

Mr. Fairmont

In looking back at the history of Fairmont and Martin County, it is truly amazing as to the number of individuals that have influenced and shaped the area from William Budd to the present time. Their achievements and civic minded ideals have influenced the direction our city and county has gone, from the early years in its history to what still exists and thrives yet today as a result of their endeavors.

One of those entrepreneurial spirits that has made our area a better place is Einar Nelson, at one time referred to, among other complimentary names, as Mr. Fairmont. Nelson was not born into wealth, but from rather humble beginnings he eventually gained a prominent place in Martin County's history. He was born in Albert Lea in 1888. His father died when he was only six years old, and his mother was then left to care for five children under the age of eight, which was no small task in and of itself. As if these hardships weren't enough, he was forced to join the work force before he could graduate from eighth grade. However, a positive attitude permeated his personality, and those events that might have proven insurmountable to others did not seem to affect Nelson, as he went on to become a highly successful businessman, public servant, politician, and significant contributor to the good of our local area.

Although there are many living in Martin County that will certainly remember Einer Nelson, others not familiar with him might well ask what he did to benefit Fairmont and Martin County. After he married Emily Lien in 1910, he and his wife eventually moved to Fairmont in 1920. It was here that he owned and operated the Nelson Ice Cream Company for thirty-seven years. In addition, he also operated a locker business that was once the largest in the United States. However, in addition to being a successful businessman, he was also very civic minded and contributed greatly to Fairmont and Martin County in a number of ways, not only donating his time, but also his resources. He served Fairmont as Mayor, as a city council member, as a school board member, as a member of the Public Utilities Commission, he served on the Salvation Army Board, and he was a member of numerous other civic organizations. Other business and civic projects he was involved with included KSUM, Cable TV, Madsen's Super Valu, helping to fund an expansion project of the Methodist Church, the Fairmont Chamber of Commerce, the Sentinel, the hospital, the United Fund, and more. A staunch republican, he was also sometimes referred to as "Mr. Republican."

According to a March 19, 1984, *Sentinel* editorial written by former *Sentinel* Publisher Ray Stougaard, ". . .he (Nelson) teamed up with Ed Duffey to bring 3M to Fairmont and keep it here." Then when 3M later needed more space, either in Fairmont or elsewhere, Duffey and Nelson sat in on the negotiations. Apparently things weren't going well when Duffy brought about a successful conclusion to the meeting by saying "Me and Einer will build you a building." Consequently, it would appear that as result of this, 3M remained in Fairmont and has been a significant factor in the local economy ever since.

Before Einer Nelson passed away in 1984, he accomplished a great deal, and his legacy lives on today. He likely served as a role model inspiring others in our local area, as many individuals and organizations have quietly followed that civic mindedness that characterized Mr. Nelson's life. Simply look around Fairmont and Martin County and observe the many organizations that survive and flourish as a result of the willingness of people and businesses in this area to provide, either financially, through volunteerism, or both for their well being. Civic mindedness, the development of community pride, and charitable giving lives on in our city and county, even in these times of economic uncertainty.

For more information on Einer Nelson visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.