

REDISCOVERING LAURA'S PEPIN OF 1873

*A walking tour of historic buildings in
Pepin, Wisconsin, the birthplace of Laura
Ingalls Wilder, author of
Little House in the Big Woods*

By Catherine H. Latané & Martha Kuhlman

3rd reprinting, 2019

Please refer to the map on the inside of this brochure to locate each numbered location. Our walking tour begins in front of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum, 306 Hwy 35.

In Laura's time, Third Street, or Highway 35, which runs in front of the museum, was a wagon track through the grasses of the Pepin prairie. The village had been surveyed and platted in blocks and lots in 1855, but in 1874, when Laura's family left Pepin, most of the lots and blocks were still undeveloped, and the homes that would have been visible from this point would have looked more like farms on the prairie than houses in town.

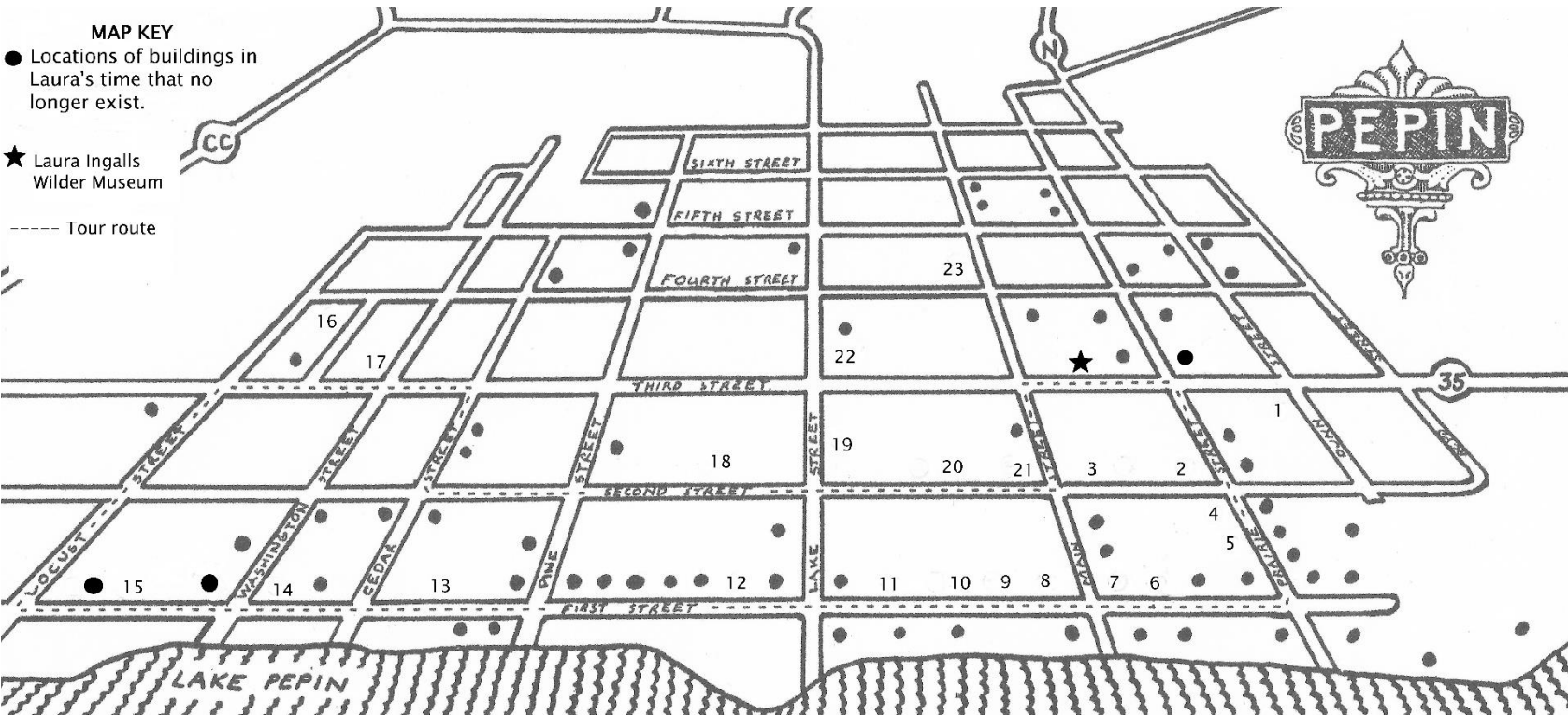
Italicized print: Structure existed after Laura's time.

1. 201 Third Street, Private Residence

In the early 1870s this was the family home of John Jahnke, a carpenter and farmer from Germany who had settled in Pepin in the late 1850s.

2. 304 Second Street, Private Residence

This was the family home of Benjamin Allen, an attorney and Civil War Colonel from Vermont, who was one of Pepin's early developers. The portion of his house that can be seen today was built in 1857. An older wing was demolished in the 1970s. The house was purchased in 1876 by the Philip Pfaff family.



3. 310 Second Street, Harbor Hill Inn

In 1891, when Edith Pfaff married Charles Francies, they had this fine house built next door to her parents.

4. 112 Prairie Street, Private Residence

Though externally much changed, the framework of this house dates back to Pepin's earliest days. In 1870 it was the family home of William Jahnke, another carpenter from Germany, and in 1873, of George Fredabaugh, a farmer from Maine.

5. 108 Prairie Street, Private Residence

In 1870, this house, which has been moved from its original location, was the family home of blacksmith/wagon maker, George Topliss, from England. The shop was on First Street just east of Prairie Street. The house was east of the shop.

Pause at the foot of Prairie Street and look across the railroad tracks at the point which now houses the Pickle Factory and the Smith Brother's Landing. In Laura's time, the A.D. Gray mill and the Pfaff elevator were located in this area.

First Street in Pepin was the "town" of Little House in the Big Woods, and in Laura's time there were commercial buildings on both sides of the street along the next three blocks. The buildings along the lakeshore were moved when the railroad was built in 1886. Some of them were moved across the

street, and others up the hill to Second Street. As trains frightened the horses on First Street, more businesses moved up the hill. Eventually, Second Street replace First as the center of activity.

On the lakeshore in this block in 1870 were the blacksmith shop connected with the Ridgeway Hotel, and the Bullard House Hotel. On the north side of First Street were the Philip Pfaff store, the Ridgeway Hotel, and:

6. 310 First Street, Dockside Pub

This building belonged to Barbara Moore through the 1870s. Newspapers of the late 1850s referred to "Moore's Hall."

Family tradition is that Mrs. Moore, Civil War Widow, rented the building to various shopkeepers. In the early 1880s, Mrs. Moore sold the building to James Hallsworth, who ran a hardware store there for many years.

7. 314 First Street, Harbor View Café

The oldest part of this building dates back to the nineteenth century. There was an inn on this corner as early as the 1850s, but early accounts suggest that the original building was replaced in the 1890s.

In the next block, along the lakeshore, were the general store of Patrick McInerney and the residence and livery stable of the P.N. Tuttle family.

8. 400 First Street, 404 Coffee Shop

Isabelle Richards had her boarding house and store built on the lakeshore in about 1880, and it was moved across the street when the railroad was built.

9. 404 First Street, 404 Coffee Shop

In Laura’s time, A.D. Gray, a prominent businessman from Pennsylvania, owned this entire quarter block, as well as number 7 and the mill property down at the point. This building was his family home and was set back from the sidewalk. It was moved to its present location in 1886 to make room for buildings that were being moved from the railroad right of way.

10. 408 First Street, Private Residence

This brick store and residence was built by hardware merchant, Frank Ficker, about 1880, to replace an earlier building.

11. 410 First Street, Private Residence

Henry Sinjen came to Pepin and established a shoe and harness business at this location in the late 1870s. When Laura came to Pepin, this property and the entire SW quarter of the block belonged to Fred Stahl, originally from Germany, another of Pepin’s prominent businessmen.

William Boyd Newcomb built the first cabin in the village in the next block at the corner of First and Pine. It was soon replaced by a more substantial residence at Second and Cedar.

In Laura’s time, the block contained several small commercial buildings: the John Lowry cabinet shop, the Hi Fuller machine shop, the masonic Lodge with rental space below, and the Lyman Fuller blacksmith shop. A large hotel was built about 1880 and called at different times the Central House, the Park Hotel, and finally the Pepin Hotel, burned in 1984.

12. 506 First Street, Private Residence

This house was built as a family home by C.D. Nehlson, a German farmer, cabinetmaker-house builder, and partner with Fred Stahl in the grain elevator business.

There were some improvements (taxable structures) on the lakeshore opposite this block, but the Stahl elevator was not built there until after Laura’s time.

On the lakeshore west of the corner of First and Pine Streets was the Richards Brothers’ General Store, which was purchased by H.J. Milliron in 1874.

13. 612 First Street, Private Residence

John Fuller, a marine engineer (he maintained and may have manufactured steam engines for riverboats) from Ohio, built this house for his family in 1874.

14. 714 First Street, Private Residence

Hiram Fuller, machinist, marine engineer, and farmer from New York, built this family home in 1857-58. Anna Barry, who taught at the Barry Corner School in which Mary and Laura Ingalls were registered in September 1871, later lived in this house until her death in 1941 at the age of 95.

15. 816 First Street, Private Residence

Ira Fuller, Jr. riverboat captain and entrepreneur, built this house in 1880 for his bride, Kate Moore.

16. 315 Elm Street, Private Residence

Ira Fuller, Sr., machinist, marine engineer, and farmer (uncle of Ira, Jr.) lived here with his wife and their large family after 1863. He introduced the steam thresher to the area and had a wide reputation as “the pioneer thresher.”

17. 806 Third Street, Pepin Depot Museum

Built in 1886 on the river side of the Chicago, Burlington and Northern Railroad tracks, opposite #11, the depot was moved

to the Laura Ingalls Wilder Park in 1985 and is now a museum of Pepin’s railroad history.

18. 504 Second Street, United Methodist Church

The Methodist church building was built in 1875 to replace the original frame structure which had been built on the same block, over on Pine Street, in 1856.

19. 207 Lake Street, Private Residence

Built in 1858 by George Densmore, this house was occupied in 1870 (and for many years after), by a widow, “Aunt” Maggie Porter and her children.

20. 410 Second Street, E&S Fresh market

This building was built in 1890 by August Thies when he moved to Pepin’s “new” business district. He had purchased the Philip Pfaff general store on First Street in 1876. This building was built in the style of the period that Laura’s family would have seen.

21. 402 Second Street, Dougieland Studios

The Masonic Lodge built this structure in 1887 to replace the smaller building on First Street. This building was built in the style of the period that Laura’s family would have seen.

22. 410 Third Street, Private Residence

In the 1870s, this house was occupied by the family of Amos Gray, a dry goods merchant. The house was surrounded by an apple orchard.

23. 404 Main Street, Private Residence

Originally at the SE corner of Fourth and Main Streets, this building was built in 1861 to house the German Methodist Church. When the German and English speaking congregations united in 1913, this church building was moved to its present location and converted to a residence.

Further details of these and other buildings in Pepin from 1855 to 1880 may be found in a book about Pepin published by Catherine H. Latané and Martha Kuhlman, sold at T&C Latané and at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum.