

Andrew E. Nuquist and the Founding of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns

One of the main forces behind the establishment of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) was Andrew Nuquist, a professor of political science at the University of Vermont (UVM). Nuquist and the UVM Center for Governmental Study (now the Center for Research on Vermont) provided leadership and administrative support in helping VLCT become an organized and operating association. This article tells the story of Andrew Nuquist.

Andrew Edgerton Nuquist was born in Osceola, Nebraska, on December 3, 1905. He was the oldest of the four children (three boys and a girl) of Andrew F. and Maude (Edgerton) Nuquist.

Nuquist grew up in Osceola, a small (pop. 900) rural town in the Nebraska heartland. After graduation from high school, he attended Doane College, a private college in Crete, Nebraska, where in 1926 he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and later, after teaching English at a Methodist school in China, earned his Master of Arts degree in 1936. During this time, he married Edith E. Wilson.

Two years later, Nuquist was attending the University of Wisconsin in pursuit of a Ph.D. degree when UVM hired him as a political science instructor. He, his wife, and his young son promptly moved to Burlington. In 1939, upon completion of his Ph.D. (his thesis was titled “Chinese Legal Codes as Causation and Effect in Chinese Political Thought”) he became a professor in the Department of Political Science. In a [2004 article](#) published in the Vermont Historical Society’s quarterly, *Vermont History*, Nuquist’s daughter Elizabeth Raby writes about her family’s move to Vermont:

My father and mother, Andrew E. and Edith W. Nuquist, came to Burlington, Vermont, in 1938, when my father was hired as an instructor in political science at the University of Vermont. My father was glad to have found a job during such difficult economic times. Natives of Nebraska, my parents did not then suspect that the move to Vermont would be permanent. To make the trip to Burlington from the University of Wisconsin, where he had been a student in the Ph.D. program, my father purchased an ancient truck. Mother remembered with considerable embarrassment the final labored climb of the old truck, backfiring and spewing exhaust, up Pearl Street to the apartment my father had rented for his family. Everything they owned was crammed into or tied to the top of the overloaded vehicle. When my father arrived in Vermont, his field of interest was international relations. Very soon, however, he became fascinated by his adopted state. Although he always retained his internationalist outlook, he became a specialist in the local and state governments of Vermont.

Soon after his arrival in Vermont, Nuquist met James P. Taylor, who was the Executive Secretary of the Vermont Chamber of Commerce. Among Taylor’s many accomplishments were the founding of the Green Mountain Club to create and build the Long Trail and the

establishment of the annual Vermont town report contest, which later became the James P. Taylor Awards of Excellence for Town Reports. Taylor invited Nuquist to help judge the town reports and he agreed. Taylor made sure that Nuquist became acquainted with Vermont local government by taking him along to many meetings, as Nuquist notes in the introduction to his book, *Town Government in Vermont*:

It was Jim Taylor who came to me one day and asked if I would be interested in doing some work on Town Reports; upon my affirmative answer there began an active and burdensome relationship that ended only with Jim Taylor's death in 1950 [1949]. The meetings which had already been scheduled and which Jim thought I should attend – there were meetings for mayors, for town managers, for business leaders, for state officers, for political figures, or for all combined. The inevitable opening statement, until I had made the rounds and was known at least by sight to most of the men, and made in his own inimitable style which is not here reproduced was, "This young pup wants to learn something about local government and since you know all about it, it is time you start teaching him a part of what you know."

Nuquist's son, Andrew S. – who we discovered lives a mile from the VLCT offices – remembers seeing town reports spread out on the floor at home as his father worked to review them all.

Nuquist's interest in Vermont state and local government then became a main focus of his career at UVM. Besides the aforementioned *Town Government in Vermont*, published in 1964, he also wrote, with his wife Edith, *Vermont State Government and Administration*, which was published in 1966. In 1999, the Snelling Center for Government and the Center for Research on Vermont published *Vermont State Government Since 1965*, which updated information in Nuquist's book.

In 1946, Nuquist launched an unsuccessful bid for U.S. Congress on the Republican ticket. He ran against incumbent Congressman Charles Plumley. Elizabeth Raby's previously cited *Vermont History* article gives a wonderful account of the Nuquist campaign. Nuquist's son Andrew S. recalls travelling around the state with his father as he campaigned. He gained respect for his father's ability to engage with people from all walks of life. He once asked his father what he was going to speak about at a campaign stop. "I don't know," he answered, "they haven't told me yet." Nuquist was apparently able to speak on any topic.

A side note: Nuquist's mother Maude also ran for political office. She was the first woman to run for Governor in Nebraska (in 1934). She ran in the Democratic primary where she finished sixth out of nine candidates. Raby also wrote [an article](#) about her campaign that was published by the Nebraska Historical Society.

In the early 1960s, while writing his book about Vermont local government, Nuquist also worked with local government officials to establish a statewide organization to represent the interests of Vermont cities and towns.

On September 22, 1965, a meeting for the organization of a state municipal league was held in Montpelier. While attendance and interest was not enough to launch the league, a slate of temporary officers was elected to continue to pursue the idea.

On June 27, 1967, Montpelier was the site of another organizational meeting. A memo from Andrew Nuquist, dated June, 9, 1967, announced the meeting.

Brattleboro Town Manager Corwin Elwell, who presided over the organizational meeting, later described it thusly:

City and Town officials gathered in Montpelier City Hall in response to a call by Andrew E. Nuquist, UVM Professor and chief initiator of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. The meeting was called “to create a permanent organization to function effectively in serving the needs of local governments in Vermont.” At that meeting, Mr. Hollis Yorke of Readsboro stated that he thought the League to be “a good idea, and that it should above all have a strong and effective lobbyist at the legislature.” Mr. Joseph Abair of Montpelier agreed saying “that his years of observing the legislature have convinced him there is a need for a real lobbyist for the towns.”

Upon VLCT’s official organization, Andrew Nuquist became its Acting Executive Director, a role he held until April 14, 1968, when Henry Warren, Town Manager of Woodstock, began work as permanent Executive Director. (See [related article](#).) The original VLCT office shared space with the UVM Government Research Center in the “Old Mill Building” on the UVM campus and soon thereafter at a UVM building at 475 Main Street in Burlington.



VLCT office, 475 Main Street, Burlington, Vt.

Nuquist continued to be active with VLCT and the UVM Center for Governmental Studies continued to provide administrative and salary support to Warren. When, after less than a year, Warren quit, Nuquist again stepped in to help, this time serving as Interim Executive Director for six months (March 15-December 31, 1969), when Robert Stewart assumed the role of Executive Director.

Andrew Nuquist also served Vermont cities and towns by helping to organize the annual Town Officer Education Conference (TOEC), which is now organized by the UVM Extension Service.

A passage from *Town Government in Vermont* describes early “town officers’ schools”:

Within a year I began attending the Town Officers’ Schools – a series of meetings for town officials which were held each fall throughout Vermont. I learned the importance of getting these schools organized so that they would not interfere with corn-cutting and yet be held before the fall rains began. ... Once in a while, after the hearty noon meals served for the large sum of fifty cents by the ladies of some church or organization, the leaders of the school would pile into one or two cars and drive out along some rural road for a few minutes away from the crowds. Then amidst much chaffing and stories of the Tunbridge Fair, a pint of ‘medicine’ would circulate the group and a wee nip would be taken to nerve the participants for the afternoon sessions. The town officials would oftentimes go to their cars for a bit of communion with the cup that cheers, but very rarely and to the acute embarrassment of fellow townsmen, was it taken too liberally.

After a distinguished teaching career at UVM, Andrew Nuquist died in Jericho, Vermont, on September 4, 1975, at age sixty nine.

Two awards currently recognize Nuquist’s devotion and contributions to Vermont government. Since 1982, the **Andrew E. Nuquist Award**, a competitive prize, has been offered annually for outstanding undergraduate research on a Vermont topic, usually a culminating study, a thesis, or year-long project. And the Vermont League of Cities and Towns offers an **Andrew Nuquist Government Service Award** that recognizes a Vermonter who is not a local government official but who shows exceptional awareness of local government problems and who works to strengthen cities and towns.

I am sure Andrew Nuquist would be both pleased and proud to see that his efforts to establish a strong and vibrant Vermont League of Cities and Towns that supports and promotes the interests of Vermont cities and towns has been so successful.

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