

Minnesota Governors Served by Aide Billy Williams (1905-1957)

No.	Name & Party	Assumed Office	Left Office	Select National or State Events During Term	Notable Legislation/Accomplishments
16	John A. Johnson (D)	Jan. 4, 1905	Sep. 21, 1909 (died)	<p>1905–Theodore Roosevelt started second term; Billy Williams began work at Minnesota State Capitol with Gov. Johnson.</p> <p>1908–Devastating fire demolished Chisolm, MN; Henry Ford introduced the Model T.</p> <p>1909–William Taft inaugurated; W. E. B. Du Bois founded the NAACP.</p>	Fought for equitable taxation and insurance reform; created a state immigration bureau; improved conservation; reduced rail and passenger freight rates; founded a state banking department; ended capital punishment; was a proponent of women's suffrage; participated directly in strike negotiations on the Iron Range in 1907. ¹
17	Adolph O. Eberhart (R)	Sep. 21, 1909	Jan. 5, 1915	<p>1910–National Urban League founded in NYC.</p> <p>1911–Capital punishment abolished in Minnesota.</p> <p>1913–Woodrow Wilson inaugurated. Wilson initiated segregation in work and public places; Women marched in suffrage parade in NYC; Local citizens started the St. Paul branch of the NAACP.</p> <p>1914–WWI began (US not involved); Minneapolis named home to the Federal Reserve Bank; Panama Canal opened.</p>	Assumed gubernatorial duties after Johnson died; was an efficient administrator; consolidated rural schools and primary elections; sanctioned a corrupt practice law; initiated a reapportionment bill. ²
18	Winfield S. Hammond (D)	Jan. 5, 1915	Dec. 30, 1915 (died)	<p>1915–First long-distance telephone service began; The controversial <i>Birth of a Nation</i> film hit theatres.</p>	Promoted women's rights and other reform measures; signed a county options bill that restricted liquor sales. ³
19	Joseph A. A. Burnquist (R)	Dec. 30, 1915	Jan. 5, 1921	<p>1916–Jeanette Rankin first woman elected to the US House of Representatives; The Great Migration began.</p> <p>1917–US entered WWI; President Wilson began second term; First airmail service started; First "Red Scare" began.</p> <p>1918–Armistice ended WWI; The worldwide influenza pandemic began; Cloquet and Moose Lake, MN, nearly destroyed by fires; New Farmer-Labor Party gained traction.</p> <p>1919–Tornado killed fifty-nine in Fergus Falls; Minnesota ratified the Nineteenth Amendment.</p> <p>1920–Prohibition enforced; Women across US earned right to vote; a white mob lynched three African American men in Duluth who had been falsely accused of rape. Burnquist was president of the St. Paul Chapter of the NAACP at the time.</p>	Stepped in after Hammond died; Because of the war, formed a controversial Public Safety Commission; improved state highways; improved child labor laws; authorized a soldiers' bonus bill. ⁴
20	Jacob A. O. Preus (R)	Jan. 5, 1921	Jan. 6, 1925	<p>1921–President Warren Harding took office; The Tulsa Race Massacre destroyed a prominent Black neighborhood. Thirty-six people died.</p> <p>1923–President Harding died. Calvin Coolidge was sworn in.</p>	Formed a state department of agriculture; expanded highway construction; approved low-interest farm loans; improved election procedures. ⁵

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21	Theodore Christianson (R)	Jan. 6, 1925	Jan. 6, 1931	<p>1925—President Coolidge was elected to a full term; The Tennessee Scopes Trial began.</p> <p>1927—Minnesotan Charles Lindbergh made the first transatlantic flight; <i>The Jazz Singer</i> debuted; Babe Ruth hit sixty home runs.</p> <p>1929—President Herbert Hoover took office; The Stock Market crashed in October, leading to financial panic and a worsening Great Depression.</p>	Formed administration, crime, and finance commissions; reduced state expenditures; restructured state government and controlled taxes (it was the Depression, after all). ⁶
22	Floyd B. Olson (FL)	Jan. 6, 1931	Aug. 22, 1936 (died)	<p>1931—The Great Depression continued; The <i>Star Spangled Banner</i> adopted as national anthem.</p> <p>1932—Amelia Earhart (who attended high school in St. Paul) became first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.</p> <p>1933—Franklin D. Roosevelt inaugurated; The New Deal was enacted by Congress; the Twenty-First Amendment repealed prohibition; William Hamm Jr. kidnapped by gangsters in St. Paul.</p> <p>1935—Edward Bremer, heir to Schmidt brewery, kidnapped by gangsters in St. Paul; the Works Progress Administration helped the unemployed.</p>	Secured funding to improve unemployment benefits and construct new highways; established a Department of Conservation and public relief programs; regulated the sale of securities; worked to mediate a meat packers' strike (successful) and a truckers' strike (more difficult); expanded charitable organizations and penal institutions. ⁷
23	Hjalmar Petersen (FL)	Aug. 24, 1936	Jan. 4, 1937	1937—President Roosevelt elected to a second term.	Served just four months following Olson's death; handled labor disputes; initiated a federal employment insurance law; made a few judicial appointments. ⁸
24	Elmer A. Benson (FL)	Jan. 4, 1937	Jan. 2, 1939	1938—Fair Labor Standard Act passed, securing the first minimum wage at \$.25/hour.	Eliminated state taxes on homesteads; created a state geographic board; established compensation insurance for employers; supported several labor strikes; and organized county welfare boards. ⁹
25	Harold E. Stassen (R)	Jan. 2, 1939	Apr. 27, 1943 (resigned)	<p>1940—Minnesota hit with 16.8 inches of snow on Armistice Day.</p> <p>1941—Roosevelt elected to third term; Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and US entered WWII; first tax on taconite in Minnesota applied; Roosevelt desegregated war production plants and created fair employment practices.</p>	Developed state highway system; sanctioned a civil service law; signed the Minnesota Labor Relations act; created a mediation structure to reduce strikes; promoted tourism; Helped Minnesota get ready for the war and then resigned to join the war effort himself. ¹⁰
26	Edward J. Thye (R)	Apr. 27, 1943	Jan. 8, 1947	<p>1944—D-Day; In Minnesota, Democratic and Farmer-Labor parties merged.</p> <p>1945—President Roosevelt inaugurated for fourth term but died in office a few months later; Harry Truman inaugurated and called for bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; WWII ended.</p>	Took over after Stassen resigned; created a Governor's Interracial Commission; promoted highway construction; established aerospace department; formed a postwar planning commission and an Iron Range rehabilitation commission; moved on to US senate. ¹¹

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27	Luther Youngdahl (R)	Jan. 8, 1947	Sep. 27, 1951 (resigned)	<p>1947–CIA established; Jackie Robinson became first African American to play Major League Baseball in the twentieth century.</p> <p>1948–President Truman desegregated the Armed Forces and federal agencies.</p> <p>1949–President Truman began a second term.</p> <p>1950–Korean War began and ran through 1955; Senator Joseph McCarthy accused the State Department of housing communist operatives and sent a letter to President Truman.</p> <p>1951–President Truman spoke to the nation on first live television broadcast.</p>	Increased funding for public education; addressed gambling issues; abolished segregation in National Guard; sanctioned a mental health act; worked to end telephone company and packing-house strikes. ¹²
28	C. Elmer Anderson (R)	Sep. 27, 1951	Jan. 2, 1955	<p>1953–President Dwight Eisenhower took office; Senator Joseph McCarthy exacerbated the second “Red Scare” with continued accusations.</p> <p>1954–US Supreme Court ruled segregation in public schools unconstitutional.</p>	Took over Youngdahl’s term and then served one more elected term; promoted skilled labor industry; advocated for reform in mental health, law enforcement, and the penal system. ¹³
29	Orville Freeman (DFL)	Jan. 5, 1955	Jan. 2, 1961	1957–President Eisenhower began second term; Billy Williams, aide to fourteen Minnesota governors, retired.	Created Water Resource Board and a Seaway Port Authority; improved state health institutions; increased funding for education; created a Fair Employment Practices Commission; protected Fort Snelling from highway encroachment; mobilized National Guard against strike in Albert Lea. ¹⁴

To learn more about each of these governors, visit Ramsey County Historical Society’s *March of the Governors* podcast series at https://rchs.com/publishing/catalog/?_sft_publication_format=podcast-march-of-the-governors.

NOTES

1. “Gov. John Albert Johnson,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/john-albert-johnson/>.
2. “Gov. Adolph Olson Eberhart,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/adolph-olson-eberhart/>.
3. “Gov. Winfield Scott Hammond,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/winfield-scott-hammond/>.
4. “Gov. Joseph Alfred Arner Burnquist,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/joseph-alfred-arner-burnquist/>.
5. “Gov. Jacob Aal Ottesen Preus,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/jacob-aal-ottesen-preus/>.
6. “Gov. Theodore Christianson,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/theodore-christianson/>.
7. “Gov. Floyd Bjornstjerne Olson,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/floyd-bjornstjerne-olson/>.
8. “Gov. Hjalmar Petersen,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/hjalmar-petersen/>.
9. “Gov. Elmer Austin Benson,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/elmer-austin-benson/>.
10. “Gov. Harold Edward Stassen,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/harold-edward-stassen/>.
11. “Gov. Edward John Thye,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/edward-john-thye/>.
12. “Gov. Luther Wallace Youngdahl,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/luther-wallace-youngdahl/>.
13. “Gov. Clyde Elmer Anderson,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/clyde-elmer-anderson/>.
14. “Gov. Orville Lothrop Freeman,” National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/orville-lothrop-freeman/>.