

# DEEP VALLEY SUN

Vol. 14, Issue 2

*To promote and preserve Maud Hart Lovelace's legacy and her work, to encourage and support literacy, and to conserve historic landmarks in Mankato.*

## Betsy-Tacy Society Board Policy for Reopening

Though the BTS is as busy as ever, the Betsy and Tacy Houses have been closed since March 2020 due to COVID. But as more people are vaccinated and CDC reports indicate a steadily downward trend in the number of new cases, we are beginning to explore how we will reopen and when. We are as eager to open the Houses as you are to visit!

We're monitoring similar local groups and state and city guidelines, and we'll choose the reopening date as soon as we can, based on the best information available.

When the Houses reopen, some new procedures and policies will be in place for the health and safety of our guests and staff:

- ◆ Visits must be pre-arranged.
- ◆ The number of visitors will be limited to allow for proper social distancing.
- ◆ Weather permitting, much of the information-sharing will take place outdoors.
- ◆ Anyone age 5+ is required to wear a mask.
- ◆ Financial transactions will be cash-free; payment will be by credit or debit card or check only.
- ◆ Tour guides will be vaccinated.

We'll announce the grand reopening on our website, on Facebook, and in our newsletters. Stay tuned!

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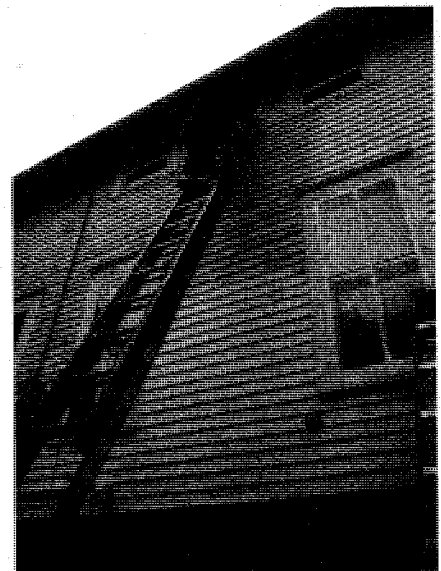
## Two "Heroes of the Houses": Candy and Doug Laven

by Jennifer Davis-Kay

Candy Laven will never forget that August day in 1997, shortly after she and husband Doug had moved into Betsy's Hill Street neighborhood: A Greyhound bus pulled up in front of Tib's house, and to her astonishment a hundred women came pouring out, cameras clicking wildly. Well, this caught her interest! The Lavens decided that when they had sometime, they'd get involved—and they have now "been involved" for more than a decade.

Candy currently serves as the BTS Board president, and she and Doug played (and continue to play, as part of the Building Maintenance Committee) a **vital** role in the restoration of Betsy's House. The Lavens love fixing up old houses, and they are mostly self-taught. Doug comes from a construction family and helped his father build the family's two homes. Candy is skilled with carpentry tools "and just has common sense," says Doug. "She knows what to do." After the BTS purchased Betsy's House, which needed a **lot** of help, Lona Falencykowski noticed all the work going on at the Lavens' house and thought, "Hey, here are some people who know how to do this stuff!" When the *Hometime* crew came out to work on Betsy's House in 2005, Doug joined them.

Over Zoom, I asked Candy and Doug to describe the work they've done in Betsy's and Tacy's Houses over the years.



(continued on p. 8)

## A Message from the President

The snowbanks are melting on the Big Hill, and early spring flowers are peeking through the flower beds at the Betsy and Tacy Houses. This is just the breath of fresh air that we need. The robins are working on feathering a nest in the big maple tree in Betsy's front yard—and, like the robins, we are getting the Houses ready in anticipation of opening them to the public soon. We are optimistic that as more vaccines are administered, we will be allowed to host face-to-face tours.

Our latest projects have been to update both Betsy's and Tacy's Houses with smart technology for remote-monitoring purposes. The March Betsy-Tacy Trivia Night was very successful, and we are currently organizing a large Madame Alexander doll collection donated to the BTS, which will be available for sale shortly. Please watch for details on our website and Facebook.

Thank you to our Board and Advisory Council members who have given so generously of their time to keep the Society operating during the pandemic, and thank you to our supporters. We couldn't do it without you!

Kind regards,

Candy Laven, BTS President

## A Message from the Treasurer

2020 was a difficult year for everyone. Now that we are setting forward into 2021, the Betsy-Tacy Society has big hopes for what lies ahead. Our volunteers successfully held virtual events over the last year, cut costs, and managed to maintain the same levels of revenue as previous years—despite the Houses being closed!

The Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation contributed a grant that allowed us to perform much-needed painting of both Houses' exteriors and make some needed repairs on the windows and sashes. We are so grateful to our donors, such as Helen Gift and the Abdo family, whose sustained generosity through the years has allowed the BTS to maintain not one but two historical houses, and artifact collections in both. We look forward to opening up to the public when it's safe and practical to do so, and we especially look forward to seeing *you*—again or for the first time, virtually or in person.

Sincerely,

Emily Falencykowski-Scott  
BTS Treasurer

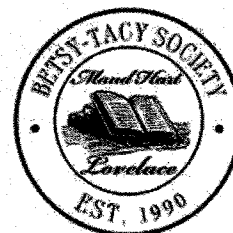


### BTS Board Members

Candy Laven, President  
Lona Falencykowski, Vice President  
Emily Falencykowski-Scott, Treasurer  
Jennifer Davis-Kay, Recording Secretary  
Amber Massaglia, Secretary  
Elizabeth (Libby) Abdo  
Michele Blake  
Pam DeMarce  
Jameel Haque  
Shandy Weimert

### Advisory Council

Penny Banwart  
Maud Hixson  
Susan Hynes  
Michelle May  
Betsy Sherman



## Introducing the New BTS Board and Advisory Council Members

The **Board of Directors** is responsible for the overall direction of the Betsy-Tacy Society. We meet monthly to plan and oversee BTS programs and services and to develop policies and procedures. In 2020, we welcomed two new members.

**Pam DeMarce** owns Mankato's Wow! Zone family entertainment center. While she read and loved the books as a child, she had never visited the Houses or explored the BT sites in her hometown, and she's excited to have this opportunity to learn more about the stories behind the characters. An avid Mankato history buff, Pam says, "I applaud all the people who've done this good work and how much they've accomplished!"

**Jameel Haque** is an Assistant Professor and Director of the Kessel Peace Institute at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He's lived in Betsy and Tacy's neighborhood "for six winters now," he says, adding, "This is how Minnesotans describe the passing of time." He hadn't heard of the books before moving to Mankato but has since devoured the series and says that *Betsy and Tacy Go Over the Big Hill* is his favorite, largely due to Maud's respectful and deft introduction of the Syrian community. He hasn't read *Emily of Deep Valley* yet, and he knows he's in for a treat!

Members of the **Advisory Council** (an adjunct of the Board) generally have a specific interest or passion that they want to explore further, and they advise the Board in their areas of expertise. In December, two Advisory Council members, both in Massachusetts, "flew up" to join the Board.

**Michele Blake's** exhaustive search for her own copy of *Emily of Deep Valley* eventually led to longtime involvement with the BTS. Although she has never been a member of the Board until now, over the years she has served as Corresponding Secretary, Membership Coordinator, and Convention Registrar. Thanks to Zoom, ducking Board meetings is no longer an option—and besides, says Michele, "Who can say no to Lona?!" Michele lives in Massachusetts with her husband (who is locally famous for creating the excellent and long-needed holiday "Wife Day") and son, whom some still remember from the 2002 Convention as the two-year-old joyfully eluding his mother's best efforts to rein him in. After spending many years as a hospital social worker, Michele is now self-employed, maintaining websites for nonprofit organizations, and her techie skills will be put to good use as we embark on a redesign of the BTS website.

**Jennifer Davis-Kay** (who was featured in the last *Deep Valley Sun*) says that simply asking an innocent question about jazzing up our newsletter got her dragooned by Emily Falenczykowski-Scott (aka Lona Jr.) into creating the E-Blast, which led to an invitation to join the Advisory Council, which led to full Board membership. Jen adores the BT books and is thrilled with this opportunity to actively contribute to their promotion.

In 2020–2021, we welcomed three additional **Advisory Council** members.

**Maud Hixson** is a St. Paul-based singer of classic jazz and popular songs of the 20th century. She co-founded the continental jazz sextet French 75 and is the recipient of four Artist Initiative grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board. Maud's latest project is a recording devoted to the songs of Sir Richard Rodney Bennett. She has gifted the BTS with her beautiful voice on numerous occasions, most notably for the CD "Listening For Your Song," a musical companion to the BT books (available in our Gift Shop), and a recent BTS benefit concert.

**Susan Hynes** is a Costumed Historical Interpreter in Mankato. She is locally famous for bringing little-known characters from history to life and for making her own costumes—in particular, her fabulous hats (featured in the spring 2021 E-Blast)! She loves doing historical reenactments and dressing up in costumes of Betsy and Tacy's era. Susan is part of our talented Facebook team; she says that Facebook is a good fit for her "because it's a visual medium, and I'm a very visual person." You can see her portrayal of Mrs. Benson (and one of her costumes, including a most gorgeous hat!) in the Betsy-Tacy Reading Series on YouTube, "Chapter 10: Calling on Mrs. Benson" (see p. 5 for more on this series).

**Betsy Sherman** says that soon after moving to Washington, D.C., she went to a nearby used bookstore and asked if they had any Betsy-Tacy books; the owner said, "You know . . . I think there's a group—and my sister is in it." !!! Betsy promptly did some research and found the Mankato Public Library. A librarian gave her Lona's phone number, Lona hooked Betsy up with some D.C. folks, and there was a D.C. BTS chapter for a time. And, like so many of us, Betsy says, "Lona told me that *I had to* join the Advisory Council." A professional editor now living in Virginia, Betsy is happy to contribute her skills to the BTS publications.

## Reading Aloud Betsy-Tacy

by Katie Watts

While waiting for my American History class to start, I was telling someone about the holy bonds of friendship that Betsy-Tacy has created for so many of us. Class member Jean McNeill overheard me. "What's Betsy-Tacy?" she asked. I explained. "I've never heard of it," she said. "And I thought I'd read every book ever written."

"The books are available at the library," I said.

She looked sad. "But I have macular degeneration. I can't read much." Impulsively I said, "I could read them to you."



And so Jean and I began getting together on her spacious sunny deck—and, when the weather turned cold and wet, indoors—to read the books in two-hour sessions on Monday and Thursday afternoons. Each time I left, she thanked me and I said, "I should be thanking you."

The experience of reading these beloved books aloud was new to me. I have three sons, and while they loved being read to, that didn't include BT. But to read the books to an alert, intelligent older woman who got all the references and fell as deeply in love with the characters as I—that was something I hadn't expected. Nor did I realize the pleasure I'd find in using my drama degree to bring our beloved books to life.

Occasionally Jean interrupted with tales of her youth. When we got to the Betsy Ray droop, she taught me her high school trend from the early '50s, a limp-wristed wave. Each time Betsy drooped—or, later, sank into the debutante slouch—Jean and I limp-wristed at each other, giggling.

A student of history, Jean got distressed when Julia went to Germany. "But the war's coming," Jean wailed. "She won't be safe!" She was even more worried when we began *Great World*: "I just know Betsy's going to get trapped in Germany. Don't go to Munich, Betsy. Please!"

It won't be a surprise to learn that Jean responded most emotionally to *Emily of Deep Valley*: Like so many of us, she's more of an Emily than a Betsy, Tacy, or Tib.

As we read, Jean cried frequently. But then, so did I. Unexpectedly, I found myself unable to speak when Jerry Sibley tells of the charge of the Fourth Minnesota in *Carney's House Party*, and I sat sobbing into the pages while Jean waited patiently—understanding from her vast knowledge of history.

When we got to the final chapter, we were both afraid we wouldn't make it. It took a while and the pages were damp, but we got through it.

"Will you stop reading to me when we're through with the books?" she asked fearfully one day, mid-*Carney*.

I assured her I wouldn't, and I haven't. Since we closed the cover on *The Tomes*, with me promising to go back and reread them whenever she asked, we've read through *Daddy-Long-Legs*, which was a perfect segue from BT. Then came Betty MacDonald's *The Plague and I*, which fell perfectly in the early days of the pandemic. I'd intended to continue MacDonald but got a craving for Daniel James Brown's *The Boys in the Boat*, which was an inspired choice. Jean's son had been the stroke oar in college; she knew the sport well. And again, as a historian, she brought her knowledge of world events to the table.

Currently, we're reading Ruth Reichl's entertaining food trilogy: *Tender at the Bone*, *Comfort Me with Apples*, and *Garlic and Sapphires*. Jean and I both cook well and were both in

California at the beginning of the local food movement that started in the late '70s, which we remember affectionately. There are murmurs of recognition as Ruth introduces us to the early days of people who've become food icons: Wolfgang Puck, Alice Waters, and, of course, herself. When I learned about Amber Massaglia's October Read-Aloud Betsy-Tacy Project [see below], I knew I needed to share my and Jean's story. So many people benefit from the experience of reading these books aloud, including those who, like Jean, can no longer read comfortably—and those like me, who get to experience these books as if reading them for the first time.

KARIE WARTS has been a San Francisco Bay Area journalist, writer, and editor since 1994. In her spare time she wrangles cats, listens to classical music, plays Animal Crossing, and talks to houseplants. To combat the stress of 2020, she practices muffin therapy, much to the pleasure of family and friends.



## Hear Betsy-Tacy Read Aloud on YouTube

Last October, BTS Secretary Amber Massaglia decided to commemorate Learning Disabilities Awareness Month by coordinating a video series, with friends and local luminaries each reading aloud a chapter from *Betsy-Tacy*. All 14 chapters are now available on YouTube. Says Amber, "People of all reading abilities deserve to know these wonderful stories!" The series can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCn5nYttKDsf2gkz9s08RzFg/featured>

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	36 views · 3 months ago	Betsy-Tacy Reading Series   Chapter 13: Mrs. Muller...
	41 views · 3 months ago	Betsy-Tacy Reading Series   Chapter 12: Margaret
	110 views · 3 months ago	Betsy-Tacy Reading Series   Chapter 11: The Buggy Shed
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	66 views · 4 months ago	Betsy-Tacy Reading Series   Chapter 3: Supper on the Hill...
	102 views · 4 months ago	Betsy-Tacy Reading Series   Chapter 2: Betsy's Birthday...
	320 views · 4 months ago	Betsy-Tacy Reading Series   Chapter 1: Betsy Meets Tac...
	3.9K views · 5 months ago	Betsy-Tacy Society tour with Penny Banwart

## Millinery: Money-Making and Merry-Making for Women

by Susan Hynes

Tib and Tacy, moved by earnestness, looked into the mirror which ran along the wall. They saw three girls wearing big, stylish, top-heavy hats. Betsy's was covered with green wings.

—from *Betsy Was a Junior*

Beginning in the late 18th century, *millinery*—or hat-making—provided women with an acceptable occupation at a time when few women worked outside the home and their sources for income were limited. The term *milliner* originally referred to a native of Milan, Italy, or to someone who sold women's fashion items imported from Milan but eventually grew to refer specifically to a hat-maker. Hats were an essential part of women's fashion in America until the 1930s, and millinery was considered a respectable and profitable trade. "Milliners engaged in custom work, like dressmakers," labor historian Helen Sumner noted in 1910, "have always been the aristocrats among the clothing makers" (p. 156).

Dr. William Mayo (who later, with his two sons, established the world-renowned Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota) came to Minnesota in the 1850s, believing it to be a very healthful climate. His wife, Louise Wright Mayo, helped support their family with her very successful shop, Fashionable Millinery, located on what is now Kellogg Boulevard in St. Paul. An ad in the October 13, 1855, issue of *The Weekly Minnesotian* newspaper read:

Mrs. L. W. Mayo is now prepared to supply all the LADIES who may favor her with their patronage the prevailing styles of the NEW YORK AND PARIS FASHIONS for Millinery and Dress Making. My stock is replete with all the most exquisite can desire in Dress Hats and Trimmings. Silks of moiré antique, in all colors, with the rich moss trimming to match. I have a few of the PATENT SKIRTS, a new article of dress, which, for the present fashions, are indispensable. A large lot of Furs in sets of Mantle Muff and wristlets, at all prices.

(*Patent skirts* refers to devices for raising a long skirt to avoid dirt or provide ease of movement. Also called *skirt lifters*, they clamped midway up skirts and then attached to a belt by a cord, ribbon, or chain.)



Maud Hart Lovelace's grandmother, Albertine Palmer, also learned to be a milliner. She opened a millinery shop in Winnebago City, Minnesota, which helped to support her two children, Stella and Frank, after husband Solomon died of tuberculosis in 1875. Albertine also briefly had a millinery shop in Mankato, where millinery was a booming business. At the beginning of the 20th century, the town was home to a total of 11 millinery shops. Hats had become so common that a woman without one might be deemed inappropriate.

She got up at last and walked to the millinery shop. Mrs. Murdock brought out half a dozen beautiful hats. Emily finally selected a broad-brimmed brown velvet with one rose underneath, and a small fox cap which matched her furs.

—from *Emily of Deep Valley*

Maud and her high school friends would have had access to many choices when it came to hats! Wide-brimmed hats worked well with their pompadour hairstyles and balanced their full skirts. These hats were often adorned with large artificial flowers such as cabbage roses, daisies, and poppies. Fancy trims, rosettes, tulle, lace ribbon

streamers, feathers, bird nests, and even stuffed birds were also used.

It is fun to envision Maud's mother and other ladies promenading downtown along Front Street in their finery. Women of all economic and social classes bought hats from milliners. Here Maud describes one of my favorite characters, the colorful hired girl Anna, in her finery at the Opera House:

Anna went with Charley, her beau. They sat in the balcony, and between acts she came to the railing to wave at the Rays sitting below. She wore such a big hat, such a fluffy boa, so much perfume and jewelry of every sort that she attracted considerable attention.

— from *Betsy in Spite of Herself*

The star of all the hats was the Merry Widow. This hat was first worn in the British operetta *The Merry Widow* (which premiered in 1907) by actress Lily Elise, who became immensely popular through the show and highly photographed during the Edwardian era. British couturier "Lucile" created not only stage costumes for this show but also a large hat with an extraordinarily wide brim that was loaded with black feathers. The largest hats from this period were usually not much wider than shoulder width (about 22 inches), but the diameter of this stage hat was over 3 feet!

Smaller Merry Widow-style hats became popular at this time, along with "The Merry Widow Waltz," and were the height of fashion for several years.

Talk was all of new suits and hats, especially hats. The Merry Widow hat had made its appearance this spring. It was as devastating as the Waltz. . . . [Betsy's] Merry Widow was blue, extravagantly wide, trimmed with green foliage and ribbon.

— from *Betsy in Spite of Herself*

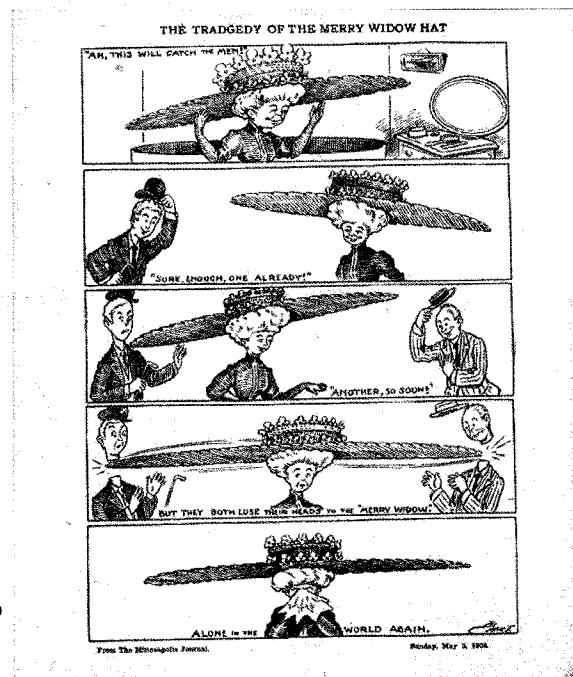
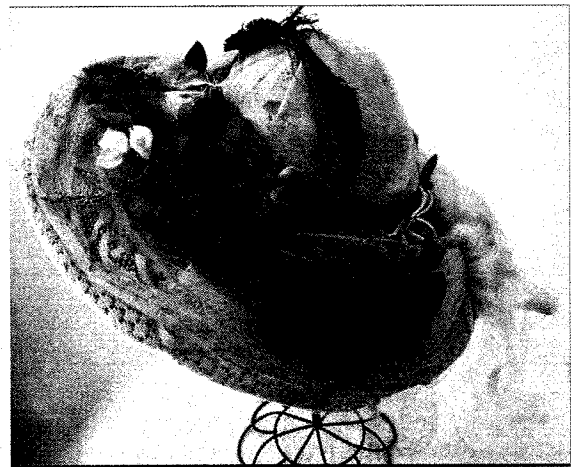
As with many popular fashions, the Merry Widow hat was also the subject of satire. There were newspaper and magazine reports of what was being worn in "other" cities. In *Betsy in Spite of Herself*, Julia says she's heard that New York ladies are getting "stuck in trolley car doors"!

We know that the millinery trade provided a way for women to make their own money. I think that these beautiful hats also helped to make life for Betsy Ray and her crowd more merry and bright.

**Source:** Sumner, Helen L. *History of Women and Industry in the United States*, 1910.

**"It was June, and the world smelled of roses. The sunshine was like powdered gold over the grassy hillside."**

~ Maud Hart Lovelace



### “Heroes of the Houses” (continued from p. 1)

Below are some highlights of our conversation.

**Candy:** Remember those cabinets that were in the basement of the Sugden house [a local historical home]?

**Doug:** Yeah. We pulled them out of the basement, and they were **big**. We should’ve had three guys, but it was just us.

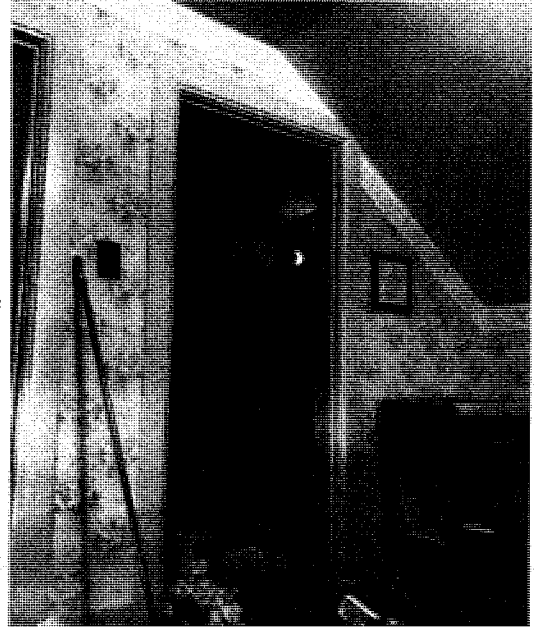
**Candy:** I stripped layers and layers and **layers** of paint off of those. Almost every piece of furniture in that house, we’ve had to do something to. The kitchen table—**13 layers** of paint. And the chairs were painted with milk paint; I almost had to pound that off with a hammer!

**Doug:** The stairs leading up to Betsy’s second floor were very challenging. Our usual carpenter, Denny Weiss, said, “I’m not touching those!” The original staircase was in the back parlor, and when the family did the addition, they moved the stairs to the back bedroom, where they didn’t really fit. That first step down is very steep—like, almost 14 inches—and none of the stairs were the same height!

**Candy:** And we found some original siding with the colors the family had used back in the day.

**Doug:** It’s now so solid and such a part of the house. From a craftsmanship standpoint, it makes me feel really good.

**Candy:** The entire upstairs had to be redone. In the hired girl’s bedroom, you could see the cut marks where the staircase used to come up. They pieced that in, and it kind of formed a closet. In the floor is a hole where the stovepipe from the back parlor comes up and angles over into the chimney.



**Doug:** We did a **lot** in the upstairs. First we had a professional electrician do the electrical work. Then we cleaned up the walls—removing layers of wallpaper and paint, then patching. There was a big hole in the wall where the wood-burning stove used to be—because every room or every other room would have had a stove—and we fixed all of that.

**Candy:** Betsy’s bedroom has always been some shade of blue. We worked with a local family who owns a wallpapering company to pick out historically appropriate wallpaper and paint colors, trying to match pattern sizes and colors to the original.

**Doug:** I was particularly impressed with how the *Hometime* people plastered the walls, because it’s a forgotten art. Those walls are like glass, the corners are perfect . . . there’s not a blemish anywhere. It was almost tragic to have to wallpaper them! But you can admire their work in the dining room and on the ceilings.

**Candy:** The floor upstairs had been painted 10 times. I chipped down to see the original floor color, kind of a gray-green, and then tried to match it within a shade or two. The ceiling is very plain, with farmhouse-style pine molding. But it took a lot of work to restore!

**Doug:** Then people donated lights, and we put up antique light covers.

**Candy:** People have been really generous with their donations. They call us if they have something that might work for Betsy’s House. We use the illustrations and descriptions in the books to try to replicate what was in each room. Someone told us they had a sink from that period, so I drove out to take a look, but I couldn’t find the address they’d given me. So I stopped to ask a neighbor—and I saw that she had a fainting couch on her porch. I thought, **Betsy needs that fainting couch**. So I asked the woman if she’d be willing to part with it. Well, she was getting ready to move, and she was glad to let us have it!

**Doug:** We’ve worked to make the Houses more accessible. We found some vintage tubing at a local school and used it to make a handrail to get from the sidewalk to the front porch of Betsy’s House. People were having



trouble getting up those four steps with nothing to hang on to. And the stairs to the second floor are now up to code—the only thing we couldn't control was the width of the walls.

**Candy:** The dining room in Betsy's House had a parquet oak floor; it was actually the nicest thing about the house, in the midst of all that 1970s renovation. But the Board felt strongly about having people walk on the same floors that Betsy walked on, so we pulled up the panels, and underneath was a pine plank floor. We pulled up **hundreds** of nails and then painted the floors. It looks great.

**Doug:** I remember one ungodly cold January night, around 10 p.m., I got a call from the BTS Treasurer, who was working at Tacy's House, saying, "Hey, we've got a problem here; you know a plumber?" I said, "**At 10 p.m.? I think the plumber is Doug and Candy Laven.**" Turns out there was a leak that doused the control board, which stopped the furnace, which caused everything to freeze—it was, like, 20 below outside!—and the main pipe in Tacy's basement burst. It was like a **fountain**. And of course I got soaked, but I had to go outside to turn off the street valve and get some stuff out of my truck. When I came back in, my shirt had frozen solid and I had to break it apart. It took **two full days** to replace all those pipes.

[Side note: The Board recently invested in smart thermostats at both Houses—no more frozen pipes!]

**Candy:** I remember when the cast-iron sewer line froze and broke at Tacy's House, and we needed a backhoe to dig it up. We had to tunnel through the foundation at Tacy's to get the new pipe in. I remember lying on the floor digging, digging . . .

**Doug:** . . . with a spoon, basically. It was like a prison escape!

\* \* \* \* \*

I asked former Board presidents Penny Banwart and Lona Falenczykowski to share some reflections:

**Penny:** Doug is worth his weight in gold. He is so knowledgeable and gracious about offering his help whenever we need him.

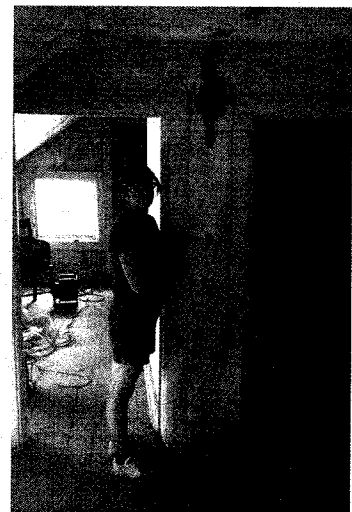
**Lona:** Usually in the middle of the night!

**Penny:** And Candy paints and refinishes everything that needs painting and refinishing. She is so generous with her time and is always willing to do the jobs that scare other people, **from hard physical labor to serving as Board president.**

**Lona:** I remember some former Board members saying that two family members should not be on the Board together, and I said, "**Candy and Doug are the best thing that ever happened to the BTS!**"

\* \* \* \* \*

(continued on p. 13)



Left—painting Mr. and Mrs. Ray's bedroom floor. Middle—staining the kitchen cabinet. Right—repairing Betsy's upstairs bedroom walls.



2nd, and Broad Streets were contaminated. On June 27, Mayor J. W. Andrews notified the public of the contamination, and the two daily newspapers warned residents to boil their water. Despite this, it was estimated that about half the city's water drinkers (between 4,000 and 6,000 people) became ill with typhoid.

Though Lovelace didn't specifically mention the epidemic in the book set at that time, *Betsy Was a Junior*, it did affect her Crowd. Several friends' fathers succumbed to the disease, and the fathers of both Bick ("Tacy") and Marnie ("Carney") became ill. Other noted figures from the Betsy-Tacy series who died during the Typhoid Fever Epidemic were Grace Pitcher Fox (mother of "Tom Slade") and James Ray Tinkcom ("Mr. Meecham"). The epidemic didn't end until autumn of 1908.

Tuberculosis affected Deep Valley not only in the past, it also recently resurfaced in Mankato with an outbreak of eight cases at Minnesota State University, Mankato, in early 2019. Commonly referred to as TB, tuberculosis is a bacterial infection that primarily affects the lungs and is easily transmitted through air droplets. Between 1887 and 1899, 20,000 residents of Minnesota died of the disease. It was common that those who contracted the disease were sent to sanatoriums. Along with the Minnesota State Sanatorium near Walker, Minnesota, which opened in 1907 and closed in 1962, there were 13 county-run facilities and several private sanatoriums.

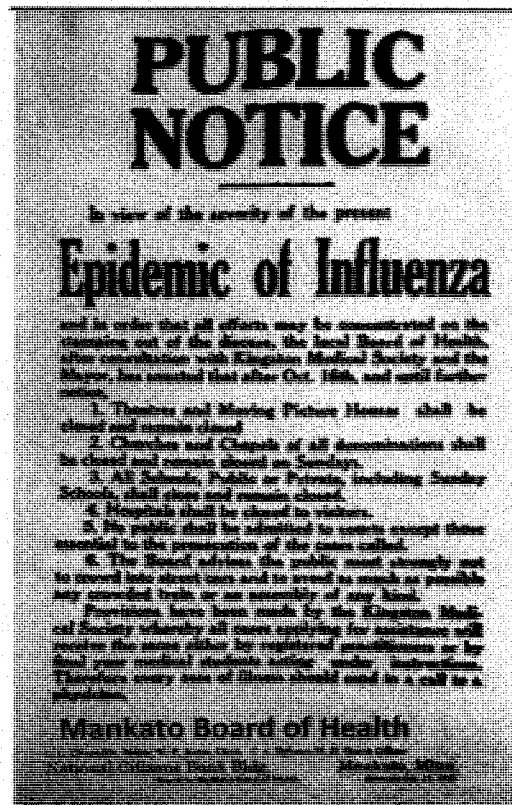
Polio (poliomyelitis), a deadly disease caused by a virus, affected many in southern Minnesota and elsewhere. In 1946, the number of cases in Minnesota grew to nearly 3,000. The disease could cause paralysis, and between 2 and 10 percent of cases were fatal. In the early 1950s, many events in southern Minnesota were canceled, and people self-quarantined. Polio has been eradicated in the U.S. since 1979, due to the development of two vaccines. Jonas Salk developed the first vaccine in 1955, and schoolchildren lined up to receive their inoculations. This vaccine was replaced in 1961 with an oral vaccine developed by Albert Sabin.

Another disease caused by a virus was known as the "Spanish flu." The 1918-1919 influenza pandemic was caused by an H1N1 virus and quickly spread worldwide. The first known case in the United States was diagnosed on a military base in Kansas in 1918. As soldiers were deployed to fight in Europe during WWI, many carried the virus with them. The first case in Minnesota was diagnosed at the end of September in

the community of Wells, located 40 miles south of Mankato. By early October, "Deep Valley" had its first case. The city council tried to prevent the spread of the disease by closing churches, schools, theaters, dance halls, and pool halls, and funerals for flu victims were prohibited. By the end of 1918, Minnesota had 150,000 confirmed cases and 8,000 deaths. The "second wave" of the pandemic was particularly severe in Mankato, with as many as one in 20 becoming ill. At least 160 people living in Blue Earth County succumbed to the disease. At the end of the pandemic, it is estimated that there were 50 million deaths worldwide and 670,000 deaths in the U.S.

Many similarities exist between the pandemic of 1918 and the COVID-19 pandemic of today. Both diseases are caused by a virus: The virus of 1918 had a genetic makeup of avian origin, and it is believed that the initial cases of 2019 were linked to a live-animal market in Wuhan, China. A nationwide shortage of nurses, doctors, and hospital beds occurred during both pandemics. Personal protective equipment was in short supply at the beginning of each outbreak. Both diseases are known as "crowd diseases," and both are extremely contagious, with high mortality rates. Millions of people have been killed worldwide during both pandemics.

(continued on p. 13)



## Mankato Loses Gifted Artist

*Marian Anderson, Known to Betsy-Tacy Fans for Library Mural*

by Penny Banwart



Local Mankato artist Marian Anderson, 84, died January 26, 2021, at Birchwood Cottages, North Mankato. Marian was raised on the shores of Swan Lake and graduated from Madelia High School. After moving to Mankato, her first job was "colorizing" high school graduation pictures for a local photographer. She established a reputation as a talented wildlife and Western artist and was the Midwest's Wildlife and Western Art Show Artist of the Year in 1991. She also received a commission to do the National Wildlife turkey stamp and did paintings for Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited. Marian also did many paintings featuring places in Mankato. She is known to fans of the Betsy-Tacy series as the artist who painted the mural "Maud's Deep Valley," which is located at the entrance of the children's wing of the Minnesota Regional Library in Mankato. The mural was dedicated in 1977.

According to a longtime friend, Marian had not known about the series growing up, but she read and enjoyed the books in preparation for painting the mural. As she painted, children often gathered to watch her, and many asked interesting questions about her work and the mural. She made every attempt to give them the true and honest answers she knew they expected.

Marian was known to be a humble woman who did not talk much about her paintings or her talent. A celebration of her life will be held at a later date in Mankato.



"Maud's Deep Valley" by Marian Anderson

**"Heroes of the Houses" (continued from p. 9)**

I concluded our interview by asking Candy and Doug what they've found most satisfying.

**Candy:** One of my favorite things now is when three generations of a family come to the Houses, you'll get the grandmother talking about what life was like when she was growing up. Seeing the Houses restored and what it all looked like back then—it really brings out people's stories.

**Doug:** I was working at Betsy's House, and I overheard a woman who had just had double knee surgery saying how easy it was to get upstairs with the two handrails, and that was great to hear. It wasn't an easy job to do, but it's so satisfying because now people can get up there and see it. We know everyone wants to!

**Candy:** I mean, there's nothing particularly joyful about, say, stripping paint off a piece of furniture. But when someone walks into Betsy's House and sees the beautifully restored furniture and goes "Ohhhhh"—or starts to cry, which happens a lot—that's when I feel the joy. That's when the hard work really pays off.

\* \* \* \* \*

Is there a way to adequately thank two people who've invested **countless hours of labor**—paint layer by paint layer, nail by nail—in our beloved homes? Probably not. But here is what we can do: We can visit the Houses. We can bring our own grandmothers, show them the cast-iron stove and the fainting couch and the dry sink, and ask them to tell us about their childhoods. We can take a closer look at things like plaster and paint, floorboards and molding, and better appreciate the craftsmanship involved. We can say **thank you, Candy and Doug Laven**, for everything you've done for our beautiful Houses, from the bottom of our collective hearts.

And in the spirit of Maud, the one who brought us together: **We can tell their story.**

**Disease in Deep Valley (continued from p. 11)**

Even though the threat of new virus variants exists, it is hopeful that the development and FDA approval of three vaccines will soon bring the COVID-19 pandemic to an end. As of March 5, the vaccine was available in Mankato for those over 65, health care workers, and educators. Also as of that date, the state of Minnesota has experienced 6,602 deaths; in Blue Earth County, 35 deaths have been recorded.

As did the pandemic of 1918, the current pandemic has brought suffering, grief, loss, and isolation to so many. As we look to the near future, we can only hope that a sense of peace, calm, and normalcy will return to our beautiful Deep Valley.

**Sources**

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PENNY BANWART is a retired teacher and member of the BTS Advisory Council who has long had an interest in local history. If you have lost someone in your family or your "Crowd" to COVID, she extends to you her sincere condolences.

## A Closer Look at *Winona's Pony Cart*—and a Special Promotion!

by Jennifer Davis-Kay

Maud wrote *Winona's Pony Cart* in 1953, right before *Betsy's Wedding*, but chronologically it is set two years before *Big Hill*. It's the shortest of the books and takes place over the briefest time period—just a few weeks. The main event is Winona Root's eighth birthday party, for which her well-to-do family hires a pony and cart. But Winona misunderstands; she believes the rented pony is in fact a birthday present.

Winona can be a more challenging heroine than Betsy Ray. It's easy to characterize her as “a spoiled little rich girl,” and readers mention the stress they feel as Winona creates problem after problem for her anxious mother. One particular conflict stands out: There are only 15 birthday party invitations, and Winona's mother has selected the children who will attend. But our headstrong birthday girl has her own guest list . . .

This theme—the friends my mother chooses for me are not the friends I choose—is a universal one, but Maud gives it a special twist. Among the friends Winona invites are, as described by Kathryn Williams-Schade on Goodreads, “the laundry lady's children [and] the Syrian children from the neighboring village.” White, wealthy Winona is a child of privilege, yet, adds Kathryn, “she sees no reason why [all her friends] shouldn't be invited to her birthday party simply because there aren't enough formal invitations printed up.”

Children's bookstore manager Abigail Moller also reviewed *Winona* on Goodreads:

Winona is a willful but winsome heroine, clearly a little spoiled, but also generous and quite democratic. I really appreciated that she invited Scundar, Marium, and Faddoul—the immigrant children who live in the “Little Syria” settlement near Deep Valley—and that she thereby demonstrated to her mother (and to readers of the 1950s) that they should be welcomed into the wider society.

A recent trend in children's literature is to examine classic stories for problematic stereotypes and cultural messages, given today's standards and social mores. Writer Lara Walsh notes that books “that were once an indispensable part of a school's reading curriculum are now receiving backlash or even being altered for containing themes or characters displaying overt racism or sexism.”<sup>1</sup>



Winona wishes she could throw around a ball with Scundar and her other Syrian friends, but her mother told her to sit on the wall and try to be spoiled. Winona would rather play!



Winona learns how to take good care of Tingle.

The *Little House* series and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are often cited as examples of beloved classics with troubling aspects when viewed by contemporary eyes.

But there's another school of thought on this issue. On Maud-L (an online group for BT fans—see below), Bethany Pheneger encourages us to read historical books in the context in which they were written:

Books are a window on another world and time. Such a picture may not be an acceptable one in today's terms, but if it's honest and without malice, do we not benefit? Even as a young reader I wasn't offended by the writings of Mark Twain, because I knew without being told that this wasn't written to offend but was just the way some people in history spoke.

I believe that both viewpoints are valid when reading historical works (i.e., keeping in mind the cultural context while also looking at them with fresh eyes), and I'm newly delighted to see how well Maud's themes hold up, all these decades later. Winona's innate kindness and inclusivity can spark empathy among today's young readers, “drawing readers into the lives of characters who may be different from themselves.”<sup>2</sup>

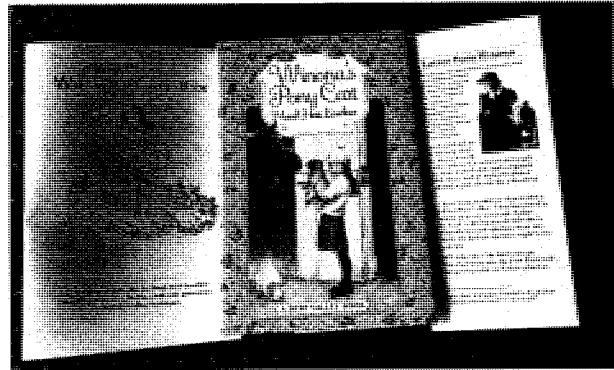
Two recent readers have found other charms in this book. Rainey Martin and Kate Howe are rereading the books together as part of their vlog series (see inset on the next page). Rainey says that the book

To join Maud-L, visit  
<https://groups.io/g/Maud-L/join>

improves on rereading: Winona is simply more fun to read about, and pup Toodles is such a great character. She notes that it works best to read the book where it fits in the series, rather than in order of publication. Both women enjoy the innate humor of the situation: Winona has **doubled** the guest list, yet Mrs. Root keeps her cool, despite her likely inner panic. "When you're young," Kate says, "you take it for granted that your parents will handle the details of hosting your friends." Kate especially enjoyed seeing the Immortal Trio through someone else's eyes (and drawn by another illustrator—this is the only "childhood" book illustrated by Vera Neville rather than Lois Lenski). Kate also admires how neatly Maud incorporates the Syrian community into the story—and she adds that it all makes her hungry for baklava!

The BTS is currently running a special promotion: For Gift Shop orders of \$25 or more,\* we'll include:

- ◆ A hardcover copy of *Winona's Pony Cart*
- ◆ A 1953 letter to Maud from Beulah Hunt, on whom Maud based the character of Winona
- ◆ A 16-page coloring book of every illustration from *Winona's Pony Cart*



(The letter and the coloring book will also be included with any order of *Winona*.)

We'll continue this promotion until supplies run out, so act quickly! Our hope is that readers who might have overlooked this "vintage, but somehow also contemporary-feeling tale" (as Abigail Moller describes it) will be encouraged to see it with fresh eyes.

<sup>1</sup> Lara Walsh, "10 classic children's books that haven't aged well," *Insider* (May 14, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> *Books That Promote Diversity and Inclusion*, Common Sense Media.

\* \$25 before tax, shipping, and handling. Shipping is \$5 + \$1 for each item after the first.

Follow Kate and Rainey's reread on YouTube:

- ◆ **Buddy Reading *Betsy-Tacy* With Rainey**
- ◆ **Re-Reading *Betsy-Tacy* with Kate**

Kate also led a rollicking discussion of the books with BTS Board members Jennifer Davis-Kay and Jameel Haque (search YouTube for **Betsy-Tacy Society Interview**).

The Betsy-Tacy illustrations by Lois Lenski and Vera Neville and quotes from Maud Hart Lovelace in this newsletter are used with permission from HarperCollins Publishers.

## Maud's Birthday • April 25, 1892

LET'S CELEBRATE Maud's birthday this month with a piece of cake or a cupcake!

Maud Palmer Hart was born *129 years ago* at 214 Center Street, Mankato, Minnesota. At six months of age, she moved with her family to 333 Center Street ("Betsy's House"), and later to 428 South Fifth Street.

(Teapot, cup, and saucer are made of fondant and painted with royal icing.)



**Contact us:**

**Address:**

Betsy-Tacy Society  
P.O. Box 94  
Mankato, MN 56002

Phone: (507) 345-9777  
Email: info@betsy-tacysociety.org  
Website: www.Betsy-TacySociety.org

**Find us online:**

Facebook: www.facebook.com/betsytacy  
Twitter: https://twitter.com/btsociety  
Instagram: www.instagram.com/betsy\_tacy

**Additional resources:**

Maud-L (the Betsy-Tacy E-List):  
<https://groups.io/g/Maud-L/join>  
Maud-L on Facebook:  
[www.facebook.com/groups/146486702094218](http://www.facebook.com/groups/146486702094218)  
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Arlington MA 02476

0247635714 0028



**“Maud Hart Lovelace”**

**Drawn by Laura Clapper**

Laura Clapper is an amateur artist residing in Waconia, Minnesota, with her husband and three children (one of whom is very new!). She says, “I first started reading the Betsy-Tacy books when I was in elementary school. I had great admiration for Betsy, but I always identified more with Tacy. My own childhood best friend was much more like Betsy. It’s almost impossible for me to pick a favorite book in the series. Lovelace’s ability to capture what it’s like to be a little girl and later what it’s like to become a woman is simply amazing. I quickly bought all the books when my first daughter was just a baby. We have read and read and reread the first book several times, and my daughter’s own personal motivation to learn to read is to be able to read *Betsy-Tacy* whenever she wants. I have yet to grow tired of it myself. Hmm . . . it may now be my favorite!”

During the pandemic lockdown, Ms. Clapper found time to draw this lovely portrait of Maud, and she generously shared it with the Betsy-Tacy Society.

