DULUTH was one of America's boom cities in the 1890s. Its population, rich in ethnic mix, was growing at a staggering rate. Between 1890 and 1895 the number of residents rose by nearly 80 per cent from 33,115 to nearly 60,000. The lumber, shipping, iron ore, and railroad industries were largely responsible for this influx of people, many of whom were European immigrants. With the expansion of population, there was also an increase in the turbulence usually associated with a burgeoning city: violent crime, drunkenness, peculation, election fraud, and poverty. In the early 1890s Duluth's reputation was that of a "wide-open" city where liquor, loose women, and confidence men could be found in abundance. Sporadic efforts to clean up the city were repeatedly overwhelmed by each wave of new residents. Vice was, after all, a lucrative business, and there were few indeed who wished to diminish any part of Duluth's vitality. Illicit sex, drinking, and gambling were usually the last enterprises to be affected by economic ups and downs. The fact that many politicians drew revenue from one or more of these activities did nothing to hasten the moral revival urged by some of the city's "respectable" citizens.\(^1\)

While the problems associated with sudden population growth were legion, there were also benefits. Demands for more efficient government and for improved services in Duluth, as in similar cities during the 1890s, grew; appeals for a cheaper transportation system

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\(^1\) United States, Census, 1890, Population, part 1, p. 203. Minnesota State Census, 1895, p. 49. Information on Duluth's character in the 1890s may be found in its numerous newspapers, especially the Duluth Daily News, Duluth News Tribune (now hyphenated), Duluth Evening Herald, The Hustler, Duluth Citizen, and Duluth Commonwealth. Other important sources include city directories, official city reports, minutes of the Common Council, and various personal records and papers, all in the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center (NEMHC), University of Minnesota-Duluth. For economic data in the 1890s, see David A. Walker, Iron Frontier: The Discovery and Early Development of Minnesota's Three Ranges (St. Paul, 1979). The author wishes to thank the staff of the NEMHC for its assistance, especially Judith Trolander, director, and David Gaynon. Frank Schleppenbach, water division manager of the Duluth Department of Water and Gas, provided helpful information.

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(streetcars), pure water, better lighting, and more extensive and reliable telephone service were common. Many reform-minded citizens suggested that these services, nearly all of which were in private hands, should be purchased and operated by the city government.

A primary concern among Duluth residents in the 1890s was the condition of the city's water supply. The water question became so dominant between 1894 and 1898 that other public concerns paled by comparison. The issue was of such magnitude that it altered, at least for a time, the traditional nature of politics in the city. It led to the election in 1896 of a mayor whose instincts for reform were remarkably similar in spirit to those of Detroit's much-publicized progressive politician, Hazen S. Pingree.

Duluth residents had complained for some time that their water system was unsatisfactory. There were problems of distribution and questions regarding its purity. The fact that more Duluth residents were dying from typhoid than from any other disease seemed to confirm suspicions about the water supply. The Duluth Water and Gas Company, a private corporation, drew its water directly from Lake Superior at a point some five miles northeast of the harbor near the Lester River. The company's managers refused to approve suggestions that they move the intake pipe farther out into the lake, that they build a new pumping station, and that they improve the screens in the pipes so that gross pollutants would be removed. This obstinacy was part of a plan to force the city government to buy the waterworks at a substantial profit for the company's stockholders. The scheme worked well.

In September, 1894, the city administration under the direction of Republican Mayor Ray T. Lewis asked Duluth voters to approve the purchase of the water system for a sum in excess of $2,000,000. It was at this point that Casper Henry Truelsen, then president of the Board of Public Works, challenged the wisdom of paying such a high price to a company that, he charged, had deliberately allowed its equipment to deteriorate. Truelsen, a Democrat who tilted toward populism, endorsed the city's desire to buy the waterworks, but not at the proposed price. Although he may not have been aware of it at the time, Truelsen had just identified himself with an issue that was to make him one of the most controversial politicians in Duluth's history.

At first, Truelsen's opposition to buying the water plant seemed to make no impression. Every newspaper in Duluth heartily supported the purchase and evinced little concern about the cost. Even the populist journal, Search-Light, observed that "Duluth citizens may differ on silver and tariffs, but not on water." Yet by the time the referendum was held in November, it was obvious that Truelsen's protests (which he carried on without succor) had reduced the anticipated majority in favor of purchase. The electors approved the agreement by just 300 votes.

Truelsen immediately contended that the election results were tainted. The directors of the Water and Gas Company, he declared, had conspired to stuff the ballot boxes with "phony" votes. In his ward alone, Truelsen claimed that there were 40 illegal votes, and to prove his point he filed suit to reverse the election verdict. After several months, the court ruled that there were over 2,000 fraudulent ballots, which meant that the purchase plan had failed to gain approval by about 1,700 votes.

Truelsen's legal victory left the city in something of a quandary over how to complete the acquisition of the water system. His success also made him a celebrity among the working-class citizens who lived in Duluth's central and western districts. Truelsen was at pains to point out that, while he supported municipal ownership of the water plant, he opposed the exorbitant profit that would accrue to the directors and stockholders if the 1894 purchase price were accepted. This position found support among those who believed themselves without influence in Duluth politics. Truelsen had upset the plans of men who were accustomed to dominating city policy. It is not surprising, then, that he was put forward as a likely "people's" candidate for mayor in the next city election.

HENRY TRUelsen had settled in Duluth in 1870 after spending several years in Eagle River, Michigan. He was born into a working-class family in the Danish territory of Schleswig in 1844. His parents were German by

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2 See Duluth Commonwealth, November 26, 1894, January 13, 27, 1896, for example.
3 Melvin G. Holli, Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics, 74-100 (New York, 1969); Commonwealth, January 1, 1896. The Duluth News Tribune, January 29, 1898, made a sarcastic reference to Henry Truelsen as "Pingree II" during the 1898 mayoral campaign. The Municipal Reform League encouraged the growth of municipal ownership, Hustler, December 19, 1896, copies in NEMHC. The Hustler was an independent paper.
4 Typhoid-related deaths led mortality statistics from 1890 through March, 1896, peaking from 1894 to 1896; Duluth Bureau of Vital Statistics, "Statement of Mortality," in City of Duluth, Reports of Municipal Officers, 1891-96, all on p. 2. Accurate records for the last three years of the decade are not available.
5 Henry Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 1, p. [7], NEMHC; Commonwealth, November 5, 6, 20, 22, 24, 1894; Duluth Evening Herald, September 19, November 1, 1894; Dwight E. Woodbridge and John S. Pardee, eds., History of Duluth and St. Louis County, Past and Present, 2:446, 450, 460, 503 (Chicago, 1910).
6 Search-Light (Duluth), September 21, 1894; News Tribune, November 6, 7, 1896, Herald, November 7, 8, 1896.
7 On the lawsuit, see Commonwealth, November 4, 28, December 17, 22, 24, 1894, January 22, May 10, July 16, 1895.
8 Commonwealth, January 11, 13, 1896.
While Henry was still quite young, his father, a brewery worker, was killed by a fall into a vat of boiling water. At the age of 15 Henry apprenticed himself to a store owner who taught him salesmanship and bookkeeping. (He often recounted these experiences when he addressed workingmen). In 1866 Truelsen set out for America. He worked as a clerk-accountant for three years in Eagle River, but when he arrived in Duluth he opened a grocery store. Some years later he expanded his interests by purchasing a substantial part of the Duluth Fish Company which he later sold to the Booth fisheries. In 1878 Truelsen began his career in city politics by successfully campaigning for a place on the Common Council. From his earliest canvass Truelsen portrayed himself as a man interested in the concerns of "the people." With his northern European background and his Swedish wife, he appealed to the large German and Scandinavian population in Duluth. In subsequent years he was re-elected to his council seat, served as county sheriff from 1886 to 1888, and held a position on the Board of Public Works. By the time Truelsen decided to campaign for mayor in 1896, there were some who tried to dismiss him as a "chronic" politician. This description had some justification, but Truelsen had performed his various duties in an adequate fashion.9

While making the customary denial of interest in political advancement, Truelsen did not seriously discourage talk about a mayoral candidacy. Those close to him observed that he was neither a "good mixer" nor a "hail fellow well met," but he never failed to put on a good performance when speaking to a crowd of his followers. Applause and flattery he could never resist. The warm support he received from Duluth workingmen in 1895 made him think he might just be able to defeat the "millionaire interests" he so frequently denounced.10

During 1895 Truelsen spoke repeatedly of the need to assure pure water in Duluth at a reasonable price. Mayor Lewis could only reply that this would no longer be an issue if "Typhoid" Truelsen had not overturned the election results in the autumn of 1894. The anxiety over drinking water increased markedly in 1895 as the city reported more than 1,500 cases of typhoid resulting in at least 100 deaths. In December, 1895, fear of the disease reached a frenzy. Plans were made to distribute water from nearby springs at various points along Duluth streets. The city health officer published a notice warning residents not to drink any water "furnished by the Duluth Gas & Water company without first thoroughly boiling the same." At the peak of concern, Henry Truelsen announced on January 3, 1896, that he would be a candidate for mayor at the upcoming city election on February 5. This announcement was received with excitement in the central and western portions of the city, but with dismay among the wealthy families who populated Duluth's east side.11

It was not just Truelsen's opposition to the 1894 purchase that disturbed the traditional brokers of power in Duluth; it was that everything about the man seemed out of touch with the image of city government they wanted to maintain. His immigrant background, his lack of smooth manners, his unkempt appearance, and, heaven forbid, his heavy German accent would likely

10 Unsigned letter to Theodore Hoffmann, July 20, 1940, Truelsen letter file.
11 Commonwealth, January 3, 21, 1896. The scare about polluted water was repeated 78 years later, causing Duluthians to seek other water than that in the city pipes. See Robert V. Bartlett, The Reserve Mining Controversy: Science, Technology, and Environmental Quality, 127 (Bloomington, Ind., 1980). Typhoid outbreaks were commonplace in American cities during the 1890s and gave impetus to water purification efforts. By 1900 there were still 36 deaths per 100,000 urban dwellers attributed to the disease. Maurice R. Davie, Problems of City Life, 268, 361 (New York, 1932).

CASPAR HENRY TRUELSEN
embarrass the city when the Carnegies, the Rockefellers, and the Hills visited the town. It was noted that this might even damage Duluth's economic prospects. (After the Panic of 1893, eastern money was vital to the continued expansion of the ore industry in northeastern Minnesota, and Truelsen did not seem to care at all about the great magnates of mining.) But financial worries were for rich Duluthians who hoped to get richer still, the day workers, the street people, and the recent arrivals were attracted to Truelsen because they saw in him a little bit of themselves.\(^\text{12}\)

Truelsen's Republican opponent in the 1896 election was Seward D. Allen, a man who had served as city attorney from 1890 to 1892. Like Truelsen, he favored municipal ownership of the waterworks, but he blamed his Democratic adversary for delaying the purchase in 1894. Allen further accused Truelsen of being responsible for the "shocking" increase in typhoid cases during November and December of 1895. The Duluth News Tribune — once owned by railroad tycoon James J. Hill and later by Guilford G. Hartley, a prominent local businessman — was a strong backer of big business interests and repeated Allen's charges time and again as the February election approached. The right-wing paper accused Truelsen of negligence while he was president of the Board of Public Works because he had failed to take action to close off broken and faulty city sewers that contaminated the drinking water. The News Tribune did not fail to note Truelsen's problem with English and particularly his poor spelling. Two other major newspapers in Duluth, the Herald and the Commonwealth, also opposed Truelsen's candidacy. But their opposition owed less to political conservatism than to a fear that the "unwashed" German would be bad for business.\(^\text{13}\)

Allen and Truelsen conducted their 1896 campaign from one end of the city to the other, but the west end clearly belonged to Truelsen and the east side favored Allen. As was customary in the 1890s, the two men frequently appeared together in various community centers to present their arguments and to hurl insults at each other. Since the campaign lasted only two weeks, there was a meeting nearly every day. As election day approached, the charges and countercharges inevitably intensified. Allen repeatedly called Truelsen a "demagogue," and Truelsen usually managed to mention that Allen represented the interests of big business. The fact that each had basically the same idea of the water issue was somehow obscured.

Truelsen predicted that the Duluth Water and Gas Company would use its resources to elect aldermen (councilmen) who were sympathetic to the company. This tactic, proclaimed Truelsen, would slow the advent of municipally owned "pure water." Allen countered his opponent by pointing out that Duluth was not the "plague stricken" city Truelsen tried to make it appear, and that, moreover, the utility company had no interest in "slowing" a purchase by the city. Allen also resisted the implication that he was the candidate of big business and tried to turn the tables on Truelsen by charging that he had improper connections with the Retail Liquor Dealers Association. Truelsen did not deny that he had accepted money from the liquor interests, but he insisted that this represented backing from local small businesses and not support from any corporation.\(^\text{14}\)

Allen's efforts to undercut Truelsen's anti-big-business campaign did not yield favorable results. By the end of January the Democrat's lead seemed assured. The conservative newspapers tried to stem the tide by launching a severe attack on Truelsen in the last days of the campaign, but this tactic did little to help Allen. On election day, there were some surprises. Allen carried only one east-end ward, while Truelsen built a substantial edge in the central and west-end wards. The final tally gave Truelsen the mayor's office by a majority of 776 votes.

IMMEDIATELY Truelsen declared his triumph "a famous victory in the name of the common people" and invited everyone to join him the next evening for a huge procession to City Hall. The celebration was all that Truelsen could have hoped: Roman rockets, kazoos, drums, and large quantities of beer and whiskey (provided by the retail liquor dealers) made the parade one of the most demonstrative in Duluth's history. From the


\(^{13}\) Here and below, see News Tribune, January 29, 1896; Commonwealth, January 3, 6, 22, 1896; Herald, January 4, February 5, 1896.

\(^{14}\) Here and two paragraphs below, see Commonwealth, January 21, 22, 24, February 6, 1896; News Tribune, January 24, 1896.
Dealt to Populists and Free-Silverites in the general election, Truelsen felt he had achieved more than he had any right to expect.

Truelsen knew, however, that when the excitement of his victory simmered down, there was a difficult task ahead. Although his Republican opponents portrayed him as a bumpkin of the first water, Truelsen understood a good deal about the structure of Duluth's government. He knew that any effort to purchase the waterworks at a reasonable price (and a "reasonable price" was essential to Truelsen) would be hampered by the Duluth Common Council, which consisted of 16 aldermen, two for each of the city's eight wards. The city charter called for half of them to be re-elected every two years. In 1896 seven of the eight aldermen elected favored municipal purchase, of the eight who were holdovers, a clear majority supported buying the waterworks from the utility company. In fact, it was their anxiety to purchase the plant that most disturbed Truelsen. He saw this as a threat to his promise to buy the water system at the lowest possible price. The Duluth charter allowed the council to override any mayoral decision by a two-thirds vote. The power of the mayor, then, was severely limited by the will of the Common Council.

The water issue dominated Truelsen's first year in office. He was determined, he later wrote, to show "a lot of Millionairs [sic]" that good government did not require their assistance. Throughout the spring and summer of 1896, Truelsen led the attack against the Water and Gas Company, threatening to revoke the company's charter on grounds that the water it provided was unfit for human consumption. This was not quite the truth, but it is what many Duluthians, including Truelsen, thought was true. The mayor also pledged to restore pure water to the city as quickly as possible.

Truelsen's adversaries argued that his interest in the waterworks was a victory for plain people over organized capital. Employees of the company had given the city sworn affidavits that they had removed 30 barrels of refuse from the intake pipe in one week and that dead fish and animal skins were to be found in abundance. Although not denying this evidence, company managers contended that the water still tested pure.

The mayor had definite ideas about how to improve water quality. He insisted that the north shore of Lake Superior was a dangerous place for an intake pipe because currents brought pollution down the shore line to Duluth. Truelsen argued that population growth and the resultant increment in pollution might make it necessary for the city to install artificial filters within ten years. As soon as municipal purchase of the waterworks was completed, Truelsen planned to recommend that the city build a new pumping station on Minnesota Point, a sliver of land that reached from Duluth toward Superior, Wisconsin, and which also buffered the harbor from Lake Superior. The mayor contended that cheaper construction costs and the promise of purer water made the Minnesota Point location the logical one for a pumping station.

The mayor's opponents, including some of the Common Council, rejected the arguments. They correctly pointed out that the same currents carrying pollution down along the north shore would bring those pollutants to an intake pipe off Minnesota Point. There seemed to be a greater likelihood of gross pollution getting into the system at Minnesota Point than at the existing intake site. So far as expenses were concerned, the News Tribune noted on March 17 and 19 that building a new plant would surely cost more than expanding the old one.

Truelsen's adversaries argued that his interest in Minnesota Point developed only after he realized that the city would need to buy more land on the north shore to expand the pumping station — land owned by the speculating interests that the mayor had pledged never to support. It seems almost certain that this was the source of Truelsen's devotion to the Minnesota Point site. Having made known his intention to run City Hall for the benefit of Duluth's "plain people," he could not very well start his administration by using city funds to purchase land from "millionaires." Eventually, the clamor for action on the water supply allowed Truelsen to back down gracefully on his resolve to block the north shore plant. The Common Council approved plans to complete and expand the north shore (Lakewood) station on the condition that day labor be used and that all workers hired should be residents of Duluth, heads of families, and married. The city issued over $1,000,000 in water bonds to pay for land purchase and for construction. This was an important decision in itself, but it did not solve the problem of municipal ownership of the waterworks.
DULUTH'S new Lakewood pumping station, built in 1896

The aldermen were anxious to settle with the company at a purchase price of around $1,650,000. This was lower than the amount proposed in 1895, but Truelsen remained adamant in his opposition even when it was made clear to him that the Water and Gas Company's bondholders would make no further concessions. Over the mayor's objections, the council proceeded with the transaction. A resolution passed on October 5, 1896, called for the city to pay $1,695,000 for the old water system. Truelsen immediately vetoed the measure, but a week later the council overrode the veto. The resolution required that a proposition be placed on the ballot in the November general election. Truelsen discouraged support for the measure, but the city electors voted to approve the purchase by a count of 6,028 to 4,616. The mayor did not see the vote as a personal setback; he attributed the result to a desire to end the drawn-out controversy, to a continuing fear of typhoid, and to the fact that most Duluthians did not understand the circumstances.

TRUelsen, the "man of the people," had no intention of following the mandate of the electorate on this occasion. Nor would he cave in to the wishes of the aldermen. Instead, he constructed a strategy that would delay completion of the deal until after the next city election in February, 1897. At that time he would go to "the People," he said, and ask them to elect councilmen pledged to support his position on the waterworks. The ploy proved successful. By asking for a recount of the November results, Truelsen managed to stall until the February election. In that contest, seven of the eight aldermen selected were pledged to support Truelsen's demand for a lower price. The mayor's direct appeal to the "plain folk" of central and west Duluth had paid a high dividend. As Truelsen explained many years later, he knew that the 1897 election would force the Water and Gas Company bondholders to sell the plant at whatever he was willing to pay. "I had them whipped," he declared.

Shortly after the election, Truelsen went to Chicago to meet with representatives of the utility. The Duluth attorney representing the bondholders, Jed L. Washburn, offered to sell the plant to the city for $2,106,000. Truelsen promptly informed Washburn (who already knew the situation) that he now had the full support of the Duluth Common Council and that, if necessary, the city would build a parallel water system. The mayor then offered a top price of $1,200,000. Although the bondholders delayed a final decision for several months, there was little recourse for the company except to sell at something close to Truelsen's offer. On November 29, 1897, the Common Council voted to accept the utility's new selling price of $1,250,000. Truelsen approved the purchase, and it seemed a foregone conclusion that the citizens of Duluth would vote to accept the deal at a special election.

The water question was settled just two months before Truelsen would have to stand for re-election. His handling of the issue, although it had not pleased all of his supporters, virtually guaranteed him another term in office. The Democrats, Populists, and Free Silverites all backed him against the Republican candidate, Elmer F. Mitchell, who soon attempted to capitalize on charges that the mayor had mismanaged the police department, that vice was rampant in Duluth, and that the new intake pipe from Lake Superior would never work. A vague rumor that Truelsen had received a $50,000 kickback from the Water and Gas Company while he was in Chicago was also perpetuated.

THE MOST SERIOUS charge against the mayor, and the only one with a degree of validity, was that he had mishandled the police department. The city charter gave the mayor a great deal of authority over the police, and Truelsen did not shy from using it. He opened himself to criticism by appointing his nephew as chief of police. While such an appointment was certainly in keeping with the politics of the day, Truelsen had promised that he would never make such positions available to his relatives. When the decision was criticized, Truelsen lamely defended it by contending that 500 Duluthians had

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19 Truelsen to his daughter, July 27, 1929, Truelsen letter file.
20 Here and below, see Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 1, p. [38]; Duluth, Proceedings of the Common Council, 1897-98, p. 235; Herald, January 21, 29, 31, 1898. By the time the council voted, work on the Lakewood plant was underway. The plant first operated with steam engines, converting in 1932 to electric pumps.
ARCHITECT'S SKETCH of the structure built in 1888–89

AN EDITORIAL CARTOON response to the council election of 1897

ELMER MITCHELL, Republican mayoral candidate in 1898

A CARTOONIST'S VIEW of “Duluth’s Doughty Fullback. Can He Force the Pigskin to the $1,200,000 Line?”
Nepotism was not the only problem where Truelsen and the police were concerned. From the time he became mayor, Truelsen had pledged to save the city money. His obstinacy on the water company purchase was just one example of his efforts in this regard; he also planned to reduce the number of individuals employed by the city. When he took office in 1896, Truelsen made it clear that he intended to cut expenses in the police department by reducing the number of officers. While this resulted in a considerable decline in the department's expense, the number of arrests also dropped more than 500 per year between 1895 and 1897. This led to accusations that Truelsen had mismanaged the police and that Duluth was now "honeycombed with crime."  

The mayor insisted that he had not weakened the police department and that crime in the city was not as serious as when he took office. He noted that he had acted quickly to close "concert hall saloons" where loose women sang; further, he had done as much as possible to control gambling in the city. Despite his assurances to the contrary, it does not appear that Truelsen considered prostitution, drinking, or gambling to be especially serious problems. As it happened, the charge that he was soft on crime was undercut when the Duluth Evening Herald of January 29, 1898, now a backer of the mayor, reported three days before the election that Republican challenger Mitchell had been selling liquor for years without a license.  

The most trying aspect of the 1898 campaign for Truelsen was the long-standing dispute he had with the Duluth News Tribune, the most widely read of Duluth's numerous newspapers. The paper had been at odds with Truelsen for years; it enjoyed poking fun at the mayor's German accent and his woeful grammar. He was mercilessly referred to as "Heinrich, the All Right," and as "de vader of de vater works." Truelsen's supporters retaliated in kind by making anti-Semitic slurs against the paper's manager, A. Thoits, and equally disagreeable comments about James Goss, the English editor of the paper. The mayor urged his audiences to ignore anything they read in "the morning liar," using the paper as an example of how moneyed interests were trying to capture city government.

The efforts of the News Tribune were not nearly enough to prevent Truelsen's re-election. His successful resolution of the water question and the fact that most

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21 Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 1, p. [38].
22 Police department expenditures fell from over $65,000 in 1895 to less than $40,000 in 1900; the force numbered 67 in 1895 and between 35 and 40 five years later. Apparently no Duluth policeman was Minnesota born during the 1890s; more than half were foreign born, and there was one Black officer appointed in 1893. Truelsen retained this man when he became mayor. "Annual Report of the City Comptroller," 1895–96, p. 36, and 1899–1900, pp. 23–26; "Annual Report of the Chief of Police," 1895, pp. 12–18, and 1901, p. 91, all in Reports of City Officers; Proceedings of the Common Council, 1898–99, p. 4; Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 1, pp. [31, 38, 39].
23 Here and below, see Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 1, pp. [18, 20, 38, 39, 60]. News Tribune, November 15, 1896. Mitchell's campaign manager, Joseph Sellwood, was active in mining and railroading and was believed to have influence with the newspaper.
Duluthians saw him as a man who could stand up to the local and eastern industrial interests made Truelsen an inordinately popular politician. This popularity and the continued backing of the Silverites and what was left of the Populists provided him with a substantial majority of 1,146 votes for another two-year term.24

There was no perceptible change in the way Truelsen conducted business during his second and final term in office. Although he had no achievement between 1898 and 1900 equal to his successful handling of the water issue, he persisted in his efforts to prove that municipal ownership could surpass private companies in efficiency and service. While the water plant was being built in 1898, Truelsen worked out a plan for managing the city’s water and gas system. He proposed a five-member, non-partisan commission to oversee rates and service. The mayor would serve as an ex-officio member of the commission, and the agency’s books would be open to the public. On August 10, 1898, the Common Council passed an ordinance establishing Truelsen’s plan. It was proof to the mayor that “plain people” did not need to rely on the rich to tell them what was best for them.25

WITH THE MANAGEMENT of the water and gas utility now set, the mayor gave his attention to other services that could come under municipal ownership. One was a city telephone exchange, and late in 1898 he persuaded the council to pass an ordinance creating such a telephone hookup. There were fierce objections from private telephone interests in Duluth, but Truelsen’s political strength was so solid that it was impossible to stop him on this issue. He also proposed municipal streetcar and electric companies so that “rates could be lowered and service improved.” But the private owners of the streetcar and the electric systems refused to sell, and Truelsen was not able to overcome their opposition by the time he left office in February, 1900. Truelsen’s most important contribution to city government during his second term in office was his leadership in revising the city charter. In 1898 he charged a committee with the task of rewriting the charter in order to clarify powers of the mayor and Common Council and generally to improve the position of city government in relation to private interests. The mayor insisted on an article that would give the city authority to “acquire by purchase or condemnation plants that furnish light, water, heat, telephone, or telegraph service.” The council would decide when such action was required, and the city’s voters would be called upon to endorse any such decision. Pleased with the revised charter, Truelsen fully expected that he would have the chance to work with it when it went into effect in 1900. He was certain it would provide the leverage he needed to overcome the remaining opposition to municipal ownership.25

THERE WAS little doubt that Truelsen would stand for a third term as mayor in 1900. He assumed that his success in governing the city was so obvious that he would retain at least the support he had in previous elections. Not only had he continued his efforts on behalf of the “plain people” in the city, but he had significantly improved the prospects for municipal ownership in the future. Moreover, the city-run water and gas utility had lowered rates and was showing a profit. In addition, Truelsen had dramatically reduced the cost of government by decreasing the spending of just about every agency in the city. None of these achievements impressed his Republican opponents, nor did they impress the Democrats who had lost their jobs because of Truelsen’s frugality. Nevertheless, when the city campaign began in January, 1900, the mayor had good reason to think that he would be re-elected.

His Republican opponent on this occasion was Trevanion W. Hugo, a Cornish mining engineer who had been president of the Duluth Chamber of Commerce for several years in the early 1890s. As they had in 1898, the Republicans accused Truelsen of going easy on crime, especially prostitution, gambling, and illegal drinking. These charges were connected to another accusation, that the mayor had permitted the police department to decline to such a degree that it was no longer able to keep Duluth’s vice under control. The mayor’s opponents further contended that the reduction in the police

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25 Here and below, see Proceedings of the Common Council, 1898-99, pp. 128, 167-169, 244; Herald, January 24, 1900, p. 5.
26 Here and below, see City of Duluth, Charter, 1898, pp. 192-195; Herald, January 20, 1900, p. 7; News Tribune, February 4, 1900, p. 1.

STREETCARS and telephone lines along Duluth’s Third Avenue in 1898
force officers had been "unreasonable." This issue provided Hugo with an opportunity to remind voters that Truelsen's nephew should never have been appointed to direct the city's police. "Chief [Ivan] Hansen," opined the conservative News Tribune, "has made Duluth the center of scandal and corruption." 27

The charges of excessive crime in Duluth were exaggerated, but even the mayor's supporters admitted that the administration of the police department left something to be desired. It was also a fact that Truelsen had liberal views on drinking and gambling. He was sterner on prostitution but appeared to take the view that three or four known houses of ill repute were preferable to many that were unknown. Hence, the police tended to permit certain houses to exist with only infrequent harassment. 28

The Republicans had other criticisms of the mayor. They again belittled his efforts for "pure water," dragging out their old argument that the water issue might have been settled in 1894 had Truelsen not taken the matter to court. By implication the Republicans were saying that Truelsen had caused at least three additional years of suffering from typhoid in order to save a few hundred thousand dollars. There was no argument from Hugo, however, on the principle of municipal ownership; he tried to make it appear, in fact, that Truelsen had not been effective enough in the expansion of city-owned utilities. 29

Truelsen countered these attacks by noting that he had given Duluthians pure water, that he had reduced city spending, that his administration had proven municipal ownership could work, and that crime in the city was a lesser problem in 1900 than it had been in 1896. In his opinion the real issue in 1900 was whether the city would be returned to the grip of the "blood-sucking corporations." But this time Truelsen's fusion coalition did not rally to his cry as it had earlier. There were some who thought that the mayor had not asserted their interests with sufficient vigor; others saw Truelsen more and more as a conventional politician after all. They felt he did not disdain all businessmen, only those who did not support him. As the election drew near, it was evident that Truelsen was in for a hard fight.

For the first time, Truelsen encountered in Hugo an opponent who was just as effective as he was in winning popular support on the hustings. Hugo promised that "thugism, bigmittenism and that sort of thing" would end when he entered the mayor's office. Although he had disparaged Truelsen's handling of the water issue, Hugo told his audiences that he favored municipal ownership and that he would use the new city charter to bring the telephone and electric companies quickly into line. The cheers for Hugo were nearly as lusty as they had been for Truelsen. So anxious were the Republicans to oust their old nemesis that they hired a Frenchman to accompany Hugo on the campaign trail and provide instant translations of his promises to the large number of immigrants in the crowd. At every campaign appearance by Hugo, an effort was made to identify those persons who were most likely to vote for the Republican. If the individuals so identified were not registered voters, the Republicans made certain that they were registered before the election. 30

Most accounts of Duluth's election day in 1900 use the word "pandemonium" to describe the scene. A crowd estimated at over 1,500 gathered on Superior Street to watch the results flashed on a white canvas by stereopticon. It seemed at first that the mayor's west-end support, though slightly eroded, would carry him to another triumph. At one point he even claimed victory and gave a speech thanking his followers. But by the

27 On Hugo, see Alfred N. Marquis, ed., The Book of Minnesotans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Living Men, 247 (Chicago, 1907), Henry A. Castle, Minnesota: Its Story and Biography, 950 (Chicago, 1915). Truelsen ran as a Fusion candidate, endorsed both by the Democrats and by the People's party, though not without some difficulties with each. On Republican charges, see News Tribune, January 24, pp. 1, 4, 5, January 31, pp. 1, 4, both in 1900. For claims of nepotism, see Herald, January 30, 1900, p. 5.
28 Herald, January 24, 25, 1900, both on p. 4; Truelsen to his daughter, May 25, 1916, Truelsen letter file; Truelsen to Duluth Preachers, undated clipping in Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 2, p. 9. The mayor, particularly upset with one clergyman who objected to the city being run by a "foreigner," pointed out that 75 percent of Duluth's clergy were foreign born.
29 Here and below, see News Tribune, January 24, p. 4, January 31, pp. 1, 4, February 3, p. 8, all in 1900.
morning of February 7. Hugo emerged the winner by just six votes. There were charges of election fraud on both sides, and both sides were no doubt guilty. After five months of litigation, the result was allowed to stand. The Truelsen era had ended in Duluth.\textsuperscript{31}

LATER in 1900 Truelsen made an ill-advised attempt to win Minnesota's 6th District congressional seat as the nominee of the Democratic-People's parties. He lost by a large margin to his Republican opponent, Judge Page Morris, carrying only Morrison and Stearns counties with their heavy German population. There were some who thought the Democrats endorsed Truelsen because he was the only one foolish enough to run. That year the Republicans won all six of Minnesota's seats in Congress.\textsuperscript{32}

Truelsen ran for mayor once more in 1902, again basing his appeal on his record of opposition to big business and his success in bringing Duluth pure water. This time he lost by eight votes, prompting Hugo to observe that after two years as mayor (Hugo) had gained two new friends. After his defeat Truelsen left Duluth, explaining that he was weary of politics and heavily in debt. He went to North Dakota where he managed the Bellfield coal mine for the Pittsburgh Coal Mining Company. A short time later he purchased a considerable stake in a nearby mine which he directed for the next 20 years. Eventually he retired and moved to Los Angeles to live with one of his daughters.\textsuperscript{33}

In December, 1928, Truelsen visited Duluth amid much pomp and circumstance. Nearly all of the city's officials turned out to praise the man who had opened city government to the people. In brief remarks to the gathering in his honor, Truelsen allowed that although he was "not a Socialist" he still believed in municipal ownership and government by the "plain people." His one last wish, he said, was to live long enough to see ocean steamers loading ore at Duluth docks.\textsuperscript{34}

Three years later, almost to the day, Truelsen died. His body was returned to Duluth to lie in state in City Hall. Eulogized as "one of the most popular chief executives of the municipality," the former mayor was praised as the "savior" of the city's water supply and for being the principal force behind the improved efficiency of city-owned services. It was Truelsen, one speaker avowed, who "first taught people of Duluth how to take control of their city government and administer it in their own interest." His long-time associate and friend, Judge Bert Fesler, remembered him as a man who "drove corruption from City Hall" and who "changed the direction of Duluth politics." No longer, said Fesler, "could special interests buy into City Hall."\textsuperscript{35}

Much of this funerary praise was clearly excessive, but the fact that Truelsen's death — more than 30 years after he left the city — aroused such an outpouring of affection showed that his importance to the city's residents was far reaching. His years as mayor were scarcely commonplace; he had solid successes in settling the water question and, through the revised charter, in broadening the scope of Duluth government. Yet these accomplishments, significant though they were, do not fully explain his lasting impression on the city. This came from the hope he held out that ordinary, even unlettered people could successfully take charge of local affairs. It was the sort of fanciful expectation that belonged to the populist movement of the 1890s. There were many Duluthians, however, who saw nothing whimsical at all about taking control of their government. They thought Truelsen had proved it could be done, and that is surely why so many remembered him for so long.

\textsuperscript{31} News Tribune, February 7, 1900, p. 1; Herald, February 7, 1900, p. 1. An immediate cause of Truelsen’s defeat was 185 voters who supported a Socialist Labor candidate; W. H. Hallenbeck to Hugo, February 10, 1900, in T. W. Hugo letter file. The letter contends that Truelsen supporters had prevented some Hugo men from voting. The Duluth Republican Committee refused to let Hugo debate Truelsen face to face. Truelsen’s followers had hoped this would aid their man; Herald, January 24, p. 4, and 26, p. 6, 1900. On the litigation, see Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 2, pp. [8, 19]. An estimate of the amount gambled on the election is in News Tribune, August 2, 1900, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{32} News Tribune, November 8, 1900, pp. 1–3; Minnesota Legislative Manual, 1901, p. 537.

\textsuperscript{33} Truelsen Scrapbook, Vol. 2, p. [19]; Herald, February 5, p. 1, and 7, p. 3, 1902. Truelsen to his daughter, August 12, 1922, in Truelsen letter file. Truelsen repaid all the debts he had incurred while living in Duluth.

\textsuperscript{34} Herald, December 7, 1928, p. 3.


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