



LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE

A top-rated NBC Wednesday night prime timer that's a TV success story no matter how you view it.

By Bob Clampett

Shooting began early this day on Paramount's massive Sound Stage 31. It was a brisk January morning in Hollywood and you could feel the cold throughout the dirt-floor set of NBC's "Little House on the Prairie." More than fifty people moved about, adding lighting, moving props, fluffing costumes and all the many things that one does just prior to a major filming sequence. Today's schedule calls for fourteen scenes to be filmed. If everything goes right, they may be out by five p.m. Director Leo Penn arrived before most of the others. It's his job to see that everything does go right.

Even as the lights intensify and the actresses give themselves their last-second makeup checks, you notice that the cold, somehow, has gone. Replacing it, a lapping warmth. A feeling of comradeship and festivity that belies the early-morning hour and mocks the gravity of the prefilming moment. All around you, people are smiling. To themselves and at each other. Throughout the morning's filming, the smiles remain; the warmth prevails. You feel that there is something special happening here.

"The motor of 'Little House,' the thing that makes it go, is a single word—love." The person speaking was John Hawkins, a large man, almost intimidating-looking, who is the show's producer. "That's the something different you sense around our sets, the awareness of love." Dressed in a yellow pullover shirt with short sleeves, Hawkins filled the space behind his desk as he spoke of the show that has become one of America's favorites this year.

"As you know, the series is based on Laura Ingalls Wilder's famous *Little House* children's books," he said. "This season is based on the volume *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, in which events take place in southwestern Minnesota in 1878. Way back in the beginning, we read all of the Wilder stories and many others from that same era. We've tried desperately to maintain the tone and the mood, and to keep the characters of the books intact.

"But most importantly, we've tried to maintain the moral standards of the Wilder books, while trying to make them appeal to the whole family. We use little or no violence, no sex, and no profanity. The people within our stories are

Michael Landon (Charles Ingalls), Karen Grassle (wife, Carolyn), and the Ingalls daughters portrayed by Melissa Sue Anderson (Mary), Melissa Gilbert (Laura, narrator) and Carrie (Lindsey or Sidney Greenbush—twins and alternates): the "first family" of Walnut Grove, Minnesota.



Actor, writer, director, strategist—Landon makes the show work.

God-fearing people who are very, very close.

"And here's where love comes in. You feel the love between husband and wife, parent and child, child and child. You feel the love between friends. Our characters express themselves openly and freely to one another. They even say, 'I love you,' which is almost never said on television today. I'd say the single most important element to our show today is the element of love."

Whatever it is, it's working. "Little House" has rested comfortably within the top twenty shows in the ratings since its debut at the beginning of last season. And its grip on children is strong. A recent poll of 40,000 *Scholastic Newstime* readers (for elementary students) showed the series to be the favorite among American youth nationally.

"What we're giving our viewers is entertainment they can trust," said Ward Hawkins, story editor for the show and producer John's brother. "When our viewers turn us on, they know they are getting quality entertainment for their children and for themselves. Not that we're a Sunday school show; we're not. We deal with some rather hard facts of life. We lose crops. We face illness. We face death. We face unemployment. You'll notice that we don't have a stock 'heavy' in the show. In 'Little House' the heavy is adversity, and we're all familiar with that."

Real people facing real problems. Back in a time when life was simpler and harder all at once. Back in a time when family members spoke with one another. When values of hard work and working together for a common good were all important. These are some of the keys to the success of "Little House," and the reasons for that feeling of warmth pervading the sound stage.

Another reason, simply, is Michael Landon. This day Landon was not on Sound Stage 31. He was shooting location footage fifty miles northwest of Los Angeles in the Simi Valley. There, the air is clear enough and the land open enough to nearly pass for Minnesota. Landon captured the allegiance of the American television viewing audience as Little Joe Cartwright, youngest of the "Bonanza" clan, for fourteen years. Since his days at "Bonanza," Landon has been writing, directing and waiting for the "right" series to come along.

"During that time, I was offered thirty-six detective roles, six doctor series and one about an astronaut landing on another planet," he said. "They were all the worst kind of junk." Finally, he was asked to consider the "Little House" role by Ed Friendly, one of the creators of "Laugh In," who had purchased the rights to the Wilder stories. Landon made up his mind when he noticed his twelve-year-old daughter reading the stories cover to cover, and when he learned that his wife, Lynn, had read them as a child herself.

"When I saw how the stories appealed to child and parent alike, I knew I had to do it," he said. He went to NBC and told them he wanted very much to do "Little House."

A multi-talented man who has earned and won the respect of the entire "Little House" cast and crew, Landon does it all for his newest series. He serves as executive producer, occasional director, leading actor and frequent story editor and script writer. "Mike's hand is everywhere," producer Hawkins states, "from approval of screenplay to accuracy of settings. Make no mistakes about it, this show is very much a part of Michael Landon's life."

Landon has faced criticism for his deep involvement in the show. Friendly left the show in mid-1974, claiming that there were "substantial deviations" from the "authentic saga" of Mrs. Wilder's books, insisted upon by Landon. But the remaining cast sides strongly with Landon on the issue, claiming that the only

Continued on page 100

BEE SAFARI

continued from page 43

"Them is beehives," the man said, putting his hand on the catch of the animal's collar. The dog looked at us as the Sioux might have looked at General Custer.

"We are field-testing the validity of a series of assumptions," Jonas said.

"Well, that's different," the beekeeper said, slightly relaxing his grip on the dog. "I thought you was trying to steal a hive of bees."

"And they *are* valid," Jonas cried triumphantly. Though standing at a respectful distance from the dog, we were close enough to see one of "our" bees, brilliantly aquamarine-colored, land on the sill of the hive.

Since there wasn't much else to say, we didn't say it. We backed off and, to mix a few biological figures, made a sheepish beeline back to our source of gin, tonic and other nectars. There are days that may inspire the thought that store-bought honey at a dollar a quart is not a bad buy.

None of this is intended to downgrade bee-tree hunting as a sport. After all, one does not climb mountains for the view or kill elephants to make elephantburgers. Furthermore, a brisk bee hunt will kill most of a hot summer's day and put the whole party in a good mood for a little late-evening frog gigging. ☞

OUTDOOR COOKING

continued from page 95

Place chicken, vegetables and seasonings in pot and add broth or bouillon. Bring to a boil, cover and simmer until chicken and vegetables are tender, about 30 minutes. To serve, remove each quarter of chicken to soup plate or bowl and surround with vegetables. As stew cools, fingers can be used to aid removal of meat from bones. Makes 4 servings.

- Fresh Fruits in Pineapple Halves
- Mixed Grill
(Bacon, sausage, lamb chops, kidneys, chicken livers—your choice)
- Blueberry Pancakes
- Syrup Butter Honey
- Sangria in a Jug
- Coffee

Outdoor brunching is even more delightful than the similar indoor sport. You'll find that in many areas the 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. hours are the most pleasant to spend outdoors.

The large grill especially designed for the Coleman campstove will accommodate a marvelous mixed grill of meats and cook up golden brown pancakes with ease.

Whip up the pancakes on the spot from a mix. Some packages give directions for shaking the ingredients together in a plastic beverage container so that the batter can be

poured onto the grill. If blueberries aren't in season, substitute other berries or chopped apples, pears or peaches. Or, there's nothing wrong with plain pancakes.

Prepare the Sangria at home and carry it along in a picnic jug. So that it won't be diluted, freeze cubes of fruit juice to use instead of ice.

SANGRIA

- 2 bottles red Spanish wine (fifths)
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 2 lemons, sliced
- 1 orange, sliced
- 4 ounces Cointreau
- 4 ounces Spanish brandy
- 24 ounces club soda
- Ice or fruit juice cubes (about 48)

In picnic jug combine wine, sugar, lemon and orange slices. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Stir in remaining ingredients. Let stand at least 15 to 20 minutes before serving. Makes 8 tall glasses. ☞

We are possessed by the things we possess. When I like an object, I always give it to someone. It isn't generosity—it's only because I want others to be enslaved by objects, not me.

—Jean Paul Sartre

PRAIRIE

continued from page 47

alterations made were those necessitated by format or logistics.

"We're not producing a Minnesota travelogue," said one director. "We're telling stories about people who lived in a particular place at a particular time. And we're doing just that."

That Landon believes in the show and its theme is evident. "'Little House' is about people and their problems and the overwhelming importance of family relationships," he said. "Whether 100 years ago or today, some things just never change, like jealousies in the home, or adolescent love. These are among the adversities that make life what it is—what it really is."

The youthful-looking thirty-eight-year-old Landon has a home life not unlike that of Charles Ingalls, whom he portrays on the series. "Mike's a really strong family man, with six children now and one on the way," Ward Hawkins pointed out. "He places as much value on the moral standards of home and family as the Wilder books do. And I think it shows on the show. I really do."

Some critics feel that these values are not enough upon which to base a television show. They cite

Continued on page 108



"Who gets the Sauerbraten?"

Order your copy now!

WE'VE TIPPED THE SCALES IN YOUR FLAVOR WITH THIS GLORIOUS NEW FAMILY COOKBOOK

Ingredients include secret recipes from Post readers, rollicking Post cartoons a la carte, and famous culinary adventures by great Post authors.

When *The Saturday Evening Post* first announced a recipe contest, readers from across the country responded with hundreds of treasured family recipes and a cookbook was born! It is a very special cookbook indeed with two unique features: famous *Post* cartoons appear throughout the book to keep the cook in good spirits; and from the archives of 50 years of old *Post's* comes a selection of classic recipes created by expert chefs and gourmets. For example, the cookbook contains secrets of German food, of clambakes, and even the special skills needed for preparing memorable eggs. These special recipes appear at the end of each category in the cookbook: salads, eggs and cheese, vegetables, rice and potatoes, fish, poultry, beef and pork entrees, bread, cakes and pies, cookies, desserts, and ethnic cooking. For pure reading pleasure, for good humor, and for excellence in recipes, we suggest *The Saturday Evening Post Family Cookbook*. This handsome hardcover book, 8-3/4 x 11 inches, done in the spirit and style of the *Post*, contains 160 pages which will set the kettle to singing!

The Trading Post

P. O. Box 1144, Indianapolis, Ind. 46206

Please send me _____ copy(s) of "The Saturday Evening Post Family Cookbook" at \$6.95 each plus 50 cents for postage and handling. (Please allow three weeks for delivery.)

Check enclosed.

Bill to: BankAmericard Master Charge

Credit Card No. _____ Expiration Date _____

If Master Charge enter 4-digit Interbank number appearing above your name: _____

Signature _____

Name (print) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Indiana residents add 4% sales tax.

Available December 1, 1974.

5D

Also available from your local bookstore

continued from page 100

the lack of "action" as a flaw in an otherwise well-conceived show. And in an age when the automobile "chase" scene is nearly a television staple, such criticism should be no surprise.

"Sure, we've thought about introducing elements of a more sensational nature," producer Hawkins said. "One time we considered an episode wherein the black hats rode into town. We tried and we tried and we tried, but dammit the black hats don't work. They just don't work. When they come in, the show goes out the window."

What keeps the show going is week after week of problems and circumstances which are faced by people in the ordinary course of their lives. Problems like the necessity of a father's leaving home for a short period to earn money in another city. Problems of economics, of family relationships, of growing up. For instance, one episode centered upon the turning up in Minnesota of a neighbor from the Ingalls' previous home in Kansas. Another, on young Laura's first dose of puppy love. And yet another, on the anxiety of bringing an inappropriate gift to a neighborhood birthday party. No sensationalism here, just real situations of importance to the participants.

Obviously, the characterizations of these participants must be good for such a series to work. And the performance by the regular cast has been superb. "They're great and they're getting even better," producer Hawkins said. "And with all the attention Mike commands, they'd better stay great." Karen Grassle plays the role of Charles Ingalls' wife Caroline, the quintessential pioneer woman. The eldest Ingalls daughter is played by Melissa Sue Anderson (Mary); Laura is played by Melissa Gilbert; and the youngest (Carrie) is played alternately by identical twins Lindsay and Sidney Greenbush.

"We know that many of our younger viewers take on strong identities with the child closest to their own age," Ward Hawkins points out. "And this just gives us all the more responsibility to produce a tasteful show."

"Little House on the Prairie" is a breath of fresh air to actor and part-time director Victor French, who plays Mr. Edwards in the series. A talented actor for twenty years, French is a big, bearded man with a deep voice and deeper eyes. "Throughout my career, I've been the heavy, the black hat, the bad guy," he said. "Why, I've been beaten, robbed, killed; and *have* been beaten, robbed and killed on so many shows I'd rather not think about it." French was a regular on both "Bonanza" and "Gunsmoke" for years as—you guessed it—the heavy.

"Now, as Mr. Edwards, I'm able to be the type of character that

means something," he said, deep eyes gleaming. "When I'm Mr. Edwards, it's really old Victor French out there being Victor French. I've never felt this good about doing a show in my life. No doubt, there *is* something special out there. It's like a labor of love. That's it—a labor of love."

You look around again. Everyone still seems to be smiling.

The sun has set hours ago. Despite Penn's efforts, the filming has gone beyond seven p.m. The last sequence features Karen Grassle and a guest star in an indoor setting. Young Melissa Sue Anderson, long completed with her scenes, lingers to watch the final shooting. The scene is worked flawlessly. You feel as if you're witnessing a scene from a century ago; as if you've been transported through some time machine back into the lives of people now long dead. You see and you believe. And you know why the show is received so well.

Miss Grassle walks smartly from the set toward her dressing room. She stops to chat briefly. She can't stay long. She has a plane to catch. She's appearing in a charity telethon the next day in Memphis. You see and you believe.

You return to the producer's office and are shown a mountain of mail upon Landon's desk.

"That's this week's mail," a woman says in a quiet voice. "We probably get thousands of letters, thousands each week. I've never seen a show get so much mail."

One letter begins: "Dear Mr. Landon: I have never before been so moved to write to any television personality or network as I have since 'The Little House' has been introduced . . ."

Another contains a paragraph: "My daughter has read every one of the books at least a dozen times and literally 'lives through' each one of your episodes. However, it is not only she, but our entire family who tries not to miss one of the programs. It is a beautiful hour for us to spend together."

The letters go on like that. Nearly all of them.

"Little House" has combined any number of elements to become one of America's most successful and best loved television series. It will return next year "with the children a year older, the community a little larger, and with a few new characters added," according to producer Hawkins. The success of the show has surprised everyone: critics, the network, the cast, even Landon. Which brings to mind the closing line of dialogue from an early show in the series, spoken by Laura:

"Pa said he was glad we'd come to live on the banks of Plum Creek, because here he'd harvested a crop he didn't know he'd planted . . . a harvest of friends."

The same has happened for all of us. ☞

QUARTER HORSES

continued from page 65

their oats in astonishment and chagrin at the very thought of such purses. Quarter horses now run for the richest treasure in all racing. The purse for the All American Futurity at New Mexico's Ruidoso Downs totals more than a million dollars. The winner will receive approximately \$336,000—for a fraction of a second over twenty seconds of running!

Well.

Those are some of the reasons why when you say quarter horse, pardner, you better smile.

But it isn't all money and cow-poking and racing. The quarter horse seems to be winning out as a pal. In Claremore, Oklahoma, there is a statue memorializing the late beloved Will Rogers. There never was a more American American than Will Rogers. So perhaps it is only fitting that this, an equestrian statue, shows Will seated on a quarter horse. He's the one Gary Cooper and Tom Mix kept their eyes on, even if them womenfolk were kinda purty. He's usually the one your kid is combing or washing or riding or just talking to when dinner's on—and dinner must wait.

It's an out-and-out love story, as I warned you at the beginning. In her book *All About Horses*, Marguerite Henry has said some sweet—and true—things about such a horse:

"The feeling which man has for his horse is universal. He respects machines. He knows they are tougher than horses, can stand heat and cold better, and they do not have to be watered and fed when they are idle. But with all their efficiency they cannot give companionship.

"The jeep or automobile doesn't whinny in gladness or in anticipation of breakfast when you come out to the garage in the morning. And you can't smack it on the fender and tell it to move over. And it doesn't care whether you ever take a ride or not. And it doesn't lip carrots from your hand or nip your jacket in fun or slobber water over your clean shirt. Machines have about as much warmth as a refrigerator. And that is why the horse is still a part of our lives and will live on. He was here millions of years before man came upon the earth, and if the cycle is completed he may still be thundering across the world long after man has vanished." ☞



The Perfect Squelch

The only thing Paul admired more than his own fussy self was exactness in detail. Lacking original ideas, he tried to get attention by criticizing all the small unimportant things his fellow workers did or said.

At a staff meeting, where a recently hired foreign physicist was talking, Paul took special pleasure in criticizing the speaker's heavy accent. While his fellow workers, who were interested in the foreigner's brilliant ideas, squirmed, Paul constantly interrupted the talk to stress the exact pronunciation of English words.

Finally, after asking the physicist to repeat one word for the third time, Paul leaned back and said, "You certainly have troubles with the language, don't you?"

"Yes," the physicist said with a smile, "and I have similar troubles with eight other languages."

George Alexandris

Copyright of Saturday Evening Post is the property of Benjamin Franklin Literary & Medical Society. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.