

Well worth remembering

Author's
fascination with
history inspires
novel set in
Eau Claire

BY WILLIAM FOY

LEADER-TELEGRAM STAFF

Patricia A. Hawkinson began writing her debut novel in 2011. But her interest in history, as it comes alive in "Born with a Tarnished Spoon," began well before that.

Published in September by Outskirts Press, the novel is set in early 1930s Eau Claire and tells the story of Cassie Clark, daughter of a socialite mother and lumber baron father. Amid Cassie's life-changing journey, local points of interest appear or are mentioned such as the Chippewa River, Shawtown and Chippewa Falls' Irvine Park. National events including the Great Depression shape the plot as well.

To add color and factual accuracy, Hawkinson, of Eau Claire, draws from sources such as the Eau Claire Leader and references the publication in her narrative. (The Leader and Daily Telegram merged into the Leader-Telegram in 1970.)

"The newspaper almost becomes a character in this story," she said. "Because as people nowadays use the internet for their everyday life ... people at that time, their newspapers were hugely important to their lives. They woke up in the morning, and they had to find out what was in the paper, what happened to their neighbors. That was their way of finding it out."

History lessons

Her fascination with history, Hawkinson said, can be attributed in part to the stories her mother and grandmother told her about their growing-up years. She further developed that interest during the 33 years she spent as a teacher in Eau Claire public and private schools. For instance, she would



Staff photo by Dan Reiland

Patricia A. Hawkinson, author of the historical novel "Born with a Tarnished Spoon," is pictured Monday at L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library, 400 Eau Claire St. Hawkinson's research for her novel included time reading old editions of the Eau Claire Leader newspaper on microfiche in the library. View more photos at LeaderTelegramPhotos.com.

More information

- "Born with a Tarnished Spoon," a novel by Patricia A. Hawkinson, is available at The Local Store, 205 N. Dewey St.
- It also can be ordered through Dotters Books, 1602 Hogeboom Ave. (715-829-0468; dottersbooks.com); or at online outlets such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million and Walmart.
- For more information about Hawkinson, including her visual artwork, visit facebook.com/ExpressiveDomain; or pawhkinson.edublogs.org.

take her fourth-graders to Sunnyside School at the Chippewa Valley Museum. "I had organized little bus trips with the students to travel around the community and see the Adin Randall statue (in Randall Park)," she said, referring to one of Eau Claire's prominent early settlers. "We would drive by the houses and look at different architectural styles. So that was always very intriguing

and interesting to me."

One firsthand history lesson Hawkinson received came during a summer she worked as the Eau Claire Parks and Recreation arts and crafts director. The position required her to help children create projects at the city's playgrounds — there were 13 at the time, she recalled.

"In doing so it took me to areas of the community that I hadn't ordinarily gone to,

little neighborhood pockets," she said. "And I would drive by a lot of interesting homes. ... There just were so many fascinating homes, architecturally. And it made you kind of wonder about the people that lived there."

At one point Hawkinson received an unscheduled, exclusive tour at one such home. She happened to be driving her moped during a storm when a woman saw her getting drenched and invited her out of the rain. When Hawkinson expressed her appreciation of the home's interior, the woman offered to show her around.

Hawkinson took particular interest in the third floor, where she saw what had once been a ballroom and thought: "It would be such a beautiful

time to have lived, where you'd have these elegant parties in people's homes."

Change in circumstances

Not coincidentally, "Born with a Tarnished Spoon" begins by establishing the luxurious situation in which Cassie lived. Waited on by servants and attending socials with her mother, the teenager's interests extended to the "Beautify Yourself" column in the Leader and meeting boys.

But things change abruptly for Cassie, and she finds herself far from home and worrying about things that previously seemed unimaginable for a person of her family's social situation.

Author working on novel set in Chequamegon Bay area

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Beyond revisiting the past, Hawkenson's plot twists bring attention to how the treatment of women has evolved — or not.

"It's really basically about women and that over time we assume and hope that health care for women and how women are treated in their relationships has improved over all this time," she said. "And I think as people read (the novel) they still see that there weren't that many choices for women then. And then certainly the social stigma of what women dealt with in their life. Those kinds of things still happen."

In using history to tell that story, Hawkenson found local resources immensely helpful.

At the Chippewa Valley Museum she found "some wonderful things that are in the archives," including maps identifying Native American trails and winter camps.

She also learned the routes of the trolley cars, which make an appearance early in the novel.

As with the museum's collection, Hawkenson encourages others to check out the old Leader editions on microfiche at L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library.

"They're still there for anybody to look at it," she said. "It wasn't like I had secret access. Everybody can go. Which is really

fun. You just get lost in reading it. It's so interesting."

Creative outlets

While Hawkenson wrote the first draft of her novel eight years ago, prompted by the National Novel Writing Month contest that November, she spent some of that time doing other creative work.

For instance, she created the adult coloring book "Color Eau Claire!" which features 40 detailed images of the city; and, co-illustrated with Jeffery Holvick, "Color Chequamegon Bay," which features the area around her native Washburn.

Those efforts also came about through her interest in local communities, past and present.

"It's not just coloring random items like bunnies or whatever," she said. "I was trying to focus on the communities so that the images mean something to people and they would attach their own memories to the images, which is what happens, and people do appreciate it, from what I hear."

Hawkenson has diverse artistic talents. Her poetry has appeared in anthologies such as "Poetic Blossomings" and Writer's Digest's 2015 Poet's Market. In fact, her poetry appears in "Born with a Tarnished Spoon" as the work of one of the characters.

She also is a visual artist, with a studio called Expressive Domain in Eau Claire's Artisan Forge Studios. Her artwork includes stained glass kaleidoscopes and jewelry boxes, tapestry handbags, and colored pencil painting, according to her studio's Facebook page.

As she said of those creative endeavors, "It's having purpose to the day — finding a reason to feel like I'm getting up and using my talents."

More stories

As a reader pointed out, Hawkenson said, she wrote "Born with a Tarnished Spoon" in such a way that would make a sequel possible. She certainly could come back to it, she said, but has started another historical novel, this one set in the

1880s-era Washburn-Ashland-Bayfield area.

Now known as a tourism hot spot, the region's population was higher during time time she's studying, when the stone quarries served as an economic driver, she said.

Because that industry involved men exclusively, Hawkenson became interested in the women of the time.

"The women still had to do their jobs, house-keeping and all of that, and then help to build the

communities, caring about what was going on there," she said.

While her story is proceeding, the early arrival of winter has kept Hawkenson from doing research at the region's libraries and other historical archives. That work may wait until spring's arrival, she said.

In talking about "Born with a Tarnished Spoon," Hawkenson made a comment suggesting how her historical tales can be linked to the present in a

universal sense; by what it says about personal relationships, real as well as imagined.

"When we all get right down to it, we all just want to be valued and we all want to be connected to a group of people that we call family," Hawkenson said. "Even though the identity of what is a family is different, we still have that need to be valued by the people around us."

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