

## Museum Notes

by Kristen-Parrott, curator  
for the week of 3/11/2015

Recently, just as we were thinking about how to celebrate Women's History Month, by a happy coincidence we were given several old newspaper clippings about a notable Vernon County woman. We have been excited to learn about her contributions to Wisconsin history, and this special month is a good time to share her story with you.

Maud Neprud was born in Coon Valley in 1892. She trained to be a teacher, and then taught history and civics for a few years at high schools in Tomahawk and La Crosse. These subjects interested her throughout her whole life, and especially informed her involvement in the women's suffrage movement.

In 1917, Maud ran for the office of Superintendent of Schools of Vernon County. At that time, women did not have the full right to vote or to run for office. Women in Wisconsin in 1917 could vote or run only in school elections. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified a few years later, in 1920, granting women full suffrage.

Women in Vernon County were encouraged to exercise their limited voting rights by voting for Maud Neprud. The Coon Valley News reported in the spring of 1917 that Maud was campaigning heavily throughout the county: "During the past two weeks she has reached by train, livery or stage, the following places: Chaseburg, Stoddard, Genoa, Victory, De Soto, Ontario, Hillsboro, La Farge, Readstown, and Viola.... This week she is working back to her home territory having already made Red Mound, Retreat, West Prairie, Liberty Pole and Westby. She expects to visit Bloomingdale, Avalanche, Springville, Bud and Esofea before returning home...."

Her hard work paid off when she won that election. Maud Neprud was the first woman in Vernon County to be elected to public office. She was also the first woman in Wisconsin to be elected as a county schools superintendent, according to one obituary. She served one two-year term, 1917-1919. Her bid for re-election in 1919 was not successful.

Later in 1919, Maud was appointed by the governor to serve on the Wisconsin State Board of Control, which oversaw all of the state's charitable institutions and penal institutions. She served on this board as a paid member until 1923.

In 1921 Maud Neprud married Christian Otjen. They settled in Milwaukee. There Maud continued her work for women's suffrage by helping to organize the Milwaukee County League of Women Voters and then serving as its president. She later served as president of the state League of Women Voters.

Her whole life was marked by service and leadership. She was active on the home front during both world wars. Proud of her Norwegian ancestors, she helped to arrange the visit of a member of the Norwegian royal family to Milwaukee in 1939. She held leadership positions in the state Republican party.

Christian and Maud had one child, Carl Neprud Otjen. Maud (Neprud) Otjen died in Milwaukee in 1981, and is buried there. Another remarkable woman in Vernon County's history!

