

## This Day in History... February 7, 1867

# Happy Birthday Laura Ingalls Wilder

Acclaimed author Laura Ingalls Wilder was born on February 7, 1867, in Pepin County, Wisconsin.

The second of five children, Wilder spent the first two years of her life in a small log cabin in Wisconsin. She was a descendant of the Delano family, the same family as Franklin Delano Roosevelt. She was also a third cousin, once removed of Ulysses S. Grant.

In 1869, the Ingalls family left Wisconsin, stopped in Rothville, Missouri, and established a home in the Kansas Indian country near present-day Independence. They thought this land was going to be open to settlement, but were misinformed and eventually moved back to Wisconsin for three years. The family then spent time in Minnesota and Iowa before finally settling in De Smet, South Dakota. There, Wilder attended school and worked a variety of part-time jobs.



*Issued for the 100th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln signing the Homestead Act, which allowed qualified people to gain land at cheap prices.*

Just before she turned 16, Wilder took a job as a teacher, while still attending school herself and working for a local dressmaker. In 1885, she married Almanzo Wilder and quit school and her teaching job to join him on his homestead. Their first few years together were difficult. They had two children, but one died in infancy. Additionally, Wilder's husband was partially paralyzed from a bout of diphtheria, they eventually lost their home to a fire, and a severe drought plunged them into debt. They moved to Florida in the hopes it would help improve Almanzo's health, but it didn't, so they returned to De Smet and purchased a small home.

In 1894, Wilder and her family moved to Mansfield, Missouri where their luck finally changed. They bought an undeveloped property, sold firewood, and eventually established a successful farm. Wilder soon became recognized as a knowledgeable figure on poultry farming and rural life and was invited to many speaking engagements.

In 1911, Wilder began her writing career when she was encouraged to submit an article to the *Missouri Ruralist*. She soon became a columnist and editor with the paper. Wilder had a regular column in the paper, "As a Farm Woman Thinks," in which she shared stories from her home and family, her trips and those of her daughter, World War I, and more.

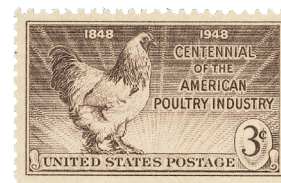
Wilder and her husband had made a comfortable living from their farm and her part-time job with the Farm Loan Association. Their daughter, Rose, had become a successful writer and encouraged her mother to pursue a literary career, particularly to write about her childhood exploits. Wilder considered it but didn't take any action. Then the Stock Market Crash of 1929 devastated all of their finances. This, coupled with the losses of her mother and older sister, led Wilder to start writing down stories from her childhood. Working with her daughter, Wilder published her first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, in 1932.



*The stock market crash was a major influence that led Wilder to start writing her famous books.*



*From the 1993 Children's Classics issue*



*Wilder was a poultry columnist for the St. Louis Star Farmer, and gained notoriety for being able to get eggs in the winter when no one else could.*

Wilder's book was an instant hit, and she would follow it up with seven more volumes during her lifetime. The success of these books allowed her and her husband to live on their farm for the rest of their lives. There they were often visited by fans of her books that wanted to meet the real-life Laura from the *Little House* books.

Wilder died on February 10, 1957. In 1968 her publisher discovered another story, *The First Four Years* (about the early years of her marriage) and published it in 1971 as the ninth volume in the *Little House* series. The popularity of her books was later boosted by the success of the television series, which first aired in 1974. During her lifetime, she was a runner-up for the Newbery Medal five times. In 1954, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal was established for authors who have made "a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children."

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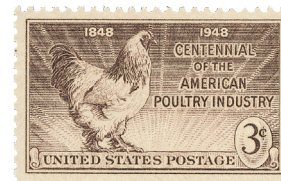
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