



Two Constitutions?  
Video Podcast Transcript  
Minnesota Historical Society

Hi, I'm Lori Williamson with the MN HS Collections Department. I'm here today to talk to you about Minnesota's two state constitutions.

Wait, what? TWO state constitutions? Is that even legal?

Apparently so. Minnesota was organized and has been governed as a state since 1858 by not one, but two legal founding documents.

There was nothing MN nice about having two constitutions. Instead there was intense rivalry between the Democrat and Republican factions of the Convention. It was so contentious that they refused even to meet together in one place.

A conference committee comprised of five Democrats and five Republicans eventually met and laid out the structure and the language for the constitution. Ideas and principles contained in the document were formalized – what it would do and how it would work. After bitter debate, the whole (separate) conventions agreed to the proposed language. However, they refused to sign the same official document. In order to make it happen, two version of the final, formal document were created.

And we thought politics today was ugly?

There is no substantive difference in meaning between the two constitutions; the only difference is that they are separate, with some minor punctuation, grammatical, and wording differences. And handwriting, of course...the Republican document is 39 pages, the Democratic 37. Also, the Republican version has the first three amendments, signed by Gov. Ramsey.

Unfortunately, there is no secret treasure map on one or the other. Just the signatures of guys who couldn't get along, and the structure of our state.