

## Constitutional Governors Historical Sketches

Thomas Mifflin  
Thomas McKean  
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William Findlay  
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George Wolf  
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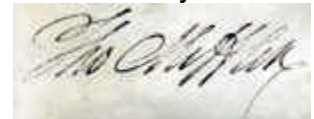
### Thomas Mifflin

**Term 64, 1788-1799, born in Philadelphia County**



Thomas Mifflin was a son of Quakers, a merchant and jurist, a delegate to the First Continental Congress, and served as Quartermaster General of the Revolutionary Army.

Mifflin was one of the three (Charles Thomson and Joseph Reed being the other two) major activists among the Pennsylvania radicals that pushed for delegates to be appointed to the first Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The radicals called two town meetings bypassing Pennsylvania's Assembly and started a grassroots movement. The second town meeting was called on June 18, 1774 when Governor John Penn (grandson of William Penn) refused to convene the Assembly for the purpose of electing delegates to the Continental Congress. At this town meeting, the idea of a Continental Congress was widely endorsed and plans were made to convene the first Pennsylvania Provincial Conference. On July 15, 1774 at the next town meeting, delegates were chosen to attend the Pennsylvania Conference.



After the June 18 town meeting, John Penn was pressured into convening the Assembly on July 18, 1774, albeit under the guise of considering Indian problems, in order to prevent the unofficial town meeting committees from taking the initiative away from the Assembly. Three days after the action taken by the committees on July 15, the "regular government" approved the committee actions and appointed delegates to the upcoming Continental Congress. Seven delegates were chosen: Joseph Galloway, Charles Humphreys, and Samuel Rhoads - all three moderates; Thomas Mifflin, John Morton, George Ross, and Edward Biddle - all radicals.

During the Revolutionary War, General Mifflin served as Quartermaster of the Revolutionary Army.

Virtually handpicked by Benjamin Franklin at the end of his second term (1785 - 1788) as his successor, Thomas Mifflin became the first Constitutional Governor.

The constant dissatisfaction that had been building against the existing Commonwealth Constitution of 1776 came to a head during his first two years of administration. With Mifflin's help, the charter was revised and a new Commonwealth Constitution was adopted in September 1790. After a fourteen year span that included a revolution, war, depression, and political passion, Pennsylvania returned almost full circle to a system of management very similar to that of the latter colonial era.

The Governor was elected by the people for a three-year term and could succeed himself twice. The word "people" was defined as all free male citizens over 21 who had lived in Pennsylvania for two years and paid a state or county tax within six months before the election.

Mifflin was reelected and became the first to simply have the distinctive title of Governor without any descriptive words preceding or following the title such as 'Proprietary' or 'Acting'. Mifflin was twice reelected and made a final record of tenure in office.

Mifflin set two early Federal-state relations precedents.

First, Western Pennsylvania rebelled against the Federal excise tax on whiskey in 1794. Never having fully trusted George Washington, Mifflin refused, when asked by President Washington to call out the Pennsylvania militia to enforce this Federal law. Mifflin asserted that a United States president had no authority to order a state governor to use state militia for any purpose during peacetime and in the absence of any local request for assistance. Mifflin's point was established, setting a precedent that is still honored.

The second conflict occurred when under a Pennsylvania law of 1794, Mifflin ordered state militia sent to Presqu'isle to protect the surveyors of the Erie Triangle from Indian attacks. President Washington was afraid that the appearance of state troops in this region would provoke the Senecas to join the war already underway between the western Indians and the Federal troops. Mifflin challenged Washington's request on the grounds that the president could not "suspend the operation of a positive law of Pennsylvania" that conformed to all Federal statutes. Although the 1794 law that was deemed objectionable was eventually repealed by the Pennsylvania Legislature, Mifflin refused to acknowledge that a United States president could suspend the operation of a state law which might run against national policy.

With the purchase of the Erie triangle from the United States Government, Mifflin gave Pennsylvania its final boundary lines.

Mifflin, based on the State's great growth, successfully encouraged the Assembly to move the State Capital toward the center of the Commonwealth. Lancaster was chosen

for the new seat of government and the capital was moved there in 1799 during the last few days of his administration.

About the document. The document is a preprinted land deed signed by Thomas Mifflin on January 25, 1797 - two years before his eleven-year term ended. It has two paper seals and is in very good condition.

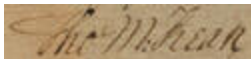
It is a warrant granting 1094 1/4 acres of land called "Parnassus" in District No. 1 in the late purchase east of the Allegheny River to the Right Reverend William White D.D. White was an Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania and also served as the Chaplain of the United States Congress.

Accompanying the document is a copy of an engraving by E. Wellmore done from a G. Stuart painting of Mifflin.

## **Thomas McKean** **Term 65, 1799-1808, born in Chester County**



In the 21st Century we are all accustomed to the fast pace of life with calendars much too full with appointments and events. In the 18th Century, we think of daily life proceeding no faster than the pace of a horse and carriage, which today would seem like a snail's pace. Thomas McKean's life defies those preconceived perceptions. From July 1777 until 1799 he was the Chief Justice of Pennsylvania. McKean held the position of president of Delaware in 1777, which was the equivalent at that time to a governorship. From 1774 until 1783, he was one of the three Delaware delegates to the Continental Congress, the only man who served from the beginning of the congress until peacetime after the Revolutionary War. In other words, McKean was probably the first and only man to hold three very important positions concurrently for a period of time that involved representation for two different states. For a long time Delaware had been part of Pennsylvania. After the land was legally divided into two colonies, evidently the redistricting lines that affected the representation of both colonies didn't cause much concern among the citizens of Pennsylvania and Delaware.



McKean's parents were Ulster Scots. He was raised in the Presbyterian faith and was educated by a Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Francis Allison who was a well-known teacher in New Castle, Delaware.

Before the age of 21, McKean was appointed to the Delaware bar. He was an elected member of the Stamp Act Congress and became one of its most influential members. Due to McKean's persuasive arguments, each colony in the congress had an equal vote, regardless of the colony's population.

During the nine years of serving in the Continental Congress, McKean held the following positions: president in 1781; member of the Articles of Confederation committee; a member of the committee that stated the rights of the colonies; a member of the secret committee that decided to contract for arms to be imported; and chairman of the delegates from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

McKean was a signer of the original document of the Declaration of Independence. There is conjecture why his name does not appear on the printer's first copy published in the journal of congress. There is some evidence that his signature may not have been written on the original document until 1781. But, there is no doubt that McKean, a man of action, was wholeheartedly behind voting for and signing the Declaration. Most of the signers of the Declaration placed their signatures on the document on August 2, 1776. Just days after the vote for independence, McKean a commissioned colonel in the New Jersey militia left Philadelphia to help General George Washington with reinforcements at Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Therefore, he was not present in Philadelphia at the time the majority of the signatures were affixed to the Declaration. Considering the turbulent times and the number of positions that McKean held throughout this period, it is conceivable that he just did not have the opportunity to sign the Declaration until 1781.

McKean attended the convention in Pennsylvania in 1787 that ratified the new Federal Constitution. The constitution of Pennsylvania was amended in 1789 to which he made contributions.

McKean's election in 1799 to three consecutive terms as governor of Pennsylvania as a moderate believer and practitioner of republicanism was an important political event of the times. He became a leader of his party and his influence laid the foundation for Thomas Jefferson to rise to the presidency of the United States.

Tall in stature, McKean a well-educated, vocal proponent of his beliefs, prolific writer, and a man of action with little tact who held numerous political positions attracted as well as admirers a multitude of enemies, including the British. In a letter to his very close friend John Adams, he wrote that his friends envied him and he was, "hunted like a fox by the enemy..."

McKean's enemies in the political realm tried to impeach him on charges of nepotism while he was Governor of Pennsylvania. There was no proof, so the issue was dropped.

In Philadelphia on June 24, 1817 at the age of 83, Thomas McKean died.

About the document: This is a rare document, dated October 12, 1782, which contains the signatures of Thomas McKean and George Bryan. Both men served as Governor of Pennsylvania. McKean was also a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

The document is a warrant to David Rittenhouse, Esquire, who at the time was Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Rittenhouse, a world-renown, self-taught mathematician and astronomer, and close friend of Franklin, served as Pennsylvania's executive for fourteen days during the interim and critical period beginning on July 24th. The Pennsylvania Convention appointed on this date a twenty-five-member Council of Safety which nullified the proprietary government (Penn family) and became the executive department.

The document requests Rittenhouse to pay four pounds and ten shillings to William Augustus Attlee, Esquire, Second Justice of the Supreme Court for the traveling expenses of his servant from Lancaster to Philadelphia and back to attend a session of the Supreme Court that began on September 24, 1782.

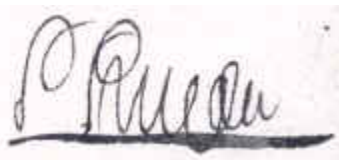
This warrant, with two Pennsylvania Governors' signatures, was added to the collection when it was given to Allison-Antrim Museum in December 2001 by Thomas Brumbaugh.

## **Simon Snyder** **Term 66, 1808-1817, born in Lancaster County**



Snyder, held office for three full terms and was the first of a long line of Pennsylvania German descendants to hold the position of Governor of Pennsylvania.

Snyder rose to the high office of governor by working hard having begun as a tanner and currier apprentice. He was elected to the House of Representatives and helped form the Commonwealth Constitution. He was chosen speaker of the House in 1802 and controlled the destinies of the Commonwealth during the Napoleonic reign in Europe. It was a time of prosperity in the country because of the neutral position it took with the combatants. The tranquility ended when the War of 1812 broke out and when Pennsylvania was drawn deeply into the war with the battles on Lake Erie.



Snyder, on the side of war, closely tied the affairs of the Commonwealth's to those of the Federal Government. He called for 14,000 militiamen and produced a great army of volunteers.

Snyder's firsts include presenting his annual message to the Legislature in writing rather than in person. It was a tradition that held for a long time.

He was the first governor to preside in Harrisburg. In 1810, a Legislative act declared Harrisburg would be the capital after 1812.



Snyder was the only governor subjected to a kidnapping attempt of a family member. Shortly after moving to Harrisburg, a nearly successful attempt was made to kidnap his youngest son.

About the document: It is dated May 25, 1818, the year after his three consecutive terms of office ended. This document is a hand-written letter that appears to have been penned by someone other than Snyder, possibly his secretary. The handwriting in the body of the letter is very much dissimilar to that of the signature.

Snyder sent this letter to Colonel John Burns, No. 70 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, along with the enclosure of another letter addressed to John Stock, Esq. in the event he was unable to make the journey from Harrisburg to Philadelphia because of health reasons. Five weeks prior he suffered "a severe attack of inflammatory fever" that caused him to lose 26 pounds and greatly debilitated him. He thinks he has now recovered enough to "undergo the fatigues of the journey."

Snyder talks of an unnamed "Secretary of the Committee" who has been avoiding Col. Burns and other of his old friends because his conduct concerning the appointment of a Mr. Clark was greatly disapproved by them. Snyder's concluding comment on the subject was, "I will not question his (Mr. Clark's) qualifications but without disparagement to Mr. C. and others who have been of equivocal politics, a selection might have been made from amongst men as well qualified & whose political integrity was never questioned."

## William Findlay



**Term 67, 1817-1820, born in Mercersburg, Franklin County**

When Findlay, Snyder's successor, was a member of the House of Representatives, he was the first person to suggest moving the capital from Lancaster to Harrisburg. During his public service, he was present when the capital moved from Philadelphia to Lancaster and then to Harrisburg.

He was from a middleclass background, having been born on a farm. If his father's store had not burned down, Findlay very well may have become a merchant. "He was tall, fair and cheerful, of fine appearance, and is said to have had a most remarkable memory for names and faces, a prime asset to anyone in politics."

He held the position, by annual elections, of State Treasurer from 1797 until being elected Governor.

He married Nancy Irwin and very soon became involved in politics.

Patronage was the word of the day, and depending upon whose side one stood, patronage could be favored or deplored. The Governor of Pennsylvania in those days had the power to appoint every State and county officer. Patronage was his downfall at re-election time when the power politicians were unsuccessful, during Findlay's term, at receiving the perks of patronage. The politicians got together against him and defeated his re-election.

Almost immediately after that, he was elected to the United States Senate serving for the full six-year term. After that he was appointed treasurer of the United States Mint in Philadelphia.

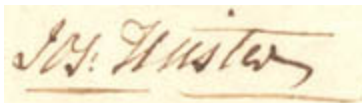
About the document: This document dated March 27, 1819 was signed during Findlay's term of office. It is a document of incorporation of the German Reformed Congregation in the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia.

## **Joseph Hiester** **Term 68, 1820-1823, born in Berks County**



On the second try (his first defeat was to Findlay) at running for governor, Joseph Hiester succeeded. He was raised on a farm and at the age of nineteen married Elizabeth Whitman from Reading. He entered the mercantile business with his father-in-law.

During the Revolutionary War, at the age of 24, he raised and equipped, in Reading, a company of men that took part in the battles of Long Island and Germantown. He was promoted to Colonel, captured, and confined for a long time in irons before he was released. During this time he did much to alleviate the suffering of his fellow prisoners. After his release and recovery he returned to front line service.



He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1776, the State Constitutional Convention, served five years in the house and four in the senate of Pennsylvania. In 1807 he was appointed one of the two major generals to command the quota of Pennsylvania militia that was called for by the president. He served in congress from 1797 until 1805 and again from 1815 to 1820 when he resigned.

Hiester deplored the patronage powers that the position of Governor held and asked the Legislature: "Would it not be possible to devise some method of reducing the enormous power and patronage of the Governor...?"

Hiester only desired one term and declined to run for re-election, at which time he retired from public life.

In his book "Carpenters and Joiners of Franklin Co., 1750 – 1850", William S. Bowers makes reference to Dr. Joseph M. Hiester. In 1831 Hiester purchased 240 acres of land that he called Millmont. Millmont was located three miles east of Mercersburg on the south side of Route 16. The Franklin County map of 1868 indicates that the Hiester family still owned a number of properties in the Mercersburg area.

## **George Wolf**

### **Term 70, 1829-1835, born in Northampton County**



George Wolf, Jacksonian portrait of Pennsylvania, 1829-1835, an edition of the New York State Historical Association and Historical Commission.

Wolf, a farmer, educator, and lawyer, climbed the political ladder starting as a clerk in the office of the Northampton County Prothonotary.

He was a Jeffersonian and was rewarded by President Jefferson with his appointment as postmaster of Easton. Governor McKean appointed him clerk of Northampton's Orphans Court and he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1814. After being defeated in a run for the Pennsylvania Senate he was elected to the United States House of Representatives.

By the time Wolf became Governor, the Legislature had gotten the Commonwealth into deep deficit spending, owing more than eight million dollars. The Legislature borrowed heavily to construct the canal system but could not pay the interest on the loans. Wolf met the issue head on by achieving the passage of a bill that taxed mortgages, bonds, notes, and bank and turnpike stock, and raised county taxes.

One of Wolf's priorities was to establish a system of free public education for Pennsylvanians. He was met with great resistance. But he persevered, and on April 1, 1834, he had the great satisfaction of signing into law a bill that created a tax-supported system of public education which would become effective wherever established by local option. Except for an extraordinary, argumentative debate performance by Thaddeus Stevens who convinced the majority of the Senate to sustain the bill, a repeal of the original bill would have been passed.

Wolf's leadership in establishing a public system of education, which has since made Pennsylvania outstanding in America, gave him an honored page in Pennsylvania history. But in turn, it cost him his re-election in 1835 because of the loss of support from many German voters who strongly opposed the bill.

Wolf was the first Pennsylvania governor to establish the Governor's Office in the State Capitol building, with staff, instead of the customary use of the front room of the Governor's house as the Governor's office.

## **David Porter**



## Term 72, 1839-1845, born in Montgomery County

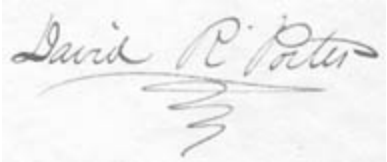


Gov. David R. Porter from the front of the state's House of Representatives in 1839. (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

David Porter was the first governor under the 1838 Constitution.

Although doing his best, he was unable to avoid the Pennsylvania financial crash that came in 1841 that stemmed from the great panic of 1837. Some thought him crazy for suggesting the construction of a railroad from Pittsburgh to the Mississippi. When riots developed in Philadelphia in 1844, he had to call out the militia to suppress them. He was a big supporter of and battled for the checks and balances of the three branches of government.

Of his character, it was said that he never "turned his back on a friend or forgot him in a difficulty."



About the document: This paper is an extradition order signed by Porter and sent to the governor of New York for the return of Daniel E. Washburne. Washburne passed false, forged, and counterfeit bank notes and fled to New York. This document, with a wax seal and ribbon, is dated

February 15, 1840 during his term of office.

## Francis Rawn Shunk

### Term 73, 1845-1848, born in Montgomery County

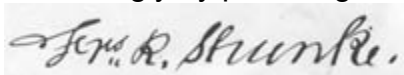


Francis Shunk

Shunk was the grandson of a German emigrant, a farmer, and a teacher. He was a clerk in the office of the Surveyor General and studied law. As a private, he helped defend Baltimore in the War of 1812. He returned to Harrisburg where he became a clerk in the House of Representatives, during which time, he supervised the planting of most of the trees that grow in the park of Capitol Hill.

After gradually moving up the political ladder and becoming Secretary of State, he retired to practice law in Pittsburgh.

He only returned to Harrisburg when he was elected Governor. In 1846 the United States declared war on Mexico. When he called for volunteers, Pennsylvania responded overwhelmingly by providing more than four regiments – not counting those in the Regular Army.



Shunk married Jane Findlay, the daughter of former Governor William Findlay.

Because of a serious lung condition, from which he later died, Shunk resigned from office (the third Pennsylvania Governor to do so) on Sunday, July 9, 1848.

## **William Bigler**

**Term 75, 1852-1855, born in Cumberland County**



William Bigler

William Bigler was the son of a Pennsylvania German farmer. His brother John became governor of California.

While working for his brother John, who published the Centre Democrat at Bellefonte, he was able to save enough money to buy a used press and some worn out type. This enabled him to move to Clearfield where he published the Clearfield Democrat. He was the second newspaperman to become Governor of Pennsylvania – the first being Benjamin Franklin.

Bigler then went into the mercantile business becoming one of the biggest producers west of the Susquehanna.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wm. Bigler".

Not long after, he was elected to the State Senate where he made a strong speech against repudiating the State debt. This gained him recognition and in due course he became Speaker of the Senate and then Governor of Pennsylvania (this at the same time his brother John became Governor of California).

One of his most important actions was stopping the practice of "log rolling" in the Legislature. "Log rolling" was when a bad piece of legislation was rolled into one or more pieces of good legislation to force the bad one through. Unfortunately this practice still goes on today by attaching amendments to bills.

Bigler was elected Governor of Pennsylvania because his party, the Democrats, remained united on support of the Compromise of 1850 whereas the Pennsylvania Whig party was divided over its support. The result was that the Whig candidate lost.

The Compromise of 1850 allowed California to enter the United States as a "free" state thereby tipping the majority rule of free and slave states in Congress. The compromise for the South was a new Federal law – The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 – which created a Federal enforcement agency and guaranteed the return of blacks if warrants were issued by the Federal commission. This law would also test the North's willingness to support (take sides on the issue of slavery) the new law.

Bigler made it clear that he would scrupulously respect the Federal Constitution and laws. But that did not deter individuals from forming strong feelings against slavery and slave hunting.

Bigler was defeated in the next election because the Free-Soil Democrats backed the Whig nominee, James Pollock (a Free-Soiler), who was also backed by a new party – The Know Nothings.

After being defeated in re-election, he became president of the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad Company and then was elected to the United States Senate.

Bigler played a major role in national politics in connection with the swiftly oncoming secession of the Southern States.

About the document: This document dated May 24, 1855 was signed about four months after his term of office as governor. It is a document from the Office of the S&E RR Company that places the name of someone in the position of one of the vice presidents of the company. There is mention of Governor Pollock, successor to Bigler, who will be happy to know that such use of this person's name will be agreeable to himself.

## **James Pollock**

**Term 76, 1855-1858, born in Northumberland Co.**



A contemporary described Pollock as "rather above medium height, with prominent dark eyes and a face beaming with intelligence and benignity. In manner he was cordial and frank."

After graduating from the College of New Jersey at Princeton, he started his law practice and within a year was appointed district Attorney of Northumberland at the age of twenty-four. He was elected to Congress for three terms beginning at the age of thirty-four.

He was a man of vision, who asked his fellow Congressmen to appoint a committee to study feasibility of building a railroad to the Pacific Coast. Twenty-one years later the last gold spike was driven into the tracks.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Pollock", written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

a railroad to the Pacific later the last gold spike was

In 1850 Pollock was appointed President Judge of the Eighth Judicial District and in 1854 he was nominated and elected Governor of Pennsylvania.

He firmly stated his position against the extension of slavery, reigned in the many state departments that over spent on projects, and he started paying off the State public debt. One of his biggest feats was his working with the Legislature to prevent a complete banking crash in Pennsylvania.

Remembering him as a visionary, one of his last official acts as Governor was to sign the bill on January 18, 1858 that provided for the purchase of an Executive Mansion for future Governors of Pennsylvania. Pollock became the father of Pennsylvania's first Executive Mansion.

He refused to stand for re-election, and three years after his term as Governor ended, he was appointed Director of the United States Mint at Philadelphia. It is in this capacity that history remembers him most, as he is the father of "In God We Trust" that is still printed on our money.

About the document: This document is a certificate of appointment, made by Governor Pollock, to the position of Commissioner of the City of Tallahassee, Florida.

This document also contains the signature of a future Governor of Pennsylvania, Andrew G. Curtin, governor during the Civil War. During Pollock's administration, he held the position of Secretary of the Commonwealth.

## **William F. Packer** **Term 77, 1858-1861, born in Centre County**



Packer was six feet tall and weighed more than two hundred and twenty-five pounds.

Packer climbed the political ladder by way of journeyman printer; owner, editor, and publisher of the Lycoming Gazette; was appointed superintendent of the West Branch Canal; along with two friends, published in Harrisburg the hard-hitting paper, The Keystone; was appointed a member of the powerful Board of Canal Commissioners; and was appointed Auditor General of the Commonwealth by Governor Porter. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1847 and became Speaker of the House in his second term. In 1849 he beat Andrew Curtin (who would succeed him as Governor) for a Senate seat.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wm F. Packer". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Packer won the governor's race by thousands of votes. He was a delegate to the Cincinnati Democratic Convention that nominated Pennsylvania's only occupant of the White House, James Buchanan.

Packer was the first occupant of the official Pennsylvania-owned Executive Mansion. Packer was also very concerned with national affairs and set the precedent of "the close intermingling of State and Federal affairs in the inner sanctum of the Mansion."

In failing health, and tired of seeking compromise after compromise over a situation that had long since passed the point of compromise, Packer retired from public life at the expiration of his term.

He died in 1870.