



COE I CRAWFORD GOVERNOR 1907 - 1909

Coe I. Crawford, the sixth governor of the State of South Dakota, was born at Volney, Allamakee County, Iowa on January 14, 1858. He was the fourth son of a family of twelve children

stemming from a long Irish lineage. Crawford was one of the truly great men in South Dakota during its early history.

Being a farm boy at Volney, it was there that he acquired the habits of industry and close application to his work. It was in those early years he developed that which constituted the foundation upon which he later built a life of professional success and prominence.

He attended the public schools and when, as a youth of fifteen, he received the opportunity to attend a graded school, he worked for his board and room in the family of a physician. It was this physician who opened the vistas of his young life for a more expanded education, for it was he who taught him Latin, geometry and English literature.

After two years Crawford was granted a teacher's certificate and he became a law student at Iowa State University. He received his LL.B. degree from that institution in 1882.

In 1883 he came to what is now South Dakota and established a law practice at Pierre. He soon gained prominence in his profession and in 1886 was elected as states attorney for Hughes County. Two years later he became a member of the legislative council of Dakota Territory and was a member of the first state Legislature which convened in 1889-1890.

His appointment as chairman of the committee on revenue offered him an opportunity to draft many of the original bills of importance that were introduced during that session, and it was due to his influence that a large number of them secured enactment. He served as an



attorney for the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company, which made him its attorney for the South Dakota area, and it was this appointment that largely caused him to move from Pierre to Huron in 1897.

Crawford had hoped to secure the U.S. Senate seat of James H. Kyle after Kyle's death in 1901. His hopes for that seat were dashed when Governor Herreid appointed Alfred B. Kittredge to fill that vacancy. Crawford then turned his energies and laid plans to run for governor on the Republican ticket and he succeeded in being elected in 1906.

During his administration there were many reforms and improvements made in matters relating to the commonwealth. Many of these laws were added to the statute book - namely, the primary election law, the anti-lobby law, the anti-pass law, the fellow servant law, the law limiting the hours of labor for the employers of common carriers, and a law requiring the publicity of election campaign funds.

He was not a candidate for re-election but accepted the party nomination for U.S. Senator. He was elected by a large majority and began his service in the Senate on March 4, 1909. While there he supported progressive policies. He was defeated for re-nomination in 1914 by Charles H. Burke.

Senator Crawford was a Presbyterian. In his professional circles he was honored with the presidency of the South Dakota Bar Association in 1899, and in 1904 and 1905 he became a member of the general council of the American Bar Association.

Among his many good works he took time to serve on the Board of Trustees of Huron College. He became a member in 1885 when that institution was known as Pierre University. He was an ardent and enthusiastic supporter with John Pyle in perfecting the reorganization of Pierre University and Scotland Academy and helped to establish Huron College.

After his public service in the Senate he returned to Huron where he again took up the practice of law with his son, Irving R. Coe. Governor Crawford passed away on April 25, 1944 as the result of a heart attack.

At memorial services held in Huron, Judge A.K. Gardner spoke of Crawford as "an impassioned, scholarly and eloquent orator, a brilliant trial lawyer, and a daring statesman - a humanitarian in the marching column of civilization - he brought to his work, whatever it was and wherever it was, the inspiring energy, optimism and enthusiasm of youth...In private life he was a supporter of all worthwhile movements in his community, a useful citizen, a kind neighbor, and a Christian gentleman."

EDITORS NOTE: This brief synopsis of the life of Coe I. Crawford was taken chiefly from the article written by George F. McDougall which was published in "South Dakota's Governors", 1953 by Charles Dalthorp. The State Historical Society has on file in its Archives, a large number of letter boxes and letter-press books containing the official correspondence of Governor Crawford.