

## *Our Missouri Podcast*

Title: More Missouri Moments: Rose Wilder Lane

Guest: Caroline Fraser

Air Date: October 15, 2018

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. When we record episodes for the podcast, we sometimes hear stories from guests that are really deserving of extra attention. From time to time, we air this bonus material in between our usual Monday premiers in a special segment called "More Missouri Moments." Today, Caroline Fraser, who was our guest in Episode 2, tells us about Rose Wilder Lane, the daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder, and her brief residence in Columbia, Missouri, in the mid-1930s while working on a book about the history of Missouri.

CAROLINE FRASER: That was a really kind of pivotal period for both Rose and her mother and the creation of the *Little House* books because what happened was a little earlier, right before the crash of the [stock] market, Rose had built her parents what she called the Rock House. This was the second house on the Rocky Ridge Farm property that Rose built for her parents, and that's actually where Laura wrote the first several books. The manuscripts for those books were written in the Rock House. Meanwhile, Rose was living in the farmhouse, their old farmhouse. But the tensions between Rose and Laura, at this point, kind of rose to a crescendo, in part, because Rose was having sort of a nervous breakdown which was brought on by her financial difficulties. She really couldn't afford the money that she'd spent on this house that she built for her parents. So, she was continually just trying to stay ahead of the bills. And what this led to, inevitably, was her taking on this project to write—it was supposed to be part of a series of books about the different states.

She was contracted to write a book about Missouri. So, she ended up moving to the Tiger Hotel in Columbia in order to be close to the State Historical Society because she needed to use their archives. The book was supposed to be about the history of the state, and how it was founded, and what had happened to it subsequently. You know, a full kind of history of the state of Missouri. So, she moved to Columbia, in part, because she was having these—she was just

mentally, I think, unable to cope with her mother anymore and living in close proximity to her mother. And, she needed to fulfill this contract. So, it was really kind of a break with her parents at that point. In fact, after she left, she would spend—I think it was in the summer of 1935 that she moved up there to Columbia and would stay there on an off for the next year or so. Eventually, then, in 1937, ended up moving to New York. After she moved away, wouldn't see her father again. So, this really was a kind of emotional break with her family. And yet, she's still very heavily involved in editing and helping her mother with the *Little House* books. So, they begin corresponding after she moves to Columbia, and it's through that correspondence that we can see much of what we know about their writing and editing process. So, that was incredibly important.

For Rose, this would not be a particularly successful project. She tried to do it, I think, mainly for the money, but she had these kind of insane deadlines where she was supposed to produce this book in just a few months. And this was during one of the hottest summers. That summer of 1935 was incredibly hot. You can see in her letters that she's just sitting and sweating in this hotel room in the Tiger Hotel. She also took long car trips/road trips around the state to visit various historical sites and so forth. It was very, I think, discouraging experience for her in a lot of ways because she never was able to produce a manuscript that satisfied the publisher. She ended up writing something that was kind of so personal in a way. It begins with a—the manuscript or at least one of the manuscripts she produced tells the story of the Wilder's arrival in the state when Rose was eight. It's quite interesting in that regard. But, as a state history, it didn't really fly.

But, her time there was important. She did meet a young woman who was student at the University of Missouri, Norma Lee Browning, who would go on to become quite a well-known journalist in her own right. Norma Lee would herself become kind of important in the whole story of the publishing and writing of the *Little House* books because she ended up living with Rose later in life and had her own view of how the *Little House* books were written. She is actually, I think, one of the people who was responsible for the idea that Rose was the real author of the books. She kind of put out that story. But, of course, when Rose first met Norma Lee, she was just a student, and Rose tried to persuade her to immediately drop out of college because she felt that the University of Missouri was full of communists. This is a period at which Rose was really developing a lot of the ideas that would later become associated with the libertarian movement. So, that was quite an important kind of meeting. I think Norma Lee went to interview Rose for a school newspaper, and they ended up becoming quite close. But, yeah, Rose's sojourn in the Tiger Hotel was not all that successful to her professionally, but it did represent her finally kind of breaking away from her mother.

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](http://shsmo.org/our-missouri).