

# Timeline of Kentucky Governors 1792-2021



## 1. Isaac Shelby

**Term:** June 4, 1792 — June 7, 1796  
*(not candidate for election)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** position did not exist

**He's No. 1 and No. 5:** Shelby was a war hero, known for the defeat of the British in 1781 at the Battle of King's Mountain in South Carolina. He was the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> governor of Kentucky.

## 2. James Garrard

**Term:** June 7, 1796 — Sept. 5, 1804 *(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** position did not exist, Alexander Scott Bullitt *(2<sup>nd</sup> term)*

**Two terms in a row:** Garrard was a Baptist minister, and like Shelby, a Revolutionary War soldier. He served two terms as governor, before term limits were imposed.

## 3. Christopher Greenup

**Term:** Sept. 5, 1804 — Sept. 1, 1808 *(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** John Caldwell *(died November 19, 1804)*, Thomas Posey

**Not with Burr:** Greenup got caught up in the legislature's investigation of the Aaron Burr treason conspiracy, but he was able to defend himself. Burr was accused of trying to split off the western states and Louisiana territory from the rest of the nation.

## 4. Charles Scott

**Term:** Sept. 1, 1808 — Aug. 24, 1812 *(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Gabriel Slaughter

**The military life:** Orphaned at 16, Scott joined the Virginia militia in 1755, the beginning of a long military career. Scott, like the governors before him, fought in the Revolution. He also fought in the Northwest Indian Wars. Two of his sons were killed in the Indian wars.

## 5. Isaac Shelby

**Term:** Aug. 24, 1812 — Sept. 5, 1816 *(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Richard Hickman

**(see entry no. 1) Back at it again:** The American Revolution wasn't the end of Shelby's military career. At the age of 62, during his second term as governor, he led Kentucky troops in the War of 1812 to victory in the Battle of the Thames in Canada. Congress awarded him a gold medal.

## 6. George Madison

**Term:** Sept. 5, 1816 — Oct. 14, 1816 *(died in office)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Gabriel Slaughter

**Too sick to serve for long:** Madison served as governor for only a few weeks. A frail man, his health had taken a turn for the worse after he was wounded in the War of 1812 and taken prisoner. He died at age 53. **Family ties:** He was a second cousin of President James Madison.

## 7. Gabriel Slaughter

**Term:** Oct. 14, 1816 — Aug. 29, 1820  
*(not candidate for election)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Vacant

**Stepping up:** When Madison died in office, it was the first time the lieutenant governor had to step up to become governor. It wasn't long before Slaughter's opponents in the legislature tried to undo it all. Some in the state House of Representatives called for a special election to replace Slaughter, but the measure didn't pass the Senate.

## 8. John Adair

**Term:** Aug. 29, 1820 — Aug. 24, 1824 *(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** William T. Barry

**Also not with Burr:** Adair's early political career was interrupted in 1806 when he was arrested in New Orleans and accused of being part of the Aaron Burr treason conspiracy. He was forced to resign his U.S. Senate seat. Years later, he was cleared of wrongdoing. **War hero:** Adair became a war hero leading Kentuckians in the Battle of New Orleans, and his political career took off again. His time as governor was spent dealing with the aftermath of the Panic of 1819, which threw many people into debt.



## 9. John Desha

**Term:** Aug. 24, 1824 — Aug. 26, 1828 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic-Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Robert B. McAfee

**Out with the Old:** The debt crisis from the Panic of 1819 led to a power struggle. Desha and the legislature wanted debt relief, but the state Court of Appeals sided with creditors. On Christmas Eve 1824, the legislature abolished the “Old Court” and established a New Court. **In with the New:** The Old Court refused to quit, but the New Court clerk took its records by force. **Back in with the Old:** The Old Court allies worked to gain control of the legislature, and in 1826 the New Court was abolished. Desha vetoed it, but the legislature overrode the veto.

## 10. Thomas Metcalfe

**Term:** Aug. 26, 1828 — Sept. 4, 1832 (*term limited*)

**Party:** National Republican

**Lt. Governor:** John Breathitt

**He helped build it:** As a young stonemason in 1797, Metcalfe helped lay the foundation for the first Kentucky Governor’s Mansion. Some 30 years later, “Old Stonehammer” was elected governor and moved in. Fitting for a stonemason, he focused on roads, railways, and canals.

## 11. John Breathitt

**Term:** Sept. 4, 1832 — Feb. 21, 1834 (*died in office*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** James Turner Morehead

**No to nullification:** Years before the Civil War, Breathitt helped steer Kentuckians against the idea of a state’s right to secede from the Union. He did this by speaking out against the doctrine of nullification, an idea from South Carolina Sen. John Calhoun that said states had the right to nullify or veto federal laws.

## 12. James Turner Morehead

**Term:** Feb. 21, 1834 — Aug. 30, 1836 (*not candidate for election*)

**Party:** National Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Vacant

**Kentucky born:** Morehead, who was born near Shepherdsville in Bullitt County, was the first native-born Kentuckian to be governor. The town of Morehead is named for him. **Now we’re the Whigs:** While he was governor, his party, the National Republicans, changed their name to the Whigs, which came from a British anti-monarchy party. The Whigs opposed President Jackson, the man they contemptuously called King Andrew.

## 13. James Clark

**Term:** Aug. 30, 1836 — Aug. 27, 1839 (*died in office*)

**Party:** Whig

**Lt. Governor:** Charles A. Wickliffe

**No hard feelings:** Remember that Old Court controversy? As a circuit court judge back in 1822, Clark struck down a debt relief law, an unpopular decision in the financially troubled 1820s. The legislature tried to remove him as judge but didn’t have the votes. Just 14 years later, Clark was elected governor.

## 14. Charles A. Wickliffe

**Term:** Aug. 27, 1839 — Sept. 2, 1840 (*not candidate for election*)

**Party:** Whig

**Lt. Governor:** Vacant

**No stopping him:** After his year as governor, Wickliffe kept busy. In 1841, he was named U.S. postmaster general; in 1845 he was sent on a secret mission for President James Polk regarding Texas annexation. That’s not all. He survived being stabbed aboard a steamship in 1840s. A carriage accident in 1862 left him unable to walk, but he still ran for governor, unsuccessfully, in 1863 at the age of 75.

## 15. Robert P. Letcher

**Term:** Sept. 2, 1840 — Sept. 4, 1844 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Whig

**Lt. Governor:** Manlius Valerius Thomson

**A merry fiddler:** Letcher was admired for his sense of humor and his fiddle playing. His winning personality and large number of friends helped him win elections his whole life.

## 16. William Owsley

**Term:** Sept. 4, 1844 — Sept. 6, 1848 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Whig

**Lt. Governor:** William T. Barry

**You're pardoned:** Owsley granted a pardon to Delia Webster, the first woman sentenced to prison in Kentucky for helping fugitive slaves escape to Ohio.

**How he was remembered:** Owsley was a justice in the Old Court-New Court controversy of 1824. Upon Owsley's death in 1862, the *New York Times* praised him for "carrying Kentucky through one of the most violent civil commotions that ever convulsed a State, and threatened it with civil war."

## 17. John J. Crittenden

**Term:** Sept. 6, 1848 — July 31, 1850 (*resigned to become U.S. attorney general*) [g]

**Party:** Whig

**Lt. Governor:** William T. Barry

**Let's set up schools:** While he was governor, the General Assembly passed a law setting up a system of common schools, funding them with a property tax and the proceeds from tolls on riverboat traffic.

**A family divided:** His son George was a Confederate general and son Thomas was a Union general. Crittenden supported the Union but criticized the Emancipation Proclamation. He died in 1863 before the war ended.

## 18. John L. Helm

**Term:** July 31, 1850 — Sept. 2, 1851  
(*not candidate for election*)

**Party:** N/A

**Lt. Governor:** N/A

**Working on the railroad:** After Helm finished Crittenden's term as governor, he was president of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad from 1854 to 1860. **Arrested:** Helm was another governor whose later life was consumed by the Civil War. Helm opposed secession, but he criticized Lincoln and was arrested once by federal military forces for disloyalty. Helm's son, Benjamin, was a Confederate general and died at Chickamauga.

## 19. Lazarus Powell

**Term:** Sept. 2, 1851 — Sept. 4, 1855 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** N/A

**'You owe it to science':** That's what Gov. Powell said to convince the Whig legislature to hire a geologist for the first geological survey of Kentucky. **Rocky term as U.S. senator:** He was such an outspoken critic of Lincoln that the General Assembly asked him to resign and his fellow Kentucky senator tried to get him expelled, both to no avail.

## 20. Charles S. Morehead

**Term:** Sept. 4, 1855 — Aug. 30, 1859 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Know-Nothing

**Lt. Governor:** N/A

**Election violence:** Morehead was the only Kentucky governor ever elected from the Know-Nothing party. His campaign's anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic rhetoric led to the "Bloody Monday" election riot in Louisville, which killed at least 22 people. **He's outta here:** During the Civil War, Morehead was imprisoned in 1861 for disloyalty to the Union. After his release in 1862, he fled the country. After the war ended, he settled in Mississippi, where he died in 1868.

## 21. Beriah Magoffin

**Term:** Aug. 30, 1859 — Aug. 18, 1862 (*resigned*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** N/A

**Not taking sides:** When the General Assembly adopted a position of neutrality in the Civil War, Magoffin held to it, refusing calls for aid from both the Union and Confederate governments. **He's outta here:** The Unionist legislature still did not trust him, and Magoffin agreed to resign in 1862, provided James F. Robinson would finish out his term.

## 22. James Fisher Robinson

**Term:** Aug. 18, 1862 — Sept. 1, 1863  
(not candidate for election)

**Party:** N/A

**Lt. Governor:** N/A

**His year as governor:** Though Robinson had Union sympathies and opposed secession, he was against abolition and the enlistment of Black soldiers.

## 23. Thomas E. Bramlette

**Term:** Sept. 1, 1863 — Sept. 3, 1867 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Richard Taylor Jacob

**From war to Reconstruction:** Election interference by the Union Army gave Bramlette a landslide victory as a Union Democrat. Bramlette opposed the federal government's recruitment of Black men for the Union Army. However, when Lincoln was assassinated, he declared a day of fasting and prayer. After the war, he issued a general pardon for most ex-Confederates in the state.

## 24. John L. Helm

**Term:** Sept. 3, 1867 — Sept. 8, 1867 (*died in office*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** John W. Stevenson

**(Second term in office. See Entry No. 18) Back but not for long:** Although in poor health, in 1867 Helm won election to be governor again at the age of 65. He was too weak to travel to Frankfort for his inauguration, so state officials administered the oath of office at his home. He died five days later.

## 25. John W. Stevenson

**Term:** Sept. 8, 1867 — Feb. 3, 1871

(*resigned to become a U.S. senator*)[k]

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** N/A

**Reconstruction governor:** Stevenson opposed federal intervention in what he considered state matters but insisted that the rights of former slaves be defended. He used the state militia to quell post-war violence in the state.

## 26. Preston Leslie

**Term:** Feb. 3, 1871 — Aug. 31, 1875 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** John G. Carlisle

**Milestone election:** Leslie won in the first election where the state's Black citizens could vote. At his urging, the legislature passed a law admitting court testimony by African Americans. **No whiskey here:** The temperance movement became more popular, and Leslie, a devout Baptist, prohibited whiskey at official functions. **Going west:** In 1887 he was named territorial governor of Montana, where he stayed for the rest of his life.

## 27. James B. McCreary

**Term:** Aug. 31, 1875 — Sept. 2, 1879 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** John C. Underwood

**First Confederate veteran as governor:**

McCreary served as the 27th and 37th governor. A Confederate veteran of the Civil War, he ran for governor attacking Reconstruction, defeating his opponent, John Marshall Harlan (the future Supreme Court justice). **Stop that feuding:** McCreary called out the militia to try to quell feuds in Breathitt County.

## 28. Luke P. Blackburn

**Term:** Sept. 2, 1879 — Sept. 5, 1883 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** James E. Cantrill

**Hero doctor:** Blackburn stopped a yellow fever outbreak with the first successful quarantine in the Mississippi River valley in the 1830s and 1840s. **Confederate conspirator:** Blackburn plotted unsuccessfully from Canada to start a yellow fever epidemic in the Northern United States during the Civil War by sending trunks of infected linens

to Unionists. (It wouldn't have worked, because the disease is spread by mosquitoes.) He denied involvement in the plot. Blackburn was tried in Canada for an act of war, but was acquitted. A Canadian newspaper called him "Dr. Black Vomit." **Then governor:** Despite being wanted on a charge of murder conspiracy in the United States, Blackburn quietly returned to Kentucky in 1872 to combat yellow fever outbreaks here and elsewhere. He was deemed a hero and elected governor, where he made a new name for himself advocating for prison reform and issuing numerous pardons.

## 29. J. Proctor Knott

**Term:** Sept. 5, 1883 — Aug. 30, 1887 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** James R. Hindman

**Another Confederate:** Knott began his political career as attorney general of Missouri. Prior to the Civil War, he resigned rather than swear allegiance to the Union. **Stop that feuding:** As Kentucky governor, he called on state troops in 1885 to quell violence in the Rowan County feud. **No thanks?:** After leaving office, Knott declined an appointment by President Grover Cleveland to be governor of Hawaii.

## 30. Simon Bolivar Buckner

**Term:** Aug. 30, 1887 — Sept. 2, 1891 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** James William Bryan

**I surrender:** In 1862 at the Battle of Fort Donelson in Tennessee, Buckner became the first Confederate general to surrender an army. He spent five months as a prisoner of war. **Stop that feuding:** As governor, Buckner offered a \$500 reward for the murderers of the McCoy brothers of Pike County, then increased it to \$5,000 in 1888. He sent the militia so the Hatfields wouldn't rescue the captured McCoy's. **Here's some cash:** In 1890, when the legislature spent all the money the state had and left the treasury empty, Buckner lent the state his own money, estimated to be \$50,000 to \$75,000, until tax revenues came in.

## 31. John Y. Brown

**Term:** Sept. 2, 1891 — Dec. 10, 1895 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Mitchell Cary Alford

**Not old enough:** Brown began his political career a little early. So early, in fact, that he was underage when he was elected to Congress in 1859. You have to be 25 and he was 24. After a delay, he was seated in the House of Representatives. **Not loyal enough:** Once there, his loyalty to the Union wavered, and when he was re-elected in 1866, the House refused to seat him, citing disloyalty. He won the seat back in 1872 and served three terms before being elected governor.

## 32. William O'Connell Bradley

**Term:** Dec. 10, 1895 — Dec. 12, 1899 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** William Jackson Worthington

**Young lawyer:** Bradley was so smart that a special act of the legislature was passed in 1865 so that he could take the bar exam at only 18 years of age. He passed, of course. **First GOP governor:** Thirty years later, he became the first Republican governor of Kentucky. He was known for his white wool, narrow-brimmed hat.

## 33. William S. Taylor

**Term:** Dec. 12, 1899 — Jan. 31, 1900 (*resigned from office*)[1]

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** John Marshall

**A contested election:** Three weeks after Taylor was sworn in, Democrats in the General Assembly challenged the election results. **A turn to violence:** Armed men showed up at the Capitol, and on Jan. 30, 1900, Taylor's opponent, William Goebel, was shot. Taylor declared that there was an insurrection and called out the militia, then disbanded the legislature. Democrats met secretly and gave the mortally wounded Goebel the oath of office.

## 34. William Goebel

**Term:** Jan. 31, 1900 — Feb. 3, 1900 (*died in office*)[1]

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** J.C.W. Beckham

**I hereby order...:** His only act as governor was to call for the militia to disperse from Frankfort and for the legislature to reconvene. **Assassination:** Goebel died on Feb. 3, 1900, the only governor in U.S. history who was assassinated.

## 35. J.C.W. Beckham

**Term:** Feb. 3, 1900 — Dec. 10, 1907 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** William P. Thorne

**Beckham vs. Taylor:** After Goebel died, Democrats said his running mate, J.C.W. Beckham, was now governor. However, Taylor still thought he was governor. The case was taken to court and resolved in favor of Beckham. Taylor, accused of being an accessory to Goebel's murder, fled to Indiana. **The youngest:** Beckham, at age 31, won a special election in November 1900 to fill the rest of Goebel's term, and won election to a full term in 1903. **A new Capitol:** Construction of the current Capitol building began during his time in office. **Family ties:** Beckham was a grandson of Gov. Charles Wickliffe.

## 36. Augustus E. Willson

**Term:** Dec. 10, 1907 — Dec. 12, 1911 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** William Hopkinson Cox

**Stopping the Night Riders:** Willson declared martial law in 1908 in Western Kentucky and sent in the National Guard to stop the violent Night Riders of the Black Patch Wars, who terrorized tobacco growers who didn't join their tobacco growers cooperative. **You're pardoned:** Willson pardoned former governor Taylor in 1909 along with five other men charged in Goebel's murder. He declared that Henry E. Youtsey, who was serving a life sentence for the murder, was the only guilty man.

## 37. James B. McCreary

**Term:** Dec. 12, 1911 — Dec. 7, 1915  
(*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Edward J. McDermott

**Not old enough: Second time in office (see Entry No. 27)** **Let's get progressive:** In 1911, McCreary convinced the legislature to make women eligible to vote in school board elections and to mandate direct primary elections where the voters elected the party nominees. He also won passage of a mandatory school attendance law.

## 38. Augustus Owsley Stanley

**Term:** Dec. 7, 1915 — May 19, 1919  
(*resigned when he was elected U.S. senator*)[m]

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** James D. Black

**Break up that monopoly:** As a congressman, he gained a national reputation as an antitrust reformer, investigating tobacco and steel monopolies. **Prohibition foe:** Stanley was against outlawing alcohol sales, but during his term, the legislature made Kentucky the first wet state to ratify the Eighteenth Amendment that established Prohibition. **Family ties:** Stanley's mother was a niece of Gov. Owsley.

## 39. James D. Black

**Term:** May 19, 1919 — Dec. 9, 1919 (*lost election*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** vacant

**Short-timer:** Black became governor when Stanley resigned to take a seat in the U.S. Senate, but he served only seven months. A lawyer and educator, he served as president of Union College in Barbourville.

## 40. Edwin P. Morrow

**Term:** Dec. 9, 1919 — Dec. 11, 1923 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** S. Thurston Ballard

**Doing the right thing:** Morrow made a name for himself early in his law career by gaining the acquittal of a Black man who had been charged with murder based on an extorted confession and perjured testimony. As governor, he spoke out against the Ku Klux Klan and won passage of an anti-lynching law. He won national acclaim for sending in the National Guard to prevent the lynching of a Black prisoner in 1920. **Family ties:** W.O. Bradley, Kentucky's first GOP governor, was his uncle.



## 41. William J. Fields

**Term:** Dec. 11, 1923 — Dec. 13, 1927 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Henry Denhardt

**Dang these roads:** As a young man, Fields drove on highways and byways throughout Eastern Kentucky delivering groceries. As governor he tried to get a \$75 million bond issue to improve the state's roads, but the voters rejected it. **Stop that dancing:** Fields refused to attend his inaugural ball because he opposed dancing. He later banned dancing in the Governor's Mansion.

## 42. Flem D. Sampson

**Term:** Dec. 13, 1927 — Dec. 8, 1931 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** James Breathitt Jr.[d]

**A dam or a park:** Sampson proposed damming Cumberland Falls to generate hydroelectric power. The General Assembly instead voted to use a donation from the DuPont family to purchase the falls and turn them into a state park. Sampson vetoed the move, but the legislature overrode the veto. **Stripped of power:** The Democratic majority in the Legislature took away much of his authority in 1930 and gave power instead to a three-man committee made up of Sampson and two Democrats, Lt. Gov. James Breathitt Jr. and the attorney general.

## 43. Ruby Laffoon

**Term:** Dec. 8, 1931 — Dec. 10, 1935 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Happy Chandler

**To tax or not to tax:** Laffoon advocated for the state's first sales tax to help deal with revenue shortfalls from the Great Depression. Fighting against the tax was the lieutenant governor, A.B. "Happy" Chandler. Laffoon was able to build a bipartisan alliance in the legislature to get the tax passed in 1934. **More feuding with Chandler:** While Laffoon was visiting Washington D.C., Chandler as acting governor called a special legislative session to pass a bill requiring a primary election instead of a convention to select the party nominee for governor. Laffoon rushed back to Frankfort to try to undo this, but was not successful. Chandler won the next primary.

## 44. Albert Benjamin "Happy" Chandler Sr.

**Term:** Dec. 10, 1935 — Oct. 9, 1939 (*resigned to become U.S. senator*)[n]

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Keen Johnson

**'Happy' days are here:** Chandler served as 44th and 49th governor. He oversaw the repeal of the sales tax, but he replaced the lost revenue with the state's first income tax and other taxes, such as a tax on whiskey, which was legal to sell after Prohibition was repealed. **Lending a hand:** Chandler risked his own safety to help evacuate prisoners from the Frankfort penitentiary during the Flood of 1937.

## 45. Keen Johnson

**Term:** Oct. 9, 1939 — Dec. 7, 1943 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Rodes K. Myers

**We're in the money:** With a boom in the economy due to World War II, Johnson took the state from being \$7 million in debt to having a surplus of \$10 million. **Newsman:** Johnson's first love was journalism. He became co-publisher of the Richmond Register in 1925, a position he kept until his death.

## 46. Simeon S. Willis

**Term:** Dec. 7, 1943 — Dec. 9, 1947 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Kenneth H. Tuggle

**The GOP is back:** Willis is the first Republican elected governor since 1927. There wouldn't be another Republican governor until 1967. **Fighting TB:** During his term, five tuberculosis hospitals were built across the state.

# Timeline of Kentucky Governors 1792-2021



## 47. Earle Clements

**Term:** Dec. 9, 1947 — Nov. 27, 1950 (*resigned to become U.S. senator*)[o]

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Lawrence Wetherby

**Big spending:** Between 1948 and 1950, New York was the only state that spent more than Kentucky on its park system. During Clements' tenure, only Texas spent more money on developing its roads. **I've got my eye on you:** Clements was known for sitting in the state Senate and House and pointing with the end of his pencil at each lawmaker voting against what he wanted.

## 48. Lawrence Wetherby

**Term:** Nov. 27, 1950 — Dec. 13, 1955 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Emerson Beauchamp

**Spending the surplus:** Wetherby quickly won acclaim by calling a special legislative session to spend the \$10 million state budget surplus on education and on government benefits for the elderly and needy children. **Desegregating schools:** He supported the 1954 desegregation order in the case of Brown vs. Board of Education and appointed a biracial commission to oversee school integration.

## 49. Happy Chandler

**Term:** Dec. 13, 1955 — Dec. 8, 1959 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Harry Lee Waterfield

(*See Entry No. 44*) **'Happy' Days, Part 2:** Chandler won a second term as governor in 1955. The major accomplishments of his second term were enforcing the racial integration of public schools by sending in the National Guard to protect Black children entering previously all-white schools and establishing a medical school at the University of Kentucky.

## 50. Bert Combs

**Term:** Dec. 8, 1959 — Dec. 10, 1963 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Wilson W. Wyatt

**Bright kid:** Combs was so smart that he graduated from high school as valedictorian at age 15. **Military service:** Combs was the first World War II veteran to become Kentucky governor. **Civil rights milestone:** Combs formed Kentucky's first Human Rights Commission and ordered the desegregation of all public accommodations. **Educator reform:** As a private attorney, he represented 66 of the state's poor school districts in a 1984 lawsuit challenging the financing of public education, leading to the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

## 51. Edward "Ned" Breathitt Jr.

**Term:** Dec. 10, 1963 — Dec. 12, 1967 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Harry Lee Waterfield

**Civil rights milestone:** A major accomplishment of Breathitt's term was the passage of the Kentucky Civil Rights Act, the first desegregation law passed by a southern state. **Family ties:** His uncle James Breathitt served as de facto governor in 1930-31 when the legislature stripped power from Gov. Sampson. Ned Breathitt was distantly related to Kentucky Gov. John Breathitt, who served 1832-1834.

## 52. Louie Nunn

**Term:** Dec. 12, 1967 — Dec. 7, 1971 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Wendell Ford[d]

**The thing he was most proud of:** Nunn oversaw the construction of a statewide network of mental health centers. **Nunn's Nickel:** Although he campaigned against raising taxes, he changed his mind once he was governor and convinced Democrats in the legislature to raise the state's 3-cent sales tax by 2 cents. **Turbulent times:** Nunn sent the National Guard to quell protests at the University of Kentucky over the Vietnam War and to quell protests after peaceful civil rights marches in Louisville.

## 53. Wendell Ford

**Term:** Dec. 7, 1971 — Dec. 28, 1974

*(resigned to become a U.S. senator)[p]*

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Julian Carroll

**A strong grip:** Ford grew up on a farm in Daviess County and milked 30 cows twice a day. The politician would later attribute his firm handshake to that daily chore. **The best job of all:** Ford was the first person to be successively elected lieutenant governor, governor, and U.S. senator in Kentucky history, but he said he enjoyed being governor the most. As governor, Ford made the government more efficient by reorganizing and consolidating the executive branch.

## 54. Julian Carroll

**Term:** Dec. 28, 1974 — Dec. 11, 1979

*(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Thelma Stovall

**Money for teachers:** Carroll said the accomplishment he was most proud of as governor was raising teacher salaries. **Saving the gorge:** In 1975 Carroll vetoed a proposal to build a dam that would have flooded the scenic Red River Gorge. The gorge became a federally protected National Natural Landmark in 1976. **Female first:** Thelma Stovall was the first woman lieutenant governor of Kentucky.

## 55. John Y. Brown Jr.

**Term:** Dec. 11, 1979 — Dec. 13, 1983 *(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Martha Layne Collins

**A born salesman:** Brown sold encyclopedias as a door-to-door salesman while in college in the 1950s. He purchased Kentucky Fried Chicken from founder Harland Sanders in 1964, built it into a global company, and became a millionaire. **Living in Lexington:** Brown and his family lived at their home in Lexington, Cave Hill, for most of his term because the Governor's Mansion was undergoing major renovations. **Not related:** Brown's father was named for Kentucky Gov. John Young Brown (who served 1891-1895), but they are not related.

## 56. Martha Layne Collins

**Term:** Dec. 13, 1983 — Dec. 8, 1987

*(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Steve Beshear

**Female first:** Collins was the first female governor of Kentucky. **Here comes Toyota:** Collins used economic incentives to bring a Toyota manufacturing plant to Georgetown, Kentucky.

## 57. Wallace Wilkinson

**Term:** Dec. 8, 1987 — Dec. 10, 1991 *(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Brereton Jones

**A fortune from books:** Wilkinson started a used-textbook store as a teenager and grew the business until he became a millionaire. **Taking chances on the lottery:** Wilkinson secured passage of a constitutional amendment allowing a state lottery. Proceeds from the lottery would be used to fund scholarships. **Education reform:** He also helped craft a significant education reform bill in response to the Kentucky Supreme Court's ruling that declared the state's entire public school system unconstitutional.

## 58. Brereton Jones

**Term:** Dec. 10, 1991 — Dec. 12, 1995

*(term limited)*

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Paul E. Patton

**A horseman:** Jones, a West Virginia native, moved to Kentucky in 1972 and founded Airdrie Stud, now an internationally recognized Thoroughbred farm. **Helicopter crash:** Jones hurt his back when the National Guard helicopter he was in crashed in 1992 in Shelby County. All six people aboard were injured.

## 59. Paul E. Patton

**Term:** Dec. 12, 1995 — Dec. 9, 2003 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Steve Henry

**A coal man:** Originally a wealthy coal mine operator, Patton sold most of his coal interests to enter politics in the late 1970s. **Two terms:** Due to a 1992 amendment to the Kentucky Constitution, Patton was the first eligible governor to run for a second term since James Garrard in 1800. He won a second term.

## 60. Ernie Fletcher

**Term:** Dec. 9, 2003 — Dec. 11, 2007 (*lost election*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Steve Pence

**Astronaut dreams:** Fletcher earned a medical degree and hoped to take his knowledge on a space mission, but deteriorating eyesight kept that from happening. **There's a doctor in the Mansion:** Fletcher was the first physician since Blackburn to be elected governor. After his term ended, he founded the nonprofit Fletcher Group in 2017 to focus on helping people with addiction and lifestyle diseases.

## 61. Steve Beshear

**Term:** Dec. 11, 2007 — Dec. 8, 2015 (*term limited*)

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Daniel Mongiardo, Jerry Abramson (*resigned November 13, 2014*), Crit Luallen

**Climbing out of recession:** Beshear oversaw budget cuts during years of revenue shortfalls after the 2008 Recession. As the state recovered, Kentucky's unemployment rate dropped from 10.7 to 4.9 percent during his two terms as governor. **To your health:** He expanded the Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act to provide health insurance to 500,000 lower-income Kentuckians.

## 62. Matt Bevin

**Term:** Dec. 8, 2015 — Dec. 10, 2019 (*lost election*)

**Party:** Republican

**Lt. Governor:** Jenean Hampton

**Adoption advocate:** Bevin and his wife, Glenna, have nine children, five of whom were adopted. They established the Bevin Center for Missions Mobilization in 2012 in memory of their eldest daughter, Brittiney. **The bell factory:** Bevin is president of Bevin Brothers, a bell factory in Connecticut that was founded in the 1832. **African-American first:** Jenean Hampton was the first Black lieutenant governor in Kentucky.

## 63. Andy Beshear

**Term:** Dec. 10, 2019 — Incumbent[q]

**Party:** Democratic

**Lt. Governor:** Jacqueline Coleman

**The pandemic:** Shortly after being elected, Beshear faced the COVID-19 pandemic. He held frequent news conferences to update the public on the viral spread and vaccine distribution, and to provide guidance on wearing masks and social distancing. **Family ties:** Beshear, son of Gov. Steve Beshear, is the first governor's son to become governor himself. He entered politics when he was elected attorney general in 2015.