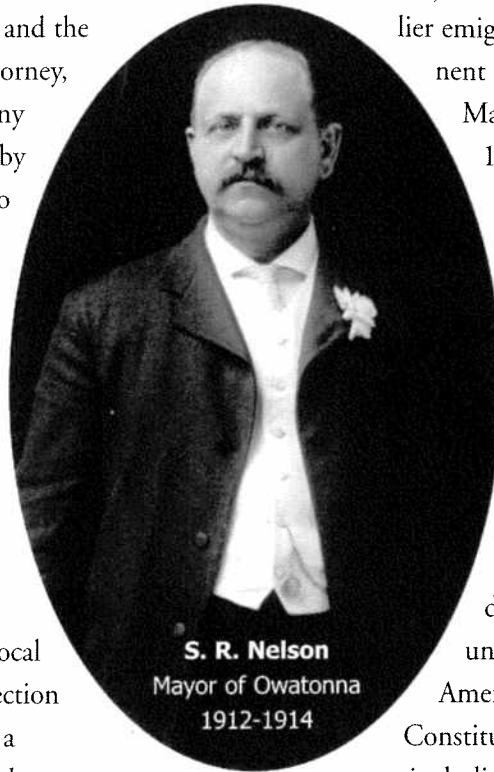


The new charter called for seven aldermen — one from each of five wards and two at large. This format is still in place today. The charter also provided for the election of a treasurer, clerk, and municipal judge and the appointment of the city attorney, assessor, and engineer. Many duties formerly performed by the council were assigned to these officers.

Up until this time, Owatonna elections had been quite partisan with the Republicans in control in the early days, but, for a dozen or so years after 1890, the Democrats usually prevailed. Many lamented the bitterness of local elections because of the injection of national issues. In 1902 a Republican mayor was unable to secure the cooperation of a Democratic council — a situation that upset many serious minded citizens. In 1910, after the adoption of the new charter, a call for a nonpartisan convention was issued. Republicans and Democrats assembled in separate rooms of the courthouse, and the Democrats invited the Republicans to join them — courteously vacating the front seats for their visitors. According to a report of the day, “harmony and goodwill prevailed.”

An important figure in Owatonna government

who emerged at this time was S. R. (Soren Rasmus) Nelson. Born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1855, he came to Minnesota in 1873 to join family members who had earlier emigrated. Nelson was a prominent businessman and served as Mayor of Owatonna from 1912-1914.



S. R. Nelson
Mayor of Owatonna
1912-1914

In a pioneering move, Mayor Nelson appointed three leading women of the town to the Library Board. All three nominations, however, were rejected by the City Council on the grounds of gender. Remember, women did not have the right to vote until the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U. S.

Area newspapers, including those in Austin and Rochester, took the Owatonna council to task over this rejection with comments such as “the council may search the town with a fine tooth comb and not find a set of men better qualified than these same women”... “Ninety per cent of cities have women on the Board, but Owatonna prefers to remain with the submerged tenth, which is along the line of some of her other ideas of progressiveness.”

After completing his term as mayor, S. R. Nelson was admitted to the bar in 1915

(at age 60!) and joined his son, Harold Nelson, who had begun a law firm in 1911. The elder Nelson remarked in a newspaper account of his bar admittance, “Young men for war and old men for counsel.” Son Harold joked that perhaps the law firm should be named “Harold Nelson & Father.” Instead, the firm became Nelson & Nelson. Others who joined this firm over the years were son Otto J. Nelson, Byron Casey, Wallace Tripp, and George Dow. The firm as it exists today is Dow, Einhaus, Mattison, and Carver, which has offices in the Parrott Building on North Cedar, as it has for many years.

S. R. Nelson had also served as the founding president of the Owatonna City Hospital Board. Other members of his family active in community service were brother Rasmus, who served five terms as an alderman; sister Ellen (Eustis), first woman elected to the Owatonna School Board; and son Otto, who served with the Minnesota National Guard on the Mexican Border and in WW I, and who later joined the family law firm in 1921. Son Harold served several terms as County Attorney, President of the Pillsbury Academy Board of Directors, and as a Minnesota State Senator.

Familiar names involved in early city government were 1906 Mayor H. S. Dartt, son of the Dartt's Park developer; Aldermen Mark Alexander (Alexander Lumber); Cline Tincher (TPS Insurance); G. J. Kaplan of the North Star Iron Works, forerunner of the Owatonna

Tool Company (Klemmer Equipment Company) was widow Miriam (Klemmer) Kasper.

Upon construction in 1906, City Hall second floor. It housed, as well as the city assessor, city assessor's office, floor also housed

City engineering in the basement, a few years the council election with the Other boards are by the council

In February 1955 city services, occupied Building, which and Cedar. This became a community sorts, offering

