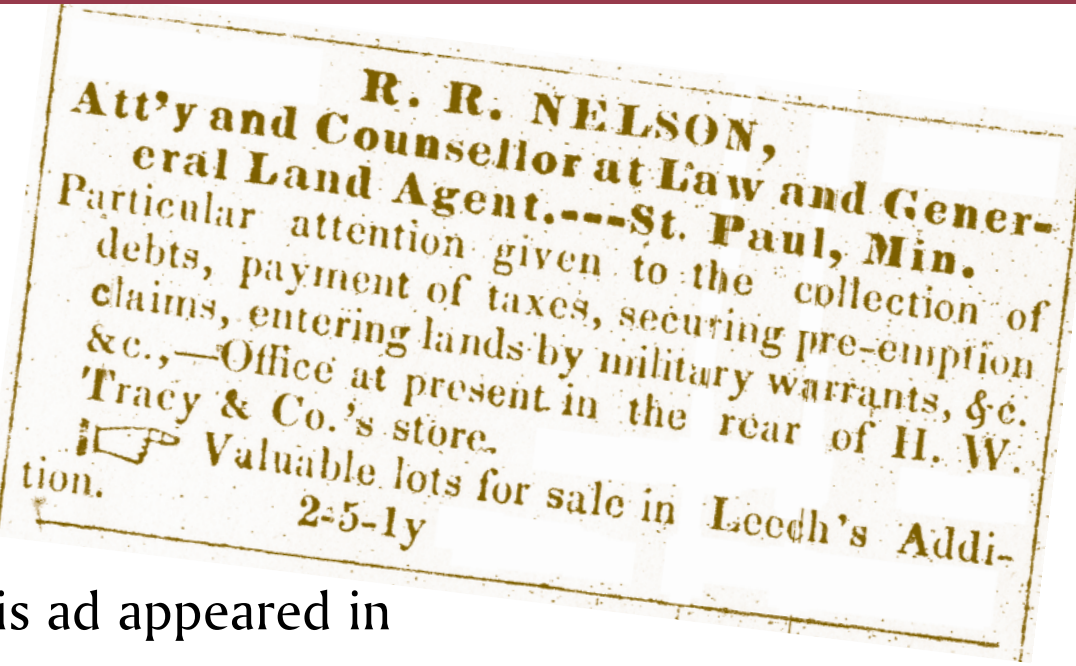


“A GOOD CITIZEN AND AN ENTERPRISING MAN OF BUSINESS”

We are of the opinion therefore, from the papers that have been introduced before us, that there has been no law passed by the Legislative power of this Territory removing the capitol from St. Paul to St. Peter. The application for a Mandamus is therefore refused.
R.R. Nelson, Judge, 2nd District

1850

Despite the post-master's warning, Nelson did not go back home, and on June 6, 1850, this ad appeared in the Minnesota Pioneer newspaper.



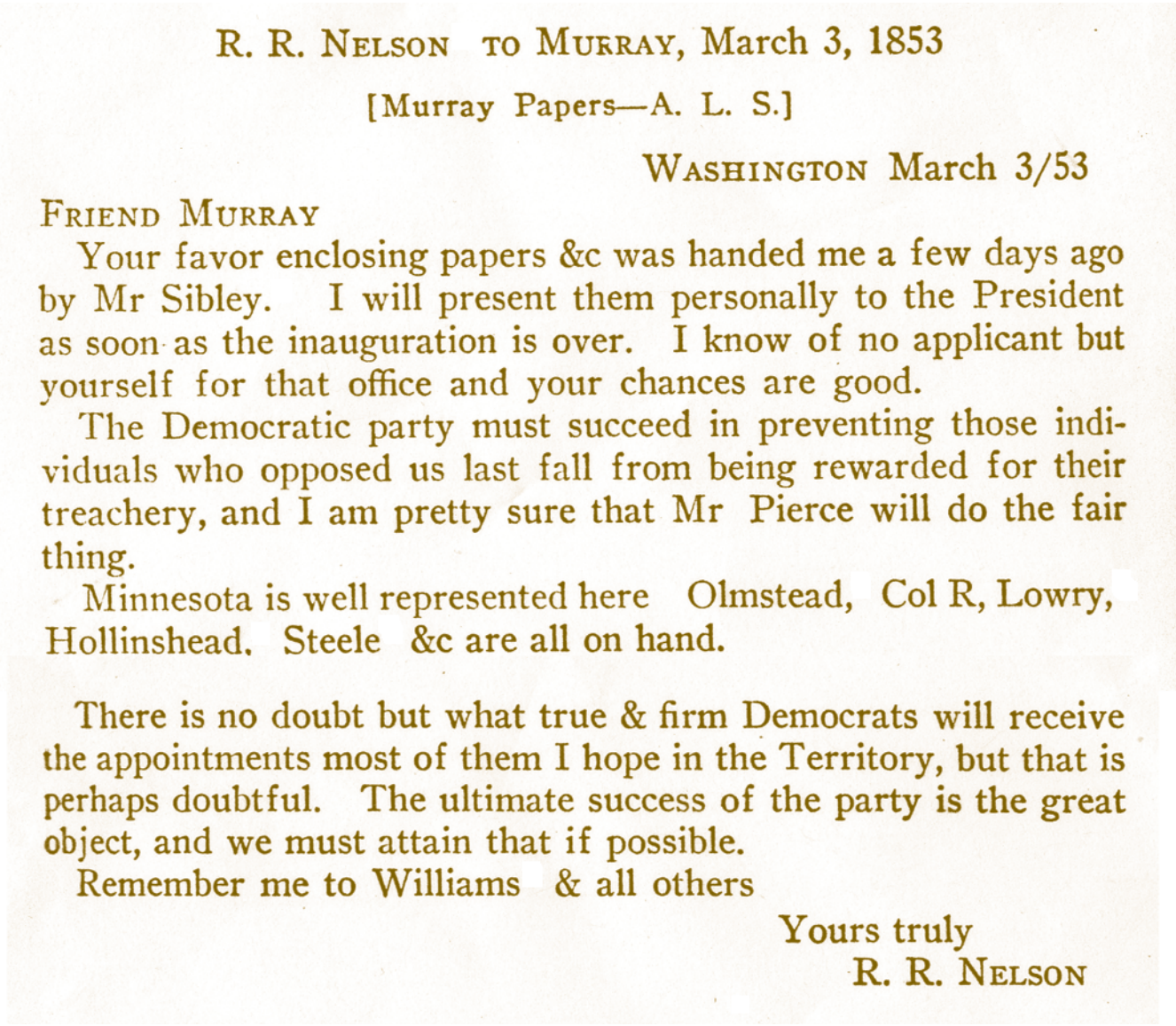
In late June he and a group of other adventurous St. Paulites “with two hours notice” pooled their money to pay \$225 for a day trip by steamboat up the St. Peter River to prove that it was navigable by steamboat farther than had been thought possible.

1851

The St. Paul Minnesota Pioneer on May 22, 1851, includes General Order No 1, directing the organization of the state militia, including R.R. Nelson and three other men, each appointed Aide-de-Camp to the Commander in Chief.

1853

While he practiced law, Rensselaer Nelson participated in Minnesota territorial politics as a Democrat. He was an organizer and orator at an Andrew Jackson Day celebration, and in 1853 was strongly urged to allow himself to be nominated as a territorial representative to Congress. He was twenty-seven years old.



In these years he had different law partners, including Alexander Wilkin and James Markland.



General view of St. Paul looking towards the Capitol in 1857.
From the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society

In 1853 R.R. Nelson went to what is now Superior, Wisconsin in a land speculation venture.

Henry M. Rice is quoted in the book *The Eye of the Northwest* as saying: “In 1853 R.R. Nelson, D.A. Robertson, and D.A. J. Baker left this city (St Paul) by an eastern route, and as was supposed, for the head of the lake. As there was opposition in everything in those days, their destination being surmised, James Stinson, the late Benjamin Thompson, and Wm H. Newton, recently deceased, started by way of Crow Wing Lake and Sandy Lake for the same point. From Crow Wing they had to make the voyage in bark canoes. I gave them letters to the traders and voyageurs on the route, to enable them to proceed without delay to the coveted point, where they found the first party named. A more intelligent, enthusiastic and determined set of gentlemen never measured swords for a more desirable but hitherto unappreciated and almost unknown prize—the site of Superior City.”

1855

While there, Nelson participated in organizing Douglas County, was instrumental in getting the county named for Stephen A. Douglas, and served as Douglas County Attorney. He returned to St. Paul in 1855 because the land venture hadn't turned out as he and his partners had hoped.



William Welch



Charles Flandrau

1857

In May 1857 he was appointed by President Buchanan to be a judge of the Supreme Court of the Minnesota Territory, serving with Charles Flandrau and William Welch. Of the three, Nelson was the one whose chambers were located in St Paul.

He did not serve long on the Minnesota Territorial Court. The confirmation of his interim appointment in 1857 was tabled because Congress was voting on statehood for Minnesota. Even so, he made a great impact with his decision of July 15, 1857:

The Joseph Rolette story and Judge Nelson's opinion in the case of the writ to move the Capitol.

The bill removing the Capitol from St. Paul to St. Peter passed the Council by a vote of 8 to 7, February 12, 1857, and six days later passed the House. Joe Rolette, chairman of the Committee on Enrolled Bills, did not appear at the Council the following day and hid the capitol bill in a bank vault until the session was ended. Meanwhile, a new law was drafted and passed, but the Speaker of the Council and House refused to sign it, holding that it was not valid. Gov. Gorman signed the measure, but when the St. Peter advocates brought mandamus proceedings under the bill to move the capitol, Judge Nelson ruled that the law was invalid.



Joseph Rolette, ca 1860.
From the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society

Judge of the U. S. District Court of Minnesota.

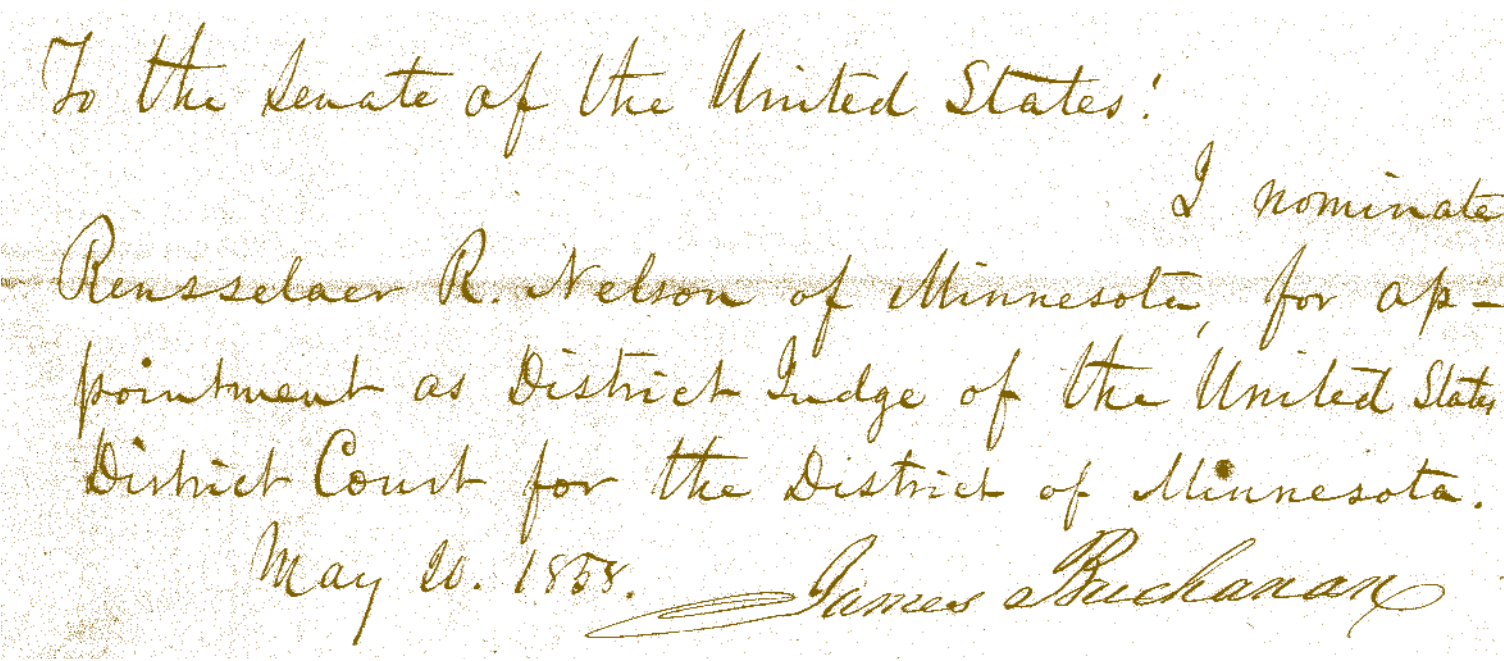
We learn by telegraph, that on Friday last, the President appointed Hon. RENSSELAER R. NELSON, of this city, to the responsible position of Judge of the United States District Court for the State of Minnesota.

This will be good news, not only to the Democratic party of Minnesota, but to the entire people of the State. Judge NELSON has resided in the State from its organization as a Territory to the present time; and as a good citizen and an enterprising man of business, has borne an active part in all measures having for their object the prosperity of Minnesota. As one of the Justices of the United States Territorial Court, Judge NELSON manifested those qualifications so essential in an upright and efficient Judge. The bar of this city, and of the State, will hail with pleasure the intelligence of this appointment.

St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat newspaper, May 25, 1858

1858

In 1858 President Buchanan nominated him to be the first U.S. District Court Judge for the new state of Minnesota with circuit duties.



The same year he became the vice president of the newly organized St Paul and Pacific Railroad.

On November 3, 1858 the new United States District Court Judge for the District of Minnesota, the Hon. Rensselaer R. Nelson, married Mrs. Emma Beebe Wright, a widow.

St. Paul and Pacific Railroad.

OFFICERS.

EDMUND RICE—President.
R. R. NELSON—Vice President.
HENRY ACKER—Secretary.
H. F. MASTERSON—Attorney.
HORACE THOMPSON—Treasurer.

DIRECTORS.

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R. R. NELSON, " "
H. M. RICE, " "
J. E. THOMPSON, " "
RICHARD CHUTE—St. Anthony.
HENRY T. WELLS—Minneapolis.
DWIGHT WOODBURY—Anoka.

St. Paul population in 1855: 4,716