

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

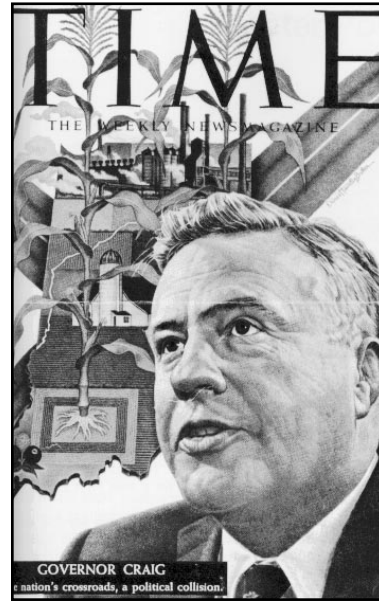
George N. Craig

In 1984, Indiana Historical Society historian Jerry Handfield declared, "George N. Craig was one of the most important Indiana governors of the 20th century."

During the Craig administration (1953-1957), Indiana instituted major reforms in several important areas, including mental health, conservation and corrections. To accomplish goals, Craig disassociated key positions from party affiliations, launched an aggressive highway safety program, founded the Indiana Youth Center and created a trailblazing police narcotics team. Under Craig's leadership the Indiana State Police became a national model. Indiana's first toll road was also instituted during his term.

Gov. Craig nurtured the Purdue University School of Veterinary Medicine, lured Ford Motor Co. to Indiana and compelled the Marion County Medical Society to allow medical school professors to engage in private practice, halting a migration of physicians from the state.

President Eisenhower praised Craig, intimating that he was a candidate for a cabinet berth. The governor opted to complete his term. *Time Magazine* placed Bernard and Chloe (Branson) Craig's son on its March 7, 1955, cover, describing him as a "colorful, instinctive administrator."



A 1927 graduate of Brazil High School, Craig was a college wrestler, graduating from Indiana University's law program in 1932. He practiced in Brazil with his father until he joined the Army a few weeks after Pearl Harbor. Decorated by France, Russia and the U.S. for combat leadership, Lt. Col. Craig became the first World War II veteran to be named the American Legion National Commander in 1949.

Active in consolidating the National Association of Mental Health, Craig initiated "Tide for Toys," a Legion program issuing more than 700 million toys to European children. Energetic resistance to the Hoover Commission's recommendation to abolish Veterans Administration hospitals made Craig a national idol.

Returning to Indiana to practice law in late 1950, he was elected the state's 39th chief executive two years later, promptly wresting GOP state control from law school classmate Senator William E. Jenner. Because Hoosier governors could serve only one term, Craig became a partner at Craig, Summers & O'Hara in Washington D.C. in 1957.

In 1967, however, he returned to Brazil with his wife, Clay County native Kathryn Heiliger, and two children, John and Margery. Until shortly before his death on Dec. 17, 1992, at age 83, Craig was an eloquent leader of the trial bar, a devoted family man and an avid outdoorsman. In 1978, the town dedicated George N. Craig Park on North Waterworks Road.

Son John, 61, a popular public speaker, is an Indianapolis attorney specializing in dispute resolution. Kathryn, now 86, lives in San Diego with daughter Margery Farnsworth, 47, a public relations executive.

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