

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Episode 2: "Prairie Fire"

Guest: Caroline Fraser

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KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. Today, we are speaking with Caroline Fraser. She holds a PhD in English and American Literature from Harvard University, and is the author of *God's Perfect Child: Living and Dying in the Christian Science Church* and *Rewilding the World: Dispatches from the Conservation Revolution*. Additionally, she served as editor of the Library of America edition of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books. Her work has also appeared in the *New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *New York Review of Books*, *Outside Magazine*, and *The London Review of Books*. Her most recent book, *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography, the Plutarch Award, and the Pulitzer Prize in Biography. In *Prairie Fires*, Fraser provides a stunning account of the events in Laura Ingalls Wilder's life that inspired her later literary masterpieces. Welcome to the *Our Missouri Podcast*, Caroline Fraser.

CAROLINE FRASER: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

SEAN ROST: Now, going through your book on kind of Laura Ingalls Wilder and kind of her American dreams and her story, could you tell us a little bit about the origins of the book? What inspired you to write a book about Laura Ingalls Wilder and her larger life and literary career?

CAROLINE FRASER: Well, I started with Laura Ingalls Wilder probably where a lot of other readers start which was I read the books as a kid and loved them. I was a big fan. Read them all more than once, like a lot of people. I think, as a kid, children often find them really comforting and kind of soothing, these books. I mean, they're great adventure stories and they're full of natural disasters. But they are also kind of wonderful in their advocacy of family life. So, I loved them as a kid and got to know them pretty well. Then, as an adult, I had some opportunities to write about the books and about Wilder. There have been various kind of news stories about her in the past twenty years or so. There was a whole kind of investigation into whether her daughter was really the author of the *Little House* books. So, I got involved in

writing about that. Eventually, was the editor for the Library of America's edition of the *Little House* books. And that was what really inspired me to write a newer biography of her because there hadn't been a new one in a few years and I just found the history behind her books so fascinating the more that I explored it. I felt that other readers might be interested in this, too.

SEAN ROST: Did you have a particular favorite one of her books as you encountered it earlier on?

CAROLINE FRASER: Yeah. My favorite as a kid was the *Long Winter* which is, of course, the book a little later in the series about how the family survives this winter of 1880 when the entire town of DeSmet, which had only been a town for about a year or so, was beset by this terrible winter. It was actually called the hard winter when there was just one blizzard after another. The town was cut-off by the railroad. The trains couldn't reach it because of the snow. So, the entire town, which at that point was around 100 people, nearly perished. It's such a great book because it's not just a kind of adventure story, but it's a real examination of what it's like to encounter and survive despair, I think. I mean, the family was so isolated and came near to starvation, and to me as a kid that was just fascinating. It just really felt like an amazing experience of kind of living through it with them. And it remains, I think, one of my favorites.

SEAN ROST: Now, in terms of researching for not only this book but also for your prior work editing the collection with Laura Ingalls Wilder, what kind of archives and collections did you visit? Were you also able to visit physical locations that she herself had been to or lived at in parts of the North and the Midwest?

CAROLINE FRASER: Yeah. Sure. The most important archive of both Laura's papers and her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, those papers reside now at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library. Rose Wilder Lane, the daughter of the Wilder's, their only surviving child, became a journalist and one of her earlier works was the first biography of Herbert Hoover before he ever became president. So, they acquired Rose's papers and her mother's papers as well. And so, that is one of the most important, probably the most important, archive in terms of the letters and manuscripts. So, I did spend quite a bit of time there going through all of those materials. But there are a number of other archives, including the State Historical Society of Missouri which were incredibly important to me and other Wilder scholars. The State Historical Society, of course, helped preserve a number of Wilder's original manuscripts by having their archivists treat the manuscripts, I think, and also make microfilm copies of them. I, and many other researchers, have used those microfilm copies over the years of the existing manuscripts and especially the manuscript of *Pioneer Girl*, the unpublished memoir that Wilder wrote first before she wrote the *Little House* books. And, of course, the State Historical Society also has great archives for newspapers, which are also really important. The *Mansfield Mirror* and the *Mountain Grove Journal* and so forth. So, those were all really important to me. But, of course, I also went to all the home sites which are fascinating. A lot of fans do this. There are some significant materials and archives at the various sites as well. These include, of course, the Wilder's home at Rocky Ridge Farm in Mansfield, Missouri. There's also a DeSmet, South Dakota—another kind of amazing place to get a feel for the way the Ingalls family lived and for what the life of that town must have been like. Also went to Malone, New York where Almanzo Wilder grew up in the

first years of his childhood. The farmhouse that he grew up in is still there—another really important place to visit. There are a number of other places as well. There's a re-creation of the Little House of the Prairie outside of Independence, Kansas. There's Burr Oak, Iowa, where the family spent a year or so that Wilder never wrote about, chose never to write about, because it was such a difficult time for the family. And, of course, then there's Walnut Grove, Minnesota, which was adopted as the site of the setting for the TV show. So, a lot of people are familiar with that. And that, too, is a really amazing place to see the land on Plum Creek where the family farmed and lived in the little dugout. You can still see the depression in the side of the creek. The side of the creek bed where the dugout was. It's an amazing thing to see and to kind of experience the landscapes where she lived.

SEAN ROST: Now, thinking about kind of talking about visiting family sites and certainly understanding her connections with her relatives and her immediate family members, could you tell us a little bit about the relationship Laura Ingalls Wilder had with her father as well as with her own daughter throughout her life?

CAROLINE FRASER: Yeah. Well, the relationship that Wilder had with her father was, I think, probably one of the most important in her life. Undoubtedly, the connection that she felt to him I think was even more, perhaps, important than her relationship with her mother, although, I think she loved her mother dearly. But, I think she felt a connection to her father because of some similarities they had in temperament. I think that they both felt a kind of wanderlust and had a relationship to the land that was very important to both of them. I think that they also shared a kind of love of being alone in the wilderness that her mother probably didn't share with her. Her mother was a much more kind of domestic creature and perhaps shared more in terms of temperament with Laura's older sister Mary. Both Mary and Caroline Ingalls were, I think, fairly pious and people who were also very patient. Whereas Laura always described herself as having a temper and kind of flying out at people and was very rambunctious and I think she felt that connection to her father because I think they may have been a little bit alike in that way. But, Laura, both as a child and then later as an adult, I think really idolized her father and always wanted to cast him in the best possible light even though he wasn't always the greatest provider or the most—wasn't somebody who was providing the most secure existence for his family. And you can see her making excuses for him in a way that she doesn't for anyone else including herself. She cut him a lot of slack, I think. I think one of the reasons why the *Little House* books exist was to memorialize him and all the joy that he brought to their lives. I mean, I think, even though he wasn't perhaps the greatest farmer, he must have been a really charming person. That really comes across in the books. He's a sort of wonderful musician, plays the fiddle. And even throughout these really terrible ordeals that the family goes through, there still is always this undercurrent of real pleasure that they take in one another's company and joy and even safety, which is such an inherent part of the *Little House* books, which I don't know if they really felt that always in some of the more extreme moments of the hard winter or various other times when they didn't know when [or] where their next meal was coming from. Her father, I think, is central to the whole series, and, indeed, I think we probably have the books because of him. The loss of her father, I think, was quite critical in inspiring Wilder to want to write the books. But, of course, the other very central relationship in Wilder's life was the relationship with her daughter

which was a very difficult one. Laura's parents were older when they had their children, and you can see how they might have been more successful in creating a kind of warm family life and sense of security even when there was very little security. But for Laura, Laura was nineteen when she had her daughter Rose. The Wilder family, Laura and her husband Almanzo, experienced a number of very severe disasters and traumatic events when Rose was very young. They came down with diphtheria which left Almanzo with a permanent disability. He had trouble with his hands and with walking, really, for the rest of his life. I mean, he was able to do a lot of very strenuous work, but nonetheless I think he was in a lot of pain for periods for the rest of his life. So, that was a huge blow, and then, of course, there were other disasters. They could not succeed as farmers. They lost crop after crop when Rose was a child. This culminated in this sort of awful summer when Laura was pregnant with their second child, and then their house burned down. The house that Almanzo had built for his wife. So, that was kind of the final blow, and I think all of those traumas taken together really effected Rose for the rest of her life. You can see how Laura was maybe not so experienced a parent as her parents were. There seems to have been tension between Laura and her daughter very early on. Even when Rose was a young child. This sense of both dependency—they were very dependent on each other, Laura and Rose, and yet also a real tension that came of Rose wanting to break away from her mother just sort of kept working itself out throughout their whole lives. Rose, of course, would be critical in the creation of the *Little House* books. She is another person who, I think, can be credited with the existence of the books not because she wrote them, but because she continually urged her mother to take on this project, told her it was important, put her mother in the way of various professional opportunities because as Rose herself became an emerging journalist in San Francisco she was constantly urging her mother to write about stuff for local newspapers. Write about eggs and chickens. So, she was the one who really sort of pushed her mother into becoming first a journalist and then a writer. And I think Rose always saw the commercial potential from those stories. And, of course, would later share her literary agent, would be instrumental in getting the books published. So, even though they had a very tempestuous relationship, it was a crucial one.

SEAN ROST: That's very true. Yeah. Looking back on kind of the connections they had, you're exactly right in the sense of being a tense relationship but also very much necessary to kind of go forward with her literary career. Now, when we think about *Little House on the Prairie* and the *Little House* books, we often kind of think of the big woods of the North. Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and even kind of her travels in Kansas as well. But, the main location that becomes kind of home for her in many ways in the latter part of Laura Ingalls Wilder's life is Mansfield, Missouri. Now, considering their earlier move to, I believe it was, Chariton County and the short-lived nature of that, I guess, establishment, what intrigued them to move back to a place like Mansfield later in life?

CAROLINE FRASER: Yeah. I think that the earlier episode in Missouri occurred when Laura was very young. Three and four years old. Her father, Charles Ingalls, had bought a piece of property possibly sight unseen in Chariton County as you mentioned. We know very little about what they did there. They do seem to have passed through there. But then they go to Kansas and have the experiences that would become the famous material behind the *Little House on the*

Prairie, behind that novel. What Laura remembered of that is not entirely clear. She only mentions Missouri once in her memoir, *Pioneer Girl*, I think, and that is a reference to when they left Kansas and went back to Wisconsin. So, I don't think she had a lot of very specific memories associated with Missouri from that earlier period. Although, they do seem to have probably spent a little time there. But, she never talks about that earlier episode as in any way inspiring their later move to Missouri. That was really inspired by some friends of theirs who—this is when they were living in DeSmet after they had had all these disasters and been forced to sell their property. They had some friends—the Wilder's were working at odd jobs in DeSmet trying to make money, trying to figure out where they were going to go. They were looking for property that was easier for Almanzo to work because he was having this trouble walking. I don't think he was particularly strong. So, plowing land and so forth may have been a little bit beyond his abilities at that point. So, they were looking for anything where any place that would be good for his health and that would also offer better opportunities for him. They had a friend in DeSmet who had taken up one of these free offers given out by a railroad to go check out land and this was the Kansas City-Memphis Railroad, I think—had various names at different points—but this railroad, as many around the country did, would offer a farmer free fare to go check out land in a region because they were trying to encourage the agricultural and economic activity along their railroad line. So, this friend of theirs went to check out Mansfield and came back full of stories about the land of the big red apple. And the railroad, too, had published, as many of them did, a spectacular pamphlet, sort of booklet, about the glories of the Ozarks and how it was the perfect place to grow apples and people were making all kinds of money working in orchards and raising fruit in this area and various other economic activities in the Ozarks. In fact, there were drawings that depicted Mansfield as a beautiful town. I'm pretty sure that Laura and Almanzo poured over this publication as they had over various other—I think it was one such pamphlet that drew them to Florida for a kind of not very successful sojourn in Florida. But, I think their hopes were raised and they were inspired to go to the Ozarks by this publication and by their friend, and it turned out to be a pretty good place for them. I mean, I think it was a real struggle at first because the land that they were able to afford near Mansfield was pretty rough country, very brushy. I mean, they called it Rocky Ridge Farm I think in an almost kind of joking sense because, of course, it was quite rocky. There are all these stories in the town of people who remember as kids picking rocks for farmers. They would be paid small sums of money to go pick out rocks from the land they were trying to clear. So, it wasn't easy, but I do think the climate was kinder in some ways to Almanzo and they both grew to love it. They were thrilled when they first saw the area and really grew to love the Ozarks.

SEAN ROST: One of the things that really struck me as I was going through your book was how once the Wilder's moved to the Mansfield area Laura herself became quite involved in kind of local matters of the community and really kind of the state as well. One thing that really stuck was her writings for the *Missouri Ruralist* at the time. Could you tell us a little bit about what kind of spurred her into writing for this publication and what topics she tried to engage with?

CAROLINE FRASER: Yeah. When Rose was first kind of trying to urge her mother to write for publication and to earn money that way, she steered to various newspapers in Kansas City and Saint Louis and so forth. And I think that Laura felt most comfortable writing about what she

knew. I mean, she was quite well known in her community as an expert on poultry. She was very successful in raising chickens and getting them to produce eggs for sale. This would become one of her first topics. So, of course, Laura, I think, maybe had a slightly more realistic sense of the newspaper market in a way than Rose did because, I think, well, Laura would end up writing for some larger newspapers occasionally. She started out sending things to very small, local, rural newspapers, and a real up-and-comer at this time was the *Missouri Ruralist* which was kind of a combination, I think, of a couple of smaller papers by a newspaper guy from Kansas. I'm forgetting his name off the top of my head. He was quite a successful entrepreneur in the newspaper in the Midwest, and designed and really had his editors focus in the *Ruralist* on the Midwest agricultural scene. The editor for the *Missouri Ruralist* went to a conference and heard a paper read that Laura had written about the small farm home. It was a really kind of beautiful, lyrical description of how wonderful it was to have one of these small farms and how successful you could be in supporting yourself on a relatively small acreages, which was a little misleading in a way because the Wilder's actually had quite a large spread. Wilder was writing about something that was about just a few acres. But in any event, she was so successful in putting this across in this piece that the editor of the *Ruralist* heard at the Missouri conference that he contacted her and asked her to write for the *Ruralist*. And over a relatively short period, she became a very important columnist for the *Ruralist*. Really, the representative of farm women across a sort of multi-state area. I think she became fairly popular and beloved. She's featured quite prominently in ads for the *Ruralist*. So, it was a really important period in which she kind of earned her journalistic chops, if you will, and began writing in a kind of personal voice to other farm women and addressing them, offering advice to them, and eventually she worked into these columns a number of anecdotes and references to her childhood, about her father, and about the hard winter, and various things. You can see her kind of trying out these topics for her later work.

SEAN ROST: Yeah. It's interesting to consider kind of not only trying out the writings about certain subjects in publications like the *Ruralist*, but also her earlier writings in her diaries and kind of just writings on the back of envelopes and letters and things like that kind of documenting day-to-day life when she was younger. How much do you think events of the late '20s and '30s—thinking of the [Great] Depression [and] the death and illness of other relatives—how much do you think that inspired her to push towards writing, ultimately, the *Little House* series?

CAROLINE FRASER: I think it was very important. I think she'd had the idea of writing down her father's stories—these are the kind of very charming little bedtime stories that you see in her first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*. I think she'd had the idea of trying to preserve those stories for many, many years. You can see references in letters between Laura and her daughter where she talks about this as early as the 1910s. But I think she may have been thinking about for a very long time. But I do think it was the passing of her mother and her sister Mary that really pressed her. I think when her mother died, especially, she wrote a very brief note to be published in the place of her column in the *Missouri Ruralist* that really expressed a sense of urgency to deal with these memories. That is the anecdote that I open with at the beginning of *Prairie Fires* because I think it's so important. I think it really shows her response to her mother's death which

is not, I think at all, unusual. Obviously, when your parents die, you feel a kind of sense of your own mortality approaching. This came at a time when she was starting to cut back on her other activities, her farming. The Wilder's really retired from farming in the late '20s, and their daughter was sort of helping to support them, so she had more free time. But I think it really was that moment when her mother died that she realized, "Oh, I wish I had talked to her about some of these things. I wish I had gotten more of her memories from her." Shortly after her mother died, she wrote to her mother's sister, Martha, asking Martha to put down in writing some of their memories, her memories, of their childhood which you can see as a real important step in Laura sitting down and writing her own memoir which happened around 1930. That memoir, although it was never published during Wilder's life, would become really the kind of outline for the *Little House* series.

SEAN ROST: Now, looking at kind of the series as a whole, why do you think they had such a strong kind of support not only at the time they were published—I mean, being able to write the next edition, the next edition, the next edition, but also having a kind of subject matter that still is quite popular today—why do you think that was? What kind of ideas in American culture did Laura Ingalls Wilder's books kind of latch on to and find a home with?

CAROLINE FRASER: Yeah. Well, I mean in terms of the response to the first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, I think there was an almost immediate sense among readers that these books tapped into a very important kind of strain in American thinking, if you will, because even though the book is intended for young children, it is such a powerful advocacy of independence. The whole idea of the American farm as kind of sacred place of self-reliance that really embodies everything that Americans felt about being able to support your family. And that whole idea was, of course, tremendously important at the beginning of the Great Depression when people are finding it impossible to support themselves. So, I think people were responding. Readers and children were responding to this vision from a somewhat earlier time that made it seem that it would be possible once again to achieve that sense of security. I mean, it was a real moment of despair for so many people. Yet, this book seemed to offer a beautiful vision of what was possible. And I think that that remained very important throughout the series. Obviously, people were very much drawn in to the stories. The struggles of the family to survive. So, Wilder, throughout, as she was writing each book, would get letters from classrooms, from students, from children demanding to know what happened next. I think she was actually quite startled by this in some ways. She, I think, didn't realize how successful she would be in creating this sense of suspense of what was going to the Ingalls, what was going to happen to Almanzo, was Laura going to marry Almanzo at the end. There were all these sort of questions that each volume raised successively. So, she was very much responding to that. But, I think the readership was initially caught and held by this extraordinary story of a single family's survival and how they pioneered, and the books really draw you into that process. Children today, even, are really—always respond, I think, to the incredible descriptions of how they did things. How they built the little house. How they crafted the door and hinges on the door and the latch for the door. How they plowed the land. How they dug a well. I mean, there are just these incredible images and descriptions of process that are incredibly involving to children, and I think create

part of the sense of security that you feel as you read the books even as the family is threatened by all these outside challenges.

BOB PRIDDY: I'm Bob Priddy with this "Missouri Minute" about a man hunted for years. The governor posted a reward: "Dead or Alive." He and his brother became Confederate guerillas during the Civil War, and after the war, they became outlaws. But now, his brother was dead, and the other members of the gang were dead or in prison, and he feared for the welfare of his family and for his own life. So, he and a friendly newspaper publisher went to Jefferson City one day. Spent the day strolling around town or lounging at a hotel. And late that afternoon, the governor invited several newsmen and state officials to his office, and the two men strolled in during the meeting. The newspaper publisher, John Newman Edwards, told Governor Thomas Crittenden, "I want to introduce you to my friend, Frank James." And so, the last of the James Gang was brought in. A reception was held that night at the hotel. The governor attended. And a few days later, James went to Independence and a jail cell. Ten months later, Frank James went on trial and was acquitted. He was never convicted of anything. But, an era ended on that October 5th, 1882, when the last of the James Gang was taken into custody. I'm Bob Priddy for the Center for Missouri Studies.

SEAN ROST: Now, when we think of the book series overall, kind of throughout its lifespan, how do you think its popularity kind of stands today? Is it still kind of a piece of central American Literature that children are kind of reading in schools or where do you see at in terms of its overall popularity?

CAROLINE FRASER: I think, you know, both Wilder's reputation and the popularity of the books has evolved significantly, obviously, since she wrote them. For one thing, there was the television show which was enormously popular in the 1970s and '80s, and brought the series and just the idea of this family pioneering in the West to a lot of people who might never have discovered the books, including internationally. There are people around the world who have seen the show who may never have read the books and don't know about them, and who have, I think, a fairly simplified idea of what the whole story was about. So, that represents one kind of major signpost in the evolution of the series. I think now we're into a very different time. I think the series when you look at it today seems like it's very much about the 1970s or '80s and is kind of dated in that way even though it's still popular and in syndication. It's hard to gauge how popular the books remain in terms of sales because I don't think we have current sales figures for them. But I do know that it remains [and] continues to be a real staple of homeschoolers, of people who are homeschooling their children. It's certainly popular in circles in which people are eager to instill these values which are associated with these books which Wilder often spoke of. She spoke of her parents' values as independence and self-reliance and integrity. So, people who are interested in kind of maintaining the American tradition associated with those values are still very fond of the *Little House* books, and are still reading them to their children. But, that having been said, there's obviously now real re-evaluation of the Little House books and whether they're appropriate to put before children in schools. This, of course, goes to the recent decision by the American Library Association to withdraw Wilder's name from the award that they had given out since the late 1950s. They had established an award named for Wilder, and, of course, Wilder

was the first recipient of it. This was for lifetime achievement. But recently, they decided to take Wilder's name off the award in a climate in which it's become increasingly clear that some of Wilder's works, especially the most famous book, *Little House on the Prairie*, includes stereotypes of Native Americans. And so the whole question of "How do you present this book or this series to children in a time in which these kind of stereotypes are no longer acceptable?" I mean, do you teach them still in school? Do you ask children to read them? I think it's a really important debate that we're now having that has to be—these questions have to be considered because it is hard to ask children to read some of these things without providing the historical context in which they were written. Without talking to them about what are stereotypes? What do they mean? How do they effect people? So, these are all ways in which Wilder and her work are really being re-examined, and I think it's an important part of her legacy.

SEAN ROST: In looking forward towards your presentation, your public talk for the Center for Missouri Studies, what would you kind of tell kind of a general audience about your talk? What are you going to talk about and how should they familiarize themselves with Laura Ingalls Wilder to prepare for your presentation?

CAROLINE FRASER: Well, I think I'm going to be talking about Wilder and American identity, and how she has kind of tapped into a lot of our traditions, our ways of thinking about who we are as Americans, and how her work has itself defined American identity for generations of school children. I don't think that anyone who comes to the lecture needs to prepare exactly. If they have a relationship to the books or have read them, that's great. But, they don't necessarily need to have that background because I'll be talking a little bit about some of Wilder's work and about *Little House on the Prairie*, I think, specifically, in a way that I think is open to anybody who has read the books and to people who may not have read them. And that, I think, was one of the ideas behind writing *Prairie Fires* was that, sure, there were generations of fans out there, and I hope that fans can get new insight from the biography, but I also felt that there were maybe a lot of people who had some kind of glancing familiarity with the TV show but didn't really know who Wilder was. I think, in a lot of ways, we've almost loved Laura Ingalls Wilder to death. She's become so beloved that it's kind of obscured who she really was. She was a fascinating and very complicated person. So, the talk will, I think, introduce her to people who may not be familiar with her work, but also provide maybe some ideas and concepts and analysis of why she's so important as an American.

SEAN ROST: Well, thank you very much for being on the *Our Missouri Podcast*.

CAROLINE FRASER: Well, thank you for having me. It's been a great conversation.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh.

Did you enjoy listening to today's episode about Laura Ingalls Wilder? Well, the State Historical Society of Missouri has two events coming up dedicated to Wilder's life and literary career. Register now to attend the Center for Missouri Studies Fall Lecture at the Courtyard by Marriot in Columbia on October 13th. This year's event features Pulitzer Prize-winning author Carolina Fraser who will talk about her recent book *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of*

Laura Ingalls Wilder. On November 5th, the Historical Society's Columbia Research Center will host a family day event organized by Sarah Poff on Little House Life featuring churning butter, making rag dolls, designing marble pouches, and other frontier activities.

Benton's *Perilous Visions* is an exhibit of Thomas Hart Benton artwork from World War II that showcases the artists' interpretation of the anxiety, horror, grief, and resolve that permeated American society during the war years. This exhibit will be on display in the Main Gallery of the SHSMO's Columbia Research Center until Spring 2019.

If you care about researching and preserving your family's history, the Historical Society is offering two events in mid-October that might be of interest to you. On October 16th, the Society is collaborating with the Historical Society of Maries County for a program on preserving family history at the Maries County Courthouse in Vienna. On October 18th, Katie Seale, Senior Archivist at the Society's Rolla Research Center is hosting an event on Beginning Genealogy at the Scenic River Library in Owensville.

If you live in southeast Missouri, please visit the Historical Society's Cape Girardeau Research Center for its open house on October 26th. This event is a great way to familiarize yourself with the center's materials documenting southeast Missouri history. The Cape Girardeau Research Center is located in Pacific Hall on the campus of Southeast Missouri State University.

On the other side of the state, in southwest Missouri, the Barry-Lawrence Regional Library will be the host for two events featuring archivists Erin Smither and Jami Lewis from the Historical Society's Springfield Research Center. On October 20th, Jami Lewis will give a presentation at the Mt. Vernon Branch of the Barry-Lawrence Regional Library on the "Cobra Scare" that terrorized residents of nearby Springfield when several snakes escaped from an exotic pet store during the summer of 1953. On November 2nd, the Unsinkable Molly Brown, portrayed by Erin Smither, will make an appearance at the Monett Branch of the Barry-Lawrence Regional Library to discuss the rags to riches story of the famous Missourian who survived the Titanic's fateful collision with an iceberg.

Are you an educator who is interested in developing a National History Day program at your school or using Missouri's primary sources in your classroom? The State Historical Society of Missouri is participating in several educator workshops in October and November that will provide tips on exhibits, performances, programming, and finding effective resources within the Historical Society's vast collections. National History Day workshops will be held at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum in Independence on October 13th, Webster Hall on the campus of Missouri Southern State University on October 18th, and Gentry Middle School in Columbia on October 25th and November 29th. National History Day in Missouri Coordinator, Maggie Mayhan, will join senior archivist Katie Seale for a digital collections workshop at the Curtis Laws Wilson Library on the Missouri S&T campus in Rolla on November 2nd. Maggie will be in St. Louis on November 9th for a workshop at the Thomas Jefferson Library on the campus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis with senior archivist Claire Marks.

Finally, did you know that your history, yes, your history is important? Join senior archivist Claire Marks and Bicentennial Coordinator Michael Sweeney at the Friedens Peace United Church of Christ in New Melle on November 2nd for an event on discovering your Missouri history in preparation for the upcoming state bicentennial in 2021. To register and learn more about these events, visit the State Historical Society of Missouri's website at shsmo.org/events.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.