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Laura Ingalls Wilder's Juvenile Historical Fiction

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Závěrečná diplomová práce se zaměří na obraz osídlování amerického Západu v románech pro mládež Laury Ingalls Wilderové.

V úvodu práce studentka charakterizuje literaturu pro mládež a specificky žánr "domestic" fiction a "historical fiction", stručně nastíní historické souvislosti a do tohoto kontextu zařadí tvorbu Wilderové. Uvede rovněž Louise Erdrichovou.

Jádrem práce bude analýza vybraných děl, v níž se studentka soustředí především na způsoby zobrazení života průkopníků amerického Západu, jejich životní styl, rodinné a společenské vztahy, specifika dětství a dospívání v této historické epoše, zobrazení Indiánů, apod. Zaměří se rovněž na literární prostředky, které autorka používá. Dále shrne obraz osídlování Západu, jak jej Wilderová vytváří a zhodnotí, nakolik je realistický a nakolik idealizovaný. Tento obraz pak bude následně konfrontovat s dílem Louise Erdrichové, jejíž dílo Birchbark House bylo napsáno jako reakce na tvorbu Wilderové zhruba o půl století později.

Své vývody bude diplomantka vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty a konzultovat se sekundárními zdroji. Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a zhodnotí, jaký obraz Západu Wilderová pro dospívající čtenáře vykreslila.

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- Wilder, Ingalls Laura. *Little House in the Big Woods*. New York : Harper & Row, 1971.
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Prohlašuji:

Tuto práci jsem vypracovala samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využila, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.

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Annotation

This master thesis deals with the settlement of American West in the juveniles' historical fiction written by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Her novels from *Little House* series featuring the Ingalls family are the object of the literary analysis. Her works will be compared with the novel *The Birchbark House* by Louise Erdrich. The features of the life of pioneers on the American frontier are analysed on the works by Wilder. Wilder is compared to Erdrich for the completion of the view of the Native Americans. The goal of the thesis is to assess how Wilder depicted the settlement of American West.

Keywords

American West, frontier, pioneers, Native Americans, Little House, Wilder Ingalls, Laura

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá zobrazením osidlování Amerického západu v historických románech pro mládež autorky Laury Ingalls Wilderové. Její romány ze série *Malý dům*, kde vystupuje rodina Ingallsových, jsou předmětem literární analýzy. Její díla budou porovnána s románem *The Birchbark House* od autorky Louise Erdrichové. Znaky života průkopníků na americkém pohraničí jsou analyzovány na dílech Wilderové. Díla Wilderové s románem od Erdrichové slouží jako doplnění pohledu na původní obyvatelé Ameriky. Cílem práce je zhodnotit, jak Wilderová zobrazila osidlování Amerického západu.

Klíčová slova

Americká západ, pohraničí, průkopníci, původní obyvatelé Ameriky, Malý dům, Wilderová, Ingalls, Laura

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Introduction

This thesis will deal with Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series and her depiction of the American frontier and overland migration.

Wilder's novels inseparably integrated into the American literature for children and they reflect a major part of American history. Wilder created the series based on the life of her own family who participated in overland migration and settled in different places when they moved westward. The series offers a detailed image of life of American pioneers. Wilder's method of depicting the American pioneers will be analysed in this thesis.

The primary sources include all the novels from the series which feature the Ingalls family. The novels are: *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932), *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (1937), *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939), *The Long Winter* (1940), *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941) and *These Happy Golden Years* (1943). For keeping the consistency of this thesis, the other novels which are commonly considered as the part of the series will not be analysed. Therefore, Wilder's novels featuring a childhood of her husband, *Farmer Boy* (1933), and posthumously published *The First Four Years* (1971) will not be included.

Since the perception of Wilder's work differs and Wilder is sometimes criticized for her unfavourable depiction of the Native Americans, Wilder's work will be compared with the novel *The Birchbark House* (1999) by Louise Erdrich. Although this novel is also a part of the series including five books, only the first one will be analysed and compared to Wilder's work. The goal of this comparison will be to determine the similarities and differences between these two authors because Erdrich wrote *The Birchbark House* series as a reaction to Wilder's *Little House*. The comparison with Erdrich's novel will complete the overall analysis of Wilder's American frontier depiction. Furthermore, it will serve as a help for determining the level of the issue of Native American depiction.

The thesis will consider the person of Laura Ingalls Wilder and an autobiographical aspect of her work from the beginning. The first chapter will introduce Laura Ingalls Wilder with a brief biography and discuss the perceptions her works had in the past and present. The second chapter will briefly introduce Louise Erdrich as an author with Native American heritage.

The third and fourth chapter will define the target reader group and genres of the analysed novels. First, children's literature and young adult literature will be defined, and their features

shown on the *Little House* series and *The Birchbark House*. Second, issues of defining the genre will be discussed. Historical and domestic fiction will be defined and analysed on the books from both authors. Moreover, autobiographical fiction will be discussed in connection to Wilder's novels.

The fifth chapter will deal with the American frontier and overland migration. First, the American frontier will be defined, and historical background discussed as the westward movement had influenced a major part of American history. The particular issues of the life on the American frontier will be analysed directly in Wilder's novels. The story of Ingalls family as Wilder depicted it will be discussed. The thesis will also consider the level of idealization of the life on the American frontier because the real Ingalls and fictional Ingalls will be compared in some of the relevant aspects. Furthermore, historical references connected to the actions the fictional Ingalls family decided to take, or situations in which they occurred, will be included in the analysis.

The text analysis will be divided into five subchapters. These subchapters will include the reasons the pioneers had for moving westward, their journey, the issues of settling down, the role of family and gender roles and potentially life-threatening situations connected with severe weather conditions and Native Americans. The last subchapter will specifically concentrate on the novels *The Long Winter* and *Little House on the Prairie*. The last analysing chapter will deal with Erdrich's novel *The Birchbark House* which will be compared to the overall analysis of Wilder's work with illustrating some main similarities and differences between featuring a Native American and pioneer lifestyle. The overall goal of the thesis is to summarise Wilder's depiction of American pioneers and the level of idealization of a frontier life.

1. Laura Ingalls Wilder and Little House Series

Laura Ingalls Wilder was born in 1867 in Wisconsin to Charles and Caroline Ingalls. Both her parents, her sisters Mary, Carrie and Grace served as the basis for their fictional counterparts in the *Little House* series (*LHS*). She married Almanzo Wilder, whose fictional counterpart also appeared in Wilder's books, in 1885. They had one daughter, Rose. Wilder died in 1957 in Missouri.¹

After moving to Missouri from South Dakota with her husband and daughter, Wilder started pursuing writing career as a columnist in *The Missouri Ruralist*. Her more successful daughter Rose Lane, who became a relatively famous author by 1920s, was Wilder's editor during the whole process of creating the *LHS*.²

Wilder first intended to write her childhood memories as an autobiography *Pioneer Girl*³ which was meant for adult readers. However, this work was not successful among the publishers. and with her daughter's help Wilder eventually rewrote the initial manuscript into eight novels for children and young adults.⁴ These novels feature the Ingalls family.

The novels, having been issued in 1930s and 1940s, became soon successful and famous. According to *History Cooperative* "need for entertainment" during the years of Great Depression and the start of the Second World War were one of the reasons why *Little House* books were positively accepted. Americans needed to return to their roots which "appeared to be a simpler time." A good timing of publishing the novels caused the *LHS* to become an American phenomenon. The theme of a "self-sufficient pioneer" was appealing to Americans who were advised "to live with moral simplicity and make do with what they had." Moreover, Wilder succeeded in idealizing frontier life by telling the story from the viewpoint of a child but still "the grit of pioneer life was preserved."⁵

¹ "In Search of Laura – About Laura Ingalls Wilder", Little House on the Prairie, accessed March 27, 2019, <http://littlehouseontheprairie.com/in-search-of-laura-about-laura-ingalls-wilder/>.

² Little House on the Prairie, "In Search of Laura – About Laura Ingalls Wilder."

³ Its annotated version was published in 2014. The thesis uses this work as a secondary source.

Laura Ingalls Wilder, Pamela Smith Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, (Canada: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2014).

⁴ Pamela Smith Hill, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer's Life* (South Dakota: State Historical Society Press, 2007), 1 https://books.google.cz/books?id=-dgv5_JxNmAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁵ Korie Beth Brown, "Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Life in Perspective," *History Cooperative*, <https://historycooperative.org/laura-ingalls-wilder-life-perspective/>.

A persisting popularity of the *LHS* can be also characterized by a 1970s TV series *Little House on the Prairie* which was based upon the Wilder's novels. Furthermore, almost fifty million copies of books were sold, and Wilder's novels have been translated into forty languages.⁶ In addition, the museums and reconstructions of the Ingalls houses exist in each site where the Ingalls lived, even with some not featured in books (such as Burr Oak in Iowa). The sites are still frequently visited by schoolchildren or adults who grew up on Wilder's books.⁷

However, negative perceptions of the *LHS* also emerged. Due to long-time complaints about racist statements of Native Americans (such as the saying "The only good Indian was a dead Indian."⁸) "Laura Ingalls Wilder Award" changed its name to "Children's Literature Legacy Award."⁹ The thesis will explore the topic of pioneer's attitudes to Native Americans more in 5.5. Hard Winter and Native Americans.

⁶ Korie Beth Brown, "Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Life in Perspective," *History Cooperative*.

⁷ "Historic Locations and Points of Interest," Little House on the Prairie, accessed March 28, 2019, <http://littlehouseontheprairie.com/historic-locations-and-museum-sites/>.

⁸ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, (New York: Harper Trophy, 1971), 211.

⁹ Meghan Flynn, "Laura Ingalls Wilder's name stripped from children's book award over 'Little House' depictions of Native Americans," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/06/25/laura-ingalls-wilders-name-stripped-from-childrens-book-award-over-little-house-depictions-of-native-americans/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6662008100c0.

2. Louise Erdrich and The Birchbark House

Louise Erdrich was born in 1954, almost a century after Wilder. She began her writing career in 1980s. In many of her novels she focused on the Native Americans. Because her mother is a half-Ojibwe, Erdrich specifically concentrated on Ojibwe tribe. Besides other novels written for adults, she also published the novel for children, *The Birchbark House* in 1999.¹⁰ This novel is the first one of the whole series telling about the main character, a seven-year-old girl Omakayas and her family.

Erdrich wrote the series as a fictionalized story of her own ancestors living on the Madeline Island in Wisconsin.¹¹ Furthermore, *The Birchbark House* series is often seen as a reaction to Wilder's novels. It describes a frontier from the other side, from the viewpoint of those who were pushed westward by pioneers. The reason for Erdrich writing this series as the reaction to the *LHS* has been explained by an author herself: "I read them [the *LHS*] as a child, and in rereading them as an adult, I was shocked to recognize that not only was there no consciousness about the displaced people whose land the newcomers were taking but also there was a fair amount of racism."¹²

However, since the first novel of Erdrich's series is set approximately twenty years earlier than Wilder's first novel *Little House in the Big Woods*, Kurup suggests that it can be regarded as a "corrective prequel"¹³ to Wilder's series. In contrast to describing what the Native Americans lost in a consequence of the settlement of American West, Erdrich focused on what they preserve – traditions, domesticity, language etc.¹⁴ Especially, the novel *The Birchbark House* is focused on the depiction of almost non-impacted Native American lifestyle as it is set at the time before the featured characters were moved westward by white Americans.

¹⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Louise Erdrich," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified June 3, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louise-Erdrich>.

¹¹ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), Thanks and Acknowledgements.

¹² Erdrich quoted in Seema Kurup, *Understanding Louise Erdrich*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016, chap. 5, https://books.google.cz/books?id=JPzZCgAAQBAJ&dq=birchbark+house&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹³ Kurup, *Understanding Louise Erdrich*, chap. 5.

¹⁴ Kurup, *Understanding Louise Erdrich*, chap. 5.

3. Children's and Young Adult Literature

First, children's literature is the literature targeted on children readers. Generally, the age group of children readers is from the birth to early teenage years.¹⁵ The need to distinguish literature for children from adult literature emerged in the 17th century.¹⁶ The former reason for it was a necessity to educate the young readers.¹⁷ Thus, books for children were at first overtly didactic. The children's literature today "is largely a nineteenth century phenomenon."¹⁸ Although as the children's literature evolved, and its primary function is not didactic anymore,¹⁹ authors still include the values, morals and patterns of behaviour into their stories. "The messages within a story help children interpret the complicated world as they grow up."²⁰

According to MacLeod a crucial theme for children's literature at the beginning of the 20th century was family. Authors distinguished children from adults because "they were different" and "there was a necessary space between childhood and adulthood."²¹ Furthermore, children readers should know "that somewhere in a child's life there was safety, security and stability available from adults."²² All Wilder's novels are tightly centred around the family. But in the first three novels, Laura's (Wilder's fictional counterpart) main focus is on her children's play. She explores the world around herself with being guarded by her parents and following her parents in whatever they do (for example when helping them with housework). In addition, considering a graphical point of view, the letters in the first three novels are considerably bigger

¹⁵ Brian W. Shaffer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-century Fiction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1010, https://books.google.cz/books?id=am1PhEWMqDIC&dq=young+adult+fiction+the+beginning+of+20th+century&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁶ Maria Nikolajeva ed., *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), Introduction, https://books.google.cz/books?id=ubZL9V1L9fEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=children%27s+literature&hl=cs&a=X&ved=0ahUKEwju2pOa_I7hAhXn0qYKHdebCkoQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁷ Nikolajeva ed., *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*, Introduction

¹⁸ Peter Hunt, ed., *Understanding Children's Literature, Second Edition* (Routledge, 2005) ,5, https://books.google.cz/books?id=4ikEPN7LKzsC&printsec=frontcover&dq=children%27s+literature+hunt&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjV6vbG_o7hAhX4xMQBHZ_VAoQQ6AEILzAB#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁹ Nikolajeva ed., Introduction.

²⁰ Deborah Lovitky Sheimann, "A Brief History of Children's Literature," in *Children's Literature: Developing Good Readers*, ed. Hannah Nuba, Michael Searson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 7, https://books.google.cz/books?id=9RLaAAAAQBAJ&dq=children%27s+literature&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlink_s_s.

²¹ Anne Scot MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 198 https://books.google.cz/books?id=Z3BntnGplcwC&dq=young+adult+literature+in+20th+century&lr=&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

²² Macleod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 199.

than in the rest of them, hinting that less skilled readers should read them. Therefore, Wilder's novels could be regarded as literature about a child for children from *Little House in the Big Woods* to *On the Banks of Plum Creek*.

Second, young adult literature emerged as the need to distinguish children from adolescents. This concept started to be used in the fifties,²³ but Sarah Trimmer (1802; quoted in Talley 2011) first highlighted the necessity to distinguish young adults from children at the beginning of the 19th century. She urged that adolescents (from the age 14 to at least 21) might have different interests than children and thus the literature should be adapted to it.²⁴ Moreover, the focus of topics in young adult literature is different from the children's literature. According to MacLeod "questions of psychological development and personal morality dominate the genre."²⁵

Since Laura is coming of age in the *LHS*, specifically from 4 years old to 18, the change of her interests is natural. Thus, the change of focus of the main character is natural too and the targeted readers are supposed to develop with the main character. Therefore, the novels from *By the Shores of Silver Lake* to *These Happy Golden Years* could be categorized as young adult literature. Wilder bordered Laura's "transition from childhood to adulthood"²⁶ quite specifically. The event that triggered this transition happened at the beginning of *By the Shores of Silver Lake* when the Ingalls' family dog Jack dies. After his death Laura realizes that "she was not a little girl anymore. Now she was alone; she must take care of herself. When you must do that, then you do it and you are grown up."²⁷ Wilder's biographer Hills has commented on this event that Laura "can no longer depend on Jack or even Pa to look out for her"²⁸ and thus she officially enters the teenage years in which she becomes more self-reliant. Furthermore, typical adolescent issues start to occur. Topics as first love, Laura's personal ambitions and opinions are more developed than before. For example, Laura deals with her struggles of becoming a teacher as she does not like the profession. But, being more mature, she has to

²³ Shannon Maughan, "English-Language Children's Literature," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified December 8, 1997. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/English-language-marketplace-1016977>.

²⁴ Lea A. Talley, *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Phillip Nel, Lissa Paul (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 230, https://books.google.cz/books?id=P3mLbIFas50C&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁵ Macleod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 190.

²⁶ Laura Ingalls Wilder, Pamela Smith Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, (Canada: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2014), 22n50.

²⁷ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, (New York: Harper Trophy, 1971), 13.

²⁸ Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 22n50.

overcome it to earn money and support her parents. Wilder also admits some serious issues that Laura's parents deal with. In addition, Laura fully comprehends these issues in contrast to the first three novels. The end of series as well as the end of Laura's adolescence is marked with the marriage to Almanzo Wilder in *These Happy Golden Years*.

Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* has been intended as a children's novel.²⁹ However, its historical perspective and very sensitive description of Native American's culture and attitudes might attract readers of all generations. Thanks to that, it is a part of cross over literature phenomenon. This phenomenon is a label for novels which were at first intended for children but were also embraced by adult readers.³⁰

²⁹ Kurup, *Understanding Louise Erdrich*, chap. 5.

³⁰ Rachel Falconer, "Young adult fiction and the crossover phenomenon," ed. David Rudd, *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), chap. 8, https://books.google.cz/books?id=KcgWV8Q8wE4C&dq=crossover+literature&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

4. Historical, Domestic and Autobiographical Fiction

A merging of genres occurs in Wilder's and Erdrich's novels. As an introduction into the genre definition of the *LHS* Wilder herself explained her intentions when writing her novels:

“I began to think what a wonderful childhood I had had. How I had seen the whole frontier, the woods, the Indian country of the great plains, the frontier towns, the building of railroads in wild, unsettled country, homesteading and farmers coming in to take possession... Then I understood that in my own life I represented a whole period of American history.”³¹

First, historical fiction as one of the genres of the *LHS* will be considered. The general definition for this genre is that historical novel is set in the past.³² As Sarah Johnson argues, this is a very simple statement. She contradicts that it might be difficult to state how many years back a story must be set so we can regard it as historical. She claims that the perception of what is historical might differ within different generations. In addition, she mentions the definition she has set in her journal “Historical Novels Review.” According to this definition, a historical novel should be set at least fifty years in the past and it should be based on author's research and not on his personal experience. However, this statement is contradicted with the claim that the author's research might not be necessary. The reason for this is if the plot matches the historical period in which it is set “so well that the story could not have occurred at any other time in history,” it meets the conditions for historical novel too.³³ As Wilder herself explained, she “represented a whole period of American history.” She decided to tell a story about a significant period in the American past. Although for her, the history she wanted to tell was not that distant (even though fulfilling the Johnson's fifty years period), her first intention was to retell an important part of American history to children. Moreover, the goal of historical fiction is to describe a certain period in the past, referring to real historical events.³⁴ Wilder set her novels in specific time of history, around 1871 to 1885, and she often referred to real historical events such as the Homestead Act of 1862.³⁵ Although the authors of historical fiction should be aware of

³¹ Hill, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer's Life*, Introduction.

³² The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Historical Novel,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified October 13, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/art/historical-novel>.

³³ Sarah Johnson, “Defining the Genre: What are the rules for historical fiction? by Sarah Johnson.” *Historical Novel Society*. Accessed March 28, 2019. <https://historicalnovelsociety.org/guides/defining-the-genre-what-are-the-rules-for-historical-fiction/>.

³⁴ “Historical Novel,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

³⁵ Robert Fink, “Homestead Act of 1862,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified September 13, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Homestead-Act>.

historical aspects, they have to create a story with a sufficient amount of authenticity.³⁶ In addition, historical novel should “immerse the reader into the period and allow them to relive experiences during that time.”³⁷ Thanks to an autobiographical aspect and domestic setting of Wilder’s novels, “the authenticity” and “reliving the experience” were reached and even enhanced.

Furthermore, the centre and setting of all Wilder’s novels is the home and thus domestic fiction comes as another definition of the genre. Nonetheless, “the domesticity” of the novels are hinted in the titles of almost all the *Little House* books. This genre’s main dominance was in the 19th century and mostly female authors concentrated on writing domestic novels. Domestic fiction is defined as the genre “centring on the home and family” and the home is “the locus of significant narrative action.” Moreover, the goal of domestic fiction was to teach morals; thus, its function was often didactic.³⁸ Since Wilder’s novels were intended as historical in the time when she was writing them, she mostly showed the morals and values of the time the novels are set in. However, her depiction of showing the children-parents respect, hardworking and self-reliant Americans could be regarded as her didactic effort as these values are timeless.

According to the definitions above, Erdrich’s novel can be characterized as historical and domestic fiction. It focuses on the particular aspects of the American history, describing the actual Native American tribe’s lifestyle including a sample usage of their original language. Furthermore, a central theme of the novel is the family and home which functions as a setting of the novel.

Furthermore, the fact that Wilder told the story of her family, using herself, her family members, friends and neighbours as models for the characters of her novels and the landscape in which she grew up as a setting, the novels can be classified as autobiographical fiction.³⁹ As C.S. Lakin states on her blog, autobiographical fiction is based on a writer’s life. However, some events, usually those more unpleasant or too complicated, are usually altered and real people

³⁶ Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), Introduction, https://books.google.cz/books?id=82avWVrVeukC&dq=historical+novel&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s

³⁷ “Historical Fiction Defined,” The Ohio State University, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://u.osu.edu/waitelit3356iip/sample-page/>.

³⁸ Shaffer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-century Fiction*, 261 – 262

³⁹ Hill, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer’s Life*, Introduction.

are used only as models for fictional characters.⁴⁰ Wilder changed the storytelling of her family quite considerably, for example missing other places where her family lived in (for example Iowa)⁴¹ or birth and death of her baby brother Charles Frederick Ingalls.⁴² Hill has paraphrased Wilder's reason for changing various events simply as "some of the stories she wanted to tell were not appropriate for children." Wilder did not want to complicate the life story of her family more than necessary and wholly concentrated on the westward movement and pioneer's goals. Nevertheless, thanks to altering her family history, making it simpler and more favourable, Wilder succeeded in transforming "the real Laura Elizabeth Ingalls" into "the fictional Laura Ingalls, an immortal character in American children's literature."⁴³

⁴⁰ C.S Lakin, Live Write Thrive, "Telling the Truth, But Not Quite! The Autobiographical Novel," last modified February 12, 2018, <https://www.livewritethrive.com/2018/02/12/telling-the-truth-but-not-quite-the-autobiographical-novel/>.

⁴¹ Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 99.

⁴² Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 97n106.

⁴³ Hill, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer's Life*, Introduction.

5. American Frontier and Overland Migration

The term American frontier is defined by Britannica as “the advancing border that marked those lands that had been settled by Europeans.” The advancing border was connected to the westward movement in the USA. Overland migration from Atlantic to Pacific coast took place from 17th to 19th century.⁴⁴

The start of westward movement was gradual. At first, the geographical gap of the Appalachian Mountains divided majority of inhabitants from forward westward settlement. Furthermore, the Atlantic coast offered a safe shelter where “was no real threat from the Indians.”⁴⁵ However, since “freedom in America included freedom to go,”⁴⁶ different kinds of adventurers went westward – these people could be “trappers, traders or individualistic settlers.”⁴⁷ Due to complaints of Native Americans and an attempt “to conciliate” with them, the Royal Proclamation was issued in 1763 to stop westward expansion.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the new rules were mostly ignored, and settlers continued in their westward movement. After the American Revolution, larger number of settlers started to establish their homesteads between the Appalachians Mountains and the Mississippi River.⁴⁹ The government sent land surveyors, Native American commissioners, army and others to explore the land behind the Appalachians and “calm Indians whose lands had been violated in total disregard of solemn treaties.”⁵⁰ The Americans who squatted on the Native Americans’ lands, long before the treaties about the American ownership were signed, presented the main complication.⁵¹ During the whole process of westward movement it was common that “squatters and [land] surveyors had continually run ahead of the government” and they appealed on the government to displace the Native Americans farther west and push the American frontier far westward.⁵² One of the significant steps done for pushing American frontier was the Indian Removal Act.

⁴⁴ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “American Frontier,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, December 17, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-frontier>.

⁴⁵ Richard A. Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 9.

⁴⁶ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 38.

⁴⁷ same

⁴⁸ “Proclamation of 1763,” History, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/1763-proclamation-of>.

⁴⁹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Westward Movement,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, July 25, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/event/westward-movement>.

⁵⁰ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 38.

⁵¹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 38 – 39.

⁵² Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 96.

It was signed in 1830 to ensure the Native American removal west of the Mississippi and vacate their lands for exchange of the lands more westward. During 1830's and 1840's the westward migration noted the biggest expansion.⁵³ Moreover, the constructing of the transcontinental railroad in 1860s also contributed to the westward expansions because the railroad ensured the provisions and supplies to towns from East to West.⁵⁴ The closing of American frontier was announced in 1890 by Henry Gannet, the head of the Census Bureau.⁵⁵

The American West attracted newcomers with its vast options. Although living in the "new country" was challenging because the pioneers had to invent the right systems for cultivating the land, so that the economic potential of the American frontier would be fully used, its attraction was irresistible.⁵⁶ The "cutting edge of the frontier,"⁵⁷ formerly "empty as far as human life went"⁵⁸ was quickly cultivated. As Barlett highlights, the domestication of "the new country" was fast and pioneers built their permanent houses and the whole towns, which improved the infrastructure of the American West. Homesteaders on the American frontier were able to own the land and thus live a self-reliant and free life.⁵⁹ However, all this was gained thanks to the incredible hardship that included a very long process of moving, sometimes several times, to different places before choosing the right one. Equally, building the homestead from the beginning on an empty prairie and coping with the restricted social circle, were other issues that complicated the whole process. According to Frederick Turner, a famous historian, who is quoted in the article "Henry George, Frederick Jackson Turner, and the 'Closing' of the American Frontier", stated that „the westward expansion with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society furnish the forces dominating American character.“⁶⁰ A major part of American life attitudes have been thus formed upon the history of westward movement. For this reason, Wilder's novels are worth to analyse and study because they depict the core of American values and attitudes.

⁵³ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Indian Removal Act," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified December 6, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-Removal-Act>.

⁵⁴ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 93.

⁵⁵ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 114

⁵⁶ Elliot West, "American Frontier," ed. Clyde, Milner A., O'Connor Carol A, Sandweiss, Martha A., *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 116

⁵⁷ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 175.

⁵⁸ same

⁵⁹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 176

⁶⁰ Alex Wagner Lough, "Henry George, Frederick Jackson Turner, and the "Closing" of the American Frontier," *California History* 89, no. 2 (2012): 6 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23215319>.

In the following subchapters, the thesis will deal with some issues of westward migration and life on the American frontier as it had been depicted by Laura Ingalls Wilder. These issues will be analysed thoroughly and supported by references to historical events.

5.1. Reasons for Overland Westward Migration

Overland migrants might have had various reasons for moving westward. However, in case of families which were like the Ingalls, the reason might be obvious. Various land companies “advertised hundreds of thousands of acres that were up to sale. They encouraged farmers in the East to go out of wood to Kansas.”⁶¹ Wilder’s father, whose adventurous character encouraged him to leave Wisconsin and move westward, might have had to be enthralled by this type of advertisement.

Although the fictional Ingalls are very well settled in their log cabin, living in relevant comfort and always having enough food supplies, the father of the family decides differently. Wilder describes their comfortable lifestyle on several passages in the first book. To illustrate the Ingalls initial settled life, these short extracts are presented:

The house was a comfortable house. Upstairs there was a large attic, pleasant to play in when the rain drummed on the roof. Downstairs was the small bedroom, and the big room.⁶²

The attic was a lovely place to play. The large, round, coloured pumpkins made beautiful chairs and tables. The red peppers and the onions dangled overhead. The hams and the venison hung in their paper wrappings, and all the bunches of dried herbs, the spicy herbs for cooking and the bitter herbs for medicine, gave the place a dusty-spice smell.⁶³

Apart from the desire to go west, another reason for a moving decision is that the overcrowded area in Wisconsin begins to feel unbearable, especially for hunting reasons. The animals slowly disappear due to more people moving to Wisconsin.

Wild animals would not stay in a country where there were so many people. Pa did not like to stay either. He liked a country where the wild animals lived without being afraid. He liked to see the little fawns and their mothers looking

⁶¹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 14.

⁶² Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, (New York: Harper Trophy, 1971), 4.

⁶³ Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 19.

at him from the shadowy woods, and the fat, lazy bears eating berries in the wild berry patches.⁶⁴

Charles Ingalls chooses for their new home Indian Territory in Kansas. He feels free to go there because the government should have moved the Native Americans further westward. Charles Ingalls wants to ensure the claim for himself there, even though he is not sure on what terms he could become an owner of the land.

Ma said she didn't know whether this was Indian country or not. She didn't know where the Kansas line was. But whether or not, the Indians would not be here long. Pa had word from a man in Washington that Indian Territory would be open to settlement. They could not know, because Washington was so far away.⁶⁵

As the Native Americans still live in the area in which the Ingalls have settled down, the family is eventually forced to leave from there. Charles Ingalls decides to leave Indian Territory after a year of settlement, as he hears from the neighbours that "the government is sending soldiers to take us all settlers out of Indian Territory."⁶⁶ Thus, the truth about the Kansas line is revealed. He is told that he has built the house out off Kansas borders. This knowledge means for his family an immediate decision to leave and move, since a further remaining on the Native American ground might cause more troubles. Furthermore, the exact date of American soldiers coming is not known to them as the nearest town, Independence, is a four-day long walk far.⁶⁷

However, the fictional Ingalls do not know, when they settle down, that they have built their house in Osage Diminished Reserve. Osage Diminished Reserve (an official name for Indian Territory in Kansas) was the remaining land of 4.8 million acres left to Osage tribe after ceding much of their land to the United States. The tension between Osages, settlers and the government should have supposedly been the most strained in the time when the real Ingalls arrived.⁶⁸

In *Little House on the Prairie*, Wilder promotes the idea of Charles Ingalls building the house over the line of Osage Diminished Reserve by mistake. Yet, some scholars studying the *Little House on the Prairie* doubt this as the real Ingalls built their house several miles over the line. This mistake seems improbable for the family with the desire to settle down on their own claim. As Penny T. Linsenmayer argues, real Charles Ingalls might have been well-aware of intruding

⁶⁴ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 2.

⁶⁵ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 47.

⁶⁶ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 316.

⁶⁷ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 208.

⁶⁸ Penny T. Linsenmayer, "Kansas Settlers on the Osage Diminished Reserve," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 24, no 3, (2001 Autumn): 169.

the land of Native Americans. Even though Charles Ingalls is depicted as someone who sided with Native Americans, Wilder admittedly showed her family as a victim of federal government decisions and her father as a person who had presupposed that the government had opened the land for the white settlers.⁶⁹ Thus, it might be possible that Wilder intentionally makes the fictional Ingalls family unaware of building the house in the land which still belonged to the Native Americans to cover the fact that the real Ingalls stayed illegally on the land.

After this experience the fictional Ingalls move to Minnesota because Charles Ingalls is attracted by the idea of growing wheat in this area. In Minnesota, as Back and Hass point out, wheat was “a preferred grain crop because it had a higher value per unit of weight than other grains”.⁷⁰ As Wilder discusses in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, Charles Ingalls plans to sell the wheat because he desires to buy a house and horses by his earning from this crop. Nevertheless, the house is built even before harvesting the wheat. He has a deal with lumberyard which provides him with the lumber for a house for which he can pay after selling the wheat.⁷¹

Unfortunately, at the end of summer, a huge herd of grasshoppers attack the wheat field and completely damage it. The grasshoppers stay in the area for several months before going more to the west. Wilder very graphically describes a disturbing feeling of grasshoppers’ presence.

The grasshoppers were eating. You could not hear one grasshopper eat unless you listened very carefully while you held him and fed him grass. Millions and millions of grasshoppers were eating now. You could hear the millions of jaws biting and chewing.⁷²

So-called “grasshopper weather” was a common phenomenon for this area between the years 1873 and 1877. The grasshoppers affected the crop leaving the families without basic necessities as well as the seed for the next crop.⁷³ Thus, many families living in the affected area might have found themselves at the edge of starvation.

Since a plague of grasshoppers has thwarted the Ingalls plans to financial security, Laura’s father decides to leave with other men to the East where the crop is not attacked by grasshoppers and where he can find a job helping with the harvest. However, even after earning some money,

⁶⁹ Linsenmayer, “Kansas Settlers on the Osage Diminished Reserve,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 24, no 3, (2001 Autumn): 169.

⁷⁰ Warren A. Beck, Ynes D. Haase, *Historical Atlas of the American West*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 64.

⁷¹ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 109.

⁷² Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 196.

⁷³ Kate Roberts, *Minnesota 150: The Pople, Places, and Things that Shape Our State*, (Canada: Minnesota Historical Society Press), 63,

https://books.google.cz/books?id=Z3Y01NYd41UC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

the amount is still not enough for loan payment. The grasshoppers have destroyed the soil, crops and plants and all the animals living in the area have been forced to leave to save themselves from starvation.

The attitude of Wilder's father to this catastrophe is worth to mention. Charles Ingalls is overall depicted as a very optimistic man in Wilder's books. In this particular situation he keeps hoping of having a great wheat harvest and getting rich even after a grasshopper's plague. It brings a question if real Charles Ingalls was such a dreamer or if Wilder intended to keep his joyful mood to idealize the situation for children readers. By every fact, this situation had to be highly desperate. Still, fictional Charles Ingalls tries to cheer his family up under all circumstances:

“We won't have any grasshoppers next summer. They say in town that grasshoppers come only when the summers are hot and dry, and the winters are mild. We are getting so much snow now that we're bound to have fine crops next year.”⁷⁴

Despite this unfortunate event, the real Ingalls stayed in the area for quite a long time, approximately between the years 1871 to 1875.⁷⁵ The number of years spent in this area roughly corresponds with the novel. Wilder admits a difficult life situation in this novel. The financial and health situation completely thwarts any progress in farming. No financial income is caused by poor crop and debts for lumber are still not paid. Poor health conditions of almost all family members are caused by epidemic of scarlet fever. Scarlet fever causes Laura's sister Mary's blindness and the doctor's bill becomes unbearable. Thus, the family is incapable of acting on their own even though Mr Ingalls desires to leave the farm in Minnesota and search for a homestead.⁷⁶

Pa did not like a country so old and worn out that the hunting was poor. He wanted to go west. For two years he had wanted to go west and take a homestead, but Ma did not want to leave the settled country. And there was no money. Pa had made only two poor wheat crops since the grasshoppers came; he had barely been able to keep out of debt, and now there was the doctor's bill.⁷⁷

A similar reason for moving is presented as in *Little House in the Big Woods*. Charles Ingalls is again frustrated by the lack of animals suitable for hunting. However, in this case, the lack of animals has been caused by a natural catastrophe. In the woods of Wisconsin, human hunters can be blamed for the animal decrease. Nevertheless, the situation might be also perceived as

⁷⁴ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 326.

⁷⁵ *Little House on the Prairie*, “In Search of Laura – About Laura Ingalls Wilder.”

⁷⁶ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 3.

⁷⁷ Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 3.

the wish to leave the country more likely because of an unpleasant situation caused by huge debts. Another moving to the West means a salvation from the hopeless circumstances caused by financial problems.

Wilder forms the salvation in Charles Ingalls's sister, Docia. She offers him a job in Dakota Territory. Docia's husband works as a contractor on a new railway and he wants Charles Ingalls to be a storekeeper, bookkeeper, and timekeeper. The job is for fifty dollars a month.⁷⁸

Various jobs were quite easily available for all the men who were in a good physical form. The jobs covered all kinds of necessities which had to be done on the frontier, including farming, blacksmithing, storekeeping and various other jobs which were needed when building the railroad. For most of the jobs, as a matter of interest including a doctor, only a few week-long trainings were needed.⁷⁹ Thus, it is not surprising Docia offers her brother all these job positions.

However, Mary is still weak and still getting used to her new unfavourable health condition. Therefore, the family is forced to divide for the first time. Charles Ingalls comes with the idea of Caroline Ingalls and their daughters travelling on the train.

When the family members meet again, they move for a short time to a railroad camp from which they begin their journey to their final destination in South Dakota. In South Dakota, they settle down in a shanty near the camp used for building a railroad and then they settle down in the beginning town, De Smet. The issue of settling down and the role of the Ingalls in the origin of this town will be more analysed in the chapter 5.3. However, the fact that should be highlighted here is that the Charles Ingalls' desire of moving westward is not satisfied by living in De Smet. Wilder even describes her fictional counterpart as an adventurous person with the migratory heart. Therefore, when Laura asks Pa at dinner why they could not go west again, Pa responds to her:

“I know, little Half-Pin,” said Pa, and his voice was very kind. “You and I want to fly like the birds. But long ago I promised your Ma that you girls should go to school. You can't go to school and go west. When this town is built there'll be a school here. I'm going to get a homestead, Laura, and you girls are going to school.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 4-6.

⁷⁹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 170.

⁸⁰ Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 126.

In comparison to their previous settlements in Wisconsin and Minnesota, the lack of animals also begins to be an issue in De Smet, as Wilder occasionally mentions, because more people are coming to town. Although under different circumstances Charles Ingalls might have decided to move again, the desire of Caroline Ingalls to provide her children with education and live a relevantly civilized life outvotes Charles Ingalls westward expansion. The fictional family (as well as the real one) stays in De Smet for good.

5.2. Journey of Overland Migrants

The overland migration was not a simple goal to accomplish. Although Barlett highlights that for an American character, “the freedom meant mobility” and the mobility meant to improve ones life,⁸¹ in case of the Ingalls, and many other families, it was always a serious decision.

As it has been already mentioned above, real Charles Ingalls was obviously a man seeking adventure. However, he definitely had to know he had to be careful when planning the journey. The Ingalls, as well as most of other families and individuals, travelled by a covered wagon pulled by a team of horses taking all their possessions they could carry. Barlett quotes a British traveller Moris Birkbeck (1817; quoted in Barlett 1974), who described a typical covered wagon: “so light that you might almost carry it, yet strong enough to bear a good load of bedding, utensils, and provisions pulled by two small horses, a cow or two following; this, save for a small amount of cash for the land office, was all their possessions.”⁸²

The first move from Wisconsin to Kansas was around 1.000 km long. Today the journey would take around 10 hours by car.⁸³ Even for a modern person the distance is unimaginable concerning you had to move all your possessions at once because no one could send you anything afterwards. The crucial decisions when planning the journey in a covered wagon were based upon weather and landscape in which an overland migrant would travel. Thus, Laura’s Pa has to consider the season of the year. When moving for the first time from Wisconsin to Kansas they have to be able to cross the Mississippi River in time. He decides to start the

⁸¹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 275.

⁸² Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 144.

⁸³ Google Maps, from Pepin, Wisconsin to Independence, Kansas

<https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Pepin,+Wisconsin,+Spojen%C3%A9+st%C3%A1ty+americk%C3%A9/Independence,+Kansas,+Spojen%C3%A9+st%C3%A1ty+americk%C3%A9/@40.7450038,-98.3440574,6z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x87f835f15a852cd1:0x6b4792d31a527ae7!2m2!1d-92.14795!2d44.4410785!1m5!1m1!1s0x87b82b45a2447869:0x8ba1712936e89047!2m2!1d-95.7083131!2d37.2242358!3e0>

journey during the winter. “We can’t get across the Mississippi after the ice breaks.”⁸⁴ Another crossing which is described in Wilder’s novel has much more dramatic effect. Since Pa is surprised by the level of water in a creek, he has to help the horses himself and swim with them in the creek.

The wagon lurched; there was a sudden heavy splash beside it. Laura sat straight up and clawed the blanket from her head. Pa was gone. Ma sat alone, holding tight to the reins with both hands. Mary hid her face in the blanket again, but Laura rose up farther. She couldn’t see the creek bank. She couldn’t see anything in front of the wagon but water rushing at it. And in the water, three heads; Pet’s head and Patty’s head and Pa’s small, wet head.⁸⁵

They reach the bank safely, however, they find out their dog Jack is missing. The family supposes he has drowned as he has been swimming next to the wagon. Wilder gives to this event a happy ending, as the dog eventually finds the way to them one evening when they are camping. However, similar events could easily happen as bridges were still not constructed in lots of the places.⁸⁶

A successful journey was achieved only if the migrants tried to keep as much daily routine in their wagon life as possible, which meant not underestimating rest and meal breaks. Although the journey could have been arduous, a slow pace was convenient.⁸⁷

It was a long, long way to Indian Territory. Almost every day the horses travelled as far as they could; almost every night Pa and Ma made a camp in a new place. Sometimes they had to stay several days in one camp because a creek was in flood and they couldn’t cross it till the water went down.⁸⁸

Although the journey for overland migrants might have brought some potentially dangerous situations, Wilder does not devote too much space to the description of their wagon journeys. The reason for that might be that most of the journeys, if planned well, were dull and uninteresting. She mentions a similar opinion in *Little House on the Prairie* on several places.

After more day they came to hills again. In a valley the wagon stuck fast in deep black mud. Rain poured down and thunder crashed and lightning flared. There was no place to make camp and build a fire. Everything was damp and chill and miserable in the wagon, but they had to stay in it and eat cold bits of food.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 3.

⁸⁵ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 23.

⁸⁶ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 281.

⁸⁷ John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 385.

⁸⁸ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 9.

⁸⁹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 9.

Next day the land was the same, the sky was the same, the circle did not change. Laura and Mary were tired of them all. There was nothing new to do and nothing new to look at.⁹⁰

Fortunately, the journey in a covered wagon does not threaten the Ingalls in any way since Wilder would have remembered it in the novel but she gives one example of what migrants might have expected on their journey. One family they encounter when moving from Indian Territory to Minnesota is found sitting next to their wagon without their horses.

“What’s wrong? Where are your horses?” Pa asked.

“I don’t know,” the man said. “I tied them to the wagon last night, and this morning they were gone. Somebody cut the ropes and took them away in the night.”⁹¹

Charles Ingalls wants to help these people, but they do not want to leave their wagon by itself.

Then Pa said, “Come ride with us to Independence.”

“No,” said the man. “All we’ve got is in this wagon. We won’t leave it.”

“Why, man! What will you do?” Pa exclaimed. “There may be nobody along here for days, weeks. You can’t stay here.”

“I don’t know,” the man said.

“We’ll stay with our wagon,” the woman said.⁹²

This excerpt shows two main drawbacks of overland migration. First, a possible danger that could happen on the way – horse-stealing, in this case – and second, the family had all their possessions in their covered wagon. They might have travelled with all their practical equipment they needed for cooking and farming, they had all their clothes, bedding and even some smaller pieces of furniture there. Even though these things were replaceable, a financial situation of most overland migrants was poor, as stated above, so the replacement of these things could have been quite difficult.

A different means of transport was taken when the Ingalls move from Minnesota to Dakota Territory. Charles Ingalls goes alone to start working at Lake Benton before moving further, but Caroline Ingalls with her daughters take the train. Wilder devotes the whole chapter about

⁹⁰ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 13.

⁹¹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 329.

⁹² Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 329-330.

travelling from Walnut Grove to Tracy in Minnesota, which is only 11 long kilometres far.⁹³ Charles Ingalls goes to pick them up in the hotel and takes them to the camp when they arrive. Although nowadays 11-long-kilometer ride by train is inconsiderable, it is a life-time experience for Laura and her sisters. At first, she shows some doubts about going by train:

Travelling on the train cost money. They had not paid anything to travel in the wagon, and this was a beautiful morning to be riding in the wagon along new roads. It was a September day and small clouds were hurrying in the sky. All the girls were in school now; they would see the train go roaring by and know that Laura was riding in it. Trains went faster than horses can run. They went so terribly fast that often they were wrecked. You never knew what might happen to you on a train.⁹⁴

At the end of the journey, Laura is amazed by the train experience and she admires people working at the railroad.

For just one little minute she almost wished that Pa was a railroad man. There was nothing so wonderful as railroads, and railroad men were great men, able to drive the big iron engines and the fast, dangerous trains.⁹⁵

Showing the rareness of travelling by train, Laura comes back to this experience in *These Happy Golden Years*, in which she accompanies Mrs McKee from De Smet to Manchester.

So the next morning Laura rode with Mrs. McKee and Mattie on the train to Manchester. She had been on the cars once before, when she came west from Plum Creek, so she felt like a seasoned traveller as she followed the brakeman with her satchel, down the aisle to a seat. It was not as though she knew nothing about trains.⁹⁶

In the excerpt, she is glad she has already travelled by train before, even though it has been only once. The journey is around the same distance as the first one, but still it has been worth for Wilder to develop it in more paragraphs in the book and she even calls Laura a “seasoned traveller”.

The journey served as a transition from the old place to the new one for the pioneers. With the journey, the careful planning and self-reliance started and continued when the migrants wanted to settle down in their chosen place.

⁹³ Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 145n94.

⁹⁴ Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 16.

⁹⁵ Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 30-31.

⁹⁶ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, (New York: Harper Trophy, 1971), 116.

5.3. Issues of Settlement

This part concentrates on the issues that accompanied pioneers during the process of settling down. These issues are very significant in Wilder's work and they are important for understanding pioneer's nature.

The Ingalls moves depicted in the novels involve the same pattern of settling down. They always have to build a new house and establish a new farm which has to be adjusted to local weather conditions. They also establish new habits individually for each area in which they live. These habits are often connected to the distance of their homestead to the nearest town. Therefore, this subchapter deals with Wilder's descriptions of building the homesteads, the meaning of home and the Ingalls family participation in the town community.

Wilder devotes lots of space in her work to describe the Ingalls' houses and settlements. Concerning the fact that she describes her childhood memories, the home, in fact the house itself, is a central part of most of the events in her novels. It is not surprising, and it can be supported by Gaston Bachelard and his *Poetics of Space* in which he claims that our home "is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world."⁹⁷ In addition, all the Ingalls' frontier houses are described in the way to create a vivid atmosphere to the reader.

How pleasant it was, after the dishes were done, when they were all settled in the front room for Sunday afternoon. Sunshine streamed through the clean windows into the warm room, where Ma sat gently rocking, and Carrie and Grace pored over the pictures in Pa's big green book, *The Wonders of the Animal World*. Pa read items from *the Pioneer Press* to Ma, and at his desk Laura sat writing a letter to Mary. Carefully with Ma's little pearl-handled pen that was shaped like a feather, she wrote of her school and her pupils. Of course, she wrote of nothing unpleasant. The clock ticked and now and then Kitty lazily stretched and purred a short purr.⁹⁸

This excerpt comes from *These Happy Golden Years* and reflects Laura's appreciation of home. Because Laura, for the first time, is staying during the week at the stranger's house, she is grateful for the home she has with her family. Love and peace, so typical for Wilder, radiate from this paragraph.

Nevertheless, at first Ingalls live in a log cabin, which is a typical and easily constructed house of American frontier. According to Barlett, a log cabin took only several weeks to be built by a

⁹⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), 1, https://books.google.cz/books?id=tN3bAwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁹⁸ Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, 42.

single man as the system of construction was very simple, “each log held in place by its own weight, supported by the log below and reinforced by the log above.”⁹⁹ It was comfortable and pleasant to stay in it during all seasons of the year. The fireplace and chimney were often in the log cabin too.¹⁰⁰ The beds were attached to the cabin wall and the cabin’s inhabitants also made their own mattresses, usually full of dried straw.¹⁰¹

Before the new log cabin is built in *Little House on the Prairie*, the family is basically settled in the middle of the prairie where they are camping and sleeping in the wagon.

“Eat your breakfast, Laura,” Ma said. “You must mind your manners, even if we are a hundred miles from anywhere.”

Pa said, mildly, “It’s only forty miles to Independence, Caroline, and no doubt there’s a neighbour or so nearer than that.”

“Forty miles then,” Ma agreed. “But whether or not, it isn’t good manners to sing at table. Or where you’re eating,” she added, because there was no table.

There was only the enormous, empty prairie, with grasses blowing in waves of light and shadow across it, and the great blue sky above it, and birds flying up from it and singing with joy because the sun was rising. And on the whole enormous prairie there was no sign that any other human being had ever been there.¹⁰²

This excerpt poignantly shows the independence and self-reliance of the pioneers. Being alone in a vast landscape, they have to take care of themselves. Have anything happened to them, no one would find out for weeks or months. In addition, Wilder shows an ordinary family atmosphere of their camp with Ma still adhering to her children proper behaviour, acting like they would camp near civilization.

Nevertheless, Charles Ingalls starts to build a log cabin. Wilder records this in detail. At first Pa has to cut and haul enough logs for the walls and then he can start working on building them.

Pa began the house first. He paced off the size of it on the ground, then with his spade he dug a shallow little hollow along two sides of that space. Into these hollows he rolled two of the biggest logs. They were sound, strong logs, because they must hold up the house. They were called sills. Then Pa chose two more strong, big logs, and he rolled these logs onto the ends of the sills, so that they made a hollow square. Now with his ax he cut a wide, deep notch near each end of these logs. He cut these notches out of the top of the log, but

⁹⁹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 184.

¹⁰⁰ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 184.

¹⁰¹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 184-185.

¹⁰² Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 40-41.

with his eye he measured the sills, and he cut the notches so that they would fit around half of the sill.¹⁰³

Someone might argue that the details in the excerpt above might seem redundant for child readers. However, Wilder might have intended to show a pioneer's handiness and independence. In addition, Wilder's descriptive parts of building the houses, doing different kinds of housework (for example making cheese, cooking, cleaning) are essential parts of the whole *LHS*.

Furthermore, as they still are not aware of any neighbours, Caroline has to help her husband. Unfortunately, this does not end well, and Caroline Ingalls gets injured. "The log was on her foot. Pa lifted the log and Ma pulled her foot from under it. Pa felt her to see if any bones were broken."¹⁰⁴

The house and other smaller buildings, like a stable or well is built with the help of their neighbours, Mr Edwards and Mr Scott. The other people are coming into the area and they could find out about each other unless they try to discover each other.

He [Charles Ingalls] had found some more neighbours. Settlers were coming in and settling along both sides of the creek. Less than three miles away, in a hollow on the High Prairie, a man and his wife were building a house. Their name was Scott, and Pa said they were nice folks. Six miles beyond them, two bachelors were living in one house.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, building a house is not enough. Since they need to be self-sufficient and the town is far, they have to start the field. It is a hard work and both children, Laura and Mary, have to help.

In the daytime everyone was busy. Pa hurried with his plowing, and Mary and Laura helped Ma plant the early garden seeds. With the hoe Ma dug small holes in the matted grass roots that the plow had turned up, and Laura and Mary carefully dropped the seeds. Then Ma covered them snugly with earth. They planted onions and carrots and peas and beans and turnips. And they were all so happy because spring had come, and pretty soon they would have vegetables to eat. They were growing very tired of just bread and meat.¹⁰⁶

Farming for most Americans was a knowledge passed on them through generations. Charles Ingalls had known he had to domesticate the land to be a successful farmer.¹⁰⁷ A fictional

¹⁰³ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 58.

¹⁰⁴ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 87.

¹⁰⁶ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 313-314.

¹⁰⁷ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 175.

Charles Ingalls has high expectations of their new settlement as he claims: “I tell you, Caroline, there’s everything we want here. We can live like kings!”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Charles Ingalls also proclaims: “This is a great country. This is the country I’d be contented to stay in the rest of my life.”¹⁰⁹ Considering Wilder’s possible memories of her father praising the Kansas land, it is quite probable they might have stayed in this place if it had not been for the “misunderstanding” of where the borders of Indian Territory were as mentioned in 5.1.

Nevertheless, some of the necessary habits that the pioneers had to establish were, for instance, going to town for supplies. One of the things the Ingalls have to buy in town were seeds, plow but also flour, sugar, cornmeal, fat pork, salt,¹¹⁰ and all the things that could not be obtained otherwise. Because they live far from the town, going there plays quite an important role in Wilder’s novels, particularly in *Little House in the Big Woods* and *Little House on the Prairie*. In both novels she devotes whole chapters to these rare occasions. Although her father usually goes alone to do necessary shopping, some rare occasions occur when the rest of the family could go to town too. Wilder describes every occasion of going to town, whether Laura participates in a town trip or not.

Wilder describes Laura’s first personal visit to town when visiting Pepin in Wisconsin, recorded in *Little House in the Big Woods*. The journey to Pepin from their home and back takes almost the whole day, but Charles Ingalls decides that for once Laura and Mary could go too, “Pa said that as soon as he had the crops in, they would all go to town. Laura and Mary could go too: They were old enough now.”¹¹¹ Wilder describes complex preparations for this occasion (bathing and packing lunch) and their excitement.

They were so excited that they did not go to sleep at once. Ma was not sitting with her mending basket as usual. She was busy getting everything ready for a quick breakfast and laying out the best stockings and petticoats and dresses, and Pa’s good shirt, and her own dark brown calico with the little purple flowers on it.¹¹²

As Walter Hazen explains, a typical frontier town of the size of Pepin was a place that served as a source of supplies for homesteaders living in the surrounding area. It consisted of one main

¹⁰⁸ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 49.

¹⁰⁹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 74.

¹¹⁰ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 224-225.

¹¹¹ Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 160.

¹¹² Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 160.

street and a few shops.¹¹³ According to the email correspondence with Missy Murray, a deputy clerk and treasurer of Village of Pepin, in the time of the Ingalls family, Pepin had around 370 inhabitants. In comparison, Pepin remained a small village of 820 inhabitants.¹¹⁴ In contrast, for today's child readers, these towns would not imply much amazement to them and they would probably hate visits of such places, regardless the number of inhabitants during the Ingalls time or nowadays. Conversely, for a little girl who spent all her time in a little log cabin, was any town visit something remarkable.

“There you are, Laura and Mary!” he (Pa) said. “There's the town of Pepin.”

Laura stood up on the board and Pa held her safe by the arm, so she could see the town. When she saw it, she could hardly breathe. She knew how Yankee Doodle felt, when he could not see the town because there were so many houses.¹¹⁵

For the Ingalls, it is a welcomed break from their daily routine. Wilder describes their acting in the town almost as a textbook case. As Hazen describes, women “looked over the latest materials and fashions and children drooled over the various candies on display in large jars”.¹¹⁶ Caroline Ingalls has an opportunity to buy new fabrics and Laura is amazed by the vast variety of goods that are sold in the general store. Wilder describes plenty of things Laura can see and finishes the description with these lines: “Laura could have looked for weeks and not seen all the things that were in that store. She had not known there were so many things in the world.”¹¹⁷ Both real or fictional Laura Ingallses would probably faint in shock if they saw modern shopping centres. However, the amazement is natural concerning the circumstances.

In *Little House on the Prairie* Laura does not visit the town personally but still, Wilder devotes the whole chapter for the occasion of Pa going to town. As already mentioned above, it is Independence in Kansas. Wilder states that the journey from and back to town is expected to last “four long days”.¹¹⁸ Therefore, Charles Ingalls lets his wife to take care of their homestead and children and their neighbour, Mr Edwards, is tasked to help Caroline Ingalls to do the necessary chores.

¹¹³ Walter A. Hazen, *Everyday Life: The Frontier*, (USA: Good Year Books, 1999), 66

https://books.google.cz/books?id=uxXpE750j58C&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹¹⁴ Based on my email correspondence via form entry on <http://pepinwisconsin.org/contact>

¹¹⁵ Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 164-165.

¹¹⁶ Hazen, *Everyday Life: The Frontier*, 66.

¹¹⁷ Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 167-168.

¹¹⁸ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 208.

Wilder's focus in the chapter about Pa's Independence visit is on a considerable fear they have as they do not feel safe without him: "Outdoors was too large and empty to play in when Pa was away."¹¹⁹ When he returns, the whole family is excited from the things he has brought. One of the basic supplies he has bought was sugar. What might be interesting for today's reader is that Wilder especially highlights that he has brought both brown and white sugar. Brown sugar was used for common baking but to white sugar a special attention is paid because it is only used when having guests. "Ma opened it and Mary and Laura looked at the sparkling whiteness of that beautiful sugar, and they each had a taste of it from a spoon."¹²⁰ In modern times, when brown sugar is more expensive than white sugar and is considered as a feature of healthy lifestyle, it might be hard to believe that Laura and Mary are so excited over white sugar. However, these small details of Wilder's books make her work so special and absorbing. Since Wilder plentifully describes their parents endeavour of building a new house and little field, the Ingalls' frustration when leaving Indian Territory is understandable. This frustration is expressed by Caroline Ingalls who reacts to her husband's decision about leaving the country in this way: "Ma sighed gently and said: "A whole year gone, Charles."¹²¹

Their types of dwellings in their next destination, Walnut Grove in Minnesota, are different from their previous log cabins. Their first house in *On the Banks of Plum Creek* is a dugout. A dugout was "excavated and built into sides of hills, slopes, ravines or creek banks throughout Great Plains, usually as a temporary dwelling until a family could afford a frame house."¹²² The Ingalls have traded the dugout with the man who wants to go west. When Charles Ingalls tells his family, they are going to live in a dugout, Caroline is not enthusiastic about it: "Oh, Charles!" said Ma. "A dugout. We've never had to live in a dugout yet."¹²³ Charles Ingalls promises it would be only a temporary home. "It's only till I harvest the first wheat crop."¹²⁴ Although the family is not keen on moving to dugout at first, Wilder, again, describes their first Minnesota home in detail.

¹¹⁹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 208.

¹²⁰ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 224.

¹²¹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 321.

¹²² Wilder and Smith, *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 65n16.

¹²³ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 5.

¹²⁴ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 5.

It was one room, all white. The earth walls had been smoothed and hard.

When Ma and Mary stood in the doorway the light went dim. There was a small greased-paper window beside the door. But the wall was so thick that the light from the window stayed near the window.

That front wall was built of sod. Mr. Hanson had dug out his house, and then he had cut long strips of prairie sod and laid them on top of one another, to make the front wall. It was a good, thick wall with not one crack in it. No cold could get through the wall.¹²⁵

Dugouts advantages were that they kept warmth during winter and they were cool in summer.¹²⁶ However, their disadvantages prevailed. Barlett describes it in a more pessimistic way than Wilder does in her novel. “Such a primitive ‘soddy’, with its roof of grass dripped from the ceiling when spring arrived, making it almost impossible to keep things dry. An occasional intruder might come crashing through the ceiling – a stray horse or cow.”¹²⁷ Wilder devotes one chapter to the last disadvantage named by Barlett. In the chapter “Ox on the Roof”¹²⁸ she describes an ox the Ingalls owned crashing their dugout’s roof. “Pete [the ox] jumped right on top of the dugout. Laura saw his hind leg go down, down through the roof.”¹²⁹ Fortunately, no major harm is done and only “a hole through the roof where Pete’s leg had come down and gone up again”¹³⁰ stayed there. Despite a primary shock, Wilder describes their relief and adaptation to the place they are temporarily living in. “Then she [Laura’s mother] and Laura laughed because it was funny to live in a house where a steer could step through the roof. It was like being rabbits.”¹³¹

After some time, they succeed in moving to a better housing, having bought lumber for a new house on credit (see 5.1.). Charles Ingalls builds a frame house after a short time they have spent in a dugout. According to Brown frame houses slowly replaced log cabins and dugouts on the American frontier. As saw mills came to the town and farmers started to profit from their crops, they were able to buy lumber for building frame houses. A frame house was more spacious and in contrast to a log cabin or dugout quite luxurious.¹³² In case of the Ingalls, the

¹²⁵ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 12.

¹²⁶ Wilder and Smith, *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 65n16.

¹²⁷ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 216.

¹²⁸ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 45 – 51.

¹²⁹ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 48.

¹³⁰ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 49.

¹³¹ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 50.

¹³² Dee Brown, *The American West*, (USA: Touchstone, 1995), 39, https://books.google.cz/books?id=Yys8EJC6xWUC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

house has two rooms. “One was the bedroom, and the other was only to live in.”¹³³ Furthermore, Charles Ingalls has built the attic “for Mary and Laura, to sleep in an to play in”.¹³⁴

The frame house phenomenon is depicted by Wilder as a feature of better status of a frontier family. Wilder, again, as in previous books, describes the whole process of building a house in the chapter “The Wonderful House”¹³⁵ showing the importance of this major event in their family’s life. The whole Ingalls family is happy about the new house.

He [Charles Ingalls] sang out, “Here’s your new house, Caroline!”

“But Charles!” Ma gasped. Laura ran and climbed up over the wheel, up onto that pile of boards. She had never seen such smooth, straight, beautiful boards. They had been sawed by machinery.”¹³⁶

Wilder’s ability to vividly describe the environment with choosing the right words to express Laura’s inner emotions as a child, is especially employed in the description of the houses. However, it is possible that her biggest effort is involved in describing the Minnesota frame house.

“There was nothing more that a house could possibly have. The glass windows made the inside of that house so light that you would hardly know you were in a house. It smelled clean and piny, from the yellow-new board walls and floor. The cookstove stood lordly in the corner by the lean-to door. A touch on the white-china door knob swung the boughten door on its boughten hinges, and the door knob’s little iron tongue clicked and held the door shut!”¹³⁷

In this excerpt, Wilder indirectly indicates that their new house is really a luxurious place. She concentrates on such details as a door knob because they have never had a door knob before in their log cabins. Furthermore, she highlights the cookstove with using the word “lordly.” The reason for that might be that this cookstove is brand new and the whole family is proud of their new possession.

Going to town during their stay in Minnesota becomes quite a common habit. As Charles Ingalls states: “Town’s only three miles away! Just a nice walk.”¹³⁸ Their settlement close to the town is mostly triggered by a necessity to start sending Laura and Mary to school. Laura is unhappy

¹³³ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 111.

¹³⁴ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 112.

¹³⁵ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 107 – 117.

¹³⁶ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 109.

¹³⁷ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 116.

¹³⁸ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 13.

about going to school because she loves playing outside. However, Pa clarifies an importance of schooling to her:

“Oh, Pa,” Laura said, “do I have to go to school?”

“You will like school, Laura,” said Pa.

“I like it better here,” Laura said, mournfully.

“I know, little half-pint,” said Pa, “but it isn’t everybody that gets a chance to learn to read and write and cipher. “Your Ma was a school-teacher when we met, and when she came west with me I promised that our girls would have a chance to get book learning. That’s why we stopped here, so close to a town that has a school. You’re almost eight years old now, and Mary going on nine, and it’s time you begun. Be thankful you’ve got the chance, Laura.”¹³⁹

Schooling and organizing the classes on the American frontier was, as Wilder claims herself, “a law to itself in those days.”¹⁴⁰ School terms were irregular depending on the seasons of year and weather conditions. Sometimes, children were able to go to school during winter but sometimes the harsh winter did not allow them to undergo the journey to school at all.¹⁴¹

The reason why Laura’s father highlights that she should be grateful for the opportunity of going to school is that some pioneer children had never attended school, or they started on the threshold of adulthood.¹⁴² According to Brown “education as well as salvation was important to the pioneer cultural effort.” However, the school in town was not a commonplace. Teachers were missing, and a town community had to “cooperate to build a schoolhouse.” Parents provisionally taught their children at home, the Ingalls included. Admittedly, home-schooling was dependent on what education parents themselves had obtained during their life.¹⁴³ Concludingly, Wilder and her sisters were truly lucky to obtain some education.

For the first time in Wilder’s work, Laura and her sister Mary get acquainted with strange children. Wilder concentrates on depicting the awkwardness and fear Laura feels when she has arrived at the school building for the first time.

Laura kept on going nearer and nearer to, she swung the dinner-pail and called out, “You all sounded just like a flock of prairie chickens!”

¹³⁹ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 137–138.

¹⁴⁰ Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 86n71.

¹⁴¹ Hazen, *Everyday Life: The Frontier*, 43.

¹⁴² Hazen, *Everyday Life: The Frontier*, 43.

¹⁴³ Brown, *The American West*, 180.

They [children at school] were surprised. She was ashamed, too. Mary gasped, “Laura!” Then a freckled boy with fire-colored hair yelled, “Snipes, yourselves! Snipes! Snipes! Long-legged snipes!”

Laura wanted to sink down and hide her legs. Her dress was too short, it was much shorter than the town girls’ dresses. So was Mary’s.¹⁴⁴

In this excerpt, Wilder describes an unpleasant welcoming that the Ingalls sisters have at school. Since the sisters have never been in any children group before, the awkwardness of the situation is natural. Furthermore, for the first time they have an option to compare with others. A boy’s insinuation about their short skirts reflects the Ingalls poor financial situation. The family members have to think carefully about their expenses thus Laura’s and Mary’s dresses do not always suit their age. However, the sisters start to be aware of the financial status of their family. Wilder mentions one particular event that shows Laura and Mary’s thoughtfulness in a financial matter. They need a new slate for school, which is an expense their parents do not count with. “He (Pa) gave Mary a round silver piece to buy a slate. “There’s plenty of fish in the creek,” he said. We’ll hold out till wheat-harvest.”¹⁴⁵ However, the sisters also need a pencil to go with a slate. “Pa had already spent so much for the slate that they hated to tell him they must have another penny.” Therefore, they solve it unselfishly and use their own savings. “They still had those pennies that they had found in their stockings on Christmas morning in Indian Territory.”¹⁴⁶ By these minor generosityes, Wilder could teach her children’s readers unselfish behaviour.

Nevertheless, the opportunities of social events in Walnut Grove are even wider because church sermons and Sunday school begin there too. Active church attending also occurs for the first time in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. As the official webpage of Walnut Grove states, “the Congregational Church was built in the village in 1874”¹⁴⁷ and the real Ingalls lived around this time there. Churches were highly important buildings in every frontier town. They showed a town’s prestige and stability. Nonetheless, quoting Brown, “churches in the new West had to wait their turn; houses and stores were built first as a matter of practical survival.”¹⁴⁸ Wilder shows that the whole community cooperates to build a church building. For instance, Wilder

¹⁴⁴ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 145.

¹⁴⁵ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. 153.

¹⁴⁶ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. 153.

¹⁴⁷ “Walnut Grove History,” City of Walnut Grove, accessed March 28, 2019. <http://walnutgrovemn.org/walnut-grove-history/>.

¹⁴⁸ Brown, *The American West*, 177.

mentions Charles Ingalls going to town to buy new boots and returning without them because of his solidarity.

“Where are your boots, Charles?” she (Caroline) asked.

“Well, Caroline,” Pa said. “I saw Brother Alden and he told me he couldn’t raise money enough to put a bell in the belfry. The folks in town had all given every cent they could, and he lacked just three dollars. So I gave him the money.”¹⁴⁹

Wilder also depicts Laura’s first seeing of Christmas tree in this church. Since the Ingalls Christmas are usually very modest, usually with homemade gifts, Laura is stunned. “There had never been such a Christmas as this. It was such a large, rich Christmas, the whole church full of Christmas.”¹⁵⁰ Moreover, she and her sister receive clothes that have been sent to them by people from the East. Reverend Alden explains this generosity: “You see, when I told them about our church out here, they said they must send a box for the Christmas tree. They all gave things they had.”¹⁵¹

The Ingalls’ next and last destination is reached less directly than the previous ones. Since Charles Ingalls works for his brother-in-law, the whole family is living in a railroad camp for a while on the shores of Silver Lake in South Dakota. When Charles Ingalls’ job is finished, and the men go back home because the winter is coming, the family is supposed to go back East to spend winter there.

She [Laura] did not want to go back east again. She hated to leave Silver Lake to go east. They had got as far as Silver Lake and she wanted to hang on there, not to be pushed back. But if they must be, they must; next spring they could start again.¹⁵²

Wilder shows Laura’s strong emotions about this matter to highlight the urge of the pioneers to continue westward, as going back to the East would mean a failure to them. However, the situation is solved, and they can stay in the surveyor’s house during the winter. The house is full of provisions that should last till spring. Charles Ingalls’ only obligation is to “be responsible for the company tools till spring.”¹⁵³ When they move into the house, Laura is the first one who explores it. She is amazed by its greatness. “That made three rooms already, and still there was another door. Laura thought that there must have been a great many surveyors to

¹⁴⁹ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 190 – 191.

¹⁵⁰ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 255.

¹⁵¹ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 257.

¹⁵² Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 132.

¹⁵³ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 133.

need so much space. This would be by far the largest house she had ever lived in.”¹⁵⁴ According to De Smet official webpage, the surveyor’s house was built in 1879, a year before the town of De Smet was officially established. The Ingalls family was recorded as the first family of De Smet and they “watched the town of De Smet rise up from the prairie in 1880.”¹⁵⁵ Again, Wilder vivid description can transfer anyone to the American prairie through the fictional Ingalls family: “Suddenly, there on the brown prairie where nothing had been before, was the town.”¹⁵⁶

As the webpage Discover Laura Blog mentions, the surveyor’s house was also “the oldest building in De Smet and served as a railroad company house.” The real Charles Ingalls noted in his journal that they moved in December, 1879. Today, a gift shop and museum of Laura Ingalls is present there. An interesting note is mentioned in the article about the surveyor’s house saying: “Many people who visit are surprised by how small the home is.”¹⁵⁷ This serves as an interesting comparison with today’s dwelling expectations and requirements and Laura’s enthusiastic feelings about the house.

Moreover, the house is full of supplies, which consists of for example pork (“Laura had never seen so much salt pork at one time.”¹⁵⁸) soda crackers, beans, dried apples and potatoes. Laura comments this with a question: “Doesn’t it make you feel rich, Ma, just to think of the whole winter provisions laid in, already?”¹⁵⁹ However, staying in a surveyor’s house, as much supplied and cosy it is, the Ingalls are again completely self-dependent.

“Don’t you realize, Caroline, that our nearest neighbour to the east is sixty miles away and our nearest west is forty miles? When winter shuts down, they might as well be farther off. We’ve got the world to ourselves!”¹⁶⁰

In fact, their nearest neighbours, Mr and Mrs Boast decide to stay over the winter and they celebrate Christmas altogether. During their Christmas feast made of surveyor’s supplies, Charles Ingalls pronounce memorable words:

“Well,” Pa said, “It’s the first Christmas dinner anybody ever ate in this part of the country. I’m glad it was a good one. In time to come, no doubt a good many folks will celebrate Christmas around here, and I expect they’ll have

¹⁵⁴ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 144.

¹⁵⁵ “History...” De Smet South Dakota, Wilder’s Life, accessed March 28, 2019, <http://www.desmetsd.com/community/history>.

¹⁵⁶ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 242.

¹⁵⁷ “The Surveyor’s House,” Discover Laura Blog, last modified May 3, 2014, <https://discoverlaura.wordpress.com/2014/05/31/the-surveyors-house/>.

¹⁵⁸ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 144.

¹⁵⁹ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 134.

¹⁶⁰ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 147.

fancier fixings in some ways, but I don't know how they can have more solid comfort than we've got, for a fact."¹⁶¹

Charles Ingalls is right because the town of De Smet really grows quickly starting with the spring 1880, as Wilder depicts it. In this year the surveyor's house serves as a hotel and the Ingalls have to take care of people coming west and finding a homestead. Wilder highlights an incredible flow of people coming through the new town.

"The strangers came from Iowa, from Ohio, from Illinois and Michigan, from Wisconsin and Minnesota and even from faraway New York and Vermont. They were going to Huron or to Fort Pierre or even farther west, looking for homesteads."¹⁶²

The Ingalls are occupied with accommodating strangers in the surveyor's house and their own homestead has to wait. Charles Ingalls has his area for homestead chosen, but he has to fill in a homestead claim. Otherwise a danger of someone coming before him is quite high. Mr Boast urges Charles Ingalls to fill in the claim as soon as possible because lots of people are coming to Dakota Territory.

"But I tell you, Ingalls, the whole country is moving west in the spring. All Iowa is coming, and we knew we must be ahead of the rush or some claim jumper would be on our homestead. So we came, weather or no weather. You should have filed on a homestead last fall. You'll have to rush it in the spring, or you'll find no land left."¹⁶³

Homestead claim was based upon Homestead Act of 1862. This act should have "encouraged western migration."¹⁶⁴ New settlers could have been assigned to 160 acres to land of the public domain for a small fee. However, they had to successfully cultivate and farm the land for five years. A homesteader had to be either a head of family or at least twenty-one years old. After meeting all these conditions, he or she obtained "a legal patent to the land."¹⁶⁵

Wilder explains Charles Ingalls' attitude to Homestead Act as a bet with the government. "Well, girls. I bet Uncle Sam fourteen dollars against a hundred and sixty acres of land, that we can make out to live on the claim for five years. Going to help me win the bet?"¹⁶⁶ Wilder highlights his attitude on several places in all books set in Dakota Territory. Farming successfully in different weather conditions from a pioneer's former home and having the time "only" of five

¹⁶¹ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 199.

¹⁶² Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 227.

¹⁶³ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 186.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Fink, "Homestead Act of 1862," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

¹⁶⁵ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 113.

¹⁶⁶ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 237.

years might have been challenging. Charles Ingalls' bet metaphor is thus apt because working on the homestead involved a complete focus and devotion with no guarantee. Moreover, Charles Ingalls also alludes to the fact that the whole family should be included in the farming toil. In addition, it is important to notice that Wilder does not deal in detail with the matters of her parents' property until *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. This reflects that Laura is no longer considered as a child but a young adult who is concerned about her family future and capable of reacting to more serious matters.

Although Charles Ingalls successfully fills a homestead claim, before he prepares everything for living there, he has to build a house in town. The reason for that is the surveyors have returned to their house and the Ingalls have to move out. Thus, for the first time, Wilder describes the experience of the Ingalls living in town. She devotes several passages for describing a new arising town, which serves as a perfect authentic image of a frontier life.

Through the frames of buildings that did not have the siding on yet, and down alleys between the buildings, and beyond both ends of the street, the clean, green prairie rippled far away and quiet under the clear sky, but the town was troubled and noisy with rasping saws and pounding hammers and the thud of boxes and sharp crash of boards unloaded from wagons, and men loudly talking.¹⁶⁷

From this excerpt, it can be noticed that Laura does not appreciate a new town. Wilder uses adjectives like "troubled", "noisy", or "sharp", evoking the town rush which Laura is not used to. It has been also for the first time when she does not feel safe in their new home. Wilder does not describe this house as a snug one when they move in.

The lamplight shone on the white curtain while they ate, but the end of the long room was shadowy and the chilly air coming through all the cracks made the lamp flicker and the curtain move. There was too much empty space in that building but all the time Laura felt that strangers were close outside it.¹⁶⁸

Wilder specifically mentions several times that Laura has not felt comfortable in the town at first. "Even when the night was still, she felt crowded by so many other people so near."¹⁶⁹ To clarify Laura's first impressions, owing to railroad which started functioning in De Smet, the population in 1880 grew from 50 to 300 within one month.¹⁷⁰ Although some of these people

¹⁶⁷ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. 248.

¹⁶⁸ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 249.

¹⁶⁹ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 249.

¹⁷⁰ Constance Potter, "De Smet, Dakota Territory, Little Town in the National Archives, Part 2," Prologue 35, no. 4 (Winter 2003) <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2003/winter/little-town-in-nara-2.html>.

might have lived on their homesteads and not in the “centre” of De Smet, Laura’s emotions might be understandable. For a girl who used to be surrounded by her family most of the time could be such change quite stressful.

Yet, they very soon move to their claim. The reason for their fast moving is a claim jumper who kills an owner of one claim, Mr Hunter.

“When they [Mr Hunter and his father] drove up to his claim shanty, a man opened the door and looked at them. Hunter asked him what he was doing there, and he shot Hunter dead.”¹⁷¹

This event is one of a few tragic, “wild west” like stories depicted by Wilder, which corresponds with a common but false assumption that the American West was a dangerous place.¹⁷² Although a very restricted space is devoted to this event, it slightly deviates Wilder’s otherwise quite serene depiction of the frontier life.

Charles Ingalls builds a claim shanty for his family but does not have time to finish it because he expects they would stay in town longer.

“There it is!” he said. The little claim shanty stood bright in its newness in the sunlight. It looked like a yellow toy on the great rolling prairie covered with rippling young grass. Ma laughed at it when Pa helped her from the wagon. “It looks like half of a woodshed that has been split in two.”

“You are wrong, Caroline,” Pa told her. It is a little house only half built, and that half unfinished. We’ll finish it now and build the other half soon.”¹⁷³

Despite an unfortunate event and quick moving, the usage of words describing their new home is more favourable than above descriptions of a building in town. Wilder calls a claim shanty a “toy”, highlighting its small size, which Wilder might have preferred. She highlights that it does not matter if the house is small or big, the most important is that it feels like home. Bachelard mentions that “the humblest dwelling has beauty.”¹⁷⁴ This short quotation does not have to apply only to this claim shanty, but to all houses, cabins and shanties mentioned in the novels. The luxurious dwelling does not guarantee happiness, but its inhabitants do.

¹⁷¹ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 257.

¹⁷² Thomas J. DiLorenzo, “The Culture of Violence in the American West: Myth versus Reality,” *The Independent Review: A Journal of Political Economy*, 15, no. 2, (Fall 2010) <http://www.independent.org/publications/tir/article.asp?id=803>.

¹⁷³ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 263.

¹⁷⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1.

Wilder concentrates the following chapters of *By the Shores of Silver Lake* on the living on the homestead claim. From her descriptions, it is obvious Laura is enjoying living in the countryside much more than living in town. After settling down in their claim shanty and finishing their moving, the family rests in front of their new small home and Wilder makes Laura's attitude clear: "A little wind was whispering. The darkness was velvety soft and quiet and safe. All over the huge sky the stars were twinkling merrily."¹⁷⁵ Regarding they have no neighbours close to them, it might be surprising for today's point of view to feel "safe" on the open unsettled prairie with the knowledge of a murder which has been committed nearby recently. However, Wilder keeps her characteristic mood and lets her characters enjoy their new life in the new country. With these tools she highlights an importance of keeping a pioneer's persistence.

A claim shanty is transferred into a house the next year because it is necessary to break sod, take care of new fields and the garden. "Now that the corn was planted, Pa built the missing half of the claim shanty."¹⁷⁶

Thanks to its closeness to town, as the Ingalls' homestead is only one mile far, and winter seasons spent in the Ingalls' town building, Wilder describes totally different experience of her family in Dakota Territory than she does in Wisconsin, Kansas or Minnesota. The real Ingalls not only belonged to the town community, they also significantly formed it. "The first religious service in the settlement of De Smet was held in the home of Charles P. Ingalls on February 29, 1880."¹⁷⁷ This service was held before the first church was built and Wilder describes it in *By the Shores of Silver Lake*.

Pa played the fiddle, and they all sang a hymn. Reverend Stuart, with Ma's receipts in his pocket, made a short prayer for guidance in all their worthy endeavors. Then Reverend Alden preached the sermon.¹⁷⁸

Church going was very important for pioneers, and beside the religious reasons "the church served as a social and community centre, providing a safe gathering place and activities to people isolated on farms."¹⁷⁹ The first De Smet church was built in 1882 and finance for its construction "was raised through contributions and pledges."¹⁸⁰ Pa and Ma participate in the

¹⁷⁵ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 264.

¹⁷⁶ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 16.

¹⁷⁷ "The Church That Pa Built," De Smet Alliance Church, last modified September 29, 2013, <http://desmetalliancechurch.com/about-us/the-church-that-pa-built/>.

¹⁷⁸ Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 222.

¹⁷⁹ Douglas R. Hurt, *Nathan Boone and the American Frontier* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 55, https://books.google.cz/books?id=8dVr6yoel3oC&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s

¹⁸⁰ De Smet Alliance Church, "The Church That Pa Built."

whole process: “One evening Pa and Ma walked to town to help organize a church, and soon a foundation was laid for a church building.”¹⁸¹ The real Charles Ingalls participated in construction works as a skilful carpenter,¹⁸² which Wilder briefly mentions in *Little Town on Prairie*. “There were not carpenters enough to do all the building that was wanted, so Pa got carpenter work to do.”¹⁸³

Another important community involvement of the Ingalls is in De Smet schooling. The real Charles Ingalls was “a member of the original De Smet school board, which was organized in July 1880.”¹⁸⁴ Wilder mentions the fictional Charles Ingalls’ involvement several times because one of Laura’s teachers (in fact Wilder’s sister-in-law, Eliza Wilder) bullies Laura due to her father. Eliza Wilder complains to Charles Ingalls: “It is Laura Ingalls who makes all the trouble in this school. She thinks she can run the school because her father is on the school board. Yes, Mr Ingalls, that is the truth. She he brags that she can run this school.”¹⁸⁵ This suggests that Laura has been first time in trouble because her father has an advanced position. Laura is partially innocent since it is just a revenge of her lifetime enemy Nellie Oleson who envies Laura that Laura’s father has a better position in town than her own father. Nevertheless, thanks to that, a reader has an opportunity to investigate school board functioning and witness that a human envy of someone’s success existed also on the American frontier.

Yet, Laura’s school experience is overall depicted as a happy and beneficial one. Wilder describes her fictional counterpart as a hardworking, deliberate young woman. “Every evening after supper she studied till bedtime.”¹⁸⁶ Laura constantly fights with her own laziness, but she successfully overcomes it and even earns a teacher’s certificate. Wilder’s concern in education is one of the crucial parts of Laura’s story. Despite Wilder’s autobiographical purpose to depict her studying career, it proves that education was important even in the middle of prairie and studying is worthy under all circumstances.

Wilder also devotes several chapters in her books set in De Smet to some of the social events. For example, a spelling competition, signing school or sociable are organized by the town community. Laura has experienced these events for the first time in her life. To comment on one of them, a spelling competition takes place in a De Smet school building. Wilder portrays

¹⁸¹ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, (New York: Harper Trophy, 1971), 27.

¹⁸² De Smet Alliance Church, “The Church That Pa Built.”

¹⁸³ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 27.

¹⁸⁴ Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 246n49.

¹⁸⁵ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 179.

¹⁸⁶ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 147.

it as a break from the Ingalls' daily routine. At the beginning of the chapter, which deals with this competition, Laura is "tired of everything"¹⁸⁷ and she wants "something to happen."¹⁸⁸ Her desire is fulfilled and people from town are called to gather in the school.

The words grew longer. More and more spellers went down. First Gerald Fuller's side was shorter, then Pa's, then Gerald Fuller's again. Everyone grew warm from laughter and excitement. Laura was in her element. She loved to spell.¹⁸⁹

The spelling competitions were often held on the American frontier to provide people with a social event. In addition, "the ability to spell correctly was a status symbol."¹⁹⁰ Wilder describes this event as a jolly one, full of excitement.

To follow a certain pattern of settling down was highly important for the pioneers. They had to sort out their priorities and constantly think about the necessity to be self-reliant and independent. As Wilder shows in her novels, it was upon the pioneers how comfortable life they lived. Furthermore, their goal was to belong to the community because the involvement in it was necessary. Belonging to the community meant to be able to participate in town decision processes, and they could occasionally participate in entertaining activities.

5.4. Family and Gender Roles

The reason for the family being a central theme for the *LHS* might be simple. As Barlett states: "The family was of special importance in the new country, for it was the one social structure that provided stability."¹⁹¹

Wilder's depiction of her family is quite idealistic and shows the stability that was needed on the American frontier. Despite Laura's struggles with her sister Mary at a younger age because of Mary's perfect look and behaviour, Wilder shows an image of a frontier family in which its members respect each other and communicate openly. Wilder frequently describes situations in which children obey their parents without any efforts of back talk. An example of a pioneers'

¹⁸⁷ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 212.

¹⁸⁸ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 212.

¹⁸⁹ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 217

¹⁹⁰ James Maguire, *American Bee: The National Spelling Bee and the Culture of Word Nerds* (USA: Rodale Books, 2006), Part 2,

https://books.google.cz/books?id=iP1Pfv55Qr0C&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁹¹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 363.

way of raising children is when Laura slaps Mary's face because Mary has been boasting with her blond hair. Laura's father sees it.

"You remember," Pa said, "I told you girls you must never strike each other."

Laura began. "But Mary said..."

"That makes no difference," said Pa. "It is what I say that you must mind."

Then he took down a strap from the wall, and he whipped Laura with the strap.¹⁹²

Although Laura is physically punished – this type of punishment is described only once in all of Wilder's books – her father soon reconciles with her and Laura has an opportunity to explain herself.

At last, when it was getting darker, Pa said again, "Come here, Laura." His voice was kind, and when Laura came he took her on his knee and hugged her close. She sat in the crook of his arm, her head against his shoulder and his long brown whiskers partly covering her eyes, and everything was all right again.

She told Pa all about it, and she asked him, "You don't like golden hair better than brown, do you?"

Pa's blue eyes shone down at her and he said, "Well, Laura, my hair is brown."¹⁹³

In this scene, Wilder shows a strict way of raising children, however, with parents favouring a communicative approach. Laura's father is interested in her motives of naughty behaviour to her sister and thanks to that he calms down his little daughter explaining that having brown hair is as good as having blond hair. In the next example, Caroline Ingalls similarly communicates with Laura to indicate she sympathises with her. This event happens in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, in which Laura has to give up her child doll and gave it to a daughter of their neighbours. Laura is around eight years old in this novel and her mother feels she is too old to incline to one doll. "I'm sorry, Laura," Ma said that night. "I wouldn't have given your doll away if I'd known you care so much. But we must not think only of ourselves. Think how happy you've made Anna."¹⁹⁴ Laura's parents are not afraid of admitting a mistake and always try to see a profit in every situation. Thus, the respect among children and parents is mutual.

¹⁹² Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 183 – 184.

¹⁹³ Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 184 – 185.

¹⁹⁴ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 232 – 233.

A birth of children on the American frontier was always welcomed because children served as the base of newly becoming country. According to Barlett, “the people knew that America was sparsely populated, that it [family] could provide sustenance for many millions more.”¹⁹⁵ Moreover, children were soon involved in the house chores, “by age four they could carry a bucket and collect the eggs from the nests of the hens in the barn; they learned to plant and weed and harvest, to milk cows and slaughter a few pigs after the first frost.”¹⁹⁶ Wilder herself had three sisters and all of them are depicted as their parents’ helpers. Laura and her sister Mary help their mother from their very young age. Wilder describes them doing house chores in the very first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, in which Mary is around six years old and Laura around five. “Every morning there were dishes to wipe. Mary wiped more of them than Laura because she was bigger, but Laura always wiped carefully her own little cup and plate.”¹⁹⁷ In *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, when Laura is eight and Mary nine, they are even let alone to manage the house whilst their parents are gone to town. They are tasked to maintain their mother’s routine such as doing morning chores. “Then Laura swept the floor while Mary cleared the table. Mary washed the dishes and Laura wiped them and put them in the cupboard. They put the red-checked cloth on the table. Now the whole long afternoon was before them and they could do as they pleased.”¹⁹⁸ After doing the morning chores, they still have time to play. They cannot decide what to do when Laura suggests they could play keeping house. Mary replies: “We are keeping house. What is the use of playing it?”¹⁹⁹ This situation nicely shows that pioneer children were disciplined enough to do morning chores but still they did not lose their playfulness.

Unsurprisingly, the American frontier was mainly masculine. The masculinity of the frontier and a natural patriarchal arrangement evolved from the “initial stages of the westward advance the exploration of the new country,”²⁰⁰ which was done by men. Furthermore, hunting, slaughtering or building shelters, the crucial activities for surviving in initial stages of settlement, were also male tasks.²⁰¹

Wilder portrays Charles Ingalls as a head of family whose children obey him but who is always interested in opinions of his wife. For example, he includes Caroline Ingalls into the decision

¹⁹⁵ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 361.

¹⁹⁶ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 362.

¹⁹⁷ Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, 28 – 29.

¹⁹⁸ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 284.

¹⁹⁹ Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 284.

²⁰⁰ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 343.

²⁰¹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 344.

process whether to stay in a surveyor's house during the first De Smet winter or not: "How'd you like to stay here all winter, Caroline?"²⁰²

In addition, Wilder depicts him as a hardworking homesteader who is trying his best to provide for his family. She occasionally mentions that a homesteader had an unsecure income and if no temporary job was available in the town, his family had no income at all. An irregular income was a struggle, especially, when someone of the family wanted to please themselves. For example, Laura wants to buy the name cards, a trend which has spread among frontier children, and she realises her father will not be able to give her money for them.

Mary Power's [Laura's friend and schoolmate] father was the tailor and he could work all winter, but now there was no carpentering work in town and would be none till spring. Pa had five to feed at home, and Mary to keep in college. It was folly even to think of spending twenty-five cents for mere pleasure.²⁰³

Eventually, Laura's father gives her a needed amount of money for the name cards. Laura, being self-aware of their situation, doubts her father's decision: "Do you really think I ought to [buy them]? Can we afford it?"²⁰⁴ Even in this situation, in which Laura means it well for her family, her mother reminds her to always obey her father: "Laura!" Ma said. She meant, "Are you questioning you're your Pa does?"²⁰⁵ However, Laura's worries about their family's financial situation are legitimate. Wilder occasionally depicts Charles Ingalls' hardship caused by poor finances. "He [Pa] was cutting the oats and wheat again, with the old cradle. A harvester cost more money than he had, and he would not go in debt for one."²⁰⁶

The only person who can help financially to the family is Laura herself. Her sisters Carrie and Grace are too young, and her older sister Mary is blind. Therefore, Laura realizes that her duty is to help, even though she is not forced to it by her parents. She starts occasionally earning money in her teenage years. She uses her sewing skills when sporadically helping to few dressmakers. Wilder depicts Laura's joy over her first wages.

"I don't like to take all your money, Laura," Ma said once. "It does seem that you should keep some for yourself."

"Why, Ma, what for?" Laura asked. "I don't need anything."

²⁰² Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 133.

²⁰³ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 191.

²⁰⁴ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 196.

²⁰⁵ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 196.

²⁰⁶ Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, 197.

Her shoes were still good; she had stockings and underwear and her calico dress was almost new. All the week, she looked forward to the pleasure of bringing home her wages to Ma.²⁰⁷

Wilder shows Laura's self-awareness about her parents' financial situation and incredible generosity and humbleness. Although it is a question whether real Laura Ingalls Wilder would have had been so tolerant to her mother taking all her earnings, Wilder shows the way how it should be done. That is, the children should feel obliged to their parents.

Laura is even happier when she can help financially more after starting working as a teacher. According to Myres "aside from the arts, teaching was about the only profession open to respectable women in the nineteenth century."²⁰⁸ Laura receives her first teaching certificate at the age of 15 and since then she teaches several terms of school irregularly until she gets married to Almanzo Wilder.

Nevertheless, the most important job of all, which women had to perform, was housekeeping. According to Myres, women's responsibility was to keep the house and make it "homelike," raise children and provide their family with good and nutritious meals. However, on the contrary to the home back East, living on the American frontier required prompt adaptation to different types of dwellings, sometimes temporary ones like dugouts, and poor living conditions. According to Myres, "just as men struggled to learn new farming techniques and modified existing economic institutions to meet new conditions, women had to devise new domestic techniques to meet challenges of frontier living."²⁰⁹ Caroline Ingalls is successful in turning all their dwellings into their homes, as described in 5.3. Moreover, she constantly tries to evolve new ways in which she runs the household or improves her cooking skills. For instance, it occurs to her that she could make a green pumpkin pie instead of an apple pie because the apples are not available. "Laura said, "A green pumpkin pie? I never heard of such a thing, Ma." "Neither did I," said Ma. "But we wouldn't do much if we didn't do things that nobody ever heard of before."²¹⁰ Caroline Ingalls shows she is open to the innovations a frontier life is offering and thanks to that a necessary progress can be made.

²⁰⁷ Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 48.

²⁰⁸ Sandra L Myres, *Westering women and the frontier experience 1800 – 1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989), 248, https://books.google.cz/books?id=vN22pP4-gpAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁰⁹ Myres, *Westering women and the frontier experience 1800 – 1915*, 146.

²¹⁰ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *The Long Winter* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1971), 31-32.

Caroline Ingalls and her daughters make the green pumpkin pie as a surprise dessert for Charles Ingalls after dinner. He cannot recognize the fillings of the pie and he thinks apples are in it. When he finds out the truth, he appreciates his wife's cooking: "I'd never have guessed it," he said. "Ma always could beat the nation cooking."²¹¹ Wilder shows the appreciation that men felt to women work. Myres deals with different views on this issue as she discusses that "recently feminist historians have emphasized the drudgery of frontier wives, particularly on the farms, and the failure of men to appreciate women's efforts." However, Myres also contradicts that according to authentic women's diaries from those times, "in many families women's work was respected."²¹² The respect is what Wilder shows between a frontier man and woman.

In contrast, when Laura is teaching her first school, she is temporarily staying at the family who is much different from her own. Wilder shows a dark side of a frontier woman, who is a total opposite of Laura's optimistic, caring and hardworking mother. The depiction of Mrs Brewster might be regarded as a denial of Wilder completely idealizing a frontier experience. Mrs Brewster keeps arguing with her husband every evening whilst Laura is staying at their place: "Mrs Brewster was quarrelling now about the flat country and the wind and the cold; she wanted to go back east."²¹³ Mrs Brewster's desire "to go back east" escalates with threatening her husband to harm him or Laura with the knife.

"If I can't go home one way, I can another," said Mrs Brewster.

"Go put that knife back," said Mr Brewster. He lay still but tensed to spring.

"You'll catch your death of cold," he said. "I won't go over that again, this time of night. I've got you and Johnny to support, and nothing in the world but this claim. Go put up that knife and come to bed before you freeze."²¹⁴

Although Wilder does not specify a real cause of Mrs Brewster's behaviour, it might be suggested that Mrs Brewster has felt lonely because their settlement is several miles far from De Smet. Myres addresses this problem with this explanation: "Certainly loneliness and isolation were a part of life on some frontiers. In the first days of settlement, homes were scattered, neighbours often miles away. Women, tied to home and hearth by a variety of tasks, often found themselves tired and lonely."²¹⁵ Therefore, Mrs Brewster's probable depression

²¹¹ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 36.

²¹² Myres, *Westering women and the frontier experience 1800 – 1915*, 164.

²¹³ Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, 23.

²¹⁴ Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, 66.

²¹⁵ Myres, *Westering women and the frontier experience 1800 – 1915*, 167.

and loneliness might be understandable and legitimate. Unfortunately, Wilder does not develop the Brewsters' story further, but it is definitely significant that she has mentioned the dark side of a pioneer's character.

Nevertheless, when depicting her own family Wilder concentrates on the mutual support and respect among the family members to show that a well-ordered family was a crucial way of surviving on the American frontier. In addition, her family's portrayal stands as one of the reasons for making her novels so exceptional. Thanks to that her novels radiate the feeling of solidarity, safety and true love, which is something people need in every period.

5.5. Hard Winter and Native Americans

Although the *LHS* was initially written for children and young adults and Wilder's overall mood of her storytelling is optimistic, she included several dangerous and sometimes even potentially life-threatening situations in her books. Two of most developed potentially dangerous issues are connected to the influences of difficult weather, and pioneers' fear of Native Americans.

If a pioneer travelled and moved from one place to another, a great likelihood of encountering severe weather conditions was relevant. Wilder's own focus was mainly on the difficult weather conditions in winter. She devotes the whole book, *The Long Winter*, for describing the danger brought by the severe weather conditions. This novel is specifically set in 1880-81 and the time and events correspond with so called the Hard Winter of 1880-81 in Dakota Territory.²¹⁶ The Hard Winter begun with a blizzard in October 1880 "and never succeeded in severity, in the history of Dakota or northwest." The chapter "October Blizzard"²¹⁷ describes the experience of Ingalls. "The shanty was growing colder. The stove could not warm the air inside the thin walls. There was nothing to do but sit huddled in coats and shawls, close to the stove."²¹⁸ The fictional Ingalls still live in their claim shanty and have not moved into the house in town which has thicker walls. They are unprepared for such an unpleasant weather and still expect Indian summer to come as Caroline Ingalls proclaims: "We'll likely have nice warm weather now. It's beginning to warm up a little already."²¹⁹

²¹⁶ "Dakota Territory History - 1880-1881," USGenWeb Archives, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/sd/history/robinson/liii.txt>.

²¹⁷ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 37 – 44.

²¹⁸ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 39.

²¹⁹ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 52.

However, soon after that the family moves to town anyway. They are fortunate to decide this way because their building in town is more suitable for the winter. Furthermore, soon after that Wilder describes another severe blizzard. This one catches Laura and Carrie at school. Unfortunately, the school house is unprepared for such conditions: “There was only a little fuel at the schoolhouse.”²²⁰ Laura’s teacher does not know if they should stay inside and try surviving the blizzard or embark on a journey home. “Miss Garland was thinking and biting her lip. She could not decide to dismiss school because of a storm, but this storm frightened her.”²²¹ Her irresolution is understandable as “rural school teachers often had frightening decisions to make when blizzards struck without warning during the school day.”²²² The danger of children getting lost and froze to death was very topical during blizzards because the orientation during snowstorm in the town on the open prairie was tremendously demanding. Wilder describes this feeling vividly in the following excerpt dealing with their way home from the schoolhouse which is directed by the teacher and one homesteader.

Laura felt that they were going in the wrong direction. She did not know why she felt so. No one could see anything. There was nothing to go by – no sun, no sky, no direction in the winds blowing fiercely from all directions. There was nothing but the dizzy whirling and the cold.²²³

Fortunately, they all successfully arrive home. This blizzard is only one of many coming. The snow storms came very often during the Hard Winter.²²⁴ Consequently, coal and food supplies were almost exhausted due to the complete separation from the supplying towns. “Many lines train service became utterly impracticable”²²⁵ because trains “remained snowbound on the tracks, buried in drifts.”²²⁶ Shovelling the snow away did not help because the new snow was shovelled off on the old one and trains remained in deep drifts.²²⁷ Wilder depicts this state in a very authentic way. The Ingalls family starts to get into a very frustrating and desperate position. Laura understands the situation well and even though she participates in the family’s entertainment – Pa’s playing the fiddle and Laura signing with her sisters – she realizes they have occurred at the edge of starvation.

Laura hoped that she seemed cheerful enough to encourage the others. But all the time she knew that this storm had blocked the train again. She knew

²²⁰ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 85.

²²¹ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 85.

²²² Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 207n15.

²²³ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 89.

²²⁴ “Dakota Territory History - 1880-1881,” USGenWeb Archives.

²²⁵ “Dakota Territory History - 1880-1881,” USGenWeb Archives.

²²⁶ Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 209n19.

²²⁷ “Dakota Territory History - 1880-1881,” USGenWeb Archives.

that almost all the coal was gone from the pile in the lean-to. There was no more coal in town. The kerosene was low in the lamp though Ma lighted it only while they ate supper. There would be no meat until the train came. There was no butter and only a little fatmeat dripping was left to spread on bread. There were still potatoes, but no more than flour enough for one more bread baking.²²⁸

Due to the lack of coal, many families started to burn hay²²⁹ which had to be made into a twist. Laura starts helping her father to twist hay. In addition, the supplies of flour were insufficient on prairie towns. Nevertheless, from time to time, a word might have spread that a random homesteader had some wheat hidden for spring planting. If this wheat was found, then it had to be grinded in coffee mills.²³⁰ Wilder has mentioned several times in the novel that the flour supplies are scarce. The wheat in abundance in Wilder's novel is kept at her future husband's home. Almanzo Wilder has hidden the wheat in the walls of his and his brother's store building because he wants to plant it the next year. However, he understands the Ingalls family will die of starvation if he does not help them. Then the days in the Ingalls' home are filled with twisting hay and grinding wheat in a coffee mill to make bread.

A dark twilight filled the kitchen and the lean-to. Mary and Carrie took turns at the coffee mill that must never stop grinding. Ma made the bread and swept and cleaned and fed the fire. In the lean-to Laura and Pa twisted hay till their cold hands could not hold the hay to twist it and must be warmed at the stove.²³¹

For the first time Wilder lets her father's fictional counterpart be less optimistic than in her other novels. Due to twisting the hay, his finger tops are cracked, and he cannot play the fiddle – the only joy and fun that can be brought to his family during this long winter. “In all the hard times before, Pa had made music for them all. Now no one could make music for him.”²³² Therefore, it is no wonder he loses his temper and dares the blizzard as it would be alive: “Then suddenly he shook his clenched fist at the northwest. “Howl! Blast you! Howl!” he shouted. “We're all here safe! You can't get us! You've tried all winter, but we'll beat you yet! We'll be right here when spring comes!”²³³ The Hard Winter becomes desperate and frustrating for all, not only for Charles Ingalls. Thus, such situation requires a very much necessary saving act which would save De Smet inhabitants from starving. Almanzo Wilder and Cap Garland leave

²²⁸ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 162.

²²⁹ “Dakota Territory History - 1880-1881,” USGenWeb Archives.

²³⁰ “Dakota Territory History - 1880-1881,” USGenWeb Archives.

²³¹ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 226.

²³² Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 288.

²³³ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 287.

to search for the wheat that one homesteader “raised south of town.”²³⁴ Wilder describes their long and enduring search in detail. This excerpt shows an enormous effort Almanzo and Cap have to devote to the act.

“How far are we going?” Cap shouted.

“Till we find that wheat!” Almanzo called back. But he, too, was wondering whether there was any wheat in the endless emptiness. The sun was in the zenith now, the day half gone. There was still no threat in the north-western sky, but it would be unusual to have more than this one clear day between blizzards.

Almanzo knew they should turn back toward town. Numb from cold, he stumbled off the sled and ran on beside it. He did not want to go back to the hungry town and say he had turned back with an empty sled.²³⁵

Considering today’s perception, Almanzo and Cap’s deed is very courageous. Due to the unstable weather and frequent blizzards on the open prairie, they expose themselves to the danger of getting lost and freeze to death. However, neither Almanzo nor Cap felt like heroes in real life, according to Wilder. Hill mentions Wilder and her daughter’s correspondence in which Wilder commented on her husband’s heroic deed transforming it into an ordinary one: “Living with danger day after day people become accustomed to it. They take things as they come without much thought about it and no fuss, in a casual way.”²³⁶ Wilder generalizes this issue but the truth is, that during such harsh conditions either someone tried their luck or let all the people of town starved to death.

The patience and staying together were core pioneer’s qualities in those times. Eventually, after long seven months, the Ingalls family can welcome the spring and Wilder describes the happiness it brings. “She [Laura] could hardly believe that the winter was gone, that spring had come.”²³⁷ According to Hill *The Long Winter* is “the strongest, most powerful and cohesive.”²³⁸ Wilder succeeded in creating a very vivid picture of the pioneers who tried to survive the long period of cold and blizzards.

A very different kind of potential danger for pioneers was a possibility of encountering the Native Americans. Most of migrants felt threatened by them because a common misconception

²³⁴ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 249.

²³⁵ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 271 – 272.

²³⁶ Wilder, Hill, ed. *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, 222n46.

²³⁷ Wilder, *The Long Winter*, 312.

²³⁸ Hill, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer’s Life*, 6.

was widely spread around the frontier. Barlett describes the reason for this misconception very clearly:

The folklore of American history has created a stock setting of the stalwart pioneer with a wife and children, from nursing babe to teenager, hacking out a home from the wilderness. The cabin is crude, perhaps a tiny log house eighteen feet by thirty, a chimney at one end, a single two-foot-square window, and a crude wooden door. The stealthy enemy creep up on these innocent, peaceful, God-fearing Christian people and commit horrible crimes. Then, their savage and bloody deeds accomplished, they disappear again into the darkness of the primeval forest.²³⁹

Barlett also adds that these events, although rare, might have happened only on the very edge of frontier where encountering the Native Americans could have been common due to their camps nearby. In addition, the only circumstance under which pioneers could be in danger of getting harmed by Native Americans was, when the pioneers “had chosen to settle on Indian lands.” In such case, the pioneers were deliberately “committing an illegal act.”²⁴⁰ Therefore, Wilder depicts quite a traditionalistic frontier picture of Native Americans in *Little House on the Prairie*.

The first visit of Osage tribe members at the Ingalls home includes eating cornbread and taking all tobacco Charles Ingalls has at home. The Native Americans visit when Charles Ingalls is outside hunting and Caroline Ingalls is at home alone with her daughters. When they leave, they all feel relieved. “Then Ma sat down on the bed and hugged Laura and Mary tighter, and trembled. She looked sick.”²⁴¹ Charles Ingalls praises Caroline for her non-rejecting behaviour to the Osage. “You did the right thing, Pa told her. “We don’t want to make enemies of any Indians.”²⁴² This event in the novel perfectly shows frontier people’s fears of Native Americans. In this case, the caused crimes include only stealing. But it is possible that Caroline Ingalls’ reasonable behaviour saves the family from a major harm. However, it is clear that her expectations of how Native Americans could act might be different. Wilder might have hinted when describing this event that real Caroline Ingalls could have been well aware of her family staying illegally in Indian Territory.

Despite of the unfortunate location of the Ingalls settlement, they also have a pleasant visit of a Native American who Wilder calls “Tall Indian.” “Then Pa squatted down by the Indian, and

²³⁹ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 16.

²⁴⁰ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 17.

²⁴¹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 141.

²⁴² Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 143.

they sat there, friendly but not saying a word, while Ma finished cooking dinner.”²⁴³ Charles Ingalls even smokes an improvised peace pipe with this Tall Indian: “They filled their pipes, and they lighted the tobacco with coals from the fire, and they silently smoked until the pipes were empty.”²⁴⁴

Even though, the visit is a friendly one, Wilder’s mother is not convinced about blamelessness of Native Americans: “Let Indians keep themselves to themselves,” said Ma, “and we will do the same. I don’t like Indians around underfoot.”²⁴⁵ On the contrary, Charles Ingalls has a total opposite and quite reasonable attitude to this situation: “Their camps down among the bluffs are peaceable enough. If we treat them well and watch Jack, we won’t have any trouble.”²⁴⁶ He continues in this approach even when Jack is almost shot by one Native American. Jack is growling and standing on the Indian trail, hinting he wants to attack him and his horse. Charles Ingalls withdraws Jack from the trail and comments on the event with these words: “Well, it’s his path. An Indian trail, long before we came.”²⁴⁷

In contrast to her husband’s respectful approach, Caroline Ingalls constantly shows her disapproval of Native Americans. She is openly claiming she does not like them and criticizes their lifestyle. For instance, in the sample in which Charles Ingalls suggests his wife to wash clothes in the creek like Native American women, Caroline Ingalls responds: “If we wanted to live like Indians, you could make a hole in the roof to let the smoke out, and we’d have the fire on the floor inside the house.”²⁴⁸ Interestingly, the disagreement over Native Americans is the only one depicted by Wilder that Caroline and Charles Ingalls have throughout all the novels.

On the other hand, Laura’s approach, is much different from her mother’s. Laura as a young child is amazed and fascinated by a Native American lifestyle. She becomes almost obsessed by the idea of seeing a papoose (a Native American baby) and when seeing him for the first time she wants to have him for herself. This baby is seated behind his mother on a pony during a massive ride on the Indian trail next to the Ingalls’ house.

“Pa,” she said, “get me that little Indian baby!”

“Hush, Laura!” Pa told her sternly.

²⁴³ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 228.

²⁴⁴ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 228-229.

²⁴⁵ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 229.

²⁴⁶ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 229-230.

²⁴⁷ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 230.

²⁴⁸ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 76.

The little baby was going by. Its head turned and its eyes kept looking into Laura's eyes.

"Oh, I want it! I want it!" Laura begged.²⁴⁹

Her hysteria graduates with crying and sorrow over losing a papoose. "The little Indian baby was gone. She knew she will never see it anymore."²⁵⁰ She explains her obsession to her parents with: "Its eyes are so black."²⁵¹ Despite the fact Laura is around seven years old in this novel, thus her unexplainable behaviour could be attached to her childish mind, Wilder might have hinted a certain mysticism and ethereality that surrounded the Native Americans. Young Laura is not affected by the government laws or American freedom to move westward. With her acting, she might have admitted a certain magic the Native Americans transmit which her parents do not admit.

The last opinion about Native Americans which Wilder has introduced in *Little House on the Prairie* is the most extreme one. It is proclaimed by one of the Ingalls' nearest neighbours, Mrs Scott.

She said, "Land knows, they'd never do anything with this country themselves. All they do is roam around over it like wild animals. Treaties or no treaties, the land belongs to folks that'll farm it. That's only common sense and justice." She did not know why the government made treaties with Indians. The only good Indian was a dead Indian. The very thought of Indians made her blood run cold. She said, "I can't forget the Minnesota massacre."²⁵²

First, Mrs Scott uses a proverb "The only good Indian was a dead Indian." This proverb has been used since 1860s and "fit the stereotypical world-view of three-quarters of the population of the United States in 19th century."²⁵³ As Mieder explains, "the word "dead" meaning both a literal death and, for those who survived the mass killings, a figurative death, that is a restricted life on the reservation with little freedom to continue the traditional lifestyle."²⁵⁴ Mrs Scott's hatred to the Native Americans could be attributed to the Minnesota massacre she mentions and in which her family was involved ("My Pa and my brothers went out with the rest of the settlers and stopped them only fifteen miles west of us."²⁵⁵). The Minnesota massacre happened on 18th

²⁴⁹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 308.

²⁵⁰ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 309.

²⁵¹ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 309.

²⁵² Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 211

²⁵³ Wolfgang Mieder, "The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Indian: History and Meaning of a Proverbial Stereotype," *The Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 419 (1993): 42, doi:10.2307/541345.

²⁵⁴ Mieder, "The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Indian: History and Meaning of a Proverbial Stereotype," 39.

²⁵⁵ Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 212.

August in 1862. Dakota Indians attacked isolated homesteads and killed more than 200 settlers. They took hostage more than 200 women and children.²⁵⁶ Again, even an extreme and for today's understanding racist perception, Mrs Scott's view might be understandable as it was influenced by the events which happened directly to her.

To sum it up, Wilder offers a wide range of different views on the Native Americans. The negative and racist views are often a result of common misconceptions about them. However, Charles Ingalls stands as an example of white settlers who tried to be unbiased and had a reasonable approach to the situation. Thus, together with Charles Ingalls' sober opinions and Laura's fascination by Native American culture, one cannot say Wilder's work is only one-sided and racist. Concerning the question of Native Americans, Wilder's novels perfectly reflect the mood in the American pioneer society. Although from today's point of view, some of the statements in the novels are racist, the authentic experience of pioneers stays relevant.

²⁵⁶ "War," The US Dakota War of 1862, accessed March 28, 2019, <http://usdakotawar.org/history/war>.

6. Comparison with The Birchbark House

The Birchbark House is strictly structured according to the seasons of the year. Erdrich names each section in her book according to the name of the season in English and Ojibwe language. The novel starts with summer and ends with spring. Ojibwe tribe was migratory and, in this way, Erdrich maps their year's cycle. In autumn they hunted for fur and in summer they lived near fishing areas.²⁵⁷ Even though Wilder does not divide her novels into such a strict order, most of her novels also consider the seasons of the year because they were essential for pioneer's self-reliant life regarding the winter's preparation or harvesting.

Erdrich describes Omakayas's family living in autumn and winter in a log cabin and in spring and summer living in the birchbark house:

All winter long Omakayas's family lived in a cabin of sweet-scented cedar at the edge of the village of La Pointe, on an island in Lake Superior that her people called Moningwanaykaning, Island of the Golden Breasted Woodpecker. As soon as the earth warmed, the birchbark house always took shape under Nokomis's [Omakayas's grandma] swift hands.²⁵⁸

The log cabin is built in the same style as the one pioneers lived in. "The cabin was made in the chimookoman [white man's] way. Deydey [Omakayas's father] was proud of its snug construction, with thick logs fitted together as closely as possible."²⁵⁹ Moving into the log cabin meant to be among other members of the tribe again: "It was exciting to live around other people again, and both of the girls wanted to find out if old friends had stayed to winter."²⁶⁰ Ojibwe people stayed near the town La Pointe where their village was built.²⁶¹ A similar tendency of being close to others during winter can be seen when the Ingalls live in De Smet and their claim shanty is not furnished with walls thick enough. They also move to spend the winter in town, so they would be nearer the shops and town supplies.

Nevertheless, before Omakayas's family move into the log cabin, necessary preparations have to be done, "the family worked hard to prepare as much food as possible for the winter."²⁶² Erdrich describes a cache the family dug in their log cabin in which they hide their winter

²⁵⁷ The Editors of Britannica. "Ojibwa," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified December 6, 2016.

²⁵⁸ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 6.

²⁵⁹ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 121.

²⁶⁰ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 109.

²⁶¹ „More Ojibwe History," Ojibwe, accessed March 28, 2019, http://www.ojibwe.org/home/pdf/More_Ojibwe_History_Summary.pdf.

²⁶² Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 99.

provisions. Omakayas's grandmother, Nokomis, then performs a praying ritual to bless the cache and ensures that they would not starve during the winter.

“We're very small,” she said, “just humans. Help us live this winter through. Come to us, especially, during the harshest moons, the Crust on The Snow Moon, when so often meat is scarce, when the ice is too thick to catch many fish, when disease breaks us and the windigo spirit, the Hungry One, comes stalking from house to Anishinabe house. Oh, daga, wedookaow Anishinabeg. Wedookaow Anishinabeg,” she asked.²⁶³

The Ojibwe fear of starving is transformed into the Windigo spirit who is usually depicted as a giant built of ice. This monster is often connected with the starvation and winter.²⁶⁴ In contrast to the Ingalls, who although active church-goers, are not depicted as someone who would bless the winter provisions. However, Native Americans regarded their rituals as common precautions.

Consequently, the winter depicted in the novel is very difficult. The enthusiasm about the incoming spring is self-evident but quite poignant: “They would be able to think of something other than the next bite of food. They would live again, truly live.”²⁶⁵ In contrast to Laura's spring welcome in *The Long Winter* (see p. 58), Omakayas exhaustion after the winter is more obvious. Furthermore, Wilder did not let her characters starve, as Erdrich did. Wilder concentrates on her characters balancing on the edge between the scarcity of supplies and starvation, saving the desperate situation with a heroic deed showing that the pioneers always managed to take care of themselves. In contrast, Omakayas's family fails in this. “There was only enough cornmeal in the morning for a few mouthfuls of mush, only enough wild rice for a handful each during the day,”²⁶⁶ and “they could fish all day and not even come up with a skinny lake trout.”²⁶⁷ Omakayas's family cannot rely on anyone else who would have hidden supplies of wild rice as Almanzo Wilder hid his wheat. They are completely dependent on the fruits of nature.

In addition, the whole village suffers from an epidemic of smallpox during the winter described in the novel, which adds to the poor physical condition of the characters. Because of the disease, Omakayas's baby brother Neewo dies. From then on, Omakayas is fighting with the feeling that she could not become reconciled with his death. “She missed him terribly, so much so that

²⁶³ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 101-102.

²⁶⁴ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 244.

²⁶⁵ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 190.

²⁶⁶ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 162.

²⁶⁷ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 168.

her heart seemed to drop right through her stomach with a thud.”²⁶⁸ In contrast to Wilder, who did not mention her brother in the series at all (see chap. 4.), Erdrich includes the question of coping with death in the novel showing the real struggle of the period.

Furthermore, Omakayas’s sister Angelina, who is described as a beauty “so pretty people turned in their tracks to stare at her,”²⁶⁹ is also affected by smallpox. Angelina and Mary carry similar characteristics. As mentioned in 5.4., Laura struggles with her sister’s perfect appearance. Omakayas envies her sister in the same way: “She was so perfect that Omakayas despaired.”²⁷⁰ Both characters, Angelina and Mary, suffer from serious illnesses which has left tracks on them and eliminated their life options. Angelina’s face is irretrievably scarred due to disease. “The smallpox had left Angeline’s cheeks pitted with scars and slightly twisted Angeline’s perfect hunting bow of a dark mouth. The smallpox had thinned her face until her teeth stuck out.”²⁷¹ Mary gets blind after suffering scarlet fever, which leaves her dependent on her parents for the rest of her life. Furthermore, Omakayas could be considered the pretty one from the family, even though she has not really admitted it, and Laura becomes the responsible one as she “tried to be eyes for Mary.”²⁷² Moreover, Laura retakes the future of becoming a teacher from her sister. Angelina and Mary, Omakayas and Laura, thus occur in comparable life situations and Erdrich and Wilder depict an unpredictability of fate whether one was a Native American or a pioneer.

Moving to the birchbark house in spring meant building it each time again. Birch bark, as a material, was used by Ojibwe for building houses, which in the summer were “erected close to the lake to make access to fishing easier.”²⁷³ Erdrich, like Wilder, includes thorough description of building the house. However, in comparison to the *LHS*, this house is built only by women of the family.

Omakayas helped her grandmother carefully push the bark aside, then the two peeled it away strip by strip. She and Omakayas carried the light papery pink-brown rolls out of the woods, down a trail to a special place near the water. Here, they set up the birchbark house.²⁷⁴

Meanwhile, Mama and Omakayas’s older sister tied together a frame of bent willow poles. Finally, as the light faded, they fastened the mats of bark onto

²⁶⁸ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 200.

²⁶⁹ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 10.

²⁷⁰ Same

²⁷¹ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 157.

²⁷² Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 23.

²⁷³ Kurup, *Understanding Louise Erdrich*, chap. 5

²⁷⁴ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 8.

the willow frame, a half skeleton of pliable saplings. The bark mats overlapped like shingles, to shed the rain. Each one was secured to the next so as not to blow off in a storm. When the house was swept out, smoothed, fussily arranged, and admired, they moved in.²⁷⁵

The reason for women building the house might be that its construction was simple and did not require any male strength. The delicacy of birch bark demanded women's touch. Nevertheless, another Ojibwe women's tasks were to take care of household. They made clothes, farmed, prepared food and raised children, similarly as pioneer women.²⁷⁶ As Gonzalez summarizes, Ojibwa women took part in private life and men in public life.²⁷⁷

Erdrich presents Omakayas's father to be often absent: "Her father, her Deydey, was in the fur trade business, which meant that he was often gone, paddling the great canoes for the fur company or sometimes trapping animals himself."²⁷⁸ Native Americans were often hired for hunting jobs to improve their family's income.²⁷⁹

Concerning the role of father, a striking difference between Erdrich's and Wilder's work is present. Omakayas's father does not participate in his children's raising so straightforwardly as Charles Ingalls does due to his frequent absence. Furthermore, Erdrich describes an uncertainty and uneasiness when the father of family comes home.

The world changed when Father was home. Everyone had to be more careful and orderly. When Mama and Grandma were in charge, there was a way to do things, of course, and yet there was room to make mistakes. Mistakes were funny and could be fixed. With Omakayas's father, Mikwam, or Ice, everything had to be done exactly right.²⁸⁰

In contrast to Wilder's stable family environment, Erdrich introduces a paternal figure as someone who disbalances his family by his presence. However, still, the feature of the man protecting his family is important: "With Deydey home, things were more exciting, things were more difficult, things were less predictable but somehow more secure."²⁸¹ Thus, the natural patriarchal system as among the pioneers, describing a father as a provider and protector of the family, was set in a similar way. Contrastingly, Wilder describes a female part of family missing

²⁷⁵ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 9.

²⁷⁶ Penny Gonzalez, "Ojibwa Women and Marriage from Traditional to Modern Society," *Wicazo Sa Review* 8, no. 1 (1992): 31, doi:10.2307/1409361.

²⁷⁷ Gonzalez, 34.

²⁷⁸ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 9.

²⁷⁹ "Making Money." Indians of the Midwest. Accessed March 28, 2019.

<https://publications.newberry.org/indiansofthemidwest/indians-the-marketplace/commercial-activity/making-money/>

²⁸⁰ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 51.

²⁸¹ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 52.

Charles Ingalls on every occasion. For example, when he is gone because of work in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, they even make marks on the slate to countdown the days before he comes back. However, Erdrich points more on male's strong authority in connection to the protecting role.

Furthermore, a character of Omakayas's grandmother is crucial to her grandchildren upbringing, presenting another woman in the family except her mother. Nokomis helps with domestic responsibilities and tends to ritual and religious functions. The next woman, playing a major role in Omakayas's life, is Old Tallow. She lives alone because she has "driven off"²⁸² all of her three husbands. Additionally, she "loved to hunt and was very skilled, shared her catch with them when Deydey was gone."²⁸³ Erdrich shows that Native American women could participate in hunting as men did, substituting those who were not present. Additionally, this share of responsibilities, involving not only nuclear family but also the broader family and members of the tribe, reflects on the unity of Ojibwe. Their unity was "the fundamental essence of their life."²⁸⁴ Although Wilder occasionally mentions the neighbourly behaviour among inhabitants on the American frontier, the family was more closed unit, often wholly dependent on themselves.

Concerning Native American children participation in the house chores, the same demands were put on them as on the pioneer children. They were obliged to fulfil tasks from their parents. For example, Omakayas is supposed to tan the hide for the moccasins, which her father praises her for: "The skins you prepared for my makazins are very fine. From now on, I want you to prepare skins often for Mama and for me."²⁸⁵ Although Omakayas hates this work because of the smell and texture of the hides, she obeys her father. Nevertheless, the tasks were not restricted only to domestic responsibilities.

A process in which the whole family, including the broader one, took part, was extracting sap from sugar maple tree and making maple syrup and sugar. Maple syrup was one of the main means of support traded to Americans. For the family, it was also a salvation after a hard winter with smallpox since winter "was often a lean time" for Ojibwe.²⁸⁶ Similarly as in *Little House in the Big Woods*, in which Wilder also presents a chapter about producing maple sugar, "sugar making was a time of celebration." However, in contrast to the American pioneers who were

²⁸² Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 19.

²⁸³ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 20.

²⁸⁴ "More Ojibwe History," Ojibwe.

²⁸⁵ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 69.

²⁸⁶ "More Ojibwe History," Ojibwe.

not dependent on the maple sugar, maple sugar “provided a healthy source of energy” for Ojibwe people. Furthermore, maple sugar could be also traded with white settlers.²⁸⁷ “This was such a good sugaring year,” said Deydey, “we’ll be able to pay off most of our bill at the trader.”²⁸⁸ Although Erdrich describes Omakaya’s family as self-reliant Native Americans, Deydey’s expressing the necessity to pay off some debts to the white trader shows the dependence of Native Americans on the trade with the whites.

Another case of Omakayas’s family depicting their cooperation and openness to the white settlers was Angelina’s voluntary attendance in mission school.

Angeline went to the mission school every day now. She was learning to write her name in Zhaganashimowin, the white man’s language, and she taught Omakayas the things she learned.²⁸⁹

Mission schools were based upon the Indian Civilization Act. Teachers were sent to educate Native Americans to teach them “the habits and arts of civilization.”²⁹⁰ Although the school attendance is Angeline’s choice, her grandmother warns her not to be too enthusiastic about it.

“Take their ways if you need them,” she said, “but don’t forget your own. You are Anishinabe. Your mother and your grandmother are wolf clan people. Don’t forget. Also, you sweat-bath yourself clean every day, even jump in the freezing lake, a thing that the chimookomanug do not do. My girl, don’t become like them.”²⁹¹

Erdrich shows that Omakayas’s grandmother might have realized the Americans’ motives as the mission schools’ task was also to spread the idea of what advantages the cooperation with the American government might bring to Native Americans.²⁹²

Furthermore, the question of westward expansion was a topical among the tribe members. Erdrich describes tribal members careful following of the current situation:

It seemed to Omakayas that every time the grownups began to talk, they discussed travel routes west. They argued whether the pressure of so many

²⁸⁷ “American Indian Maple Syrup Harvesting Tradition,” Ziibiwing’s Blog, last modified April 2, 2011, <https://ziibiwing.wordpress.com/2010/04/02/american-indian-maple-syrup-harvesting-tradition/>.

²⁸⁸ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 216.

²⁸⁹ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 190.

²⁹⁰ Jon Reyhner, Jeanne M. Oyawin Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*. (USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 43, https://books.google.cz/books?id=9ZbcrB2cPp4C&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁹¹ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 110.

²⁹² Reyhner, Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, 43.

newcomers was going to send them the way so many others were sent, into the territory of the Bwaanug, the Dakota. There was now constant talk of government intentions, plans to meet in council, invitations to smoke the pipe.²⁹³

Consequently, one of the members points out the cupidity of white Americans:

“Not until they have it all,” said Fishtail. “All of our lands. Our wild-rice bed, hunting grounds, fishing streams, gardens. Not even when we are gone, and they have the bones of our loved ones will they be pleased. I have thought about this.”²⁹⁴

His point of view summarises the situation of Native Americans and white Americans. Since the Native Americans, according to Barlett, “had a primitive sense of land ownership” they understood the landscape as their place of residing, hunting, growing up and using the fruits of nature. Thus, the American style of conquering and then a need to own the land was incomprehensible to them.²⁹⁵

Erdrich shows the Native American’s awareness of the situation. In comparison, Wilder only mildly describes the Native American’s issue. Her problem description is only superficial, adjusted to children readers. Furthermore, Caroline and Charles Ingalls take for granted that the land belongs to the government and is opened to white settlers. Wilder describes them as not very well informed about the current situation. On the other hand, Erdrich hints that her characters discuss quite detailed information about the white settlers’ intentions.

Concerning the depiction of Native American culture, Wilder uses only few hints based on the stereotypes and common prejudices of the American West when describing the Native Americans in her books. However, Wilder’s point of view might be understandable as she had been describing the Native American question as a combination of her memories, from the view point of young Laura. Wilder might have intended to dispose of any complications in her text for children. Nevertheless, both authors tried to depict as authentic viewpoints of their characters as possible. All the viewpoints are reflecting the time, setting and the characters’ situation. Erdrich’s work can be understood as completion of Wilder’s in the sense of Native American question.

²⁹³ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 123.

²⁹⁴ Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House*, 80.

²⁹⁵ Barlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890*, 26.

7. Conclusion

Laura Ingalls Wilder used her own family members as the models for the characters in her novels describing the pioneer life on the American frontier. Her novels can be ranked as an American phenomenon because they describe a self-reliant and free pioneer life. The history of American frontier, as well as Wilder's novels, characterize the core values of American character.

Wilder's work belongs to the children's and young adult literature because the main character is coming of age in the novels. In a way, Wilder divides her novels into two parts: the first three books are intended more for children and the rest for young adults. Furthermore, different genres occur there. The thesis analysed the aspects of Wilder telling a story about an important part of American history based on her own experience. She also set the story at home, where the most narrative took place. Thus, the genres of historical fiction, autobiographical fiction and domestic fiction were defined as those which merges in the *Little House* series.

Louise Erdrich was introduced as an author with strong connection to a Native American tribe Ojibwe. The novel, *The Birchbark House*, describes a Native American family with the main character, seven-year-old Omakayas. The book has been intended as a children's novel, however, an aspect of cross-over literature was discussed concerning this work as Erdrich's depiction of Native Americans can attract both children and adult readers. Furthermore, similarly to Wilder, Erdrich's novel is set at the home of the main characters and thus the novel could be regarded as domestic fiction. In addition, it thoroughly depicts a Native American lifestyle and thanks to that, the historical fiction is another genre which corresponds with this novel.

After the authors' introduction, the historical background of the American frontier and overland migration was discussed. The American frontier was defined as the border which was continuously pushed further westward correspondingly with the Native American movement. The westward movement of the frontier was also accompanied with the pioneers who were the first who settled down on the land on which the Native Americans previously lived. However, the thesis also considered the aspect of those pioneers who settled illegally on those lands which still belonged to the Native Americans. This problem played a major role in Wilder's second novel, *Little House on the Prairie*. The historical background of overland migrations also dealt with a general description of the pioneer life which was filled with a lot of hard work because they had to adapt to the new conditions. It was highlighted that a pioneer free mind, nature and

persistence served as basis for American core values. Then the analysis of the particular issues that accompanied the life of overland migrants were analysed in Wilder's work. The issues analysed were namely, reasons for overland westward migration, journey of overland migrants, issues of settlement, family and gender roles, and danger in the form of difficult winter and conflicts with the Native Americans.

Laura Ingalls Wilder created a very wide depiction of overland migration and westward settlement in her novels. Thanks to her authentic experience as a direct participant of this part of American history, her novels vividly show the whole process of overland migration, from an initial decision process of moving westward to settling down and integrating into a frontier town community.

A common reason for overland migration was economical. Overland migrants used the opportunity to move to the land offered by the government and try their luck at a new homestead. The Ingalls frequent moves show that several attempts had to be made before the homestead was successfully established. Since natural catastrophes, like the mentioned grasshopper invasion, were unpredictable, a homesteader could easily get into debts. Financial deprivation often accompanied the pioneers. Wilder describes this problem as something which often stood as an obstacle in the pioneer family development. Furthermore, Wilder offers some possibilities, however scarce, with which a pioneer family could improve their income. She depicts her fictional counterpart Laura as the one who tries her best to help to her family through a teaching job position. Wilder also highlights an important factor which formed a pioneer nature and made him a persistent human being. That is that a pioneer could have started from the very beginning several times.

When pioneers settled on a homestead, one of their main tasks was to make a home there. Wilder draws the attention to the home even in the titles of almost all the novels and thus it is not surprising that the home and the overall importance of a good dwelling are the core values of Wilder's work as such. Different types of the houses are described. The family experience log cabins, a typical American frontier dwelling, a dug out, a temporary frontier dwelling, and a more luxurious house – a frame house. Charles Ingalls builds all of them with his own hands, which highlights his handiness and self-reliance. The home for the Ingalls family is a sanctuary where the whole family meet and spend most of their time. Wilder depicts the Ingalls family as a stable structure, in which its members respect each other. Children obey their parents, but parents are willing to listen to them. Furthermore, Wilder also divides the gender roles quite

strictly, depicting the father as a head and provider of the family and mother as a head of the household. However, she also shows a mutual respect between their parents. Based on Barlett and Myres, the pioneer family functionality was a really core value for surviving on the American frontier.

Besides a necessity to start a farm (which was one of the main reasons why Americans chose moving westward), it was important to participate in community events. Schooling, church going, and some social events on the prairie were organized by town communities. These events functioned as a break in pioneers' daily routine, but also as a very much needed cultural refinement. Wilder depicts these events as joyful and exciting ones in her novels.

Although the Wilder's novels are generally approached as the idealized version of the frontier life, she does not avoid depicting darker sides of the frontier. First, the loneliness and a restricted contact with people on the American Frontier could cause severe problems. One of the "darker" events mentioned in the thesis was the unsuccessful coping with the lonely frontier life in Mrs Brewster's mental breakdown. Second, unpredictable harsh weather conditions could severely endanger people of a whole town. Wilder devotes the whole novel, *The Long Winter*, describing the Hard Winter of 1881- 1882 during which the town of De Smet was completely separated from the food supplies. Third, fear of potential conflicts with the Native Americans were often based on the misconceptions about them. However, if a pioneer settled illegally on the land which should have still belonged to the Native Americans, problems might have been expected. *Little House on the Prairie* mostly deals with the depiction of the Native Americans. For this depiction, Wilder is often criticized because she uses racist statements when referring to the Native Americans. However, when approaching Wilder's work, it is important to realize that an original pioneer is telling a story about the issues of westward movement. Wilder's authentic experience can serve as a genuine story and trip to the past among American pioneers. Thus, the thesis allowed to discuss several views featured in the novel connected to the Native Americans. In this analysis, the thesis offered milder views of Charles Ingalls but also harsh views of the Ingalls' neighbour, Mrs Scott, who uncompromisingly condemns the Native Americans. Furthermore, the Wilder shows that the pioneers were straightforwardly affected by the American urge for the westward movement. For example, despite Charles Ingalls' sensible approach to the issue of the Native Americans, he still takes for granted that the land should be free for the white settlers even though it is not.

In addition, Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* can serve as a perfect additional explanation and tour into Native American's lifestyle. Erdrich has successfully completed something, which is missing in Wilder. After all, some resemblance between Erdrich's depiction of the Native Americans and Wilder's pioneers could be found as similar issues surround them. Although these issues are approached differently. First, the Native Americans were more self-reliant than pioneers because pioneers mostly had the backup in the form of the town and supplies. This is proved during the winter as Ojibwe family is starving while the Ingalls are saved by the supplies of Almanzo Wilder and later by the supplies of a strange homesteader. However, both authors also let their characters suffer with the diseases – Angeline with smallpox which causes her irretrievable scars and Mary with scarlet fever which is the cause of her blindness. Both authors thus show that the fate could not have been controlled and it did not matter if it was connected to a Native American or pioneer. Second, a similar hierarchy system is described as men are regarded as a head of their families in both, Erdrich and Wilder. However, different family relationships in Omakayas's family are portrayed. In contrast to kind and loving Charles Ingalls, Deydey is depicted as someone who disbalances his family with his presence. Third, Erdrich's characters are more aware of the situation with American settlers than Wilder's pioneers with the Native Americans. Erdrich's Ojibwe tribe members discuss the potential moves of Americans and try to follow the situation as much as possible. On the contrary, the fictional counterparts of Wilder's family observe the Native Americans as something distant and not understood. However, both groups feel a certain worry of the other one.

To sum it up, Wilder was influenced by her parents and memories of historical circumstances, which include the view of free Americans who expected that the land would be given to them. Thus, the thesis cannot condemn Wilder for her racist statements about the Native Americans because these statements reflect the era of pioneers. Consequently, thanks to Erdrich, a different point of view is given, and her work can serve as an explanation to the Native American lifestyle and completion to *Little House* series.

Furthermore, the level of idealization of Wilder's novels is totally adapted to the child and young adult readers. Still, she tried to show some of the negative sides of living on the American frontier. Concludingly, the hardship and hard work of the pioneers are highlighted throughout all the novels. However, Wilder also highlights that all of it was manageable with an optimistic approach. A continuous endeavour and unwillingness to give up might be called some of the core values of her work. Furthermore, with a stable family, and its members who loved and respected each other, a pioneer managed everything.

Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá otázkou osidlování Amerického západu, pobytem v americkém pohraničí a průkopníky západu tak, jak tuto problematiku vyobrazila Laura Ingalls Wilderová ve svém díle, v sérii *Malý dům*. Úkolem diplomové práce je zhodnotit, jaké prostředky Wilderová použila k zobrazení tohoto období a zda je obraz, který vytvořila zidealizovaný nebo pravdivý. Diplomová práce zahrnuje do svých primárních zdrojů všechna díla Wilderové, které popisují příběh její vlastní rodiny Ingallsových. Hlavními postavami těchto děl je fiktivní protějšek samotné Wilderové, dále fiktivní protějšky jejích rodičů, sester, manžela a různých lidí, které během procesu osidlování rodina potkala.

Analyzována budou tato díla: *Malý dům ve Velkém lese* (*Little House in the Big Woods*, 1932), *Malý dům na prérii* (*Little House on the Prairie*, 1935), *Na březích Švestkového potoka* (*On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 1937) *Na březích Stříbrného jezera* (*By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 1939), *Dlouhá zima* (*The Long Winter*, 1940), *Malé město na prérii* (*Little Town on the Prairie*, 1941) a *Ty šťastné zlaté roky* (*These Happy Golden Years*, 1943).²⁹⁶ V této práci dojde také k porovnání vyobrazení průkopníků západu s tím, jak Louise Erdrichová vyobrazila rodinu původních obyvatel Ameriky ve svém díle *The Birchbark House* (1999)²⁹⁷.

Práce začíná tím, že uvádí osobu Wilderové do úzké spojitosti s jejím životním dílem. Wilderová napsala sérii *Malého domu* na základě vzpomínek ze svého dětství a dospívání. Vzhledem k tomu, že se její rodina často stěhovala a patřila k americkým průkopníkům, kteří osidlovali Americký západ, chopila se Wilderová možnosti autenticky předat tyto vzpomínky svým čtenářům. Její knihy pro děti se tak zabývají častým stěhováním na západ. Rodina Ingallsových žila ve Wisconsinu, na území patřící původním obyvatelům Ameriky v Kansasu, v Minnesotě a Jižní Dakotě.

Série *Malého domu* se setkala s úspěchem díky vyobrazení soběstačných průkopníků západu. Vzhledem k tomu, že romány Wilderové vycházely v letech po velké hospodářské krizi a v průběhu druhé světové války, byla teze jejích děl, kdy si každý musí vystačit s tím, co má, přesně to pravé pro tehdejší náladu společnosti. Wilderová se ovšem setkala i s kritikou jejího

²⁹⁶ České překlady děl jsou mé vlastní vzhledem k tomu, že v češtině vyšly pouze tři romány. V jednom výtisku, s názvem *Uprostřed hlubokých lesů a mezi Indiány* (1992) vyšly první dva díly. V roce 1997 vyšlo *Na březích švestkového potoka*. Viz.: <https://www.databazeknih.cz/vydane-knihy/laura-ingalls-wilder-14097>

²⁹⁷ Dílo nebylo přeloženo do češtiny.

rasistického ztvárnění původních obyvatel, kdy ve svých dílech použila například pořekadlo „Mrtvý indián, dobrý indián.“

Krátce je představena i Louise Erdrichová, jakožto autorka zabývající se ve svých dílech tematikou původních obyvatel. Erdrichová je potomek původních obyvatel, konkrétně kmenu Odžibvejů, na které se specializuje. Román *The Birchbark House* zobrazuje rodinu kmene Odžibvejů s hlavní hrdinkou, sedmiletou Omakayas. Erdrichová vytvořila toto dílo v reakci na dílo Wilderové. Jak sama proklamuje, Wilderová se dostatečně nezabývala otázkou původních obyvatel a v jejích knihách se objevuje rasismus vůči této skupině.

V další kapitole je definována literatura pro děti a mládež. Práce mimo jiné konkretizuje dětskou literaturu ze začátku 20. století, což je také doba, kdy vznikala díla Wilderové. Rodina a pocit bezpečí byly centrem dětské literatury, což díla Wilderové splňují. Je ovšem zdůrazněno, že hlavní dětská témata jsou vyobrazena převážně v prvních třech dílech série *Malého domu*. Od čtvrtého dílu se význačně mění pohled hlavní hrdinky Laury, která začíná řešit problémy spjaté s dospíváním. Literatura pro mládež je v práci definovaná jako literatura, která se zabývá zralejšími tématy a sleduje psychologický vývoj postavy. U Erdrichové je brán zřetel na to, že ačkoli původním zamýšlením autorky bylo napsat knihu pro děti, vzhledem ke stylu vyprávění se její kniha dá zařadit mezi crossoverovou literaturu.

V pořadí čtvrtá kapitola řeší splynutí žánrů v sérii *Malého domu*. Za prvé přichází v potaz žánr historické fikce. Wilderová věrně popisuje důležitou historickou epochu amerických dějin a často odkazuje na konkrétní události z minulosti. Dále díky tomu, že se všechna její díla odehrávají doma a sledují chod domácnosti rodiny Ingallsových, a „domáckost“ děl je vůbec nejzřetelnějším charakterem románů, přichází do úvahy žánr románu rodinného života. Nemůže se ani vynechat autobiografický aspekt děl. Wilderová sice životopis své rodiny pozměnila, aby byl vhodný pro dětské čtenáře a vynechala některé příliš komplikované situace ze svého života, ale i přesto lze romány pokládat za autobiografickou fikci. Samotná analýza děl v této diplomové práci se mírně dotýká autobiografického aspektu, pokud je uznáno za vhodné porovnat skutečnou rodinu Ingallsových s tou fiktivní.

V páté kapitole začíná hlavní část práce. Nejprve se uvádí do širšího kontextu problematika amerického pohraničí a osidlování Amerického západu. Osidlování Amerického západu za Apalačským pohořím bylo velice pozvolné a datuje se od 17. století do roku 1890. Hranice osidlování se neustále posouvala dále na západ v souvislosti s vytlačováním původních obyvatel. Kvůli nedočkavosti osadníků, se však často stávalo, že bylo osídleno území, které

mělo být chráněno smlouvami, jež měli zajišťovat vlastnictví půdy původním obyvatelům. Nicméně, obecně život průkopníků Amerického západu zahrnoval léta odříkání a tvrdé dřiny, aby si dokázali vybudovat prosperující hospodářství. V práci je také zmíněn historik Frederick Turner, který uvádí, že osidlování západu se význačně podílelo na formování amerického charakteru. Práce pak dále přechází na samotné analyzování otázky osidlování v dílech Wilderové a analýza je doplněna vhodnými ukázkami přímo z jejích děl.

Za prvé analýza zkoumá důvody pro migraci na západní území Ameriky. Důvody byly povětšinou ekonomického charakteru. Osadníci byli zlákáni touhou po tom vlastnit území a stát se soběstačnými farmáři. Ovšem, jak ukazuje Wilderová, migrace často zahrnovala početné stěhování se a budování všeho od základu několikrát. Častou překážkou v dalším posunu na západ mohlo být finanční strádání, což doprovázelo rodinu Ingallsových po celou dobu série *Malého domu*. Práce se také zabývá vyobrazením samotné cesty, pro kterou byl povětšinou použit legendární krytý povoz. Wilderová se lehce dotýká pár nebezpečí, které migranty mohlo čekat, ale zdůrazňuje hlavně důležitost dobré přípravy na takovou cestu.

Nejdelší podkapitolou analýzy je část zabývající se záležitostmi týkající se samotného osidlování. Wilderová ve svých dílech popisuje na každém místě velice podobný vzorec, kdy jsou Ingallsovi nuceni se nejprve ubytovat v dočasném příbytku a postupně budují svůj vlastní. Posléze je vybudován i statek, který má sloužit jako zdroj obživy. Vzhledem k tomu, že jsou Ingallsovi soběstační, velice si váží všech svých domovů. Wilderová věnuje spoustu stránek ve svých románech popisu stavby domů, různých domácích prací ale i domova a pocitů z něj. Je tedy zřejmé, že domov byl pro osadníky to nejdůležitější a nejcennější, co vlastnili. Dále se analýza zabývá potřebami osadníků pro různá společenská a kulturní setkání. Mezi ně se dá zařadit návštěva kostela, školní docházka, návštěva města atd. Analýza zdůrazňuje to, že v americkém pohraničí tyto běžné aktivity rozhodně nebyly pokládány za samozřejmé.

Navazujícím tématem k domovu je bezpochyby rodina, jejíž členové jsou v románech Wilderové ústředními postavami. Wilderová popisuje stabilní a fungující rodinné vazby jako zásadní aspekt pro přežití osadníků Amerického západu. Analýza také zkoumá zobrazení rolí mužů, žen a dětí v americkém pohraničí, vzhledem k tomu, že soběstačnost a nezávislost ještě více vzbuzovala zodpovědnost funkcí těchto skupin.

Poslední částí analýzy je zabývání se potenciálním nebezpečím, které mohlo osadníky potkat. Tato podkapitola analyzuje dva konkrétní romány ze série, jimiž jsou *Dlouhá zima* a *Malý dům na prérii*. Podkapitola tedy řeší vyobrazení dlouhé a obtížné zimy, kterou Ingallsovi

tráví již v Jižní Dakotě v 80. letech 19. století, a dále vyobrazení původních obyvatel Ameriky, s nimiž se Ingallsovi intenzivně setkávají ve druhém jmenovaném díle.

Díky poslednímu analyzovanému tématu může navázat šestá kapitola, která porovnává dílo Erdrichové s Wilderovou. V této kapitole práce řeší to, jak Erdrichová vyobrazila rodinu Odžibvejů. Erdrichová podrobně řeší jejich životní styl a vztahy. Tyto aspekty jsou pak porovnávány s podobnými záležitostmi, které se objevují v díle Wilderové.

Zobrazení Amerického západu je zhodnoceno jakožto sice dostatečně upravené pro dětské čtenáře, ale i tak podařené s ohledem zachycení zásadních témat, se kterými se průkopníci museli potýkat. Co se týče vyobrazením původních obyvatel Ameriky, Wilderová se zcela omezuje na pohled tehdejší společnosti, čímž dochází k autentickému vyobrazení pohledu amerických osadníků. Ačkoli její vyobrazení působí diskriminačně vůči původním obyvatelům, je potřeba k jejím dílům přistupovat s vědomím, že byla napsána skutečným osadníkem západu. I díky tomu může být dílo Erdrichové bráno jako potřebné doplnění a pochopení životního stylu původních obyvatel. Nicméně, v dílech Wilderové je upřednostňována důležitost rodiny a rovnováhy v ní, díky čemuž jsou její díla tolik poutavá. Wilderové se tedy podařilo optimisticky popsat velice tvrdou dobu, kdy se její románová rodina nikdy neohlíží zpět a bez váhání pokračuje dál i přes překážky, které jim život přináší.

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