

## Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder

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includes only one map, and that map, though clear and pleasing to the eye, fails to locate points like Helena, Arkansas; Alexandria, Louisiana; or Niblett's Bluff, Texas—all places of strategic importance referred to repeatedly in the text.

*Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder*, edited by Nancy Tystad Koupal. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2017. 317 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer John J. Fry is professor of history at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois. He is the editor of *Almost Pioneers* (2013) and is writing a biography of Laura Ingalls Wilder that pays particular attention to her faith.

When reading Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books, one is led to believe that things happened exactly as they were written. In addition, at a speech at a book fair in Detroit in 1937, Wilder said, in reference to the most recent book published, that "every story in this novel, all the circumstances, each incident are true. All I have told is true but it is not the whole truth" (15). After Wilder's death in 1957, however, readers and researchers began to discover many ways that the books were not historically accurate. That process accelerated when it was revealed that Wilder had previously written an adult memoir she called "Pioneer Girl" that publishers had rejected. The memoir was first made widely available to the public by the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa, during the 1980s. The South Dakota Historical Society (SDHS) Press published *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography* in 2014, and it quickly became a best-seller. It is now in its ninth printing; more than 165,000 copies have been sold.

*Pioneer Girl Perspectives* is a collection of essays edited by Nancy Tystad Koupal, director of the Pioneer Girl Project, and published by the SDHS Press. The volume was originally meant to address how the publication of *Pioneer Girl* shapes our understanding of Wilder and her work. However, contributors take their considerations in a number of new directions, including the life and works of Wilder's daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, the popularity of the Little House books, and the books' literary value.

The book is divided into four sections. "Working Writers" begins by reprinting Wilder's Detroit Book Fair speech, and then biographers of Wilder and Lane engage the different types of writing each published. In "Beginnings and Misdirections," authors consider the history of the Pioneer Girl manuscript and the Little House books compared to other early twentieth-century children's literature. Historians writing in the third section, "Wilder's Place and Time," situate Wilder in regional

and historical context. The essays in the final section, "Enduring Tales and Childhood Myths," explore a variety of literary features of the books.

As in all books of essays, some chapters are more insightful than others. Readers of this journal will be especially interested in John E. Miller's essay describing the midwestern context of Wilder's life and work. He argues that the Midwest is depicted in the following characteristics of the Little House books: "(1) the prominence of the land in its residents' thinking and the centrality of agriculture in its way of life; (2) the Homestead Act and the frontier process as integral parts of its historical experience; (3) the crucial role that small towns played in its culture; and (4) the development and nurturing of specific values as a result of those cultural experiences that helped shape residents' special identities as Midwesterners" (155). Paula Nelson does a thorough job placing Wilder's views on family, women's roles, farming, and woman suffrage into the multiple contexts of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. Nancy Fraser examines the use of the tale of the "Bloody Benders" in some Pioneer Girl manuscripts in order to assess Wilder and Lane's relationship to the "yellow journalism" of the early twentieth century. Elizabeth Jameson considers how Wilder's troubled and poverty-ridden childhood was transformed into the happy childhood of the Little House books. Finally, William Anderson gives a fascinating brief history of the Pioneer Girl manuscript between Wilder's death in 1957 and its publication in 2014.

Overall, *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* is an excellent book. It's slightly larger than a normal hardback, and the dust jacket art is beautiful. It includes many illustrations from the original Helen Sewell editions of the Little House books as well as historical photos of Wilder, Lane, and others. Many essays fill gaps in Wilder scholarship or bring together what is already known in helpful ways. It is a worthy companion to *Pioneer Girl* on the shelves of anyone interested in the Little House books and the way that they depict the West—and the Midwest.

*Coxey's Crusade for Jobs: Unemployment in the Gilded Age*, by Jerry Prout. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. 152 pp. \$25.00 paperback.

Reviewer Carlos A. Schwantes is Saint Louis Mercantile Library Endowed Professor of History Emeritus, University of Missouri-St. Louis. He is the author of *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (1985) and "Soldiers of Misfortune: Jack London, Kelly's Army, and the Struggle for Survival in Iowa" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1983).