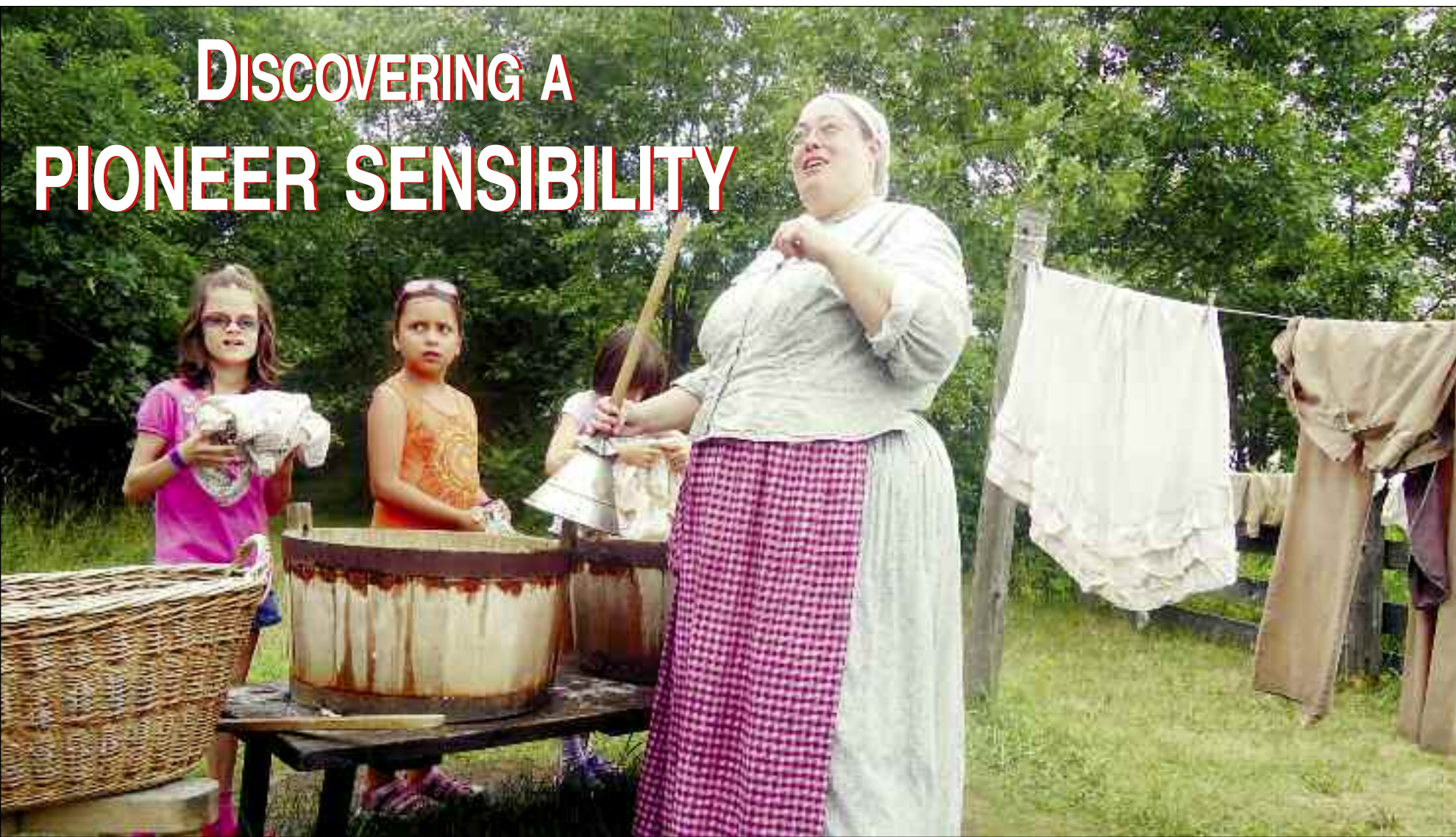




DISCOVERING A PIONEER SENSIBILITY



PHOTOS BY LISA M. SCHMELZ/FOR WALWORTH COUNTY SUNDAY

Amy Hunt, a costume-clad interpreter at Old World Wisconsin, talks to a group of parents watching their children fall in love with old school chores during Laura Ingalls Wilder Days.

Laura Ingalls Wilder weekend draws visitors to Old World Wisconsin

BY LISA M. SCHMELZ
FOR WALWORTH COUNTY SUNDAY

They moved to southern Wisconsin from the West Coast about 10 years ago. To get to know the lay of the land, they took frequent Sunday drives. When they didn't wind up in Illinois by accident, which was about every other Sunday, they found some really cool places. One of them was Old World Wisconsin, located near Eagle on the southernmost tip of the Kettle Moraine State Forest.

The only problem was it was early winter and closed. Parked on the side of the high-

way, the couple decided this was a very cool place. Look at all these old buildings. Too bad they aren't open. We should come back one day when they are.

A decade later, they finally did.

"I guess it's in our backyard. We really should have been here by now," the man behind the wheel said, as they made their way up Old World Wisconsin's entrance road. "Oh look, hiking trails."

When the road ended at a crushed gravel parking lot, the man behind the wheel was clearly impressed.

"Wow, look how many cars there are," he said. "This is way more popular than I envisioned. Did you know it was this popular?"

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Stephanie Endres, in orange, takes her turn at the washboard at Mary Hafford's house, a widowed Irish immigrant whose 1883 Jefferson County home was moved to Old World Wisconsin.

Woman struggles to overcome death of her daughter

Editor's note: The Time is Now to Help was founded by a local businessman who knew extreme poverty as a child. With the help of donations from the community, The Time is Now is able to help local residents in need.

Dear W.C.,
I have been a self-sufficient, hard-working person my whole life. Then last year everything



changed when my daughter became ill with cancer. She was living in an apartment, working and raising two young boys. It was obvious she was going to need my help. I had no idea how ill she would become from her

treatments. It broke my heart to watch how bravely she battled this terrible disease. She always remained positive around her boys, even when I knew it took every ounce of strength just to ask what they did in school. My grandchildren's father left several years ago and my daughter has been raising the boys herself since. I always was proud of what a great job she did as a

single mother.

My daughter had to give up her job because she was too sick to even get out of bed. I lost my job when I had to stay with my daughter around the clock to care for her and the boys. I had my daughter move into my small house because she was so sick and could no longer pay her rent. My daughter died after a nine-month battle. I have been

raising my grandsons with little assistance for the last year. I have struggled to find another job; there are not any jobs available for an older woman who has not worked for more than a year. Our utilities are late. My grandsons are in need of clothing and shoes. I promised my daughter that I would raise her boys as

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PIONEER

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"I had an idea," said the woman.

Boosting popularity on this summer Sunday was Wisconsin's favorite daughter, Laura Ingalls Wilder. No, Half-Pint never lived in this neck of the woods. She was born in Pepin, Wis. But why not inject some of her pioneer sensibility into this 576-acre living history museum, which bills itself as the world's largest outdoor rural museum?

Sadie and Faith Jacobson are 8-year-old twin sisters from Oconomowoc. They know Wilder from her books and, of course, the long-running television series. They wouldn't mind a little house of their own, and thanks to Mary Hafford, a widowed Irish immigrant whose 1883 Jefferson County home was moved to Old World Wisconsin, they got one.

Inside is a time capsule of all things pioneer — a black stove for cooking and heating, humble furniture made from materials of the land and a few dishes lovingly displayed. But it is outside the house that Sadie and Faith get a taste of what life really was like for little house dwellers during the nation's westward expansion.

"Would anyone like to do some laundry?" asked Amy Hunt, a costume-clad interpreter, stand-

ing next to a pile of prairie garb and a large bucket of water.

Sadie and Faith take to an antique washboard and pile of laundry like Laura Ingalls took to Almanzo Wilder.

"This is fun," Sadie said.

"It's my turn," said Faith, waiting behind her sister.

Who knew turn-of-the-century women's work was so enthralling?

Down the road from the Hafford house, a growing crowd of bonnet-clad girls stood in awe outside a building they dubbed the Nellie Oleson store.

"Welcome," said another interpreter in period attire. "Come in, come in. This is our Thomas General Store. It dates from

1880, and everything here was manufactured with machines in 1880 and that was new. The Thomas Store was competing

with small businesses that made similar items by hand."

So, the Thomas Store is not the Nellie Oleson Store, and there were no sightings on this day of Nellie or Alison Arnggrim, the actress who played the prairie bully with such gusto. But via phone from her home in Los Angeles, Arnggrim was thrilled to hear that a gaggle of girls was looking for her 28



ARNGRIM

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best as I could. I don't want to break that promise.

— *Heartbroken Grandma*

Dear readers,

The death of a child, at any age, is something a parent should never have to endure. Now, this grandmother has to move on as she tries to raise her two young grandsons on her own.

I called the grandmother and heard a lot of noise in the background, including what must have been her grandsons. The grandmother patiently quieted the boys. I introduced myself and assured her I would be there to help and asked if it was a convenient time to visit. She said she would appreciate it if I came over.

I arrived at a small home that looked a little run down. When the grandmother answered the front door, two young boys jumped out from behind her and excitedly began to tell me about how they helped their grandma. I told them what a good job they had done and told them, as the men of the house, they need to keep helping Grandma as much as they can. They beamed with pride and said they would.

The house was small, with only two bedrooms, a small

kitchen, living room and one bath. The grandmother told the boys to go play in their room for a bit while we talked. The grandmother started to cry and explained she was still trying to just get through each day. She had just enough energy to care for the boys and search for a job. She also had been trying to apply for assistance.

She said it had taken two months to get the boys past the stage of asking for their mom every day. She said it had broken her heart to tell them she had died and was in heaven. The boys wanted their mom here with them and did not understand she would never be back. The grandmother began to cry again as she told me about her daughter's illness and death. It was sad to hear what the daughter went through. The daughter knew she was dying, and all she could think about was what would happen to her boys now that she was broke. The grandmother broke down in tears, saying, "I cannot let my daughter down."

I consoled the grandmother, who said all of her funds were gone within the first year of caring for her daughter and grandchildren. Now, she was left with nothing but the house she and her husband had lived in for years. Her husband had passed away years ago. The utilities would be disconnected soon, and the house and her car needed

AT A GLANCE

Old World Wisconsin is a backyard treasure open June 13 through Oct. 31. Admission for adults is \$16, \$14 for students and seniors, and \$9 for children. A family of four is admitted for \$43. The 576-acre rural museum can be navigated on foot or via trams. Tram access is included in admission. Season passes to Old World Wisconsin, and other sites operated by the Wisconsin State Historical Society, are also available. Call or check online for operating hours.

■ **What:** Old World Wisconsin
 ■ **Location:** W372 S9727 Wisconsin Highway 67
 ■ **Contact:** (262) 594-6301
 ■ **Website:** oldworldwisconsin.wisconsinhistory.org.

years after the final episode of "Little House on the Prairie" was shot, and thrilled that the "Little House" books are still finding new readers.

"I just go all to pieces whenever I'm at an event and a little girl comes up in a bonnet," Arnggrim said. "Tell them to keep it up. I love it."

Why does Arnggrim, now a stand-up comedienne and best-selling author, think "Little House" — and venues like Old World Wisconsin — still resonate?

UPCOMING EVENTS

■ **Vintage base ball games** (Yes, America's favorite pastime is two words in the 1800s). Special carload admission prices. Aug. 27 — Game begins at 1:30 p.m.

■ **Paragon Springs Dinner Theater**
 Slip away into a 1920s rural speakeasy for some clandestine liquid refreshment, appetizers served by waiters in period attire and a delicious, themed dinner before you view the drama "Paragon Springs" by acclaimed playwright Steven Dietz.

Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, Aug. 6 through Aug. 21

Call or check online for hours.

■ **Sunday in the Garden: Sanford Farm**
 Celebrate the Summer 2011 release of "Putting Down Roots: Gardening Insights From Wisconsin's Early Settlers" by Old World Wisconsin historical gardener Marcia Carmichael.

Aug. 21, 10:30 a.m. to noon

■ **Broom Corn Labyrinth**
 Explore Old World Wisconsin's first-ever broom corn labyrinth. Walk the winding passageways through a broom corn maze and find your way from start to finish.

Sept. 3 through Oct. 9

In a voice that is still recognizably Nellie, but utterly devoid of the sharp barbs she was famous for, she noted "Little House" is watched in 140 countries.

Much of the world, she said, still lives in humble two-room structures, with three or more generations pulling together to put food on the table.

"When the show was on, it was less popular than it is now," Arnggrim said. "It was in the top 10, but it was dismissed by critics in New York and never even garnered an Emmy.

But now, it's on all over the world. In Borneo, Bangladesh, Iraq.

What happened? People can relate. They can identify with the problems of the characters. The problems of the Ingalls are the problems of the whole world."

Lucky for us, like the man in the car said, residents in southern Wisconsin don't have to travel far to experience the Ingalls or the pioneers whose spirit built this country. It's right in our backyard.

YOU CAN HELP

What: The Time is Now can be contacted by mail or online only.

Mail: P.O. Box 70, Pell Lake, WI 53157.

Online: www.timeisnowtohelp.org.

repairs. She said she had lost her daughter's car because they could not make the payments.

The last of her savings had gone for a modest funeral. She had kept her daughter home and cared for her around the clock because her daughter did not have health insurance. The bill collectors had told her the medical bills must be paid. One bill collector even told the grandmother the boys could be taken away if she was found to be financially incapable. Out of fear, she gave them all the money she had saved for years. The bill collectors' threats had worked, leaving the grandmother broke.

We talked about her job opportunities. She was an educated woman who had held the same job for most of her adult life. I asked if that job was still available to her. She said she could never ask them for her job back because she had left them so suddenly when her daughter needed her. I asked her if she had done a good job and if they

understood the reason for her sudden departure. She said, "Yes, I always did my best for them. They were very understanding about my leaving."

I told her to let me try calling to ask for her job back and she finally agreed. They knew The Time Is Now to Help and were happy to talk to me. I explained the reason for my call and he immediately offered her job back. He said he had hired a replacement, but that person always was late and missed a lot of days. He set up an appointment for her the following day. The grandmother could not believe she was going to have her old job back. She never even thought to ask since she felt so bad about how she had left. She had been a loving, caring and sharing mother, and now was doing the same for her grandsons. She should be proud for her decision to put her daughter first. She started to cry and gave me a hug, thanking me for the kind words and her job. I told her she had earned her job by her past performance.

We went over her immediate needs, brought the utilities up to date, did some house and car repairs. I asked her about her diminished food supply and she told me she had been to the pantry but she still runs out of food. We supplied her with several vouchers.

I noticed the younger boy's clothes were in poor condition.

His pants were worn and his shoes were dilapidated because he was wearing his brother's hand-me-downs. We supplied the grandmother with gift cards for clothing and shoes for the boys.

After our assistance, a job and guiding her in the right direction for some additional government help, they were getting by much better. The grandmother asked how and why we help people in need. I explained my moments of poverty as I grew up, my vow to God to help and how all of you, my fellow creations, make our assistance possible by your caring and sharing.

Health and happiness, God bless everyone, W.C.

A special thank you: Michael and Sue Borden, Sprecher's Restaurant & Pub in Lake Geneva, Paper Dolls, Martin O'Brien, Dean and Leeanne Wolanyk in honor of Dr. Mark Brower, Robert and Barbara Hogan, Dick and Jean Honeyager, Randall and Susan Hofberger, William and Sandra Blaesing, George and Laretta Clettenberg, Kenneth and Nova Kyburz, Jerry and Marilyn Wilkin, Ingalls-Koepen American Legion Post No. 102, Lisa Luedtke, Michael Burke, Fred Zeller and Bette Popik, Alfred and Mildred Thorson, Geri Hinton, Francis Branfort, W.C. Family Resource Center/Food Pantry volunteers.