

The Selected Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder

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and his family's place in the opening of the western prairies. Ultimately, *Prairie Visions* depicts the hard work that produced modern Iowa.

The Selected Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder, edited by William Anderson. New York: HarperCollins, 2016. xxvii, 400 pp. Illustrations, maps, index. \$26.99 hardcover.

Reviewer John J. Fry is professor of history at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois. An authority on the life and works of Laura Ingalls Wilder, he is also the editor of *Almost Pioneers: One Couple's Homesteading Adventure in the West* (2013).

Laura Ingalls Wilder's eight Little House books provide fictionalized accounts of Wilder's childhood in Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota. They became instant best-sellers when they were published during the 1930s and 1940s, and they remained popular for the rest of the twentieth century, especially when the television series *Little House on the Prairie* aired from 1974 to 1983. It is unclear whether the books are as popular now as they were during the twentieth century, but there is still publishing interest in Wilder. During the past ten years there have appeared new biographies (Pamela Smith Hill's *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer's Life* [2007] and Sallie Ketcham's *Laura Ingalls Wilder: American Writer on the Prairie* [2015]), her final previously unpublished work (*Pioneer Girl*, edited by Hill [2014]), and a memoir of engagement with the books (Wendy McClure's *The Wilder Life* [2011]). Now William Anderson, the foremost living authority on Wilder, has edited this collection of over 400 letters Wilder wrote between 1894 and her death in 1957. The volume is a worthy addition to the body of Wilder's work.

The letters are arranged in strict date order and divided chronologically into six chapters. Each chapter begins with an overview of the events in Wilder's life during that period. Anderson has added a descriptive title to each letter, usually using words from the letter itself. Most letters also have a brief introduction that provides background on the correspondent and/or the context of the letter.

For those interested in how the Little House books were written, this book provides 100 pages of correspondence from Wilder to her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, between 1936 and 1940, when Wilder was writing several of the Little House books and Lane was editing and revising them for publication. The letters provide a window on the lively collaboration between the two women. At times Wilder, who was used to being able to tell her daughter what to do, had to accept Rose's advice about writing. There were also occasions, however, when Wilder refused

to budge, and it is clear that her instincts were correct. The efforts of both women combined to make the Little House books memorable.

Other groups of letters are also fascinating. For instance, Wilder wrote to her husband while she took trips to California in 1915 and 1925. Letters from the first trip were published by HarperCollins as *West from Home* in 1974, but letters from the second are published for the first time here. Imagining Wilder at 58 years old riding in a Buick through the mountains of Colorado, Nevada, and California is a treat. There are also multiple letters from Wilder to her literary agent and editors; she argues for more royalties, thanks them for the work they do, and shares news. Finally, the book reproduces dozens of letters she sent to fans of the books who wrote to her. During the last years of her life, she wrote to hundreds of these correspondents.

One wonders if the correspondence could have been organized differently to bring similar letters together. The chapters are also of uneven length; the shortest is only 22 pages, the longest is over 150. Finally, it is unclear why the correspondence between Wilder and Lane is divided into two different chapters.

These are minor concerns, however. This book is a must-read for Wilder scholars and for anyone who loves the Little House books.

Somewhere Over There: The Letters, Diary, and Artwork of a World War I Corporal, by Francis H. Webster, edited by Darrek D. Orwig. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. xv, 277 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Matthew J. Margis recently earned a Ph.D. in history from Iowa State University. His dissertation focuses on the National Guard's development as both a social and military organization during the Progressive Era.

During World War I, a young corporal from Iowa personified the role of "embedded journalist" decades before that term existed. In August 1917 the U.S. Army officially drafted the National Guard into the American Expeditionary Force, and the Third Iowa Infantry Regiment became the 168th U.S. Infantry Regiment as part of the newly created 42nd Infantry Division. Francis Webster enlisted in the Iowa National Guard shortly after the United States declared war on Germany. He served as a bugler in the Third Iowa Infantry Regiment's machine gun company. In addition to drawing illustrations about life in the trenches for publication in an Iowa newspaper, Webster maintained an extensive correspondence with his family and friends, and he kept a detailed diary. For *Somewhere Over There*, Darrek Orwig painstakingly edited Webster's letters, diary, and artwork.