

Historical Highlights of the House



House Members Who Became Governor

Prepared and Updated by
The Pennsylvania House of Representatives Archives



The 1790 Constitution of Pennsylvania established the office of Governor that we recognize today. Since then, eight Members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives have later held the State's highest office.

Unless otherwise specified, images are provided courtesy of the Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee.

Thomas Mifflin



***Born:** January 10, 1744, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, PA*

***Died:** January 20, 1800, Lancaster, Lancaster County, PA*

***Member of the Colonial Assembly:** Philadelphia City, 1774-1775*

***Member of the General Assembly:** Philadelphia City, 1778-1779; Berks County, 1780-1781; Philadelphia County, 1785-1788*

***Governor:** December 21, 1790 to December 17, 1799*

***Member of the House:** Philadelphia County, 1799-January 20, 1800*

***Affiliation:** Republican, Democrat-Republican*

Thomas Mifflin was born into a prominent Quaker family in Philadelphia. He was a successful merchant, and had a distinguished military career. During his time as a member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Mifflin represented both Philadelphia and Berks Counties. He was elected Speaker of the House for three sessions (1785-1788).

Mifflin was elected president of the Supreme Executive Council for the Commonwealth in 1788. He held this title until the 1790 Constitution altered the name of the office from “President” to “Governor” of the Commonwealth. In 1790 Mifflin was re-elected, this time with a new title and distinction of being the first Governor of Pennsylvania. As Governor, he was considered by many responsible for diminishing Pennsylvania’s debt after the Revolutionary War, initiating public works development, and laying the groundwork for a modern penal code in the Commonwealth.

Simon Snyder



***Born:** November 5, 1759, Lancaster, Lancaster County, PA*

***Died:** November 9, 1819, Selinsgrove, Union County (now Snyder County), PA*

***Member of the House:** Northumberland County, 1797-1804, 1806-1808*

***Governor:** December 20, 1808 to December 16, 1817*

***Member of the State Senate:** 1817-1819 (his death)*

***Affiliation:** Democrat-Republican*

Simon Snyder was born to a Pennsylvania German family in Lancaster County. He served an apprenticeship as a tanner and currier while a young man, and later ran a store and operated a grist mill. Snyder was elected to the Pennsylvania House to represent Northumberland County from 1797 to 1804 and again from 1806 to 1808. He served as speaker for the 1804-1805, 1806-1807, and 1807-1808 sessions.

Snyder was elected Governor of Pennsylvania in 1808 and re-elected in 1811 and 1814, serving until 1817. In 1812 Snyder signed Act 29 of 1810, which called for the official state capital to be moved from Lancaster to Harrisburg. Throughout his governorship, Snyder wrestled with issues of state versus Federal sovereignty, a controversial issue in early 19th century American politics. He was also responsible for directing the mobilization of Pennsylvania during the War of 1812.

William Findlay



***Born:** June 20, 1768, Mercersburg, Franklin County, PA*

***Died:** November 12, 1846, Harrisburg, Dauphin County, PA*

***Member of the House:** 1797-1798; 1803-1807*

***Governor:** December 16, 1817 to December 19, 1820*

***Member of the United States Senate:** 1821-1827*

***Affiliation:** New School Jeffersonian Democrat (also known as the Family Party)*

William Findlay was born June 20, 1768, in Mercersburg, Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Findlay studied law and was admitted to the Franklin County bar. He also engaged in farming. Findlay served as a brigade inspector in the State Militia. He was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, serving from 1797 to 1798, and again from 1803 to 1807. He was elected State Treasurer from 1807 to 1817.

Findlay served one term as Governor of Pennsylvania, from 1817 to 1820. He was the first Pennsylvania Governor to reside in Harrisburg, conducting business and hosting guests and legislators at his home on Front Street while the Hills Capitol was being constructed. Findlay lost his re-election bid for Governor, but was elected to the United States Senate in 1821, and remained in office until 1827. He then served as Treasurer of the United States Mint from 1830 to 1841.

Joseph Hiester



***Born:** November 18, 1752, Berne Township,
Berks County, PA*

***Died:** June 10, 1832, Reading, PA*

***Member of the House:** Berks County, 1787-
1790*

***Member of the State Senate:** 1790-1794*

***Member of Congress:** 1797-1805; 1815-1820*

***Governor:** December 19, 1820 to December 16,
1823*

<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/governors/1790-1876/joseph-hiester.html>

Joseph Hiester was born in Berne Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania. He worked in the mercantile business, and served in the Revolutionary War as a captain and colonel. Hiester was a Member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1787 to 1790. From 1790 to 1794, he served in the Pennsylvania State Senate. In 1797 he was elected to the 5th Congress to fill a vacancy, and was re-elected to the 6th, 7th, and 8th Congresses. After a hiatus, during which he served as major general of the Pennsylvania Militia, he was re-elected to the 14th, 15th, and 16th Congresses.

Joseph Hiester served one term as Pennsylvania's Governor, from 1820 to 1823. During Hiester's time in office, he presided over the dedication of the Hills Capitol Building in Harrisburg in 1822. Governor Hiester's administration was noted for its reduction in spending, efforts to combat corruption, and political appointments made on merit.

George Wolf



***Born:** August 12, 1777, Allen Township, Northampton County, PA*

***Died:** March 11, 1840, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, PA*

***Member of the House:** Northampton, Lehigh, Wayne, Pike Counties, 1814-1815*

***Member of Congress:** 1824-1829*

***Governor:** December 15, 1829 to December 15, 1835*

***Affiliation:** Jeffersonian Democrat (also known as the Family Party)*

George Wolf was born August 12, 1777, in Allen Township, Northampton County, Pennsylvania. Wolf worked as a teacher and later practiced law. Wolf was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for the 1814-1815 session. He served as a member of Congress for three terms, from 1824 to 1829.

Wolf was elected Governor of Pennsylvania in 1829, and was re-elected for a second term in 1832. While Governor, Wolf oversaw the enactment of the 1834 Common School Law, which established free public education for children in Pennsylvania. He also worked to revise Pennsylvania's statutory laws and tax system to address the large loans that the state had taken on to finance railroad and canal construction projects. After his time as Governor, Wolf was appointed the first Comptroller of the Treasury of the United States by President Andrew Jackson. In his final years, he served as the collector of customs for the Port of Philadelphia.

Joseph Ritner



***Born:** March 25, 1780, Alsace Township,*

Berks County, PA

***Died:** October 16, 1869, Carlisle, Cumberland County, PA*

***Member of the House:** Washington County, 1821-1827*

***Governor:** December 15, 1835 to January 15, 1839*

***Affiliation:** Democrat, Anti-Mason*

Joseph Ritner was born March 25, 1780, in Berks County, Pennsylvania. He worked as a laborer on farms across the state, as well as a weaver. He later pursued farming in the southwestern part of the state, largely on lands in Allegheny and Washington Counties. Ritner was elected to serve in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1821 to 1827. He served as Speaker for the 1825-1826 and 1826-1827 sessions.

Ritner served one term as Governor, from 1835-1839, during which time he spoke openly against slavery and anti-education movements in the state legislature. Ultimately, the legacy of his governorship was the preservation of the Free Public School Law of 1835. Through supplements passed by the legislature, the law ensured areas throughout the state would implement the new law. This law was objected to by many politicians, but greatly increased access to education for the children of Pennsylvania.

David Rittenhouse Porter



***Born:** October 31, 1788, near Norristown,
Montgomery County, PA*

***Died:** August 6, 1867, Harrisburg, Dau-
phin County, PA*

***Member of the House:** Huntingdon,
1819-1821, 1822-1823*

***Member of the State Senate:** 1836-1838*

***Governor:** January 15, 1839 to January
21, 1845*

***Affiliation:** Jacksonian Democrat*

David Rittenhouse Porter was born October 31, 1788 near Norristown, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Prior to his political career, Porter worked as a clerk, engaged in the iron business, and worked as a farmer. Porter was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for the 1819-1820, 1820-1821, and 1822-1823 sessions. He served in the State Senate from 1836 to 1838.

Porter was twice elected Governor of Pennsylvania, serving from 1839 to 1845. Porter's first election as Governor is noted for the contentious transition of power after he narrowly defeated incumbent Governor Ritner. Disputed seats in both the House and Senate led the political factions to demonstrate in the streets of Harrisburg, that later became known as the "Buckshot War." While Governor, Porter oversaw the passage of legislation that ended the practice of imprisoning debtors.

William F. Packer



Born: April 2, 1807, Howard Township,
Centre County, PA

Died: September 27, 1870, Williamsport,
Lycoming County, PA

Member of the House: Lycoming and Clin-
ton Counties, 1848-1849

Governor: January 19, 1858 to January 15,
1861

Affiliation: Democrat

William Fisher Packer was born in Howard Township, Centre County. Packer worked extensively in the newspaper business. He worked at the *Sunbury Public Inquirer* and *Bellefonte Patriot* as a printer's apprentice, and later at the *Pennsylvania Intelligencer* as a journeyman. He later owned and edited the *Lycoming Gazette* and *Keystone Gazette*. Packer was elected to serve in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for the 1848-1849 session. During his single session in the House, he also served as Speaker.

Packer served as Governor of the Commonwealth from January 19, 1858 to January 15, 1861. While Packer was Governor, his administration saw to the privatization of the state canal system with Act 445 of 1858, calling for the sale of the canals to private railroad companies, and Act 8 of 1859, which abolished the offices of Canal Commissioner and State Engineer.