A Nobel Peace Prize winner. A Supreme Court justice from St. Paul. Another Supreme Court justice from St. Paul. Al Capone’s lawyer. And 96 others. All attorneys. All from Minnesota. All with Sasquatch-sized legal footprints. We started this project nearly a year ago, just sitting around talking about the legends of Minnesota law. Then it took on a life of its own. Our casual hallway discussions soon led to interviews with dozens of area opinion leaders and months of research, and suddenly we had a list of several hundred lawyers. Then came the hard part: cutting it down. Believe us, we could have published something three times this size. But after much consideration and plenty of debate, we decided on the group that follows—in alphabetical order—a Super Lawyers list for the ages, if you will. Not all of them are still around, but they all deserve to be remembered. L&P
L. Douglas K. Amdahl 1919-: During his 30 years as a judge — including eight on the Minnesota Supreme Court as the state’s 15th chief justice — Doug Amdahl was a leader in establishing the state’s Court of Appeals and the State Compensation Council. He unified the state’s trial courts and advocated for a home for the judicial branch on the Capitol Mall. He was instrumental in developing the state’s sentencing guidelines. The plaque hidden and unassuming Amdahl grew up in Mabel, a small town in southeastern Minnesota, the son of a Norwegian harness maker and shoe repairman. Following his 1951 graduation from Minneapolis-Minnesota College of Law, he went into private practice with George Scott, forming the firm Amdahl & Scott, and then served as an assistant Hennepin County attorney before moving to the Hennepin County Municipal Court in 1961. Amdahl served in the Hennepin County District Court from 1962 until his appointment to the Supreme Court in 1980. “It’s an interesting life,” he once reflected on being a judge. “You’re kind of in the center of a storm all the time.”

2. Bernie Becker 1938-1991: Indian law authority Bernie Becker spent almost two decades working with the Minnesota Legal Aid Society in Minneapolis. He is credited with bringing the first broad-based lawsuits for poor clients into the federal courts. Becker, the son of a New York house painter, earned his law degree in 1965 at the University of Minnesota. He worked for a year at the New York Legal Aid Society before returning to Minnesota, where he served as chief counsel for the Minneapolis Legal Aid Society from 1967 to 1973. Becker won several groundbreaking cases, including one on behalf of the Leech Lake Band of Chippewa Indians that established the band’s right to hunt and fish on the reservation. In 1975 and 1976, Becker was chief counsel and staff director for the Joint House-Senate Committee that investigated the deaths at the Minnesota state prison at Stillwater. He also worked on the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act of 1985. In 1986, Becker was unanimously selected as a part-time magistrate by federal judges in the Minnesota judicial district. Becker taught at both the University of Minnesota Law School and at William Mitchell College of Law. At William Mitchell, Becker initiated the American Indian law studies program, which, at that time, made the school one of few in the nation teaching Indian law.

1. Bruce Beneke 1944-: The “Happy Warrior” of legal aid won bipartisan support for legal representation of the poor in his 30 years as head of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services. Under his leadership, the state’s second-largest legal aid organization grew to nine offices throughout southern Minnesota annually serving more than 2,000 indigent people. Beneke believed that legal aid was not only the right thing to do, but also fiscally responsible, saving the state millions by helping poor mothers get child support and poor disabled people get federal disability benefits. Beneke grew up in Glencoe, the son of a playwright father who helped women inmates, and a small-town lawyer father “who I remember telling me, always, that we were out here for one purpose, and that’s to help other human beings.” Beneke recently stepped down as head of SMRLS but remains as staunch an advocate as ever.

4. L. Howard Bennett 1913-1993: The first African-American judge in Minnesota, L. Howard Bennett was a civil rights leader. Appointed to the Minneapolis Municipal Court by Gov. Orville Freeman in 1956, Bennett served for two years before being defeated in an election. In 1963, he became the first black to be elected to the Minneapolis school board. Bennett was born in South Carolina, the son of a slave. He attended Avery Institute in Charleston and graduated with honors from Nashville’s Fisk University in 1935. He helped set up Mayor Hubert Humphrey’s Council on Human Relations, and worked on his close friend’s first presidential campaign. Bennett received his law degree from the University of Chicago in 1950 and became a partner in the Minneapolis firm of Hall, Smith, Hedlund, Bennett, Juster, Forsberg & Merlin. He was president of the Minneapolis NAACP from 1956 to 1958 and served as president of the Minneapolis Urban League. Under President Kennedy, Bennett served in the Department of Defense, holding a number of high-level positions involving equal opportunity and civil rights. He retired to Pensacola, Fla., in 1974.

5. Harry Blackmun 1908-1999: Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun wrote the 1973 Roe v. Wade opinion that inspired one of the century’s most impassioned public debates. Blackmun received an avalanche of hate mail throughout the rest of his life but never wavered in his decision. “I think it was right in 1973,” he said at his 1994 retirement, “and I think it is right today.” Although he joined the court as a conservative in 1970, the lifelong Republican emerged a liberal hero. In his 24 years as an associate justice, Blackmun wrote more than 550 rulings, including groundbreaking opinions in the areas of civil rights and free speech. Before leaving the bench in 1994, Blackmun announced his opposition to capital punishment — a dramatic shift from his earlier days on the bench — and said, “From this day forward, I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death.” Born in Nashville, Ill., Blackmun grew up in a working-class neighborhood of St. Paul, where he and future Chief Justice Warren Burger (later dubbed “the Minnesota Twins”) were elementary school classmates. Blackmun graduated summa cum laude in mathematics from Harvard in 1929 and three years later earned his law degree there. He spent 16 years in Minneapolis as a tax and trust law specialist at Dorsey & Whitney before becoming legal counsel of the Mayo Clinic in 1950. Dwight Eisenhower appointed him to the 8th Circuit in 1959. He was nominated by Richard Nixon to the Supreme Court in 1970.
6. Kathleen Blatz 1954: A legislator and children’s rights advocate, Justice Kathleen Blatz became the first woman to lead the state’s highest court in 1998. Under her leadership, Minnesota overhauled its child protection system. She also spearheaded the Children’s Justice Initiative, designed to get abused and neglected kids out of foster care faster, and led improvements in public trust and confidence, access to justice and court technology. Prior to being appointed to the state Supreme Court in 1996, Blatz, a Republican, served eight terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives, representing Bloomington from 1979 to 1994. There she chaired the Crime and Family Law committee and sponsored legislation to help pregnant, drug-addicted women. Blatz was in private practice from 1984 to 1988 and was a Hennepin County assistant attorney from 1992 to 1993. She received her law degree and a master’s in social work from the University of Minnesota. Blatz retired in 2005 to spend more time with her family. “Justice Blatz has been an outstanding leader and public servant,” said Gov. Tim Pawlenty on her departure from office. “Justice Blatz personifies the Minnesota spirit. She will be deeply missed.”

7. Joseph R. Brown 1805-1870: Joseph Brown was a celebrity during territorial days. He was an apprentice to a Pennsylvania printer as a young man before running away to join the army and ending up at Fort Snelling. Brown was clerk to the first House of Representatives in state history and was elected to both the Minnesota Territorial Council in 1854 and 1855 and the House in 1857, was made territorial printer, and edited the Democratic Pioneer. His ability to get things done — he ran a one-person government in St. Croix County in 1838, serving as county clerk, county commissioner, and clerk of the district court — earned him the nickname “Joe the Juggler.” He presided over the state’s first jury trial in what is now Marine-on-St. Croix in 1840 as well as the famous “Foot Race” case, in which Brown ruled that the proper owner of a tract of land would be the first man to plow and plant it out. He was a delegate to the 1857 constitutional convention and helped draft the Minnesota constitution. A lifelong Democrat, Brown was rewarded for his service by being made Sioux Indian Agent in 1858. At his funeral in Henderson, Gov. Henry Sibley said, “No man stands forth more prominently as the untiring friend of Minnesota in all the phases of her existence than does Major Brown.”

8. Warren Burger 1907-1995: The 15th chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Warren Burger wrote landmark opinions on obscenity, discrimination and religious freedom in his 17 years on the bench. President Richard Nixon, who nominated Burger in 1969, called him “the most important appointee [I] would ever make.” How true. Writing for a unanimous court, Burger ordered Nixon to surrender the tapes and records subpoenaed in the Watergate cover-up trial, a ruling that led to Nixon’s resignation two weeks later. In another opinion, he invalidated the one-house legislative veto that had been the practice of Congress for more than half a century. Burger voted to support busing as a tool for racial desegregation, expanded public access to the nation’s courts and enhanced women’s protections against sexual discrimination. Born to a poor family that farmed outside of St. Paul, Burger worked at the St. Paul law firm Faricy Burger Moore & Costello for 20 years after graduating from law school in 1931. He was active in the Republican Party, helping to launch former governor Harold Stassen’s political career. Burger left his practice in 1953 to become an assistant U.S. attorney general. He was a U.S. Court of Appeals judge in Washington, D.C., from 1956 to 1969, and then served the high court until 1996.

9. Kevin Burke 1950-: Innovator and chief Hennepin County district judge Kevin Burke has served Minnesota’s largest metropolitan court for more than two decades. As chair of the Minnesota State Board of Public Defense, Burke transformed the public defense delivery system in Minnesota. Burke was an early leader in promoting community outreach by judges. He earned national recognition as the driving force in the creation of the Hennepin County Drug Court, the first drug court in Minnesota and the first in the country to focus on felony-level drug cases. Starting out as a district judge in 1984, he has served as chair of the Minnesota Conference of Chief Judges, assistant chief judge of Hennepin County District Court, presiding judge of the Hennepin County Drug Court, and in his current position as chief justice. In 1998, Burke received a Lifetime Achievement Award presented by H.E.A.R.T. for leadership in helping people with chemical dependency. In 1997, he received the Director’s Community Leadership Award from the FBI. In 2003, Burke received the William H. Rehnquist Award from the National Center for State Courts.

10. J.A.A. Burnquist 1879-1961: The formidable Burnquist served the state as governor from 1915 to 1921 and as attorney general from 1939 to 1955. As governor, Burnquist called a special legislative session to ratify the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. He established a child-welfare commission, advocated for a minimum wage for women and signed the mother’s pension law and a uniform sales tax designed to break up monopolies. He is best known for creation of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Although it was formed to maintain law and order and ensure that Minnesota would contribute to the war effort, it gained a reputation for repressing constitutional freedoms. Born in Dayton, Iowa, Burnquist earned his law degree from the University of Minnesota in 1905. He served as a Republican state representative and lieutenant governor before taking over in 1915 when Gov. Winfield Hammond died suddenly. After his tenure as governor, Burnquist went back to his St. Paul law practice. In 1939, he re-emerged from private life to become Minnesota’s attorney general.
11. Pierce Butler 1866-1939: The first Minnesotan on the U.S Supreme Court, Butler served from 1923 until his death. He held conservative economic views and was a thorn in President Franklin Roosevelt's side, opposing virtually every aspect of the New Deal. Butler was born in a log cabin to Catholic Irish immigrants and graduated from Carleton College. Admitted to the bar in 1888, he formed a St. Paul law practice with Stan Donnelly the same year, representing major railroad companies against state and federal regulation. Butler was elected Ramsey County attorney in 1893 and served until 1897. When he was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Warren Harding in 1922, Butler was in the middle of winning approximately $12 million for the Toronto Street Railway shareholders. While on the Court, Butler vigorously opposed welfare programs and the regulation of business. As the Court grew more liberal, Butler never wavered from his conservative stance. He dissented in 73 cases from 1937 to 1939.

2. Andrew Chatfield 1810-1875: Chatfield was a judge, state Supreme Court justice, community leader and one of Scott County's earliest settlers. Born to a New York farmer, Chatfield paid for his legal education, in part, by teaching. He was admitted to the New York bar in 1833, as elected a member of the New York Assembly several times and was active in the Democratic Party. After 10 years hard work with little financial success, Chatfield packed his family and moved west to Kenosha, Wis., in 1848. He as elected a judge in Racine County in 1850 and in that session attended a Supreme Court session in Washington. Here he met Henry Sibley, a delegate from the Minnesota territory, who recommended to President Franklin Pierce at his appoint Chatfield associate judge of the Minnesota territorial Supreme Court. Chatfield accepted in 1853. He designed the town of Belleair and received the first patent on the town sites of Shakopee, St. Peter and several her communities. The 8th Judicial District was created in 1870 by the Republican Party, which Chatfield was not a member, as a tribute to him. The newspaper described his death as the saddest and most melancholy event in the history of the county.

13. Mike Ciresi 1946-: Litigator Mike Ciresi, this year's top Super Lawyers point-getter (see story on page 12), led the landmark trial for the state of Minnesota and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota against the tobacco industry, which culminated in a $6.6 billion settlement in 1998, the largest in state history. In addition to “the mother of all lawsuits,” as it was coined by then-state attorney general Skip Humphrey, Ciresi's high-profile clients have included the plaintiffs in the Dalkon Shield cases, the government of India in the Bhopal Union Carbide litigation, which settled for $470 million; Honeywell, in a patent infringement case that settled for nearly $500 million; and the lead plaintiffs in the Copper-7 IUD cases. The son of a grocer and liquor store owner, Ciresi graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School and landed a clerkship at what is now Robins Kaplan Miller & Ciresi. Firm founder Sally Robins hired him right out of law school. He is currently seeking DFL endorsement for a 2008 Senate run.

14. John Cochrane 1922-: On his first day as an attorney, the famously strong-willed John Cochrane stormed out of a courtroom and up to the Supreme Court, obtaining two Writs of Prohibition directed to a judge who tried to suppress the court recorder. Cochrane tried the longest and one of the most highly publicized murder trials in the state against Norman Matriand, who was convicted of first-degree murder for hiring a hit man to kill prominent criminal lawyer T. Eugene Thompson's wife. He also tried the shortest murder trial in state history on behalf of a mother who threw her child into the Mississippi River. Cochrane's only witness, a psychiatrist, told the court, “Any woman who kills her kid is nuts.” The mother was found not guilty in one hour and 45 minutes. Cochrane represented plaintiffs in class actions against the nation's corporate giants, including high-profile wins against Exxon Valdez and the Dalkon Corporation. During his longest civil case, the Antitrust Amorrust litigation of the mid-1970s, an argument between Cochrane and opposing counsel Peter Dorsey over settlement became so heated that they were both thrown out of the Lion's Head in New York. “Big John,” as he was known, often frequented the Little Wagon and Jimmy Heggs in Minneapolis. He graduated from St. Paul College of Law and hung his shingle in St. Paul in 1959.

1. Francis R.E. Cornell 1821-1881: A pioneer trial lawyer, attorney general and state Supreme Court jurist, Francis Cornell established his reputation litigating the land claims that arose out of the opening of the government reservation that occupied most of the west side of the Mississippi River at the time. An active abolitionist, he argued for a freedom of a slave woman who had been brought north to accompany her owner on a visit. The court ruled that the man could choose freedom or servitude. “So firm were his convictions that . . . no popular clamor, however insistent, could move him a hair's breadth from what he believed,” said an admirer. Trained as an attorney in New York, Cornell thrilled in Minneapolis in 1854. He served on the state legislature throughout the 1860s until he was elected attorney general in 1867, an office he held for three terms. Cornell served as an associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court from 1874 until his death.
16. Mary Jeanne Coyne 1926-1998: The second woman justice named to the Minnesota Supreme Court, Coyne had a keen legal intellect and impeccable professionalism and was a major force in family law. After graduating from the University of Minnesota, Coyne began her career at Meagher & Geer in 1957 at a time when there were only a few women members of the Minnesota bar. In her business law practice, Coyne specialized in appellate law, arguing more than 100 cases before the Supreme Court before she became a member in 1982. In her 14 years as an associate justice, Coyne was instrumental in such family law opinions as Nardini v. Nardini, which addressed the distribution of property during divorces. Coyne was known for saying, “A wise old man and a wise old woman often reach the same conclusion,” a statement that has been quoted by U.S. Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day O’Connor. “She was a very strong woman, a top legal mind,” said Douglas Amdahl, chief justice of the court when Coyne was appointed, upon her death in 1998. “She loved the law.”

The Deinard Brothers

The Deinard brothers were founding partners of the law firm of Leonard, Street and Deinard. They moved to Minneapolis as young men and both attended the University of Minnesota Law School and Harvard Law School. Because Amos’ sight was impaired, Benedict read all their lessons and cases aloud.

18. Amos Deinard 1898-1985: A distinguished attorney and public servant, Deinard was widely known for his work to eliminate discrimination in hiring. Born in Minneapolis in 1898, the son of a rabbi, he was a founder of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation and served as president from 1935 to 1940. Appointed to the Minneapolis Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1945 by Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey, he served on the commission for 17 years, 15 of them as chairman. He also served on the Minnesota Society for the Prevention of Blindness.

19. Benedict Deinard 1899-1969: Deinard was a successful trial lawyer, law professor, deputy attorney general in the U.S. Department of Justice during World War II, and one of the four civilians asked to participate in the Nuremberg war crimes trials. As lead lawyer in the economic section of the proceedings, he was responsible for cases against German businesses that had participated in the war or committed economic crimes in German-occupied countries. In that role, he prosecuted and convicted Alfred Krupp, head of the powerful German munitions family that armed Germany for war. After the Nuremberg trials, Benedict returned to Minneapolis and his law practice. He also taught at the University of Minnesota Law School and was vice president of the Minnesota Orchestral Association.

20. William H. DeParcq 1905-1988: A tragedy led William DeParcq to his calling. At age 18, DeParcq was severely injured in a car collision that left him paralyzed from the waist down. Robert McDonald, the attorney who represented him, encouraged him to go to law school. DeParcq later went into practice with McDonald and became one of the finest personal injury lawyers in state history. He was known for his determination and commitment to winning compensation for his injured clients, especially railway workers. After graduating from the St. Paul College of Law (with the help of his mother, who sat through law classes to help him take notes and read to him while he took therapeutic walks), DeParcq opened a practice in Staples, where he was sometimes paid in bushels of corn. With international notoriety, he opened offices in Minneapolis and Chicago. DeParcq served as a Minnesota state representative from 1932 to 1934, a member of the Minnesota Judicial Council from 1937 to 1949 and dean of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers from 1964 to 1965. He also founded Minnesota’s Courage Foundation, which serves people with disabilities.

17. J. Earl Cudd 1930-2005: Federal prosecutor and U.S. Magistrate Judge J. Earl Cudd brought good humor and kindness to the federal bench while presiding over some of the state’s most high-profile cases. Born to public school teachers, Cudd grew up in Red Wing and graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1954. After two years in the Army, Cudd went into private practice as the attorney for a farmers’ organization. He joined the U.S. Attorney’s office in 1961, then moved on to the Attorney General’s office as solicitor general in 1964. In 1973, Cudd became a magistrate judge. In that role, he handled the criminal indictments of Joe Biernat, a former Minneapolis City Council member; U.S. Sen. Dave Durenberger; the three Northwest Airline pilots accused of flying under the influence of alcohol; former banker Hal Greenwood Jr.; and serial killer Billy Glaze. In his spare time, Cudd was a horseman who wore cowboy boots and loved to ride in cattle roundups.

21. Edward Devitt 1911-1992: During his 38-year tenure on the U.S. District Court, from 1954 to 1992, Devitt became one of the most respected and influential trial judges in the nation. His decisions were seldom reversed on appeal. Among Judge Devitt’s most notable cases were the 1961 racketeering trial of Minneapolis gangster Isadore “Kid Cann” Blumenfeld, the 1963 fraud trial of former Minneapolis mayor Marvin Kline, the trial of the “Minnesota Eight” resisters of the Vietnam-era draft and the Reserve Mining environmental pollution trial of the mid-1970s Devitt went to the University of North Dakota Law School and upon his graduation ran for—and won—a seat on the municipal court in East Grand Forks. He became assistant attorney general of Minnesota in 1939. During World War II, Devitt served as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy and earned a Purple Heart for his actions. In 1946, he was elected as a Republican to the 80th Congress and served one term before being defeated by Democratic newcomer Eugene McCarthy. Devitt served as a probate judge for Ramsey County from 1950 until 1954, when he was appointed U.S. district judge for the district of Minnesota. He was named chief U.S. district judge in 1958. Although he officially retired in 1981, Devitt continued to hear cases until his death. More than 1,200 attended his funeral in 1992.
22. Ignatius Donnelly 1831-1901: A reformist, lawyer, politician, scholar, author and newspaper publisher who helped form the state’s political structure after it entered the union in 1858, Donnelly arrived in the Minnesota Territory in 1856 and built a home in what is now Nininger Township in Dakota County. As the state’s second lieutenant governor under Alexander Ramsey, a 20-year state senator and then congressman during the Andrew Johnson impeachment, Donnelly developed enemies for his outspoken progressive views on universal suffrage, immigration policy and racial justice. Donnelly was a father to the Populist and third-party movements, running as vice president for the People’s Party in the elections of 1900. He was “a leveler who attempted to reduce those who arrogated too much power or special privilege to themselves,” wrote his biographer, Martin Ridge. Known for his wit, spellbinding oratory skills, intelligence and diverse interests, Donnelly was the first of five generations of St. Paul lawyers.

3. Martha Angle Dorsett 1851-1918: The first female lawyer in Minnesota, Dorsett was born in Randolph, N.Y. She graduated from Iowa College of Law, the first public university in the United States to admit men and women on an equal basis, and was admitted to the Iowa bar in 1876. When she applied for admission to the state bar of Minnesota in 1877, however, her application was denied on the grounds that state law permitted only males to practice law. In the words of Hennepin County Judge Austin H. Young, who denied her application, “the part assigned to women by nature is, as a rule, inconsistent” with the “life-long application” needed to practice law. He also noted that “the lady passed the best examination of any applicant for admission that has been presented for a long time.” Dorsett and her husband, attorney Charles William Dorsett, who ran twice for governor on the Prohibition Party ticket, lobbied the state legislature to have the statute amended, and on Feb. 27, 1877, by vote of 63 to 30, the House approved, and Mrs. Dorsett was admitted to the bar in January 1878.

4. Hyman Edelman 1905-1993: In the early 1970s, trial lawyer Hyman Edelman led the charge to desegregate Minneapolis public schools, and fought the school district when it tried to appeal a decision in 1978. Concerned about religious discrimination against Jewish doctors in city hospitals, Edelman co-founded Mount Sinai Hospital in 1948 and served on the hospital’s board of governors until it merged with Metropolitan Medical Center in 1990. Edelman was born in St. Paul and earned his law degree from the University of Minnesota. In the 1940s, Edelman served on Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey’s first human rights commission, which drafted the first city ordinance prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, creed or color. He was presented with the city’s distinguished service award for his work, and was reappointed to the commission in 1968 and 1972. After leaving eonard, Street and Deinard in 1946, Edelman founded Kaplan, Edelman & Kaplan, which later became Mason Edelman Borman & Brand. Edelman practiced law for 60 years and retired in 1991.

25. William T. Egan 1925: Along with his friends Stu Rider and Gene Bennett, Egan founded Rider Bennett & Egan in 1960. Egan represented the Vikings in its ownership dispute in the mid-1980s, and Lakers owner and Minneapolis businessman Bob Short when he moved the team to Los Angeles before the 1960 season. Egan was one of the lead trial lawyers on the Reserve Mining case in which the company was ordered to stop dumping waste into Lake Superior — an early battle in the environmental movement. Egan served in the U.S. Army Air Force until March 1946. After his service, he enrolled at the University of Minnesota, where he received his law degree in 1950. Egan practiced civil litigation, especially insurance defense, at Meagher, Geer & Markham for 10 years before starting his own firm.

26. Lafayette Emmett 1822-1906: Minnesota’s first chief justice. Born in Mount Vernon, Emmett studied law in Ohio and served a term there as prosecuting attorney before moving to Minnesota in 1851 to practice law. He served as territorial attorney general from 1853 to 1858 before being elected to the state’s highest judicial post upon statehood. He took office at age 35 and served until 1865 in the role. Emmett expressed Minnesota’s abiding trust in its people to determine its own course in these famous words: “If the people are incapable of selecting their judges, they are also incapable of selecting the [governor] who is to appoint the judges.”

7. Charlotte Farrish 1904-1995: Mankato attorney Charlotte Farrish, who practiced from 1926 until 1989, was one of the first women to establish a successful law practice in Minnesota. In third grade, she told her father, “When I grow up, I’m going to be a lawyer and see that justice is done.” Farrish graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1926 – at the age of 22 – and joined what is now Farrish Johnson Law Office. During World War II, Farrish took over the law practices of many Mankato attorneys while they fought in World War II. When the war was over, Farrish returned those clients to their former attorneys. Farrish served on the Mankato Planning Commission for more than 20 years.
28. Charles Flandrau 1828-1903: A prominent attorney and judge in 19th-century Minnesota, Flandrau served on the Territorial Council of Minnesota and on the territorial and Minnesota Supreme Courts. Flandrau wrote 40 percent of the 504 opinions of the state’s first Supreme Court between 1858 and 1865. He was also appointed U.S. Agent for the Sioux in 1856. In August 1862, learning of a violent Lakota uprising, Flandrau enlisted in the Union Army as a captain, and assembled an armed force to rush to the defense of the community of New Ulm. Gov. Alexander Ramsey put him in charge of the defense of the southwestern frontier of the state, and he served in this capacity as colonel for two years, simultaneous to his position on the Supreme Court. Born in New York, Flandrau spent his teenage years as a sailor and mahogany trader before passing the New York bar in 1851 and joining his father’s law firm. (His dad was law partners with Aaron Burr.) In 1853, Flandrau relocated to Traverse des Sioux, Minn.

29. William D. “Flash” Fluskamp 1924-2000: William Fluskamp was an outstanding trial lawyer and community leader and a fearless advocate for his personal injury and products liability clients during his 48 years at Meagher & Geer. “You couldn’t shake Flash in court,” says former colleague Gary Hoch. “He was amazing.” Born in St. Louis, Fluskamp was a state champion debater. He graduated from high school at 16 and went to Georgetown University on a full football scholarship. He served in the Army Air Corps during World War II, and later in the Minnesota Air National Guard, earning the rank of brigadier general. After law school at the University of Michigan, Fluskamp moved to Minnesota and started his law practice. In the early 1960s, Fluskamp handled the complaints of citizens who said that the supersonic planes flying out of Wold-Chamberlain Field had damaged their property. Consistently recognized as one of the state’s best trial lawyers, Fluskamp was popular among juries, judges and attorneys for his intelligence, charm and sense of humor.

30. William T. Francis 1869-1929: William T. Francis was one of Minnesota’s first black attorneys, a respected leader in St. Paul and one of the nation’s first black diplomats. Born in Indianapolis, Francis moved to Minnesota in 1888 and enrolled in law school in 1901. He was the second African-American graduate of the St. Paul College of Law in 1904. Working as a messenger for the Northern Pacific Railway Co. as a young man, Francis became the chief clerk in the railway’s legal department after graduation. In 1912, Francis took over the law practice of Frederick McGhee, Minnesota’s first black attorney, and continued McGhee’s crusade for civil rights. Francis and his wife lobbied for an anti-lynching bill, which passed the legislature in 1921, well before national legislation on the topic. President Calvin Coolidge named Francis minister and consul general to Liberia in 1927. He held the position until his death there from yellow fever.

31. Everett Fraser 1879-1971: Dean of the University of Minnesota Law School from 1920 to 1948, Everett Fraser developed the four-year law curriculum that became the model nationwide. During Fraser’s tenure, the law school grew in size and stature to become the fifth-largest full-time law school in the nation. Fraser received his law degree from Harvard University in 1910 and was so highly regarded that he was immediately hired as an assistant professor of law at George Washington University and, four years later, became dean of the school. Fraser came to the University of Minnesota in 1917, and was promoted to dean of the law school three years later. Because of Fraser’s work in 1928 and 1929 as the university’s legal counsel, the Minnesota Supreme Court upheld the university’s independent constitutional status. Fraser taught at Hastings College of Law in San Francisco until his retirement in 1965.

32. Orville Lothrop Freeman 1918-2003: A founding member of the DFL party and the state’s first DFL governor from 1933 to 1961, Freeman helped cement Minnesota’s reputation as a haven of progressive politics in the 1960s and 1970s. As U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from 1961 to 1969 under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, he helped start the food stamp program. Freeman proposed what is today the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Freeman grew up in South Minneapolis, where his father ran a men’s clothing shop. He worked as a hospital orderly, grass waterer and grain harvester to pay tuition at the University of Minnesota. Law school was cut short by World War II. As a second lieutenant in the Marines, Freeman took a sniper shot to his jaw during a combat patrol and had to relearn how to speak; he was awarded a Purple Heart. By 1948, he and lifelong friend Hubert Humphrey, shown here, had emerged as the leaders of the nascent DFL. Freeman was elected governor at age 36.

33. John French 1933: A former managing partner of Faegre & Benson and an avid DFLer, French, upon his graduation from Harvard University Law School in 1960, clerked for Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter before returning to Minnesota to establish his antitrust, appellate and business law practice. French’s clients have included the state legislature, the DFL during its redistricting battle, the Star Tribune and Dorsey & Whitney partner James O’Hagan in his 1997 insider trading appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Says attorney Andy Luger: “[French was] a class act who could relate to judges, juries and opposing counsel all while vigorously advocating for his clients.”
34. Joseph Friedberg 1937-: In 1974, Joseph Friedberg stunned the legal community when he successfully used mental illness as a defense in a murder case, the first attorney in Hennepin County to do so in 35 years. Four years later, he did it again when he and St. Paul lawyer Doug Thomson used an insanity defense in the acquittal of June Mari Mikulanec, who fatally stabbed the wife of her former boyfriend. Friedberg won national recognition as a leading attorney in the settlement of thousands of suits involving the Dalkon Shield. The brush and colorful Friedberg is known for his innovative defense tactics—he once found a defense witness by scouring the ads of High Times magazine. “I’m sick of people being convicted without being defended aggressively with positive theories,” Friedberg told a Minneapolis newspaper reporter in 1992. “It’s no fun, but I’m going to at least scare the prosecutor.” The son of a New York fabric salesman, Friedberg passed the New York bar, then moved to Minneapolis in 1964 and sold encyclopedias for 14 years (sometimes wandering through the poorest neighborhoods in Minneapolis, offering free legal advice) before accepting a job with Thomson in 1972. His clients have included political consultant and sports entrepreneur Pat Forcina, former Minneapolis City Council member Brian Herron, Edina philanthropist Percy Ross, Minnesota Vikings Moe Williams and Randy Moss, and accused killer Russell Lund Jr.

35. Mark H. Gehan 1892-1967: St. Paul reform mayor Mark Gehan took office during the early 1930s, when St. Paul had a national reputation as a place where gangsters could come to cool off. Not long after John Dillinger shot his way out of an apartment building at Lincoln and Lexington, Gehan ran for office and won. He purged the police force of corruption, balanced the city’s budget and cleaned up the streets. After two terms, Gehan left politics in 1938 to run his solo practice for 30 years.

36. Sidney P. Giselson 1908-1985: A nationally known trial lawyer, Sidney Giselson was involved in some of the most important litigation that took place in southern Minnesota in the middle of the 20th century. He represented the plaintiffs in an early products liability case against International Harvester after a propane explosion destroyed downtown Springfield. When Fred Ossana, Giselson’s former law partner and head of Twin City Rapid Transit Company, was charged with criminal fraud in 1960 for activities that had taken place during the conversion from streetcars to busing, he hired Giselson. Judges often called Giselson to ask for his opinion on legal issues. Born in Minnesota, Giselson helped support his family as a streetcar conductor after his father’s death. Upon his graduation from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1935, Giselson began a practice in Minneapolis but moved to New Ulm after his brother was killed in a car crash, taking over his practice there (now known as Giselson & Hunter) in 1937. Giselson practiced in New Ulm for the rest of his life.

37. Ronald E. Hachey 1909-2005: A Ramsey County district judge for 25 years who was known for his fairness and public service, Hachey was born in Grand Rapids and worked in the taconite mines and played tenor sax in a traveling band before enrolling at the St. Paul College of Law in 1939. He graduated in 1943 and was shipped off for war. Hachey returned home, opened a private practice and was an assistant U.S. attorney from 1951 to 1953. He served as a district judge from 1955 until his 1979 retirement—including five years as chief judge. Hachey was a model of judicial impartiality: “Each person in his courtroom, of whatever color or sex or persuasion or station, was treated with respect,” said retired judge Rosalie Wahl, of the Minnesota Supreme Court. Hachey was named as a Distinguished Humanitarian by the Ramsey County Bar Association for his community service work with the St. Paul United Fund, the Southeastern Minnesota chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and St. Joseph’s Home for Children.

38. Doug Hall 1915-2004: Civil rights attorney Doug Hall founded the Legal Rights Center of Minneapolis in 1970. Hall represented many protesters and draft resisters during the Vietnam War, as well as several of the large unions that joined together to form the AFL-CIO. A former president of the Minneapolis NAACP, he was a member of the defense team for American Indian Movement members Dennis Banks and Russell Means after the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, which brought national attention to the treatment of Native Americans by the U.S. government. Hall graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 1939 and was active in educational and political movements his entire life. He left Hall, Smith, Hedlund, Jaster & Forsberg in 1970 to co-found the Legal Rights Center. “[Hall] was the spiritual leader for equal justice in Minneapolis,” said U.S. District Judge Michael J. Davis, a member of the Center’s board of directors. “All his life he fought for equal access for minorities who were in court.”

39. Bruce Hanley 1950-2005: Criminal defense attorney Bruce Hanley was universally respected as a dauntless advocate who practiced the law with integrity and grace during his 29-year career. Growing up in Hopkins, Hanley graduated from the William Mitchell College of Law in 1976. He practiced at Hanley Hergott & Hunziker for six years and at Dunkley, Bennett & Christensen for 21 years before settling at Rider Bennett, where he specialized in white-collar criminal defense. Hanley successfully defended a highly regarded University of Minnesota biochemist charged with making a synthetic drug. In 2004, Hanley’s colleagues in the bar raised $100,000 to establish a scholarship in his name at William Mitchell College of Law. He was president of the Minnesota Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and a director of the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights. Hanley died of cancer at age 54.
40. Horace R. Hansen 1910-1995: At the close of World War II, Horace Hansen prosecuted Nazi war criminals across Europe. An infantry officer during the war, the Army reassigned Hansen after learning he had been a prosecutor with the Ramsey County attorney’s office. In 1945, Hansen was sent to Holland to investigate crimes committed by Nazis against Dutch citizens; he identified more than 40 perpetrators. He spent the closing months of the war at the Dachau concentration camp, where he prosecuted military and civilian German offenders. (In an odd twist, five of Hitler’s former secretaries were hired to aid Hansen.) “Our trials are models of fairness and give the defendant every opportunity for defense,” he wrote. Following his discharge, Hansen went into private practice. In the late 1950s, Gov. Orville Freeman offered to appoint Hansen to the Minnesota Supreme Court. Hansen’s response? “No, thank you.” He opted instead to have a family life—“Horace had his ego in tow,” said former law partner Gene Bradt. “He had earned many accolades. But you never heard of them from him. Always it was from someone else.”

1. Gerald W. Heaney 1918-: After serving in World War II, a white attorney and federal judge, Gerald Heaney devoted his life to the needs of vulnerable citizens, including children, workers, racial minorities, and the poor. Heaney joined Lewis, Hammer, Heaney, and Albersen in 1945 after his tour of duty with the U.S. Army and spent 20 years in private practice until President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed him to the federal bench. As a federal judge on the 8th Circuit Court, Heaney was involved in a landmark case that desegregated the public schools in St. Louis. He helped design a busing program that allowed tens of thousands of inner-city kids to attend schools in the suburbs, and channeled money into city schools to improve the education there. He also wrote opinions affirming equal rights for women and criticizing the death penalty. Heaney was elected into Duluth’s Hall of Fame in 2006.

42. Hubert H. Humphrey III 1942-: The state attorney general from 1983 to 1993, Skip Humphrey initiated landmark litigation against the nation’s major tobacco companies. When he filed the lawsuit in 1994— which aimed to stop targeted sales and advertising to children, among other things—no state had ever waged a successful attack on big tobacco. The settlement of $6.6 billion was the largest in state history. The son of Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Humphrey attended the University of Minnesota Law School. He was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 1972 and served until 1983. Humphrey was the DFL gubernatorial candidate in 1998 but lost to Independent Jesse Ventura. He is currently a senior vice president at Tuhem Partners, a Minnesota-based public relations and public affairs firm.

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43. Charles T. Hvass Sr. 1922-: Named the “best all-around trial advocate” in a 1977 Minneapolis Star reader poll, Charles Hvass Sr. was known for his thoughtfulness, logic and preparedness as a plaintiffs’ personal injury attorney. Hvass graduated from the University of Texas Law School and was a bomber pilot in World War II. He was admitted to practice in 1946 and specialized in aviation accident litigation. (He met his second wife handling a case involving her husband, who died in a crash.) Hvass was involved in nearly every important commercial aviation case involving a Minnesota resident for more than two decades. He also served as president of the Hennepin County Bar Association.

44. C. Paul Jones 1927-: When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1963 that poor defendants accused of crimes are entitled to legal counsel, C. Paul Jones helped build Minnesota’s public defender system from the ground up. Appointed as the state’s first public defender in 1966, Jones served in the post for 24 years, until his retirement in 1990. Jones was raised during the depression in Minot, N.D., and Minneapolis. Busing dishes and parking cars to get through the University of Minnesota, he graduated in 1950 and joined a Duluth law firm. A year later, he joined the Hennepin County Attorney’s office as a prosecutor. In 1959, he joined the U.S. Attorney’s office and then went into private practice from 1960 until his appointment as state public defender. He is credited for many of the improvements in the state’s representation of criminal defendants and inmates. He also earned a reputation for helping new attorneys build their careers, and for hiring women at a time when many firms weren’t even interviewing them.

45. William I. Kampf 1943-2005: Prominent bankruptcy attorney and social activist William Kampf used to say that he walked companies “through the valley of the shadow of death.” An attorney for companies such as M.A. Gedney Co., Hoff Jewelers, Bridgeman’s Restaurants and Paper Warehouse, Kampf spent his career helping clients through crisis situations. Kampf came to Minnesota from New York in 1964 to attend the University of Minnesota Law School. In the early 1970s, he sued the Minneapolis Police Department for raiding the home of David Lykken, who volunteered for the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union, handling a 1983 U.S. Supreme Court case in which he challenged a state law that allowed tax breaks for families with children in private and parochial schools. A leader in the Jewish community, Kampf was the regional president of the Union for Reform Judaism and president of Mount Zion Temple in St. Paul. Before his death in a car crash at age 62, Kampf was a partner in Henson & Efron and was supervising a bankruptcy clinic at the University of Minnesota to introduce law students to consumer practice.

46. Elliot Kaplan 1937-: Business litigator, entrepreneur and community activist Elliot Kaplan has been a leader in Minnesota for almost 50 years. Kaplan graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1961 and joined Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, where he specializes in business, antitrust and intellectual property litigation. Kaplan has served as director and secretary of Best Buy since January 1971, and is the company’s corporate counsel. He is also a director of infoUSA, Inc., and an owner and director of the Bank of Naples in Naples, Fla. A leader in the Jewish community, Kaplan led the Minneapolis Jewish Federation’s Securing Our Future Community Capital Campaign. He has been a leader in major fundraising initiatives for the Juvenile Diabetes Ball, the University of Minnesota Law School, PACER and the Jewish-Christian Studies Program at the University of St. Thomas.

47. Sam Kaplan 1936-: Renowned Democratic backer, social activist, real estate magnate and opinion leader, Sam Kaplan founded Kaplan, Strangis & Kaplan in 1978. He has been a director of Piper Jaffray Companies since 2003 and was co-counsel for the Minnesota Vikings for three decades. Nobody does deals like Kaplan. Just ask Harvey Mackay — the prominent businessman and author who has been a client of Kaplan’s for decades. Kaplan is also the attorney for car-dealership magnate and close friend Jim Lopient, managing his children’s trusts and serving as a company director. As a lawyer for liquor wholesalers, Kaplan has successfully fought proposals at the legislature to sell wine in grocery stores. Kaplan was chairman of U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone’s 1990 and 1996 campaigns and fundraiser for former U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley’s 2000 presidential campaign in Minnesota.

48. A.M. Sandy Keith 1928-: Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice A.M. Sandy Keith advocated for society’s least powerful. He wrote opinions protecting child witnesses, upholding stronger laws against repeat sex offenders and forbidding off-track betting. Keith led the court in cases involving pollution cleanup, Minnesota’s psychopathic personality law and school financing. His major legacy was the unification of the trial bench, a project that had been under way for 20 years. During his tenure, caseloads on the court rose 27 percent while the number of judges increased by only 4 percent. Before he joined the bench as an associate justice, Rochester native Keith was a state senator from 1959 to 1963 and lieutenant governor from 1963 to 1967. After an unsuccessful bid for governor in 1966, Keith withdrew from public life and focused on the law. Gov. Rudy Perpich appointed Keith to the court in 1989, and named him the 18th chief justice the following year. Keith returned to his family law practice in Rochester at Dunlap & Seeger after resigning from the court in 1998, one year before his term was to end. “I thought it was the right time,” he told a Duluth newspaper reporter. “Many politicians stay longer than they should.”
49. Frank B. Kellogg 1856-1937: A farm boy who rose to international preeminence, the self-educated Kellogg passed the state bar in 1877 and practiced in Olmsted County until moving to the St. Paul firm of David, Kellogg & Severance in 1887 at the age of 30. During his years in private practice, Kellogg earned a fortune as counsel for railroads, iron mining companies and steel manufacturing firms and befriended some of the great business figures of the day, including Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and James J. Hill. Kellogg achieved national fame as a trustbuster after a series of high-profile wins on behalf of the government against the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads, as well as one of the most dramatic legal battles of the era against John D. Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company. In 1912, Kellogg was named president of the American Bar Association. Kellogg was a member of the National Committee of the Republican Party from 1904 to 1912 and a delegate to its national conventions in 1904, 1908 and 1912. In 1916 he was elected to the U.S. Senate. In 1925, Kellogg succeeded Charles Evans Hughes as secretary of state in Calvin Coolidge’s cabinet, holding the position until 1929. Among his many honors were the Nobel Peace Prize and the French Legion of Honor.

51. Jeremy Lane 1944-: In his more than 25 years directing Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance (MMLA), which provides free legal services for the poor, Jerry Lane has fought tirelessly for the disadvantaged. Lane grew up in a family of lawyers from Yonkers. When he graduated from Fordham University School of Law in 1968, he started a probate law private practice on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Then a friend invited him to join his Legal Aid office in Queens, and Lane found his calling. In 1970, he moved to Minnesota and, with Bernie Becker, fought for victims of discrimination and harassment, especially in housing. Lane was named executive director of MMLA in 1981.

0. Bill Kennedy 1934-2003: The first full-time Hennepin County public defender, Kennedy was appointed in 1971 and created an office that would become one of the largest and most respected in the country. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, Kennedy spent three years in the Army before attending law school at the University of Notre Dame. He worked for Attorney General Walter Mondale from 1961 to 1965 and “had a deep belief... his whole life in legal defense of the undefended,” Mondale said upon Kennedy’s death. “He had a lot of spunk and ght and dash. He did it his way. I think he left a big mark.” As chief public defender, he was a staunch advocate against racial discrimination. Kennedy retired in 1996.

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52. Earl Larson 1911-2001: The founder of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union, Earl Larson was appointed as a U.S. district judge in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy. In two of his most significant decisions, Larson ruled in 1972 that Minneapolis schools must be desegregated, and in 1974, he ruled that Minnesota’s mental institutions must improve care of their patients, some of whom had been subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. During his 16 years on the bench in the 1960s and 1970s, Larson also oversaw the integration of the Minneapolis Fire Department and ruled for National Football League players in an antitrust case involving free agency. The son of a janitor who died when Larson was 7, he grew up in north Minneapolis and worked as a golf caddy to help support his family. After serving in Navy intelligence during World War II, Larson and Leonard Lindquist formed the law firm now known as Lindquist & Vennum. In 1952, Larson served as the first president of the MCLU, where he fought for civil liberties. He was chairman of the Minnesota Human Rights Commission from 1955 to 1960.

53. George Latimer 1935-: George Latimer practiced labor law in St. Paul from 1963 until he was elected mayor in 1975, an office he held until 1990. After his mayoral term, Latimer served as dean of Hamline University’s law school from 1990 until 1993 and served as a special adviser to Henry Cisneros, President Bill Clinton’s Housing and Urban Development secretary, from 1993 until 1995. From January 1996 to January 1998, Latimer was CEO of the National Equity Fund. Latimer has been director of Indentix Incorporated since 2001. “I don’t ever want to retire,” he told a Minneapolis reporter recently. “I can never predict what’s next.”

54. Donald Lay 1926-2007: In his four decades on the federal bench, Donald Lay was a champion of civil rights. He was appointed to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals at age 39, the second-youngest judge ever named to the court. While Lay was a member, the court heard Jenson v. Eveleth Taconite Co., in which the company was found to have been liable for sex discrimination; the case was the subject of the 2005 movie North Country. The court also heard Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians v. Minnesota in 1997, which was decided in favor of the band’s hunting and fishing rights, and United States Jaycees v. McClure in 1983, in which Lay favored the right of women to be allowed full membership in the Jaycees. Lay was a “brilliant scholar” and a person “with a real heart,” retired 8th Circuit Judge Gerald Heaney said. “We made a lot of law in those cases in the 1960s and ’70s.” Lay served as chief judge for the 8th Circuit from 1980 to 1992.

55. Leonard Lindquist 1912-2004: Leonard Lindquist was a nationally known labor mediator and arbitrator and an advocate for human rights, fair housing and employment. Born in Minneapolis, Lindquist took long breaks from school to find work in Montana and Washington after his father died in 1926. While serving in the Navy during World War II, he and fellow attorney Earl Larson decided to form a law firm called Larson, Loevinger, Lindquist, Freeman & Fraser (now Lindquist & Vennum). Active in civil rights and community causes, Lindquist served two terms as a state representative in the 1950s, sponsoring legislation to ban racial discrimination in nursing homes. In the 1960s, he was chairman of the Mayor’s Committee on Fair Employment Practices. Lindquist helped NFL players form their first collective bargaining agreement in 1970 and served as the first general counsel of the NFL Players Association. He intervened in 1982 in the violent three-month printers’ strike at the Bureau of Engraving Inc. in Minneapolis and had the dispute settled within days.

56. Greer E. Lockhart 1929-: Greer Lockhart tried hundreds of cases in his career, specializing in medical malpractice and product liability defense, and was passionate about the fight for women equality in the church in the 1970s. When the Rev. Dr. Jeanette Piccard became one of the first women ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1974, Lockhart defended her in the Ecclesiastical Court against charges that she defied church law. The charges were dismissed, and three years after her appointment, the church recognized Piccard as a leader. Upon his graduation from the University of Minnesota Law School, Lockhart joined Bassford Remele in 1953. In 1979, he became the firm’s second president and CEO. In that role, he is credited for his forward-thinking hiring practices and encouragement of women in the profession.

57. Miles Lord 1919-: Federal judge, U.S. attorney and attorney general Miles Lord wrote landmark opinions on civil rights and the environment. In one of his most famous rulings, Lord ordered the Reserve Mining Company of Silver Bay to stop dumping its waste into Lake Superior — effectively closing the plant, shutting down one-twelfth of the nation’s supply of iron ore and putting 3,000 people out of work — until the company found an alternative means of waste disposal. This was one of the first times a judge had shut down a major industrial plant to protect the environment. Lord grew up on the Iron Range. He served in the Army in 1944 and 1945, received his law degree from the University of Minnesota in 1948 and was named an assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Minnesota in 1951. Lord was Minnesota’s attorney general from 1955 to 1960 and a U.S. Attorney from 1961 until his appointment to the Federal U.S. District Court by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966. He served as chief judge on the district court from 1981 until his retirement in 1985.
58. James Manahan 1866-1932: Revered as the “people’s lawyer,” James Manahan was the first graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School in 1889. After 10 years of practice in Lincoln, Neb., Manahan returned to Minnesota in 1906 and formed Manahan & Cook. He brought suit on behalf of local farmers and consumers against the Great Northern Railroad and, later, the Pullman Company. Manahan was a passionate defender of the rights of farmers. He also defended socialists and others who were prosecuted during World War I. In 1912, Manahan was elected to Congress as a Bull-Moose Republican, receiving more than twice as many votes as all of his competitors combined. Years later, his daughter, Kathryn Manahan Hoxmeier, became the first woman to graduate from the University of Minnesota Law School.

9. Samuel Maslon 1901-1988: The founder of Maslon Edelman Borman & Brand, Samuel Maslon was a leading corporate and tax attorney who helped fledgling businesses evolve into large companies traded on the New York Stock Exchange. In one of Minneapolis’ most celebrated cases, Maslon defended business tycoon Wilbur Shaw against government fraud charges after the nancial collapse of his company. Maslon was born to the owner of a Jewish grocery on the north side of Minneapolis. When he decided to go to law school, the Jewish community raised the funds to pay his tuition at Harvard. After graduating first in his class in 1923, Maslon moved to Washington, D.C., and clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. Maslon was a renowned art collector and philanthropist.

60. Stephen L. Maxwell 1921-: Minnesota’s second black municipal judge and its first black district judge, Maxwell presided on the Ramsey County bench for 19 years until his retirement in 1987. Maxwell’s father, a St. Paul barber, died when he was 9, and Maxwell put himself through Morehouse College in Atlanta with odd jobs cleaning latrines and the like. While in private practice in St. Paul, he was legal counsel for the St. Paul NAACP and won the first substantial verdict — $800 — for two black men who were refused service in a Dakota County bar. In 1964, he was named St. Paul’s city attorney. Gov. Harold LeVander appointed Maxwell to the municipal court in 1967; he moved up to the Ramsey County District Court bench one year later. “You can, in fact, succeed in what I call the mainstream,” Maxwell told a St. Paul newspaper in 1990. “But it takes first-class preparation, it takes diligence of purpose, and it takes courage.”

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61. Frederick L. McGhee 1861-1912: A civil rights activist and Minnesota’s first African-American lawyer, McGhee was born in 1861 as a slave in Mississippi. His father was one of the few slaves who could read and write. McGhee attended Knoxville College in Tennessee with the help of the Freedmen’s Bureau, then moved his family to Chicago to attend Union Law School (now Northwestern), working as a waiter to pay his way. He graduated as one of the top three students in his class and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1885. McGhee practiced in Chicago for three years with another black attorney before moving to Minnesota, where he was admitted to the state bar on July 17, 1889. His practice focused on criminal defense. In his first case, McGhee established the innocence of a man who'd been sentenced to 99 years in prison and served five for a crime he did not commit. In another case, he won a clemency from President Benjamin Harrison for client Lewis Carter, a black soldier falsely accused of a crime. A protégé of W.E.B. DuBois, McGhee founded the Niagara Movement, forerunner of the NAACP. McGhee was one of the first nationally prominent black Democrats. He practiced law in St. Paul for 23 years.

62. Hiram Mendow 1893-2001: Hiram Mendow’s most famous client, Al Capone, called him “The Kid,” after he represented the mobster in a concealed weapons case in 1929 around the time of the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre. Along with his work for such mobsters as Capone and bootlegger Isadore “Kid Cann” Blumenfeld, his best-known case in 80s of practice in Minneapolis was the defense of an American Indian charged with murder in 1935 after a picture appeared in Time magazine showing the man wielding a baseball bat over a prone figure. Mendow produced the alleged victim in court, alive and well, sued Time for damages and won. In a 1923 divorce case that brought national attention, Mendow worked out a compromise between a wife and her husband, who allegedly preferred the radio to sex. He prosecuted antitrust cases against GE and RCA, wrote manuals on family law and worked with Clarence Darrow on fraud cases. The son of poor Romanian immigrants, Mendow sent himself to law school at the University of Minnesota by making window blinds at night. He flew vintage biplanes with the U.S. Army during World War I, and during Prohibition wrote a book about making wine at home. He wrote about Yiddish theater for a Minneapolis newspaper, coached basketball and football, and taught English to immigrants. In 1923 he served as a judge, resigning because he disliked sending people to jail. Nonetheless, people called him “Judge” for the rest of his life. Mendow practiced law until the age of 100. He died at age 107.

63. Ronald Meshbesher 1933:: One of the most prominent criminal defense attorneys in Minnesota, Ron Meshbesher has won acquittals in more than 65 felony jury trials, including at least 10 murder cases, in his more than 50 years in practice. Meshbesher has represented defendants in several of the state’s most publicized criminal cases, including the 1972 kidnapping and ransom of Virginia Piper, the 1974 kidnapping of Eunice Kronholm and the 1977 murder of Elisabeth Congdon. Clients have included Boston Bruins Dave Forbes — the first professional athlete in the United States to be charged with felonious assault from an incident during a game — and former Minnesota Court of Appeals judge Roland C. Amundson, who pleaded guilty to stealing more than $300,000 from a vulnerable adult’s trust fund. Meshbesher graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1957. At age 24, he became a prosecutor at the Hennepin County Attorney’s office, trying 45 felony cases in three years with a 92 percent conviction rate. In 1961, he went into private practice, founded Meshbesher & Spence and devoted his career to criminal defense.

64. William B. Mitchell 1832-1900: Mitchell shaped Minnesota law in the state’s formative years. Born to Scottish immigrants near Niagara Falls, Mitchell went to college in Pennsylvania and moved to Winona in 1857. There he served in the second Minnesota Legislature and was elected county attorney. He became a third District judge in 1874 and was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1881. In his 18 years on the court, Mitchell wrote more than 1,500 opinions, making huge contributions to the state’s jurisprudence on issues such as negligence, state constitutional law and the common law of riparian rights and navigable waters. Mitchell won the support of both parties in partisan judicial elections in 1886 and 1892. He left the court in 1899 and went into partnership with his son, William D. Mitchell, and died of a stroke the next year.

65. William DeWitt Mitchell 1874-1955: The son of William B. Mitchell had a tough act to follow but became a legend in his own right. Born in Winona, Mitchell graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1896, served as an infantry officer during the Spanish-American War and World War I, worked for How, Taylor & Mitchell (now Doherty, Rumble & Butler) and was appointed U.S. solicitor general in 1925. In that role, he argued regularly before the U.S. Supreme Court, fighting for the government’s side only when he believed it to be right. Mitchell became so highly regarded by the members of the high court that the entire body called on Republican President Herbert Hoover to appoint the Democratic Mitchell as attorney general. Hoover did so in 1929, and Mitchell stayed in office until 1933. He later served as chairman of the U.S. Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules of Civil Procedure.
66. Walter F. Mondale 1928- : As Minnesota attorney general, U.S. senator, vice president, Democratic Party candidate for president and ambassador to Japan, Mondale has been a leader in the state and country for nearly 50 years. Born in Ceylon, Mondale attended Macalester College and the University of Minnesota as an undergraduate, served in the Army for two years during the Korean War, graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1956 and passed the bar that year. At age 32, four years out of law school, Mondale was elected attorney general of Minnesota. He was re-elected in 1962. In 1964, Mondale filled the U.S. Senate vacancy caused by the resignation of Hubert H. Humphrey; he was elected in 1966 and 1972 and served until 1976, when he was elected vice president on the Democratic ticket with President Jimmy Carter. After an unsuccessful 1984 presidential run, he returned to private practice with Dorsey & Whitney. Mondale was U.S. ambassador to Japan from 1993 to 1997.

67. Diana E. Murphy 1934- : When Diana Murphy came the first woman to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals, 8th Circuit Chief Judge Richard Arnold said, “More important than [the fact that] she is a woman is that she is the woman she is.” As a trial lawyer, Hennepin County district judge, federal court trial judge and judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals, Murphy has played a key role in the development of the law in Minnesota. Upon graduating from the University of Minnesota cum laude in 1974, Murphy worked for two years at Lindquist & Vennum. She became a Hennepin County municipal judge in 1976 and a strict judge in 1978, and she was appointed by President Carter to the federal bench in 1980. Murphy became a judge in 1992. In one of her most prominent cases, Murphy ruled in favor of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe in a suit case to decide hunting, fishing and other land rights.

68. Floyd B. Olson 1891-1936: A Depression-era hero, Gov. Floyd Olson inspired hope in Minnesotans during one of the state’s darkest periods. The son of poor Scandinavian immigrants who settled in north Minneapolis, Olson was known as a straight-talking man of the people. In 1919, he was appointed assistant attorney for Hennepin County and soon became county attorney, a position he held for 10 years, earning a reputation as a tough prosecutor who took on gangsters, the Ku Klux Klan and crooked politicians. He was elected as the state’s first Farmer-Labor Party governor in 1930. During his tenure, Olson pushed through bills that instituted a progressive income tax, created a social security program for the elderly, expanded the state’s environmental conservation programs, guaranteed equal pay for women and the right to collective bargaining, and instituted a minimum wage and a system of unemployment insurance. When he died during his third term as governor at age 44, President Franklin D. Roosevelt eulogized Olson as a “personality of singular force and courage.”

69. William Oppenheimer 1883-1975: William Oppenheimer joined the law firm now known as Oppenheimer Wolff & Donnelly in 1913 and turned it into one of the most prominent firms in Minnesota. Oppenheimer graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1904 at age 20 and worked as an editor until he reached 21. He opened a solo practice in the Globe Building and was soon recruited to Lawler & Durment (later Oppenheimer) in 1913. From there, Oppenheimer built a base of corporate clients, many of whom remain loyal to this day, such as Economics Laboratories (now Ecolab) and St. Paul Companies. In 1972, Oppenheimer won a mammoth antitrust victory against IBM on behalf of Control Data Corporation. The case lasted for more than four years and employed 30 full-time and part-time attorneys and 125 paralegals. His motto: “Never give the client a flat no. Don’t tell him he can’t do it the way he wants — and then tell him how he can do it.”

70. Vance Opperman 1943- : A prominent antitrust trial lawyer, businessman and Democratic supporter, Opperman served on President Clinton’s national information infrastructure advisory council from January 1994 through January 1996. Opperman is the former president of the Thomson Corporation, the title that purchased West. He is president of Key Professional Media, a burgeoning media empire that includes online graphics and custom-publishing ventures, as well as Twin Cities Business, Minnesota Law & Politics and Mpls/St. Paul magazines.

71. Alan Page 1945- : The first African American to serve on the Minnesota Supreme Court, Alan Page earned his law degree from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1978 while playing football full-time as defensive tackle with the Minnesota Vikings (and later, the Chicago Bears). He left professional sports in 1981 to focus on his law career. Page practiced with Lindquist & Vennum from 1979 to 1984 and was appointed a special assistant attorney general in 1985. He was quickly promoted to assistant attorney general and, in 1992, was elected to serve as an associate justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court. “Justice Purple People Eater,” as he was affectionately dubbed, was re-elected in 1998, the biggest vote-getter in Minnesota history, and again in 2004. The Page Education Foundation, which Page and his wife founded in 1988 to help minorities afford college, has provided almost 3,000 scholarships to Minnesota students. Upon his induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1988, Page said: “At the very best, athletic achievement might open a door that discrimination once held shut. But the doors slam quickly on the unprepared and the under-educated. … We must educate our children.”
72. Maynard Pirsig 1902-1997: One of the greatest contributors to legal education in Minnesota, Maynard Pirsig taught law for 64 years. Born on a farm near Elmore, Minn., Pirsig spoke only German until he entered public schools. His father, of only an eighth-grade education, insisted that Pirsig go to college. He did, graduating from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1925 with near-perfect grades. Pirsig became an attorney and director for the Minneapolis Legal Aid Society. In addition to teaching at the University of Minnesota for 37 years and at William Mitchell College of Law for 23 years, Pirsig was secretary of the Minnesota Judicial Council, which studied the organization and procedures of the courts, and spent more than 30 years representing Minnesota as a member of the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Law. For the majority of his teaching career, Pirsig taught “Judicial Administration,” a course that strove to encompass all subjects — from justice and precedence to trial techniques and the organization of the courts — pertinent to developing well-rounded lawyers. Pirsig retired in 1993.

73. Peter S. Popovich 1920-1996: The only Minnesota jurist to serve as chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court and the Minnesota Court of Appeals, Popovich, who popularized the statement “Justice delayed is justice denied,” breathed life and vitality into the Court of Appeals as its chief judge. The court was established in 1983 with seven judges as a way to relieve the workload and delays at the Minnesota Supreme Court. It now has 16 judges handling more than 2,500 cases a year. Popovich, the son of Yugoslavian immigrants, was born in Crosby and grew up in Chisholm. After graduating from the St. Paul College of Law in 1947, and a three-month hospitalization with polio, he co-founded the Peterson & Popovich law firm in St. Paul, where he practiced for 36 years. Popovich was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 1952 and served 10 years. He was named chief justice of the Supreme Court in 1998, retired in 1990 at the mandatory age of 70 and joined Briggs and Morgan in St. Paul, where he practiced until 1996. More than 400 people attended his funeral Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, the St. Croix Beach parish that Popovich attended for years, near his home in St. Mary's Point.

74. William Prosser 1898-1972: William Prosser is known to a generation of lawyers for his written works on torts. Of his first book off torts, The Handbook of the Law of Torts, the former chairman of the Board of Governors of the Philadelphia Bar Association wrote, “The informed reader will close this book with the realization that it is the best general text on the American law of torts which has ever been published.” After graduating from the University of Minnesota Law School, Prosser joined Dorsey, Colman, Barker, Scott & Barber. He taught at the University of Minnesota from 1931 until 1940, when he resigned to become the Minnesota counsel for the Roosevelt Administration’s Office of Price Administration. In 1943, he returned to private practice for another four years. In 1947, Prosser became a professor at Harvard Law School, and a year later he was named dean of the University of California Law School at Berkeley.

75. Alexander Ramsey 1815-1903: Minnesota’s first territorial governor and second state governor who later served as a U.S. senator and secretary of war. Ramsey was born near Harrisburg, Pa., the son of a blacksmith, and practiced law there until elected to Congress as a Whig in 1843. He served two terms, then moved to Minnesota and served as governor of the new Minnesota Territory from 1849 to 1853; mayor of St. Paul in 1855; and governor of Minnesota from 1860 to 1863. His administration was marked by sound economic management and by two crises: the Civil War and the Dakota Uprising. Elected in 1863 and 1869 as a Republican to the U.S. Senate, he served through 1875.

76. Robert Renner 1923-2005: As a U.S. district judge, Renner was known as a conservative with a heart of gold. “The thing that stands out about him is his character,” said federal magistrate J. Earl Cudd. “He was totally nonpartisan. He carried no prejudices with him.” When President Richard Nixon appointed Renner to be U.S. attorney in 1969, he sent John Dean to tell Renner to purge the office of assistant U.S. attorneys who had served under the liberal Miles Lord. Renner wouldn’t hear of it and sent Dean packing. Renner served in the Minnesota House for 12 years, from 1957 to 1969, where he co-sponsored the bill that created the state’s public defender system. After serving as U.S. attorney, Renner became a U.S. magistrate and in 1980 was named to the federal bench. In 1968, he presided over the Copper-7 intrauterine device trial, in which a woman claimed the device caused her infertility and won $8 million. An opponent of the Vietnam War, Renner went easy on the 700 draft resisters he had to judge. The Walker native is remembered as a gentle man who loved people, and whose happiest words were “doggone” and “rascal.”

77. Eugene A. Retar 1898-1979: Criminal defense attorney Eugene Retar won more settlements between $100,000 and $500,000 by the early 1960s than any other attorney in Minnesota. Born into a family of 11 children, Retar dropped out of high school to help his family and enrolled in the Minnesota College of Law at age 24. Retar secured his fame as a trial lawyer by defending the head of the Minneapolis Moral Squad during a grand jury investigation in 1931. He successfully defended Minneapolis gambler and bookmaker Robert Newborn in two separate bankruptcy and murder trials in the 1930s. In later years Retar specialized in personal injury cases, representing the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and other railroad unions.
78. Solly Robins 1913-1999: When Solly Robins graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1936, he discovered that Twin Cities law firms were reluctant to hire Jewish lawyers. So Robins, in 1938, founded his own firm: Robins, Davis & Lyons, today known as Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi. In the late 1950s, he won what was then one of the largest verdicts in Minnesota, more than $350,000, representing Factory Mutual Insurance Company and Fuller Brush Company in a case involving a major gas explosion. More so than almost any lawyer of his time, Robins championed the rights of the consumer. A 1964 trial established the principle of strict liability against manufacturers, while a later trial established for the first time that doctors were required to inform patients of any risks that arose from procedures they faced. Robins led the firm to national leadership in major litigation, including representation of the government of India in the 1984 Bhopal gas leak and the $6.6 billion case against Big Tobacco. “Solly was the consummate trial lawyer,” recalls his partner, Mike Ciresi. “He had the ability to mesmerize a jury, from the moment he came into the courtroom, until he completed his closing argument.”

9. James M. Rosenbaum 1944- : Rosenbaum was appointed as Minnesota’s 25th federal judge by President Ronald Reagan in 1985. He became chief judge of the District of Minnesota in 2001. An expert on the issues of legal technology and intellectual property, Rosenbaum has been instrumental in integrating technology into courtrooms. The federal courthouse in Minneapolis, completed in 1997, houses some of the most technologically advanced courtrooms in the country, thanks in large part to Rosenbaum’s guidance. And a power grid of cable and electrical connections beneath the floor of each courtroom ensures that the court will be able to adapt to whatever technological advances come next.

1991, Rosenbaum certified one of the first sexual harassment class action suits nationwide, on behalf of female Iron Range miners.

80. Gordon Rosenmeier 1907-1989: This small-town attorney became one of the most powerful, influential and respected legislators in Minnesota history. A Little Falls native, Rosenmeier went to Stanford University Law School and studied at the University of Chicago but returned home to practice law. In 1932, Rosenmeier took over the Little Falls law practice of his father, Christian Rosenmeier, and maintained that office for the rest of his life. In 1940, he was elected to the first of his eight consecutive terms in the Minnesota Senate, serving until 1971. “The Little Giant from Little Falls,” as he was sometimes called, Rosenmeier authored bills to create the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Metropolitan Council, State Department of Corrections and the State Planning Agency. Former Gov. Elmer L. Andersen called Rosenmeier “the ablest man who ever served in the state Senate.”

81. James Schwebel 1942- : James Schwebel founded Schwebel Goetz & Sieben in 1974. In his 30 years in practice, Schwebel has secured nearly three dozen recoveries of $1 million or more. He represented victims of the MGM Hotel fire in Las Vegas, the Williams Pipeline explosion in Roseville, the Nicollet Mall Holidazzle crash and the Minnesotans who lost family members in the Galaxy Airlines crash in Reno, Nev. In a 2002 jury trial, Schwebel received the largest wrongful death award ever handed down. Schwebel graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1968 and took his first job with William DeParcq, a top personal injury attorney. Six years later, he struck out on his own, with one legal assistant and a secretary. Since then, the firm has grown into the largest personal injury litigation outfit in the state.

2. Charles W. Scrutchin 1866-1930: One of the first African-American lawyers in Minnesota to practice outside of the Twin Cities, Bemidji trial lawyer Charles Scrutchin was one of three black lawyers tried by the NAACP after the Duluth lynchings in 1920. Scrutchin led the defense team for William Miller, one of the 11 African-American circus workers accused of raping a white woman. He won an acquittal for Miller that resulted in the dismissal of the charges against the other defendants. In 1899, Scrutchin helped raft the constitutional rights law, which prohibited exclusion from public places based on race and allowed or up to $500 in damages. Scrutchin used the law in 1902 to sue a barber who refused him service — and won. Born to former slaves in Richmond, Va., Scrutchin worked as a Pullman porter and hotel waiter before moving into the law. He graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 1894 and moved to Chicago, St. Paul and finally Bemidji, where he lived and practiced — with an almost entirely white clientele — until his death in 1930.
83. Robert Sheran 1916: Waseca native Robert Sheran is the only judge who has been appointed twice to the Minnesota Supreme Court. He served as associate justice from 1963 to 1970, and again as chief justice from 1973 to 1981. During Sheran’s tenure, the court adopted the Minnesota Rules of Evidence and established a mandatory continuing legal education requirement. In between the two terms, and after he left the court, Sheran was a partner at Lindquist & Venum, where he focused on mediation and arbitration. Sheran graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1939 and served in the Minnesota House of Representatives from 1947 to 1951 as a conservative from Blue Earth County. Says attorney J. Michael Dady: “[Sheran was] a spellbinding orator; a man of extreme graciousness and empathy.”

84. Henry Sibley 1811-1891: A congressman, governor, military leader and senior statesman who shaped the early state of Minnesota. Sibley, who was born in Detroit, came to Mendota in 1834 as a partner in the American Fur Company. The first lawyer in the state, Sibley hung his shingle in 1835. He was appointed the first justice of the peace west of the Mississippi River in 1838. As a congressman, serving from 1849 to 1853, Sibley pushed against much opposition for the passage of an act that organized the Territory of Minnesota on March 3, 1849. It was during this process that Itasca was considered for the name of the territory, but Sibley insisted on Minnesota or “Cloudy Water” in the Dakota language. Sibley helped write the state’s laws as a member of the constitutional convention of 1857. He was elected the first governor of the state and served from 1858 to 1860. In his inaugural address, Sibley declared, “I have no object and no interests which are not inseparably bound up with the welfare of the state.” A colonel of the state militia during the Dakota War of 1862, Sibley protected exposed parts of the Minnesota River from attacks.

85. William Sieben 1952: One of the top plaintiff’s personal injury lawyers in Minnesota, Sieben has won more than 20 verdicts, awards or settlements in excess of $1 million in his 30-year career. A native of Hastings, Sieben was inspired to practice law by his father, who was a non-practicing lawyer and a member of Gov. Orville Freeman’s Cabinet. Sieben graduated from William Mitchell College of Law in 1977. He served on the White House staff of Vice President Walter Mondale, then returned to Minnesota and in 1980 joined Schwepel & Associates. In 1983, he became a principal shareholder and the firm was renamed Schwepel, Goetz & Sieben. In two of his major settlements, Sieben secured $3 million in 1999 for 16-year-old Natasha Schuh, a high school student made a quadriplegic in a theater accident in 1997, and $4.5 million in 1998 for 21-year-old Kim Middendorf, a road construction worker and college student made paraplegic in a 1985 accident involving a road-rolling machine. “I believe in the fundamental rights of the individual and their right to have access to a fair courts system,” Sieben says. “That’s what lets the poorest people in America go toe-to-toe with the richest, and that makes our country work.”

86. John Simonett 1924: Small-town attorney John Simonett was famous for his thoughtfulness, wit and humor as an associate justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court. “Simply because free speech allows us to make fools of ourselves is no reason we should avail ourselves of the opportunity,” he once wrote in a decision on a disciplinary case involving improper lawyer advertising. Simonett graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1951 and practiced law in Little Falls for 29 years with state legislator Gordon Rosenmeier. He was named to the state’s highest court in 1980 by Gov. Al Quie and served until 1994. Simonett, a moderate, wrote decisions upholding the state’s fetal homicide law, overturning lower welfare benefits for new state residents and, in one controversial case, allowing a lawyer to eliminate a potential juror based on religion. Upon his retirement from the bench, Simonett joined Greene Espe, where he serves as a mediator and arbitrator.

87. Lena Olive Smith 1885-1966: The first African-American woman lawyer in Minnesota, Smith spent her lifetime fighting segregation and discrimination as an early civil rights leader. She opened her own law practice in 1921, working with community groups to improve conditions for black people. Smith fought police brutality, housing segregation and racist appeals to all-white juries during criminal prosecutions. As lead attorney for the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP in the 1920s and its president from 1930 through 1939, she led the coalition to reverse the convictions of the Scottsboro Boys — nine young black men accused of raping two white girls on a Southern Railroad freight run from Chattanooga to Memphis. When a white mob of 3,000 surrounded the Minneapolis home of a black family new to the neighborhood, throwing bricks at the windows, Smith met with the mayor and police chief to demand that the police protect the family. Smith also helped establish the Minneapolis branch of the Urban League, which helped blacks struggling with employment and housing. Smith smoked cigarettes, never married, cut her hair short in the 1920s and wore suits and ties to work at a time when most women still wore long dresses.
88. Warren Spannaus 1930-: As Minnesota attorney general, Warren Spannaus aggressively enforced environmental and consumer protection laws and was an early advocate of gun control. Born to a working-class family in St. Paul, Spannaus was known as a man of the people who never forgot his roots. In the early 1960s, he got his start in the attorney general’s office as an aid to Walter Mondale. Spannaus was named attorney general in 1971 and served 12 years. He initiated the first major action against the Reserve Mining Company, setting off the largest environmental dispute in Minnesota history. In the end, the company was forced to find an alternative means of disposal for the 67,000 tons of taconite tailings it was depositing daily into Lake Superior. Spannaus also pushed for restrictions on the purchase and carrying of handguns in the mid-1970s. He ran for governor in 1982 but lost the DFL primary. He joined Dorsey & Whitney, specializing in government relations, and lobbied for Northwest Airlines when it obtained a $200 million assistance package from the state in 1992. Spannaus retired in 1997.

90. Douglas W. Thomson 1930-2007: Doug Thomson was the godfather of criminal defense to many attorneys in the 20th century. In a 1977 interview, Thomson said, “I’ll defend anybody accused of anything, provided I control the case. I’m not going to be anybody’s mouthpiece.” Born in St. Paul to a railroad supervisor, Thomson spent his childhood in Montana, returning to Minnesota to attend the University of Minnesota. After serving in the Korean War, Thomson graduated from the William Mitchell College of Law. He defended Connie Trimble, charged with murder for her role in the 1970 death of St. Paul police officer James Sackett, and Roger Caldwell, accused of murder in the 1977 death of heiress Elisabeth Congdon in Duluth. In 1978, Thomson represented June Mikulance, who fatally stabbed her former boyfriend’s wife more than 100 times. Mikulance was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Thomson was known for his strong oratory skills and as a stylish dresser with a love for practical jokes.

91. Kenneth Tilsen 1927-: An activist attorney who was instrumental in the civil rights movement. Tilsen grew up in St. Paul and graduated at the top of his 1950 University of Minnesota class. He practiced with Robins, Davis & Lyons for 14 years before striking out on his own to take on public interest cases, often pro bono, defending “anti-establishment” protesters like the members of the Honeywell Project and the students involved in the 1969 takeover of the University of Minnesota’s Morrill Hall. In 1964, Tilsen was investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee and refused to answer the committee’s questions about his time as president of a Marxist-Socialist club while at the University of Minnesota. Tilsen represented members of the famed “Minnesota Eight,” accused of a 1970 draft office break-in. He was chief legal coordinator for the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee and attorney for American Indian Movement leaders Dennis Banks and Russell Means.

92. Esther M. Tomljanovich 1931-: Upon her retirement from the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1998, the Star Tribune described Tomljanovich as “one of the pioneering women in the Minnesota judiciary.” She is remembered for making the court more accessible, as well as for her fairness and lively sense of humor. One of the only women in her law school class, Tomljanovich did not bother applying for a job at a law firm upon graduation because at that point, she said, women were not likely to get through the door. So she went to work for the legislature, indexing and eventually drafting bills. In 1977, Gov. Rudy Perpich appointed Tomljanovich to the 10th Judicial District trial court bench in Stillwater — the second female district judge position in Minnesota history. Then, in 1990, she was named to the state Supreme Court. With Sandra Gardebring’s appointment to the body the next year, Minnesota became the first state in the nation with more women than men on its highest court.
93. Andrew Volstead 1860-1947: The pioneer of Prohibition and former city attorney and mayor of Granite Falls, he authored the Volstead Act, intended to “stop evil at its source” by prohibiting the manufacture of alcohol and abolishing saloons. Born to Norwegian immigrants, Volstead attended St. Olaf College and Decorah Institute in Iowa. He was admitted to the bar in 1884. Elected to Congress on the Republican ticket in 1902, Volstead authored the Capper-Volstead Cooperative Marketing Act of 1922, which enabled agricultural producers collectively to process, prepare, handle and market their products, and exempted farm cooperatives from antitrust laws. The congressman also supported suffrage and anti-lynching laws and extended workers’ compensation laws to long-shoremen. After his defeat in 1922, Volstead returned home to Granite Falls to practice law and served as legal adviser to the Northwest Prohibition Enforcement District in St. Paul.

94. Rosalie E. Wahl 1924-: “We decided not to make the coffee anymore ... unless we could help make policy,” said Rosalie Wahl, the first female judge of the Minnesota Supreme Court, upon her retirement. Growing up during the Depression in Kansas, Wahl was raised on a farm by her grandmother after the deaths of her mother, grandfather and brother. Wahl graduated from the University of Kansas in 1946 with a sociology degree and spent more than a decade as a homemaker and community volunteer. In 1962, “tired of sitting outside doors waiting for the men inside to make the decisions,” a 38-year-old Wahl entered the William Mitchell School of Law and completed her law degree in night classes while raising five children. Upon graduating in 1967, Wahl served six years as an assistant state public defender, representing the appeals of convicted criminals. Wahl was a founding member of Minnesota Women Lawyers in 1972. In 1977, Wahl, then 54, was named to the state Supreme Court. In that role, she headed two Supreme Court task forces to study gender and race bias in the state’s judicial system and was a staunch advocate for women and the poor. Wahl held the post until her retirement in 1994 at the mandatory age of 70. In her 17 years on the bench, Wahl was opposed for re-election only once.

95. Mary Walbran 1915-1995: When she registered to the University of Minnesota Law School in 1935, “[Dean Everett Fraser] sent a letter to my father,” Walbran later recalled. “He suggested that I would be better off taking a course in music. My father wrote back, ‘I already tried that. She’s no good. You keep her.’” After a year at the university, she transferred to Creighton Law School, in Omaha, Neb., and was the only woman who graduated in her class in 1937. Walbran began her practice with her father’s firm, Moonan & Moonan, in Waseca, but after marrying John Walbran she moved to Owatonna and worked with her husband. By 1943 she was raising a family of three children and working as a full-time attorney. People in town joked that she read legal abstracts on her way to the maternity ward. When her husband was called into the service in 1944, Walbran took over his job as a county attorney. Walbran’s legal expertise spanned from general practice to litigation to handling rural cases such as farm problems and closing country schools. In 1944 she prosecuted the landmark case of State v. Biskinger, one of the first vehicular homicide cases in Minnesota. Walbran wrote “Equal Pay for Equal Work” legislation as early as 1976. She was appointed by the state Supreme Court to the State Board of Law Examiners in 1978, and served until 1987.

96. Roberta Walburn 1952-: Walburn’s colleagues call her “a 10,000-pound gorilla” and “an armored tank, flattening anything that stands in her way.” She has earned the reputation. As plaintiffs’ liaison counsel for the state of Minnesota and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota in the groundbreaking lawsuit against Big Tobacco, Walburn wrested 30 million pages of documents from the tobacco companies. She represented the families of Sen. Paul Wellstone, his wife, his daughter and three staff members who died in a plane crash near Eveleth, Minn. The case settled for $25 million. Walburn represented the Union of India and the victims of the Bhopal disaster in federal court in New York and the courts of India. Other clients include the women injured by the Copper-7 IUD; Alan Page, in a constitutional challenge in the Minnesota Supreme Court to vacate the governor’s executive order extending the term of an incumbent justice; and Honeywell Inc. in a series of patent infringement cases that settled for nearly $500 million. Walburn, a former reporter for the Star Tribune, specializes in complex litigation. She is of counsel to Robins Kaplan Miller & Ciresi.

97. Joe Walters 1920-2005: Once known as the toughest litigator between Chicago and California, Walters, an early partner in the Washington, D.C.-based O’Connor & Hannan firm, was the attorney for the Hubert Humphrey family. He successfully represented Humphrey backer Dwayne Andreas when Andreas was charged with illegally contributing money to Humphrey’s 1968 presidential campaign. When news reports in 1978 claimed that the Humphrey family had secretly been given more than $1 million in stock by the Andreas family, Walters led the family’s denials. In 1986, Walters was involved in the ownership squabbles of the Vikings, representing the founding families, who wanted to retain control of the team. Walters stood firm with a client, the government of El Salvador, when a coalition of groups fought to cut off U.S. aid to the El Salvadoran government in the late 1980s, saying it had repressed and murdered its citizens in an attempt to defeat leftist rebels. The coalition was pushing another client, the city of Minneapolis, to cut off its business with O’Connor & Hannan if the lobbying work continued with El Salvador. The firm stuck with El Salvador and lost Minneapolis.
98. Betty W. Washburn 1917-1962: Minnesota's first woman judge, Washburn was sworn in to the Hennepin County Municipal Court in 1950, more than 70 years after the first woman was admitted to practice in Minnesota. Washburn was born Betty Whitlock in Terre Haute, Ind. After earning her undergraduate degree in sociology and psychology from the University of Indiana in 1938, she and her husband, William W. Washburn, moved to Minnesota in 1940 so he could teach sociology at the University of Minnesota. Washburn graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1943 and practiced for three years at Dorsey, Coleman, Barker, Scott & Barber (now Dorsey & Whitney), focusing on divorce, juvenile delinquency, dependency, adoption and insanity. Washburn and her husband’s hopes to work together in the law were dashed when he died of a brain tumor. She later married Malcolm Willey, vice president of administration at the University of Minnesota. After serving as the first woman court commissioner in Hennepin County for three years, she was appointed to the municipal court by Gov. Luther Youngdahl when she was 33. While serving as a judge, Washburn died of cancer at age 45.

39. Benno Wolff 1905-2006: Since Benno Wolff joined the Oppenheimer law firm in 1927, the it. Paul operation grew from seven attorneys (who, reportedly, used to work seven days a week, sneaking out occasionally to the movies) at one office to more than 300 lawyers in 10 locations. He graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1927 and worked as a corporate and estate attorney until 1945. In 1948, Wolff — with the help of just one other attorney — negotiated the $20 million sale of Toni Co. of Gillette Co. He represented Children’s Hospital in a 1978 civil case involving the removal of a 4-year-old brain-dead girl from life support, a proceeding that expanded Minnesota’s legal definition of death. Colleagues recalled that Wolff agonized over the case. Wolff was a leader in the state’s oldest synagogue, the Mount Zion Temple. After 73 years in practice, Wolff retired in 2000 at age 95. “I’m one of these loyal guys,” Wolff said in 2000. “I had many opportunities to leave. But I just wouldn’t do it.”

100. Lawrence Yetka 1924-: A 20-year state Supreme Court justice who helped transform the courts and made landmark decisions supporting civil rights and the environment. Born in Croquet to a Farmer Labor party founder, Yetka was once called a “Humphrey with the volume down.” Active in Democratic political circles, he brought John F. Kennedy to Minnesota in 1963, sat on Lyndon Johnson’s civil rights commission and was a floor manager for Hubert Humphrey at the 1968 convention in Chicago. After graduating in 1948 from the University of Minnesota Law School, Yetka served in the Minnesota House of Representatives from 1951 to 1961 and as a municipal judge from 1961 to 1964. Yetka was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1973 and served until 1993. “He’s a leader,” former Justice Rosalie Wahl told a newspaper reporter in 1993. “He’s forceful, and when I thought he was right, boy, I was willing to follow him. I often thought, ‘Here’s a man who could lead an army.’”

Minnesota’s Legal Hall of Fame: RUNNERS-UP

2. Jeffrey R. Anderson 1948-: Sexual abuse victim’s advocate.
4. Robert Blaeser 1953-: First American-Indian Hennepin County district judge.
5. Gene Bradt 1937-: Litigator with Hansen, Dordell Bradt.
11. Joseph Daly 1943-: Hamline law professor and labor arbitrator.
14. Don Fraser 1926-: Congressman and Minneapolis mayor.
28. Eleanor Nolan 1910-1995: For many years, the only female attorney in northern Minnesota.
29. Brian O’Neill 1947-: Lead counsel in the $5.3 billion Exxon verdict.
34. John Sanborn 1883-1966: District court and 8th Circuit Court of Appeals judge.
37. Martin Severance 1826-1907: Civil War veteran and district judge.
42. Charles Start 1839-1919: Supreme Court chief justice.
43. Ralph Strangis 1936-: Kaplan, Strangis & Kaplan co-founder.
44. Peter Thompson 1946-: Minnesota’s first federal public defender.
45. Stuart G. Webb 1931-: Collaborative law founder.
46. Mark Wernick 1950-: Criminal defense attorney and judge.