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Article Summary: Maud Nuquist was known only for her work with Women’s Clubs before she became a candidate in the 1934 Democratic gubernatorial primary. Her platform called for professional, not political, control of state departments.

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Photographs / Images: Nebraska Federation of Women’s Clubs board of directors, 1927; Andrew and Maud Nuquist, about 1934; inset advertisement from the Nuquist campaign; Nuquist planting a tree during a 1931 Federation of Women’s Clubs meeting in Wahoo

“Yours for Political Housecleaning”

**MAUD E. NUQUIST**  
FIRST WOMAN CANDIDATE  
FOR GOVERNOR OF NEBRASKA

By Elizabeth Raby

Upon the completion of her term as president of the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs in 1932, Maud E. (Mrs. Andrew F.) Nuquist of Osceola received a laudatory letter from a fellow clubwoman: "The state will never have your equal again . . . your beauty . . . beauty of soul as well as outward beauty, your poise, charm, graciousness, executive ability."<sup>1</sup> Beneath the poise Maud had been in an inward ferment of excitement since the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt that year. On January 24, 1934, Maud wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt on Nebraska Federation letterhead:

My thoughts and prayers have been with you and your courageous husband since the day he accepted the nomination for the presidency and began setting aside cumbering traditions. Now I feel a more vital concern for you and your husband's administration than ever. . . . My office in a non political organization, makes it impossible to say much only in a quiet personal way, when I should like [to] go about shouting my convictions from the housetops. . . . I am a Democrat both by inheritance and conviction, mother of three fine sons who long for purer politics and expect to work toward that end.<sup>2</sup>

A month later Maud was shocked to unfold the Lincoln *Nebraska State Journal* to find an article in which unnamed citizens were urging her to enter the Nebraska gubernatorial race. Maud could not imagine who was putting her name forward. Had it not been for that article and the letters and calls she received from around the state in response to it,

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she would probably never have decided to become the first woman candidate for governor of Nebraska.<sup>3</sup>

Curious that morning, and perhaps flattered, Maud telephoned Bayard Paine, judge of the Nebraska Supreme Court. He and his wife, Grace Bentley Paine, had been Maud's high school teachers in Grand Island and were her life-long friends. They lived in Lincoln, knew everyone, and Maud even suspected that they might have instigated the article. Judge Paine denied having anything to do with it, but urged Maud to give the idea serious consideration. Judge Paine "went out and around the halls" of the Supreme Court, but none of the reporters would tell him anything. After three trips to the press room in the afternoon and a call to the *Journal* at 5:30 P.M., he finally learned that "it was the wishes of a small but important bunch of Lincoln women . . . they were much interested in the matter and that it wasn't to be considered lightly by you at all."<sup>4</sup>

Maud Nuquist, mother of four grown children, was fifty-one years old in 1934 and serving as secretary-treasurer of the Director's Council of the General Federation, the national organization of women's clubs formed in 1889. She had risen through the local, district, state, and national Federation since the early 1920s. By 1930 there were almost 800,000 individual members of affiliated clubs located in all forty-eight states and the District of Columbia. Club programs and projects were organized around community improvement through volunteer service.<sup>5</sup>

A tall, stately, imposing woman of gracious demeanor, Maud said in one of her

notes that one should feel "sorrow for the woman who laments her birthday; . . . [I]t must indicate a barren life."<sup>6</sup> Her air of sweet humility concealed, briefly, from new acquaintances, a disciplined will and enormous energy.

Born in Stromsburg, Nebraska, in 1882, Maud grew up in an atmosphere of constant and passionate discussion of public issues. In her childhood Maud's father, homesteader Joseph W. Edgerton, abandoned farming to read law and was an unsuccessful Populist candidate for state attorney general and for judge of the Nebraska Supreme Court. As the Populist Party faded and fusion with the Democratic Party became the fashion, Edgerton transferred his allegiance to the Democrats. His daughter grew up in that faith and remained faithful to it all her life. "I suspect my interest in government is largely a part of my early environment as my mother was always interested in my father's political activities."<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Edgerton died in July of 1933 so his loss was still a fresh wound. He had written Maud in 1931 a letter, which must have been quite unusual in its time: "It is a great source of satisfaction to me the success you are having in your club work, you are opening the way to higher honors, you can be elected to the Legislature and from there go on to Congress."<sup>8</sup>

It is striking in this context that in her 1934 letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Maud neglected to mention her fourth child, Irma, an intelligent college graduate. Despite the step Maud herself would soon take, only Maud's sons could be expected to *choose* politics. A woman

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waited to *be chosen*, as Maud had been chosen for president of the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs.

At the thirty-sixth annual convention in 1931, Maud's second and last as state president, her address to the 586 attendees assembled in the First Methodist Church of Fremont revealed her interest in good government and citizen participation. After discussing the Depression, she introduced the theme of the convention, "The Woman's Club: A Factor in Upholding and Maintaining the Principles upon which this Government is Founded."

She quoted to the women from Pericles: "We Greeks differ from other peoples of the world in this, that we do not merely hold a man who abstains from public affairs as idle, we hold him as useless." She continued:

Today, a man who abstains from taking a high stand on public questions is not merely useless, but dangerous. . . . When the rallying cry of both political parties is

absolute honesty in the administration of public affairs, then we can proudly rush to the support of the party of our choice, rather than hanging back with reluctance to announce ourselves as adherents of either party because of the corrupt practices of both. We should make it our duty to see that a change of administration follows the first betrayal of a public trust.

We women are less bound by political tradition than men. We feel much more freedom from the restraint of party allegiance than men. Let us make use of this freedom from party prejudice to effect a housecleaning in both parties.<sup>9</sup>

As a representative of the 14,000 members of the women's clubs of Nebraska, a member of the Nebraska Conference for Social Work, and a participant in the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, Maud had been part of a delegation that visited Governor Charles Bryan, as well as other prominent politicians from both parties, to speak to them about the need for major change in the 1931 welfare bill. The bill provided for the administration of

county welfare problems on a county unit plan, cooperating with the state Department of Public Welfare.<sup>10</sup> During their investigations of current conditions, the women had visited the State Industrial Home for Women near Milford, where unmarried pregnant girls were committed for a year's term. They were appalled by the conditions they found there. The young women received no educational or vocational training. Maud never forgot seeing young girls in the final stages of pregnancy weeping at ironing boards, where they had been standing for hours, their legs swollen and painful. The clubs took the position that public welfare required professional, not political, control.<sup>11</sup>

By February 1934 Maud for several years had been working "to the best of my capabilities to represent the dignity of our organization, to maintain its integrity, and further its usefulness." She did not take her Federation responsibilities lightly. "Many days I have spent



Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs board of directors, 1927. Maud Nuquist is seated second from left in the front row. Courtesy of author

longer hours [working on state federation affairs] than my husband does at his place of business."<sup>12</sup> She had been mightily shaken but also stimulated by the Depression and by the resulting election of Franklin Roosevelt. The *Nebraska State Journal* article found her at a receptive moment.

Then letters began to arrive. One of the first came from Winifred Scott, the current president of the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs. "Madam Governor—I would love to see that come true and hope you decide to be a candidate . . . . You surely would have a big vote from the club women of the state and others as well."<sup>13</sup>

Maud heard from many clubwomen. Mrs. M. S. McDuffee, chairman of the County and Inter-County Federation, wrote:

Of all the women I have met in club work or any public work, you are the outstanding one to shoulder this responsibility. All your years of training have prepared you for this. It has come unsought—and I feel deeply that you should consider it from the standpoint of *Duty*. Mr. McDuffee shares my feeling. We believe you could be elected. It seems that this is the ideal result of years of club training. It is our great opportunity to make practical some of the things we have advocated. We're for you!<sup>14</sup>

Maud believed, as did many clubwomen of her day, that club work educated and prepared her for intelligent participation in community and national life.<sup>15</sup> The club had literally been her university. Now, she believed, "No longer must our clubs be strictly a university but a social laboratory."<sup>16</sup> She had graduated from the "university" with a considered position on almost every important public issue of the day and was not hesitant to express those opinions.

Maud began to write some letters herself, soliciting comments and opinions about the feasibility of her entering the race. On March 5 Grace Morrison Poole, the president of the General Federation, urged Maud to seek the nomination.<sup>17</sup>

If Maud chose to enter the primaries, she would, of course, enter as a candi-

date for the Democratic nomination. It was already clear she would join a crowded field. In March Maud received a letter from Democratic Congressman Ashton C. Shallenberger before he knew that she was considering becoming a candidate. "I am sure your father would have been pleased," he wrote, "if he could have been here to watch the Democratic Administration working at full speed and under competent leadership . . . [T]he prospective success of the Democratic party, no doubt, influences a larger number of entries than we would ordinarily have."<sup>18</sup> It was a propitious year for Democrats, even in Nebraska, possibly even for a woman Democrat.

Perhaps testing to see if she would elicit an encouraging response, perhaps merely to gather suggestions, Maud again wrote Eleanor Roosevelt to inquire how, as a woman, she could best promote the policies and principles of the New Deal if she decided to run. Mary Dewson, director of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee, replied:

We are of course always interested whenever a woman has the popular support for an office because it shows that she is taking seriously the fact that much of our happiness and the stability of our homes depends on the kind of government we have.<sup>19</sup>

From the lack of any record of internal discussion at the Democratic National Committee level about Maud's entering the race, and from the tone of the letter from Miss Dewson, it seems fair to conclude that not much was expected from Maud's candidacy.

Maud also contacted another member of the Roosevelt administration, Grace Abbott, who in 1934–35 as a member of Roosevelt's Council on Economic Security, had played a prominent role in drafting the Social Security Act of 1935. Abbott was completing her thirteenth year as head of the federal Children's Bureau and her twelfth as the unofficial United States representative on the League of Nations Committee on Traffic in Women and Children. Abbott had

been another of the remarkable teachers who had instructed and inspired Maud's high school class at Grand Island.

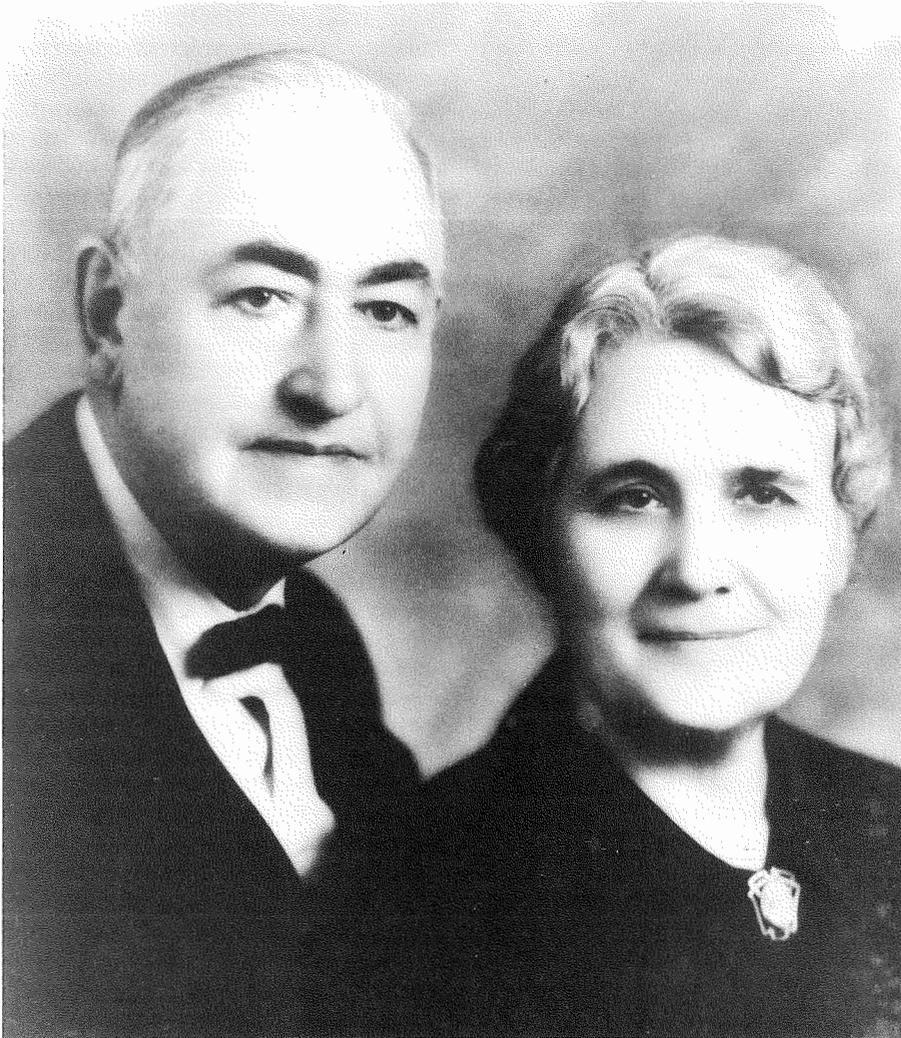
Maud's concern with matters of child health and welfare, child labor laws, and the League of Nations had kept her in some contact with Abbott over the years, and Maud respected and admired her. On May 10, 1934, Grace Abbott responded that it would be wonderful if Maud were to become a candidate. If she did, Abbott would like to help.<sup>20</sup>

To Maud, musing in her notebooks and in her speeches, the best product of civilization was a fine home. A fine home was not dominated exclusively by either the father or the mother, for if one or the other's interests were continually subjugated they were working at cross purposes, with hidden rancor or guilt, which would hinder the full development of the family and its members.<sup>21</sup>

Maud and her husband, Andrew F. Nuquist, in some ways reversed the traditional order of things. Maud said that, in her marriage, she had been the member of the partnership who had been away from home, while Andrew kept the home fires burning faithfully.<sup>22</sup> Ten years older than Maud, Andrew had seen his first duty as the financial support of his wife and four children and had devoted his time to that end, working as a banker. The son of Swedish immigrants who had purchased land in Stromsburg, Andrew was a member of the first graduating class of Stromsburg High School and attended Omaha Business College. Since completing a term as Polk County sheriff and being defeated as a Populist candidate for the Nebraska Senate in 1902, he had not been active in politics.

Andrew was insistent that Maud's sense of public responsibility not negate her responsibility to home and family. As long as her endeavors remained within that framework, Andrew was proud of Maud's accomplishments, and he would support and help her as he could. Now, he told Maud, "You can at least tell the world your ideas and not waste them on me."<sup>23</sup>

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Andrew and Maud Nuquist, about 1934. Courtesy of author

Maud apparently accepted his position as just and did not question or try to expand the boundary. She was particularly scrupulous in not allowing her Federation activities to be a strain on the household finances. She traveled only when her expenses were covered. Even as Federation president she conducted two-day board meetings in her own home, putting up extra beds, cooking the meals, running the linens afterwards through her mangle at the opposite side of the basement from her office with its desk, files, typewriter, and secretary paid by the Federation.

Maud had noted that the Nebraska

women who joined the Federation were, on the whole, not farm women, but they were often, like herself, only one generation removed from the farm. Farm women, she was sorry to see, rarely had time to come to meetings or to read the materials so painstakingly prepared, especially since drought and the Depression had made living conditions more and more precarious. Yet, as far as Maud was concerned, the very life of Nebraska depended on the health of the farms. Wasn't the farm problem everybody's problem?<sup>24</sup>

Maud was sure Nebraska needed a shared outlook on life and group think-

ing as never before.<sup>25</sup> Families could not thrive in isolation if the community around them suffered instability and economic and social distress. Clearly, a few women should have responsible positions in government because a woman's perspective was necessary to the common good. The "woman's movement of the future will be determined by the intelligence we use in settling today's problems." As she saw it, "a new deal for women" could mean "a new deal for civilization."<sup>26</sup>

As she pondered possible courses of action for Nebraska, she learned about the Iowa Planning Board through reading newspaper articles. She wrote for more information and decided to advocate a similar body for Nebraska.<sup>27</sup> She favored the appointment of a nonpartisan, long-range planning commission, composed of the best brains available, to map a program for education, welfare, industrial development, and agriculture. The commission should work to ensure the conservation and rehabilitation of Nebraska's natural resources. The members would serve without pay and would devote their energies to mapping a legislative program.<sup>28</sup>

Her platform would also promote professional, not political, control of state departments, especially roads and public welfare. Having completed a platform, she made her decision. "I had felt for several years that Nebraska was behind the procession in public welfare, and in 1934 I had the courage, or possibly the effrontery, I don't know which it might be construed, to run for governor of Nebraska."<sup>29</sup>

Having decided to enter the race, Maud next had to decide whether she could run while continuing to hold her position as Federation director. At the national convention in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in May 1934, her fellow directors had many conflicting opinions, but the Nebraska state president, Mrs. Winifred Scott of North Platte, concluded that there would be a conflict because Maud would be running as a Democrat. A partisan in one arena could not be seen as

nonpartisan in another.<sup>30</sup> Maud resigned, mourning the loss of that fellowship of women and the life they had given her. The irony of Maud's having to resign her Federation position in order to run for governor was noted by Laura Waples McMullen of New York, chairman of the Federation's Department of International Relations:

If I could afford it, I would come straight out and help. I do hope you get it. I am so sorry you resigned as director. You know best of course but I know of no man's organization which requires such action. A Rotary Club would be proud to have a member running for distinguished political office. We women follow our old behavior patterns and don't realize the world has left us behind.<sup>31</sup>

Although today it is impossible to imagine beginning a campaign without one, Maud had no campaign chest. Maud stated she did not feel right about asking people for contributions. One can only speculate as to her scruples in this regard: Times were hard enough for most people without adding to their financial burdens, and she had a strong distaste for the unseemly obligations money might impose. Perhaps she thought it was enough for people to absorb the notion of a female candidate without being asked for money to support something so outlandish. The only surviving record of a contribution is a letter from her brother in California, dated July 6, 1934, which enclosed a check for \$25.<sup>32</sup>

Maud thought it essential to devise a strategy to provide her with maximum coverage of the state with a minimum expenditure and she looked to her family for help. Her husband's assistance would be limited to providing her campaign with the use of the family automobile when possible. He would not make campaign appearances on her behalf. It is probable he made a financial contribution, because Maud printed and distributed considerable campaign literature.

The four children were enthusiastic in their support. Andrew E., the oldest, had been accepted into the graduate political science program at the University of Wis-

consin and had moved to Madison in June with his wife Edith. He and Edith agreed to come back to campaign for Maud, but they could not assume responsibility for the overall management.

Irma, next oldest, was married and living in Hastings, where her husband, Roy Laase, taught speech at Hastings College. They had two small babies. Roy's family was most disapproving of a woman running for office. Irma's availability would be limited at best.

Joe, the third child, was eager to assume campaign responsibilities. Joe had suffered from epilepsy since infancy and was subject to strong and unpredictable seizures. Although highly intelligent, he lacked tact and had an unfortunate tendency to extremism of speech and thought. Maud concluded he had neither the temperament nor the health to be her chief spokesman.<sup>33</sup>

Bob, the youngest, a twenty-year-old junior at Hastings College, was a successful debater who relished being on a platform. Maud appointed him her campaign manager. Together they decided that Maud would not file for office until the last possible moment. Waiting would permit them to concentrate all their efforts, restricted as they would be in terms of money and manpower, into the five weeks between the July 5 filing deadline and the August 14 primary.

Bob urged his mother to use only her first initials in her campaign material, to run as M. E. Nuquist, and to release no photographs of herself. He thought people should read what she had to say without being distracted by her gender so they would be more likely to give serious consideration to her proposals and to judge them solely on their merits. Maud, however, had no intention of running under false pretenses. As she saw it, the point of her candidacy was that a woman's fresh perspective on the problems of the day was an advantage, not a disadvantage. Whatever the result, she would run as Maud E. Nuquist. Perhaps a bit defiantly, she adapted a line from one of her speeches as her campaign slogan: "Yours for political housecleaning."<sup>34</sup>

Maud mailed drafts of her campaign literature to friends around the state for their comments and suggestions. Private citizens and government officials were generous with their responses. For example, State Auditor William Price wrote that he could not think of anything to add to make her position more impressive.<sup>35</sup>

Even the vice chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party, Evelyn Mills Minier, former state president and current board member of the National Federation, commented favorably on Maud's candidacy: "These three letters will reach many people, and influential people. It was a bright idea . . . You know I am wishing you well and when I have the opportunity, I shall speak of your candidacy and your statesman-like qualities for government office."<sup>36</sup>

Maud submitted the necessary paperwork on July 5, 1934, the last of nine Democrats to file. Despite the crowded field, perhaps because a woman's candidacy was such a novelty, the notice of Maud's filing was picked up by newspapers outside Nebraska. Mrs. Anna Day Chastain, Federation director for Missouri, read the notice in the *Kansas City Star* and wrote that she had admired Maud since her first meeting of the General Federation Board and could think of no one more qualified to be governor. If Maud needed a campaign manager she should send for Mrs. Chastain.<sup>37</sup>

Mrs. Marie K. Brown saw the notice in the Chicago papers. Brown, head of the Women's Travel Service of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, had made Maud's travel arrangements when Maud traveled back and forth to Washington and around the country on Federation business. They had often met for dinner in Chicago when Maud changed trains there. Maud was surprised and moved when Mrs. Brown sent personal letters to friends and to the wife of an employee of the B & O in Nebraska asking them to vote for Maud. Brown sent copies of the letters and a note to Maud in which she promised to come to Nebraska to attend Maud's inauguration.<sup>38</sup>

## Maud Nuquist

And so the campaign began. Maud found speaking about herself, selling herself, difficult and distasteful. "Called" to the Federation presidency, she had been willing to sacrifice, willing to share, willing to give of her thought and influence, all very different from asserting herself as capable to lead the state as its chief executive.

A friend, Omaha attorney Ross King, chastised Maud after he heard her give one of her first campaign speeches:

It seems to me that you are too modest. That you should tell why you decided as a woman to seek the nomination, emphasize more your qualifications, contacts and experiences in legislative and executive matters as president of the State Federation. Tell of the contact you have had with state government and its officers, appearances before legislative committees, trips you have made to Washington and the contacts you have made there.

It goes against the grain but seems to be expected and is apparently not looked upon as boastful. I know that you have the qualifications and experience, but the voters won't know it unless they are told and it is up to you to tell them.<sup>39</sup>

Her family had moved many times when Maud was a girl. She had considered those moves disadvantageous, but now she decided that she was blessed by her broad acquaintance. The family had friends in towns across Nebraska. There were her father's old Populist contacts, most of whom were now Democrats. Maud had also been active in the affairs of the Methodist Church. As an officer in the Federation she had traveled back and forth across the state and had stayed in more homes than she could remember.

In an effort to reach as many of the people she had met as possible, she and Bob prepared a card with her photograph and her slogan, "Yours for Political Housecleaning." Posters, flyers, and a news release were printed. Letters were duplicated to mail to the membership of the women's clubs, the county chairmen and vice-chairmen of the Democratic Party, the chairmen of the Women's Committee, and the Young Democrats. Maud's Osceola pastor, W.

H. Wright, wrote a letter of endorsement, which they mailed to Methodists throughout the state.<sup>40</sup>

The letters received a good response, particularly from Maud's fellow Federation members. Women who said they were registered Republicans found active Democrats to work on her behalf. Democratic women volunteered to distribute her cards and to talk up her candidacy, even in the midst of the terrible

heat that befell Nebraska that July, the worst in Nebraska history. Mrs. William Witte of Nebraska City wrote, "Have given out all the cards you sent me. . . . We are advocating your capability, why even your initials M.E.N . . . more capable than any one man candidate."<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Grace Lutgen of Wayne, another national director from Nebraska, wrote, "Have distributed my twenty-five cards and my boy had the bright idea that if



# MAUD E. NUQUIST

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE

for

# GOVERNOR

***"Yours For Political House Cleaning"***

Courtesy of author

you send more we will have them put in autos on the street Sat. or Sun. nights—any night for that matter as there are hundreds almost any night but those two nights find the town *full*.<sup>42</sup>

The response from Democratic Party officials was either measured or non-existent. Maud did receive three letters from Democratic Party women. One was an enthusiastic letter from the chairman of the Saline County Democratic Central Committee, Mrs. M. R. Byrnes:

You have undertaken a gigantic task and I admire your courage to come out in the open with opposition to gangsterism, Political machine-ism, basement ward politics that now continue to rule. The entire State House needs a cleaning which I do hope the good people can bring about and that just and right shall prevail, With kind wishes for your success.<sup>43</sup>

Carrie S. Bailey, the chairman of the Woman's Division of the Nebraska Democratic Party, wrote to say that personally she was glad for Maud's filing. Maud was a pioneer and "eventually" women would "take their place actively in politics." Her candidacy would "mean much to the next generation."<sup>44</sup> The Democratic National Committeewoman, Mrs. Evelyn Ryan, was cordial and noted that Nebraska women had been slow to join the ranks of office-seekers.<sup>45</sup>

Former Nebraska governor Keith Neville, Democratic National Committeeman, did not remember ever meeting Maud. He did not share her view that "factional strife" was a detriment, but rather such strife was an indicator of "strong and virile leadership."<sup>46</sup> Since Maud would never exercise "virile" leadership, her hope was that in a crowded field she might get the votes of women, Methodists, and the network of acquaintances she and her family knew from their years in Nebraska.

In addition to the flurry of mailings, Maud tried as best she could to visit towns across the state. She and Bob sorted the requests so that Maud could appear where the most people would be gathered or where her presence might win "real votes." The *Omaha World-Herald* reported her appearance

at a picnic held at Krug Park by the Tenth Ward Democratic Club. The paper found it noteworthy that Maud's headquarters was in her home and she was campaigning in the family car, with her son acting both as chauffeur and campaign manager. Maud, who never did learn to drive, clipped the notice, but appended no commentary about its subtly patronizing tone. Perhaps she was grateful for any coverage that was not overtly hostile.<sup>47</sup>

Otoe County treasurer Charles Kelly reported on another of Maud's appearances, this one in Nebraska City, in a letter to one of Andrew Nuquist's business associates:

Your friend from Osceola Mrs. Nuquist made a most favorable impression and received the biggest applause of all the candidates. This applause came when she said: "A housekeeper is accustomed to making one dollar do the work of two; the trouble with most politicians is that they make two dollars do the work of one." Mrs. Nuquist has a pleasing manner and her voice carries well and you folks at Osceola have every reason to be proud of your candidate.<sup>48</sup>

That meeting afforded Maud her first opportunity to hear all but one of the nine Democratic candidates speak. Fremont Mayor John Rohn endorsed Roosevelt and said that relief was the most important problem before the people. If elected, he would call a special session of the legislature to work out a more rational and effective manner of handling welfare issues. Maud wrote Rohn to say she thought his idea a fine and constructive one.

Rohn replied on July 13, surprised to be complimented by a fellow candidate. He commented that Maud's speech had been "one of the few that reached beyond the material and into the ideal." He suggested that he, Maud, "and perhaps some others" should combine to defeat Congressman Terry Carpenter, the candidate behind which "the other favor seeking interests are strongly entrenched."<sup>49</sup>

Now that Maud had embarked on the campaign, she was not yet ready to stop. She wanted to carry her message

directly to the people as best she could. Her idea of governing, then and forever after, was that officials are servants of those they govern, charged to listen to all ideas, and to adopt the best and most helpful, no matter from whom or from what party they originated.

So the campaign continued through the broiling days of Nebraska's hottest summer. During the last full week before the primary, Andrew and Edith returned from Wisconsin to help. Andrew would accompany Maud through southeastern, central, and southwestern Nebraska, beginning with a day in Omaha. Joe would cover the northwestern and Bob the northeastern sections of the state.<sup>50</sup>

Maud's cousin, J. T. Stanton, was a candidate for reelection as Polk County attorney. He had written her in March offering his support. Now, in the August heat, he gave Maud a week despite his own campaign, professional, and family responsibilities. It seemed wise that someone accompany Joe, so the two of them traveled together in Stanton's automobile. Because Joe was always in danger of a seizure, the family tried to discourage his driving. Stanton and Joe visited three to four towns a day, beginning with a stop at a newspaper office wherever there was one. They began at Dannebrog.<sup>51</sup>

Maud heard good reports about Bob's efforts. For example, a Mrs. Armitage wrote from Albion:

Mr. Armitage says he has heard several men say that his was the fairest, cleanest speech free from rancor or personalities that has been given on the streets of Albion this year. In these days of so much campaign bitterness, that seems to be a very fine compliment. Many club-women here are supporting you—at least the *true blue* Democrats are.<sup>52</sup>

In the meantime Maud and Andrew toiled in the heat from Omaha through Falls City, Brownville, and Auburn, where there was not as big a crowd as they had hoped. They talked to anyone who would listen. There was a good and attentive crowd in Beatrice. While they were in Beatrice, they heard about a picnic in Odell. They hurried over and

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found two or three thousand people assembled. Maud felt her talk was well received and that the crowd was attentive. Unfortunately they ran out of handbills.<sup>53</sup>

That week, Edith Nuquist's mother wrote to her from her home in South Dakota:

I suspect you will be on an anxious seat until after the elections to see whether Mrs. N. gets a good showing in the primary. You know there are a lot of men who think a woman can't tell them anything and aren't brainy enough for Gov.<sup>54</sup>

The vote on August 14 seemed a confirmation of those sentiments. Roy Cochran won the Democratic nomination. Maud placed sixth in the field of nine, well down in the also-ran category. On the Republican side Dwight Griswold was nominated. In Maud's home county of Polk, Griswold received 678 votes. Roy Cochran led the Democratic vote-getters with 589, while Maud attracted 533.<sup>55</sup> It was widely believed that the Republicans had no chance in the general election. Whoever won the Democratic primary would be the next governor, which proved to be the case.

Maud had no regrets about her attempt to win the nomination. She knew that even in Osceola there were people who were scandalized that she had chosen to run. She did think she might have won if women had supported her. She had counted on the votes of the women's clubs, assuming that the women who had been so enthusiastic in support of her club leadership would be equally enthusiastic about her leadership of state government.

In March, Maud had received a letter from a club member urging her to run as an independent. She would need only a thousand signatures to have her name added to the ballot, and many people wished to vote for a candidate not "under the thumb of political machines."<sup>56</sup> Maud, however, believed so strongly in President Roosevelt and his policies that she wanted to continue to be part of his party. She believed in political parties; she hoped, however, they could be more responsive to the people and less responsive to special interests.<sup>57</sup>



While president of the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs, Maud Nuquist planted a tree during a 1931 Federation meeting in Wahoo. Courtesy of author.

Maud Nuquist's campaign proved to be the beginning of a whole new phase of her public life. Governor Cochran thought so well of Maud Nuquist as a worthy opponent and as a representative of a large, potent group of women who had a sincere objective, that he ap-

pointed her as director of the state Bureau of Child Welfare.<sup>58</sup> Since she had advocated a professionally trained person for that post, she accepted the appointment reluctantly, making it clear she considered herself the bridge between the old system of political ap-

pointments and the new system with a professional director, appointed because of training, qualifications, and experience.<sup>59</sup>

Upon assuming her new position, she immediately appointed a professionally trained assistant. When the federal social security laws were passed in 1935, the bureau established the original programs for Aid to Dependent Children, Crippled Children's Services, and many others in Nebraska. During her tenure she served as sponsor for a 1936 survey of Nebraska's care of the poor, children, and the aged, of veterans, of the handicapped, and of juvenile and adult offenders, and appointed a committee to oversee the project. Labor was supplied by the WPA.<sup>60</sup>

After two years as director of the child welfare bureau, Harry Becker, her professional assistant, succeeded Maud upon her recommendation. Governor Cochran nominated Maud and the Legislature confirmed her six-year appointment to the Board of Control. She served there until 1943, the last two years as chairman.

In 1937 the Legislature placed the Department of State Assistance and Child Welfare under the jurisdiction of the Board of Control, which already governed all seventeen state charitable, reformatory, and penal institutions in Nebraska.<sup>61</sup> Because of the board's energy in obtaining funds from the WPA, the "building program was unprecedented in the history of the institution, for scope of accomplishment in a short space of time."<sup>62</sup> Maud continued to urge the hiring of professionally qualified management and staff for each of the institutions under board oversight, and to encourage treatment and training rather than long-term custodial care.

Maud also returned to Federation work and served again on the national board of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, this time as director of the Division of Child Welfare.

For the eight years of her government service, Maud lived in Lincoln during the week, returning to Osceola for the weekends. She and Andrew hired a

housekeeper so Andrew would continue to have his meals on time and his supply of clean shirts. This arrangement occasioned much jest, gossip, and criticism in Osceola, especially among the men, to which neither Andrew nor Maud paid much attention.<sup>63</sup>

In 1943 Andrew F. Nuquist wrote family members a letter that clearly mirrored Maud's views:

Your Aunt Maud is also busy but she is going to come home by July 1 as she told the Governor that she was not an applicant for reappointment . . . he appointed a man to take her place and there, I think, he made a mistake and he is getting plenty of kicks regarding it.

There is getting to be too much politics at Lincoln and in the Board of Control which should be non-political, so she don't like that and is glad to leave. She has been at Lincoln the past eight years and [I] think for her to be home suits her best.<sup>64</sup>

Maud and Andrew lived quietly until Andrew's death in an automobile accident in 1946. Maud remained in their Osceola home for the rest of her life, active in her church, the woman's club, and the many other organizations to which she belonged. One of the last times she presided at a podium was on October 21, 1962, when, at age eighty, she served as organizer and presiding chairman of a program honoring United Nations Day in Osceola. She died in 1968 at the age of eighty-six.

Maud was an organized, honest, efficient administrator whose unyielding commitment to principle perhaps meant she was temperamentally unsuited to the compromises of politics. Her drive and her achievement were to improve the lives of Nebraska's children, pensioners, infirm, and others who needed an advocate.

Maud Nuquist's candidacy was a short, exciting detour on a long road. It would be several years before other Nebraska women made that turn, eventually to be elected governor. In 1986 both the Nebraska Republican and Democratic parties nominated women as candidates for governor, marking the first such contest between two women in U.S. history.<sup>65</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Julia G. Himes to Maud E. Nuquist, Oct. 30, 1932. (Unless otherwise noted, all letters and manuscripts are in the author's possession.)

<sup>2</sup> Maud E. Nuquist to Eleanor Roosevelt, Jan. 24, 1934, File 190 Miscellaneous, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>3</sup> "Woman For Governor," *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), Feb. 27, 1934; "Mrs. A. F. Nuquist Asked to Enter Governor's Race," *Omaha World-Herald*, Feb. 28, 1934.

<sup>4</sup> Bayard H. Paine to Nuquist, Feb. 27, 1934.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Jean Houde, *Reaching Out* (Chicago: The Mobium Press, 1989), 208.

<sup>6</sup> Maud E. Nuquist, unpaginated notes between the covers of a blue notebook which, by comparison with her travel itinerary, speeches, and campaign materials, appear to have been written between 1932 and 1934 (hereafter cited as Nuquist notebook).

<sup>7</sup> Maud E. Nuquist, *PEO History*, 1943.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph W. Edgerton to Nuquist, Feb. 10, 1931.

<sup>9</sup> "Address to State Convention," *The Nebraska Club Woman* 20 (1931): 1.

<sup>10</sup> Nuquist, *PEO History*.

<sup>11</sup> *Summary Survey of Social Resources of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Works Progress Administration, Dec. 1936), 47-48; Maud E. Nuquist interview by Edith W. Nuquist, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> "Report of Mrs. A. F. Nuquist, President, 1930, Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs," typescript, 5, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Winifred B. Scott to Nuquist, Feb. 28, 1934.

<sup>14</sup> Mrs. M. S. McDuffee to Nuquist, Feb. 28, 1934.

<sup>15</sup> "Message of the State President," *The Nebraska Club Woman*, 20 (1931) 1: 4.

<sup>16</sup> Nuquist notebook.

<sup>17</sup> Grace Morrison Poole to Nuquist, Mar. 5, 1934.

<sup>18</sup> Ashton C. Shallenberger to Nuquist, Mar. 7, 1934.

<sup>19</sup> Mary W. Dewson to Nuquist, Apr. 9, 1934.

<sup>20</sup> Grace Abbott to Nuquist, May 10, 1934. Maud had as teachers at Grand Island High School both Grace and her older sister, Edith Abbott, who went on to obtain a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Chicago, to become the legendary dean of the School of Social Service Administration there, and to write more than one hundred books and articles. Both sisters were renowned in later years as magnificent teachers.

<sup>21</sup> Nuquist notebook.

<sup>22</sup> Nuquist, *PEO History*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>24</sup> Nuquist notebook.
- <sup>25</sup> "Address to State Convention," 1.
- <sup>26</sup> Nuquist notebook.
- <sup>27</sup> Maud Nuquist, "Planning Board in 20 Projects—15 Members for Iowa Serve Without Pay," typescript.
- <sup>28</sup> Nuquist notebook.
- <sup>29</sup> Nuquist, *PEO History*.
- <sup>30</sup> Winifred B. Scott to Nuquist, Mar. 11, 1934.
- <sup>31</sup> Laura Waples McMullen to Nuquist, July 15, 1934.
- <sup>32</sup> J. Edgar Edgerton to Nuquist, July 6, 1934. Edgerton's letter commented, "Kind of proud of you, Sis, and I only wish I could be back on the battlefield and add something in the way of actual support . . .  
"To show you my good intentions, I am enclosing my check for \$25.00 as a small contribution to your expense account, and I wish I could make it \$1,000."
- <sup>33</sup> Emily Guiwits to Andrew E. Nuquist, July 25, 1934.
- <sup>34</sup> Robert E. Nuquist, interview by author, Oct. 24, 1981.
- <sup>35</sup> William P. Price to Nuquist, June 28, 1934.
- <sup>36</sup> Evelyn Mills Minier to Nuquist, July 17, 1934.
- <sup>37</sup> Anna Day Chastain to Nuquist, July 5, 1934.
- <sup>38</sup> Marie K. Brown to Nuquist, July 21, 1934.
- <sup>39</sup> William Ross King to Nuquist, July 19, 1934.
- <sup>40</sup> Campaign materials in author's possession.
- <sup>41</sup> Mrs. William Witte Jr. to Nuquist, July 29, 1934.
- <sup>42</sup> Grace Welsh Lutgen to Nuquist, undated. Perhaps here is a record of a second financial contribution. The letter ends: "Here is a little personal matter with my love. A bit crude but sincere."
- <sup>43</sup> Mrs. M. R. Byrnes to Nuquist, July 12, 1934.
- <sup>44</sup> Carrie S. Bailey to Nuquist, July 14, 1934.
- <sup>45</sup> Evelyn A. Ryan to Nuquist, July 16, 1934.
- <sup>46</sup> Keith Neville to Nuquist, July 10, 1934.
- <sup>47</sup> "Woman Candidate Urges a Nebraska Brain Trust," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 18, 1934.
- <sup>48</sup> Charles L. Kelly to Kenneth Cornish, July 13, 1934.
- <sup>49</sup> John F. Rohn to Nuquist, July 13, 1934.
- <sup>50</sup> "Most of Candidates Centering Fight in Omaha This Week," *Grand Island Independent*, Aug. 6, 1934.
- <sup>51</sup> J. T. Stanton to Nuquist, Mar. 22, 1934; "Joe and Stanton," schedule in Maud Nuquist's handwriting, undated.
- <sup>52</sup> Mrs. A. C. Armitage to Nuquist, undated.
- <sup>53</sup> Andrew E. Nuquist to Edith W. Nuquist, Aug. 8 and 9, 1934.
- <sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Wilson to Edith W. Nuquist, July 26, 1934.
- <sup>55</sup> *Report of the Nebraska State Canvassing Board, Primary Election, 1934*, RG2, microfilm at Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln;
- "Record Vote in Polk County," *The Osceola Record*, Aug. 16, 1934. Nuquist received 7,018 votes statewide in the Democratic primary. Winner R. L. Cochran received 54,961 votes.
- <sup>56</sup> Mary H. Axtell to Nuquist, Mar. 12, 1934.
- <sup>57</sup> Nuquist notebook.
- <sup>58</sup> "State Capitol News—June 20, 1943," relating to Maud Nuquist retirement ceremonies.
- <sup>59</sup> Nuquist, *PEO History*, 1.
- <sup>60</sup> *Summary Survey of Social Resources*, introduction.
- <sup>61</sup> *Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Board of Control of Nebraska for the period ending June 30, 1943*, 9.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>63</sup> Harriet J. Newcomer, interview by author, July 24, 1992.
- <sup>64</sup> Andrew F. Nuquist to "Dear Folks," Apr. 8, 1943.
- <sup>65</sup> Other woman candidates for governor were Mina B. Dillingham, Democrat, 1952; Mabel Fossler, Democrat, 1954; Hazel Abel, Republican, 1960; and Darlene Brooks, Democrat, 1962. Brooks was the widow of Governor Ralph G. Brooks, who died in office in 1960. Helen Boosalis and Kay Orr in 1986 were the first female gubernatorial candidates in Nebraska to advance to the general election. Orr, a Republican, was elected.