

Margaret “Mabel” Griffin Fitzgerald



Lifespan: 101 years, 1897-1998. Born in Wisner, Cuming, Nebraska on 01/15/1897. Died on 01/30/1998, in White Lake, of natural causes. She is buried in the St. John's Catholic Cemetery in Plankinton.

Locations: Cuming County, NE (1897), White Lake (1903), Plankinton (1921), White Lake (1992).

Spouse: Raphael/Ray Vincent Fitzgerald, 1889-1980. Married 06/22/1921 in White Lake. Ray owned and operated the Fitzgerald Implement Company and John Deere Dealership in Plankinton from 1914 to 1956. His parents, first-generation Irish American, homesteaded in Miner County, SD, where they raised five children.

Mabel Fitzgerald Profile: Mabel Griffin Fitzgerald was a strong woman, a staunch Democrat, a life-long Catholic, and a feminist before her time. Raised in a large, farming family, Mabel chartered a career course uncommon for women of her era. She attended college out of state, taught school, and then pursued a full-time career after her four children were born. Respected by her peers, throughout her 29-year career as a postmistress, she was elected to serve as the state president of the National Association of Postal Supervisors.

Mabel celebrated 101 birthdays. She lived through the Depression, six wars or major conflicts, and nineteen U.S. Presidents. She was witness to the transition from horsepower to space travel and from telegraph to the internet. Twenty-two years old when American women achieved the right to vote, she never lost her lifelong interest in politics. Mabel had very high standards and frequently admonished her grandchildren and great-grandchildren to sit up straight and corrected mispronounced or misused words. She was known as a very elegant and gracious, well-dressed woman. Neighbor children were awed that her home contained its own personal library, filled with the books she loved. She aged gracefully and remained very active until the last years of her long life. When she was 85, she completely redecorated her house and when she 90, she purchased a brand, new car.

When Mabel Griffin Fitzgerald celebrated her 100th birthday, she said,

I admit that my choices (marriage, motherhood, a career, and community work) were not the standard at the time, but I never felt my life extraordinary. I made choices that were rewarding and fulfilling for me.

Roles/Talent: Wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, teacher, professional woman, homemaker, voracious reader, life-long learner, active Democrat Party member, American Legion Auxiliary member, enjoyed crochet, golf, bowling, gardening, playing cards, traveling (once visited Cuba), and visiting with family and neighbors

Parents/Ethnicity: Michael Griffin and Margaret Kane, both first generation Irish American.

Children: 4 children, born 1923-1933. Raphael/Doom Vincent, Jr. (Helen Ruth O'Donnell), Robert (Dorothy Dirkswager), Mary Ruth (Frank Mika), Kathleen.

Sisters: Ellen (died in infancy), Margaret Flynn, Mary Ruth Leahy, and Helen Strand.

Brothers: William, John, George, Joseph, Eugene, Francis, Delwin.

Education: White Lake High School (Mabel and a fellow student were the fourth graduating class in 1915) and St Clara College in Sinsinawa Mound, Wisconsin (no longer in existence).

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Work Experience: Mabel taught school in White Lake for two years (1919-1921). In 1933, Mabel was appointed Postmistress at Plankinton. She served in that role for 29 years, until 1962. She served as the elected President of the South Dakota Postmasters, a branch of the National Association of Postal Supervisors, in 1940 and 1941.

Church, Clubs/Organizations: Life-long Catholic and a member of St John's Catholic Church, Plankinton.

Family Connections: Mabel Griffin's parents came from Chicago to Nebraska where they bought a farm in about 1891. In 1903, when Mabel was about six years old, the family moved with all 11 children to White Lake where land prices were cheaper. Mabel's father and three brothers drove a lumber wagon and her mother and the rest of the children came to South Dakota by immigrant train. Those trains were reserved for land seekers heading west. Passengers could transport their household goods, personal belongings, farm machinery, livestock, and pets on the same train. The Griffins raised cattle and hogs and racehorses. They owned a horse named Shady Gray who later won fame as the champion trotter of all Europe.

Each of Mabel's four children owned farmland in Aurora County, Ray/Fitz/Doom and Bob farmed their land for several years. Eventually, all parcels of land were sold. Only one of Mabel's 18 grandchildren (one of her daughter, Mary Ruth Fitzgerald Mika's, children) continues to own and farm their land in nearby Kimball in Brule County.

Time in Aurora County: 95 years

Physical Appearance: Mabel was of medium height and build. She was an attractive woman with perfect posture.

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Submitter: Maureen Fitzgerald, her granddaughter.



Picture 1: Griffin Michael White Lake Farm

Picture 2: Fitzgerald Family 1940s. Back: Kathleen, Mary Ruth, Mabel. Front, Ray, Jr., Ray Sr., Bob

Picture 3: Fitzgerald Family 1980s. Back: Kathleen, Mary Ruth. Front, Ray, Jr., Mabel, Bob,