



Dakota Images

Only one man, Arthur C. Mellette, served as governor of both the territory of Dakota and the state of South Dakota.

Arthur Calvin Mellette was born 23 June 1842 in Henry County, Indiana, to Mary Moore Mellette and Charles Mellette, a farmer and Baptist lay minister. Nicknamed "Cal," young Mellette taught himself to read before he regularly attended school. Skilled at persuasion, he converted his father, a staunch Democrat, to the Republican party by forcefully arguing the party's antislavery position. He graduated from Indiana University in 1864 and, following a year of service in the Union army, received a law degree. While at the university, he married Margaret Wylie, and in 1866 the couple moved to Muncie, Indiana, where Mellette entered law practice. He also invested in the Muncie *Times*, ran successfully for district attorney, and served in the Indiana legislature.

Mellette came to Dakota Territory in 1879 to work as register at the United States Land Office in Springfield after his wife's battle with tuberculosis made a change of climate necessary. When the office was transferred to Watertown in 1880, he began a long association with that city, practicing law and engaging in a wide range of business activities there. His political experience soon drew him into the battle for statehood for southern Dakota. He was a delegate to the 1883 constitutional convention and chaired the 1885 convention, which chose him as governor of the provisional State of Dakota. In the late 1880s, he spent much of his own time and money lobbying in Washington, D.C., for statehood. In March 1889, President Benjamin Harrison appointed Mellette, his old friend from Indiana, to be the last governor of Dakota Territory. In October of that year, the people of South Dakota elected him to serve as the first governor of their new state. His time in office, which lasted until January 1893, was troubled by drought, revenue shortages, and unrest on the state's Indian reservations. In 1895, Mellette lost most of his property to the state as bond for funds stolen by State Treasurer W. W. Taylor.

Arthur C. Mellette died in Pittsburg, Kansas, on 25 May 1896. He is buried in Watertown, where the brick Mellette residence, built in 1883, is preserved by the Mellette Memorial Association.

by DAVID B. MILLER

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