

Behind The Scenes 'Waterford Girls' Opens Tonight

by Gale Waldron

A pretty vignette of local history will come to life tonight at the opening performance of *The Waterford Girls* in the auditorium of the Blue Ridge Middle School. Presented by The Growing Stage and written by local historian Meredith McMath, the touching drama is based on a true story about four spirited and heroic women in nearby Waterford during the Civil War years.

The Waterford Girls begins and ends with a snapshot of Lida Dutton. What happens in between is a photoplay of life surrounding a peaceful Quaker family during the War Between the States. It is a story about two sisters and their two friends who dare to produce an underground pro-Union newspaper in the preeminent Confederate state.

The Dutton family was known for its opposition to the war as well as for its support and aid to the underground railroad which spirited runaway slaves to Canada. The young girls take their loyalty even further, risking daily danger to communicate the goings on in their small town to the soldiers camped just across the river in Maryland. Their journalistic effort, the *Waterford News* captures the hearts and minds of those Union soldiers.

The play is a testimonial to the human spirit and to the heights people will go, as Lida Dutton says, "to do justice." Elizabeth Nichols plays a resourceful and spirited Lida Dutton whose determined sister, Lizzie is acted by Meghann Godfrey. Mary Price is sweet Maggie Loden, who helps soften conflict, and Caroline Ashbaugh is the observant and hopeful Sarah Steer. A talented cast fills the stage with scenes of life in wartime Waterford, with each character recreating a piece of the area's history, and of course, an old fashioned romance lends some humor to ease the tensions of war.

The Waterford Girls is the fifth production of The Growing Stage, western Loudoun's local theater group, under the experienced direction of the versatile Dolly Stevens. Costumes are beautifully and authentically handcrafted by The Growing Stage's Laurie Farnsworth, who studied and interpreted an original Dutton patchwork quilt as the basis for her creative costumes.

The Waterford Girls was written by Meredith Bean McMath, a Hillsboro resident, historian and recipient of the last year's 1996 Loudoun History Award. McMath says that this is an amazing county for studying the Civil War. "It is the Civil War written small. Loudoun had everything: union and confederate armies, brother fighting brother, the underground railroad, heroes, narrow escapes and skull-duggery."

McMath, a 10-year resident of Hillsboro, discovered the story of the Waterford heroines when she was researching the history of her own home. She knew immediately that she wanted to share it with her neighbors.

A number of other artistic elements have come together to create this original presentation. The backdrop for the play is Waterford's Second Street, hand painted by the Loudoun Sketch Club. Civil War music plays between the scenes, sung by Germaine Connelly and played by local musicians under the direction of Matthew Bradley.

McMath generously offers, "*The Waterford Girls* belongs to Loudoun." Thank you, Meredith



Liz Nichols, Benjamin Domenech, Caroline Ashbaugh, Meghann Godfrey and Mary Price rehearse for *The Waterford Girls*.

McMath, Dolly Stevens and everyone at The Growing Stage, for such a rich and special gift.

The Waterford Girls opens tonight at 8:00 p.m. Performances continue this weekend, Saturday at 8:00 p.m.

and a Sunday matinee at 3:00 p.m., and next weekend, March 14, 15 and 16. General admission is \$10; \$8 for seniors and children. For box office information call 338-5608