



A VERMONT WRITER

BY MARGARET EDWARDS

This column is an offering of The Danforth Library in Barnard and a chance to introduce a Vermont writer who deserves wider renown.

Katharine Jay Bacon

1928 – 2013



Kitty Bacon circa 2000

She was Kitty Bacon to her friends, a talented and gracious woman but definitely “not from around here,” living on Town Farm Hill Road in Hartland, Vermont. A bit imperial in her manner on the one hand, but a bit radically down to earth in a flash—certainly, for thirty years, she was one of the more glamorous inhabitants of the town. And it was during those years that she wrote three acclaimed children’s books: *Pippa and Emma* (1986), *Shadow and Light* (1987), and *Finn* (1998). The first two books were “about the exploits of a Vermont grandmother and her many grandchildren during summer vacations at fictional Bell Brook Farm.” Writers are always advised: “Write what you know”—and, indeed, Kitty *knew*. At her death at 84, she left behind in this world *twenty-six grandchildren*, and surely some of them can vouch for the authenticity of fictional counterparts in Kitty’s books.

Vermont was a counterweight to Kitty’s background:

great-grandchild of illustrious Supreme Court Justice John Jay; born at the Ritz Hotel in Paris; raised in Old Westbury, Long Island; educated at St. Timothy’s and Radcliffe; wed to an American in France. Eventually she became the mother of six and got divorced—and then her life became even more interesting. Avid horsewoman, gardener, lover of dogs, she fit right in when she moved to Vermont. She bought an acreage with a farmhouse, and then, to the astonishment of many locals, she had the whole house raised and moved a good way back from the road. She had a tower built for it, as well as a pond dug within a short walking distance. And she had the good sense to leave the beautiful old barn just the way it was.

Kitty characterized herself as a novice at fiction writing. She first submitted her manuscripts to her good friend Sally Ryder Brady, a literary agent who conveniently lived in a cottage on Kitty’s property. “Though she could be prickly about criticism in general,” says Sally, “Kitty was all humility when it came to her writing.” She was open to suggestions, eager to try new wording, and appreciative of the time Sally spent to help her. All three books were handsomely published by New York firms, first by Athenaeum and then by Simon & Schuster. All three were well reviewed.

However, perhaps because Kitty didn’t feel she was a “real” writer (her books being aimed only at the Young Adult market), she would never put herself forward as an author, never press her books on friends, and never do much on her own to advertise her work. Such humility had an unfortunate and lasting effect. As of this writing, neither the Hartland Public Library nor the Hartland Historical Society have her three novels on hand, and people in Hartland who thought they knew her well have voiced astonishment at this “hidden” aspect of Kitty Bacon’s life. No one even knew that she wrote, much less that her books have now become rare and almost unavailable.

The beauties of Vermont landscape and weather are well evoked again and again in Bacon’s writing. Sometimes the description will set a scene. Here a young granddaughter wakes up in grandmother Gee’s farmhouse:

Only the sun was up before her, a big orange ball rising on the other side of the hills across the valley. Emma watched it through her eyelashes. For a moment the sun seemed to rest on its bed of hilltops. Then, even as she watched, it rose bit by bit into the sky to make the day. As it climbed, the sky turned from pink to green to blue. The dew sparkled on every blade of grass, and the light streaming through Emma’s window made everything in the room rosy.

Here is another scene, at night, that Emma’s brother appreciates:

Cont. next page - Bacon

Bacon - Cont. front page

Two hours later, when the whole house was dark and quiet, and the stars were shining in the sweet black country sky, when dogs in the kitchen chased rabbits in their dreams, when the only sounds in the world were the horses cropping the pasture grass and an occasional barn owl in the valley, Pip climbed out of his south window. He lay on the roof, gazing at the barn.

Bacon carefully observed country traditions and rural people:

Mrs. Archer was a beautiful and noble old lady who had a little log cabin on top of a hill. She spent a lot of time there, sometimes alone, sometimes with family and friends; but her Fourth of July picnic was the biggest social event of the summer. It was a very old-fashioned affair. There were songs, guitar-playing, an accordion, lots of games, and—at the end, when it got dark enough—Mrs. Archer passed out sparklers to all the children and teenagers, who ran up and down the hillside looking like fireflies, while the parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles stayed near the fire and watched them.

Anyone who lives any time in Vermont is aware of the vagaries of its weather, how changeable from dawn to dusk, with a storm sometimes rising or subsiding in moments. Bacon records this observation, neatly tucking it into a wedding scene:

[Pip] turned back and studied the two huge vases of late summer flowers on the altar. They seemed to glow from the light pouring in through the stained glass windows. The light fell on the stone floor and turned it into a patchwork of colors: red, blue, green, gold, and suddenly [he] realized that the light was constant, the sun must be out. The wind buffeting the church had blown away the last of the clouds. It would be a perfect day after all.

Kitty Bacon's more ambitious third volume, *Finn*, reaches for darker emotional territory and more suspenseful action than the family tensions that drive the narratives at Gee's Bell Brook Farm. A boy named Finn is orphaned by a plane crash, and his grandmother's serene farm, where he's staying, is the setting for a cocaine drop. Despite the melodrama, Bacon has a firm hand on the inner life of each character. Finn is healing from the crash that killed his parents:

Waking up had its own traps. He had to get out of bed immediately; otherwise, no matter how high and tight he built his inner fortress, no matter how craftily he suppressed his dreams, the pain would seep through the walls as he woke. Speed was what mattered now. If he was fast enough to rise the moment his eyes opened, if he took off his cast and stumbled hastily into the shower, he might keep enough balance to get through another day.

The boy's challenge is not just physical, but emotional:

But even as he raged, his heart was filled with grief. Somewhere there was a place he had once known and could not find again. Sometimes, as he sat at his win-

dow at night, he would think about this place. Someone he knew lived there, but he didn't know who. He had no idea where or what that place might be or who he would find there, though the memory of it haunted him like a piece of music he could not name or finish. All he knew for sure was that the place once existed and he had lost the way into it.

Bacon has an affinity for extreme horseback rides as a crucible of action in her fiction. In *Finn*, she does justice to a ride in a fierce rainstorm:

The mare, her silver coat turned to pewter by the down-pour of rain, stepped through the gate... Wind rose to drive the rain in horizontal sheets. Finn put up his arm to shield his face and squeezed Belle's sides with his knees...

Anyone who knew Kitty Bacon when she was alive, who visited her at "Six Willows Farm," knew her horsemanship was as much a part of her as her decisiveness and her warm laugh. She looked very elegant on a horse, and she loved, as they say, "to put wind in her hair." She was the sort of person whose death stuns people; on first hearing the sad news, they say, "No! It can't be true." Kitty Bacon always seemed much too vital ever to exit the scene. Her few books, like her many progeny, attest she was here.

* Quotations are either from *Pip and Emma* or from *Finn*, both novels by Katharine Jay Bacon. *Pip and Emma* was published by Athenaeum as a Margaret K. McElderry Book in 1986. *Finn* was published in 1998, also as a Margaret K. McElderry Book, by Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division. The third novel, not to be found at the time of this writing, is *Shadow and Light*, published in 1987, which Kitty Bacon considered her best. The Danforth Library of Barnard has received a donation of *Pip and Emma* and *Finn* from Margaret Edwards. Both are kept in the rare books section.

LOCAL CRYPTOGRAM

A cryptogram is a code in which one letter is substituted for another. For example, the word "Church" could be written BWMSBW. The letter B would be the letter C and would be throughout the entire message. In this message Q=N. The solution is found by trial and error.

"ADE GQCDQT IBD JWXTR WQ SBT

DGH-GQO-PGMJT GETG DA QTI TQFJGQO

SBTET WR G MTETQQWGJ STPMSGSWDQ

SD MJLQFT WQSD G MLEMJT RTG DA

GOUTZSWXTR GKDLS DZSDKTE."

- BGJ KDEJGQ

The CRYPTOGRAM answer is on the last page.

THE DANFORTH LIBRARY IS OPEN!

Danforth Library's Book Room has reopened!

Danforth Library reopened on Saturday September 5, 2020. Open hours are Wednesdays from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m., and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to Noon. Due to COVID-19 precautions, masks are required, and we are limiting the capacity to three people at a time, including the librarian on duty. This means one person at a time or two people if you are from the same family or group. Hand sanitizer is available at the door. Curbside service is still available-- Just call ahead to arrange for pick up in the foyer (234-9408). And our high-speed Wi-Fi remains accessible from outside of the building for anyone who needs it.

New Books: We have been updating our collection of children's picture and chapter books to reflect and illuminate our diverse lives more accurately. Reading levels range from Preschool through Grade 7. Included are two non-fiction titles from the *WhoHQ Series* that are geared towards children from 6-8 years of age: *What is the Constitution?* and *What is Climate Change*. Coming soon, is *Wild Symphony*, a hybrid picture book and album for young children featuring a mouse conductor who recruits other animals to join his orchestra, and written by Dan Brown--yes, the Dan Brown of *The Da Vinci Code*.

For Older Children (8-12): Hilary McKay's *The Time of Green Magic*; David Macaulay's *Mammoth Science: The Big Ideas that Explain Our World* (Age8-12; grade 3-7); and, *Finish the Fight! The Brave and Revolutionary Woman Who Fought for the Right to Vote*.

For Adults: We have also been purchasing for the adult collection throughout our closer, so you'll find our new-books shelf full, including these most recent titles: *Afterlife*, by Julia Alvarez; Maggie O'Farrell's novel *Hamnet & Judith*; David Mitchell's *Utopia Avenue*; and Zadie Smith's book of timely essays, *Imitations*.

Welcome back – We look forward to seeing you all again!

Trustees Margaret Edwards, Suzy Hickey, Ellen Miles, Judy Maynes, and Edythe Wright

Email: Charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com Phone: 802-234-9408

Hours: Wednesdays 3 – 5 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to noon.

NEWS FROM BARNARTS

BARNARTS PRESENTS

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE by Sinclair Lewis

Fall Staged Reading Tour

Sept 26-Oct 25

Directed by Maureen Hennigan

Starring: Erin Bennett, Andy Carmichael, Larry Fuller, Aaron Michael Hodge, Joanna Pejouhy Kell, D. Gene Kraus, Amy Leavitt, Will Moore, Daniel Naranjo, Daniel Patterson, Chris Peirce, Jim Schley, Yael Taylor, Jeff Tolbert, Linda Treash

Performances:

Sat Sept 26 - Fable Farm Orchard, Barnard - 2pm

Sun Sept 27 - East End Park, Woodstock - 2pm

Sun Oct 4 - Factory Point Town Green, Manchester - 2pm

Sat Oct 10 - State House Lawn, Montpelier - 2pm

Sun Oct 11 - City Park Venue (TBA), Burlington - 2pm

Sat Oct 17 - Farr's Hill, Chandler outdoors, Randolph - 2pm

Sun Oct 18 - Rotary Theater at Living Memorial Park, Brattleboro - 2pm show

Sun, Oct 25 - Lyman Point Park in WRJ - 2pm

Sliding-Scale Donation: \$5-25

Tickets and Info

Sinclair Lewis's 1935 satirical novel, adapted for the stage and performed "radio drama" style in an appropriately distanced but fully live version by a BarnArts touring ensemble. The populist buffoon Buzz Windrip unexpectedly defeats Franklin D. Roosevelt for the 1936 Democratic nomination. Windrip wins the election, declares martial law, and begins eliminating his adversaries. The story's hero is Doremus Jessup, an battle-worn Vermont newspaper editor who decides to take a stand and use the press to fight tyranny, getting him locked up in a military prison. A daring "What if?" that examines risks to American democracy, relevant 85 years ago and relevant today.

BarnArts Center for the Arts
PO Box 41
Barnard, VT 05031
info@barnarts.org
802-234-1645 (voice mail)

THE BARNARD BULLETIN, is your local newsletter. If you would like to post a notice or if you have an article of interest to her town, please consider submitting it.

THE BARNARD BULLETIN, is printed each month on the 20th, and is on the web at barnardbulletin.news. PO Box 161, Barnard VT 05031-0161, 802-457-1792.

THE PLANNING COMMISSION meets on the first Monday of the month at 7:00pm at the Town offices.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR zoning@barnardvt.us, 234-9211. By appointment only, no standing hours during due to the COVID-19 restrictions. After hours cell 603-762-5280.

BEES MEETINGS are held at 6:30pm on the 2nd Thursday of each month in the library at the school.

DANFORTH LIBRARY: Tues.: Noon - 2 p.m.; Wed. 3 - 5 p.m.; and Sat. 10 a.m. - Noon. The Trustees meet the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 p.m. in the Library.

ECFIBER Governing Board meets the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7pm in 012 Oakes Hall, Vermont Law School. More information at <https://www.ecfiber.net/>

BARNARD CONSERVATION COMMISSION meets the second Monday of the month, 7:00pm, Town Hall.

SELECTBOARD meets the first and third Wednesday of the month at the Town offices at 7:00pm.

SELECTBOARD ASSISTANT, Rob Ramrath, 234-2911 x 2, Cell 603-762-5280, selectboard@barnardvt.us. By phone at any time, in person by appointment.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR, Rob Ramrath, 234-2911 x 2, Cell 603-762-5280, zoning@barnardvt.us. By phone at any time, in person by appointment.

TOWN CLERK office hours are Monday & Tuesday, 8:00am-3:30pm. Public access is restricted. Call 234-9211 for an appointment.

THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD meets the third Thursday of the month at 7:00pm at the Barnard Town Hall as necessary.

THE BARNARD ACADEMY SCHOOL BOARD meets at 6:00pm at the school on the third Monday of each month.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY Programs to be announced. Questions? email: historicalbarnard1761@gmail.com

BARNARD LISTERS listeners@barnardvt.us, 234-9576. Office hours, except holidays: Wednesday 9:00am - 11:00am; by appointment; or anytime a Lister is in the office.

THE BARNARD ENERGY COMMITTEE meets on the 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7:00pm at the Town Hall

YOGA CLASSES offered at Danforth Library, Mondays 9:00am - 10:30am with Amanda Anderson. Classes are by donation; for more information contact Amanda@innerliftyoga.com. Yoga Classes are also offered on Thursdays from 9-10:30 with Beth Umba. Contact Beth at: bethumba@gmail.com.

BARNARD GENERAL STORE, 7am - 7pm, 8am - 7pm Sundays. <https://www.facebook.com/barnardgeneralstore>

RECYCLING HOURS: Saturdays, 8:00am to 4:00pm,

BARNARD LISTSERV: to subscribe please send an email to: barnard-subscribe@lists.vitalcommunities.org.

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

“For anyone who lives in the oak-and-maple area of New England there is a perennial temptation to plunge into a purple sea of adjectives about October.”

- Hal Borland

FLU VACCINATIONS

You can receive a flu vaccination at one of our two convenient locations in Windsor and Woodstock, VT.

We offer appointments during regular business hours and on Saturdays for your convenience.

Please bring your insurance card to ensure easy and accurate processing. Additional dates will be added as they become available.

Mt. Ascutney Hospital and Health Center

289 County Road, Windsor, VT

Appointments are available by calling (802) 674-7300.

Saturday, September 26, 9 am - Noon

Wednesday, October 7, 8:30 am - 11:30 am

Ottawaquechee Health Center

32 Pleasant Street, Woodstock, VT

Appointments are available by calling (802) 457-3030.

Saturday, October 3. 9 am - Noon

Thursday, October 8, 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm

NEW DATE AND TIME FOR WOODSTOCK VEGGIEVANGO

Every second Wednesday of the month starting September 9th at 10am at the WUHSMS back parking lot (toward the Union Arena)

VeggieVanGo is a FREE FOOD distribution event provided by the VT Foodbank and sponsored by the WCUD School Nutrition Program. We have moved our VeggieVanGo to every second Wednesday of the month starting September 9th to accommodate the reopening of the WUHSMS campus. The distribution site will be located in the back parking lot at the Union Arena Entrance. We welcome families to pick up and deliver out for other families as well. We have yet to run out of food! ALL ARE WELCOME! Please contact Gretchen Czaja-WCUD School Nutrition Program Director with any questions-gczaja@wcsu.net 802-457-1317, 1123

Gretchen Czaja

WCUD School Nutrition Program Director

Follow us on Instagram @vtschoolmeals

Program and Menu Updates:

<https://www.wcsu.net/wcud-school-nutrition-program>