

# Betty Nalls Swartz Wins The Jean Tibbetts History Award

BY GREG HAYMANS, CHAIR  
TIBBETTS AWARD SELECTION  
COMMITTEE

Your child may have come home from school one day, telling you all about dairy farming in Great Falls. Betty Nalls Swartz, born and bred in Great Falls, and a member of the Nalls Family – owners of the last operating dairy farm in Great Falls when the farm was sold in 1989 – is the person who has been sharing the story of life as a dairy farmer with local elementary school classes.

As Chair of the Great Falls Historical Society's (GFHS) Educational Committee, I have had the honor of working alongside Betty as she documented the story of the local history of dairy farming that she shares with elementary and — coming soon — middle school children in our area.

As Chair of the Tibbetts Nominating Committee, along with Karen Washburn, and Kathy Pherson, long-time members of GFHS, and previous Tibbetts

judges, our committee reviewed seven nominations and unanimously selected Betty Nalls Swartz as this year's winner.

Betty meets all of the criteria that the Tibbetts Award honors: Outstanding contributors to the research, articulation, dissemination, and preservation of history of life along the Potomac River corridor from McLean, west to Dranesville, and south through Herndon. Betty was selected for her educational outreach to local students, which she enjoys enormously. (One question from the students: "Do brown cows make chocolate milk?" Another question: "How can you tell a boy cow from a girl cow?") Her documentation of local dairy farming history comes alive when she shares artifacts, which she has been saving for years, with the students: Her stainless steel 10-gallon milk can with farm insignia to show how milk was transported to the Sealtest plant in Georgetown via truck; her milking machine; an old Montgomery Ward catalog showing all kinds of products people used to enjoy in the past;

and an old 1930s telephone to show the "party line" phone service that used to run along Seneca Road in Great Falls.

Betty has been an effective advocate for the preservation of open spaces at the Turner Farm and, more recently, the Marmota Farm – both containing dairy barns of historical significance – as she pleads with the rest of us to protect the historic view sheds of our former dairy farming land. Betty recently reported to a group of open space advocates that she opens her car window when she passes Marmota Farm along Georgetown Pike — formerly known as Digges Farm – as the 20 plus acres, once a dairy farm, "still smells like a farm."

Beyond Betty's writing, advocacy, and sharing of local history, Betty has labored long and hard to disseminate local history through her coordination of Great Falls Day over many years, including coordinating Old School Days reenactments, and presentation of a 4-5 feet tall plywood cow, painted black and white to look



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

## Betty Swartz, Great Falls native, born and bred, last of the dairy farmers.

like a cow with an udder filled with water to give school children the experience of "milking," as well as her service to the Great Falls Historical Society as Corresponding Secretary, Public Relations Chair, Hospitality Chair, and member of the GFHS Board of Directors over the last 20 years.

Betty is "the real McCoy," born and bred here in Great Falls, Virginia. She gives us all a sense of what a reliable, dependable farmer and passionate community advocate is all about. Her "love of place," deeply rooted in her soul, is an inspiration to us all.

The Great Falls Historical Society established the Jean Tibbetts History Award in memory of former president, historian, and author, Jean Tibbetts, who died in September 2004. The Award car-

ries a stipend of \$200 and the award winner's name is placed in recognition on the Society's Great Falls Historian's Plaque that is displayed in the Great Falls Library.

The Great Falls Historical Society will celebrate Betty's many achievements and bestow the award on Betty at our annual Tibbetts Award Banquet which will be held at the Great Falls Grange at 6 p.m. on Thursday, April 21. Betty has agreed to share her Dairy Farming presentation with us at the Banquet.

Please reserve your seats prior to April 1 by emailing [gfhsva22066@outlook.com](mailto:gfhsva22066@outlook.com) or by calling Jan Schar at 703-759-3940 or Betty Swartz at 703-759-2378. We will invite you to select your food and pay after April 1.

The Great Falls Historical Society was formed in 1977 to bring the past into the present, cultivating a sense of place and a spirit of community.