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## OUR VIEW

# LITERARY LANDMARKS A BOON

The designation that labels two Mankato structures as National Literary Landmarks gives the community a special standing in the realm of literature.

The only other Minnesota location on the national list is in St. Paul, birthplace of "The Great Gatsby" author F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Those who have been in Mankato awhile are familiar with the childhood homes of Maud Hart Lovelace and Frances "Bick" Kenney Kirch, better known as Betsy and Tacy, the characters made famous by Lovelace, the author of 18 children's books and six novels.

### Why it matters

Their new status as National Literary Landmarks mean the Betsy-Tacy houses will likely attract more fans.

Now the houses at 333 and 332 Center St., which have undergone extensive renovation thanks to the efforts of The Betsy-Tacy Society, have landed on a larger map. The Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations deemed the homes as National

Literary Landmarks, and the dedication ceremony was held Thursday.

Devoted fans of the Betsy-Tacy series are already familiar with the Mankato houses. And last summer Mankato hosted the national Betsy-Tacy convention, drawing fans from across the country. Best-selling author of "The Princess Diaries," Meg Cabot was keynote speaker. She talked about how even though the Betsy-Tacy series was written 100 years ago, it still seems timely and has endured. Public demand has meant reprint of books in the series.

Tours of the historic houses were not only part of the convention but are a regular highlight in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. This recent national designation, however, should be a boost to tourism in Mankato, drawing even more Betsy-Tacy fans to the site and likely capturing new fans who hadn't previously been introduced to the author and her southern Minnesota roots.

The landmark registry puts Lovelace in good company: It boasts about 100 sites, including the San Francisco apartment building where mystery writer Dashiell Hammett lived while writing "The Maltese Falcon"; several public libraries, including the one housing the papers of Thomas Paine; and residences Pearl S. Buck in West Virginia, the estate where Frederick Douglass died in Washington, D.C., and the lifelong home of William Carlos Williams in New Jersey.

Now the Deep Valley is on the list and will give Lovelace and her beloved hometown of Mankato the attention it deserves.

## OTHER VIEW

# State budget woes? Wait 'til next year

The Journal of New Ulm

The Minnesota Legislature and the governor managed to come up with a last minute budget balancing measure over the weekend, working throughout the night on little sleep Sunday and early Monday morning to finish it up.

But we doubt they'll be getting much more sleep in the months ahead as they ponder the even bigger deficit they will be facing next year. They really didn't solve anything this year, just kicked the problem into the next session.

Adding to the upcoming deficit will be the \$2 billion in deferred state payments to local school districts that is part of this year's budget plan. School districts will

have to hope their reserves, if they have them, will be sufficient to pay their bills and meet their payrolls without checks bouncing. If they aren't big enough, the districts will have to do some short-term borrowing to make ends meet.

Legislators did the only thing they could do about Gov. Tim Pawlenty's unalotments from last year. They ratified them. Without any money to reinstate the unallotted payments, they had no other option.

Some day, we may have a legislature and governor who will actually do something about the persistent budget problems we are facing. They will have quite a task on hand, thanks to the actions of the current bunch.

### Letters policy

The Free Press welcomes letters on any issue of general community interest. Please limit your letters to no more than 275 words, typewritten or clearly printed. Letters must contain the author's name, address and phone number for verification purposes. All letters will be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling and length.

Contact us by phone at (507) 344-NEWS (6397) or by e-mail at editor@mankatofreepress.com



# Chickenscratches from the future

Hello, good people of Mankato. I am sending you a letter from your future.

In 2012 we developed the technology to send messages back in time. This was an important development because it allowed us to make better choices and avoid some difficult future scenarios. I am writing to you today to tell you what happened after the hens ordinance was adopted in Mankato. As you know in May 2010 this was a hot issue and people had opinions on all sides.

After much discussion at a well attended public hearing, and some compromise on both sides, the council voted to pass the hens ordinance.

Now in 2014 about 15 households in Mankato keep a small flock of hens (five or less hens) on their property. Many in the no-chickens group thought hundreds of people would go out and get hens. They were afraid that hens would be running wild through the streets of Mankato, a sort of out-of-control chicken stampede. This did not happen. In fact the hen population grew very slowly, because only people who had the space and means to care for hens actually went out and got some.

In 2014 hens owners can be found throughout the city of Mankato. You would not know it though by walking through the neighborhoods, because they are so quiet they hardly make a

peep. One thing everyone who owns hens agrees, it has improved quality of life in the city by creating friend-



**MONIKA ANTONELLI**  
My View

lier neighborhoods. A Minnesota State University study published in 2013 showed that neighbors with hens were more likely to know the names of the people in their neighborhood and be involved in neighborhood activities like potlucks, garage sales and shared gardens.

Most people who raise hens do so because they want to eat clean, healthy food, meaning food that was raised without using chemicals like antibiotics. The eggs the backyard hens produced were some of the best tasting people had ever eaten and they were pretty, too. Some were white, some brown, but there were also pink, green, even light blue ones.

Raising hens has been good for education, too. Several of the Mankato schools got hens and the children learned how to care for them. The kids were so excited to go out in the morning and collect eggs and then they would use the eggs in the lunch room. Some of the children after doing research reports and talking to their parents and grandparents have shown an interest in farming. And many of these young people are planning on taking vocational classes on local food production farming, as

well as keeping hens on their property.

Many people who own hens also have gardens. Several people have used their hens to clear garden plots of weeds and they do it quickly. The hens just eat them up. They also like to eat caterpillars, slugs and ticks. Yum! And while they are eating weeds and bugs, the hens add nutrients to the soil through their manure. The tomatoes those gardeners grew in the summer were the best we ever tasted. Gardeners with hens also did not have to buy fertilizer. Which was a good thing because the cost of chemical fertilizer tripled in price due to a fertilizer shortage in 2013.

And finally, keeping hens in the city has been good for several Mankato businesses. Several stores do steady business selling chicken coops, chicken coop kits and chicken runs, as well as other gear hens need to be kept fed and healthy.

While the people who were against hens meant well and were concerned for the city, the future clearly shows their fears were ungrounded. From the school kids who got to learn all about raising hens and creating healthy foods to the businesses that increased their bottom line to the neighborhoods that grew strong from sharing eggs and working together, keeping hens in Mankato has been a good for the city.

Monika Antonelli lives in Mankato.

## YOUR VIEWS

# Writer distorted facts about deficit

A recent "Your View" by Bob Jentges distorts statistical information about "the largest deficit on record for the month of April" in three regards.

First, the large April federal deficit was reported in a U.S. Treasury publication prominently labeled with this highlight: "Military active duty pay, veterans' benefits, supplemental security income payments, and Medicare payments to health maintenance organizations for May 1, 2010, were accelerated to April 30, 2010." In other words, the April spending numbers were artificially inflated by including one day earlier some spending that was going to occur anyhow; the May numbers will be correspond-

ingly lower.

This proves nothing about whether our government is "bloated."

The source document is at <http://www.fms.treas.gov/mts/mts0410.pdf>

Second, using nominal dollars without adjusting for inflation or growth of the economy always tends to make more recent deficits look large compared with older ones. The U.S. federal deficit has been much larger as a fraction of GDP than it is now. Admittedly, that was during extraordinary times, when the world was at war on a massive scale. But Jentges' rhetoric might have fooled some readers into thinking current deficits exceed even that heroic

national outpouring, when in fact they pale by comparison.

Third, if Jentges wishes to use numbers to show that we have a "bloated, excessive spending, entitlement-laden government" rather than merely a fiscally irresponsible one, then he ought to break the deficit down into its revenue and expenditure components. Unfortunately, looking at the data in that more appropriate way would undermine his case; our current large deficits have as much to do with a decline in revenue (as a percentage of GDP) as they do with growth in spending.

Max Hailperin  
St. Peter

