

Great American Lives

of Nineteenth Century Missouri

Rose Wilder Lane

By Donna Marshall

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While most people are familiar with the "Little House" book series by Laura Ingalls Wilder, what's not as well known is the role her daughter played in making the books successful.

Rose Wilder Lane was born in 1886 in De Smet, Dakota Territory, to Almanzo and Laura Ingalls Wilder. While in the Dakotas, the Wilders experienced many misfortunes. Crops failed, they lost their home to fire, and Rose's baby brother died when he was only a few days old. Rose flourished, however, and early in life laid the foundation for her education through literature. An avid and excellent reader, she mastered books such as "Robinson Crusoe" and "Gulliver's Travels" by the time she was 7.

In the summer of 1894 with the country in the throes of depression, Rose's family moved to Mansfield, Mo., settling into a home on a farm they called Rocky Ridge. It was in this home that Rose's mother, Laura Ingalls Wilder, wrote the "Little House" books.

While living in Mansfield, Rose completed the highest grade offered by Mansfield schools. At 16, she went to live with her aunt in Crowley, La., and completed her formal education. She then returned to her parents in Mansfield.

Rose aspired to know the world beyond Mansfield's streets, and she was a quick and eager learner. She learned Morse Code, a system of written communication in which letters of the alphabet are represented as dots and dashes. This helped her land her first job as a telegrapher for Western Union in Kan-

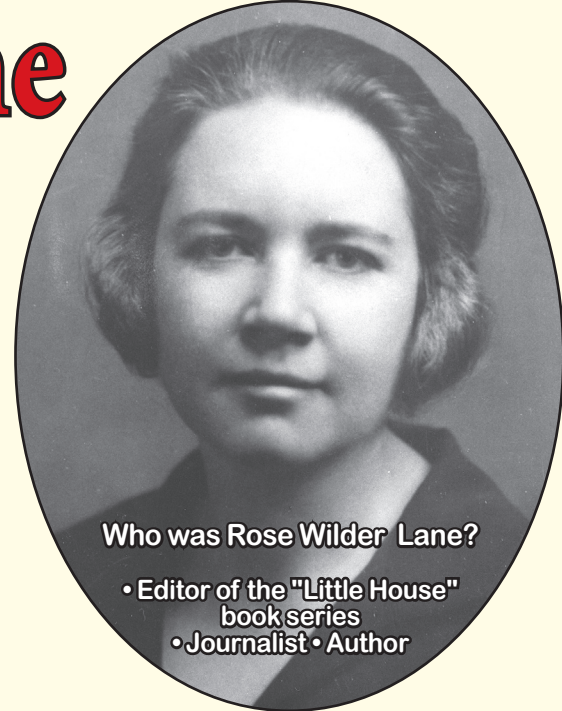
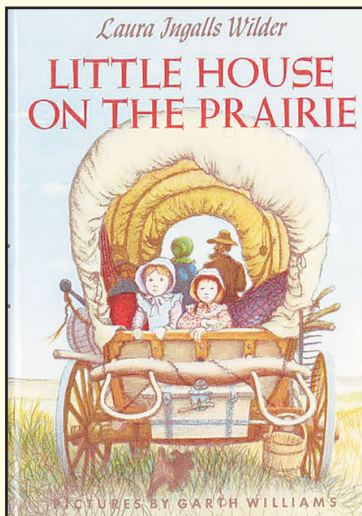
sas City, Mo., then as a manager of the Western Union office in Mount Vernon, Idaho.

Rose began her journalism career in San Francisco, as a feature writer and reporter for a newspaper. Later, as a publicist for the American Red Cross during World War I, she traveled abroad to Europe and the Near East.

Throughout her career, many of Rose's stories were published in magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post, Good Housekeeping, and Ladies Home Journal. She wrote several books of her own, including biographies of auto magnate Henry Ford and Herbert Hoover, who became the 31st President of the United States. As a ghostwriter, however, Rose authored many books we may never know about.

In the early 1930s, Rose encouraged and helped her mother write a series of books beginning with "Little House in the Big Woods," published in 1932, and ending with "These Happy Golden Years," published in 1943. She edited her mother's manuscripts at length so they would be appealing to a publisher and the reading public. Although experts don't agree on how much of a role she played in the book project, one of Rose's biographers has argued that she did enough rewriting on the manuscripts to be considered a co-author as well as editor.

During her twilight years, Rose Wilder Lane remained an active and interested citizen who continued to work. In 1965, at age 78, she completed a tour of South Vietnam as a war correspondent for Women's Day magazine. A three-year world tour was in her plans when she died in 1968.



Who was Rose Wilder Lane?

• Editor of the "Little House" book series
• Journalist • Author

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For Discussion

- Why did Rose's family leave the Dakotas?
- What is Morse Code?
- Rose's first job as a telegrapher required her to transmit messages over wire by Morse Code. How has technology changed the way we send and receive messages?



Vocabulary

Match the vocabulary word with the correct definition, then write a sentence using each word.

Aspired	A – To desire or aim for something with eagerness, excitement
Telegrapher	B – A person who writes a speech, book, etc. for another person who is believed to be the author
Editor	C – A press agent or specialist in public relations
Ghostwriter	D – Eager and enthusiastic
Publicist	E – A period of severely slow economic activity
War Correspondent	F – A person who transmits a coded message over wire
Biographies	G – Histories of the lives and characters of other people
Depression	H – A person who prepares a manuscript for publication
Avid	I – A reporter who writes or broadcasts war news from a distant place