



Afterword to the Reprint Edition

BORN in 1892 in Mankato, Minn., when the town was only 40 years old, Maud Hart Lovelace grew up hearing stories from the pioneers who had arrived by steamship or covered wagon. She loved the stories of courage and determination of young pioneers settling in this new wilderness and the devastation of grasshoppers, floods, blizzards and epidemics, stories of bravery from the old soldiers from the First Minnesota Regiment at Gettysburg and vivid stories of the Dakota Conflict. Army veterans regularly visited Maud's grade school on Memorial Day to tell the children about the Civil War and the Dakota Conflict. She loved hearing these stories and reading others written in a book entitled *Mankato — Its First Fifty Years*.¹

“As a child,” Maud recalled later, “I loved its pictures of the bearded pioneers and the views of Mankato in the early days. I loved the stories of hardships and adventure. After I was married and in a home of my own I borrowed this book so often that at last, in despair, probably, my father gave it to me. It was always on my desk.”² Certainly Maud did not overlook the following passage from the book that was included in a speech General James H. Baker

delivered as part of his address on Old Settlers Day in Mankato on July 3, 1902: “The early pioneers hereafter will be the interesting victim of the novelist, as well as the subject of the historian. The literary ferret will hunt their lives for romance, and their exploits will be celebrated in story and song.”³ Twenty-four years later, *The Black Angels*, the first of Maud Hart Lovelace’s novels dramatizing the exploits and romances of the Minnesota pioneers was published.

The following is an excerpt from a letter Maud Hart Lovelace wrote to her cousin, Marjorie Austin Freeman on May 19, 1964, describing her beginnings as a writer:

Perhaps you would like to know that, preceding my novels, were dozens of published short stories, the first of which, called “Number Eight”, was written in San Diego when I was eighteen. This was in 1911 when I visited Grandma Austin for several months and saw so much of your family at Chula Vista.

Uncle Frank Palmer, who lived then at El Cajon, took a great interest in my constant writing of stories and their consistent rejection by the magazines. He suggested that perhaps they failed to sell because they were hand-written. He loaned me his old Oliver typewriter... He tried to give it to me, but I refused the gift because I knew he liked to write stories, too. On this, I pecked out “Number Eight” and sent it to the Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine. My visit was just ending and soon Grandma and I took the train to Los Angeles where we were to visit her

brother, my Great Uncle Abel Crocker. A newsboy came through our car and I bought a copy of the Times, I scrambled through the magazine section and there was "Number Eight"! I had had no notification of its acceptance; they paid on publication. The moment in which I saw that story in print was one of the happiest of my very happy life.

I continued writing and selling short stories, long after my marriage to Delos W. Lovelace, and when he returned from World War I, he started to do the same. But where his were soon selling to the very best markets... The Saturday Evening Post, Country Gentleman, Ladies' Home Journal, American, and so on... mine continued to sell mostly to the smaller magazines, I seemed to have no great gift for this field and Delos suggested that I try a novel.

That turned out to be "The Black Angels" (John Day Co. 1926... later reprinted by Grosset and Dunlap.) It was laid in Minnesota from the 1850s through the '80s and the town I called Cloudman was, in my mind, Mankato. The plot idea had sprung from the family legend of Uncle Frank, who did not get on well with his step-father, running away from home with an opera troupe and marrying an actress as old as his mother. The character I call Alex was based on Uncle Frank, and mother's memories of his looks and temperament as a boy were helpful to me, as were the yarns he himself had told me in California about his barn-storming days.

My fictional opera troupe was based on the Andrews Opera Company. The Andrews family had

lived near Mankato in the early days. All the sons and daughters were musical but one. They were bell ringers at first, then started off in a covered wagon to give concerts and later opera through the Middle West. In due time, of course, they took to railroad trains. I am sure the music-loving Randalls must have heard them, especially in the bell ringer period. The one Andrews who stayed at home became a doctor who practised in Mankato and brought me, and probably some of you Austins, into the world. Uncle Frank did, actually, sing with this company for a time.

However "The Black Angels" was a novel, and so fiction, and although my hero did run away from a stern stepfather, as Uncle Frank had, I did not model my fictional stepfather on Grandpa Austin. Oh, there were a few resemblances, such as Grandpa Austin's dislike of the theater and dancing.

As with all my historical novels, I did for this one a very thorough research job, reading newspapers, magazines, and memoirs of the period, as well as working in Historical Societies and Museums to check costumes, furniture, popular music and so on. This procedure continued, in fact, even with the Betsy-Tacy books. For stories of a period after the turn of the century, Sears Roebuck Catalogues were helpful.

Maud and Delos Lovelace moved back to Minneapolis from New York in 1923. She began the research for her first novel in the summer of 1924, spending hours in the archives at the Minnesota Historical Society reading newspapers, magazines,

memoirs and Folwell's *History of Minnesota*. After the death of their first child in 1925, Maud and Delos did a lot of traveling. Some of the cities they visited were New York; Detroit; Grand Marais, Mich.; Chicago; and New Orleans. Delos described as peripatetic the period when Maud was writing *The Black Angels* in 1925 and 1926 "during the days when it lived the curious expectant life of a novel half in the mind of its maker, half in manuscript."⁴

The Black Angels takes place in the fictional Cloudman (Mankato) and opens in the days before the Civil War. As Maud explained in the letter to her cousin and in other interviews, the idea for the plot came from a family legend about her Uncle Frank, who had run away from home and joined an opera troupe, and the fictional opera troupe was based on the Andrews Opera Company. The Andrews Opera Company was widely known during Maud's childhood. Dr. J.W. Andrews, the Hart family physician, had delivered Maud. The Harts would have read about the company in the newspapers and may have attended some of its performances.

The Andrews family started out in St. Peter, Minn. in 1875 as a concert troupe called the Andrews Family Swiss Bell Ringers. By 1884 they had become the Andrews Opera Company, performing primarily in the Midwest, but also in the East, South, and Southwest.

The Rev. John R. Andrews, the patriarch of this talented and enterprising family, was a circuit-riding Methodist minister who left Illinois in 1856 and settled in a farmhouse near Lake Washington between