

Testimony

Remembering Minnesota's Supreme Court Justices

This book showcases the *remarkable lives* and *striking accomplishments* of the men and women who have served on the Minnesota Supreme Court. Browse a few or read them all. Either way you will find yourself thinking, “No wonder Minnesota’s judiciary is regarded as among the *best in the country*.”

— Publications Committee Co-chair William M. Hart, Minnesota Supreme Court Historical Society



Moses Sherburne
1808-1868

Associate Justice, Territorial Supreme Court,
1853-1857

In April 1853, President Pierce appointed his friend Moses Sherburne, the able and eloquent lawyer and public servant from Maine, territorial supreme court justice in the distant land of Minnesota. In Maine, a local newspaper applauded the appointment, stating: “The President could hardly have selected a man better suited to this honorable and responsible position.”

— William M. Hart



M. Jeanne Coyne
1926-1998

Associate Justice, 1982-1996

Although Justice M. Jeanne Coyne was the only woman to graduate in her law school class, her firm’s only woman lawyer for 22 of her 25 years of practice, and one of the first women to serve on Minnesota’s highest court, she would not want to be remembered as a “trailblazer.” She once observed, “Although I was always aware of being a lawyer and a woman, I never practiced law as a ‘woman lawyer’ ... My goal was to be the best lawyer that I could be and to serve my clients and the community well.”

— Mary R. Vasaly



Luther W. Youngdahl
1896-1978

Associate Justice, 1943-1946

Any gallery of Minnesota’s preeminent public servants must include Luther W. Youngdahl. He served as municipal and district court judge, associate justice of the state supreme court, governor, and federal district court judge for the District of Columbia.

— Justice Paul H. Anderson



Henry M. Gallagher
1885-1965

Chief Justice, 1937-1944

Henry Gallagher’s philosophy is illustrated by a quotation that he kept always in his office, reading: “There are three sides to every question – your side, my side, and the right side.” This saying epitomized his faith that men could, if they but would, find a common denominator of agreement for the adjustment of controversy and dispute.

— Chief Justice Robert J. Sheran



Thomas F. Gallagher
1897-1985

Associate Justice 1943-1967

Gallagher’s law clerks during the time he was on the state supreme court included Walter F. Mondale – future Minnesota attorney general, U.S. senator, vice president, and ambassador to Japan – who recalled his clerking experience with great fondness. Vice President Mondale remembers being assigned a big case his first day on the job, whereupon he asked Justice Gallagher what he should do. Gallagher asked what kind of case it was and, when told that it was an insurance case, advised the young law clerk to “Look under ‘I.’”

— Thomas H. Boyd



Walter F. Rogosheske
1914-1998

Associate Justice, 1962-1980

Rogosheske’s road to the bench developed quickly after he left the legislature. Governor Youngdahl appointed him chair of the Metropolitan Airport Commission, then involved in the development of the current Minneapolis/Saint Paul airport, despite Rogosheske’s protest that he was afraid of planes. A year later, in 1950, the governor, using an early form of merit selection that relied on a plebiscite of the lawyers in the district, appointed Rogosheske to the Seventh District Court. Rogosheske indicated his willingness to be considered in the plebiscite but almost withdrew when he thought Fergus Falls attorney Roger Dell might want the job. Dell interviewed Rogosheske and at the conclusion said, “I think you ought to be the judge.” Rogosheske was appointed at age 36. Dell later was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court and ultimately became chief justice. In small-world fashion, Rogosheske filled the vacancy created when Chief Justice Dell retired.

— Justice Sam Hanson



Maynard E. Pirsig
1902-1997

Associate Justice, 1942

Legend has it that if someone asked whether to call him professor or judge, he told them, “The judges call me professor, and the professors call me judge.” In 1925, Pirsig turned down a job offer from the Minneapolis law firm of Dorsey & Whitney to become a Legal Aid attorney, supposedly because Legal Aid then paid more. He was the director of the Legal Aid Society for the six years from 1925 and 1931.

— Barbara L. Jones



Lee Loevinger
1913-2004

Associate Justice, 1960-1961

In 1960, Gov. Orville Freeman, Loevinger’s former partner, appointed Loevinger an associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. For most, this would have been the capstone of a successful legal career. But for Loevinger it was just the beginning. He was just one year into his appointment, and he had authored just 19 majority opinions, when he got a call from President John F. Kennedy. In 1961, Loevinger left the Minnesota Supreme Court for Washington to serve with Robert F. Kennedy as assistant attorney general in charge of the Antitrust Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. There, along with Robert Kennedy and Byron White, who later became a Supreme Court Justice, Loevinger became part of the “exclusive triumvirate” of antitrust enforcement.

— Dan Piper