter, and protect themselves from wild animals and the elements. Pa Ingalls's assertion that a man with a gun in the West could get all the meat he wanted proved overly optimistic. The arrival of the settlers pushed bison and antelope farther west. A hunter could not support a family on occasional jackrabbits and game birds. He had to wrest a living from the land. A family had to plant a garden and buy staples at the store. But if a family didn't have enough money, it might suffer from malnutrition.

During the long winter of 1880-81, when all trains from the east were blocked for months, the Ingalls family got tired of living on potatoes and brown bread, but they were lucky to have that.<sup>14</sup> When wheat threatened to run out in the newly built town on the prairie, Almanzo Wilder and his friend Cap Garland risked their lives to ride twenty miles south over snowswept prairies devoid of landmarks to find a settler who, according to rumor, had some wheat that he might sell. When they got to his shanty, his initial response to their request to buy wheat to feed starving women and children epitomized the kind of self-sufficient individualism that has been attributed to frontiersmen. "That's not my lookout," he said. "Nobody's responsible for other folks that haven't got enough forethought to take care of themselves."

Having persuaded the man to part with sixty bushels by offering him \$1.25 a bushel for them, the two barely managed to make it back to town, only to discover that Daniel Loftus, the storekeeper who had sent them on their errand, was trying to bilk the townspeople by upping the price to \$3.00 a bushel. Loftus told a delegation led by Charles Ingalls, "That wheat's mine and I've got a right to charge any price I

want for it."

"That's so Loftus, you have," Ingalls replied. "This is a free country and every man's got a right to do as he pleases with his own property." But in this case, he continued, circumstances were different. The well-being of the community was involved and whatever Loftus did now would long be remembered by everyone gathered there. Gerald Fuller, the tailor, chimed in, "You got to treat folks right or you won't last long in business, not in this country." The will—or tyranny, if you prefer—of the majority carried the day. Loftus looked like a beaten man. He agreed to sell the wheat for the \$1.25 he had originally paid for it.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the historical accuracy of the story, Loftus went on to become the most prominent storekeeper in town during the next forty years, active in civic affairs, prominent in the state retailers' association, and successful in business.<sup>16</sup> The episode illustrates several manifestations of control: the dangers imposed by climate and environment, the usefulness of physical strength and bravery in overcoming those elements, the lack of roads and landmarks installing control on the landscape, the ability of money to talk, the centrality of gossip as a means of establishing consensus in the community, and the force of public opinion on individuals' actions.

Within several years' time, garden vegetables, chickens, pigs, grain, and other foods helped the Ingallses forget the rapid depletion of game.<sup>17</sup> But there was always the danger of crop failure, something that recurred frequently over the years, and tables would have to be set more sparsely from time to time, even if starvation was no longer a danger. Shelter, too, had to be provided. The titles of Wilder's novels, as well as their contents, reflect the importance of buildings. In the little houses that were home to her she found warmth and comfort, both physical and emotional. Whether it be a dugout in a hillside, a tarpaper claim shanty, a store building in town, or a snug house with manufactured windows, the walls surrounding Laura provided protection from cold and rain and wolves. Nature was two-faced: on the one

hand beautiful and inspirational, on the other full of danger. Blizzards could kill. It seemed to Laura sometimes that the storms were alive, trying to get them. They sounded like packs of wolves or panthers. Ma advised that since they couldn't do anything about the storms, they should take them as they came, but Pa shouted his defiance at them when he was cooped up more than he could stand. "Howl! blast you! howl!" he called back. "We're all here safe! You can't get at us!"<sup>18</sup>

The threat of wild animals was more imaginary than real, but caution was advisable. Wolves generally retreated as the settlers advanced, and coyotes usually posed no serious danger to people or farm animals. But once after she and Almanzo were married, Laura grabbed a pitchfork to ward wolves off from their sheep. Gophers sometimes got into the corn and blackbirds into the oats. Ma and the girls vainly tried to scare the blackbirds away with shouts and brooms. In defeat, Ma found some consolation, baking some delicious blackbird pies for dinner. Her comment, "There's no great loss without some small gain," typified her approach to life. If she couldn't control a situation, she would redefine it, looking for the cheerful aspects of otherwise dreary circumstances.<sup>19</sup>

The outcome of the struggle the farmers and townspeople waged to keep their farms and businesses was always in doubt. All of Laura Ingalls Wilder's novels remain steadily optimistic about the future, with the partial exception of *The First Four Years*, published posthumously. Dakota Territory remained "next year country" and people who lacked faith in the future did not stay around long. But the difficulties of wresting a living from the land were always pressing. And if the farmers did not make it, the storekeepers in town could not either.

Agriculture during the 1880s was moving through a transitional phase as mechanization rapidly replaced human labor. "Agricultural machinery is going off like hotcakes, and the smile of the dealer is broad and bland," the *De Smet Leader* reported in March 1883.<sup>20</sup> Mechanization, of course, proved beneficial in that

it conferred on the farmers greater physical control over their situation. With its advantages came further complications, however, that actually left them with less control over their total situation: machinery was hardly ever paid for in cash. The debts and mortgages that accompanied the new reapers, binders, and cultivators saddled the farmers with a burden that was hard to escape. Many of them mortgaged their land, whether it had been purchased or homesteaded originally, because crop prices often lagged behind the expenses involved in planting and harvesting.

After disastrous experiences with buying on credit at Plum Creek, Laura's father was careful to stay out of debt, recognizing how easy it was to get sucked deeper and deeper into the morass.<sup>21</sup> His son-in-law Almanzo, however, saw no way to avoid it and remained continually hopeful that the next crop would turn his and Laura's financial affairs around. The arithmetic of farming was often discouraging. When interest was 3 percent per month, the calculations led almost certainly to disaster. No wonder Laura, who had started out liking her family's claim and hating the town, ended up liking the town and hating farm life after marriage: "She hated the farm and the stock and the smelly lambs, the cooking of food and the dirty dishes. Oh, she hated it all, and especially the debts that must be paid whether she could work or not."<sup>22</sup> The tone of *The First Four Years* differs considerably from that of the earlier books. The sense of optimism, while present, is muted. Laura as a married woman no longer could depend upon her parents to take care of things. Concerns about the future come to the fore. The period Wilder is writing about—the late 1880s—followed upon the Great Dakota Boom, the setting for the four books about De Smet published during her lifetime. She kept the manuscript of *The First Four Years* hidden away during her lifetime, and it was published only when it was discovered after her death.<sup>23</sup>

Along with the new farm machinery, other technological innovations made work easier for people and allowed them greater control over

their lives. But here, too, there were tradeoffs. Kerosene lit the lamps of the Ingalls family during the long winter, but when the trains stopped running, the kerosene ran out and they discovered that they had become dependent upon it. "If only I had some grease I could fix some kind of a light," Ma said. "We didn't lack for light when I was a girl, before this newfangled kerosene was ever heard of." Pa agreed: "These times are too progressive. Everything has changed too fast. Railroads and telegraph and kerosene and coal stoves—they're good things to have but the trouble is, folks get to depend on 'em."<sup>24</sup>

Even with new labor-saving devices, people relied heavily on human muscle power to get their work done. During the long winter, gangs of snow shovelers walked down the line trying to clear the railroad tracks so the trains could get through. The family twisted hay into sticks to burn in the stove and laboriously ground wheat in a coffee grinder until their muscles ached. Farm work remained backbreaking labor, something Laura learned from experience helping her father and later her husband in the fields from time to time.<sup>25</sup>

Laura played an important economic role in the family from a very early age and quickly felt an obligation to contribute to the family's economic well-being. Whatever money she could earn would increase the family's ability to control its destiny. Thus, she accepted the need for taking in boarders as settlers streamed into the region, even though she was afraid of the rough men who stayed under their roof. The family temporarily lost some control over its daily life but came out \$42.50 ahead in the process, money that could be used for sending Mary to college. It was this incentive more than anything that spurred Laura on—that drove her to work as a seamstress for twenty-five cents a day, to stay with a woman on her claim west of town, and to take several schoolteaching jobs despite her wish not to. As she thought in *Little Town on the Prairie*, "If she studied hard and faithfully, and got a teacher's certificate, and then got a school to teach, she would be a real help to Pa and Ma. Then she could begin to repay them

for all that it had cost to provide for her since she was a baby. Then, surely, they could send Mary to college."<sup>26</sup>

Hard work was both a family duty and an obligation rooted deep in the psyches of almost everyone. The work ethic was engrained in people through the socialization process.<sup>27</sup> If that or family obligations were not enough of a spur, economic necessity usually did the trick. Pa liked to say that he had made a fourteen dollar bet, the cost of the filing fee, with Uncle Sam that he could hold out on his 160 acre homestead for five years before giving up.<sup>28</sup> Many settlers lost their bets. Pa won his but never achieved a great deal of prosperity, spending many of his later years doing carpentry and other jobs around De Smet.<sup>29</sup> Laura and Almanzo got married just as the wet years gave way to the dry and just as the floor began to drop out of farm prices. By the time they finally gave up (just after the period covered in *The First Four Years*), the Farmers Alliance was active in Dakota Territory and the Populist Party was about to be born. Dakota is sometimes credited with being the birthplace of Populism because an Independent Party was established in 1890 in Huron, forty miles west of De Smet. During the mid-nineties, the Populists captured political control in the fledgling state (South Dakota entered the Union in 1889), a sign that many people had given up on the two major parties' abilities to solve their economic problems.<sup>30</sup>

Although the final book concludes on a note of optimism, Laura and Almanzo gave up on South Dakota and moved to Missouri several years later. By 1889, the homestead had been sold off, hot winds had killed the wheat and the oats, their second child had died shortly after birth, a tornado had struck, and a fire had burned down their farmhouse. Their only hope for getting out of debt and holding onto their land was getting a good crop the next year—something they had prayed for during the first four years but never obtained. Considering all of this, Laura realized,

"It would be a fight to win out in this business of farming, but strangely she felt her spirit

rising for the struggle. The incurable optimism of the farmer who throws his seed on the ground every spring, betting it and his time against the elements, seemed inextricably to blend with the creed of her pioneer forefathers that "it is better farther on"—only instead of farther on in space, it was farther on in time, over the horizon of the years ahead instead of the far horizon of the west.<sup>31</sup>

By then Laura had given up her childhood dreams of going farther west to find freedom and happiness, now investing her hopes in realizing her dreams over the horizon of tomorrow. The irony here is that she and Almanzo *did* decide to make a geographic move—to the southeast, to Mansfield, Missouri, where they would live the rest of their lives.

Unable to control their economic destiny, Laura and Almanzo sought some measure of control over themselves and their situation. That effort to achieve control is a theme that weaves its way through her later books. Laura's account of her first teaching job at the Brewster school, south of De Smet, illustrates several aspects of this process. Only fifteen years old at the time, she approached the job with trepidation. She worried that the children wouldn't mind her—that she wouldn't be able to control them—but her father reassured her by reminding her that she had never failed at anything she had tried. He also reiterated the need for *self-control*. "You are so quick, flutterbudget," he told her. "You are apt to act or speak first, and think afterward. Now you must do your thinking first and speak afterward. If you will remember to do that, you will not have any trouble."<sup>32</sup>

The practice of controlling one's emotions was a lesson drilled in early in the Ingalls family. That a "grown-up person must never let feelings be shown by voice or manner" was a principle the girls all learned. By the time they were grown up, they usually followed it. "Modulate your voice, Laura," Ma would remind her. When Laura's spiteful statement about Nellie Oleson's country parents led to an incident between the two girls, Ma wrote some advice in Laura's al-

bum that she could keep forever:

"If wisdom's ways you wisely seek,  
Five thing observe with care.  
To whom you speak,  
Of whom you speak,  
And how, and when, and where."<sup>33</sup>

Memory work provided another source of self-discipline as well as of enjoyment. Along with the Psalms, Laura memorized the Declaration of Independence and the exports of Brazil. At the singing school held in the Congregational church, Mr. Clewett drilled his pupils up and down the scales to improve their voices. Living each day was so much exercise of discipline over one's emotions and inclinations. Once Laura slackened off in her studies and obtained only a 99 in history and 92 in English. The experience convinced her that there could be no more self-indulgence. And when she thought she could not bear to return to stay with the Brewsters, who were constantly fighting with each other, she simply told herself that everything must go on.<sup>34</sup>

Laura's child's-eye view of De Smet, short as it falls of a full sociological portrait of the town, does make reference to the problem that probably did most to challenge community norms, the liquor issue. In towns like De Smet, one day the temperance forces would manage to shut down the saloons; next day the liquor interests would reverse the decision at the polls. At heart, the liquor issue was one of control—by one group of people over another and by the individual over his or her own actions. Pa Ingalls sided with the prohibition camp. "Two saloons in this town are just two saloons too many," he said.<sup>35</sup>

Nowhere else, perhaps, do society's instruments of control expose themselves so dramatically as in its rituals and celebrations. With the possible exception of Christmas, the Fourth of July was the most anticipated and participated in celebration of the year in American frontier towns. People loaded themselves into wagons and buggies, driving in from miles around to join in the ceremonies and fun and games.<sup>36</sup>



By 1881, the second year of the town, the people of De Smet worked out an elaborate program. Horse racing was the big attraction of the day. There were lemonade and firecrackers and games for the children. The focal point of the day was the reading of the Declaration of Independence and the presentation of patriotic speeches. People sang "My country, 'tis of thee," and as Laura thought about the song and the Declaration, she pondered the notion that God is America's king. She thought,

Americans won't obey any king on earth. Americans are free. That means they have to obey their own consciences. No king bosses Pa; he has to boss himself. Why (she thought), when I am a little older, Pa and Ma will stop telling me what to do, and there isn't anyone else who has a right to give me orders. I will have to make myself be good.

Thus were opposites joined. Freedom did not constitute license; rather it implied self-discipline:

Her whole mind seemed to be lighted up by that thought. This is what it means to be free. It means, you have to be good. "Our father's God, author of liberty—" The laws of Nature and of Nature's God endow you with a right to life and liberty. Then you have to keep the laws of God, for God's law is the only thing that gives you a right to be free.<sup>37</sup>

The search for freedom and individualism on the frontier thus culminated in the novels of Laura Ingalls Wilder in the discovery of self-discipline. The entire web of controls—over nature, economic affairs, other people, and oneself—is interconnected. What freedom and liberty there were had to exist within a society heavily governed by values, norms, and rules that established limits for people's actions. Individualism was not the opposite of community; it was its analogue. Control did not preclude freedom; rightly understood, it established the foundation upon which freedom rested.

## NOTES

1. Wilder's novels, all published in New York by Harper & Row, are *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932), *Farmer Boy* (1933), *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (1937), *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939), *The Long Winter* (1940), *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941), *These Happy Golden Years* (1943), and *The First Four Years* (1971). This study focuses on the last five, set in and around De Smet.

2. Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p. 4.

3. Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, p. 138.

4. Frederick Jackson Turner established the framework for serious study of the frontier character in "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," (1893) reprinted in *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. Ray Allen Billington (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961), pp. 37-62. Turner and his followers concentrated almost entirely on the male frontier experience. Only in the last fifteen years or so has much attention been given to the experience of the pioneer woman. See, for example, Glenda Riley, *Frontierswoman: The Iowa Experience* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981); Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979).

5. Wilder, *Long Winter*, p. 65; *These Happy Golden Years*, pp. 153, 169, 196, 269.

6. Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, pp. 11-12. Rosa Ann Moore shows that Wilder in different scenes reassigned the two girls' attributes so as to maintain consistency in their characters. Thus, while in real life Laura and Mary played sometimes contradictory roles, in the books Mary remained good, patient, and literal, while Laura was reckless, restless, and metaphorical. "Laura Ingalls Wilder's Orange Notebooks and the Art of the Little House Books," *Children's Literature* 4 (1975): 114-15.

7. Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, p. 138.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

9. Rosa Ann Moore was the first extensively to document the close collaboration between mother and daughter in the writing of the novels and the extent to which artistic considerations shaped the raw materials. See "Laura Ingalls Wilder's Orange Notebooks": 105-19; "The Little House Books: Rose-Colored Classics," *Children's Literature* 7 (1978): 7-16; "Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane: The Chemistry of Collaboration," *Children's Literature in Education* 11 (Autumn 1980): 101-109. William T. Anderson likewise demonstrates the guiding influence of the daughter, especially in the first several novels, but he also emphasizes their rootedness in

historical experience. See "The Literary Apprenticeship of Laura Ingalls Wilder," *South Dakota History* 13 (Winter 1983): 285-331 and "Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane: The Continuing Collaboration," *South Dakota History* 16 (Summer 1986): 89-143. See also Janet Spaeth, *Laura Ingalls Wilder*, (Boston: Twayne, 1987), pp. 1, 34, 86, 93-95. A comparison of the novels with contemporary newspapers reflects many parallels between journalistic and fictional accounts. See John E. Miller, "Place and Community in the 'Little Town on the Prairie': De Smet in 1883," *South Dakota History*, 16 (Winter 1986): 351-72.

10. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier," p. 37.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58, 61-62.

12. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner, trans. by George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 477-78; Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. vii.

13. Beard recounted by George W. Pierson, "Turner's Views Challenged," in Billington, ed., *The Frontier Thesis: Valid Interpretation of American History?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 36; Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 53.

14. Wilder, *The Long Winter*, p. 209.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 264-308.

16. *De Smet News*, 25 May, 26 Oct. 1900, 8 March 1907, 17 May 1918, 14 Oct. 1921. The Loftus family gravestone stands out most prominently in the De Smet cemetery two miles south of town.

17. Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, p. 29.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 265; *Long Winter*, pp. 187, 288; *These Happy Golden Years*, p. 197; *The First Four Years*, pp. 38-40, 76-77. See also Doris Rosenblum, "'Intimate Immensity': Mythic Space in the Works of Laura Ingalls Wilder," in Arthur R. Huseboe and William Geyer, ed., *Where the West Begins: Essays on the Middle Border and Siouxland Writing* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Center for Western Studies Press, 1978), pp. 72-79.

19. Wilder, *First Four Years*, pp. 104-106; *Little Town on the Prairie*, p. 102.

20. *De Smet Leader*, 10 March 1883.

21. Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, p. 197.

22. Wilder, *The First Four Years*, pp. 119-20.

23. Anderson, "Literary Apprenticeship of Laura Ingalls Wilder": 290-99; William Holtz, "Closing the Circle: The American Optimism of Laura Ingalls Wilder," *Great Plains Quarterly* 4 (Spring, 1984): 85.

24. Wilder, *The Long Winter*, pp. 192-93.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-10, 107-110, 173, 186, 189, 195; *The First Four Years*, p. 64.

26. Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p. 243; *Little Town on the Prairie*, pp. 37, 48 (quoted); *These Happy Golden Years*, pp. 42, 151, 237.

27. On the work ethic, see Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New York: Free Press, 1954).

28. Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p. 237; *These Happy Golden Years*, p. 119.

29. William T. Anderson, *The Story of the Ingalls* (De Smet, S.Dak.: Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society, 1971), pp. 14-15.

30. Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota," *North Dakota History* 34 (Winter 1967): 77-92.

31. Wilder, *The First Four Years*, pp. 133-34.

32. Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, pp. 2-4.

33. Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, pp. 97, 228, 184.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-75, 253, 262, 304; *The Long Winter*, pp. 81, 228; *These Happy Golden Years*, pp. 24, 98.

35. Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, p. 55. Although Kingsbury County in 1883 became the first county under territorial law to vote no license for saloons, the law was very laxly enforced, when at all. "There is room for some vigorous temperance work in De Smet," editor Mark Brown commented. "Drunken men reeling and yelling in the streets rather give away a temperance community. The liquid damnation is obtained freely somewhere. It wants looking after." *De Smet Leader* 24 March and 5 May 1883.

36. John E. Miller, "The Old-fashioned Fourth of July: A Photographic Essay on Small-town Celebrations Prior to 1930," *South Dakota History* 17 (Summer 1987): 118-39.

37. Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, pp. 63-77.