

Biographical Dictionary of the Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania (1684-2022)

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Introduction

This biographical dictionary comprises the biographies of 172 justices covering the entire history of the court beginning in 1684 to the current year. Modern scholarship created *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania: A Biographical Dictionary*, researched, authored, and edited by a team of scholars headed by Craig W. Horle. The three volumes, published between 1991 and 2006, extend to a total of more than 4,000 pages and represent the years 1682–1709, 1710–1756, and 1757–1775, respectively. The editors of *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania* confirmed the great majority of those listed in John Hill Martin, *Martin's Bench and Bar of Philadelphia* (1883) as Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, but also concluded that the historical evidence was insufficient to include a small number – about six to eight – of Martin's Justices.

A few additional notes should be observed:

For the years 1684 through 1775, the spelling of the surnames of all Justices is the same as found in Horle, et al, *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania*, Volumes 1 through 3. Where Martin differs from Horle, et al, regarding the year or years when each Justice served on the Provincial Court or the Supreme Court, the years shown here are taken from Horle, et al, *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania*. In those instances for which the original sources conflict with one another, a parenthetical note of explanation has been added.

For the years 1776 to the present, both the process by which a person is admitted a Justice of the Court and the length of time a Justice may serve on the Court have undergone revision from time to time. A summary of the dates when those changes have been introduced follows here:

a) The Constitution of 1776 provided for the appointment of Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania by a committee of twelve, known as the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania (under this constitution, there was no office of Governor). The appointments were for terms of seven years. At the end of their terms, the Justices were eligible for re-appointment. The Constitution of 1776 also specified that Justices were “removable for misbehaviour at any time by the General Assembly” of Pennsylvania (under this constitution, the legislature was unicameral). See Ch. II, § 20 and § 23 of the Constitution of 1776.

b) The Constitution of 1790 provided for the appointment of Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania by the Governor. The appointments were for life, that is, “during good behaviour.” See Art. II, § 8 and Art. V, § 2 of the Constitution of 1790.

c) The Constitution of 1838 provided for the appointment of Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania by means of a three-step process. First, the Governor was to nominate the Justices; second, “and by and with the consent of the Senate;” and only then, third, the Governor was to appoint the Justices. The appointments were for terms of fifteen years, “if they shall so long behave themselves well.” See Art. V, § 2 of the Constitution of 1838.

d) The Constitution of 1838 was amended in 1850 to provide for an elected judiciary, beginning with the state-wide election of 1851.

e) The Constitution of 1874 continued the provision for an elected judiciary. The elections for justices were for a single term of twenty-one years, "if they so long behave themselves well"; they could be "removed on conviction of misbehavior in office or of any infamous crime." See Article V, § 2 and Article VI, § 4 of the Constitution of 1874.

f) The Constitution of 1968 continued the provision for an elected judiciary. The elections were for terms of ten years. At the end of their terms, the justices were eligible for retention elections. A new provision provided for mandatory retirement initially at age 70, but later changed to 75. Justices also "shall not engage in any activity prohibited by law and shall not violate any canon of legal or judicial ethics prescribed the Supreme Court". The Judicial Inquiry Review Board, later changed to the Judicial Conduct Board and Court of Judicial Discipline, could investigate and bring justices before the court for disciplinary action for a range of punishments up to and including removal from office. See amended Constitution of 1968, Art. V, §§ 15-18.

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