

## Librarian's Shelf by Kelli Keyes

### Meet Stephanie Grace Whitson at the Library

Are your ears still ringing? I hope everyone had a wonderful 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrating with friends and family. We used up several cans of bug spray, but that didn't stop us from the great food, fellowship, and fireworks. Now that Independence Day is over, and the rest of summer is ahead of us, let me relax you with a story.

Sarah Biddle tried her hardest to take care of her baby sister, crippled younger brother, and sick mother, while her father looked for a job in their new country, America. Her father was not having much luck, being a new immigrant and not knowing English. They lived in a crowded apartment building with other immigrants, with barely enough food to keep them alive. Her brother had stolen a small bowl of sugar, and found a withered apple that the two older children shared as a meal. Sarah dipped her finger in the bowl of sugar and let her baby sister suck her finger. That night their mother passed away. In despair, the father took the children to the Children's Aid Society and they were sent west on the orphan train to find homes. Even though Sarah tried to keep the family together, their baby sister was adopted right away by a wealthy family that had just lost their own child. As Sarah and her brother, Tom, rode the train west hoping to find someone that wanted them both, they became discouraged that no one wanted to take on a crippled boy. Sarah would not leave him behind. After the Society chaperones had taken them through every town and they were the only children left, Sarah was determined to run away and raise Tom on her own rather than go back to New York City. In Lincoln, Nebraska, Sarah and Tom managed to sneak away from their chaperones and hid in a barn next to a rooms-for-rent home. Here they met Jesse King and Augusta Hathaway, the two ladies that ran the establishment.

This is the beginning of a wonderful and compelling story about Sarah Biddle written by a successful and well-known local author that is coming to our library. Stephanie Grace Whitson researched the history of pioneer women in Nebraska for a history lesson she gave to her home schooled children. In learning of the stories of the strong women of our past, the disappointments, hardships, and loss that they endured, she was inspired to write of their strength and resourcefulness to triumph over tragedy. Stephanie Grace Whitson also learned about the quilts that these women of the prairie created to make their houses made of dirt more beautiful and welcoming and wove that into her stories.

Stephanie Grace Whitson will come to the library Saturday, July 18<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM in the library auditorium to talk about Nebraska pioneer life in a sod house. She is bringing quilts to show us, will tell us how the women of the west made these quilts, and how their life was back then. The Friends of the Library have worked with us to create a quilt display in the auditorium for this program. Mrs. Whitson will talk about her books and her newest will be available for purchase. The library owns all three books in this Keepsake Legacy series as well as others in print and in eBook form, which we invite you to check out and see for yourself what a wonderful story teller Stephanie Grace Whitson is. Most of her books are set in Nebraska. Don't miss this chance to visit with an important author and learn about our Nebraska ancestors.