

1980

A Study of Historical Fiction and the Works of Laura Ingalls Wilder

Kathleen L. McLaughlin
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1980 Kathleen L. McLaughlin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>

Recommended Citation

McLaughlin, Kathleen L., "A Study of Historical Fiction and the Works of Laura Ingalls Wilder" (1980).
Graduate Research Papers. 3844.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3844>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

A Study of Historical Fiction and the Works of Laura Ingalls Wilder

Find Additional Related Research in UNI ScholarWorks

To find related research in UNI ScholarWorks, go to the collection of [School Library Studies Graduate Research Papers](#) written by students in the [Division of School Library Studies](#), Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, at the University of Northern Iowa.

Abstract

This study was undertaken for the specific purpose of developing criteria for good historical fiction, applying the resulting criteria statements to each of the books that make up the "Little House" series, and determining the frequency of criteria appearance in each book separately and as a series. The purpose of this study was to develop and apply a criteria list to each of the books in the "Little House" series point by point.

A valid list of criteria has been established and used in evaluating the "Little House series. Eleven separate criterion which describe the five important elements of good fiction make up the checklist. This study applied the established criteria to each individual book of the "Little House" series. A weighted scale was used to determine the number of episodes in which each criterion appeared in a given book. The individual totals for the series ranged from 29 (87.8 percent) to 33 (100 percent). Every book in the series exceeded by several points the anticipations of the study. The "Little House" series met the criteria 95.83 percent of the time, exceeding the 60 percent requirement of the study. The "Little House" series by Laura Ingalls Wilder is a good example of historical fiction.

A STUDY OF HISTORICAL FICTION AND
THE WORKS OF LAURA INGALLS WILDER

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. McLaughlin

April 12, 1980

Read and approved by
Mary Lou McGrew

Elizabeth Martin

Accepted by Department
Elizabeth Martin

Date May 1, 1980

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken for the specific purpose of developing criteria for good historical fiction, applying the resulting criteria statements to each of the books that make up the "Little House" series, and determining the frequency of criteria appearance in each book separately and as a series. The purpose of this study was to develop and apply a criteria list to each of the books in the "Little House" series point by point.

A valid list of criteria has been established and used in evaluating the "Little House series. Eleven separate criterion which describe the five important elements of good fiction make up the checklist. This study applied the established criteria to each individual book of the "Little House" series. A weighted scale was used to determine the number of episodes in which each criterion appeared in a given book. The individual totals for the series ranged from 29 (87.8 percent) to 33 (100 percent). Every book in the series exceeded by several points the anticipations of the study. The "Little House" series met the criteria 95.83 percent of the time, exceeding the 60 percent requirement of the study. The "Little House" series by Laura Ingalls Wilder is a good example of historical fiction.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	iii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	2
Hypothesis	2
Significance of the Problem	2
Assumptions	3
Limitations	4
Definitions	4
2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	6
3. METHODOLOGY	18
4. ANALYSIS OF DATA	23
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	54
Summary	54
Conclusions	57
Recommendations	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61
APPENDIXES	
A. SAMPLE TABLE	63
B. SAMPLE SUMMARY TABLE	64

TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>Little House in the Big Woods</u>	27
2.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>Little House on the Prairie</u>	30
3.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>Farmer Boy</u>	34
4.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>On the Banks of Plum Creek</u>	37
5.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>By the Shores of Silver Lake</u>	40
6.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>The Long Winter</u>	43
7.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>Little Town on the Prairie</u>	47
8.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for <u>These Happy Golden Years</u>	49
9.	Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for the "Little House" series	52

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years one of the most popular series of books among upper elementary children has been the "Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. This may be due in part to the popular television program of the last few years which is based on Mrs. Wilder's books; however, this cannot be the only reason. The "Little House" books have been widely read for over forty-five years, ever since the first book, Little House in the Big Woods, was published in 1932. The series is not only in demand among the young, but the older generations enjoy reading the series as well. Reacting to the Little House in the Big Woods, Judith Stromdahl stated, "It is a joy to find that it met the test of a truly great children's book, for it could be enjoyed by the young and the old alike."¹

No librarian who has ever witnessed the speed with which these books circulate among the young readers, boys and girls alike, can doubt the attraction of this series. As Charlotte S. Huck says, "No books of historical fiction are more loved than the nine "Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder."²

¹Judith E. Stromdahl, "A Lasting Contribution," Top of the News, January, 1965, p. 111.

²Charlotte S. Huck, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976), p. 498.

Huck and other reputable authorities in the field of children's literature claim that the "Little House" series of books are examples of good historical fiction. What does the term historical fiction mean? Can the series stand up under scrutiny if it is compared with a list of criteria for good historical fiction?

Problem Statement

A search of related literature did not produce a study in which Mrs. Wilder's "Little House" books were compared with criteria that established that standard of good historical fiction. The purpose of this study was to develop criteria for good historical literature and to apply the resulting information to each of the individual "Little House" books.

Hypothesis

H₁: Valid criteria can be established which measure the value of a particular book as historical fiction.

H₂: The "Little House" series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder can be evaluated by an established list of criteria to determine whether or not they are examples of good historical fiction.

H₃: Each of Mrs. Wilder's books, which compose the "Little House" series, will meet a weighted scale for determining the number of episodes in which each criterion appears at the 60 percent level.

Significance of the Problem

A review of the literature shows that authorities in the field of children's literature, such as Charlotte S. Huck, Constantine Georgiou, and May Hill Arbuthnot, all have great respect for Laura Ingalls Wilder as an author of children's books. To testify to the respect the library profession has for her, the

nominating committee for the Newbery Award have placed her name in nomination five times for that award.³ The American Library Association created the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award as a tribute to her in 1954.⁴

Sources claim that the series is good historical fiction, and they define what the elements of good historical fiction are; however, they fail to relate the two. This study has looked at all of the books in the Wilder series in depth and has attempted to determine whether or not each of them is an example of good historical fiction. A search for sources did not produce a study of the series from this angle. This researcher has attempted to produce such a study.

Assumptions

Certain assumptions must be made about this study:

1. The purpose of this study was not to determine if the "Little House" series is historical fiction. The series has been properly labeled historical fiction.

2. It was assumed that valid criteria could be developed with which to evaluate the series. It is accepted procedure to evaluate works of literature using criteria. Charlotte S. Huck, Constantine Georgiou, and Zena Sutherland all used stated criteria when they evaluated literature in their books. Each of these authorities indicated characteristics of historical fiction which

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

were used as a foundation for the list of criteria to be used in this study.

Limitations

This study was limited to the eight books that make up the "Little House" series, even though the criteria developed may be applied to any children's historical fiction book. The following books are considered to be part of that series: Little House in the Big Woods, Little House on the Prairie, Farmer Boy, On the Banks of Plum Creek, By the Shores of Silver Lake, The Long Winter, Little Town on the Prairie, and These Happy Golden Years. This study did not include any other books by Laura Ingalls Wilder or her daughter Rose Wilder Lane. Sources used in this paper are those which can be located at the University of Northern Iowa and those available through interlibrary loan systems. The researcher's ability to develop and apply criteria for the evaluation of historical fiction may tend to be a limitation of this study.

Definitions

Historical fiction and / or historical realism reconstructs the past⁵ as it really was. Children learn the facts of history by being able to identify with real or imaginative characters from a period of history. To give readers a feeling of "we were there"⁶ authors must pay extremely close attention to detailing descriptions

⁵Ibid., pp. 470-71.

⁶Zena Sutherland and May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1977), pp. 369-70.

that make the insights, emotions, and physical surroundings reflect that time in history.

Criteria are standards used to judge facts, principles, opinions, and conduct which are tested in forming a correct judgment respecting a concept.⁷

⁷William Allan Neilson and Thomas A. Knott, Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (Springfield, Massachusetts: G & C Merriam Co., 1959), p. 627.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A search of the literature available in the University of Northern Iowa Library concerning historical fiction and the westward movement of the 1880's was conducted. The trends toward westward movement by pioneers were studied. Information on their reasons for moving west, their original homes, and what attracted them to move were sought.

Information concerning the elements that makeup historical fiction were needed. An over-all definition of historical fiction was made, and the parts of it were defined. This information was needed because a checklist, or some form of criteria for historical fiction, would be developed in order to evaluate the "Little House" series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The resulting criteria needed to be comprehensive enough so that they could be used to evaluate any example of historical fiction. The purpose of the criteria in this study, however, was to evaluate the Wilder series of books.

Two studies by John C. Hudson were helpful in discovering pioneer motivations. The first article is entitled "Migration To An American Frontier". The article studied the movement of settlers into the Dakota territory. DeSmet, South Dakota, was the last move west on which Charles Ingalls took his family. Hudson maintained^d that a change in jobs was a prime reason for pioneers to move, and

that they changed their jobs and lines of work often.⁸ Hudson claimed that:

The first massive influx of settlers into Dakota Territory occurred in the 1880's. The westward push beyond the subhumid Middle West took place during the arrival of thousands of northern European immigrants. Dakota Territory became the new home of landless middlewesterners.⁹

In the article, "Two Dakota Homestead Frontiers", Hudson reported studies of the migration trends and settlement of two Dakota counties. They were Sanborn, South Dakota, and Bowman, North Dakota. Sanborn County is located adjacent to the southwest corner of Kingsbury County whose county seat is DeSmet, South Dakota. Settlement of Sanborn started very slowly in 1871, but the big rush for homesteads did not take place until 1879 and the early 1880's. The Northern Pacific Railroad was given credit for being the biggest promoter of settlement in the area. The railroad was responsible for taking the people to Sanborn and encouraging the people to build towns.¹⁰ Settlers looked for homesteads situated near towns, wooded areas, and along streams.¹¹ Those choice pieces of land were settled first.

According to Herbert S. Schell, the people who went to South Dakota to make their homes came from all over the world and

⁸John C. Hudson, "Migration To An American Frontier", Annals of the Association of American Geographers, June, 1976, pp. 243-44.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰John C. Hudson, "Two Dakota Homestead Frontiers", Annals of the Association of American Geographers, December, 1973, pp. 444-45.

¹¹Ibid., p. 446.

the United States. However, the majority of them, sixty percent, came from the neighboring states of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois. Those settlers were not only from neighboring states, but they were also from rural agricultural communities.¹²

Three factors which may have influenced pioneers to seek new homes and a chance at a better life were the railroad, grasshopper plagues, and the improvements in farm machinery. Grasshoppers drove farmers away from their old homes with little or no money left. The railroad took the farmers to new settlements. The new farm machinery made it easier to plow the prairies and harvest the grain.¹³ The Dakota territory not only gave settler's a second chance to succeed, it gave them a second chance to fail. Success or failure depended on the first few crops.

The most serious single problem confronting the early Dakota settler was his need for credit. He generally moved into the region with very little—usually with just enough to enable him to take a claim and plant a few acres. For a season or two he often sought employment at sawmills, or on military posts and Indian agencies and sometimes on the steamboats plying the Mississippi River. Earnings from such work would tide the family over until a crop was harvested or could provide money to buy some livestock and equipment.¹⁴

The pioneers of America were all individuals with their own private reasons for moving west. However, as a whole, without consideration for individual circumstances, Fred A. Shannon was

¹²Herbert S. Schell, History of South Dakota (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 168.

¹³Ibid., pp. 159-60.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 122.

able to isolate common motives for moving west into more unsettled territory. There was the promise of cheaper farms or free homesteads.¹⁵ Large families created a surplus of sons and a shortage of land in the settled states.¹⁶ There was also a tradition of pioneering. Pioneering is the desire for better land, new experiences, for more money, or just the feeling for more space between a pioneer's nearest neighbor and himself.¹⁷

The frontiersman's experiences were always new and always different. He had to make adjustments of old knowledge to new surroundings. His institutions and his ways of life had to undergo alterations. Inasmuch as the West was occupied much more rapidly than the East, those changes came about more suddenly and with greater violence.¹⁸

Like the rest of the authorities consulted in this study, Ray A. Billington thought the frontier farmer to be an "incurable optimist".¹⁹ His hopes and his dreams were full of "ifs". If he could find fertile soil, a better climate, get credit, the grasshoppers did not come, the rain came when it was expected, and the snows stayed away until the harvest was finished, then maybe he could become rich. Encouraging the pioneer and his dreams were the railroads. It was the railroads that lead the way into the unsettled

¹⁵Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier (New York: Farrar & Rinehart Inc., 1945), p. 33.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 35

¹⁷Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion (New York: MacMillan Co., 1960), p. 748.

plains of Dakota and advertised the possibilities of the Great Plains.²⁰ According to Billington, there were six major reasons for moving on farther west into the frontier. Those reasons were: dissatisfaction at home, the hope of sudden wealth, overcrowding in bordering states,²¹ the hope of economic betterment because of free land, the chance for adventure,²² and an infectious desire to move on and see new lands. Sometimes pioneers shifted their homes as many as six times or more in their lifetimes.²³

Although many pioneer farmers were perennial movers who shifted with the frontier, until they became shiftless themselves, their objective was to transform the western wilds into replicas of eastern communities with no trace of the natural environment remaining.²⁴

In summary, all the authorities searched for this review appear to agree that the western frontiersmen were all individuals unique in themselves. Whatever their reason for moving, they were personal, arising out of private needs and dreams. Pioneers were nonconformists.

The second part of the literature review dealt with the characteristics or elements of historical fiction. Criteria for historical fiction ~~are~~^{were} to be developed as part of the research study, so a definition and the elements of historical fiction were required.

²⁰Ibid., p. 706.

²¹Ibid., p. 705.

²²Ibid., pp. 1-2.

²³Ibid., p. 6.

²⁴Ibid., p. 5.

Zena Sutherland in her book Children and Books, maintained that historical fiction must meet all the criteria of good fiction.²⁵ Authors of historical fiction must do a tremendous amount of background research in order to make their study a convincingly good story. It is the small details that make a story convincing. A convincing story is one in which the reader becomes so absorbed in that he soon becomes unaware of the time difference and the details of the time. He puts himself beside the main characters in his imagination. The social customs, speech, manner of dress, and ideas are those of the time.²⁶

The key element of the development in a story seems to be characterization. "The characters should develop naturally and behave and talk in ways that are consistent with their age, sex, background, ethnic group, and education."²⁷ Other elements of fiction to be considered are style, plot, story line, and setting. Consistency and authenticity seem to be the key words.

In an essay entitled "The Character of an Historical Novel," Hilaire Belloc identified an historical novel as one "which is vivid, which impresses itself upon the imagination of the reader and makes him live in the scenes it describes, and convinces him at the same time that the past is what the author makes it."²⁸ The

²⁵Zena Sutherland and May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Co., 1977), p. 494.

²⁶Ibid., p. 25.

²⁷Ibid., p. 25.

²⁸Hilaire Belloc, One Thing and Another (New York: Robert M. McBride Co., 1955), p. 18.

author who can give the reader an understanding of the time period and the people in it has reached the ultimate success in historical fiction. In a good historical novel, the author depicts the past in terms of its value, understandings, and philosophy—not in terms of today's values. The past is made to come alive so that the reader can see it in the same way as someone who is living at that time. The author corrects any preconceived falsehoods in idea and fact.²⁹

Constantine Georgiou's Children and Their Literature used a term, "historical realism", which is very significant when it comes to evaluating Laura Ingalls Wilder's books. The term describes the method by which her books became historical.

This is a piece of literature that has since become historical. At the time it was written, it may have been contemporary, but its age makes it historical. These books have historical value because they tell us about life during the times in which they were written.³⁰

Like any other piece of fiction, an historical novel should tell a good story in excellent literary form. In an historical study, what matters the most in understanding an era is that the reader understands the motives and the reasons why rather than the hard facts. The facts which are included should be necessary to the story line, not just interesting in themselves.³¹

The best way to represent the flavor of the age is through characterization. To do this, an author pays meticulous attention

²⁹Ibid., pp. 21-22.

³⁰Constantine Georgiou, Children and Their Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 305.

³¹Ibid., pp. 306-07.

to the character's surroundings, speech patterns, dress, choice of name, and human interest details. "Quaintness and antiquity grace the sets depicting life in the past while the issues of the period are clarified and a sense of history is gained."³²

In "The Novel of Contemporary History", John Hersey stated that "Characters are the main focus of any style fiction".³³ Well-written historical fiction allows the reader to feel as if he is part of the story's action. By doing this, the reader gains not only knowledge of the historical facts, but an understanding of the reasons why things happened the way they did and the motivations for a particular event or person in time. Eventually, if a contemporary novel stays popular long enough, it becomes an historical novel by virtue of its age.³⁴

Time is the important element of an historical work according to Carolyn Horovitz in "Dimensions of Time". The consciousness of time should slip away from the reader as he reads a book.

The prime test of success in historical fiction is not only in how well the past is made to live, but how well its inconceivable oddities are made conceivable, its incomprehensibles illuminated so that the reader perceives the past as if it were the present.³⁵

³²Ibid., p. 309.

³³John Hersey, "The Novel of Contemporary History", Atlantic Monthly, November, 1949, p. 82.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 80-2.

³⁵Carolyn Horovitz, "Dimensions in Time", The Horn Magazine, June, 1962, p. 255.

The author's ability to breakdown time barriers between the past and the present thereby creating a sense of participation for the reader is of prime importance according to Charlotte S. Huck.

Historical fiction can dramatize and humanize the sterile facts of history. It can give children a sense of participation in the past and an appreciation for their historical heritage. It should enable the child to see that today's way of life is a result of what people did in the past, and that the present will influence the way people live in the future.³⁶

There are three forms of historical fiction according to Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature in the Elementary School. The three forms are those written from memory of a past time, true historical books written by a current author about history, and books that have because of their age become history.³⁷ The "Little House" books would be classified as being from memory. Huck does not add any significantly new concepts to this study on how the five elements of literature should relate to historical fiction. After an historical book has met all the criteria for good writing, it should be evaluated to see that it meets the following criteria for good historical fiction:

1. Does the book tell a good story, blending fact with fiction in such a way that the background is subordinate to the story?
2. Is the story accurate and authentic in every detail, including the setting and the known events of history?
3. Does the story adequately reflect the values and spirit of the times, or is it written from the point of view of today?

³⁶Charlotte S. Huck, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976), p. 474.

³⁷Ibid., p. 471.

4. Is the authenticity of the language presented in both the spoken word and in the description and comparisons of the written work?

5. Does its theme provide insight and understanding for today's living as well as in the past?³⁸

The last study of this review was done by Leland B. Jacobs. Jacobs identifies the two forms of historical fiction as being the researched past and the aged contemporary novel. After reading a good historical novel, the reader should have the feeling of having been an active participant in the past. He should come away with a full understanding of the essence of the time. "From having had an identification with the characters and happenings in historical fiction, the needs of a human being, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually,"³⁹ the child better understands history.

The pitfalls of historical fiction are: getting too carried away with descriptions of quaintness; faulty research which produces false facts or impressions; forsaking the spirit of the times by giving historical characters modern traits; failing to utilize speech patterns which reflect the people's dialect, but at the same time do not detract from the book by being too thick; distorting the facts that are presented in the material rather than using them as an essential tool for telling the story.⁴⁰ At the end of his article, Jacobs gives a checklist of criteria for appraising

³⁸Ibid., p. 471.

³⁹Leland B. Jacobs, "Historical Fiction for Children", The Reading Teacher, January, 1961, p. 192.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 192-3.

children's historical fiction that ~~were~~^{were} very valuable to this study. Jacob's criteria for historical fiction offers a good example, being concise and to the point.

They are stated as follows:

1. Is the story truly historical in nature, or might it as well have been told in a modern setting?
2. Is the spirit of the story authentic and is the information accurate?
3. Is the story tone realistic, free from romanticizing the past?
4. Does the story utilize historical settings, events, and personages for the creation of a picture of the past that centers in a child's characters realization of life rather than as ends in themselves?
5. Is the historical information included that which is truly essential to the behavior of the characters rather than interesting in and of itself?
6. Are the real historical personages included virtually necessary to the telling of the story?
7. Are the motivations and the behavior of the characters appropriate to the influence of the times in which they live?
8. Does the story illuminate life and living in the past in such ways that it raises the sights⁴¹ as well as stirs the imagination of the young today?

To summarize, historical fiction is fiction which tells a story about the past which the reader was not around to remember. Depending on the age of the reader, the Vietnam War may or may not be historical. History is not historical if the reader can vividly remember the time it took place.

Historical fiction can be created three ways: either by writing about a topic from the author's memory; by researching and writing about a past age; or by the work becoming historical by virtue of its age. Regardless of how the work became historical, it must be well founded in history and the basic dates, places,

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 193-4.

and pivotal characters must be authentic. The reader gains an understanding and appreciation of history when reading an historical novel depending on how the author uses the five elements of good literature to develop the spirit of the times. The five elements of good literature are theme, plot, setting, characters, and style. The most frequently mentioned criterion is characterization.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The study was concerned with a series of books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder which are referred to in this study as the "Little House" series of books. This study did not include the "Little House on the Prairie" series which is currently popular as a weekly television series. Included in the "Little House" series are these eight titles which were previously listed in the limitations section of this study. These eight titles include: Little House in the Big Woods, Little House on the Prairie, Farmer Boy, On the Banks of Plum Creek, By the Shores of Silver Lake, The Long Winter, Little Town on the Prairie, and These Happy Golden Years.

Development of Criteria Checklist

A criteria checklist was developed to be used in evaluating any book of historical fiction to determine its value. After completing the "Review of the Literature" section of this study, four of the seven sources consulted about historical fiction stood out from the others. Those four presented concise listings of characteristics describing historical fiction at its best. They are: Leland B. Jacobs, Constantine Georgiou, Charlotte S. Huck, and Zena Sutherland.

Leland B. Jacobs's criteria for historical fiction can be found in an article titled "Historical Fiction for Children."⁴²

⁴²Leland B. Jacobs, "Historical Fiction for Children", The Reading Teacher, January, 1961, pp. 191-4.

Georgiou's criteria is explained in his book Children and Their Literature.⁴³ The five parts of Huck's criteria are stated in the book Children's Literature in the Elementary School.⁴⁴ Zena Sutherland discusses what she considers necessary elements of good historical fiction in Children and Books.⁴⁵

While each authority's criteria were complete within themselves, they were very broad lists pliable enough to fit any era of history being studied. Each authority's list was analyzed and individual characteristics of historical fiction were identified. There were criteria used in some of the four lists that were not included in all of the lists, just as there were common characteristics found in all four sources. Each of the basic characteristics of historical fiction cited by the four authorities were compared and evaluated in terms of their likenesses and differences. The result was a new listing of eleven criteria that incorporated the like criteria and eliminated those criteria found only in one source. These eleven criteria were then placed in categories representing the five important elements of good fiction which include theme, plot, characterization, style, and setting.

The new criteria listing was then adapted specifically for use in evaluating books about that part of America's pioneer era

⁴³Constantine Georgiou, Children and Their Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 306-15.

⁴⁴Charlotte S. Huck, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976), p. 474.

⁴⁵Zena Sutherland and May Hill Arbutnot, Children and Books (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Co., 1977), pp. 368-443.

covering the years of 1870-1885. Those fifteen years were the years Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about in her books. Examples of circumstances under which each criterion might be found were cited to help the user or reader of this study better understand each criterion. However, those examples are not intended to be all-inclusive in illustrating the criterion which they exemplify.

The eleven criteria for evaluating historical fiction with their illustrative examples and separated into the five general elements by which all fiction is judged are:

Theme:

(1) Shows people dealing realistically with and coming to terms with their fate, both good and evil. - People are depicted as meeting head on and dealing with the situations of life as they arise, win or lose. Indications of this may be life or death, economic success or failure, unexpected windfalls, or illness.

(2) Provides insight and understanding for living in society, both the past and the present. - The meanings of emotion or physical freedom, loyalty to country or to other people, love of life or individuals, acceptance or tolerance of new ideas, people's lifestyles, or political philosophies of the pioneers are made clearer.

(3) Shows an interdependence of people within a community. - People depend on and need the help of other people when it comes to matters of barn and house building, sickness in the family, planting and harvesting of crops, protection from hostile elements or people, or providing goods not produced in the home.

(4) Shows people's struggle for the good life and for independence. - Historical fiction should stress the dignity and worth of man. An illustration of this may be freedom from domination by others, learning to accomplish something despite a handicap, or righting an injustice imposed on a person by natural forces or other people.

Plot:

(5) Weaves historical facts into the story line, giving the story substance without dominating the story. - Illustrations of this could be the passage of a federal law, the introduction

of a historical personage, the advancement of technology through the improvement of communication, the invention of labor saving equipment, or the celebration of a political anniversary.

Characterization:

(6) Shows universal human needs through character's feelings and emotions. - Events cause feelings to be brought out in the open. Feelings such as fear of the unknown frontier, fear of hostile elements, compassion for the suffering of others, hope for the future, or the need for security and love may be used to illustrate this characteristic.

(7) Shows people's actions as behavior appropriate to an historical era. - Samples of this may be the way in which food is gathered and prepared, or the way people act at social gatherings such as church, celebrations, or company in the home.

(8) Shows a sense of value and purpose for life in another time through characters. - There is a reason for always trying to improve the land, to bring civilization to the west, in moving further west, or in conquering the elements of nature to work for the good of humanity.

Style:

(9) Reveals authentic speech patterns. - This may be shown by the use of accents from foreign countries or dialects of sections of the United States.

(10) Uses terminology and figurative language representative of a particular era and location. - Indications of this may be the use of teepee instead of house, mustang instead of pony; or references to different articles of clothing such as trousers instead of pants or petticoats instead of slips.

Setting:

(11) Provides a memorable picture of the past. - Graphic details provide colorful backdrops. These background scenes may include covered wagons, prairies, homesteads, towns, or social gatherings.

A recording form was developed to determine how many times each of the eleven criteria was found in every book that makes up the "Little House" series (see Appendix A). A three point scale was used. Located to the right of each criterion statement is a frequency count scale on which the researcher tabulated the number

of times it appeared. Zero represents the absence of the criterion, one represents the presence of the criterion in one episode, two represents the presence of the criterion in two episodes, and three represents the presence of the criterion in three or more episodes. Also included on the scale are the page numbers on which each example of the characteristic appears in the book. When evaluating these books, the researcher used Harper Trophy paperback editions. The page numbers and illustrations of this edition correspond with those found in the Harper hardback editions.

The final table was developed to summarize the presence of the criteria in all of the books in the "Little House" series (see Appendix B). The criteria are listed at the left side by number and brief phrase, and each book title is given at the top of the table. Listed below each title and across from each criterion are the scores obtained. On the far right side are the totals of each line with a final count in the lower right hand corner.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Hypothesis 1 states that valid criteria can be established which will measure the value of a particular book as historical fiction. A list of criteria was developed and used in evaluating the "Little House" series.

Not one of the eleven criteria was totally absent from any one of the eight books of the series. The number of examples for each criterion usually met or exceeded the third level of the weighted scale. Only three of the criteria did not meet the level three each time.

A valid set of criteria were developed to measure historical fiction, and those same criteria were used to evaluate the "Little House" series. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 must be accepted until the list is shown to be ineffective in evaluating a book thought to be an example of historical fiction.

Hypothesis 2 states that the "Little House" series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder can be evaluated by an established list of criteria to determine whether or not they are examples of good historical fiction. The eleven point criteria developed for this study were used to evaluate each of the books in the series, and no difficulties were encountered in applying them; therefore, H_2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3 says that each of Mrs. Wilder's books, which compose the "Little House" series, will meet a scale for determining the number of episodes in which each criterion appears at the 60 percent level. To test Hypothesis 3, each book was analyzed to identify examples of each criterion. A checklist for each book was completed by noting the page numbers of examples, and by placing an "X" in the column representative of the level reached by each criterion in the book.

There are 33 possible points that can be assigned to any one of the books. Each time one of the criteria appeared in a book, it was awarded one point, but no more than three examples were recorded. A total of 20 points was needed for a specific book to meet H_3 at the 60 percent level of acceptance.

Using the scale of the checklist, a total of 29 points (87 percent) was assigned to the first book in the Wilder series, Little House in the Big Woods (see Table 1, page 27 and Table 9, page 52). Hypothesis 3 is accepted for this book. Three examples were found for eight of the criteria in Little House in the Big Woods. Authentic speech patterns, Criterion 9, were found in one episode while a struggle for the good life, Criterion 4, and the use of historical facts, Criterion 5, were found in two.

Most of Mrs. Wilder's scenes were very detailed. One example of the author's ability to bring an activity or scene to life was listed on the chart as representative of the first criterion, dealing realistically with and coming to terms with their fate, both good and evil.

The grass was dry and withered, and the cows must be taken out of the woods and kept in the barn to be fed. All the bright-colored leaves became dull brown when the cold rains began.

There was no more playing under the trees. But Pa was in the house when it rained, and he began again to play the fiddle after supper.

Then the rains stopped. The weather grew colder. In the early mornings everything sparkled with frost. The days were growing short and a little fire burned all day in the cookstove to keep the house warm. Winter was not far away.

The attic and the cellar were full of good things once more, and Laura and Mary had started to make patchwork quilts. Everything was beginning to be snug and cozy again.

One night when he came in from doing the chores Pa said that after supper he would go to his deer-lick and watch for a deer. There had been no fresh meat in the little house since spring, but now fawns were grown up, and Pa would go hunting again.

Pa had made a deer-lick, in an open place in the woods, with trees near by in which he could sit to watch it. A deer-lick was a place where the deer came to get salt. When they found a salty place in the ground they came there to lick it, and that was called a deer-lick. Pa had made one by sprinkling salt over the ground.

After supper Pa took his gun and went into the woods, and Laura and Mary went to sleep without any stories or music.

As soon as they woke in the morning they ran to the window, but there was no deer hanging in the trees. Pa had never before gone out to get a deer and come home without one. Laura and Mary did not know what to think.

All day Pa was busy, banking the little house and the barn with dead leaves and straw, held down by stones, to keep out the cold. The weather grew colder all day, and that night there was once more a fire on the hearth⁴⁶ and the windows were shut tight and chinked for the winter.

The Ingalls family had no control over the seasonal changes. The house had to be insulated against the cold winds, as much food as possible had to be stored, and provisions for future hunting were made if the family was to survive. The Ingalls wanted to do more than just survive. They wanted their shelter to be cozy and warm, and their food to be varied and plentiful.

⁴⁶Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little House in the Big Woods (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 229-32.

On the last few pages of the book is found an example of the Criterion 6, which asks that the author show needs through character's feelings and emotions.

Pa lifted Mary up out of her chair and hugged them both together.

'You're my good girls,' he said. 'And now its bedtime. Run along, while I get my fiddle.'

When Laura and Mary had said their prayers and were tucked snugly under the trundle bed's covers, Pa was sitting in the firelight with the fiddle. Ma had blown out the lamp because she did not need its light. On the other side of the hearth she was swaying gently in her rocking chair and her knitting needles flashed in and out above the sock she was knitting.

The long winter evenings of firelight and music had come again.

Pa's fiddle wailed while Pa was singing:

'Oh, susi-an-na, don't you cry for me,
I'm going to Cal-for-ni-a,
the gold dust for to see.'

Then Pa began to play again the song about Old Grimes. But he did not sing the words he had sung when Ma was making cheese. These words were different. Pa's strong, sweet voice was softly singing:

'Shall auld acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Shall auld acquaintance be forgot,
And the days of auld lang syne?
And the days of auld lang syne, my friend,
And the days of auld lang syne,
Shall auld acquaintance be forgot,
And the days of auld lang syne?'

When the fiddle had stopped singing Laura called out softly, 'What are days of auld lang syne Pa?'

'They are the days of a long time ago, Laura,' Pa said. 'Go to sleep, now.'

But Laura lay awake a little while, listening to Pa's fiddle softly playing and to the lonely sound of the wind in the Big Woods. She looked at Pa sitting on the bench by the hearth, the firelight gleaming on his brown hair and beard and glistening on the honey-brown fiddle. She looked at Ma, gently rocking and knitting.

She was glad that the cozy house, and Pa and Ma and the firelight and the music, were now. They could not be forgotten, she thought, because now is now. It can never be a long time ago.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 236-8.

Table 1

Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
Little House in the Big Woods

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					59-82
1. Dealing with fate				X	212-4 229-32
2. Insight for living in society				X	22- 3 51- 2 53- 8
3. Interdependence of people				X	12- 3 102- 3 199-202
4. Struggle for good life and independence			X		121- 7 150- 2
Plot					136- 7
5. Use of historical facts			X		221- 8
Characterization					103- 6
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	183 238
7. Behavior appropriate for life				X	5- 9 45- 6 187-90
8. Value and purpose for life				X	185- 6 203 233- 5
Style					
9. Authentic speech patterns	X				205
10. Uses terminology and figurative language				X	2- 3 49 107
Setting					4
11. Provides memorable picture				X	18-20 167-80

Laura's need for security is displayed by this episode. Throughout the entire series, the reader is made very aware of the need for a feeling of security. Laura had many symbols for security, but the most frequent one was Pa playing his fiddle. Pa was there to protect his daughters, and he only played the fiddle when everything was secure.

A total of thirty-three examples (100 percent) was found in Little House on the Prairie (see Table 2, page 30, and Table 9, page 52). Hypothesis 3 is accepted for this book.

Throughout her series, Mrs. Wilder created episodes that provide guidelines for children to follow in their behavior. Children in Laura's childhood had many strict rules to follow if they were going to be properly mannered. Their rules provided insight and understanding for living in society, both the past and the present, Criterion 2.

Then Mary saw a red bead, and Laura saw a green one, and they forgot everything but beads. Pa helped them look. They found white beads and brown beads, and more and more red and blue beads. All that afternoon they hunted for beads in the dust of the Indian camp. Now and then Pa walked up to the edge of the hollow and looked toward home, then he came back and helped to hunt for more beads. They looked all the ground over carefully.

Then they couldn't find any more. It was almost sunset. Laura had a handful of beads, and so did Mary. Pa tied them carefully in his handkerchief, Laura's beads in one corner and Mary's in another corner. He put the handkerchief in his pocket, and they started home.

Supper was cooking on the fire, Ma was setting the table, and Baby Carrie played with little pieces of wood on the floor. Pa tossed the handkerchief to Ma.

'I'm later than I meant, Caroline,' he said. 'But look what the girls found.'

Ma untied the handkerchief and exclaimed at what she found. The beads were even prettier than they had been in the Indian camp.

Laura stirred her beads with her finger and watched them sparkle and shine. 'These are mine,' she said.

Then Mary said, 'Carrie can have mine.'

Ma waited to hear what Laura would say. Laura didn't want to say anything. She wanted to keep those pretty beads. Her chest felt all hot inside, and she wished with all her might that Mary wouldn't always be such a good little girl. But she couldn't let Mary be better than she was.

So she said, slowly, 'Carrie can have mine, too.'

'That's my unselfish, good little girls,' said Ma.

She poured Mary's beads into Mary's hands, and Laura's into Laura's hands, and she said she would give them a thread to string them on. The beads would make a pretty necklace for Carrie to wear around her neck.

Mary and Laura sat side by side on their bed, and they strung those pretty beads on the thread that Ma gave them. Each wet her end of the thread in her mouth and twisted it tightly. Then Mary put her end of the thread through the small hole in each of the beads, and Laura put her end through her beads, one by one.

They didn't say anything. Perhaps Mary felt sweet and good inside, but Laura didn't. When she looked at Mary she wanted to slap her. So she dared not look at Mary again.

The beads made a beautiful string. Carrie clapped her hands and laughed when she saw it. Then Ma tied it around Carrie's neck, and it glittered there, Laura felt a little bit better. After all, her beads were not enough beads to make a whole string, and neither were Mary's,⁴⁸ but together they made a whole string of beads for Carrie.

Neither girl possessed enough beads to make themselves a necklace, but when they worked together, all of the beads made a pretty necklace for Carrie. By working together, the girls were able to give pleasure to someone else and they learned not to be selfish.

Little House on the Prairie provides numerous colorful and realistic pictures of the countryside around the family, Criterion 11. The author has outdone herself in providing a memorable picture of the past.

⁴⁸Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little House on the Prairie (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 177-81.

Table 2

Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
Little House on the Prairie

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					140- 1
1. Dealing with fate				X	151- 4 276-82
2. Insight for living in society					15 145- 6 177-81
3. Interdependence of people				X	63- 4 88- 9 189-91
4. Struggle for good life and independence				X	1- 2 124- 5 206
Plot					47 171
5. Use of historical facts				X	237
Characterization					24- 6
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	83- 5 171
7. Behavior appropriate for life				X	100- 5 110-12 147- 8
8. Value and purpose for life				X	94- 8 244-51 260- 1
Style					169
9. Authentic speech patterns				X	194 273
10. Uses terminology and figurative language				X	12 30 192
Setting					26- 7
11. Provides memorable picture				X	110-12 172-77

So Laura and Mary played by the creek, while Pa dug the rocks he wanted and loaded them into the wagon.

They watched the long-legged water-bugs skate over the glassy-still pools. They ran along the bank to scare the frogs, and laughed when the green-coated frogs with their white vests plopped into the water. They listened to the wood-pigeons call among the trees, and the brown thrush singing. They saw the little minnows swimming all together in the shallow places where the creek ran sparkling. The minnows were thin gray shadows in the rippling water, only now and again one minnow flashed the sunshine from its silvery belly.

There was no wind along the creek. The air was still and drowsy-warm. It smelled of damp roots and mud, and it was full of the sound of rustling leaves and of the water running.

In the muddy places where deer's tracks were thick and every hoofprint held water, swarms of mosquitoes rose up with a keen, sharp buzzing. Laura and Mary slapped at mosquitoes on their faces and necks and hands and legs, and wished they could go wading. They were so hot and the water looked so cool. Laura was sure that it would do no harm just to dip one foot in, and when Pa's back was turned she almost did it.

'Laura,' said Pa, and she snatched the naughty foot back.

'If you girls want to go wading,' Pa said, 'you can do it in that shallow place. Don't go in over your ankles.'

Mary waded only a little while. She said the gravel hurt her feet, and she sat on a log and patiently slapped at mosquitoes. But Laura slapped and kept on wading. When she stepped, the gravel hurt her feet. When she stood still, the tiny minnows swarmed about her toes and nibbled them with their tiny mouths. It was a funny, squiggling feeling. Laura tried and tried to catch a minnow, but she only got the hem of her dress wet.

Then the wagon was loaded. Pa called, 'Come along girls!' and they climbed to the wagonseat again and rode away from the creek.⁴⁹

Farmer Boy is the only book in the series whose main characters are not the Ingalls family. This is the story of Almanzo Wilder growing up. Almanzo was the man who would later become Laura's husband.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 110-12.

Farmer Boy has exceeded the expectations of H₃. Tables 3, page 34, and 9, page 52, shows that thirty-three examples (100 per cent) were found in this book.

Farmer Boy more than any of the other books in the series stresses the importance of the American work ethic. People can be proudest of the work they do for themselves. Hard work is what advances man the fastest when it comes to economics and respect. There are times, however, when extra outside help is necessary. People must realize when they cannot do all the work themselves. Criterion 3 calls for a show of interdependence of people within a community.

Now the meadows and pastures were velvety with thick grass, and the weather was warm. It was time to shear sheep.

On a sunny morning Pierre and Louis went with Almanzo into the pasture and they drove the sheep down to the washing-pens.

Pierre and Louis kept the flock from running away, while Almanzo took hold of a woolly sheep and pushed it through one gate. In the pen Father and Lazy John caught hold of it. Then Almanzo pushed another one through, and Royal and French Joe caught it. The other sheep stared and bleated, and the two sheep struggled and kicked and yelled. But the men rubbed their wool full of brown soft-soap and dragged them into the deep water.

As soon as a sheep was clean, the men made it swim around the end of the dividing fence, and they boosted it up the bank into the outer side of the pen.

Next morning John came before breakfast and Father hurried Almanzo from the table. He rounded up the sheep and drove them across the dewy grass, into the sheepfold in the South Barn.

Father had cleaned the sheepfold and built a platform across one end of it. He and Lazy John each caught a sheep, set it up on the platform, and began cutting off its wool with long shears.

Royal rolled the fleece tightly and tied it with twine, and Almanzo carried it upstairs and laid it on the loft floor.

⁵⁰Laura Ingalls Wilder, Farmer Boy (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 154-8.

In the early 1870's American Farmers not only produced all their own food, but they made by hand many necessities that the farmer of today would not even consider making. Items such as shoes were made on the farm. Few farm folks owned a boughten pair. Almost everything worn by the Wilders was made by Mother using materials produced on the farm. The family may have had to depend on a cobbler to make the shoes, but the goods he used came from the farm.

Next morning the cobbler cut soles from the thick middle of the cowhide, and inner soles from the thinner leather near the edge. He cut uppers from the softest leather. Then he waxed his thread.

With his right hand he pulled a length of linen thread across the wad of black cobbler's wax in his left palm, and he rolled the thread under his right palm, down the front of his leather apron. Then he pulled it and rolled it again. The wax made a crackling sound, and the cobbler's arm went out and in, out and in, till the thread was shiny-black and stiff with wax.

Then he laid a stiff hog-bristle against each end of it, and he waxed and rolled, till the bristles were waxed fast to the thread.

At last he was ready to sew. He laid the upper pieces of one boot together, and clamped them in a vise. The edges stuck up, even and firm. With his awl the cobbler punched a hole through them. He ran the two bristles through the hole, one from each side, and with his strong arms he pulled the thread tight. He bored another hole, ran the two bristles through it, and pulled till the waxed thread sank into the leather. That was one stitch.

Now that's a seam! he said. Your feet won't get damp in my boots, even if you go wading in them. I never sewed a seam yet that wouldn't hold water.

Stitch by stitch he sewed the uppers. When they were done, he laid the soles in water overnight.

Next morning he set one of the lasts on his peg, the sole up. He laid the leather inner-sole on it. He drew the upper part of a boot down over it, folding the edges over the inner sole. Then he laid the heavy sole on top, and there was the boot, upside down on the last.

The cobbler bored holes with his awl, all around the edge of the sole. Into each hole he drove one of the short maple pegs. He made a heel of thick leather, and pegged it in place with the long maple pegs. The boot was done.

Table 3
 Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
Farmer Boy

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					43- 7
1. Dealing with fate				X	169-72 240-51
2. Insight for living in society					40 69-70 182-85
3. Interdependence of people					66- 7 133- 8 154- 8
4. Struggle for good life and independence					51- 4 74 370- 1
Plot					33- 4 188- 9
5. Use of historical facts				X	296- 7
Characterization					91- 2
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	221 271- 2
7. Behavior appropriate for life					6 28 292- 5
8. Value and purpose for life					22- 3 36 58-62
Style					56
9. Authentic speech patterns				X	130 181
10. Used terminology and figurative language				X	41 62 98- 9
Setting					14- 6
11. Provides memorable picture				X	120-32 136- 7

The damp soles had to dry overnight. In the morning the cobbler took out the lasts, and with a rasp he rubbed off the inside ends of the pegs.

Almanzo put on his boots. They fitted perfectly, and the heels thumped grandly on the kitchen floor.⁵¹

Regardless of whether or not the shoes were bought in a store or made on the farm, shoes were all made the same way during Almanzo's childhood. This incident shows people's actions as behavior appropriate to an historical era, Criterion 7.

On the Banks of Plum Creek received a 93 percent rating on the criteria scale with a total of thirty-one illustrations (see Table 4, page 37, and Table 9, page 52). Hypothesis 3 is accepted for this book. For two of the eleven criteria, only two examples were found. Those two criterion called for authentic speech patterns and the use of historical facts. Three examples were found for each of the remaining criteria. This book more than any other book in the "Little House" series illustrated the pioneer spirit, Criterion 4, the intense desire to be a success economically and the tragedies that could fall on a pioneer family in the 1870's. People's struggle for the good life and for independence is seen in this example.

'A dugout is snug and cozy,' said Ma. 'But I do feel like an animal penned up for the winter.'

'Never mind, Caroline,' Pa said. 'We'll have a good house next year.' His eyes shone and his voice was like singing. 'And good horses, and a buggy to boot! I'll take you riding, dressed up in silks! Think, Caroline—this level, rich land, not a stone or stump to contend with, only three miles from a railroad! We can sell every grain of wheat we raise!'

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 292-5

Then he ran his fingers through his hair and said, 'I do wish I had a team of horses.'

'Now Charles,' said Ma. 'Here we are, all healthy and safe and snug, with food for the winter. Let's be thankful for what we have.'

'I am,' said Pa. 'But Pete and Bright are too slow for harrowing and harvesting. I've broken up that big field with them, but I can't put it all in wheat, without horses.'⁵²

Pa wants many luxuries for his family. Luxuries like fine horses, buggies, and clothes. Most of all Pa wants horses. With horses he can cultivate more land, make more money, and become prosperous. Prosperity means respect and the ability to buy material wealth.

Pa was a dreamer. He dreamt of the good life, but just when he almost had everything, something often went wrong. Pa almost had a superior wheat harvest until the grasshoppers destroyed it and any hope for the next year's harvest. This excerpt from On the Banks of Plum Creek, Criterion 1, shows people dealing realistically with and coming to terms with their fate. Pa was a dreamer, but he was also a hard worker—he was not going to let his life be destroyed by insects.

Ma looked up at him and said, 'Charles! What is the matter now?'

'The grasshoppers are laying their eggs,' said Pa. 'The grounds honeycombed with them. Look at the dooryard, and you'll see the pits where the eggs are buried a couple of inches deep. All over the wheatfield. Everywhere. You can't put your finger down between them. Look here.'

He took one of those grey things from his pocket and held it out on his hand.

⁵²Laura Ingalls Wilder, On the Banks of Plum Creek (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 82-3

Table 4

Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
On The Bank of Plum Creek

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					12- 4
1. Dealing with fate				X	134- 9 208-11
2. Insight for living in society				X	16 24--6 132
3. Interdependence of people				X	41 187 189
4. Struggle for good life and independence				X	82- 3 120 190
Plot					192-205
5. Use of historical facts			X		261- 7
Characterization					32- 4
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	70- 2 122- 3
7. Behavior appropriate for life				X	72 181 282- 3
8. Value and purpose for life				X	12- 3 62 268- 9
Style					5
9. Authentic speech patterns			X		141
10. Uses terminology and figurative language				X	27 66 97
Setting					19-20
11. Provides memorable picture				X	45- 6 63- 5

'Thats one of 'em, a pod of grasshopper eggs. I've been cutting them open. There's thirty-five or forty eggs in every pod. There's a pod in every hole. There's eight or ten holes to the square foot. All over this country.'

Ma dropped down in a chair and let her hands fall helpless at her sides.

'We've got no more chance of making a crop next year than we have of flying,' said Pa. 'When those eggs hatch, there won't be a green thing left in this part of the world.'

'Oh Charles!' Ma said. 'What will we do?'

Pa slumped down on a bench and said, 'I don't know.'

Mary's braids swung over the edge of the ladder hole and her face looked down between them. She looked anxiously at Laura and Laura looked up at her. Then Mary backed down the ladder without a sound. She stood close beside Laura, back against the wall.

Pa straightened up. His dim eyes brightened with a fierce light, not like the twinkle Laura had always seen in them.

'But I do know this, Caroline,' he said. 'No pesky mess of grasshoppers can beat us! We'll do something! You'll see! We'll get along somehow.'

'Yes, Charles,' said Ma.

'Why not?' said Pa. 'We're healthy, we've got a roof over our heads; we're better off than lots of folks. You get an early dinner, Caroline. I'm going to town. I'll find something to do. Don't you worry!'

That was a merry supper. When they had eaten every bit of it, Pa pushed back his plate and said, 'Well, Caroline.'

'Yes, Charles?' Ma said.

'Here's the way out,' said Pa. 'I'm going east tomorrow morning.'

'Oh, Charles!' Ma cried out.

'It's all right, Laura,' Pa said. He meant, Don't cry, and Laura did not cry.

'It's harvest time back there,' Pa told them. 'The grasshoppers went only about a hundred miles east of here. Beyond that there's crops. It's the only chance to get a job, and all the men in the West are heading for those jobs. I've got to get there quick.⁵³

Again, one of the books from the "Little House" series, By the Shores of Silver Lake has provided enough evidence to accept H₃. The book rated a 93 percent on the graded scale with a

⁵³Ibid., pp. 208-11

total of thirty-one examples (see Table 5, page 40, and Table 9, page 52). Three examples were found for ten of the criteria in By the Shore of Silver Lake. Examples for authentic speech patterns, Criterion 9, were found only twice in the book.

Like the majority of the pioneers who settled the Great Plains, the Ingalls did so with the aid of the Homestead Act. References to the Homestead Act illustrate the fifth criterion which makes use of historical facts.

'All's well that ends well, Charles,' Ma interrupted. 'I guess so, Caroline,' Pa said. 'Yes, I guess that's right. Well, girls, I've 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?'⁵⁴

Charles Ingalls and many others like him considered the Homestead Act a gift of land.

'Listen to reason, Caroline,' Pa pleaded. 'We can get a hundred and sixty acres out west, just by living on it, and the land's as good as this is, or better. If Uncle Sam's willing to give us a farm in place of the one he drove us off of, in Indian Territory, I say let's take it. The huntin's good in the west, a man can get all the meat he wants.'⁵⁵

They would soon learn homesteading was harder work than they realized. The first real crop was slow in coming, the summers shadelessly hot, and the winters could be long, hard and sometimes deadly. Many homesteaders were unable to keep their free gift.

⁵⁴Laura Ingalls Wilder, By the Shores of Silver Lake (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 237.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 4

Table 5

Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
By the Shores of Silver Lake

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					119-21 132
1. Dealing with fate				X	230
2. Insight for living in society				X	95-6 134 183-85
3. Interdependence of people				X	104- 5 126 150- 2
4. Struggle for good life and independence				X	3 61 220
Plot					30 61- 2
5. Use of historical facts				X	237
Characterization					13- 4
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	42- 3 290- 1
7. Behavior appropriate for life				X	76 102- 3 127
8. Value and purpose for life				X	10- 2 22- 3 104
Style					
9. Authentic speech patterns		X			215
10. Uses terminology and figurative language				X	5 172 198
Setting					57- 9
11. Provides memorable picture				X	71- 2 76- 9

Cheap land was not the only reason for moving west. There were as many reasons for moving west as there were pioneers. For Charles Ingalls those reasons were independence and freedom from the problems of debt. When Pa was down on his luck and his family sick, he had to depend on and lean on the goodwill of his neighbors. This shows an interdependence of people within a community.

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.⁵⁶

On a graded frequency scale showing the criteria which appeared in The Long Winter, thirty-two examples were found (see Table 6, page 43, and Table 9, page 52). H₃ is accepted for The Long Winter.

This book is very somber. It shows the frustrations and the struggle to stay alive not only of the Ingalls family, but of the entire town of DeSmet, South Dakota. These people were caught by the forces of nature and there was nothing they could do about it. The people could only wait out the storm and hope the food, fuel, and they themselves lasted until spring.

'What in the world are you doing Laura?' Mary called.
'Hurry and come help warm the bed!'

Laura could not answer without unclenching her teeth to rattle. She stood at the window in her nightdress and stocking-feet. She had scraped away the frost from a place on the glass and she was trying to look through it. She cupped her hands beside her eyes to shield them from the glimmer of lamplight that came up from the stairway. But

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 3.

still she could see nothing. In the roaring night outside, there was not one speck of light.

At last she crawled in beside Mary and curled up tightly, pressing her feet against the warm flatiron. 'I was trying to see a light,' she explained. 'There must be a light in some house.'

'Didn't you?' Mary asked.

'No,' Laura said. She had not been able even to see the light from the window downstairs where she knew the lamp was shining.

Carrie was quiet in her bed by the stovepipe that came up from the hot stove below. It helped to warm her and she had a flatiron too. She was fast asleep when Ma came up to tuck Grace in beside her.

'Are you warm enough girls?' Ma whispered, bending over the bed and snuggling the covers more closely around them.

'We're getting warm, Ma,' Laura answered.

'Then goodnight and sweet dreams.'

But even after Laura was warm she lay awake listening to the winds wild tune and thinking of each little house in town, alone in the whirling snow with not even a light from the next house shining through. And the little town was alone on the wild prairie. Town and prairie were lost in the wild storm which was neither earth or sky, nothing but fierce winds and a blank whiteness.

For the storm was white. In the night, long after the sun had gone and the last daylight could not possibly be there, the blizzard was whirling white.

A lamp could shine out through the blackest darkness and a shout could be heard a long way, but no light and no cry could reach through a storm that had wild voices and an unnatural light of its own.

The blankets were warm and Laura was no longer cold but she shivered.⁵⁷

This illustration shows several emotions Laura feels concerning the blizzard—loneliness, isolation, anger and despair. Besides warmth and shelter, Laura needs to feel that she is not alone in the world. The previous example has shown human needs through characterizations, Criterion 6.

⁵⁷Laura Ingalls Wilder, The Long Winter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 121-3.

Table 6
Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
The Long Winter

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					29-30 63- 4
1. Dealing with fate				X	140- 7
2. Insight for living in society				X	26 118 305- 6
3. Interdependence of people				X	85- 6 151 199-201
4. Struggle for good life and independence				X	10 83 103- 4
Plot					74
5. Use of historical facts			X		99
Characterization					94- 5
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	121- 3 128- 9
7. Behavior appropriate for life				X	3- 4 100 171
8. Value and purpose for life				X	98- 9 191 249
Style					61- 2
9. Authentic speech patterns				X	112- 3 118- 9
10. Uses terminology and figurative language				X	76 250 256
Setting					10- 2
11. Provides memorable picture				X	87-90 264- 6

The "Little House" was weakest in those two criteria that dealt with language. Very rarely does the reader find that the author goes into detail when it comes to speech patterns. There were many opportunities such as the first time Mr. Edwards was introduced, the Indians and cowboys of Oklahoma, and the Norwegians along Plum Creek, but Mrs. Wilder did not take full advantage of those opportunities. The best example of authentic speech patterns in the entire series is found in The Long Winter when Mr. Edwards, who has come to visit the family, complains about the government bureaucracy.

Mr. Edwards admired the well-built, pleasant house and heartily enjoyed the good dinner. But he said he was going on West with the train when it pulled out. Pa could not persuade him to stay longer.

'I'm aiming to go far West in the spring,' he said. 'This here country, it's too settled-up for me. The politicians are a-swarming in already, and ma'am if'n there's any worst pest than grasshoppers it surely is politicians. Why, they'll tax the lining out'n a man's pockets to keep up these here countyseat towns! I don't see nary use for a county nohow. We all got along happy and content without 'em.'

'Feller come along and taxed me last summer. Told me I got to put in every last thing I had. So I put in Tom and Jerry, my horses, at fifty dollars apiece, and my oxen yoke, Buck and Bright, I put in at fifty, and my cow at thirty-five.'

'Is that all you got?' he says. Well I told him I'd put in five children I reckoned was worth a dollar apiece.'

'Is that all? he says. How about your wife? he says.'

'By mighty! I says to him. She says I don't own her and I don't aim to pay no taxes on her, I says. And I didn't.'

'Why, Mr. Edwards, it is news to us that you have a family,' said Ma. 'Mr. Ingalls said nothing of it.'

'I didn't know it myself,' Pa explained. 'Anyway, Edwards, you don't have to pay taxes on your wife and children.'

'He wanted a big tax list,' said Mr. Edwards. 'Politicians, they take pleasure a-prying into a man's affairs and I aimed to please 'em. It makes no matter. I don't aim

to pay taxes. I sold the relinquishment on my claim and in the spring when the collector comes around I'll be gone from there. Got no children and no wife, nohow.⁵⁸

H₃ is accepted for Little Town on the Prairie with a score of 96 percent (thirty-two examples). The authentic speech criterion, Criterion 9, was the only criterion which did not have the maximum of three examples—it only had two examples (see Table 7, page 47, and Table 9, page 52). Little Town on the Prairie is a book that tells the story of DeSmet, South Dakota, its development, and the new social world its people built to lessen the isolation of pioneering. This book shows best the idea that people need each other. People band together for many reasons, including companionship. Interdependence of people within a community, Criterion 3, is seen in the following example.

'Oh I don't know!' Laura said in despair. 'I am so tired of everything. I want—I want something to happen. I want to go West. I guess I want to just play, and I know I am too old,' she almost sobbed, a thing she never did.

'Why, Laura!' Ma exclaimed.

'Never mind,' Pa said soothingly. 'You have been studying too hard, that is all.'

'Yes, put away your books for this one evening,' said Ma. 'In the last bundle of "Youth's Companions", there are still some stories that we have not read. You may read one to us, Laura, wouldn't you like that?'

'Yes, Ma,' Laura answered hopelessly. Even reading a story was not what she wanted, but she knew she could not have it, whatever it was. She got out the "Youth's Companions" and pulled her chair to the table again. 'You choose the story you want, Carrie,' she said.

Patiently she read aloud, while Carrie and Grace listened wide-eyed and Ma's rocker swayed and her knitting needles clicked. Pa had gone across the street to spend an evening talking with the men around the stove in Fuller's hardware store.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 112-3.

Suddenly the door opened and Pa burst in, saying, 'Put on your bonnets, Caroline and girls! There's a meeting at the schoolhouse!'

'Whatever in the world—' Ma said.

'Everybody's going!' said Pa. 'We are starting a literary society.'⁵⁹

Literary societies were one of the very common ways to provide companionship and gaiety in an otherwise monotonous life during the 1880's. Another method people used to bring themselves together was to create contests of skill or strength. One popular contest of skill was the spelling bee. The spelling bee shows people's actions as behavior appropriate to an historical era.

'Let's have a spelling match!'

Mr. Clewett appointed Pa and Gerald Fuller as leaders. There was a good deal of joking as they took their places in the front corners of the room and began to call out names.

Laura sat anxiously waiting. The grown-ups were chosen first, of course. One by one they went up, and as the two lines grew longer, Laura grew more afraid that Gerald Fuller might call her before Pa did. She did not want to spell against Pa. At last there was the most anxious pause. It was Pa's turn to choose, and though he made a joke that set everyone laughing, Laura could see that he was hesitating. He decided, and called 'Laura Ingalls.'

Rapidly now all the school pupils were chosen, even the smallest. The two lines went from the teacher's desk all around the walls to the door. Then Mr. Clewett opened the speller.

First he gave out the primer words.

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

Slowly almost all the seats filled with breathless, laughing folks who had been spelled down.

Fast and hard the words came pelting. Then, the tricky words from the very back of the spelling book. On the other line, everyone went down but Mr. Foster. Ma went down. Only Pa and Laura were left, to down Mr. Foster.

⁵⁹Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little Town on the Prairie (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 212-3.

Table 7
 Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
Little Town on the Prairie

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					97
1. Dealing with fate				X	97-102 137- 9
2. Insight for living in society				X	58 63- 4 71- 7
3. Interdependence of people				X	29-30 113- 4 212- 3
4. Struggle for good life and independence				X	47- 8 61- 2 88- 9
Plot					47- 8 49-50
5. Use of historical facts				X	207- 8
Characterization					11- 2
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	149-50 154-56
7. Behavior appropriate for life				X	1- 2 90- 3 216-20
8. Value and purpose for life				X	27- 9 32- 4 89-90
Style					222
9. Authentic speech patterns			X		277-78
10. Uses terminology and figurative language				X	54 55 66- 7
Setting					38-41
11. Provides memorable picture				X	206- 7 228-30

Then, 'Xanthophyll,' said Mr. Clewett. It was Laura's turn.

'Xanthophyll,' she said. To her surprise, she was suddenly confused. Her eyes shut. She could almost see the word on the speller's last page, but she could not think. It seemed that she stood a long time in a dreadful silence full of watching eyes.

'Xanthophyll,' she said again desperately, and she spelled quickly, 'X-a-n, zan; t-h-o, tho, zantho; p-h-'. Wildly she thought, 'Grecophil,' and in a rush she ended, '-i-l?' Mr. Clewett shook his head.

Trembling, Laura sat down. Now there was only Pa left.

Mr. Foster cleared his throat. 'Xanthophyll,' he said. 'X-a-n, zan; t-h-o, tho zantho; p-h-y-' Laura could not breathe. No one breathed. '-l,' said Mr. Foster.

Mr. Clewett waited. Mr. Foster waited too. It seemed that the waiting lasted forever. At last Mr. Foster said, 'Well, then, I'm beat,' and he sat down. The crowd applauded him anyway, for what he had done. He had won respect that night.

'Xanthophyll,' said Pa. It seemed impossible now that anyone could spell that dreadful word, but Laura thought, Pa can, he must, He's GOT to!

'X-a-n, zan' said Pa; 't-h-o, tho zantho; p-h-y-' He seemed slower, perhaps, than he was. 'Double-l,' he said.

Mr. Clewett clapped the speller shut. There had never been such thundering applause as that applause for Pa. He had spelled down the whole town.⁶⁰

Laura Ingalls Wilder's book These Happy Golden Years has provided evidence needed to accept H₃. In this book thirty-one examples (93 percent) of the criteria were in evidence. The weakest criterion was Criterion 9 calling for authentic speech patterns, only one example was found.

These Happy Golden Years is the last book of the "Little House" series. Laura grew to maturity, discovered her life's direction, and gained self-sufficiency in this book.

Laura prepared to become an independent person. There was a transitional point in her life when she began her second teaching

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 216-20.

Table 8
 Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
These Happy Golden Years

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					53- 4
1. Dealing with fate				X	72- 5 257- 8
2. Insight for living in society				X	31- 2 163 235
3. Interdependence of people				X	76- 7 83 147
4. Struggle for good life and independence				X	61 124- 5 197- 8
Plot					105- 9
5. Use of historical facts				X	115 118- 9
Characterization					1- 3
6. Shows human needs through characters				X	32- 5 100- 1
7. Behavior appropriate for life				X	36 40- 3 120
8. Value and purpose for life				X	82 138- 9 160
Style					
9. Authentic speech patterns		X			55
10. Uses terminology and figurative language				X	10 39 131- 2
Setting					4- 5
11. Provides memorable picture				X	13- 4 152- 3

job and left her own school days behind. Laura's mother offered her this piece of advice which provided insight and understanding for living in society, both the past and the present, Criterion 2.

'A body makes his own luck, be it good or bad,' Ma placidly said. 'I have no doubt you will get as good as you deserve.'⁶¹

Again, the value of hard work is brought out. People can not be given everything in life. There are somethings that only that person can give him/herself.

Like her father, Laura was a dreamer. She had a vision of a good life—one that she herself had created. Out of this vision comes a memorable picture of the past, Criterion 11.

Sometimes on Saturday Laura walked westward across the prairie to Reverend Brown's house—on his claim. It was a long mile and a half walk, and she and Ida always made it longer by going to the highest point of the rise of ground beyond the house. From there they could see the Wessington Hills, sixty miles away, looking like a blue cloud on the horizon.

'They are so beautiful that they make me want to go to them,' Laura said once.

'Oh, I don't know,' Ida replied. 'When you get there, they would be just hills, covered with ordinary buffalo grass like this,' and she kicked at a tuft of the grass where the green of spring was showing through last year's dead blades.

In a way, that was true; and in another way, it wasn't. Laura could not say what she meant, but to her the Wessington Hills were more than grassy hills. Their shadowy outlines drew her with the lure of far places. They were the essence of a dream.

Walking home in the late afternoon, Laura still thought of the Wessington Hills, how mysterious their vague shadow was against the blue sky, far away across miles after miles of green, rolling prairie. She wanted to travel on and on, over those miles, and see what was beyond the hills.

That was the way Pa felt about the West, Laura knew. She knew too, that like him, she must be content to stay

⁶¹Laura Ingalls Wilder, These Happy Golden Years (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 235.

where she was, to help with the work at home and teach school.⁶²

The landscape surrounding the Brown's home was not the only thing seen in this quote. The urge to move west often described as the pioneer spirit was also part of Laura's spirit.

Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House" series of books has provided the needed evidence to accept H₃ (see Table 9, page 52). Altogether, 253 episodes out of a possible 264 were found as examples of the eleven criteria for a 95.83 percent level. Each of Mrs. Wilder's books, which compose the "Little House" series, has met a weighted scale for determining the number of episodes in which each criterion appears at the 95.83 percent level. Hypothesis 3 only asked that the series meet the 60 percent level. The series met eight of the criteria 100 percent of the time. Those eight criteria were as follows:

1. Dealing with fate.
2. Insight for living in society
3. Interdependence of people
6. Shows human needs through characters
7. Behavior appropriate for life
8. Value and purpose for life
10. Uses terminology and figurative language
11. Provides memorable picture

The fewest examples were found of the three criteria that dealt with a struggle for the good life and independence, Criterion 4; use of historical facts, Criterion 5; and the use of colorful speech patterns or dialects, Criterion 9. Criterion 9 produced the fewest examples, out of a possible 24, it scored a total of 17—

⁶² Ibid., pp. 152-3.

Table 9

Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
"Little House" Series

Criteria	Big Woods	On The Prairie	Farmer Boy	Plum Creek	Silver Lake	Long Winter	Little Town	Golden Years	Total
1. Dealing with fate	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
2. Insight for living in society	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
3. Interdependence of people	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
4. Struggle for good life and independence	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	23
5. Use of historical facts	2	3	3	2	3	2	3	3	21
6. Shows human needs through characters	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
7. Behavior appropriate for life	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
8. Value and purpose for life	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
9. Authentic speech patterns	1	3	3	3	1	3	2	1	17
10. Uses terminology and figurative language	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
11. Provides memorable picture	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
Totals	29	33	33	32	31	32	32	31	253

appearing only once in three of the books, and only twice in Little Town on the Prairie. Criterion 4 acquired a total of 23 out of a possible 24, only two examples were found in Little House in the Big Woods. Three of the books yielded only two examples, giving Criterion 5 a total of 21.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary:

This study was undertaken for the specific purposes of developing criteria for good historical fiction, applying the resulting criteria statements to each of the books that makeup the "Little House" series, and determining the frequency of appearance in each book and the series as a whole. Previous researchers have developed criteria for good historical fiction used to evaluate historical fiction, and they have claimed that the "Little House" books are excellent examples of good historical fiction; however, this researcher was unable to uncover any work that applied a list of criteria point by point to each of the books in the series. The purpose of this study was to develop and apply a criteria list to each of the books in the "Little House" series point by point.

There were three hypothesis to be tested in this study. The first hypothesis asked if valid criteria could be established which would measure the value of a particular book as historical fiction. A valid list of criteria has been established and used in evaluating the "Little House" series. The list that was developed evolved from a comparison study of four recognized authorities in the field of literature review. The four authorities were Leland B. Jacobs, Constantine Georgiou, Charlotte S. Huck, and Zena Sutherland. Hypothesis 1 is accepted; however, until the criteria

has been used to evaluate several other books as historical fiction, it cannot be said with absolute certainty that these criteria are valid.

One major difficulty that developed when applying the criteria statements was that several times an example found in one of the books illustrated more than one criterion. Farmer Boy presents an example of this problem.

Father sat astraddle on the end of the shaving-bench, by the window. The bench slanted upward toward him, and at the top of the slant two pegs stood up. At his right hand was a pile of rough shingles which he had split with his ax from short lengths of oak logs.

He picked up a shingle, laid its end against the pegs, and then drew the shaving-knife up its side. One stroke smoothed it, another stroke shaved the upper end thinner than the lower end. Father flipped the shingle over. Two strokes on that side, and it was done. Father laid it on the pile of finished shingles, and set another rough one against the pegs.

His hands moved smoothly and quickly. They did not stop even when he looked up and twinkled at Almanzo.⁶³

This scene could be reviewed as an example of either criterion four or seven. As seen in this example, a man is making shingles for a roof. By describing in detail the process used by the father to make one shingle, Mrs. Wilder illustrates Criterion 7, a behavior appropriate for that historical era; however, also seen in this illustration is a desire for independence and the good life as asked for in Criterion 4. Even at that time in history, it was possible for Mr. Wilder to buy shingles from a store; however, he wanted to be as self-sufficient as possible and took pride in the quality of his workmanship.

⁶³Laura Ingalls Wilder, Farmer Boy (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 58-9.

It is suggested that the next time the criteria list is used in evaluating historical fiction that a conditional limitation be attached to the criterion calling for authentic speech patterns. This criterion needs to be revised to say: if accents or dialects are interpreted in speech, they should be authentic. For example, in this case Mrs. Wilder may have deliberately elected to leave out accents or dialects because she felt them too difficult to reproduce or that her books would be easier reading for the young audience her series is directed to without them.

The "Little House" series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder can be evaluated by an established list of criteria to determine whether or not they are examples of good historical fiction. That is Hypothesis 2. This study has applied the established criteria to the "Little House" series—that was the main purpose of this study. Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House" series of books has provided the needed evidence to accept H_3 for every individual book and for the entire series. Little House on the Prairie and Farmer Boy each yielded a total of 33 episodes—meeting 100 percent of the criteria. Three of the books lacked one example each. On the Shores of Plum Creek and The Long Winter both were missing the same criterion (Criterion 5), giving them a score of 32 or 96 percent. The third book missing only one criterion was Little Town on the Prairie. It provided only two examples of authentic speech patterns, Criterion 9. Two examples each were missing in On the Shores of Silver Lake and These Happy Golden Years. Criterion 9

appeared only once in both books—both books provided 31 episodes or 93 percent of those possible. The lowest scoring book in the series was Little House in the Big Woods. It yielded a total of 29 out of a possible 33 (87 percent) and provided the fewest examples of Criteria 4, 5 and 9. Criteria 4 and 5 were each found twice, Criterion 9, only once.

Hypothesis 3 states: each of Mrs. Wilder's books, which compose the "Little House" series, will meet a weighted scale for determining the number of episodes in which each criterion appears at the 60 percent level. The "Little House" series met the criteria 95.83 percent of the time, exceeding the 60 percent requirement of H_3 . See Table 9, page 52, for the tabulated results of H_3 .

Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Conclusions:

With the use of the criteria, the researcher was able to agree with Constantine Georgiou, Charlotte S. Huck (pages 498-99 of her book), and others when they claimed the "Little House" series is an example of historical fiction.

Among the historical stories affording a genuine portrait of American pioneer life is the series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Frequently known as the 'Little House Books', the series is unexcelled in the use it made of authentic background details, life-like characterization, and themes appropriate to the sturdy pioneers.⁶⁴

Eight of the eleven criterion were found in the series 100 percent of the time. Those areas concerned: dealing with fate, insight for living in society, interdependence of people, showing human needs, appropriate behavior for life, value and purpose in

⁶⁴Constantine Georgiou, Children and Their Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 312.

life, terminology and figurative language, and providing memorable setting.

The fewest examples were found for the two criteria that dealt with presenting historical facts and information, and in the use of colorful speech patterns or dialects. These two weaknesses could be explained due to the nature or emphasis of the series. The series is about the Ingalls family, they did not determine political or historical events, they were influenced by them. Mrs. Wilder may have elected not to try to reproduce accents or dialects. For the beginning child reader, this may be best. She may have felt her readers would have become too burdened with the many different speech patterns and would have ^{lost} lost the real meaning the author was trying to convey. This criterion needs to be revised to say: if accents or dialects are interpreted in speech, they should be authentic.

Recommendations:

To provide complete support for H_1 , other books, both good and poor examples, must be evaluated as historical fiction. The "Little House" series proved to be good historical fiction, but that assumption had already been recognized before the study was begun. Should the checklist, in the future, provide grounds for accepting as good historical fiction a book which several authorities have previously rejected as historical fiction, then the acceptance of H_1 must be questioned. Future studies that would either lend support to or lead to the rejection of H_1 could include the evaluation of a publisher's selection of new titles for the year.

Additional studies could be attempted in which the eleven criteria were applied to picture books or to fiction for young adults. The number of expected examples might be decreased for picture books and increased for young adult books. Because of the nature of the format in a picture book, it cannot be expected to meet the same frequency as the "Little House" series which was intended for upper elementary readers and the frequency count will need to be steeper for an adult reading level book.

Examples of ways this study may be put to practical use are: the fifth or sixth grade social studies unit on westward expansion, the middle/junior high level English unit on the elements of good literature, and the college level children's literature course dealing with evaluation of good literature.

Included in the "review of the literature" are the prevalent patterns of moving west, the reasons why, and the equipment and methods used to move west. Many of these factors are a part of story lines in the "Little House" series. The social studies student could study the series to see how those three elements affected one family. Possible classroom projects could be: student visits to historical museums, interviews with older people who experienced the pioneer way of life, and the creation of maps showing the routes taken westward with reports explaining the advantages of taking a given route.

The criteria checklist could be used in an English classroom study of the five basic elements of literature. It could be related to the eighth grade study of U. S. History because the

existing checklist was developed for the 1870-80's era in history, and the "Little House" series is still popular reading material for students of that age group. With the help of the checklist, students could identify the criteria in one of the books for themselves. The main objective of this unit would be to comprehend the importance of each element to the development of the story line.

The college level children's literature course could benefit from this study. The course would benefit most from the process used to develop the criteria checklist, the explanations of why each criterion is essential, and actual application of the checklist. It could also be used to identify other works of historical fiction. Students could be asked to develop or adapt a criteria checklist, defend their opinion, and then put their list to practical use in evaluating several works.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Periodicals

- Hersey, John. "The Novel of Contemporary History." Atlantic Monthly. 184:80-84, November, 1949.
- Horovitz, Carolyn. "Dimensions in Time." The Horn Book. 38:255-67, June, 1962.
- Hudson, John C. "Migration To An American Frontier." Annals of the Association of American Geographers. 66:242-65, June, 1976.
- Hudson, John C. "Two Dakota Homestead Frontiers." Annals of the Association of American Geographers. 63:442-62, December, 1973.
- Jacobs, Leland B. "Historical Fiction for Children." The Reading Teacher. 14:191-94, January, 1961.
- Stromdahl, Judith E. "A Lasting Contribution." Top of the News. 21:11-21, January, 1965.

Books

- Belloc, Hilaire. One Thing and Another. New York: Robert M. McBride Co., 1955.
- Billington, Ray Allan. Westward Expansion. New York: MacMillan Co., 1960.
- Georgiou, Constantine. Children and Their Literature. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969.
- Huck, Charlotte S. Children's Literature in the Elementary School. 3rd ed. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.
- Neilson, William Allan and Thomas A. Scott. Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language. 2nd ed. Springfield, Massachusetts: G & C Merriam Co., 1959.
- Schell, Herbert S. History of South Dakota. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1975.
- Shannon, Fred A. The Farmer's Last Frontier. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1945.

Sutherland, Zena and May Hill Arbuthnot. Children and Books. 5th ed. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1977.

"Little House" Series

- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. By the Shores of Silver Lake. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. Farmer Boy. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. Little House in the Big Woods. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. Little House on the Prairie. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. Little Town on the Prairie. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. The Long Winter. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. On the Banks of Plum Creek. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. These Happy Golden Years. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Appendix A. Frequency Scale Showing Criteria

Criteria	Frequency				Example Pages
	0	1	2	3	
Theme					
1. Dealing with fate					
2. Insight for living in society					
3. Interdependence of people					
4. Struggle for good life and independence					
Plot					
5. Use of historical facts					
Characterization					
6. Shows human needs through characters					
7. Behavior appropriate for life					
8. Value and purpose for life					
Style					
9. Authentic Speech patterns					
10. Uses terminology and figurative language					
Setting					
11. Provides memorable picture					

Appendix B. Summary Table

Frequency Scale Showing Criteria for
"Little House" Series

Criteria	Big Woods	On The Prairie	Farmer Boy	Plum Creek	Silver Lake	Long Winter	Little Town	Golden Years	Total
1. Dealing with fate									
2. Insight for living in society									
3. Interdependence of people									
4. Struggle for good life and independence									
5. Use of historical facts									
6. Shows human needs through characters									
7. Behavior appropriate for life									
8. Value and purpose for life									
9. Authentic speech patterns									
10. Uses terminology and figurative language									
11. Provides memorable picture									
Totals									