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The Wilder **MORGANS**

By Brenda L. Tippin

Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House" novels of American pioneer living are beloved, and have sold millions of copies. Among their cast of characters are the Morgan horses which she and her husband, Almanzo, depended upon for life. Our resident historian recites how Morgans graced the pages of these novels, as they did the lives of their early day owners.

The immensely popular series of "Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder first appeared with *Little House in the Big Woods* in 1932. Eventually nine books were included, the last being *The First Four Years*, discovered and published after Laura's death and telling of the hardship of her first years of pioneering with her young husband Almanzo Wilder. Although classed as fiction and adapted as children's books, they are based on the true episodes of Laura's own childhood growing up as a pioneer girl. Their appeal lies in Laura's simple and direct style of describing life in that day as it really was. Just as she became

the eyes for her sister Mary, who became blind, it is possible to see vividly through Laura's descriptions. Prince and Lady, the spirited, perfectly matched, glossy brown Morgans of Almanzo Wilder play a subtle but powerful role from the time Laura first notices them in *By the Shores of Silver Lake* through drawing the buggy for Laura and Almanzo's wedding in *These Happy Golden Years*.

WILDER MORGANS

The history of the Wilder Morgans goes back to the very beginnings of the Morgan breed. The Wilder family ancestors were among the

ABOVE: Almanzo Wilder (left) and wife, Laura Ingalls Wilder (right).

early settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, arriving in America as early as 1630.

Daniel Wilder was born in Bolton, Massachusetts, in 1764, fought in the Revolution and died in 1851. He married Polly Gould in Wyndham, Vermont, in 1783 and they had ten children, among them Almanzo's grandfather, Abel Wilder who was born in 1784 in Westminster, Vermont. It was Abel who established the Wilder farm in Malone, Franklin County, New York, and the tradition of Morgan horses began with him or his father, both of whom may well have known the original Justin Morgan horse and certainly they knew his offspring. Abel married Hannah Payne and had nine children, including Almanzo's father James. Abel died in 1849. At the time James Wilder was born in 1813, the family was living near Milton, Vermont, within 70 or 80 miles of where the Justin Morgan horse stood at that time. They moved to Malone, New York, when James was four years old and it is likely that the farm horses they brought with them included sons and daughters of old Justin Morgan. In 1840, James purchased his own 88 acre farm and married Angelina Albina Day in 1843.

Here the story becomes even more remarkable, for Angelina, born in 1819, was the daughter of Justin Day II and Diademia Bateman. Justin Day was a grandson of Ezekiel Day, a brother of Thankful Day, the mother of Justin Morgan, the singing master who owned the original Justin Morgan horse who bore his name. And Luke Day, another brother of Ezekiel and Thankful, was the father of Martha Day, who was Justin Morgan's wife (and first cousin). So, Almanzo Wilder was not only raised with the tradition of the earliest Morgan horses—he was in fact a relative of Justin Morgan, the man who became famous for his horse.

The Wilders were considered prosperous farmers in Franklin County and were known for the quality of their Morgan horses. The town of Malone originated in 1805 with a huge expanse of nearly three quarters of a million acres, but was not incorporated until 1853, just a few years before Almanzo was born in 1857. Franklin County, created in 1808, was named in honor of Benjamin Franklin and Malone became the county seat.

New York was impacted more heavily than any other state in the Union during the Civil War, which raged from 1861 to 1865. They also suffered more losses, with more than 46,000 deaths, and it is estimated at least five horses were lost for every soldier killed. This was when Almanzo was four to nine years old. This must often have been a topic of conversation in the Wilder home with Malone providing Companies A, B, and C of the 98th Regiment. Among the most famous cavalry regiments of the Civil War was the 5th, which was mounted completely on Black Hawk Morgans from Essex County, which borders Franklin County just to the southeast. Of these 108 horses, just seven survived the war. At the time, all of upstate New York including Franklin County, and Clinton and St. Lawrence counties which bordered it on the east and west sides respectively, were all rural farming areas and rich sources of the earliest Morgan families.

While the exact bloodlines of the Wilder Morgans are not recorded, another interesting link is that the James Wilder family was also related to Levi Wilder (1798 - 1876) of Lyndon, Vermont, who is mentioned several times in Volume I of the *Morgan Horse*

Register. His breeding survives to the present in descendants of Black Morgan 810 (Bachops Green Mountain x mare by Levi Wilder Colt) foaled in 1840, and Streeter Horse 674 (Billy Root x mare by Batchelder Horse) foaled in 1844, whose third dam was bred by Levi Wilder. These lines trace down to us today through the U. S. Government farm's use of the famous mare Artemisia (Ethan Allen 3d x Lady Laura), dam of Mansfield and several full siblings by Bennington (General Gates x Mrs. Culvers), as well as J. C. Brunk's foundation mare Daisy (Billy Bodette x mare by Billy Folsom) foaled in 1884 and registered in Volume I. They are also found in most of the Lippitt and Lambert lines. Levi was a distant cousin of Almanzo's father, James, and, as the Wilders maintained connections with a large extended family, it is also possible they may at some time have obtained horses from him.

ALMANZO WILDER

Almanzo James Wilder was born February 13, 1857 in Malone, New York, the fifth of six children born to James Wilder and Angeline Day. By this time the Wilders had three long barns that surrounded three sides of the square barnyard, and were considered the finest barns in the country. The horse barn, which faced the house, was 100 feet long and contained fine box stalls for the horses in the middle. On one end was the Buggy House which contained two buggies and a sleigh. It was large enough that it could be driven into, the horses unhitched inside, and led directly to their stalls without going outside again.

Almanzo was fascinated with the horses from an early age, but was never allowed to handle the young horses or the colts as his father feared he might spoil them. He was only allowed to handle the gentle old work mares, Bess and Beauty, which probably had been foaled sometime around 1850. In the book *Farmer Boy*, which is the second of the "Little House" books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the story of Almanzo's boyhood on the farm in Malone is recounted. Almanzo's father is described as being an important man and well-respected, known for driving the best horses in the country. This is significant considering that Morgans were common throughout that area at the time. The exact number of horses owned by the Wilders is not mentioned in *Farmer Boy*, which covers Almanzo's ninth year; but, in addition to the older, gentle work horses, there were at least six older colts of various ages from yearlings to three- and four-year-olds, and at least two newborn foals that year. There is no indication the Wilders owned their own stallion, so they must have used a neighboring one. The Veto line has been suggested as one highly regarded in Franklin County. Steven's Veto, foaled in 1852, was a son of Smith's Veto (Godfrey Horse x mare by Hale's Green Mountain Morgan) and stood in Bangor, New York, from 1862-66, which was about 12 miles from Malone, and came to Malone in 1867. He was dark bay and had a reputation as one of the finest stock horses in Franklin County, and might well have been the sire of the Wilder colts. Another possibility could have been Prince Albert, a son of Hale's Green Mountain Morgan, who stood in Malone during the 1850s. He left a son, Prince Albert Jr., out of a mare by Flying Morgan who continued to stand in Malone for many years and was highly regarded. Doubtless



Almanzo and Morgans at Rocky Ridge (probably Fanny and Kate) (Courtesy of the Rose Wilder Lang Collection).

there were many other good Morgans in the area who were never registered, as this was thirty years before Battell founded the Morgan registry.

STARLIGHT

Almanzo's favorite was the colt of the old mare Beauty, foaled in 1866, when Almanzo was nine years old. Like all the Wilder Morgans, he was brown in color, and he was marked with a large white star. Almanzo named him Starlight. Finally, satisfied that Almanzo had learned enough to work with the spirited young horses, Almanzo's father gave him Starlight for his very own. He gentled and broke Starlight himself, and when the family moved to Minnesota in 1875 when he was 18 years old, Almanzo rode the 105 miles on Starlight, who was then nine. Almanzo liked to tell the story of how Starlight was still so fresh at the end of this long journey, he tried to race another horse. Later, when Almanzo became a homesteader, he needed a team, so he gave Starlight back to his father and took with him a matched team he had raised and trained, Prince and Lady.

THE INGALLS FAMILY

Charles Phillip Ingalls, ("Pa") was born in Cuba, New York, in 1836, and Caroline Lake Quiner ("Ma") was born in Brookfield, Wisconsin, in 1839. Both the Ingalls and Quiner families also had

roots tracing back to the early settlers of Massachusetts. Laura Elizabeth Ingalls was the second of five children, born in 1867 in Pepin, Wisconsin. Mary, the oldest, was born in 1865, Carrie was born in 1870, Charles Frederick (who died at nine months) was born in 1875, and Grace was born in 1877. After stays in Kansas, Minnesota, and Iowa, the Ingalls family moved to De Smet in the Dakota Territory in 1879 when Laura was twelve. It was here she first met Almanzo Wilder, whom she later married, and went on to become famous for her series of "Little House" books describing her life growing up on the frontier. Laura's first-hand recollections of Almanzo's Morgans and their feats, often appearing through several of her books, provide a striking account of the impression they made on her and the high regard in which Morgans were held by the early settlers of the Dakota Territory.

PRINCE AND LADY

Laura's first mention of Prince and Lady, the Morgans who figured so prominently in her acquaintance with Almanzo, appears in her fifth book, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. The setting is 1879. As the Ingalls family traveled to their new homestead claim near De Smet, South Dakota, in their loaded wagon, Laura caught a vision of these horses that forever changed her. She remembered holding onto the back of the springseat of the wagon as it jostled over the deep ruts of dried mud, and her bonnet closed off her side vision

so all she could see was endless green prairie and blue sky.

“Suddenly into the sunny green and blue came two brown horses with flowing black manes and tails, trotting side by side in harness. Their brown flanks and shoulders gleamed in the sunshine, their slender legs stepped daintily, their necks were arched and their ears pricked up, and they tossed their heads proudly as they went by,” Laura wrote.

Up to this point, many other horses had been mentioned throughout the books, but these were clearly special and captured Laura’s attention in an unusual way. Pa also turned to admire the horses and identified the young men with the light wagon as the Wilder boys. Laura recalled him saying the Wilders owned the finest horses in the whole country and teams like that were seldom seen. She could not stop thinking about them and wondered how much horses like that would cost. When Pa replied that it would be at least \$250 to \$300 for a matched team like that, Laura felt certain only rich people could afford to pay that much for horses.

Laura’s next encounter with Almanzo and the Morgans occurs in *The Long Winter*, the sixth book of the series. Laura and her sister Carrie came upon the Wilder boys loading hay onto their wagon that fall, and she realized she had seen those beautiful brown horses before, “their haunches gleaming in the sun and their black manes glossy on the glossy necks.” This is the first time she identifies them as Morgans.

Later in the book, Laura tells of Almanzo driving his own fine team of matched Morgans to town one afternoon where a group of men are gathered before the store. She describes a very old Native American wrapped in blankets, coming to warn them of the long hard winter ahead. Her Pa understands the warning to mean that an exceptionally hard winter occurs every 21 years, and they would have seven months of blizzards. He decides to move his family into town. This was the winter of 1880 when Laura was 13 years old, and meteorologists have verified that the weather she described really did happen.

The suspense builds in Laura’s story as the long winter begins to take its toll on the little town and many families are short on food and supplies. Laura describes a scene where the men of the town attempt to go after a herd of antelope west of town, with Almanzo and another man riding the beautiful Morgan horses. The Morgans are mentioned by name for the first time in this chapter. Laura explains that Mr. Foster, mounted on Lady, does not know how to ride. Almanzo is sorry he let him ride her; he warns Mr. Foster the mare will jump out from under him. Mr. Foster, unable to contain his excitement, jumps off Lady and lets go of her reins to take a shot before he is even in range. The whole herd of antelope is frightened away, and Lady runs off with them.

“Brown Lady overtook the gray herd and reached its middle, running with them,” Laura writes. Desperately Almanzo warns the men not to shoot, but he cannot be heard above the wind. However, all the men are spellbound and know better than to shoot for fear of hitting the mare. Laura’s description continues, “The glossy brown Morgan, head up and black mane and tail flying, went over a prairie swell in the midst of the gray, low cloud of antelope and vanished. In a moment the horse and herd passed over another white curve, then growing smaller, they appeared again and again

the prairie swallowed them.” Everyone believes Lady is gone for good and Almanzo will not get her back, but the mare does return.

In the most memorable scene of *The Long Winter*, Laura remembers the little town facing a serious situation as a succession of blizzards deliver so much snow it is determined no more trains will be able to get through with supplies. Many families are running low on food and will not have enough to last until more supplies can come. The Ingalls family has run out of fuel and Pa and Laura are obliged to spend endless hours twisting hay into tight sticks in order to keep the fire going so they won’t freeze. The only hope of the town surviving is a possible rumor that one settler wintering on his claim south of town may have a supply of wheat he would be willing to sell. No one knows for sure if the rumor is even true or exactly where the settler’s claim is located. Although a blizzard may strike any day, Almanzo and another young man, Cap Garland, determine they will make the trip to try and locate this man and persuade him to sell his wheat. The storekeeper puts up the money for the boys to buy all the wheat they can haul if they can find it. Almanzo takes Prince, and Cap takes his buckskin gelding, each hitched to bobsleds; they take turns leading the way as every little while the crust of snow breaks and the horse falls into a hole, having to be unhitched from the sled and then dug out. The snow then must be trampled down so the horse can be led up out of the hole and onto solid ground again.

After more than 20 miles of guiding the floundering horses through the drifts, the telltale smudge of blue-grey smoke rising from a bank of snow in the endless white waste finally suggests they may have found the settler’s claim. At last they near the snowed-in sod shanty, and the bearded old settler, excited and astonished to see visitors, invites them in. It is no small task to explain their dilemma and convince Mr. Anderson to sell, but finally he agrees to let them have sixty bushels at \$1.25 per bushel, .43 cents per bushel above the market price. The brave horses struggle back through the drifts with their heavy loads, growing weary and exceedingly nervous about falling through the crust into one of the hidden holes. Prince’s strength and calmness through these episodes helps keep the other horse steady. It is a long and tedious trip and they barely make it back before the next blizzard hits, but thanks to their courage and persistence, the town has been saved from starving.

The next time Prince and Lady appear is in the seventh book, *Little Town on the Prairie*. It is the Fourth of July celebration of 1881. Laura and her little sister Carrie are watching in excitement as several teams come onto the track for the buggy races. Several fine teams appear pulling light buggies as though they weigh nothing at all, but suddenly Laura’s heart stops as she sees a team she recognizes. “She knew their proud, gay heads and arching necks, the shine of light on their satiny shoulders, the black manes blowing and the forelocks tossing above their quick, bright, gentle eyes.” Almanzo was driving, but at the time he did not own a buggy. The Morgans were hitched to a long, high, heavy wagon with a door in the side, which was a peddler’s wagon owned by his brother, Royal. The whole crowd was murmuring in consternation, for everyone admired Almanzo’s Morgans; but no one believed there was any way on earth they had a chance of winning with that cumbersome heavy wagon. All the other teams, including several



Almanzo haying with Morgans Buck and Billy at Rocky Ridge (Courtesy of the Rose Wilder Lang Collection).

known to be good fast horses, were hitched to light buggies.

“The brown horses were by far the most beautiful on the track, and so proud,” Laura’s description continues. “They did not seem to mind the heavy wagon at all, but tossed their heads, pricked their ears, and lifted their feet as if the ground were not quite good enough for them to step on.” Laura is sitting with clenched fists thinking how unfair it is the Morgans don’t have a chance when the race begins. “Every buggy rushing by was a light, one-seated buggy. Not a team drew even the weight of a two-seated buggy, except the beautiful brown horses who came last, pulling the high, heavy peddler’s cart.” The crowd shook their heads, insisting the wagon was too heavy for the Morgans to pull and they would surely break their trot. “But they were pulling it,” Laura continues, “and they were trotting. Evenly, without a break, the eight brown legs kept moving in a perfect trot. The dust-cloud rose up and hid them. Then bursting out of it, up the other side of the track, the teams and buggies were speeding. One buggy—No, two buggies! were behind the peddler’s cart. Three buggies were behind it.”

Only the team of bays who were favored to win remained in the lead. Almanzo spoke to the Morgans from the high wagon seat and they came ever faster, and still trotting smoothly crept up beside Mr. Owen’s buggy and drew even with the bays as the crowd

cheered in excitement. Owens drew out his whip, yelling and with two sharp cuts the bays leaped ahead. Almanzo had no whip but his patient encouragement to his horses communicated to them through his firm hold on the lines. “Fast and smooth as swallows flying, the brown Morgans passed the bays and crossed the line. They’d won!” Only then did Laura discover some men in town had put up a five dollar prize for the best trotting team and Almanzo and the brown Morgans had won it.

Later in *Little Town on the Prairie*, Almanzo’s sister Eliza Jane comes to teach at the school. Laura notices Almanzo and the brown Morgans pulling a new buggy. “All their slender legs were moving swiftly, their hoofs raising little explosions of dust. Their glossy shoulders glistened; their black manes and tails blew shining in the wind. Their ears pricked forward, and their glancing bright eyes saw everything gaily. Dancing little red tassels trimmed their bridles. Sunlight ran glistening on the curve of their arched necks, straight along their smooth sides and curving again on their round haunches. And behind them ran a shining new buggy. Its dashboard glittered, its spotless black top curved over the seat on gleaming black spokes, its wheels were red.”

Laura stares open mouthed and forgets to bow as Almanzo raises his hat to the girls. Her thoughts are filled with longing to

ride in the buggy behind the swift Morgans. Her wish finally comes true later that winter when Almanzo pulls up with Prince and Lady in the shining buggy and offers her a ride to the schoolhouse. She is not quite fifteen. By the next winter, Almanzo is seeing her home from church and promises her a ride in the new sleigh he is building. Suddenly she is faced with the opportunity to get her teaching certificate although she is not quite sixteen.

The beginning of the eighth book, *These Happy Golden Years*, finds Laura teaching at the Brewster school for the next term. Since it is twelve miles from her home, she is obliged to stay with the Brewsters even though Mrs. Brewster doesn't want her there and is very unpleasant. After the first week of teaching, she is finishing Friday's class and wondering if she should close school early since a storm is moving in. Her hopes that her Pa might come for her are shattered by the weather, and she is dreading the prospect of the long weekend enduring Mrs. Brewster's cold disapproving silence. Suddenly she hears sleighbells and sees Prince and Lady with necks arched and flying manes flash past the window and pull up beside the schoolhouse with a flourish, shaking and jingling their bells. Almanzo had come to take her home. He explains that he made his cutter smaller than the boughten ones, only five feet long and twenty-six inches wide at the bottom. Laura remarks that it is like flying and notes, "the low clouds raced backward overhead, the blown snow smoked backward on either side, and swiftly onward went the glossy brown horses, streaming music from their strings of bells. There was not a jolt nor a jar; the little cutter skimmed the snow as smoothly as a bird in air."

Every week Almanzo comes faithfully with Prince and Lady to pick her up on Friday afternoon and return her in time for school on Monday morning. Laura puzzles, wondering if he really means to court her, and at the same time feels guilty about him making the long cold drive every week on her behalf. At last she feels bound to tell him she is only going with him because she wants to go home for the weekend, and after she is home to stay, she won't go with him anymore, so he need not make the miserable drives to come after her if he would rather not. Almanzo is momentarily startled, but not easily dissuaded. The next week is so bitterly cold, Laura is certain he would not have come even if she had not made her confession, but he does. It is so cold he has to stop every couple of miles and thaw the frost off Prince and Lady's noses because their breath freezes over and they can't breathe. Laura begins to grow sleepy because of the intense cold and Almanzo warns that she must stay awake. When she gets home, Pa informs her that it was 40 below zero when Almanzo started after her and then the thermometer froze and it continued to grow colder, so there was no telling how cold it really was. Almanzo continues to come for her until her teaching assignment is done.

With only one more week left, Laura is lost in quiet thought and Almanzo wonders if she will miss the sleigh rides. She exclaims how beautiful the horses are as she describes, "their dainty feet spurned the snow in perfect rhythm and their blue shadows flew along the snow beside them. They were so gay, tossing their heads to make a chiming of the bells, pricking their ears forward and back, lifting their noses to the breeze of their speed that rippled their black manes." Prince and Lady touched noses as though they

whispered to each other and tried to break them into a run. Gently but firmly Almanzo pulls back and asks Laura if she would like to drive them. She says Pa will never let her drive his horses because he says she is too little and would get hurt. Almanzo says he raised Prince and Lady himself and they would not hurt anyone. Then he wishes she could have seen Starlight and begins to tell Laura all about him.

Almanzo has seen that she shares his love of horses and it is not too hard to convince her; he soon thinks of other excuses to get her to go driving with him. Though she notes that he says "Good-by" when he drops her at home instead of "See you Sunday afternoon" as usual, she is thinking of course it is good-by and there will be no more sleigh rides. Then she is tormented all the next day as all her schoolmates drive by in sleighs laughing and she has been gone so long she guesses no one thinks to ask for her to come along. Again the sleighs begin going by Sunday afternoon until the bells stop before her door. There is Almanzo again with Prince and Lady, wondering if she would like to go for a sleigh ride, and of course she would. Laura laughed and said the joke was on her as she hadn't intended to go with him anymore and asked him why he had come. Laughing too, Almanzo said he thought she would change her mind when she saw the sleigh riding parties go by. These continued for the rest of the winter and Laura enjoyed knowing she rode behind the prettiest and fastest-stepping horses in the Sunday Parade.

At last the spring came, and only patches of snow remained here and there. Laura was sorry there would be no more sleigh rides. However, Almanzo, with Prince and Lady, appear again, suggesting she might like to go for the first buggy ride of spring, and again, of course, she wants to go. The next winter, Almanzo is busy breaking colts to drive and asks Laura along to help break them. He explains that Lady has a colt and Prince doesn't drive well without her. So he breaks at least a couple of teams, and remarks to Laura that no man in town but Cap Garland, who went with him after the wheat, would be willing to ride behind those colts. He wonders why she would come and she replies innocently that she thought he could drive them. Some sources have assumed that these teams were also Morgans, but Laura never refers to them as such, nor describes them as she does Prince and Lady.

Finally, Laura and Almanzo are engaged and he leaves Lady with Laura to drive as often as she pleases while he goes to Minnesota for the winter to visit his parents. However, he returns on Christmas Eve as a surprise. At last in 1885 they are married, and Prince and Lady bring them home to the new little house Almanzo has built.

LAURA AND ALMANZO

The ninth book in the series, *The First Four Years*, was not published until after Laura's death. She had not finished it in a form she was happy with or wanted to use for publication. It tells of the remarkable series of struggles and hardships during their first four years of marriage. Although Prince and Lady brought them home and must have remained with them for a time, they were not mentioned by name in this book. Some have speculated they no longer had Morgans after that, but it must be remembered that the



The Government Stallion

"Governor of Orleans" is expected to arrive April 21st, and will stand this season at my farm, one mile east of Mansfield.

This stallion is a thorough-bred Morgan from the government Horse Farm at Middleburg, Vermont and is sent here for the purpose of raising horses for the U. S. army. Fee \$10.00 number of mares limited. If you want service see me at once.

A. J. WILDER.

GOVERNOR OF ORLEANS

Will stand the season of 1922, at Jim Atkisson farm, 3-4 mile west of Mansfield.

This stallion is a thorough-bred Morgan from the government Horse Farm at Middleburg, Vermont and is sent here for the purpose of raising horses for the U. S. army. Fee \$10.00 number of mares limited. If you want service see me at once.

A. J. WILDER, Government Agent
JIM ATKISSON, Keeper.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Governor Of Orleans at Rocky Ridge (Courtesy of the Rose Wilder Lang Collection); Governor Of Orleans A.J. Wilder Ad, April 1922, *Mansfield Mirror*; Governor Of Orleans Ad, April 27, 1922, *Mansfield Mirror*.

Morgans and what happened to them were never the central part of the story, they are only mentioned incidentally. Laura's careful descriptions of Prince and Lady in her earlier books seems to be an important part of her theme in relating her early impressions of Almanzo, the man she would later marry, and culminating with these special Morgans bringing them home from their wedding. Later clues indicate the horses are still there.

Their daughter Rose was born in 1886. Both Laura and Almanzo suffer a serious bout of diphtheria in the spring of 1888, and their baby boy, born in August of that year, lives only 12 days. Almanzo suffers a stroke after the diphtheria and is crippled for a time. During 1890-91, they spend some time in Florida, hoping the climate may help Almanzo recover. It does not help much, however, and does not agree with Laura, so they return to South Dakota and save their money, planning a new start in "The Land of the Big Red Apple," the Ozarks of Missouri. Laura's diary of this trip made in 1894 is recounted in *On the Way Home*, the story finished and published after Laura's death by her daughter Rose. A team of Morgans did bring them on this trip and one of them was Prince. From her diary August 13, Laura writes, "At noon we went through Rossville, a small place, but just as we were going

by the depot the train came in. The engine frightened Prince and he went through a barb-wire fence. He struck it straight and went through it, end over end, jumped up, ran against a clothesline and broke that and ran back to the fence. He stopped when Manly said, "Whoa, Prince," and Manly helped him through the wire. He had only one mark, a cut about an inch long where a barb had struck him. How he ever got through so well is a wonder." (*Author's Note: while it is possible this could have been a different Prince named after the first one, the original Prince was probably 18 or 20 years old at the time of this trip and could certainly have still been part of the team.*)

The other horse referred to occasionally in Laura's diary is old Pet, a mare, and her colt Little Pet (*Note: Laura seems to use the term "colt" in a general sense, calling Little Pet a colt but referring to her as a she*) who evidently ran loose after her mother. It is possible that Pet may have been the colt of Lady's mentioned in *Those Happy Golden Years*, who would have been foaled in 1884 and ten years old at the time of this journey, or perhaps an earlier foal of Lady's. If Lady was no longer with them, the team may have consisted of Prince and Pet. In a July 21 entry she writes, "When we were hitching up we let go of old Pet and she started off. Manly had the halter off Little Pet so she could not go after her mother. I said

Whoa and went toward her and as soon as she saw I was coming she ran. I could not catch her. Mr. Cooley chased her on his pony and they were far away before he could head her. She was going to Missouri without waiting for us." In a July 23rd entry on crossing the mile wide Missouri river, Laura wrote, "Pet made no fuss at all at the ferry, but drove onto it nicely, stood as quiet as could be, and calmly drove off it. Her colt Little Pet ran onto it loose and stood beside her as still as a mouse."

Finally they arrived at Mansfield, Missouri, where they purchased a farm, which they named Rocky Ridge for the very rocky soil; there they would spend the rest of their lives. Laura at that time was twenty-seven and Almanzo thirty-seven. Rose was seven years old at the time of this journey.

They settled in to years of hard work, eventually adding another sixty acres. Almanzo did the farm work with his team, for a time using a pair of Morgans named Buck and Billy. By 1912 through the 1920s, Laura was serving regularly as a columnist and Home Editor for the *Missouri Ruralist*. Rose had grown up and established her own reputation as a journalist and novelist. Laura went to spend some time with her daughter in San Francisco in 1915, and in a letter home to Almanzo she writes, "Manly Dear, About the horse—if it is the horse you want I suppose it would be a good idea to exchange a horse as old as Buck for a six-year-old. The \$50 you would give to boot you would just be giving for the colt and it would soon be the third horse for the farm, or would sell and buy the third horse. However, be sure the mare is the horse you want so you will not be out of a team."

Almanzo's letters to Laura during this time were never published so we can only surmise he must have been writing her about an opportunity to trade an apparently aging Buck and \$50 for a six-year-old mare with a colt. His greatest joy, however, was in acquiring the registered Morgan stallion Governor Of Orleans. Some accounts have supposed Almanzo traveled to Vermont and purchased this horse himself, sometime in the late 1800s to early 1900s, but this was not the case.

GOVERNOR OF ORLEANS

Governor Of Orleans 6866 was a handsome bay horse with a white left hind ankle, one of the last bred by Joseph Battell and foaled in 1914. His sire was the General Gates son Ben Lomond 3000 (x Highland Mary), foaled in 1908. Ben Lomond was a full brother of the well-known stallion Scotland, purchased at auction for the U. S. Government farm for \$800 following Battell's death. Governor Of Orleans was from Ben Lomond's first and only crop of just two registered foals. Battell registered the colt, but lived only a few months more, as he passed away in February 1915. At the resulting auction of his stock, the yearling colt was sold April 20, 1915 to E. R. Yates of Middlebury for \$70. His sire, Ben Lomond, was at first retained by the estate, as they sought a higher price than offered, and later was sold to C. A. Woolson & Son.

During the years Governor Of Orleans was owned by Yates, he was regularly advertised in the *Middlebury Register* from 1917-1921:

"Morgan Stallion Governor Of Orleans Registered 6866 Dark bay, 15-2 hands, weighs 1085 pounds, four years old, pure

trotting action, bred by the late Joseph Battell, got by Ben Lomond, son of Gen. Gates 666, he by Denning Allen 74, by Honest Allen 73, son of Ethan Allen 50; Ben Lomond, dam Highland Mary, got by Lambert Chief 1498, son of Daniel Lambert 62, dam Jessie Benson (dam of Mattie C. 2.25), by Highland Gray 94 (2.28), son of Darkey 93, by Rounds Horse 92, son of Black Hawk 2d, dam by Paris Hamiltonian, son of Harris Hamiltonian. Governor Of Orleans' dam was Maid Of Orleans, got by Morris M. 5225, race record 2.23, son of Moloch 4800, by Stranger 100; dam Bettie Moloch, by Moloch 4800, son of Stranger 100, by Gen. Washington 76; dam Beth, got by Berial, dam of Illinois Egbert 2,16, by Bowman's Clark Chief, son of Clark Chief 2993; 3d dam by Ward's Flying Cloud 144, son of Fairy Gift, race record 2.30, son of Thorndale, by Alexander's Abdallah. Maid Of Orleans traces at least 15 times to Justin Morgan and through both sire and dam to Goldsmith Maid, at one time Queen Of The turf. Governor Of Orleans will make the season at his home 70 Washington St. 1314 Middlebury, Vt. AT 10 DOLLARS, E. R. YATES."

His 1918 ads also included this note:

BREED A MARE

Riding Horses for Army in Demand

A high officer of the Remount Division of the Quartermaster Corps of the United States Army, in discussing horses for the war says:

"The adoption of some method of encouraging the breeding of a good type of riding horse for the Army is vitally necessary. It appears from the information obtained by our Remount Service since the war began that farmers and breeders have produced a plentiful supply of horses suitable for army artillery and general draft purposes. It is practically impossible at this time, however, to find in this country a sufficient number of the real cavalry type of horse to meet the demands of war."

Governor Of Orleans was still in the ownership of Yates and was exhibited in the stallion class along with Bennington, Scotland, and McMahan at the unveiling of the Justin Morgan statue by F. G. Roth, presented by the Morgan Horse Club to the U. S. Morgan Horse Farm in Weybridge, Vermont, on Oct 1, 1921. Yates sold Governor Of Orleans to the government in 1922 as a remount stallion, which is documented by the *Middlebury Register* of April 28, 1922.

This was how Almanzo, who signed on as a government agent, came into possession of Governor Of Orleans, instead of purchasing the horse himself as has been previously thought. Almanzo, then 55 years old, was still raising Morgans for his own farm use, and he was convinced that a Morgan Remount stallion would be the answer to improving his neighbors' stock as well as his own. Almanzo believed the tough and sure-footed Morgans with their excellent feet and legs were ideal both for the stony roads and rocky fields of the Ozarks. He had always taken pride in the ability of the Morgan horse to have strength, intelligence, and willingness to work in the fields as well as serving as beautiful, all-purpose family horses for both riding and driving. The coming of this well-bred Morgan stallion must surely have been an exciting



Laura with Governor Of Orleans (Courtesy of the Rose Wilder Lang Collection).

event which Almanzo took great pride in, which may be seen in his ads in the *Mansfield Mirror* which soon followed.

George F. Jordan, who was then editor of the *Missouri Ruralist*, paid Almanzo a visit and wrote an article about Almanzo and his Morgans titled, “The Morgan, A Horse for the Ozarks.” This was reprinted in the booklet, *Laura Ingalls Wilder Family, Home and Friends* by Irene Lichty Le Count.

Jordan described “Governor” as a dark bay, 1,150 pounds, with broad chest, deep, well sprung ribs and a superb back, wide forehead with kindly intelligent eyes and, “as fine feet as ever traveled an Ozark road.”

“What we hope to do is to improve the quality of Ozark horses by an admixture of Morgan blood,” Almanzo told Jordan. “For many years we have been attempting to breed an ideal Ozark horse...On many farms there are fine mares weighing from 1,110 to 1,350. But in many cases the quality is lack. The Morgan horse has that quality. It means good feet to withstand the stony roads and fields. It means an exceptionally good back. And there must be ability to pull, yet serve our purpose for road uses—and this ability must be backed by a willingness to go into the collar. A horse must have sense as well as weight and the Morgan, I’m convinced, has more intelligence than any breed of horses I have ever known.”

In addition to helping produce good farm horses of a lighter type, Jordan noted that The American Remount Association, who owned Governor Of Orleans, also expected that his blood would enable them

to go into the Ozark territory and find good horses for cavalry and artillery purposes. He also added that Governor Of Orleans had sired 23 colts the previous year, and while he had not seen all of them, those he did see showed him to be a very prepotent sire.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WILDER MORGANS

While none of the Wilder Morgans were ever registered, and their bloodlines were lost to the breed, their stories as shared by Laura Ingalls Wilder have been a strong influence, nevertheless. Laura’s first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, was published in 1932, and has since sold more than sixty million copies in 33 languages. She went on to write seven more in the series, with stories of Prince and Lady featured in books six through eight. The ninth book was published after her death, and additional writings later rediscovered have added additional clues. So popular were her simple stories of her life as a pioneer girl, it is safe to say that almost everyone who reads one book will ultimately read them all. Numerous museums abound, including Almanzo Wilder’s boyhood farm home in New York; the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Decorah, Iowa (when the Ingalls family lived in Burr Oak, Iowa); the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove, Minnesota; The Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Homes, De Smet, South Dakota, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Home and Museum in Mansfield, Missouri. All who visit these places and read Laura’s books will also learn about the beautiful Morgans who played such a part in her stories. ■

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