

Mayoral Memorial Walk

In the early years of Nelson City Council covered here, Mayors were elected for one year and Councillors for two. This led to many non-consecutive mayoral terms, and many mayors served as councillors for long periods. It also led to delays in making decisions around projects needing major expenditure.

1 Joseph Reid DODSON (1874-75; 1877-81) became the first mayor in 1874 of the struggling little town that became a city by virtue of a royal decree. This was due to Nelson being the site of a Bishop's seat rather than the size of its population. Dodson was a member of the Board of Works which had been in place since 1853 tackling such thorny problems as sewerage disposal and the foul "Ditch" which ran through the centre of the city and reputed to have been the source of repeated epidemics killing the town's children. Unfortunately the new Council which was elected in 1874 immediately came into conflict with the Provincial Government over the profits of the Harbour operation and costs of the gasworks. Accounts of both organisations were hopelessly muddled and Nelson City Council went bankrupt early in 1875, and Dodson, and most the Councillors resigned. He did a second, happier term in 1877-1881.

2 Lowther Broad who held an extraordinary number of roles in the community as Resident Magistrate, Sheriff, Registration and Returning Officer, Registrar of Poisons, Sub commissioner for Government Insurance and warden of Wangapeka goldfield stepped in and conducted an election for new city councillors in 1875. Seven nominees neatly filled seven positions. Broad, a leading member of the Catholic community also wrote 'The Jubilee History of Nelson 1842-1892' before dying suddenly in 1892.

3 Joseph Henry Levien (1875-76) the next mayor was a local businessman of immense drive and he sorted out the city's financial management. No doubt the gas being cut off and the lights going out at a Council meeting focused councillors on the need for decisive action. Unfortunately Levien died in 1876 before really seeing the results of his hard work but by insisting on the appointment of a capable and dedicated town clerk with legal qualifications, he ensured Council's finances were soundly managed. H.V. Gully (son of the famous

painter John Gully) was chosen. He was an accountant as well as a barrister and solicitor and was chosen above many other applicants to be Town Clerk for the next 34 years.

4 Francis Trask (1890-1900) steered Nelson through some very lean times coming to office at the time of yet another typhoid epidemic. He kept a steady course through the 1895-7 depression. Happier moments came in 1892 when the enthusiastic 50th jubilee celebration of Nelson took place. Rocks Road was completed, rather slowly, making copious use of prison labour and finally metalled in 1897. Trask had a passion for parks and gardens and Queens Garden was developed during his tenure, and the southern garden gates are a memorial to him.

5 Joseph Auty Harley (1900-1901) was a councillor on and off from 1876, becoming Mayor for a short term 1900-1901. Harley struggled, like other Mayors before him, to get approval from ratepayers to spend money on large civil works despite a pressing need to deal with sanitation in particular. The Jubilee History of the Council records that councillors "may not have had anything great to do but they did it with meticulous care and infinite discussion" due to the "disputacious character of certain councillors". Joseph was one of a number of Harleys who had strong opinions and served the Council with passion and drive. Prior to entering Council Joseph had been educated at Nelson College, and worked in the Magistrates Court where among other duties had collected sheep and dog tax, and he had also worked for a while as a brewer. His father Charles had been the owner of the Carpenters Arms Hotel built in 1843 which was the centre of social life at that time in the colony.

6 Thomas Field (1911-1913) was the first Mayor to serve a consecutive two year term aligned with Councillors' terms of service. Field found his main task was to get roads in order after the large water, drainage and sewerage works of past Council's had finally been approved, financed and completed. Anzac Park reclamation was also completed and planting commenced in this attractive Park, which pays homage to those Nelsonians who died in war. Field went on to sit as Nelson's Member of Parliament.



Mayoral Memorial Walk

This walk maps the early history of the Nelson Council under the leadership of some Mayors who served the city between 1874 and 1913, and who are buried at Wakapuaka Cemetery.

The stories are chronologically ordered and coloured markers are found at intervals to guide your way, corresponding to the religious denomination groupings buried here. The attractive cemetery is hilly and has great views of Nelson's harbour, so take a picnic and wear good walking shoes.

More information and other heritage walks can be found on www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz.

