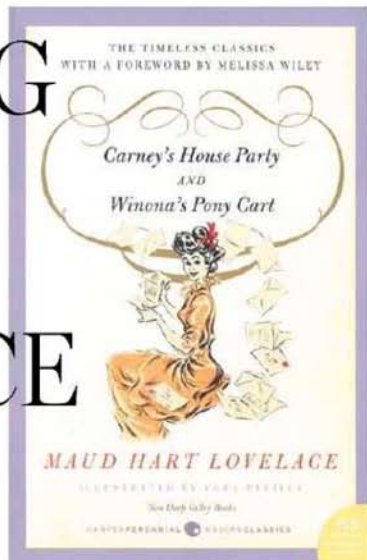


LOOKING for LOVELACE



Three recently
re-released titles

by the
Mankato-born author
make finding her
books much easier

By Sara Gilbert Frederick
Special to The Free Press

In the summer of 2009, Jennifer Hart, a vice president and assistant publisher with Harper Perennial in New York, came to Mankato to help promote the re-release of the final six titles in Maud Hart Lovelace's beloved Betsy and Tacy series during the Betsy-Tacy Society's national convention.

By the time she left, she had more publishing ideas in mind as well.

"When I was at the convention, I met Carney's granddaughter," Hart says. "I heard people talking about Emily and about how she was one of their favorite characters. I left there thinking that my work would not be done until we re-released the Deep Valley series as well."

In October, the three novels that make up that series — *Emily of Deep Valley*, *Carney's House Party* and *Winona's Pony Cart* — were re-released by Harper Perennial and are now available at the Betsy-Tacy Society in Mankato and at bookstores across the country.

Finding them prior to the re-release was a challenge, admits Jackie Hilgert, the interim executive director of the Betsy-Tacy Society.

"You really had to luck into the books somehow," she said. "You had to find them at thrift stores or antique shops. You couldn't just go to Amazon.com like you can now."

Hart remembers looking for the Deep Valley titles as a child and not being able to find them. "They were out of print, and my library didn't have them," she said. "I remember at one point there were photocopied pages of them that were being passed around, because you just couldn't

find the books anymore."

Making Lovelace's book more widely available has been a labor of love for Hart, who fell in love with Betsy, Tacy, Tib and the rest of their friends while reading the Betsy-Tacy series as a child. She initiated the re-release of the last six titles in the series in 2009, when she realized that they were out of print. When she realized how popular the Deep Valley books were, and how difficult they were to find, they became the logical next project.

Finding fans of the Mankato-born author and her books hasn't been a challenge, though. Through Facebook, Twitter and various book blogs, Hart connected with thousands of readers eager to get their hands on Lovelace's books — and eager to share their love for her work with others.

It was through Twitter, Hart says, that she found the people who wrote the forewords for the new releases this fall — children's book writer Melissa Wiley and young adult author Mitali Perkins.

Wiley and Perkins follow a long line of acclaimed authors who credit Lovelace for inspiring them to write. Meg Cabot, Anna Quindlen, Laura Lippman and Judy Blume, as well as director Nora Ephron and actor Bette Midler, are all avid fans of the author and her books.

But it isn't just longtime fans who are responding to the re-released titles.

Thanks to the publicity generated by the re-releases, including articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Magazine*, the *Washington Post* and elsewhere, Hart has heard from many readers who are just discovering the books — and are quickly falling in love with them.

"We had a tremendous response from people who found out about the books and started reading them because of the re-release," Hart said. "That has been just amazing."

Hilgert has noticed that the wider availability of the books has made it easier for older generations to share them with children and grandchildren.

"We see a lot of multigenerational connections being made," she said. "A lot of grandmas loved these books and passed them on their daughters. Now those daughters are able to pass them on to their daughters as well."

Each new re-release, Hilgert adds, brings more attention to Lovelace's body of work, which includes at least 20 total titles. "It's been very special for us to see this," she said. "It really motivates us to reach out to the next generation of readers and make sure they know about Maud Hart Lovelace as well."

Hart hasn't ruled out the possibility of future re-releases as well. She'd like to find a way to promote the 10 books in the Betsy-Tacy series as a whole, for example, although she isn't sure yet exactly how that will happen.

It's possible, though, that she'll know more when she returns to Mankato in 2012 for the next Betsy-Tacy Society national convention.

"I'm already making plans to be there," Hart said. "I've been thinking it might be even bigger this time than it was last year."