

Journey To 'Little Town On Prairie'

By Craig Montgomery
Independent News Editor

A girls' weekend road trip turned into a journey of discovery for two New Haven librarians.

Wanda Walkenhorst and Pat Aichholz-Schowe traveled to De Smet, South Dakota and Walnut Grove, Minnesota in late July to see *Little House on the Prairie* author Laura Ingalls Wilder homes and historic sites.

Every year, the library receives mail advertising the Little Town on the Prairie Pageant in De Smet, held the last three weekends in July. This year it caught Walkenhorst's attention.

"I've always been interested in Laura Ingalls Wilder," she said. "I taught fifth grade, read the books as a child, and when I began teaching I bought a set," which she used in the classroom.

She has been to Wilder's last home in Mansfield, Missouri, but none of her previous homes in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas or South Dakota. "I

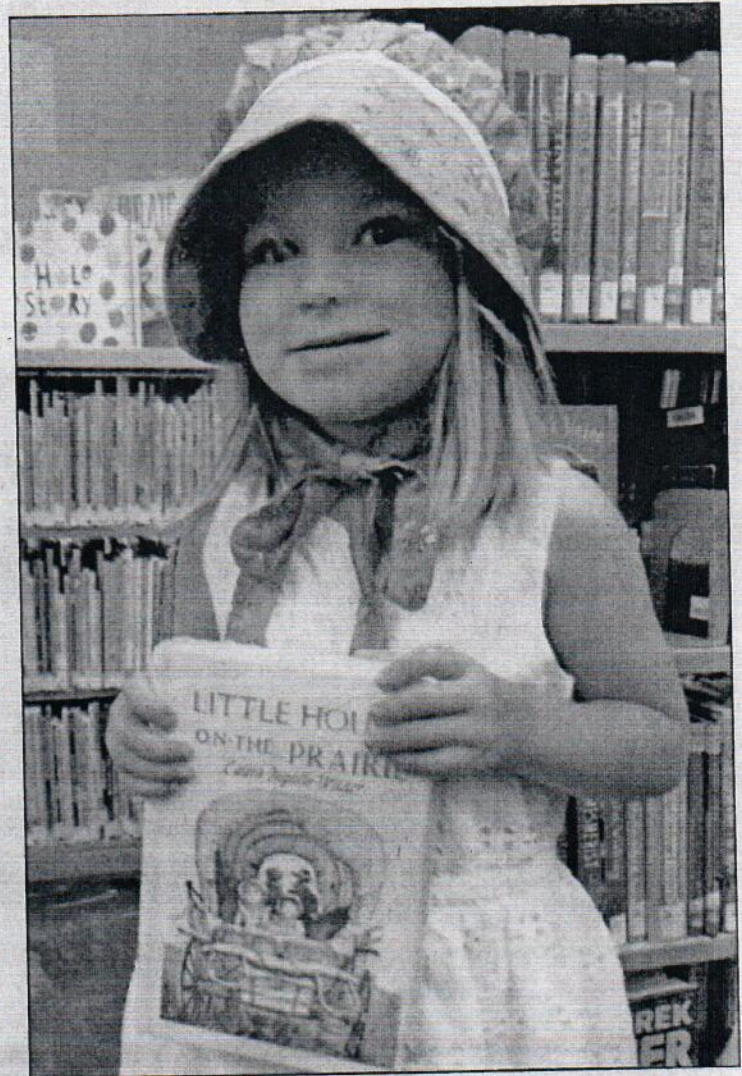
wanted to go. I wondered if could get Pat to go," she said.

"So Wanda asked me and I thought a girls' road trip sounded pretty good," Aichholz-Schowe said. "As my kids were growing up, they watched Little House on TV and the girls had some of the books. Our family also visited Mansfield."

So they headed for De Smet on a Thursday after work, stayed overnight in St. Joseph and arrived in De Smet on Friday afternoon in time for the pageant that night. Walkenhorst called the outdoor venue "The Munny on the Prairie."

The sets include the Wilders' house in town, the general store, schoolhouse and their shanty on the prairie. "It's out in an open field on the prairie. They just set up benches with concrete blocks and boards across them," Aichholz-Schowe said. "There are live horses brought in. It's really very nicely done."

This year's pageant marked Wilder's 150th



JOSIE BORCHERDING models a Laura Ingalls Wilder bonnet her grandma Pat brought back from De Smet, South Dakota.

SUMMER
CLEARANCE
EVENT



PAT AND WANDA visit De Smet's first school.

birthday. "That was kind of an extra incentive to go to it," she said. The Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant is over 45 years old and is presented by a volunteer cast and crew.

Wilder was born in Pepin, Wisconsin, but also lived in Independence, Kansas; Burr Oak, Iowa; Spring Valley, Minnesota; De Smet, South Dakota and Mansfield. "She was all over the place," Walkenhorst said. "The pageant tells the De Smet story, where they spent the most time."

It's based on *The Little Town on the Prairie*, an autobiographical children's novel, the seventh of nine books in the Little

House series.

They spent the next day touring some of the sights in town, including the original surveyor's house the Ingalls lived in and the home where their parents lived until their passing.

"We also saw the first school attended by Laura and Carrie," Walkenhorst said. "Those little one-room schools didn't look too much different from the one I attended for the first three years. So it kind of brought back memories." As a child, she went to Richwoods School, west of Stony Hill off Highway E.

They took a bus tour out in country where they saw Silver Lake (from *On the Shores of Silver Lake*) and a house where Laura and Almanzo first lived when they got married. It also took them to the original Ingalls homestead and cemetery.

"We woke up the next morning and thought, Walnut Grove is only two hours from here," Aichholz-Schowe said. So they headed to the next Wilder site.

"We were only there about an hour but it had a museum and they had built replicas of all the places, the depot, school and the dug-out," an earthen dwelling, Walkenhorst said. Walnut



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Grove was the basis of the book *On the Banks of Plum Creek*.

Aichholz-Schowe was surprised at how small some of their homes actually were. "The surveyor's home been built onto," she said. "It was very small. They had it painted off on the floor where the original house was. In the dugout house, the walls, ceiling and floor were dirt. It was just dug into a hillside."

She added, "We talked about how many times they traveled and at the end of Laura's life, how many memorabilia items they still had: dishes and pictures, postcards and letters. They just held onto all of that. It's amazing with how much they traveled that things like that would be left."

The whole trip took three and a half days. De Smet is about a ten-hour drive from New Haven.

Walkenhorst said her interest in the book series was rekindled when the TV show started airing in 1974.

"I bought the paperback series and had them in my classroom. I encouraged my kids to read them as historical fiction. They were considered biographies. When my mom got a certain age and couldn't read any more, I brought her those books and that was something she still could read."

Walkenhorst taught two years in Gerald and fourth and fifth graders for 27 years in Chamois before retiring. Wanda and Pat work part-time at the New Haven branch of the Scenic Regional Library.

"Our next trip we're planning is to go up through Iowa, to Burr Oak and see what's there, and maybe go to her birthplace in Pepin, Wisconsin and see what's there," Aichholz-Schowe

said.

and more.

learned about planets, the Milky Way

Missourian Photo.

Journey Back in Time Eclipse Event Is August 29

The Scenic Regional Library in New Haven will host a program about the 1959 solar eclipse.

The Journey Back in Time to the 1959 Eclipse event will be Tuesday, Aug. 29, at 6 p.m. at the old New

Haven School, 810 Maupin Ave.

New Haven resident Jack Hereford will share details and photos of his experience. Hereford was a senior flight test engineer and captured aerial photo-

graphs of the Oct. 2, 1959, eclipse while flying over the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa.

To RSVP call the New Haven Library at 573-237-2189 or visit scenicregional.org.

Missourian

Aug. 23, 2017

Aug. 26-27,

2017