

I Stan Laura Ingalls Wilder
By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

There's something about me that I don't think I've ever shared with Library Lines readers: I'm a Laura Ingalls Wilder stan. If you're not familiar with that modern term, a stan is someone who is an overzealous or obsessive fan of a particular celebrity. In recognition of the 157th anniversary of her birthday on February 7, this seems like the perfect time to share recommendations for stans, fans, and anyone curious to know more about Laura.

I wouldn't be a Laura stan without having devoured the original eight novels for children that were published in the 1930s and 40s. As a child, I was captivated by the feelings of freedom and exploration that she evoked. As an adult, can see that some of her writing is problematic. One scene that haunts me is from "Little House on the Prairie" when Laura and her family watch a native family ride past on horseback. Laura cries because she wants to keep a "papoose," as if it were a toy. There's no doubt that racism exists in her writing. I believe in recognizing it, calling it out, and learning more. Several excellent non-fiction books examine the racism in Laura's stories and give historical background and context.

The most prominent biography of Laura is Caroline Fraser's 2018 Pulitzer Prize-winning "Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder." The book takes a deep dive into the parts of Laura's life that weren't told in her novels. Using unpublished manuscripts, letters, diaries, and legal documents, Fraser tells a grown-up story of the beloved childhood character. We learn about the Ingalls' poverty, how Charles' wanderlust consumed the family, and rumors that Laura's daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, was the real writer behind the novels. This book might be more appropriate for stans than fans, but I highly recommend it.

Some of the topics in "Prairie Fires" are also covered in the 2023 podcast "Wilder." Over nine episodes, host Glynnis MacNicol discusses the business empire behind the scenes, visits the sites of the Ingalls and Wilder family homes, and interviews some stars in the Little House universe. (Alison Arngim is one of those celebrities. If you know, you know.) "Wilder" is available wherever you listen to podcasts.

"The Beautiful Snow: The Ingalls Family, The Railroads, and the Hard Winter of 1880-81" by Cindy Wilson is a nonfiction book that combines the historical record of that year with Wilder's fictional account in "The Long Winter." The book includes information from local newspaper articles, photographs, maps, and other graphics to take the story from the Ingalls' freezing but cramped DeSmet home into a broad historical context.

Maybe Little House books aren't known for their comedy, but if you want a laugh with your Laura, I recommend Wendy McClure's book "The Wilder Life: My Adventures in the Lost World of Little House on the Prairie." McClure travels to some of the sites where Laura once lived, churns butter in her apartment, and hand-grinds wheat to make her bread. The book is hilarious and relatable for anyone who read the original novels. "Laura Ingalls is Ruining My Life" by Shelley Tougas is a chapter book for young readers about a girl whose mother drags the family to Walnut Grove where she's sure she'll find inspiration to write her own famous children's novel.

It's said that reading can take you to places that you've never been before, but I'd like to travel to some of the places where Laura lived. The only "Little House" site I've gotten to so far is the Little House in the Big Woods in Pepin, Wisconsin. The town of Pepin has a Laura Ingalls

Wilder Museum and a few miles north is a replica of the original cabin. That was a magical day that I think about every time I glance at the Little House books on my shelves. Standing in the sunshine and imagining where the tall trees once stood, I felt the presence not only of Laura but of the millions of other readers who were also touched by her words. If you're one of those people, I hope you will enjoy these recommendations!