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*George Theodore Mickelson*

## *Dakota Images*

George Theodore Mickelson, governor of South Dakota from 1947 to 1950, was born 23 July 1903 in Selby, South Dakota, the ninth of ten children of pioneer homesteaders George and Emma Mickelson.

Orphaned at the age of fifteen, Mickelson lived with older brothers and worked on their farms and ranches. During high school and college vacations, he sold insurance in order to support himself and finance his education. He graduated from Selby High School in 1921 and received his LL.B. degree in 1927 from the University of South Dakota, where he was also active in college athletics and drama and was elected student-body president. Mickelson married his high school sweetheart, Madge Turner, in 1928, and they had four children.

After college graduation, Mickelson practiced law in Selby and served as Walworth County states attorney from 1933 to 1936, when he was elected to the South Dakota House of Representatives. He was speaker of the house in 1941 when his youngest son, George, was born, and fellow house members gave the newborn the middle name of "Speaker." Between 1943 and 1947, Mickelson served as South Dakota's attorney general, leaving that post in 1947 to run for governor.

Mickelson defeated the incumbent Republican governor, Merrell Q. Sharpe, in the primary and went on to win the election. A popular political figure, Mickelson had no difficulty being reelected in 1948. During his tenure as governor, he reduced bonded indebtedness, making the state debt-free for the first time in forty years. He pushed conservation measures through the legislature to protect the state's natural resources, promoted expansion of highways and public institutions, provided vigorous leadership in Missouri River development, and initiated the distribution of World War II veterans' bonuses.

In 1951, Mickelson returned to private life in Selby, where he had extensive land ownings, a flourishing law practice, and a successful business venture (Selby Bank). The following year, he came out of political retirement to lead Dwight D. Eisenhower's South Dakota presidential campaign. In 1953, Mickelson was appointed to a federal district judgeship, and many of his decisions dealt with Indian tribal relations. He served as judge until his death on 28 February 1965.

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