



Gov. Knute Nelson

He was the first foreign-born governor of the state and his statue is close to the office he once occupied.

Gov. Knute Nelson's is one of two memorials on the south steps of the State Capitol. Former Gov. John A. Johnson's is the other.

Nelson was born in Norway in 1849 and sailed to the United States six years later, settling briefly in Chicago before his family moved to Wisconsin.

A Civil War veteran with the Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, Nelson was wounded and taken prisoner in Louisiana in 1863. Following the war, Nelson finished his schooling, was admitted to the bar, and began to practice in Cambridge, Wis.

His political career began with a two-year stint in the Wisconsin assembly in 1868-69. After moving to Alexandria, Minn., in 1871, Nelson was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 1874. He served for four years.

Nelson, a member of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents from 1882-1893, went to Washington D.C. in 1883 as a Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives, but after three terms he decided to return to Minnesota.

However, his political career was far from over as Nelson was elected governor in 1892 and re-elected in 1894. He resigned from the position in Jan. 31, 1895 to run for the U.S. Senate. He served there for 28 years, until his death aboard a train near Timonium, Md. on April 28, 1923 on his way home to Minnesota. He stands as the longest serving Minnesotan in the U.S. Senate.

In Washington, Nelson frequently went against traditional Republicans, as he favored antitrust and income tax legislation. He was also a key player in the formation of the departments of Commerce and Labor.

Sculpted by John K. Daniels, and dedicated in 1928, the statue features Nelson as a statesman surrounded by figures that show him as a child with his mother and as a Civil War soldier.

(M. Cook)

Reflections

Horses are agile, strong, and intelligent, and they played a major role in the growth of Minnesota.

Early in the state's history horses pulled wagons full of pioneers and homesteaders across rugged land to settle in the territory. Later, they were used alongside oxen to haul cartloads of harvested crops or take goods to distant markets, drag logs down to the river for lumber mills downstream, or were harnessed to a carriage for transportation

purposes. In the 1880s, horses were hooked up as the power source to pull streetcars around town.

In fact, the term "workhorse" is an outgrowth of how the animals were used, such as in the hauling of stones and lumber by pulley to the upper levels of the building.

When the State Capitol was completed in 1905, most people arrived at the seat of government by horseback, horse and buggy, or streetcar.

Capitol architect Cass Gilbert provided for an arrival and departure area for horse carriages beneath the south steps that is free from inclement weather. Dignitaries and other visitors only had to take a few strides from there to enter the building.

During the early 1900s, when horse racing was at its peak, many national figures came to see Gilbert's new and magnificent building and to speak at the state fair. Thousands of people listened to famous people talk at the fair, but more went to see racing and exhibitions performed by renowned horses of the day, including the legendary Dan Patch.

Not counting the four horses of the Capitol's Golden Quadriga, Dan Patch is likely the most remembered horse in Minnesota.

Born in Oxford, Indiana in 1896, the horse gained his fame as a champion harness racer across the country. He is still

honored in his home city by the annual "Dan Patch Days." The Indiana Legislature also passed a resolution to rename a state road for the racer, much like the Minnesota State Fair's main street, which is aptly named Dan Patch Avenue.

Joe Patchen, a well-known racehorse, sired Dan Patch, but Patch's owner, Dan Messner, thought the crooked-legged foal would be destined to pull a milk wagon. That was before a local stable owner nurtured the colt

with patience and fortitude.

Dan Patch began to show racing promise as a three-year-old. As a four-year-old, he won so many harness races that other owners refused to have their horses compete against him. By July 1902, he had won 54 of 56 races.

Later that year the horse was purchased by Marion Willis Savage of Hamilton, Minn., who made him the most popular horse in the country, primarily through a series of exhibition races where he raced against the clock. The town of Hamilton was renamed Savage in 1904.

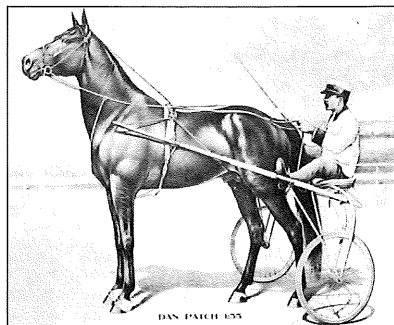
In his heyday, the horse's image was used to promote different products — from tobacco to washing machines — that national companies named after him. He also helped make the Minnesota State Fair one of the best attended in the country with his appearances as a main attraction.

His gentle personality attracted people. According to his owner, Dan Patch understood the attention adults and children gave him and he honored them by winning races and always pacing "with head held high, and in a most dignified manner."

Dan Patch died in 1916 at age 20, and his owner passed away the next day at age 57.

—LECLAIR GRIER LAMBERT

Illustration courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



Dan Patch in 1904.