



## *History of the Betsy-Tacy Society*

When Maud Hart Lovelace memorialized Mankato as “*Deep Valley*,” the town in turn prized its famous author, holding “Betsy-Tacy Day” in 1961, naming the library’s children’s wing in her honor, and installing a bench at the top of “*Hill Street*” (Center Street) to mark where *Betsy* and *Tacy* picnicked. But by the end of the 1980s most of the Betsy-Tacy books were out of print, and even local interest had waned. In April 1990, twelve women from Mankato and surrounding areas met to establish the Betsy-Tacy Society, determined to promote awareness of the beloved series and to preserve and protect the still-existing homes and landmarks so faithfully depicted. From that handful of women evolved an organization that now boasts more than 1,200 members throughout the United States and, among others, countries as diverse as Canada, Japan, France, Germany and Australia.

The Society’s early activities included mobilizing its members to encourage re-publication of the Betsy-Tacy books no longer available, and organizing local events focusing on the series’ ties to Mankato. An initial one-page newsletter eventually developed into *The Journal*, issued bi-annually. *The Journal* later became the *Deep Valley Sun*, which is currently published three times a year. In July 1992, the Society sponsored a Convention to celebrate what would have been Maud Hart Lovelace’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, with 350 registrants attending. The author’s daughter, Merian Lovelace Kirchner, was the guest of honor, with noted Minnesota writer Patricia Hampl giving the keynote address. Membership grew rapidly thereafter, and subsequent conventions have been held in 1997 (the late Elizabeth Riley, editor of the Betsy-Tacy series, was the keynote speaker), and most recently in 2002, with “*Tacy’s*” granddaughter sharing memories of her grandmother, Frances Kenney Kirch, known as “Bick” to her friend Maud.

Betsy-Tacy Society members were instrumental in supporting the campaign to return the books to print, an effort rewarded in 1993 when HarperCollins reissued the first four titles, followed by the six high school books. In 2000 the publisher reissued the entire series, plus the three long-unavailable companion books *Emily of Deep Valley*, *Carney’s House Party*, and *Winona’s Pony Cart*, with new cover art and forewords by noted Betsy-Tacy fans such as Anna Quindlen and Judy Blume.

In 1995, the Betsy-Tacy Society bought the real-life model for the *Kelly* family home at 332 Center Street and began restoration efforts. In 2001, the Hart’s house at 333 Center Street became available, and the Society arranged for its purchase, probably saving it from demolition given its poor condition. *Tacy’s* house currently serves as the organization’s headquarters and a gift shop. Many items from the Hart/Lovelace family are on display here, as well as at the Blue Earth County Historical Society and the Lovelace wing of the library. These include *Mrs. Ray’s* brass bowl, a clock, corner cupboard, drop-leaf table, rocking chair and Tom Hart’s footstool, along with letters, stories and articles by Maud and Delos Lovelace. The Society hopes to develop a visitor’s center focusing Lovelace’s work that emphasizes family and women’s history. Much-needed repairs to both houses are ongoing, supported by the generous donations of Society members.

Membership information is available from The Betsy-Tacy Society, PO Box 94, Mankato MN 56002-0094. For information call 507-345-9777 or visit [www.betsy-tacysociety.org](http://www.betsy-tacysociety.org)