

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

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

Frank Fox



Oil speculator, race car driver, real estate developer and horse breeder—for 20 years Frank P. Fox made a significant impact on Indiana.

A native of Monroeville, Pa., Fox located in Bridgeport, Ill., in 1905 to develop oil, but automobiles soon became his passion. Given the chance in 1908 to own the Pope-Hartford auto franchise in Terre Haute, he seized it, opening his business at 811-815 Ohio Street.

Fox's driving proficiency made national headlines in April 1911. Detective William J. Burns—later U.S. Justice Department Bureau of Investigation director—was retained by publisher Harrison Gray Otis to seek and apprehend culprits responsible for the bombing of the Los Angeles Times build-

ing Oct. 1, 1910, killing 21 and maiming 17. The investigation brought Burns to Indiana where he found dynamite secluded on a Marion County farm owned by John J. McNamara, secretary-treasurer of the International Association of Bridge & Structural Iron Workers and outspoken critic of Otis' anti-union newspaper.

Certain that Indiana courts would not allow him to extradite McNamara, Burns kidnapped the union leader, his brother James and associate Ortie McManigal. Reputedly "the best auto driver in the Midwest," Fox was Burns' choice to transport the trio to jail in California. Gaining front-page notoriety for his accomplishment, Fox returned to Indiana to participate in the first Indianapolis 500-mile Race in May 1911, finishing 22nd in his Pope-Hartford. Failing to qualify for the 1912 Indianapolis race, Fox built "The Gray Fox" for driver Howdy Wilcox, who finished sixth in the 1913 event. The owner drove several relief laps.

Crippled by a highway accident, Fox turned to other projects including horse racing and developing Edgewood Place subdivision. Upon purchasing the pacer LaPaloma, he acquired a farm near Oaklandon, Ind., and relocated, keeping his auto dealership for a few years. Fox bred horses and piloted sulkies in competition. Clair Wolverton was his trainer.

Irked by the low prices pacing yearlings commanded compared to trotting yearlings, he established "The Fox Two-Year-Old Pacing Stake" at the Indiana State Fair in 1927. The first purse, \$14,887.63, was the richest ever awarded there; Red Pluto set a world record for two-year-olds. Today, the Fox Stake is the oldest, most prestigious harness race of its kind in the United States.

Impulsively, Fox sold his horses in 1929. Failing to recover from injuries sustained in another accident, he died April 19, 1931, at age 53. Terre Haute pals Harry Hedges, William Kivits and Malcolm Steele were pallbearers. Fox was immortalized by the Indiana Standardbred Hall of Fame soon after it was established in the 1980s.

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