Almost to a person those of the "baby boomer" generation will fondly remember the popular TV series, "Little House on the Prairie." Few, however, will have known of Rose Wilder Lane, her connection to this series, to Harlingen, and more importantly her accomplishments.

Rose Wilder Lane was born December 5, 1886 in De Smet, Dakota Territory. She was the first child of Almanzo and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Aha, this stirs a memory; isn't the latter the author of the "Little House on the Prairie" book series for children? Yes, indeed. Rose also lived the hardship life, similar to her mother's as portrayed on television. Before the age of two she was sent away to her mother's parents for several months after her parents contracted diphtheria, then a deadly disease. In August 1889 she became a sister but only for the short period that her baby brother survived without ever being given a name. Rose was to have no other siblings. When a fire destroyed their home soon after the baby's death and repeated crop failures compounded the Wilder family miseries, the Wilders moved from the Dakotas to his parent's home in Spring Valley, Minnesota. In their search for a settled life and livelihood, the Wilders in 1891 went south to Westville, Florida to live with Laura's cousin Peter. Still unhappy in these surroundings, the family returned to De Smet in 1892 and lived in a rented house.

Here Grandma Ingalls took care of Rose while Laura and Almanzo worked. Rose began to attend school and was a quick study. After only two years here, the Wilders embarked in 1894 with their friends, the Cooleys, in a horse-drawn hack to Mansfield in the Missouri Ozarks. Rose, who was bored with her schoolwork because of its ease, was allowed to study at home. With the Mansfield school system going only to the 10th grade, Rose at age 16 journeyed to Crowley, Louisiana to live with her father's sister Eliza Jane to complete high school.

Upon being graduated in 1904, the now independent young woman learned telegraphy and took employment with the Western Union Company in Kansas City, moving three years later to Mount Vernon, Indiana. Rose obviously had a strong wanderlust which stayed with her the whole of her life, for in 1908 she moved to San Francisco. There she met and fell in love with Claire Gillette Lane, who lived in the same apartment building. He was a salesman and sometime newspaper man. They married in March 1909 and moved to Kansas City where Rose worked for the Kansas City Post. The next summer she gave birth to a baby boy, who died shortly afterward.

Once again on the move, the couple lived in several cities before returning to San Francisco. Here they successfully entered the real estate field. She was one of the first woman real estate agents in California. While her career flourished the couple grew apart. Upon the depressed real estate market at the cessation of the Great War, Rose returned to writing.

Even before the war Rose was writing serial stories for major magazines including Sunset, The Ladies Home Journal, Harper's Monthly, The Saturday Evening Post, and Country Gentleman. By 1915 she was a featured reporter for the San Francisco Bulletin. Her first book was to be "Henry Ford's Own Story" published in 1917. Her increased inde-
pendence may have contributed to her divorce from Gillette in 1918. She gave a fiction-
alized treatment of it in her novel "Diverging Roads." In the following two decades her
works would be nominated for O. Henry and other literary honors and be included in an-
thologies.

With the urge to travel, she moved to Greenwich Village, New York where she flirted
with "radical socialism." Here she ghostwrote the non-fiction travel book "White Shadows
on the South Seas" for Frederick O'Brien and under her own name in 1920 "The Making
of Herbert Hoover", his first biography. This made her a lifelong friend of the future
president. She also wrote an early biography of Charlie Chaplin, and biographies of Art
Smith and Jack London.

Upon the conclusion of the war Rose fell into a job perfectly suited to her character. She
became a reporter for the American Red Cross publicity bureau, writing about the poor
post-war conditions in Europe. She traveled extensively on the continent, and in this pe-
riod she became close friends with the to-be famed columnist Dorothy Thompson and
with Helen "Troub" Boylston, author of the "Sue Barton" nurse series for girls. Albania,
no less, became her favorite country. She portrayed it in "The Peaks of Shala." An Alba-
nian boy, Rexh Meta, was to save her life here. In return she informally adopted him and
provided him an American college education.

It was in 1924 that Rose returned to Rocky Ridge Farm in the Ozarks. Here this prolific
writer compiled two of her most enjoyable novels, "Hill Billy" (1925) and "Cindy"
(1928). Discontent with the quiet rural life lead Rose to visit Albania once again, this
time with her friend Laura Boylston. Jointly they published their experiences in "Travels
in Zenobia", but this area's instability, including a revolution no less, forced them to re-
turn to Missouri in 1928. Somewhere along the line Rose refused a proposal of marriage
from Ahmet Zogu, the future King Zog I of Albania.

Rose and Helen moved into the Rocky Ridge Farmhouse as Rose, now financially secure,
had a modern rock house built on the farm for her parents. In the stock market crash of
1929 Rose was to lose most of her money and be driven back to writing to earn a living.

While in Missouri, Rose, remembering fondly the stories her mother had related of her
own childhood in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, encouraged her mother to record the many
autobiographical stories. She also felt it might become a source of income for Laura.

Laura did compile her stories in a collection which she called "Pioneer Girl", but no pub-
lisher was to be found until the manuscript was reworked into a children's book titled
"Little House in the Big Woods." Its success propelled Laura to continue writing the se-
ries. Rose herself wrote "Let the Hurricane Roar" in 1932 and "Free Land" in 1938 bas-
ically telling the Ingalls and Wilder family stories in an adult format. These novels were
her most commercially successful. In "Old Home Town" (1935) she wrote of her chil-
dhood years in Mansfield.

With two headstrong women involved, it is not unusual that a controversy would arise
over the roles of mother and daughter in the formulation of the famed "Little House" se-
ries. Where Laura Ingalls Wilder's work ended and Rose Wilder Lane's began is hard to
establish. Likely Rose was able to edit her mother's rough drafts to an extent rendering
them publishable. One reference states "The conclusion can be made that Wilder's
strengths as a compelling storyteller and Lane's considerable skills as in dramatic pacing,
literary structure, and characterization contributed to an occasionally tense, but remarka-
ble collaboration between two talented women." Rose's biographer, William V. Holtz, in
his "The Ghost in the Little House: A Life of Rose Wilder Lane" points out "that Lane's libertarian ideas caused her to make some changes to her mother's stories as she "ran then through her typewriter" to ensure the Ingalls family were true libertarian heroes." The last work of Laura's classic nine volume series was "These Happy Golden Years" published in 1943. She was to die at age 90 in Mansfield in February 1957.

In the 1930s Rose described her experiences for a Federal Writers Project. She wrote: "I have been office clerk, telegrapher, newspaper reporter, feature writer, advertising writer, farmland salesman. I have seen all of the United States and something of Canada and the Caribbean; all of Europe except Spain; Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq as far east as Baghdad, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan." She went on to write: "In 1917 I became a convinced, though not practicing Communist...I am now a fundamentalist American; give me time and I will tell you why individualism, laissez faire and the slightly restrained anarchy of capitalism offer the best opportunities for the development of the human spirit. Also I will tell you why the relative freedom of human spirit is better—and more productive, even in material ways—than the Communist, Fascist, or any other rigidity organized for material ends."

Rose, at the age of 52, moved to New York City in 1938. It was there that she was to see her pioneer novel and last fiction effort published. Its royalties allowed her to purchase a house in Danbury Connecticut. One might surmise that she began a second career when she became one of "the 20th century's most important popularizers of the ideas of liberty." Actually her views were being formulated over a lifetime. In 1921, she had covered events in the Soviet Union and became at that time a "devoted opponent of Communism." In a 1936 Saturday Evening Post essay title "Credo" she contrasted abuses in Europe with the American Constitutional order that protected personal liberties and disavowed her youthful involvement with socialism. It was reprinted as a pamphlet called "Give Me Liberty." She was a critic of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies, especially for vastly increasing the size of government.

In 1943, in an unusual coincidence, three women authors were to help ignite the modern libertarian movement. In "white heat" Rose Lane was to write her most famous book, "The Discovery of Freedom: Man's Struggle Against Authority." Ayn Rand would publish "The Fountainhead" and Isabel Paterson "The God of the Machine." A correspondence between Lane and Rand that lasted several years began after Lane wrote a favorable review of Rand's book.

Rose's book traces political and economic liberty from the earliest stages of human history to the 20th century. One chapter could well be translated into Arabic and distributed in Iraq at this time. It deals with Islam and praises the early Arab caliphate in Baghdad "as a place where people enjoyed a degree of personal liberty unknown in the contemporaneous medieval European principalities." Recently this portion has been extracted from the larger book and reprinted in a 96 page paperback as "Islam and the Discovery of Freedom."

In this same year (1943) Roger Lea MacBride, teenage son of one of her editors, met her. She took him under her wing as a mentor and exposed the young man to her beliefs. Roger was later to attend Harvard University, become a lawyer by profession, a political figure, and television producer. In 1962 he was elected to the Vermont legislature as a Republican. Ten years later and now in Virginia he jumped ship and by casting his electoral college vote for Libertarian Party candidates John Hospers for President and Theodora
Nathan for Vice President became the first presidential elector to cast a vote for a woman. In the 1980s he supported the Republican Liberty Caucus, a group of libertarians working within the Republican Party.

As the adopted grandson of Rose he inherited the substantial Ingalls-Wilder literary estate including the "Little House on the Prairie" franchise. He went on to co-produce the 1970s television series of the same name. His control and use of those and Rose's finances when she was alive were questioned by some. When MacBride died in 1995 the Laura Ingalls Wilder Library in Mansfield contended that Wilder's original will gave her daughter ownership of the literary estate for her lifetime only, all rights to revert to the library after her death. After a court case, an undisclosed settlement was made, but MacBride heirs retained the rights.

Rose acted on her beliefs. She was not only a theorist but an activist too. Opposed to creeping socialism and taxation, she turned away from highly paid commercial fiction in the 1940s in order to avoid paying income taxes. In 1945 and 1946 in Danbury she "led a campaign against the introduction of zoning, which she saw as a violation of individual property rights..." Her experiences had taught her that central planning was incompatible with both prosperity and individual freedom. During World War II she grew her own food to avoid wartime rationing and later quit her editorial job with the National Economics Council, so as not to pay Social Security taxes. Throughout the 1950s she characterized Social Security as unstable and a "Ponzi fraud." She predicted it would collapse catastrophically.

"On the Way Home", a biography-autobiography of Rose was published in 1962. In 1963 she put together the "Woman's Day Book of American Needlework." Still a ball of energy at age 78, she went to South Vietnam in 1965 as a war correspondent for Woman's Day. By the following year she was to retire (?) in relatively sedate Harlingen. Why she chose this town is unknown but possibly she had knowledge of Raymond Hoiles and his Freedom Press chain of newspapers or just wanted to spend her winters away from icy New England. For three years she lived at 435 Woodland Drive north of City Lake. It was the former home of J. H. Barnes, owner of Valley Laundry and Dry Cleaners. While living here she became friends with the Giffens, who lived at 425 Woodland. Rose befriended and mentored young college graduate E. Don Giffen, currently owner and manager of Grimsell's Seed Store. She offered 24-year old Giffen a chance of a lifetime. It was to accompany her on a three-year tour of the world during which she would be a correspondent. They commenced their journey with a trip to Mississippi then went on to Danbury. Too tired and heavy to ascend the stairs to the second floor, this borderline diabetic bid "Goodnight" and turned in. The next morning, 10/30/68, Giffen found his 81 year-old mentor had died in the night.

The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa houses the Rose Wilder Lane Collection and documents her extraordinary life. In the end it could be said of her "She was opinionated and prickly, with a complicated personal and family life. She was an admirable woman and should be well-known for her many own accomplishments." A quote from Rose reflects a truth: "The longest lives are short; our work lasts longer." Harlingen needs to remember this remarkable woman who lived within our midst.