

The Minnesota Legislature has drawn lawmakers from many walks of life, but only one used a headlock and a half Nelson to defeat his opponents.

Rep. Helmer Myre not only represented Albert Lea, Minn., in the Legislature but was a U.S. light heavyweight champion wrestler who later became a world light heavyweight champion.

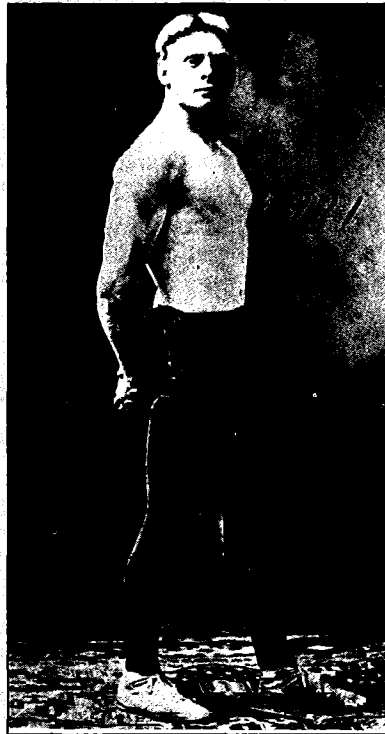
Myre won and lost various wrestling titles from 1918 until the end of his grappling career in 1925. He wrestled approximately 500 matches in all.

Myre and his wife, Ethel, moved from Iowa to Geneva, Minn., in 1918, and to Albert Lea in 1921. He served in the Minnesota House from 1939 to 1943 and in the Minnesota Senate from 1947 to 1951. He also served as sheriff of Freeborn County from 1928 to 1939.

To describe Myre as tough was an understatement. He once wrestled out of his weight class, taking on Ed "Strangler" Lewis, a heavyweight champion who had a 52-pound weight advantage over Myre.

One newspaper account said: "The wrestling world will admit that any light heavyweight who can stay 57 minutes and 35 seconds with Ed "Strangler" Lewis, the far-famed heavyweight, is a mighty tough grappler. . . . The big Kentuckian had to call on his headlock, the most wicked hold in the game, to win the match with."

## It's a fact!



Rep. Helmer Myre not only represented Albert Lea, Minn., in the Legislature but was a U.S. light heavyweight champion wrestler who later became a world light heavyweight champion.

Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

As sheriff of Freeborn County, Myre needed to be just as tough.

In 1935, a riot broke out at the D.A. Potter Foundry Co. over what union officials called a broken agreement with management concerning the dismissal of some employees.

According to a newspaper account of the riot, Myre was "heroic" and "stood off single handed — for considerable time — a mob of some two hundred or more infuriated men. . . . It is reported that Myre, because of his wonderful physique and his experience as a wrestler threw many of his attackers right and left, knocking several to the ground. But on they came. It was then that someone struck the sheriff over the head with some heavy instrument. The blow was a vicious one, but Myre did not go down. This blow was followed by several others against Myre's face, mouth and head."

Little is written about Myre's legislative career but after policing several strikes and labor disputes in Freeborn County, he did sponsor a state labor relations bill.

Myre died in 1951. Two years after his death, the Legislature named a state park in Myre's honor — Helmer Myre State Park, about 2.5 miles east of Albert Lea. In 1948, Myre was a co-sponsor of the bill to create a state park in the area.

## Q&A

### Q. The harvesting of wild rice was regulated by the state in what year?

A. The first attempt to regulate the harvesting of wild rice was passed in 1931. The law made it illegal to harvest wild rice in any public waters of Minnesota by using anything other than a motorless boat or a hand-held tool. "Wantonly" destroying wild rice plants was made a misdemeanor offense.

Later, in 1939, the law was strengthened, and an emergency declared, noting that the wild rice crop "from time immemorial. . . has been a vital factor to the sustenance and continued existence of the Indian race of Minnesota." Commercial harvesting methods were posing an "imminent danger of starvation and misery to large bands of said Indians." The law granted exclusive harvesting rights to Indians on reservation land. Harvesting at night was prohibited. Harvesting licenses

were established (at a cost of 50 cents) and only state residents were eligible. Each licensee was limited to operating only three boats at any given time. This boat limit applied to businesses as well as individuals. A state director of the wild rice harvest was also established by the law. The original 1931 law was repealed, but the misdemeanor penalty carried over to any violation of the 1939 law.