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Article Title: Bess Furman, Nebraska's Front Page Girl: Her Formative Years

Full Citation: Liz Watts, "Bess Furman, Nebraska's Front Page Girl: Her Formative Years," *Nebraska History* 74 (1993): 63-71

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1993Furman.pdf>

Date: 11/2/2012

Article Summary: Furman began her career in journalism setting type at her father's country weekly. She went on to become a reporter for the Associated Press and the *New York Times*. The article reproduces Furman's 1928 *Omaha Bee-News* story on Al Smith's campaign stop in Omaha.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Bess Furman ("Bobbie O'Dare"), Archie C Furman, Mattie Furman, Eleanor Roosevelt, M A Brown, Calvin Coolidge, William Randolph Hearst, Herbert Hoover, Al Smith, Sue McNamara

Place Names: Danbury, Nebraska; Marion, Nebraska; Kirksville, Missouri; Kearney, Nebraska

Furman's Employers: *Kearney Daily Hub*, *Omaha Bee*, *Omaha Daily News*, *Omaha Bee-News*, Associated Press, *New York Times*

Keywords: Bess Furman ("Bobbie O'Dare"), *Antelope* (Kearney State Normal School newspaper), Associated Press, *New York Times*, *Kearney Daily Hub*, *Omaha Bee*, *Omaha Daily News*, *Omaha Bee-News*, William Randolph Hearst, Al Smith, *Danbury News*, *Marion Enterprise*, Bookman Prize

Photographs / Images: Bess Furman with Eleanor Roosevelt, Emma Bugbee, Dorothy Ducas, and Ruby Black, 1934; Archie C Furman; "Meeting Incoming Students at Trains" (Kearney State Normal School photograph); "Observing Omaha" logo of Furman's column, *Omaha Daily News*, January 10, 1926; Al Smith and Mrs. Smith arriving in Omaha, September 18, 1928; inset Furman article "We Want Al! Crowd Shouts," *Omaha Bee-News*, September 19, 1928; Furman with Eleanor Roosevelt, Martha Strayer, and Malvina Thompson, 1934

BESS FURMAN, NEBRASKA'S FRONT PAGE GIRL: HER FORMATIVE YEARS

By Liz Watts

Few journalists could say they learned their abcs setting type by hand or that they entered the field at such a young age that they considered themselves printing pioneers. Bess Furman could. Nor did many journalists dis-

cover their love of journalism after training for and abandoning a traditional woman's career – teaching – and then achieving renown as a "front page girl" and as a member of Eleanor Roosevelt's press corps in 1933.¹

Yet the Nebraska-born Furman's career followed this route. Her professional achievements spanned more than half a century. She worked for the Associated Press from 1929 to 1937 and as a *New York Times* correspon-

Bess Furman (right) with Emma Bugbee (left), Dorothy Ducas, Mrs. Roosevelt, and Ruby Black in 1934. Courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.



dent from 1943 to 1962, covering the White House during five presidential administrations. She became the first female reporter ever assigned by a press association to cover the U.S. House of Representatives and the first woman to hold a top press job with a Cabinet rank agency.²

Furman was one of two in Mrs. Roosevelt's press corps who did not have a college education. Apparently an eighth grade graduate, she attended two normal schools which prepared her to be a public school teacher. Furthermore, she was in comparison to her counterparts one of the least experienced reporters.³

Yet she could still boast a varied background in news reporting and writing as well as hometown newspapering. She recorded details of her career as a journalist in her autobiography *Washington By-Line*, published in 1949, but she gave short shrift to her formative years and early career. Perhaps when she began to write her life's story, her work as amusements editor and stunt and verse writer at the *Omaha Daily News*, as the city editor of the *Kearney Daily Hub*, or the chief typesetter and general factotum of her father's country weekly, seemed tame compared to covering Eleanor Roosevelt's first press conferences or to accompanying the first lady on outings and trips. Yet Furman's formative years both as a person and as a reporter were exciting years.

Bess Furman was born December 2, 1894, to Archie and Mattie Furman in Danbury, a small town in southwest Nebraska, at the family home, which included a residence, newspaper office, photograph gallery, and barber shop.⁴ Furman described Danbury in verse for a speech she gave in 1926:

Oh, the Main Street stores all had false fronts,
That grandly rose to view,



Archie C. Furman. (NSHS-P853)

and the board side walks alpl had big cracks
The dimes went rolling thru.⁵

She observed that she was not ashamed of her birthplace, noting she thought false fronts were "high brow" and her family was "as good as anybody else in town."⁶

When Bess was four years old, her father rented the *Danbury Topics* newspaper with a subscription list of 118 names for five dollars a month. When the rent increased to eight dollars, her father gave up the lease, bought a press in a nearby town, and moved it via lumber wagon to Danbury. By 1905 he was producing 500 copies weekly of the *Danbury News*.⁷

Bess was the second child in a family of five children. She had an older sister, a younger sister and two younger brothers. She had fair skin and red hair, which she attributed to the "merciless sun."⁸ Bess reported that she took refuge inside in summer and winter because "there was nothing to stay outdoors about." She said she got in the habit of climbing onto the type

stool and "getting acquainted with the cases."⁹ Using a little bellows, she would blow the dust out of the boxes, and sort the letters into their proper spots. She also set fillers and folded newspapers. Her sisters encouraged her even though she said she didn't realize it was to keep her working so they didn't have to. She was rewarded by having her photo printed with mention that she was the only woman member of the *Danbury News* staff.¹⁰

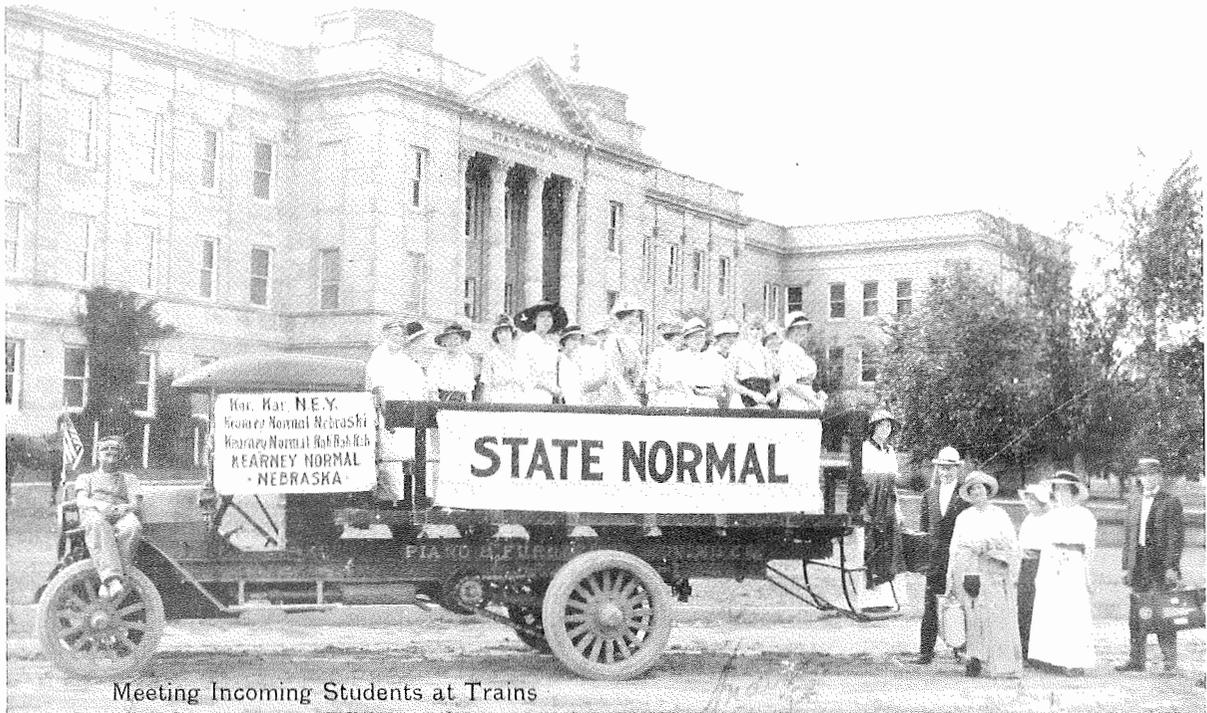
In 1906 the Furman family moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, apparently to live near Mrs. Furman's brother. By 1910, however, Furman had returned to southwest Nebraska and settled in Marion, about five miles southwest of Danbury. He bought the *Marion Citizen* and renamed it the *Marion Enterprise*. At this point, the family did not move with him. Mrs. Furman and the four younger children (including Bess) moved to Kirksville, Missouri, where Mrs. Furman enrolled in the American School of Osteopathy.¹¹

In September 1910 Bess came to Marion to live with her father. During the first month of her stay, the *Enterprise* stopped using ready prints or "patent insides" and offered strictly local news. The newspaper was also published from a new building on a new press. After Christmas, Bess may have run the shop by herself while her father went to Lyle, Kansas, to care for his sick brother.¹²

One of Bess's special talents was writing poems. She revealed very little about this skill in her autobiography except to note that it was not one the Associated Press appreciated. While it is not known when her interest in verse writing started, she began to display her work in her teenage years. Her father reported that the *Normal School Index* of Kirksville, Missouri, had printed one of Bess's poems, which represented her effort to supply the school with a song.¹³

Bess received some recognition of her verse writing from another poet whose verses appeared in the *Enterprise*. In 1919 she sent a book of poems

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Meeting Incoming Students at Trains

During the summer of 1917 Bess Furman served as editor of the *Antelope*, student newspaper at Kearney State Normal School (above). (NSHS-B930)

written by newspaper poet and columnist Walt Mason to her father for his birthday. She inscribed it with a poem. All this was noted in the newspaper, resulting in Mason's reply to Bess, also reprinted in the *Enterprise*. Mason told her she had talent and that he hoped she would continue writing.¹⁴

Between 1911 and 1913, when she was sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen, Bess attended the Missouri State Normal School at Kirksville and taught school near there. She graduated from the elementary course in May 1913. In 1915 she enrolled in an eleven-week course at the normal school in Kirksville. A year later her mother moved to Kearney to practice as a doctor of osteopathy, and Bess moved there to attend a summer institute for teachers at the Kearney State Normal School.¹⁵

During the summer of 1917 at the age of twenty-two, Bess became the editor of the *Antelope* at Kearney State

Normal School. In accepting the job, Bess became the first woman to edit the *Antelope*, and she was charged with the responsibility of reviving the summer editions, defunct in 1916.¹⁶ Since nothing was bylined except her poems, it is difficult to tell exactly what Bess contributed to the newspapers. Since it was summer, it is likely she did most of the writing herself.¹⁷

Each edition, published weekly, consisted of four quarto pages – smaller than today's broadsheets and larger than tabloids. News consisted of college stories and personal news items about students, faculty members, and visitors to campus.¹⁸ Page two usually featured a series of comments by the editor in lieu of an opinion piece on one subject. It is here that we can glean some hints of Bess's character.

In the June 8, 1917, edition she wrote a poem about the "antelope," mascot of the school and the namesake of the newspaper. She notes that it has

been the pet of the former male editor and continues:

Since he's entrusted to our care
His pet, domesticated,
We'll supervise the beasties' fare,
We'll feed him nought o'er
done nor rare,
Nor tale (e.g. jokes on red hair
Which we've always hated.)¹⁹

Later she explained her decision to drop the use of the title of "professor": "We object to [professor] because in common usage, it is not applied to both sexes."²⁰ In July Bess urged the women to keep up with current affairs in order to "register their opinions thru the ballot box."²¹ She reported that the school librarian had told her that ninety percent of the male students read current events magazines and newspapers and at least seventy-five percent of the women did not. "Votes cannot be based on love stories and fashion notes," she concluded.²²

Bess wrote, edited, and produced the July 6, 1917, edition on the semi-

centennial of Kearney. In lauding the effort, her father noted that she had "displayed her talent and training in describing Kearney's early history, its growth, and development."²³

In her concluding remarks at the end of the summer term, she chided her predecessor, the male editor. She related how he had passed on enough fillers, including a collection of jokes on the use of paint and powder, to fill a special issue. Bess "immediately consigned all jokes which were a reflection on the common sense of the female sex to the discard."²⁴

Bess's performance as the summer editor apparently impressed the editor of the city daily enough to hire her. She went to work at the *Kearney Daily Hub* in August 1917 and worked there until Thanksgiving Day, when she quit to take a job as principal of a consolidated school in western Nebraska.²⁵ Though she graduated in 1917 from Kearney State Normal School with a professional life teacher's certificate, she returned to Kearney in June 1918 and resumed course work at the normal school as well as her editing duties at the *Antelope*. Her younger sister, Lucille, was hired as business manager, responsible for advertising and folding and mailing newspapers. Students were asked to subscribe at a cost of twenty-five cents for the summer.²⁶

At this point, her interest in teaching may have been flagging. A poem she wrote in 1919 expressed her attitude:

For nine months long must the
school marm hoard
Her pittance so strangely small
That Eight weeks of summer
school she may afford
buy clothes and pay for her
room and board
At \$4.50 per – Green Terrace Hall.²⁷

Bess resumed her teaching job in the fall. But by October she had returned to Kearney. Her return was heralded by the *Antelope*, which noted that she had enrolled in postgraduate work at the school.²⁸ Though it was not named as the reason for her return to Kearney, the influenza epidemic may



"Observing Omaha" was written for the *Omaha Daily News* under the pen name of "Bobbie O'Dare." *Omaha Daily News*, January 10, 1926.

have closed the school where she was to have taught.

Bess apparently did not continue her studies long, as the *Antelope* noted in December that she was the city editor of the *Kearney Daily Hub*.²⁹ In January she again took a teaching job, this time with the Kearney Public Schools, but she resigned in February to resume the job as city editor of the *Hub*.³⁰ The highlight of her reporting during 1918 came in November when she wrote an eyewitness account of the "false" armistice celebration in Kearney. Her father re-ran her report in the *Enterprise* along with her photo.³¹

For the next year, her jingles filled the columns of the *Hub*. She wrote on many subjects and wrote something nearly every day. Some ran separately, but frequently, several of her verses were grouped under the heading "Nebulous Nothings."³²

Bess also honed her verse writing by commenting on current events. Topics included the Boston riots which brought Calvin Coolidge national attention, the coal strike, high cost of living, and Prohibition. In one poem she extolled a new dehydration process which she proposed be tried on the opponents of the League of Nations.³³

A hint of Bess's feminist bent is evident in several poems she wrote while at the *Hub*. In October 1919 she wrote about her status at the Commer-

cial Club, a predecessor of the Chamber of Commerce.

You ask me why the tear drops flow
And why I bawl and blubber, it is
Because I cannot go – I'm no
Commercial Clubber – Unto that chicken
Dinner fine which they'll have
Monday noon . . .

I really think it is not right, it puts
me in a pet, and makes me glad
that I'm a fight – ing rampant suffragette
to have to quaff this bitter cup while
men-folks of the town are all a -
sliding blithely up to slide,
slide the chicken down.³⁴

Many of her poems were also used by the daily *Omaha Bee*. One poem about rent profiteering made it to the top of page one. The managing editor sent her the page on which he had written, "Miss Furman, aside from the typos, this is clever. Some day when you are in Omaha drop in and see me. Taylor Kennerly."³⁵

Bess apparently enjoyed her tenure at the *Hub*; and later she described the editor, M. A. Brown, as her mentor. She labeled him a "rock-rooted republican but independent of partisan dictation or behests of party machine. [He] has conscientiously striven to maintain a high standard of newspaper ethics and [to] exemplify the principle of service to community and state."³⁶

On February 7, 1920, Bess received a telegram from the city editor of the *Omaha Daily News*, asking her to work as a feature writer on the *Sunday Magazine* for thirty dollars a week. "Believe you would like the work," the telegram concluded.³⁷

Feature writing and club and social reporting were all open to women. They could work in the library, advertising, business, art, promotion, and mechanical aspects of the newspaper as well.³⁸ Women could work as stenographers but rarely as reporters. Catherine Brody, writing in 1926, noted that male editors clung to "the sentimental notion that . . . women are too good, too pure, too sweet and innocent, to be brought into contact with the more unlovely facts of life." She observed that if a woman should manage to

report news, "care was taken to toss her nothing but the crumbs." A woman reporter was sent to get the proverbial "woman's angle."³⁹

The "spectacular papers" or the picture papers, Brody reported, afforded women more opportunities. These papers "have no prudery and no sentiment. They are quite willing as the *New York Daily News* did – to send a pretty girl to vamp the prince of Wales one week, and to assign her to count the dead under a fallen Brooklyn elevated structure the next."⁴⁰ Though Bess's work was probably not as varied as that described by Brody, she wrote to her father four months into her new job that she was pleased with her work at the *News*, and she wondered why she ever taught school when she could have been at work at something she liked so much better.⁴¹

The Omaha Daily News touted itself as "the People's Paper" and had a daily circulation of 82,000 in February 1920. There were three other dailies in Omaha: the *Omaha World-Herald*, *Omaha Bee*, and *Omaha Tribune*. The *Daily News*, established in 1889, was independent and reflected the Jazz Age. It regularly ran the "Night Pink" edition, a four-pager filled with lurid headlines and stories. It ran a weekly photo section and during Bess's tenure it revised and updated its design.⁴²

Three other women worked on the staff when Bess was hired: Belle Dewey, the dramatic and women's editor; Bess Mahoney, the society editor; and Edna Levine, reporter. In 1923 there were eleven reporters, including four women, and in 1925 there were eleven reporters but only two of them were women.⁴³

It is difficult to ascertain Bess's early contributions to the *News*. An example may have been "Rhymed Reviews of Recent News," which ran March 15, 1920, on page one, but since it is not bylined, one can only guess that the writing and reporting styles match Bess's.⁴⁴ Her first appearance as a "front-page girl" may have occurred when her photo was featured on page one April 15, 1921, along with a bylined

story describing her collection of movie gossip via long distance telephone calls. She interviewed Florence Vidor, wife of film director King Vidor, for inside news from Hollywood.⁴⁵ Another unbylined story which appeared in 1922 may be identified as Bess's. Appearing in the *Sunday Magazine*, it began with a poem and featured interviews with Omaha girls on today's man.⁴⁶

Bess's work became more readily identifiable as time passed and as she started to develop her identity, using the pseudonym Bobbie O'Dare. In December 1923 the first article carrying the byline of Bobbie O'Dare appeared. For this article, run in the *Sunday Magazine*, a regular weekly feature, she conducted a "scientific survey of the field" of bachelors in Omaha for a feature extolling the coming leap year and proposed a ward-by-ward survey of the city to locate all unmarried men. Her article attracted enough reaction to merit a page one follow-up story the following week.⁴⁷

By the time these articles appeared, Bess's routine on the *Daily News* was set. She wrote features for the *Sunday Magazine* and began to write a column titled "Observing Omaha," which appeared weekly, usually on the metro page and later featured in the city life section created in 1925.⁴⁸ Later she was also assigned the jobs of Santa Claus editor to promote the newspaper's annual Christmas party for children, and of movie editor to promote and review movies.⁴⁹

Her column did not regularly receive a byline until the end of 1924. A plain logo bearing the words "Observing Omaha" was added to the column in 1925. A different logo appeared in January 1926 which featured a young woman wearing a dress lying on her stomach with arms bent and chin resting in hands as she apparently looked out over the city.⁵⁰

As a feature writer, Bess strove for a scoop. She scored an exclusive when she covered the arrival in Omaha of Madame Marie Jeritza, Metropolitan

Opera star, in March 1926. Jeritza, according to Bobbie O'Dare, jumped out of her rail car before its arrival at the depot to avoid the crowds. Bobbie spotted the singer and offered to hail a taxi. The resulting page one story carried Bobbie O'Dare's byline. In November 1926 she again gained a small scoop by providing stories about the arrival of the Romanian Queen Marie and Princess Ileana in Omaha.⁵¹

In 1925 Bess was elected president of the Omaha Woman's Press Club. She concluded her term of office by writing and directing "Front Page Follies of 1925," a humorous review of the year.⁵² She was also a member of the Nebraska Writers Guild, and was the only woman invited to speak at a testimonial dinner for A. L. Bixby, a well-known Nebraska newspaper poet and columnist.⁵³

Bess continued to write features and columns through 1927 but events that year put her on the path to journalism fame. In February the *Omaha Daily News* was merged with the *Omaha Bee*. The merger apparently did not have any immediate effect on Bess's job; she continued writing her column, features, and movie report.⁵⁴

By June, however, her routine had changed considerably. On June 12, 1927, she left Omaha with her sister, Lucille, and her mother in Bess's Model T Ford, named Sylvia, to drive to Rapid City, South Dakota, to cover President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge's stay at the summer White House.⁵⁵ The Coolidges decided to vacation in the West, the first time a U.S. president had done so. Bess was probably one of the only women reporters covering their summer trip. Her friend and former co-worker, Sue McNamara, also reported the president's vacation.⁵⁶

Coolidge told reporters assigned to cover his trip to concentrate on the scenic beauty of the Black Hills and to leave him alone. However, in the two weeks that followed Bess's arrival, she submitted thirteen bylined stories (as Bobbie O'Dare) on the activities of the President and First Lady. For three

New York Governor Al Smith (with derby) and his party arrived in Omaha on September 18, 1928. Mrs. Smith is at his right. Courtesy Omaha World-Herald.



consecutive days her photo appeared on page one of the *Bee-News* with her reports, and appeared again with her story on July 1, 1927.⁵⁷ She also scooped other newspapers with the story that a young preacher was scheduled to give his first sermon with the Coolidges in the congregation. Bess noted that the minister was not "in the least appalled by the prospect" but was glad to get the publicity.⁵⁸

After returning from the Black Hills, Bess's life resumed its normal routine. In August 1927 her father reprinted her story recounting the Omaha mayor's memories of early Nebraska.⁵⁹ Bess's reputation as a journalist apparently was growing.

In August William Randolph Hearst bought the *Bee-News*, and the new ownership had a direct impact on Bess.⁶⁰ Both political parties were courting votes from the Midwest, Bess said in her autobiography, and both had picked Midwesterners as vice presidential candidates. The real struggle, Bess believed, was between Democrat Al Smith and Republican Herbert Hoover. Hearst had a vendetta against Smith, Bess noted, as Smith had presumably kept Hearst from becoming the U.S. Senator from New York by refusing to run for governor on the same ticket. Hearst intended to use his editorial might to defeat Smith.⁶¹

Evidence of Hearst's vendetta did manifest itself in the *Omaha Bee-News* coverage of Hoover's visit to his hometown of West Branch, Iowa, and Smith's visit to Omaha – although Bess felt that the newspaper did not support Hearst's efforts. During the third week of August 1928 Bess and her sister, Lucille, traveled by train across Iowa to West Branch so Bess could cover Hoover's ceremonial visit to his hometown.⁶² On the day of his arrival, August 21, 1928, the *Bee-News* bannered

the front page with two-inch high letters heralding the candidate's arrival, and Bess's story received an extended headline.⁶³

Bess's story was bylined with her given name, but the style of writing echoed that of Bobbie O'Dare. She packed the lead with her usual descriptions:

Quaintly Quakerish even on Herbert Hoover's home-coming day, West Branch forgot to swing into a loud-lunged huzza to greet his 7:20 a.m. arrival until the 'spirit moved.' The Hoover special, 10 minutes ahead of schedule, had stood beside the yellow frame station, decorated with tall corn, whose tassels tickled the eyes, fully 10 minutes before the home town crowd, swelled to hundreds, caught breath enough to cheer.⁶⁴

The newspaper assigned eight reporters to cover Al Smith's speech in Omaha on September 18, 1928. However, unlike the coverage of Hoover which appeared on page one, much of the coverage of the speech, including Bess's story, appeared on page two of the September 19, 1928, evening edition. (The morning edition did run her story on page one.) Two stories and a photo of Smith with a little girl appeared on page one.⁶⁵

If the editors intended page two to

be Smith's page, the casual reader would not have guessed it. There were two photos of Hoover but no photos of Smith; and the coverage which extended over eight columns did not fill the columns. Three photos of either Smith or his family appeared on page three. One showed Smith wearing a big Indian headdress and carried an uncomplimentary caption: "Perhaps you might think this happy looking white man is Captain John Smyth, and that Pocohontas is somewhere in the offing, but such is not so. It is none other than Gov. Al Smith, chief of the sachems and sagmores of Tammany."⁶⁶

Bess and the *Omaha Bee-News* photographer boarded the eleven-car special train for Smith in Iowa. Their goal was to capture a better spot in Smith's Omaha parade. Bess followed her usual routine of writing sidebar stories to the main story, finishing her work by late afternoon. Her editor told her to go home.⁶⁷

Before she left the office, she was commandeered by the Associated Press reporter, Bob Broad, who took her to a hotel where the AP Washington bureau chief was holding court. Broad

WE WANT AL! CROWD SHOUTS

By Bess Furman

High-falutin' phrases, such as "the most notable gathering of Democrats ever convened in this part of the world," "the most memorable meeting in the history of Omaha," and "the outstanding event of the national campaign," were applied by Democratic leaders to the Tuesday night Omaha opening of the 1928 Democratic campaign.

But without a single superlative, plain talk Al Smith started politics stirring as gently as he stirs with his brown derby on parade, stirred, and stirred and stirred till he could quaff a campaign concoction to his taste. It was a brew with a kick in it, and Al Smith smacked his lips on his last sentence, a prediction of victory. He had flavored his drink with that mint, called humor, added the faintest tang of satiric vermouth, had given it body with logical lime, and brought it to rosy perfection with the big red maraschino cherry of his own personality.

A connoisseur of that heady vintage called campaigning – Al Smith.

"A campaign every two years" was his oft-reiterated statement of his record.

MAKES 'EM LAUGH

And Al Smith campaigned with the perfection of the practiced "master hand" – never a meaningless motion, never a sentence shot out that did not get its inevitable result in emotional and psychological reaction.

When Al Smith willed, that closest-packed crowd ever massed in the Omaha auditorium rocked to the roof with laughter. When Al Smith held up an arresting hand, the laughter stopped.

Artful was the musical combination of those once-antagonistic songs, "Sidewalks of New York," and "Omaha" in

the Al Smith meeting. Al was twice as artful.

He combined the English language oratorical, and the English language unvarnished; the eye-glass of the man of affairs with the brow-moppings of the proletarian (and with a colored handkerchief); high finance and farm relief.

BOTH TUNES ALIKE

The bubbling-over audience didn't notice where "Sidewalks of New York" left off and "Omaha" carried on the harmony. It made no difference to them whether Al happened to be rounding out his sentences in a manner pleasing to the cultured ear, or whether he was saying "and here's a lotta more language."

All was Al, and Al was all.

They started calling for him long before Ed Smith, master of ceremonies, had finished Al's eulogy-biography. They called more insistently as Ed instructed stranger Al in the A, B, C, of agriculture. And when the 9 o'clock whistles sounded Al's announced moment at the mike, bedlam broke.

"Al ____ Al ____ We want Al!" chanted the crowd.

Al came. Al appreciated. Al absorbed that Auditorium in his "act."

William Jennings Bryan could do it – but he had a "silver tongue."

HIS SMILE ENOUGH

Al Smith did it with nothing but a smile, some assorted papers and pamphlets arranged as "exhibits" on his desk, and a peculiar simian shake of his shoulders.

From the moment he cut short his own opening ovation till he crescendoed to his climax after giving extemporaneous answer to questions flung at

him in the advertising columns of the Omaha morning newspapers, his hearers hung on his every motion. And because he knew they would be intent, he gave them variety. A little brown pamphlet here, a government bulletin there, with gymnastics with the eye-glass in between. If Senator Norris's statement had been typed on a little piece of paper, and Coolidge came next, the remarks of Mr. Coolidge would be on foolscap. Al never let his crowd forget he was on the move, and that something different would be coming with the next shift of scenery.

Out in the center section, a man with an ear trumpet yelled loud enough to hear himself. An ardent Democrat cocked one of those half-pint Al derbies over one ear. A gallery owl started hooting. A gray-haired newspaper man started talking of the days when campaigns were campaigns – red hot and rampageous.

And along came Al.



Bess Furman. Sunday Journal-Star, August 17, 1980. Furman's story on Al Smith appeared in the Omaha Bee-News, September 19, 1928.

and Sue McNamara had been promoting the AP to Bess and Bess to the AP. To please her friends, Bess reluctantly played the part of a job applicant. During the short meeting Bess recalled that she mentioned that she could write in rhyme and was told that was a talent the AP would never use.⁶⁸

Later she went to the auditorium where Smith was to present his speech. She found a seat with the *Omaha Bee-News* male reporters at the press table below the stage. There she saw Smith mesmerize the crowd. "I've heard many and many a political speech since then," she wrote in her autobiography, "but the only one I ever heard that topped it, for sheer crowd-capture, was Franklin D. Roosevelt's second acceptance at Franklin Field, Philadelphia."⁶⁹

She wandered back to the office where she was assigned to write the color story of the speech. She recalled that she was "in the mood to turn myself inside out to do [the managing editor] proud."⁷⁰ Bess said Smith's campaigning had a special effect – like cocktails – and she wrote her story to emulate that effect. It appeared on page one of the September 19, 1928, morning edition under the headline "We Want All! Crowd Shouts." It was reprinted on the second page of the evening edition.⁷¹

Bess received the Bookman Prize and \$100 for her color story on Smith's speech because "it gives the most vivid pen pictures of Governor Smith . . . In a brief space she sketches not only the spirit of the man but also that of the crowds."⁷²

The Smith story signaled the end of her reporting career in Omaha. She was hired by the Associated Press in April 1929. In the pages of her father's newspaper, he noted that she took a position left vacant by Martha Dalrymple, who had been assigned to go to England for AP.⁷³

Several important observations can be gleaned from Bess Furman's childhood, adolescence, and young womanhood that point her toward the successful journalistic career she enjoyed in Washington. She grew up in an atmosphere of news and even more important, she displaced her siblings as her father's assistant in both office and home. The training she obtained at her father's newspaper prepared her to move into an editing job at her normal school and later into a reporting job.

Her mother provided an example different from that of most mothers by leaving husband and home behind to move out of state to become a doctor of osteopathic medicine. Bess mirrored her mother's career choice by taking reporting jobs, an area of employment that had only started to attract women, and by displaying her own brand of feminism.

During part of her early career Furman used a pseudonym and may have identified herself as a nontraditional woman. Under her given name she had pursued one of the traditional women's professions, teaching. She gave it up when the influenza epidemic closed the schools where she taught. Unlike many women, she had a second career. When she could not teach, she did not have to be a secretary or a shop girl or hope for marriage to meet her needs. She could work as a reporter for a newspaper, but to do so meant leaving the realm of traditional women's work.



Bess Furman (third from left) with Martha Strayer (left), Malvina Thompson, and Mrs. Roosevelt in 1934. Courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

At thirty-four years of age, Bess had paid her reporting dues and was ready for new assignments. She had moved from the chicken dinner coverage of her college newspaper, to writing rhymes on the day's events at a small city daily, to being the flapper reporter on a Midwestern metropolitan newspaper. Gradually she developed her skills of description and the courage to tackle assignments and to report them under her own name. She had been a front-page girl used by the newspaper to attract readers, but through her experience and development as a journalist she became a front page reporter in her own right.

NOTES

¹Maurine Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self Fulfillment* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 39, 45.

²*Sunday Lincoln Journal and Star*, Aug. 17, 1980, 1H, 10H. In private life she was the wife of Robert B. Armstrong, Jr., and the mother of twins - a daughter and a son - born in 1937 in McCook. She died in 1969 at the age of 74.

³In Mrs. Roosevelt's inner circle Bess joined Ruby A. Black, Genevieve Forbes Merrick of the *Chicago Tribune*, Elizabeth May Craig, a correspondent for the *Guy Gannet Newspapers of Maine*, Martha Strayer of the *Washington Daily News*, and Emma Bugbee of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Strayer did not attend college. Black, Herrick, Craig, and Bugbee were college graduates, and Herrick held a master's degree.

Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 40, 45, 46, 47. Herrick had seventeen years of experience when the first press conference was held in 1933. Bugbee had twenty years, Strayer had twelve, and Craig had ten.

⁴"Danbury Has Its First Fire," *Danbury News*, Feb. 23, 1922, 1. Many items quoted from the *Danbury News* were not headlined. Thus page numbers were given for these items. Headlines will be cited when they were used.

⁵"Bess Speaks for Bix," *South Side Sentinel* (Marion), Apr. 29, 1926, 2.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Danbury News*, Apr. 27, 1905, 4.

⁸See 1920 Federal Population Census Schedule, Vol. 34, ED152, Sheet 10, Line 80, Beaver Precinct, Nebraska. "Bess Speaks for Bix," *South Side Sentinel*, Apr. 29, 1926, 2.

⁹"Bess Speaks for Bix."

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Marion Enterprise*, June 2, 1910, 1; Aug. 24, 1911, 1. Bess's older sister finished the eleventh grade at Fort Collins and then moved to McCook, Nebraska, to attend normal school.

¹²*Ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1910, 1; Oct. 27, 1910, 1; Nov.

27, 1910, 1; Dec. 1, 1910, 1; Jan. 12, 1911, 1; Jan. 26, 1911, 1.

¹³*Ibid.*, May 9, 1912, 1.

¹⁴From Walt to Bess," *ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1919, 1.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Aug. 22, 1912, 1; May 22, 1913, 1; May 29, 1913, 1; May 20, 1915, 1; May 17, 1916, 1.

¹⁶*Antelope*, June 8, 1917, 1. Copies are available in the archives of the Calvin T. Ryan Library at the University of Nebraska-Kearney.

¹⁷Annual Catalogue of the Kearney State Normal School, Kearney, Nebraska, 1917-1918, Vol. X., No. 2, Apr. 1917, 25.

¹⁸*Antelope*, Vol. 7 beginning with No. 34, June 8, 1917.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, June 8, 1917, 2.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, July 20, 1917, 2.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Marion Enterprise*, July 19, 1917, 1.

²⁴*Antelope*, July 28, 1917, 2.

²⁵*Marion Enterprise*, Aug. 2, 1917, 1; Dec. 6, 1917, 1.

²⁶*Ibid.*, June 14, 1918, 1.

²⁷*Kearney Daily Hub*, Jan. 31, 1919, 3. Green Terrace Hall was the women's dormitory on the Kearney State Normal School campus.

²⁸*Antelope*, Oct. 4, 1918, 3.

²⁹*Ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1918, 3.

³⁰*Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1919, 1.

³¹*Kearney Daily Hub*, Nov. 8, 1918, 1; *Marion Enterprise*, Nov. 28, 1918, 2.

³²*Kearney Daily Hub*, Jan. 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 1920, 2. All were bylined.

³³"Nebulous Nothings," *ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1919, 4.

³⁴Box 146, Bess Furman Papers, Scrapbook: "Newspaper Work of the Years 1918-1919," Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁵"Nebulous Nothings," *Kearney Daily Hub*, Oct. 4, 1919, 4.

³⁶Box 146, Furman Papers.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Ishbel Ross, "Front Page Reporters," as reprinted in *Women in Media: A Documentary Source Book* (Washington, D.C.: Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 1977), 69.

⁴⁰Catherine Brody, "Newspaper Girls," *American Mercury*, Mar. 1926, 274, 275.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 275.

⁴²*Marion Enterprise*, June 3, 1920, 1.

⁴³Editorial pages of the *Omaha Daily News* regularly carried circulation figures during the 1920s. The four newspapers and their staffs were listed in *R. L. Polk & Co.'s City Directory of Greater Omaha* of 1921, 1418.

⁴⁴*Polk City Directory* of 1920, 29. *City Directory* of 1923, 1500. *City Directory* of 1925, 1351.

⁴⁵"Rhymed Reviews of Recent News," *Omaha Daily News*, Mar. 15, 1920, 1.

⁴⁶"Daily News Reporter Gets Movie Gossip By Long Distance to Los Angeles," *ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1921, 1.

⁴⁷"Omaha Maidens Flay the He-Flapper," *Sunday Magazine*, *ibid.*, Mar. 5, 1922, 1.

⁴⁸"Card Catalog for Bachelors," *Sunday Magazine*, *ibid.*, Dec. 30, 1923, 6. "Beware! Bobbie O'Dare Warned by Omaha Bachelors Spokesman," *ibid.*, Jan. 3, 1924, 1.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1925.

⁵⁰"4,000 Kiddies in Throng at Daily News Christmas Party," *ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1926, 1; in-

house promotions touting Bobbie O'Dare as movie editor in the Jan. 14, 15, and 16, 1927 editions.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, Sept. 7, 14, 21, 28, Oct. 5, 12, 19, 26, 1924; Aug. 30, Oct. 4, 1925; Bobbie O'Dare, "Observing Omaha," Jan. 3, 1926, city life section.

⁵²See Bobbie O'Dare, "Jeritza Arrives Shaken by Wreck," *ibid.*, Mar. 22, 1926, 1. "10,000 Miss View of Queen Here," *ibid.*, Nov. 11, 1926, 1.

⁵³"Follies of Front Page Burlesqued at Press Banquet," *ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1926, 4.

⁵⁴"Bess Speaks for Bix."

⁵⁵*Omaha Daily News*, Jan. 31, 1927, 1. "What Bobbie O'Dare says about movies and theatricals will interest you every day in the *Omaha Daily News*, the newspaper that originates, never imitates."

⁵⁶Bobbie O'Dare, "Song of Sylvia," *ibid.*, June 15, 1927, 1. *South Side Sentinel*, June 16, 1927, 1.

⁵⁷See Carson C. Hathaway, "Coolidge to Go West and Set a Precedent," *New York Times*, Apr. 10, 1927, 8. Furman, *Washington By-line*, 13.

⁵⁸Bobbie O'Dare, "Trucks Bearing Flags, Smooth Road Coolidge Will Travel to Rapid City," *Omaha Bee-News*, June 16, 1927, 1; "President at Troop Review," June 22, 1927, 1; "Cameramen Command President at Review," June 23, 1927, 1; "President in Big Hat Passes 'Mt. Coolidge,'" June 24, 1927, 1; "Old Range Feud Rages Near Coolidges . . .," June 25, 1927, 1; "President Always Ready to Halt Fishing Trip to Greet Tourists," June 28, 1927, 1; "Coolidges on Porch Watch World Go By," July 1, 1927, 1; "Grace Coolidge - Westerners," July 3, 1927, 1; "How to Get a Good Glimpse of Coolidges," July 4, 1927, 1; "President Hears Banjo Offertory," July 5, 1927, 1; "Coolidge Clad as Cowboy on Birthday," July 6, 1927, 1; "Cal Fools the Trout, The Inside Story of the President's Famous Worm-Baiting Fishing Expedition," July 10, 1927.

⁵⁹*South Side Sentinel*, June 23, 1927, 3.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, Aug. 25, 1927, 1; Jan. 19, 1928, 4.

⁶¹Furman, *Washington By-line*, 4. Bess wrote that Hearst bought the paper late in June 1928. The *Omaha Bee-News* reported the ownership change on page one of the Aug. 1, 1928, edition.

⁶²Furman, *Washington By-line*, 4.

⁶³*South Side Sentinel*, Aug. 30, 1928, 1.

⁶⁴Bess Furman, "Childhood Friends Welcome Candidate at West Branch and Take Him to Old Familiar Scenes," *Omaha Bee-News*, Aug. 21, 1928, 1.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Omaha Bee-News*, Sept. 19, 1928, 1.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁸Furman, *Washington By-line*, 12-13.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 13, 14.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 14.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁷²Bess Furman, "Plain Spoken, Master Politician Al Smith Moulds Crowd to Liking," *Omaha Bee-News* (evening), Sept. 19, 1928, 2. "We Want All! Crowd Shouts," *Omaha Bee-News* (morning), Sept. 19, 1928, 1.

⁷³Furman, *Washington By-line*, 18.

⁷⁴*South Side Sentinel*, Apr. 25, 1929, 1.