

[THEME MUSIC]

**NINA MOINI:** You may recognize this song from the 1970s TV adaptation of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*. That series got a Netflix reboot that was released this month, and the streamer announced it's renewing that show for a second season two that'll be set in Walnut Grove, in southwestern Minnesota, here. Wilder's family lived there in the 1870s, and she channeled their time there into her writings.

Joining me now to talk about the new series is Julian Nolan, Director and Curator of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove. Thanks for being with us, Julian.

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Hi, Nina. Thanks for having me.

**NINA MOINI:** I have to say, I watched a couple episodes of the Netflix show last night, and it's very different. It's a very different experience. But I want to start with talking about *Little House on the Prairie* books and the show, as many of us knew it growing up. I understand you grew up in Wisconsin. Did you read many of the books or watch the show?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah, absolutely. My mother actually taught me and my siblings how to read using the books, so I have a pretty personal connection to them.

**NINA MOINI:** Wow, that's amazing. What did you think of the show? Have you been watching the Netflix show?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah, I think it's really cool. When the show was in production, we were able to talk with some of the people who were in the art department, and they explained to us that they were kind of going away from the original shows, the way that it looked and the way that it felt, and trying to aim more towards the books and being more in line with that story.

**NINA MOINI:** So cool that they came to you. I mean, as they should, go to experts and the areas, but that's really cool that you got to consult a little bit on that. So Wilder's fourth book, for folks who don't know, in the *Little House* series, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, is set in Walnut Grove. Can you talk just a little bit about what's going on in that book?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah. So in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, it's Laura's family first arriving in Minnesota. It chronicles their time, their initial settlement in what is known as the Dugout. It's a literal hole in the ground with sod walls, to eventually settling in, having a home, and then finally leaving Walnut Grove.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah. And one of the things in the show that was interesting to me was that it was more raw, right? It was like the difficulties of starting life in these new places, in these new terrains, and in the prairie. Because the Ingalls family moved from the Big Woods of Wisconsin to Independence, Kansas, and that's actually where this first season of the Netflix show is. Then they moved to Minnesota. Tell us a little bit about their lives in Walnut Grove.

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah, it's actually, I would say, it's funny, but not really. They came to Minnesota in possibly the worst possible time. The winter that they arrived was the coldest on record for Minnesota and one of the snowiest. And then following this brutal winter, there was the great locust plague, which came through and decimated all the crops in the area. So it was a really hard time for them to come into Minnesota, to come into Walnut Grove. But they lasted, and they survived, and they did well.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah. Walnut Grove, as we mentioned, it's not the only town with a Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum too, right? How do the different communities where she lived represent her life and her stories today?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah. So I think each different community tries to focus on her time there, at least that's what we do here. There's plenty of interesting stories in each one of her stops. So we have tons of stuff to talk about just here in Walnut Grove. But the other ones in Independence, Kansas, or Burr oak, Iowa, they talk about her time there.

**NINA MOINI:** What do you think resonates so much with people still about these stories? Obviously, we have a connection here in Minnesota. But I mean, the fact that they rebooted it, a lot of things are getting a reboot nowadays, but what do you think still resonates with folks?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** I think everyone has some sort of childhood connection to the stories. Either you read the books as a kid, you saw the old TV show, and it's a story about a child kind of experiencing new things in a world that's very strange and new. And I think, as we all grow up, we have experiences like that ourselves. So there's something to be found in every one of her stories that someone can resonate with.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah. And one of the things that the show made clear just in the couple episodes I watched was some of the isolation that people experienced when they were kind of moving into different land. How do you think community or what are some stories of the community there in Walnut Grove, and how they interacted with Laura Ingalls Wilder and her family, and just how that sense of community helped sustain people?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah. I mean, like I had mentioned before, when the locust plague comes through and everyone's crops get decimated, it requires a lot of organization and community works to both try to get rid of locusts, to try to regrow crops, to look out for a neighbor who maybe didn't get to harvest their crops that year. So without a good community like Walnut Grove, it wouldn't be possible for people to even be out here in the first place.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah. And the second season, like we talked about, is going to be set in Walnut Grove. It's being filmed, I understand, in Winnipeg. But you mentioned they did, the creators, reached out. Did they come in person and visit the museum?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah, we actually had two people from the art department. They came down from Winnipeg to Walnut Grove. They spent a whole day here. We had them go through our archives. We had them look through pictures of the town at that time.

Unfortunately, Walnut Grove actually had a massive fire about 25 years after the Ingalls family left. So a lot of what would have been here when Laura and her family were here is no longer here, but we do have pictures of that. So they were really interested in setting the scene and looking what she would have seen.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah. What did you tell them, hey, you can't miss this, this is very important to the authenticity of this story? Were there a couple of things you wanted to make sure the creators really knew?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah. Well, I think, one big thing is that today, when you come out to this part of Minnesota, there's trees everywhere. It's not a full forest, but there's farms. There's trees. You'll see that. But at the time that the Ingalls family would have been here, it would have been a lot of emptiness and prairie grass. And I really wanted them to get a sense of that. And kind of look for what would have been there, not what's here currently.

**NINA MOINI:** That's such a good point because there was so much uninterrupted prairie land, obviously, here in Minnesota for a long time, and now, there's so much less. What else are you looking forward to from the second season of the new show?

**JULIAN NOLAN:** I mean, selfishly, I'm just very excited to see what Walnut Grove looked like at that time. I'm here, in this town almost every day working at the museum, but the Walnut Grove that I experience is a lot different than the one that Laura experienced. But I do get to see a lot of pictures, obviously, in my position of where buildings were, what they looked like. So I'm really excited to-- I might take a few photos home with me to compare what the set looks like to our original place. I'm just really excited to see that.

**NINA MOINI:** So just lastly, Julian, I understand the Walnut Grove Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant is happening this month. Is that related to what you all do? Or tell us about the pageant or how people can come visit all of you.

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Yeah. Actually, we have quite a few different exciting things going on in Walnut Grove right now. So our pageant takes place three weekends in July each year. This upcoming weekend is our last pageant weekend. The pageant is kind of a live action story of one of Laura's stories. So it won't go her entire time in Walnut Grove. They'll maybe select a year or two to explore and to show people. And that's on Fridays and Saturdays in the evening time.

But then during the day, we also have our Walnut Grove Village Fair going on right now. And there's plenty of different events. There's a Laura and Nellie look-alike contest. There's another reenactment. There's plenty of fun things to do out there.

**NINA MOINI:** All right. Thanks so much for stopping by *Minnesota Now* and telling us all about it. Julian, we appreciate your time.

**JULIAN NOLAN:** Thank you very much.

**NINA MOINI:** Julian Nolan is Director and Curator of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove, Minnesota.

That is going to do it for us today. Tomorrow on the program, we're going to talk with a scientist about how climate change is reshaping fires in northern Minnesota and Canada. And another heat wave cresting over the weekend. We'll have the weather forecast from our chief meteorologist, Ben Cathey. I'm Nina Moini. Thanks so much for listening.

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