

Director's Note for *The Drowning Girls*

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By Stacey Schiller

It has been a joy and an honor to be an Artist in Residence this year at Anderson University, a place that is so special to me. This year's season on Byrum Hall's stage has been an exciting one, largely because it was the first season of live shows with live audiences since the pandemic hit. In the past few years, we have used theatre as an exciting escape from the troubles of the world. We have loved experiencing it as a celebration of the joy that we find. But we have also missed using theatre as a tool. Stories can be a way to connect to something we may not have a direct line to in our own lives. This is where we create empathy and possibly inspire action.

Bessie Mundy, Alice Burnham, and Margaret Lofty were real women who experienced domestic violence. Their stories continue to be relevant over 100 years later. In 2020 when we were all confined to our homes, domestic abuse rates increased. *The Drowning Girls* not only gives a voice to Bessie, Alice, and Margaret, but to all the victims of domestic abuse and violence. It goes without saying that this is not an easy subject to tackle, and I want to extend my gratitude to the University for supporting a piece of theatre that creates interesting and challenging conversations among the students and community.

I also want to extend my gratitude to the cast for bringing their unique talents to these characters. There is not much information out there regarding the Brides of the Bath. If you do some research, you will find their names and a few small details about their lives, but the majority of what you will read will be about the man who killed them — their husband, George Joseph Smith. We must remember that these people were more than victims; they were people with passions, thoughts, flaws, senses of humor, opinions, and dreams. The topic of domestic violence is heavy and nuanced. It is much more than what I could cover in this short note. However, I believe you will find that this show and this cast does an incredible job of navigating the journey.