



History of the Betsy-Tacy Society

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



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 Mankato library 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, a small group of local women met to establish the Betsy-Tacy Society, with the goals of promoting awareness of the beloved series and preserving and protecting the still-existing homes and landmarks that Maud so lovingly depicted. That small group evolved into an organization that now boasts hundreds of members throughout the United States and other countries.

The Society’s earliest activities included mobilizing its members to encourage re-publication of the out-of-print Betsy-Tacy books and organizing local events focusing on the series’ ties to Mankato. An initial one-page newsletter became a multi-page *Journal of the Betsy-Tacy Society*, issued biannually. In July 1992, the Society sponsored a Convention to celebrate what would have been Maud Hart Lovelace’s 100th birthday, attended by 350 fans. The author’s daughter, Merian Lovelace Kirchner, was the guest of honor, and noted Minnesota writer Patricia Hampl gave the keynote address. Membership grew rapidly thereafter, and subsequent Conventions were held in 1995, 1997 (the late Elizabeth Riley, editor of the Betsy-Tacy series, was the keynote speaker), and 2002 (with “Tacy’s” granddaughter, Peggy Kirch, sharing memories of her grandmother, Frances Kenney Kirch). Volunteers then stepped in, and volunteer-coordinated Conventions were held in 2009, 2012, and 2018.

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 Society bought the real-life model for the Kelly family home at 332 Center Street and began restoration efforts. In 2001, the Hart 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 office, gift shop, and Interpretive Center. Many items from the Hart/Lovelace family are on display, including Mrs. Ray’s brass bowl, a clock, a corner cupboard, Maud and Delos’s drop-leaf table, a rocking chair, and Tom Hart’s footstool, along with letters, stories, and articles by Maud and Delos Lovelace. Much-needed repairs to both houses are ongoing, supported by the generous donations of Society members.



Timeline: Maud Hart Lovelace and the Betsy-Tacy Society

- 1892 Maud Hart is born to Thomas and Stella (Palmer) Hart on April 25, 1892, in Mankato, Minnesota.
- 1902 Thomas Hart privately publishes a collection of Maud's poetry.
- 1910 Maud graduates from Mankato High School and enrolls at the University of Minnesota.
- 1911 Maud has her first sale of a short story, "Number Eight," to the *Los Angeles Times*.
- 1917 Maud Hart and Delos Lovelace are married on November 29. (Delos was born in Brainerd, Minnesota, and worked as a journalist for the *Minneapolis Tribune*.)
- 1926 Maud's first novel, *The Black Angels*, is published.
- 1931 Merian Hart Lovelace is born January 18. Maud continues to write adult novels. As Merian grows older, Maud tells her daughter stories about her own childhood in Mankato. These stories would later become the Betsy-Tacy books.
- 1940 *Betsy-Tacy* by Maud Hart Lovelace is published by Thomas Y. Crowell Company. From 1940 to 1955, Maud wrote nine more Betsy-Tacy books and three companion Deep Valley books.
- 1961 The Mankato Branch of the American Association of University Women sponsors a "Betsy-Tacy Day" celebration, and Rex Hill, the mayor of Mankato, proclaims October 7 "Betsy-Tacy Day."
- 1967 Delos Lovelace passes away on January 17.
- 1977 The *Mankato Free Press* successfully champions for a Maud Hart Lovelace wing for the new Minnesota Valley Regional Library; Maud's daughter, Merian Kirchner, attends the dedication.
- 1979 The Mankato Friends of the Library Association establishes the Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award for children's books. Nominees are chosen in two categories: grades 3–5 and grades 6–8. Children who read at least three books in the relevant category cast a vote for their favorite. The winner is announced on April 25, Maud's birthday.
- 1980 Artist Marian Anderson is commissioned to paint a portrait of Maud and a mural for the Lovelace wing of the library; an unveiling ceremony is held on March 9. The Friends of the Library and the Sweet Adelines hold a Betsy-Tacy Festival at the Minnesota Valley Regional Library.
- Maud Hart Lovelace dies on March 11, in California; her ashes are buried in Glenwood Cemetery in Mankato, Minnesota.
- 1989 Shirley Lieske and the Greater Mankato Area Camp Fire begin the project to install a bench at the foot of Center Street as a memorial to Maud. The stone bench and plaque are dedicated on April 30.
- 1990 The Betsy-Tacy Society is established to encourage the re-publication of the Betsy-Tacy books, to preserve and protect the homes and landmarks depicted in the books, and to

promote awareness of Maud Hart Lovelace and her work. An initial one-page newsletter is sent to Betsy-Tacy Society members.

- 1992 *Victoria* magazine includes the upcoming Betsy-Tacy Convention in its “Events” column, prompting a dramatic rise in membership.
- The first Betsy-Tacy Society Convention is held in Mankato to celebrate Maud Hart Lovelace’s 100th birthday. Merian Lovelace Kirchner is the guest of honor, and noted Minnesota author Patricia Hampl is the keynote speaker.
- 1993 HarperCollins reissues the first four titles in the Betsy-Tacy series, due to the campaigning of the Betsy-Tacy Society. Soon after, the six high school books in the series are reissued.
- 1993–1999 Patty Warhol and Marney Wilde produce *The Betsy-Tacy Society Note Book*, a quarterly 30- to 40-page journal.
- 1995 The Betsy-Tacy Society purchases Tacy’s house at 332 Center Street (the real-life home of Frances “Bick” Kenney), and restoration begins. The house was built in 1881.
- The second Betsy-Tacy Society Convention is held in Mankato, with Dr. Louisa Smith, Professor of English at Mankato State University, as the keynote speaker.
- 1997 The third Betsy-Tacy Society Convention is held in Mankato, with Elizabeth Riley (Maud’s editor of the Betsy-Tacy series) as the keynote speaker.
- Merian Lovelace Kirchner dies on September 25.
- 2000 HarperCollins reissues the entire Betsy-Tacy series, including the three companion Deep Valley books: *Emily of Deep Valley*, *Carney’s House Party*, and *Winona’s Pony Cart*.
- 2001 The Betsy-Tacy Society purchases Maud’s childhood home on Center Street, saving it from possible demolition. The house was built in 1892.
- 2002 The fourth Betsy-Tacy Society Convention is held in Mankato, with Peggy Kirch, “Tacy’s” granddaughter, as the keynote speaker.
- 2004 Betsy-Tacy Society membership grows to over 1,500, with members throughout the U.S., Canada, Japan, France, Netherlands, Australia, Germany, and England.
- 2005 The Betsy-Tacy Society appoints Julie Schrader Executive Director and Newsletter Editor. The first issue of the *Deep Valley Sun*, the new Society newsletter, is printed.
- 2005–2009 *Hometime*, a syndicated home improvement show on PBS, films a total of five episodes at Maud Hart Lovelace’s childhood home.
- 2007 A Maud Hart Lovelace historic plaque is dedicated at Betsy’s House on September 29.
- 2008 Betsy’s House and Tacy’s House signs, designed and crafted by David and Nancy Allan, are installed at the Houses.
- The first engraved pavers from the paver fundraiser are laid in the walkway outside Betsy’s House in June.
- 2009 The Betsy-Tacy Society celebrates burning the mortgage for the Betsy-Tacy Houses.
- HarperCollins reissues the Betsy-Tacy high school books, two novels in one volume with original Vera Neville cover artwork.

- 2009 (cont.) A volunteer-coordinated Convention is held in Mankato on July 18–21, with author Meg Cabot as keynote speaker.
- The Society receives the “Bring It Home” award from the Mankato Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- 2010 The Betsy-Tacy Houses are designated National Landmarks by the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends, and Foundations, and a dedication ceremony is held on May 20.
- HarperCollins reissues the three Deep Valley books (*Emily of Deep Valley*, *Carney’s House Party*, and *Winona’s Pony Cart*) in two volumes with original cover artwork.
- 2011 HarperCollins releases a paperback *Betsy-Tacy Treasury*, containing the first four Betsy-Tacy books (*Betsy-Tacy*, *Betsy-Tacy and Tib*, *Betsy and Tacy Go Over the Big Hill*, and *Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown*) in one volume.
- 2012 The Betsy-Tacy Society bylaws are amended and approved.
- A volunteer-coordinated Convention is held in Minneapolis and Mankato, July 19–22.
- The original artworks of Lois Lenski and Vera Neville, illustrators for Maud’s Deep Valley books, are gifted to the Betsy-Tacy Society by the estate of Merian Kirchner, daughter of Maud Hart Lovelace and Delos Lovelace. The Society also receives Hart and Lovelace family artifacts, now on display in the Interpretive Center at Tacy’s House.
- 2013 The Betsy-Tacy Society receives a grant from the City of Mankato for the restoration of the second floor at Betsy’s House.
- The first e-newsletter is created for Betsy-Tacy Society members.
- An Endowment Fund for the Betsy-Tacy Society is established and approved by the Board, with the goal of continuing to grow funding and interest income to meet the Society’s ongoing financial responsibilities.
- 2014 The Deep Valley Homecoming is held June 28–July 2 in Mankato.
- Kasota stone hitching blocks are dedicated at the Betsy and Tacy Houses on October 25.
- 2015 The second annual Deep Valley Homecoming is held June 26–30 in Mankato.
- 2016 The third annual Deep Valley Homecoming is held June 24–27 in Mankato.
- 2018 A volunteer-coordinated Betsy-Tacy Convention is held August 3–5 in Minneapolis.
- 2019 The Frances “Bick” Kenney House historic plaque is installed.
- 2020 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Houses close temporarily.
- A new newsletter, designed to promote member engagement, is sent as an e-blast to all Betsy-Tacy Society members.

