

It's not often that someone "really devoid of political ambition" becomes governor.

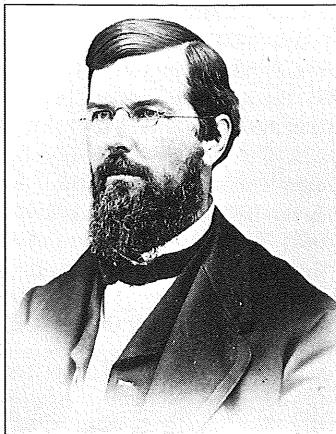
But in July 1863, without a single Minnesota citizen casting a ballot, that's exactly what happened.

Henry Adoniram Swift, an Ohio-born real estate and insurance agent, stumbled reluctantly into state politics in 1861. Republican party leaders nominated Swift for Sibley County's state Senate seat, after another candidate refused the offer. So began Swift's rapid ascent in Minnesota's body politic.

He served in the state Senate until 1863, when then-Lt. Gov. Ignatius Donnelly was elected to the U.S. House. Swift unanimously was chosen by his state Senate peers to replace Donnelly. Soon after, Gov. Alexander Ramsey moved to the U.S. Senate. Swift, as lieutenant governor, was Ramsey's legal successor, and became the third governor of Minnesota on July 10, 1863.

Since 1863 was an election year, both Swift's political peers and the local papers

It's a fact!



Henry Swift

urged him to seek another term in office. Swift didn't want the job, and under increasing pressure published "an authoritative statement . . . that under no circumstances would he be

a candidate," wrote former Secretary of State James Baker in *Lives of the Governors of Minnesota*.

So after just six months in office, Swift's tenure as governor expired.

He did, however, consent to a repeat performance as a state senator — but vigorously opposed all efforts to have him elected to higher office.

When Alexander Ramsey completed his second U.S. Senate term, Swift's persistent colleagues urged him to seek the post. Swift refused. His legislative friends, in a losing effort, voted for him anyway.

In a letter to his wife, Swift wrote, "I am very much relieved that this senatorial contest is over as it is, and for a few minutes, I was afraid I might be elected." (At the time, the Legislature picked the U.S. senators. It wasn't until 1913 that they were chosen by popular vote.)

In 1869, the humble Swift was stricken with typhoid fever and never recovered. He died at just 45 years of age, and is buried with his family in Ravenna, Ohio.

Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society