



Laura Ingalls Wilder LORE

Newsletter of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society

Winter Hours

SEPTEMBER–APRIL
Tuesday–Saturday
9:00 am–4:00 pm

MAY

Monday–Saturday
9:00 am–4:00 pm

JUNE–AUGUST

Monday–Saturday
9:00 am–5:30 pm
Sunday
Noon–5:30 pm

In this issue

From the
Executive Director
page 1

Exhibit Sneak-Peek
page 3

Owen Shoe Shop
page 4

Meet Zoey!
page 5

Mary Ingalls
page 6

Preserving
Laura's Legacy
page 8

Exterior Restoration
page 9

Ma's Green
Pumpkin Pie
page 11

From the Executive Director's Desk

by Mary Jo Wertz

It's been a **full and joyful season** at the Society. We kicked off late spring with school field trips, welcoming local students for hands-on history and introducing a new exhibit scavenger hunt—an instant hit with kids, teachers, and staff alike.

In July, we received a \$5,000 Deadwood Grant **to begin repairs on the Ingalls Home**, as recommended by last year's CAP (Collections Assessment for Preservation) report. Thanks to incredibly generous \$7,500 gifts from siblings David and Marilyn Meade, we'll be able to address the most critical needs.

That same month, we hosted **our first Pioneer Festival**, featuring Jessica Michna as Laura Ingalls Wilder. Her performance was so vivid it felt like sitting down with Laura herself. Guests also enjoyed demonstrations of pioneer skills from local vendors—an unforgettable day.

August brought more good news: a **\$25,000 TPS (Teaching with Primary Sources) grant** to develop new museum content using Library of Congress materials. This will enrich our school field trips and deepen the visitor experience.



continued on page 2

From the Executive Director *continued from page 1*

In October, **we were honored to be interviewed by the BBC** in celebration of America's 250th birthday. The podcast series explores what makes America unique, and our segment highlights the legacy of pioneers like Laura. It will air in early 2026—be sure we have your email so we can let you know when it's released.

We're also **deeply grateful to the Scottish Rite Foundation of South Dakota for their generous \$5,000 donation** this October, inspired by Pa's tombstone. Their support helps us continue preserving and sharing Laura's legacy.



As Thanksgiving approaches, we bid farewell to our exhibit *Beyond the Prairie*, which explored the lives of Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane. After a wonderful two-year run, it's bittersweet to see it go. But **we're excited to begin work on *The First Families of De Smet: The Story Behind the Real People Who Shaped Laura's Little Town***.

I want to thank **our year-round staff**—Anne Aamot, Eric Fairchild, Snookie Stoddard, and Holly Penn—who keep us running with grace and grit, managing everything from archives and grants to mail orders, cleaning, social media, and tours. I'm deeply grateful for their dedication.

Our summer staff—Kendra Palmlund, Grace Schaefer, Neva Clubb, Josslyn Emery, Zoey Lancaster, and Lyla Schoenfelder—were nothing short of extraordinary. In a world quick to criticize the younger generation, these young women proved themselves hardworking, joyful, and deeply committed to Laura's legacy. One evening, I found three of them weeding the grounds after hours, unasked and unpaid, simply because they cared. They truly rock.



This issue features articles by two of our summer guides: Grace Schaefer, who wrote a beautiful piece on Mary Ingalls and also designed next year's exhibit as our intern, and Zoey Lancaster, who reflects on her experience as a guide. Both are moving on—Grace to post-college adventures and Zoey to a new home—and we'll miss them dearly.

Looking ahead, **mark your calendars for July 25, 2026**—the final Saturday of Pageant weekend—when Jessica Michna will return as Laura Ingalls Wilder. We hope you'll join us.

Until next time, may you be happy and well.

Mary Jo



EXHIBIT: The First Families of De Smet *by Snookie Stoddard*

Are you ready? Because it's coming! Here is a sneak-peek at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society Exhibit for 2026-2027

- Haven't you always wondered about Cap Garland? Wanted to know if he was as sweet on Laura as she seemed on him?
- How about Mr. Edwards? Was he real? Or based on another person?
- Mr. and Mrs. Boast, were one of the first four founding families of De Smet. Who were they? Where did they come from? What celebration did Mr. Boast help to create for the town of De Smet, South Dakota.
- What about Ida Brown, one of Laura's best friends? How did she get to De Smet and what tragedy did she go through before Laura became her friend?
- We all know about Nellie Oleson, but who were Genevieve Masters and Stella Gilbert to her?
- Mr. Loftus was the man who wanted to charge too much for the wheat that Cap and Almanzo brought back to the town during the long winter. Was he a bad guy or a good guy in the end?
- Mr. Fuller owned the hardware store, but what happened in Fuller's store that has nothing to do with hardware?

Be sure to visit the exhibit in person, but for now enjoy this preview:



Then and Now: The Owen Shoe Shop

by Eric Fairchild

What remains of Laura's De Smet? This is the first of a multipart article that will answer just that question.

The first stop on the *Then & Now tour of De Smet* is the Owen Shoe Shop on Calumet Ave. This building was originally constructed in the summer of 1882 by Samuel Owen (1828 to 1909). Sam opened his shoe store on Main Street (Calumet Ave.), and according to an advertisement in the *Kingsbury County Independent* (Dec. 22, 1892):

“Keeps the only exclusive boot and shoe store in the city. He has a first-class stock of goods and has enlarged his building to accommodate his stock. He also has a repair shop in connection with his store.”

Sam, his wife Sarah, son Vidocq, and daughters Adaresta and Frances moved to De Smet in 1880. He was present at the Surveyor's House in February 1880 when the first church service was held by Rev. Alden.

Sam opened his store in 1882, which was later expanded to the north for additional showroom space. He later sold the business in 1897, and the store building was moved to a new location.

The Owen's house—which constituted the south end of the building—and the showroom addition are still present today. Later years have seen the remodel of the front facade into a very modern look. However, look behind the building and you can see the original wooded structure still remains.

As a note, you will perhaps recognize Vidocq's (Ven) name as “Mr. Owen,” Laura's teacher in the first school. He was her last teacher before she finished her education in 1884. Carrie also had Mr. Owen as a teacher, and remembered him fondly later in life.

Sam's brother John also traveled to De Smet in 1880, and became a lawyer, Judge, land surveyor, district attorney, Judge Advocate-General of the South Dakota Militia, and a member of the convention that drafted the South Dakota State Constitution.

One last note: Ven's great niece was among the last residents of the Surveyor's House before it was purchased to become a museum.



Meet Zoey Lancaster!

Hi! My name is Zoey, and I have been a tour guide here for two years. This has been a great experience. I first visited De Smet when I was seven, and I loved the tour. I saw so many items from the Ingalls family that I was quite overwhelmed. When my family moved to De Smet, I knew that this would be a great opportunity to learn about something that I care about. And I haven't doubted my decision for a minute. I have gotten to meet people from all over the world. We get children with huge eyes full of wonder, adults living out a childhood dream, and people bringing their friends to experience the things that they experienced. I love to bring stories to life for children and be able to show them what the Ingalls had to go through. It's so special to give people the same experience that I was given; and I get to help to create memories that they'll cherish for the rest of their lives.

During this job, I have learned several skills that I will be able to use for the rest of my life. I have learned how to run the cash register and how to restock. I have also become better at public speaking. During the process, I have met wonderful coworkers who have befriended me and helped me through the process of learning a new job. They have been very kind and patient with me through all my learning curves, and I am forever grateful to them.

It is amazing to have access to almost all of the information about Laura. She lived a very hard life, and when I'm cleaning the Surveyor's house, I like to think that I'm doing the same thing that Laura did in 1879. It makes it more personal, and it's something that not everybody gets to experience.

Behind the scenes, I have learned things that help me to better understand what she had to go through.

This year, I have met friends, learned new skills, and learned more about Laura Ingalls Wilder than I ever thought I would. I wouldn't trade this experience for anything. One of the best rewards that I can get is when somebody tells me that I made them want to read the books again.



*From the back row, left to right, then forward.
The summer staff: Zoey Lancaster, Kendra Palmlund,
Neva Club, Josslyn Emery, Grace Schaefer, Lyla Schoenfelder,
and Director Mary Jo Wertz*



Who is Mary Ingalls to you? Is she the sister that Laura herself wished she could be? The teen that tragically lost her sight? The quiet young woman who bore her suffering and pain without complaint? Or is she the even more fictional TV show version who finds love and raises a family?

For me, Mary has always been someone to admire. One scene in *Little Town on the Prairie* has defined her character for me. It is a scene early on in the book, when Laura and Mary are walking on the homestead together. Both of the sisters bare their souls to the other. Laura confesses her jealousy and bewilderment of Mary's goodness.

Mary responds by saying "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." When Laura protests that this can't be true. Mary replies by saying that she doesn't believe in focusing on her own good but on God's goodness. She quotes Psalm 23 fervently, and in that moment Laura becomes hyper aware of the fact that Mary possesses a special insight and awareness into life and faith.

To me, in that scene Mary seems so pure and confident. Each time I reread it my respect for her grows. However, at times I wish that scene was from Mary's perspective. Although Laura digs into Mary's character and her views on suffering and faith, it is from Laura's memory, not Mary's. As I have gotten older, I've always wondered what that scene from Mary's perspective would be like. What was her thought process as she spoke with such wisdom and clarity?

continued on page 7

Consolation

Heart of sorrow ease thy mourning,
Human life is full of pain;
But the sadness of the singer
Makes the sweetness of the strain.
Joy eternal shall be greater,
That on earth the tears did flow;
For the bliss of heaven is ever
Measured by life's weight of woe.

What though bitter griefs and heartaches
In this world should be thy lot,
And thy soul be filled with sorrow:
God in love forget-it-not.
Love that calms the fiercest tempest,
Raging in the human breast:
There remaineth says the promise,
To the child of God a rest.

Heart of sorrow cease thy mourning.
Human life is full of pain.
Thy joy in heaven shall be greater
For this gloomy funeral train,
And the tears we shed for loved ones
Who are laid beneath the sod,
Brighter 'll make for us the rainbow,
Shining round the throne of God.



Mary Ingalls *continued from page 6*

Just recently, I found the answer to this question. As I was exploring the archives I stumbled across two poems that were composed by Mary and written in Ma's handwriting. Her poem titled *Consolation* in particular really stuck out to me.

This poem is so full of depth. It is tragic and yet hopeful. It reveals the extent of Mary's suffering, and yet the iron strength of her perseverance and faith. One group of lines in particular stood out to me:

*What though bitter griefs and heartaches
In this world should be thy lot,
And thy soul be filled with sorrow:
God in love forget-it-not.*

Here she seems to acknowledge her suffering and pain. The use of the word "bitter" fascinates me. Mary seems to acknowledge the fact that she has felt deep pain. It has been a struggle. She hasn't taken it all passively. Life at times has been a bitter pill to swallow. And yet despite her soul being "filled with sorrow" she knows that God has not forgotten her. Mary's steadfast faith that Laura wrote about truly shines through.



What I found most impactful, though, is the fact that she means every word. She isn't someone who doesn't know what she's talking about. She has experienced great suffering. The tragic loss of her sight, the death of a brother, a life filled with physical pain. Despite this, she still believes so stoically in God's goodness. She displays such deep and unwavering faith.

To me, this poem reveals the depth of Mary's heart. It shows me how deep her suffering was, and yet how deeper still her faith was. I am able to see life directly from her eyes, not second hand. It also reveals a great creativity and deep mind. She too, like her sister, was a writer. So regardless who Mary is to you, to me she is an inspiration. Someone who showed through her quiet action and powerful words, how to live life with a grateful heart and steadfast faith.



Preserving Laura's Legacy—Together

It's amazing how quickly the holidays arrive after summer. Can you believe Thanksgiving is nearly here and Christmas is just around the corner? Laura always found joy at Christmas, even in the leanest of years. I've been rereading *The Long Winter* and was struck again by that desolate Christmas in the store on Main Street—right here in De Smet. By today's standards, they had so little. And yet, they gave so much. Pa's oysters for a special stew, Laura's lace for Mary, the surprise candy, the suspenders from the Loftus store—small gifts, deeply meaningful.

That spirit of generosity still lives here. As we reflect on another season of joy, learning, and connection, we're reminded that everything we do at the Society is made possible by people who believe in Laura's story and the power of history to shape hearts and minds. People like you.

This year, we made meaningful progress on emergency repairs to the Ingalls Home, thanks to grant support from Deadwood historic Preservation and generous donors. But the full list of preservation needs identified in our CAP (Collections Assessment for Preservation) report remains unfunded. We still need help with painting, structural touch-ups, and long-term stabilization—work that ensures the home stands strong for generations to come.

Beyond preservation, our daily needs continue to grow. Our offices could use new carpeting and a few small comforts—like a Keurig® coffee maker for our hardworking staff and volunteers. We're also seeking funds for landscaping and tree treatment to protect against the emerald ash borer, which threatens the beauty and safety of our grounds.

Our programming is expanding in exciting ways. We're developing a new exhibit, *The First Families of De Smet*, exploring the real people behind Laura's "Little Town." This project requires research, design, fabrication, and interpretive supplies to bring it to life. We're also working to enclose the Surveyor's House—a critical first step in long-term stewardship. Our CAP assessors emphasized how urgent this protection is. We have big plans for that space, and while we're not quite ready to share them, we're committed to ensuring all of Laura's treasured buildings are preserved for the next hundred years.

Education remains at the heart of our mission. We're seeking support for school field trip supplies and two new digital experiences: an online field trip for classrooms across the country and a mini-tour for guests who can't visit in person. These tools will make Laura's story more accessible than ever.

Looking ahead to July 25, 2026, we're thrilled to reprise our Pioneer Festival during Pageant weekend, featuring Jessica Michna as Laura Ingalls Wilder and a host of pioneer vendors. We hope to offer demonstrations, music, and hands-on activities—but we'll need your help to make it happen. Professional development is also key. Attending preservation conferences helps us care for our buildings and artifacts with the highest standards.

continued on page 9



Preserving Laura's Legacy *continued from page 8*

And of course, we need help with staffing. Our team—year-round and seasonal—works tirelessly to welcome guests, manage archives, fulfill orders, clean, give tours, and keep everything running smoothly.

Your donation makes
an important impact!

discoverlaura.org/donate

If you've ever walked through the doors of the Ingalls Home, watched a child light up during a field trip, or felt the quiet magic of De Smet's prairie breeze, we invite you to help us continue this work. **Every gift—large or small—makes a difference.** Thank you for being part of Laura's legacy. With your help, we'll keep her story alive for generations to come.

Preservation: Exterior Restoration Underway!

Thanks to generous support from the Deadwood Historic Preservation Grant and our dedicated donors, we've begun a major phase of exterior restoration at the museum. This work, guided by the U.S. Department of the Interior's preservation standards, is painstaking and precise—designed not only to protect the structure but to honor its historical integrity.

The project includes restoration of 14 storm windows and 4 doors, with UV film applied to all glass surfaces to shield interior artifacts from light damage. The front door threshold and frame are receiving careful repair and repainting, while all screen doors are being converted to protective Plexiglass or glass panels for winter to protect the original doors from the elements.



A rotted window frame on one of Pa's windows at the Ingalls Home on Third Street.

Siding repairs span all four sides of the home, with attention to corner integrity. On the decks, each board is being removed, trimmed, and reinstalled with flashing to shed moisture away from the house—without replacing original framing. Materials include flashing, sealant tape, and other consumables selected for compatibility with historic surfaces as approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior's preservation standards.

Finally, landscaping adjustments include the removal of two plants against the east side of the house to prevent moisture intrusion. This labor-intensive work is a testament to our commitment to preservation—and to the community that makes it possible. The photo above and on the next page show “before” photo's of what will be restored.





These photos document the significant repairs and restoration needed on Pa's windows and doors at the Ingalls Home on Third Street. The two lower-right photos show the entrance doorway.

All other photos show various windows around the house. With the generous support of donors and the Deadwood Historic Preservation Grant, restoration is underway.



Ma's Green Pumpkin Pie

by Anne Aamot

The fall months are upon us! The final remnants of the garden are being harvested, but did everything ripen before the frost? If not, you can improvise just like Ma did! Ma "Caroline Ingalls" was well noted for making do with what she had. In *The Long Winter*, we read about this firsthand:

"Caroline, however, did you manage to make a pie?" Pa exclaimed. "What kind of pie is it?"
"Taste it and see!" said Ma. She cut a piece and put it on his plate,
Pa cut off the point with his fork and put it in his mouth. "Apple Pie! Where in the world did you get apples?"
Carrie could keep still no longer. She almost shouted,
"It's pumpkin! Ma made it of green pumpkin!"
Pa took another small bite and tasted it carefully. "I'd never have guessed it."
He said, "Ma always could beat the nation cooking."

Green Pumpkin Pie

Common Family Paste for Pie

1 tsp. butter plus more for pie pan
1 (4 lb) green (unripe) pumpkin
1 cup packed brown sugar
pinch of ground nutmeg, cloves, and
cinnamon
½ cup homemade vinegar or hard cider
or 3 tbs. frozen cider concentrate.

Line the buttered pie pan with half the pie paste. Chill the top crust.

- Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.
- With a large knife, cut the pumpkin into quarters. Remove the seeds. With the paring knife, scrape away the outer skin and cut the flesh crosswise into slices resembling apple slices. Put the slices into the bowl.
- Put the crust into the pie tin and cover the bottom with brown sugar and spices. Then fill with thin slices of green pumpkin. Pour half a cup of vinegar (OR cider) over them, and put a small piece of butter on top. Put the pie crust over the top.
- Crimp the edges of the pie and vent top.
- Bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes and **then reduce the heat** to 350 degrees and bake 35-40 minutes until nicely browned.



Enjoy!



Exciting News! The *Lore* is Going Digital!

We at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society are looking at ways to save money while continuing to excel at our mission to preserve the heritage of Laura Ingalls Wilder and her time here in De Smet.

One way to do that is to minimize the ever-increasing costs of printing and postage. Therefore, the *Lore* is going digital!

(And not to worry if you prefer to receive the print version. Simply let us know, and we'll mark your record so that you receive a printed copy).

To ensure that you continue to receive future editions (which will be quarterly instead of semi-annual), **send your email address to info@discoverlaura.org and stay up-to-date with the latest news and updates. Please also provide your name and address so that we can match your digital request to your record and remove you from the print list.** Thank you!



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