



## “Living With Writing” MNHS ACQUIRES MAUD HART LOVELACE AND DELOS LOVELACE PAPERS

Lydia Lucas

**T**he Minnesota Historical Society has recently had the pleasure of adding to its manuscript collections the papers of Maud Hart Lovelace (1892–1980), beloved author of the Betsy-Tacy series of books for children and young adults, and her husband, Delos Wheeler Lovelace (1894–1967), also an author of some note.

Totalling 15 cubic feet (19 boxes), the Maud Hart Lovelace and family papers were a gift of the estate of Merian Kirchner, the Lovelaces’ daughter and only surviving child. Following Merian’s death in 1997, the papers were managed for several years by a literary executor, who in 2009 began seeking an appropriate home for them. Maud’s Minnesota roots, and the fact that many of her

works are set in, or based on, Minnesota locales, made the Minnesota Historical Society the logical choice. A formal transfer agreement was reached in 2017, after the executor's death, when her husband arranged to implement her decisions regarding placement of the papers.

"The acquisition of the Lovelace papers significantly enhances MNHS's documentation of the state's literary heritage and provides researchers and fans with exciting new insights into two major twentieth-century authors," said Duane Swanson, curator of manuscripts.

Not all of the papers have come to MNHS, however. The executor chose to split the collection. Notes, drafts, research, and other materials relating to the writing and publication of the Betsy-Tacy series and Maud's other children's books and stories were donated to the Children's Literature Research Collections at the University of Minnesota.<sup>1</sup>

Although Maud Hart Lovelace is best known for the Betsy-Tacy series, her literary career, as well as Delos's, began well before the first Betsy-Tacy book was published in 1940. She had started writing poems and short stories as a child, and several of these, both complete and incomplete—as well as two folders of her high school essays—are included in the MNHS collection. Maud's literary talents soon received public recognition. "Her Story," written when she was a student at the University of Minnesota and published in the May 1912 issue of *Minnesota Magazine*, the senior class literary journal, evoked praise at the time from noted University of Minnesota English professor emerita Maria Sanford, who wrote, "In simplicity, in directness, emotional power and skill in the structure, it is superior to the average story found in our best magazines." Sanford also sent Maud an encouraging personal letter, in which Sanford concluded, "It may not be at all wise to neglect seeking in other lines your means of support, if you must depend on yourself, but do not fail to give your gift in this line a chance to develop."<sup>2</sup>

During the 1920s, the Lovelaces were prolific writers of short stories, sometimes separately, sometimes in collaboration. By this time they had moved from their native Minnesota to New York, where Delos worked as a reporter and editor for two New York daily newspapers. Many, although by no means all, of the short stories are present in the collection as drafts, final typescripts, or published works. Many were not accepted for publication, and they are probably available nowhere else.

Delos's stories sold more consistently than did Maud's, so during the latter 1920s she turned her attention, with

his encouragement, to writing historical fiction. Her first novel, *The Black Angels*, was published in 1926, followed by *Early Candlelight* in 1929. The latter work, set at Fort Snelling in the 1830s, was praised for its portrayal of early garrison life. Maud's research notes for *Early Candlelight* are included in the collection, as well as an invitation, newspaper clippings, and photos of the review and reception given at the fort in September 1929 by the Third Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. According to the *St. Paul Dispatch*, this was the first American military review to honor a woman in private life. Four scrapbooks of newspaper clippings on *The Black Angels*, *Early Candlelight*, and her two other early works, *Petticoat Court* and *The Charming Sally*, cover announcements, reviews, articles on Maud and the books, and other publicity.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1930s, Delos had also turned his hand to book-length works. The MNHS collection includes notes and miscellany relating to two of the books he and Maud coauthored, *Gentlemen from England* and *One Stayed at Welcome*, as well as drafts of two of his unpublished novels, "The Keeper of the Scrolls" and "Flight from Herod." He and Maud were in demand as reviewers of books and some theatrical productions, and the collection includes two folders of their published reviews. Delos's are in the form of poems, sometimes laudatory, sometimes sharply critical, but all written with grace and drollery.

Featured in the collection as well are Maud's drafts, notes, and related materials for "Living With Writing," her unfinished reminiscence and family history, possibly written with an eye toward publication. In these reminiscences, Maud details her childhood adventures and friends, the Harts' family life, and turn-of-the-century Mankato with the same evocative spirit that also found expression in the early Betsy-Tacy books. She also includes reminiscences and stories of parents and grandparents on both her mother's side (the Palmers) and her father's side (the Harts). At one point she says she is not setting out to write an autobiography but rather to describe her living with writing, yet other than mentioning her childhood writings she reveals relatively little of her life as an author. The reminiscences are not dated, but occasional internal comments indicate that they were written after the Betsy-Tacy series was well underway. (Additional notes and a typescript of "Writing and Living," probably another version of the reminiscence, are in the Maud Hart Lovelace Collection at the University of Minnesota.) Some other papers in the collection encompass notes Maud made on the process of writing; royalty statements for the Lovelaces' books; and many files of notes, plotlines, and background research for prospective books.

(continued on page 161)

FACING: Maud (left) about 1917, the year of her marriage to Delos. He carried this photo of her during his World War I service in France (right).



**MAUD HART LOVELACE**

**BOOKS ABOUT BETSY**

**BETSY-TACY** *Illustrated by Lois Lenski*  
**BETSY-TACY AND TIB**

*Illustrated by Lois Lenski*

**BETSY AND TACY GO OVER**

**THE HILL** *Illustrated by Lois Lenski*

**BETSY AND TACY GO DOWNTOWN**

*Illustrated by Lois Lenski*

**HEAVEN TO BETSY**

*Illustrated by Vera Neville*

**BETSY IN SPITE OF HERSELF**

*Illustrated by Vera Neville*

**BETSY WAS A JUNIOR**

*Illustrated by Vera Neville*

**BETSY AND JOE**

*Illustrated by Vera Neville*

**BETSY AND THE GREAT WORLD**

*Illustrated by Vera Neville*

**BETSY'S WEDDING**

*Illustrated by Vera Neville*

Front and back cover of publisher T. Y. Crowell's promotional booklet for the Betsy-Tacy book series, undated.

The University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis

Stephen, Minn.

May 31, 1912.

My dear Miss Harb;  
I wanted to write a line to you before,  
but the past few weeks have been unusually  
full of work that had to be done right off.  
Your article was indeed good, and you  
have reason to be proud of your power. I do  
not say this to turn your head, but only  
to encourage you. Remember, literature  
is very exacting. The only way for a young  
person who has ability, is to keep modest;  
study hard to catch not the trick but the  
inspiration of the great masters; and work,  
work, work.

It may not be at all wise to neglect  
anything in other lines your means of support, if you  
must depend on yourself; but do not fail to give  
your gift in this line a chance to develop.  
Very truly your friend,  
Maria L. Sanford.

~~Delos~~  
W. L.

1406 East 103 Street  
Brooklyn 26 N.Y.  
July 12, 1964

Dear Mrs. Lovlace,

I am a very dear fan of your Betsy-  
Tacy books. I have read everyone in its  
series and each one has fulfilled my  
want for books that are interesting. I  
thought the book Betsy-Tacy and Tit was  
one of the cutest books I ever read. I  
enjoyed the part when the three girls  
cut off each others hair. Your books are  
so wonderful, that sometimes it is hard  
to get them out of the library because  
so many girls want to read <sup>them</sup>. I certainly  
hope that soon there will be more  
wonderful Betsy books for me to read.  
Sincerely yours,  
Helene Saterisky

## Not Worth Covers

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF GUY DE  
MAUPASSANT. Sears Publishing  
Company. \$2.50.

Tabloidia once more extends,  
Its boundaries to embrace  
More of the realm of books and  
make  
Another reasty place.

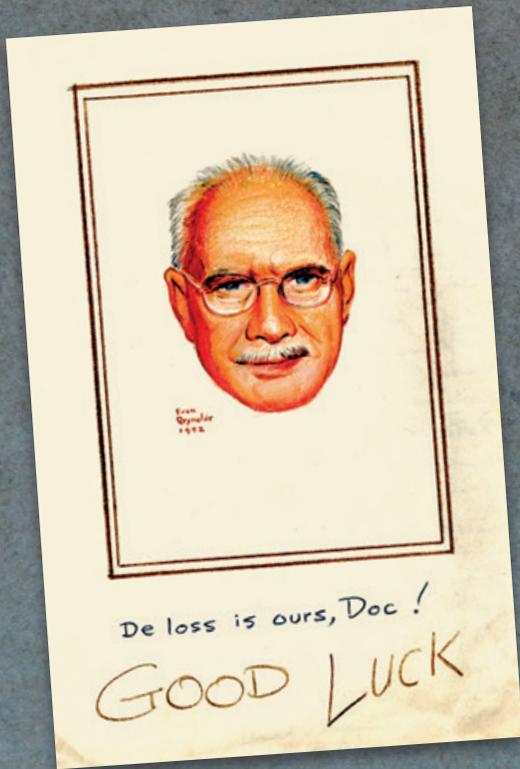
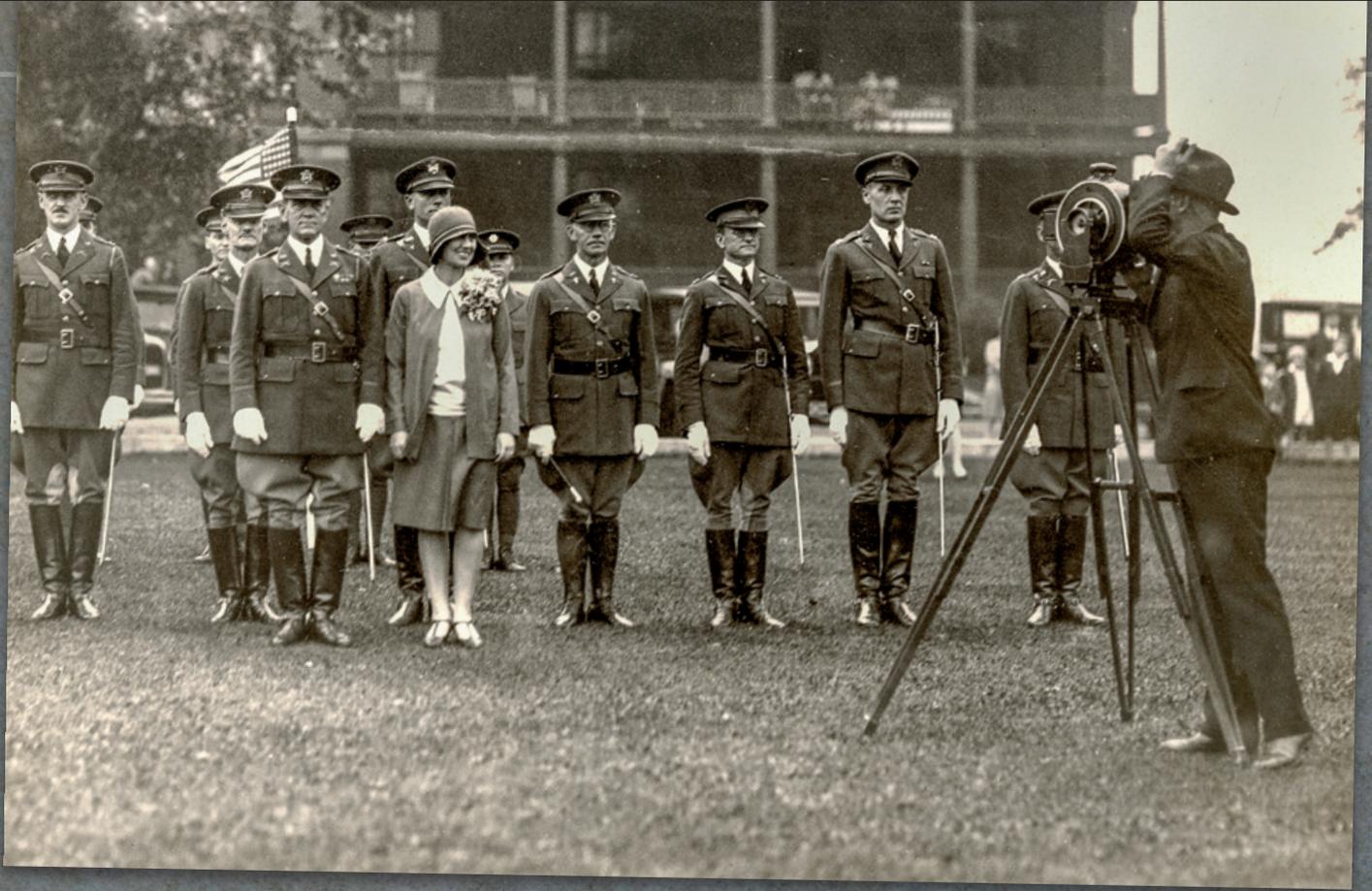
Here are set forth few valid facts  
To prove the subject's stature,  
Here chiefly works with pick and  
spade  
Another body snatcher.

If you ask me, it's poor reward  
For honest work, and bitter.  
To have your purple past set forth  
To set weak minds a-twitter.

Book covers fail to raise such fare  
Above the wood pulp level;  
Readers, reviewers all can but,  
Consign it to the devil.

D. W. L.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: letter of encouragement to Maud from noted University of Minnesota English professor Maria Sanford, 1912; Betsy-Tacy fan letter, 1964; a published book review written by Delos (D. W. L.) in the form of a poem.



TOP: Maud reviewing the Third Minnesota Volunteer Infantry at Fort Snelling, Sept. 27, 1929. BOTTOM (L TO R): drawing of Delos on a card from coworkers at the New York Sun (his long-time employer), on the occasion of his retirement, 1952; portrait of Maud and daughter Merian, mid-1930s.

Another significant body of writing in the MNHS collection comprises travel correspondence penned by Maud and her older sister, Kathleen. As part of their education, their parents sent each of them on an extended European tour, Kathleen in 1909 and Maud in 1914. They both wrote home in great detail about their travels, experiences, and impressions of the places they visited and of the local people.

Between 1929 and 1938, Maud wrote copiously to her mother, Stella Palmer Hart, and to the Hart family in general, sharing all aspects of her and Delos's lives—her writing and the publication and promotion of her books, Delos's career as a writer and editor at the *New York Sun*, their other literary endeavors, their daily lives and social activities, news of family and friends, and the childhood development of their daughter, Merian. Nearly all of the letters are Maud's typed carbon copies, making them very legible and accessible. The letters peter out following the death of her father, Tom Hart, in 1936, after which Stella moved to New York, presumably to be closer to Maud and her family.

Some of the correspondence in the MNHS collection gives glimpses into other aspects of Maud's life, including her courtship with Delos prior to their 1917 marriage and during his World War I service; correspondence, mainly Maud's, with their publisher, T. Y. Crowell Company, and with their literary agent, Nannine Joseph; and a group of fan letters, mainly from the 1960s and 1970s, for the Betsy-Tacy books.

The MNHS collection includes many other files and tidbits that will delight Maud Hart Lovelace fans. Those with the patience to decipher her handwriting will be rewarded with the contents of a nearly complete set of Maud's diaries, 1923–72, as well as her journal of her 1914 European trip. Genealogical information and family correspondence pertain to Maud's extended clan: the Lovelace, Wheeler, Hart, Palmer, Austin, and related families. Family memorabilia and miscellany include Delos's World War I military service documents; clippings on Maud and



Delos's wedding; a 1930s ocean voyage diary by Maud's mother, Stella; essays by her father, Tom Hart, Mankato shoe-store owner and, for a time, Blue Earth County treasurer; Maud's cookbook; a handwritten autobiography by Delos's mother, Josephine Lovelace; and some information on Maud's sisters, opera singer and voice teacher Kathleen Hart Bibb Foster and Helen Hart Fowler.

Four boxes in the collection contain sixteen family photograph albums, nine of them prior to the mid-1920s, including one from Delos's World War I service. Files of loose photos include formal and semiformal portraits of Maud, Delos, Merian, and their ancestors, and numerous snapshots of family, friends, environs, and activities.

The Maud Hart and Delos W. Lovelace Papers are available for public use in the Gale Family Library at MNHS. The ultimate goal is to have major portions of the collection available digitally. As part of the bequest, the Lovelace estate assigned copyright for her correspondence and unpublished writings to MNHS. Other materials are governed by the standard copyright, literary rights, and fair use provisions that apply to all published works and manuscripts.

Information about the Maud Hart Lovelace Collection at the University of Minnesota is available at <https://archives.lib.umn.edu/repositories/4/resources/7460>. □



## Notes

1. The papers at the University of Minnesota total 2.22 cubic feet, contained in two boxes.
2. *Minnesota Daily*, May 14, 1912, 1; Maria L. Sanford letter to Maud Hart, May 31, 1912, Lovelace Papers, box 3.
3. Rhoda R. Gilman, "Introduction," *Maud Hart Lovelace, Early Candlelight: Life at Old Fort Snelling* (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 1992), xvii.

All images from the Maud Hart Lovelace and Family Papers, MNHS.

# “A Double Mirror”

## *Early Candlelight: Life at Old Fort Snelling*

BY MAUD HART LOVELACE

In her introduction to MNHS's 1992 reprint edition of *Early Candlelight*, Rhoda R. Gilman astutely described the historical novel's strengths and shortcomings, as seen from the perspective of the late twentieth century. Here is an excerpt.

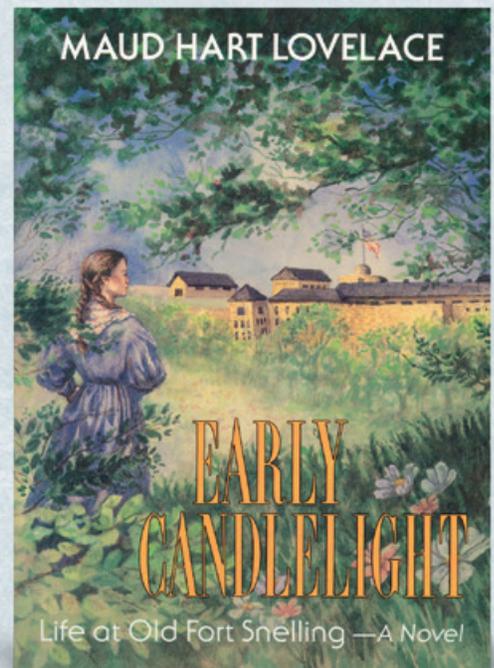
This romantic tale of early Fort Snelling has won a lasting place in the hearts of Minnesota readers. First published in 1929, it was reprinted twenty years later in connection with Minnesota's Territorial Centennial. Since 1949 the restoration of Old Fort Snelling by the Minnesota Historical Society has brought extensive research into the history of the fort and its environs in the 1820s and 1830s. Even in the light of much new information, however, this book holds its own.

*Early Candlelight* is good historical fiction. It is the kind of work that throws open a window on the past and inspires more than a few readers to go on to a lifelong study of history. Such books are neither common nor easy to write. . . .

Maud Hart Lovelace did her research well. It was a labor of love. Born in Mankato, Minnesota, on April 25, 1892, she lived most of her life in Minnesota and was already familiar with its history when she decided to write a book about early Fort Snelling. “When I was ready to begin work on the novel,” she

recalled, “my husband and I left our home at Lake Minnetonka and moved into a hotel in St. Paul for the winter. During that winter I worked every day at the Historical Society, reading all the material I could find relating to Minnesota in the early part of the nineteenth century. I read the Historical Society collections, the diaries and letters of missionaries and fur traders, of army men and Indian agents and travelers. I studied the Minnesota Indians and documents pertaining to the fur trade.” Clearly identifiable within the story are incidents drawn from the Henry H. Sibley Papers and from the reminiscences of the missionary brothers, Samuel and Gideon Pond.

The story is laid in the 1830s and early 1840s, with no exact dates given and some minor telescoping of events to fit the needs of the plot. But in general the historical events that form the background of the tale unfold with accuracy. In addition to the ongoing seasonal routine of the fur trade in the Minnesota Valley, these include the coming of missionaries in 1834 and 1835, the disastrous results of the treaties of 1837 between the United States and the Ojibway and Dakota, the eviction of settlers from the Fort Snelling military reservation in 1838, and the redefinition of the military reserva-



tion along with the founding of St. Paul in 1840. . . .

Like all other historical fiction, *Early Candlelight* is a double mirror. It reflects not only the period in which it is set, but also the times in which it was written. For an unaware reader, this can distort the image with conclusions about people and events of the past that today are seen from a wholly different angle. Moreover, in the late twentieth century, revolutionary changes in social attitudes and mores make this or any book that speaks with the language of an earlier era seem offensive in certain instances. References to Indians as “squaws” and “braves” and to the “black boy” Dred Scott and his wife, the “yellow girl” Harriet, grate on the reader despite the context of the characters’ nineteenth-century viewpoint.

Although the picture of life in and around Fort Snelling in the 1830s is faithful to the sources we have, it seems painfully one-sided when viewed from the 1990s. That is because the letters, diaries, reports,

and reminiscences that have survived were written entirely by the white men and women who invaded the upper Mississippi country and took it from Indian people. True to human nature, white Americans justified their conquest as the course of destiny and celebrated it in the name of bringing progress and civilization to an untamed wilderness. The generation in which Lovelace lived and wrote had not yet come to question those rationalizations. Nor did she have more than a superficial knowledge of Dakota Indian customs and beliefs.

Nevertheless, one of the book's strengths is the straightforward way in which it deals with the mixing of peoples and cultures. The many-layered multicultural community around the walls of the fort is shown in all its color and vitality. There is joy in the diversity and a note of regret that it will be swept away by the oncoming flood of white settlers. . . .

We are left feeling that the passing of the frontier, with its hardships and its rough democracy, is all a part of progress. Pig's Eye will, of course, become St. Paul. One could not wish it otherwise. For Lovelace, like many of her generation, America was still the great exception to history. The frontier itself, according to the influential Wisconsin historian Frederick Jackson Turner, had shaped this nation differently from others. Although one looked back with a certain amount of sadness for the fate of Indians and buffalo, prairies and forests, their destruction seemed necessary, and one could still believe in a better future. Even World War I, so shattering to the nations of Europe, had been a short and triumphant conflict for the United States. It concluded with

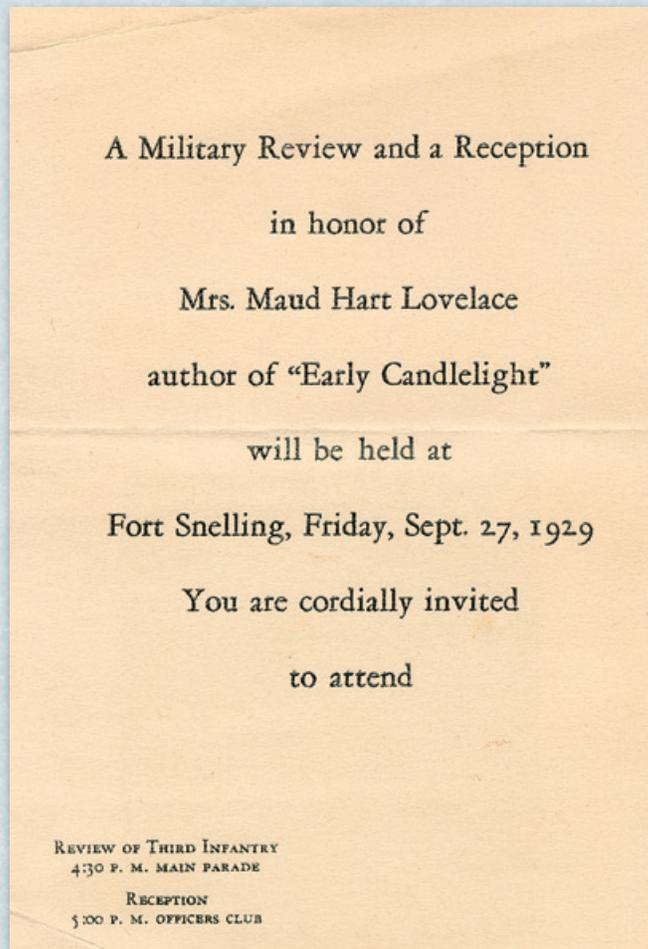
flag-waving, victory parades, and declarations of renewed optimism.

The publication of *Early Candlelight* evoked in Minnesota a wave of approval, nostalgia, and congratulations for the author. On September 27, 1929, the first American military review in honor of a woman in private life (according to the *St. Paul Dispatch*) was given by the Third United States Infantry at Fort Snelling. It was followed by a gala reception for Lovelace "in recognition of her splendid portrayal of early pioneer life in the Northwest and especially the first days of Fort Snelling." . . .

Within a few months the Great Depression had engulfed the country and the public mood was

changing. During the 1930s Lovelace wrote four more novels, two of them in collaboration with her husband, Delos, a writer for various newspapers. None was as popular as *Early Candlelight*, and in 1940 she tried a story for children, based on her warm recollections of life in turn-of-the-century Mankato. *Betsy-Tacy* and the nine books that followed in the series established her as a major children's writer and the center of an enthusiastic fan club that is still active. It was clear that she had found her stride in writing for young people about a simpler, more joyous world. Today's reader of *Early Candlelight* may sense that this had always been her real calling.

—Rhoda R. Gilman





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