

“‘Little House’ Author Traversed County”  
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One of the most beloved authors in American children’s literature is Laura Ingalls Wilder, who in her later years wrote down her childhood memories.

Those tales of the simple delights and hardships of pioneering in late 19<sup>th</sup> century America soon became honored classics. Today, Wilder and her eight “Little House” books have been printed in a dozen languages and have won millions of fans of all ages.

After her death in 1957 at the age of 90, an additional volume, “On the Way Home,” was published. Unlike the previous works, the last book was a transcript of one of Wilder’s diaries, edited by her daughter, Rose.

It describes a trip the Wilder family made in 1894 by covered wagon when they moved from South Dakota to Missouri. The diary is of interest to local history buffs, because the journey took Wilder; her husband Almanzo and Rose through Franklin County.

Her diary entry for August 16, 1894 reads in part, “At 5 in the afternoon we came through Ottawa. There is a North and a South Ottawa, separated by the Maradegene (sic) River.”

Wilder then relates a story she apparently heard while in Ottawa: “The men of Ottawa stole the county seat in the night, from another town, and for some time they had to guard it with the militia to keep it.”

Interesting story, but there is absolutely no evidence that it is true.

She refers to three especially notable buildings in town, all of which still stand today: “The courthouse is quite an imposing building.” It had been completed just the year before.

The Sante (sic) Fe Railroad hospital is in the north edge of North Ottawa, a large brick building. It looks very clean.” That structure now houses the National Sign Company.

“In South Ottawa there is a handsome college building made of native stone.” That reference, of course, is to what we now call Taub Jones Hall at Ottawa University.

The Wilders camped that night on the bank of Rock Creek in the “suburbs of South Ottawa,” probably in the vicinity of the OU soccer field.

The next day, it took 8 ½ hours to drive to Lane, where one of their horses was shod. Along the way, Wilder noted that “wild morning glories are rioting everywhere, all colors like the tame ones.”

She also was interested in a large field of castor beans. “They are raised here as a crop, they run 10 to 15 bushels to an acre and sell for \$1.25 to \$1.50 a bushel. They are picked every two weeks, piled up in the sun till they pop open then run through a fanning mill and sacked.”

The Lane blacksmith, she noted, had his place up for sale, because he wanted to go back to his native Kentucky. Her description of his house suggests that it was the handsome, two-story house that still is standing today on the west side of the north end of Lane’s Main Street.

The blacksmith’s house, shop and 130 acres of Pottawatomie Creek bottomland were for sale for \$4,300.

Wilder and her family camped a few miles south of Lane that night and continued on the next day by way of Parker and Goodrich.

Later that summer, they established a home near Mansfield, Missouri, that was to be her last “Little House.” There she lived for 63 years, authored her delightful stories and modestly accepted the international acclaim they brought to her door.