Betty MacDonald – Of Eggs, Plagues and Cures  1908-1958

Betty MacDonald, was born Ann Elizabeth Campbell Bard March 26, 1908 in Colorado. As a child she lived in mining camps in Idaho, Montana and Mexico, thriving on the rugged life (or did she?). She became one of America’s best-loved humorists, dying of cancer February 7, 1958 at 49.

When she was only 12 years old her father died. Betty then lived with her mother and her grandmother. Gammy told and read stories to Betty every night. Betty had two sisters and one brother. Graduating from Lincoln High in Seattle, Betty attended, but didn’t complete studies at the University of Washington. Instead she met Bob Haskett and married him in 1927. An insurance salesman, Bob announced on their honeymoon that he had bought a chicken farm! This was a challenging life, essentially a big chore, and Betty never took to it. They lived near Chimacum, a village just south of Port Townsend on the Olympic Peninsula.

*The Egg & I* stories derive from her experiences on the chicken farm. Having had enough, Betty divorced Bob, and moved in with her mother and sister in Seattle, taking her two girls. Betty was the first woman to work for the government at the National Recovery Administration. She married her second husband, Donald MacDonald, in 1942. She wrote nine books.

**Betty MacDonald’s Works for All Ages:**
All works: Philadelphia & NY: J.B. Lippincott Co.

- *The Egg and I* 1945
- *The Plague and I* 1948
- *Anybody Can Do Anything* 1950
- *Onions in the Stew* 1955

**Betty MacDonald’s Works for Children:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Illustrator</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle</em></td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Illustrated: Hilary Knight</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle’s Magic</em></td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Illustrated: Hilary Knight</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Nancy and Plum</em></td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Illustrated: Hildegard Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle’s Farm</em></td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Illustrated: Maurice Sendak</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Hello Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle</em></td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Illustrated: Hilary Knight</td>
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</tbody>
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“Cry Baby Tonic,” Illustration by Hilary Knight from *Hello Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle*
Works Based on Betty MacDonald’s Work:

The Egg and I 1947 Betty MacDonald & Chester Erskine – Director joint screenplay

Claudette Colbert Betty MacDonald
Fred MacMurray Bob MacDonald
Marjorie Mann Ma Kettle
Louise Allbritton Harriet Putnam
Percy Kilbride Pa Kettle
Richard Long Tom Kettle
Billy House Billy Reed
Ida Moore Emily: the Old Lady
Donald MacBride Mr. Henty
Samuel S. Hinds Sheriff
Esther Dale Birdie Hicks
Elisabeth Risdon Betty’s Mother
John Berkes Geoduck
Victor Potel Crowbar
Fuzzy Knight Cab Driver

Box Office Gross: $6 million (#8/1947) Academy Award Nom: Best Supporting Actress - Marjorie Main
This is the film in which Ma and Pa Kettle (Marjorie Main and Percy Kilbridge) make their on-screen debut.

The Ma & Pa Kettle Movies: Major Cast Members:

Feudin’, Fussin’ and A-Fightin’ 1948 Marjorie Main Ma Kettle
Ma and Pa Kettle 1949 Percy Kilbridge Pa Kettle
Ma and Pa Kettle Go to Town 1950 Richard Long Tom Kettle
Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm 1951 Meg Randall Kim Parker
Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair 1952 Esther Dale Birdie Hicks
Ma and Pa Kettle on Vacation 1953
Ma and Pa Kettle at Home 1954
Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki 1955
The Kettles in The Ozarks 1956 Without Percy Kilbridge
Arthur Hunnicutt as Pa’s brother – Sedge Kettle

The Kettles on Old MacDonald’s Farm 1957 Without Percy Kilbridge


Related Betty MacDonald material:

Ellis Lucia (editor), This Land Around Us A treasury of Pacific Northwest writing, Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1969 Excerpt: Betty MacDonald, Onions in the Stew

Blanche Caffiere, Much Laughter, A Few Tears Memoirs of a Woman’s Friendship with Berry MacDonald and Her Family, Vashon, WA: Blue Gables Publishing, 1992

Clippings: Seattle Times & Port Townsend Leader, Feb. 1950

Betty MacDonald to Take Stand in ‘Egg and I’ Libel Suit
‘I’d Have Beat Her Up,’ Witness, 75, Testifies of ‘Egg and I’ Author

From ‘Egg’ to the Kettles, MacDonald left her mark,
Misha Berson, Seattle Times theater critic–Times website

Nisei Daughter, Monica Sone…Betty helped her sanatorium friend “Kimi” publish a memoir of Seattle’s Japantown and her family’s WWII internment.

Betty in the salad days of Egg and I royalties – in the Vashon Island garden (setting for Onions in the Stew)

Discovering Oregon Originals presentation by David Milholland, OCHC President

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