VICE-PRESIDENT HENRY WALLACE SWears IN HOMER CAPEHART AS SENATOR, JANUARY, 1945.

Courtesy Acme Photo

Homer E. Capehart had two careers, first as a businessman and then from 1945 until 1963 as Republican senator for Indiana. William B. Pickett's authoritative study, the first biography of Capehart, provides insights into the businessman and the politician.

Capehart rose from relatively humble origins thanks to his talents as a salesman, but his most famous business venture, the establishment of the Capehart Corporation to produce high-quality phonographs, ended in failure in 1932. Nevertheless, he rebounded to become a millionaire by 1938 after persuading the Wurlitzer company that coin-operated jukeboxes would become profitable in the post-Prohibition era.

Capehart's values grew out of the conservatism of his rural Indiana background and his embodiment of free enterprise success. As a first-term senator he became a stalwart of the Republican right, a nationalist on foreign policy, and a virulent critic of big government. Also, partly owing to intense anticomunism and partly for partisan advantage, he was an early practitioner of McCarthyism. Viewing this as the worst blot on his record, Pickett fully explains Capehart's involvement in McCarthyism and how, in part because of his political nous but also because of the modifying influence of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Hoosier senator avoided entanglement in its worst excesses.

Pickett's confident expositions of the complex patterns of Indiana politics, shaped by ideology, factionalism, and personal ambitions, are the most illuminating sections of the book. Capehart's relationship with archconservative Hoosier senator William E. Jenner, which shifted from friendship to enmity, is particularly well analyzed. Coverage of Capehart's electoral tactics, notably his meet-the-people approach, also conveys the flavor of state politics in the mid-twentieth century. To some extent, Capehart's surprising election defeat by Birch Bayh in 1962 was due to the growth of the suburban electorate and the development of the media campaign, which had overtaken tactics better suited to attracting rural voters.
Somewhat disappointingly Pickett holds back from similarly detailed analysis of Capehart's role within national politics. The senator's own political positions are well analyzed, but a more thorough coverage of his involvement in the internal GOP feud between old guard and modern Republicans would have been welcome. Unlike many conservatives, Capehart did prove flexible and modified his views in response to changing times. In the 1957–1958 recession, for example, he favored a more interventionist approach, particularly on housing policy, than Eisenhower himself.

Pickett presents Capehart as a basically decent man with firm beliefs, a politician who tried to do his best for state and nation. Liberal contemporaries tended to dismiss him as an inarticulate and unsophisticated conservative whose politics rested on simplistic views. Nevertheless, his convictions that the Soviet Union was not as large a threat in the late 1940s as Harry S Truman claimed and that government should be thrifty appear far-sighted from the perspective of the 1990s. Pickett has produced a worthy biography of this important Hoosier politician, one that deserves attention from all interested in Indiana and American political history in the postwar years.

Iwan W. Morgan is principal lecturer in politics and government at City of London Polytechnic, England. In addition to articles on Indiana history, his publications include Eisenhowerversus "the Spenders": The Eisenhower Administration, the Democrats and the Budget, 1953–60 (1990), and, as coeditor, America's Century: Perspectives on United States History since 1900 (1992).


Since 1985 Jacquelyn S. Nelson has drawn the attention of historians of Quakerism with articles, in the Indiana Magazine of History and elsewhere, describing the experiences of Indiana Friends during the Civil War. This volume, based on Nelson's dissertation, brings the results of her prodigious research to a wider audience.

Nelson's most important finding challenges the image of Quakers as observant pacifists. During the Civil War at least 1,212 Indiana Friends, about a quarter of all Quaker men between fifteen and forty-nine, took up arms. This is a far higher number than advanced by previous historians although proportionally it is far less than the 62 percent of the eligible men among the general Hoosier population. Nelson ably sketches these Friends' wartime experiences, which were not much different from those of non-Quaker soldiers. The book concludes with informative accounts of