The Geography of Indiana’s Governors

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A study of birthplaces and various other geographic facts relative to the governors and lieutenant governors of Indiana has revealed several little known facts of interest. Since 1816, when Indiana came into the Union, thirty-five men have been governors of the State.

Under the Constitution of 1916, the governor’s term was three years, but since the second constitution went into effect in 1851, the term is four years. Before 1851 a governor could be reelected, but since then a governor is not eligible for a second consecutive term. Before 1851, three governors served single terms of three years each. Two were reelected and served six years each, while two others who were reelected did not fill out the second term. Joseph A. Wright was elected for a three year term in 1849. While he was governor, the second constitution was framed and ratified, and he was made eligible for the four year term, which was to begin in January, 1853. In the period of three-year terms, governors were inaugurated early in December, but since 1852, their terms begin in January. Governor Wright, therefore, served a little more than seven years (Dec., 1849 to Jan., 1857).

Including Governor Wright, and not counting the present incumbent, fourteen governors have served full four-year terms. Since 1857, four governors elected for four years did not serve out their terms. Before 1849, there were two governors who served less than one year each, Ratliff Boone (1822) and Paris C. Dunning (1849). Since 1857, there have been two governors, each of whom served more than four consecutive years, Oliver P. Morton and Conrad Baker. Each was first elected to the office of lieutenant-governor, and becoming governor was eligible to election for four years. Each served about six years—Morton from January, 1861 to February, 1867, and Baker from Morton’s resignation to January, 1873. Governors since 1857, who served less than four years, include elected governors who either died or resigned and lieutenant governors who became

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1 Included in the list are all who filled the office no matter how long, and also the present incumbent, Governor M. Clifford Townsend, whose term does not end until Jan., 1941.
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governors, but were not continued in office by election. Three elected governors since 1857 died while in office, and three resigned. Four lieutenant governors who were not continued in office by election, served partial terms as governor, one of whom was later elected for a four-year term. Twenty-nine governors have been elected directly by the people. Indiana has had thirty-three lieutenant governors, eight of whom resigned to become governor and did not fill out their terms. Five of these eight “promoted” governors were born outside of Indiana.

During the earlier years of statehood, governors and lieutenant governors of Indiana were natives of older states, partly because most of the people in the state came from older areas and partly because men who came to Indiana from other states had enjoyed the advantages of educational training and administrative experience which commended them to our citizens. Indeed, not before 1860, did Indiana contain many native-born men old enough in years and political experience to reach the governor’s chair. In 1820, Indiana’s population was 147,178; in 1830, 343,031. In 1840, it was 685,866, and by 1850, the number had reached almost a million people; by 1880, almost two million.

Before 1881, when Albert G. Porter, a native of Lawrenceburg (Dearborn County), was elected governor, only one native Hoosier had been governor. This earlier native-born governor was Oliver P. Morton (1861-67), of Wayne County. Between 1881, when the second native Hoosier became governor, and 1917, when Samuel M. Ralston, the last governor who was not a native Hoosier, retired, just half of the ten governors were born in Indiana. In the period since 1917, all the governors of the state have been Hoosiers. Since

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2 Ratliff Boone served for a few months in 1822 after the resignation of Governor Jennings. Paris C. Dunning served for about ten months following the resignation of Governor Whitcomb in 1849. Abram A. Hammond served for a few months following the death of Governor Willard in October, 1860. Henry S. Lane served for a few days in January, 1861, having agreed to resign when named as the Republican candidate for governor in 1860, should Republicans control the legislature. In this contingency, he was to be elected United States Senator and was to be succeeded by Oliver P. Morton, who consented to run for lieutenant-governor on these conditions. The bargain was carried out. Isaac P. Gray served for a few months after the death of Governor Williams in 1880. Gray did not continue in office but was elected in 1884 and served a four-year term. Ira P. Chase served more than half of a term, due to the death of Governor Hewey in 1893. Emmett Forest Branch became governor on the resignation of Governor McCray in 1924 and served until January, 1925.

3 Governors who died in office since 1857 were: Ashbel P. Willard (1857-1860), James D. Williams (1877-1880), and Alvin P. Hewey (1889-1891). Governors who resigned were Henry S. Lane (1861), Oliver P. Morton (1861-1867), and Warren T. McCray (1921-1924).

4 Isaac P. Gray, who filled out a term (1880-1881) and was elected in 1884 to serve a full term (1885-1889).
1905, all of the lieutenant governors have been natives of Indiana except F. Harold Van Orman (1925-1929). Not one of Indiana's governors was born in a foreign country.

The men born outside of the state, who served as governors of Indiana, came predominantly from the states to the east and southeast. Only one, J. Frank Hanly, born in Illinois, not far from the Indiana border, came from west of Indiana. No governor came from north of the state. Other close neighbors furnished several: Kentucky gave us three governors and two lieutenant governors, and Ohio was the native state of four Indiana governors and four lieutenant governors. Since many early colonists came to Indiana from the Carolinas and Virginia, it is not surprising that several early governors and lieutenant governors were born in that region. North Carolina yielded Paris C. Dunning, who was lieutenant governor (1846-1849), and then governor (1849). Virginia furnished one governor. Georgia gave us Ratifl Boone who was, successively, lieutenant governor (1819-1822), governor (1822), and lieutenant governor (1822-1825). Our first governor, Jonathan Jennings, was born in New Jersey and the first lieutenant governor, Christopher Harrison, was born in Maryland. Pennsylvania was the birthplace of five Indiana governors, three of whom had previously been lieutenant governors. One additional lieutenant governor was born in Pennsylvania.

Relatively few colonists came to Indiana from New England, but two governors and one lieutenant governor were natives of that section. Two governors and four lieutenant governors were from upstate New York.

Since 1893, the only governors who were not born within Indiana were natives of adjacent states: Claude Matthews,
Kentucky; Samuel M. Ralston, Ohio; J. Frank Hanly, Illinois. F. Harold Van Orman, lieutenant governor (1925-1929), was born in Michigan. Ira J. Chase who was elected lieutenant governor and became governor on the death of Alvin P. Hovey in 1891, was the last governor to come from a distant state. He was born in New York.

During the early decades of Indiana's statehood most of the people lived in the southern half of the state. Consequently, early governors were residents of southern Indiana. It is interesting, however, that a very large majority of the early governors resided in the eastern portion of southern Indiana. That section had only a few more people than did southwestern Indiana, which contained much rich land in the lower Wabash area and had several early settlements, including the state's oldest town, Vincennes, and also New Harmony, for some decades the most famous settlement in Indiana. The southwestern quarter of the state, aside from Bloomington, that furnished three, was the residence of only two of the men who became governors during the first fifty years of statehood.11

As already stated, the southeastern part of the state furnished more than the southwestern. Madison, on the Ohio River in Jefferson County, was the residence of one governor and of two lieutenant governors.12 Brookville of Franklin County, furnished two governors and one lieutenant governor.13 Two early governors resided in Clark and Rush counties, respectively, while one lieutenant governor lived in Washington County and another in Clark County.14

During approximately the first one-third of the state's history (1816-1856), no governor and only one lieutenant governor resided north of the National Road when elected. The exception was Samuel Hall (lieutenant governor, 1840-1843) who resided in Logansport.

11 Three governors who served before 1866 that resided in Bloomington when elected were: James Whitcomb, Paris C. Dunning, and Joseph A. Wright. The other two who resided in southwestern Indiana at the time of election during the first fifty years of statehood were: Ratlif Boone, and Abram A. Hammond. Each was elected to the office of lieutenant governor and each held the higher office but a short time.

12 The governor from Madison was William Hendricks. The two lieutenant governors were: Milton Stapp and Jesse D. Bright.

13 The governors from Brookville were: James Brown Ray (two terms) and Noah Noble (two terms). The lieutenant governor from Brookville was David Wallace, who removed to Jefferson County before his election to the office of governor.

14 The governor from Clark County was Jonathan Jennings, and the one from Rush County, Samuel Bigger. The lieutenant governor from Washington County was Christopher Harrison, and the one from Clark County, David Hillis.
The fourteen different men elected to the office of governor or lieutenant governor, or both, during the second forty years (1857-1896), nearly all resided in a belt about seventy-five miles wide across the southern part of central Indiana. No governor or lieutenant governor came from the northern third of the state. The three governors from the southern tier of counties resided in Ohio River cities. One governor came from Indianapolis and three others from within thirty-five miles of that city.

During the third forty years (1897-1936), the residences of governors were rather centrally located, ten of the twelve governors residing within sixty-five miles of Indianapolis. Only Governor Thomas R. Marshall and Warren T. McCray resided less than fifty miles from the state's northern border. Three of the lieutenant governors of the period, however, resided in southern or northern border counties—Steuben, St. Joseph, Vanderburg.

Since the beginning of the Civil War, Indianapolis has been the pre-election residence of only one man who was elevated to the governor's chair—Albert G. Porter—and of none elected lieutenant governor. On the other hand, Lafayette has been the residence of two governors and two lieutenant governors.

Thirteen natives of Indiana have served as governor and ten natives as lieutenant governor. Three lieutenant governors of the ten natives became governors—Oliver P. Morton, who succeeded Henry S. Lane, Emmett Forest Branch, who filled out the term of Governor McCray, and M. Clifford Townsend, who is now serving as Governor.

During the first eighty years of statehood (1816-1896), only three Hoosiers became governor, all of whom were born near the borders of the State—Morton in Wayne County; Albert B. Porter in Dearborn County; Alvin P. Hovey in Posey County. In brief, all of the native governors and lieutenant governors of the first eighty years of the state's his-

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15 Governors from Ohio River cities: Ashbel P. Willard (1857-1860), Conrad Baker (1867-1873), and Alvin P. Hovey (1889-1891). Baker was also lieutenant governor (1865-1867).

16 The governor from Indianapolis was Albert G. Porter. The three who lived within a radius of thirty-five miles were: Henry S. Lane (Crawfordsville), Thomas A. Hendricks (Shelbyville), and Ira J. Chase (Danville).

17 Newton W. Gilbert lived in Angola, William P. O'Neal at Mishawaka, and F. Harold Van Orman at Evansville.

18 Governors from Lafayette: J. Frank Hanly (1905-1909), and Harry G. Leslie (1923-1933). Lieutenant governors: Mortimer Nye (1895-1897), and William S. Haggard (1897-1901).
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tory (1816-1896) came from the southern half of the state, all but one from the southeastern part. The exception was Hovey from Posey County.

Since 1896, ten natives of Indiana have served as governor and eight as lieutenant-governor. Two of the governors also served first as lieutenant governors. The distribution of the birthplaces of these eighteen men is radically different from that of the earlier group just discussed. Only six of the fifteen were born in the southern half of the state and four of these six were born within about thirty miles of Indianapolis. Only one came from an Ohio River town. This was Winfield T. Durbin who was born in Lawrenceburg but elected from Anderson. The other hailing from southern Indiana was Lieutenant Governor Bush of Salem.

The northern half of the State yielded none of the governors who served from 1816-1896, but it yielded nine of the twenty-three governors and lieutenant governors of the period 1897-1939. Of these twenty-three more recent executives, only one was born in the unglaciated part of the state, and only two in the most recently and intensively glaciated section known as northern Indiana. Eleven of the fifteen came from the broad level stretch of fine farm land known as central Indiana.

A considerable majority of the governors and lieutenant governors, apparently, were born on farms. Of Indiana's thirty-five governors, fourteen appear to have been born in towns and twenty in the country; of the thirty-eight lieutenant governors, probably seventeen were born in towns and twenty-one on farms. Most of these future administrative leaders soon left the farm, however. Only seven of the thirty-five governors and five of the thirty-one lieutenant governors resided on farms in the years immediately preceding their election to office.¹⁹

As Indiana has been a great agricultural state throughout its history and as the farm population included a major proportion of the population until after 1900, it is somewhat surprising that so few farmers have been governors or lieutenant governors. Perhaps it is an illustration of the fact that, as a group, farmers are not politically ambitious. It may also be an illustration of the well-known fact that it is

¹⁹ When the birthplace or residence of a governor or lieutenant governor is given as a county instead of as a town or city, the author has assumed that he was born on a farm or lived on a farm. The assumption may not be correct in every instance.
characteristic of farmers that they are highly individualistic, and hard to consolidate behind a particular movement. Hence they often let others do the leading.

Most of Indiana’s governors were lawyers—twenty-four out of thirty-five. Several combined law with some other profession such as teaching, banking, or writing. All of the early governors were lawyers or professional politicians. The governors who were not lawyers, or not fully devoted to the law, included four farmers, three public officials (usually lesser state officials), three teachers, two bankers, and two editors.

Even though most of Indiana’s governors were lawyers, only twenty of the thirty-five governors attended college. Four of the governors describe themselves as self-educated and ten mention only common or public schools. Of the twenty who attended college, two graduated from Indiana University (Branch and McNutt); two attended DePauw (Porter and Goodrich); two attended Hanover (Hendricks and Porter); Wabash College graduated Marshall; Purdue graduated Leslie; Valparaiso University and the Central Normal College of Danville were attended by Ralston, and the Marion Normal College helped to train Townsend. Eight of our governors graduated from out-of-state colleges. Wallace was from West Point; Bigger from Ohio University; Whitcomb from Transylvania University; Wright and Baker from Pennsylvania colleges; Willard from Hamilton College; Morton from Miami University; and McNutt from the Harvard Law School as well as from Indiana University.

The first three men who served as Governors of Indiana (1815-1825) were affiliated with the Republican party which was founded by Jefferson. James Brown Ray (1825-1831) was a Jackson man or Democratic Republican. Noah Noble (1831-1837) was elected as a no-party candidate, but he was really an Adams-Clay man, or National Republican. David Wallace (1837-1840) was elected on an internal improvement platform, but adhered to the Whig Party. Samuel Bigger who followed Wallace (1840-1843) was a Whig. The next five governors (1843-1861) were Democrats. The three governors who served from 1861 to 1873 were members of

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20 The Whig party was not born until 1834.
the Republican Party that was born in 1854. Three Democratic governors followed (1873-1881). During the next four years, there was a Republican governor. He was succeeded by a Democrat. Two Republicans then filled out a four year term (1889-1893). Again there was a Democratic governor (1893-1897), but he was followed by three Republicans, each serving a full term (1897-1909). Two Democratic governors followed (1909-1917). For sixteen years, Republicans headed the state (1917-1933). From 1933 to the present, the gubernatorial chair has been filled by Democrats. The alternation of parties in regard to the governor’s office has been very marked in Indiana, revealing clearly that parties have competed on practically even terms. This has added to the importance of Indiana—a doubtful northern state—in national politics.

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