



William Wright Craig

Born: September 1, 1841 in India

Died: February 20, 1918 in Norristown, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Clerk of Court: 1901-1918

Mr. Craig served as the Clerk of the Court from 1901 to 1918.

He was for many years also a United States Commissioner, an earlier version of what has evolved overtime to what is known today as a United States Magistrate Judge. He held the dual offices of Clerk of Court and United States Commissioner, but during the later years of his service as Clerk of Court, he relinquished the post of United States Commissioner.

At the time of his death in 1918, the following obituary notices appeared about him that summarize his life and career:

William W. Craig, Long U.S. Court Clerk, Dies.¹
End Comes Suddenly—Held Federal Position More than 40 Years

William W. Craig, for more than forty years a clerk of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, died yesterday of heart failure at his home, 219 East Elm street, Norristown. Death came suddenly to Mr. Craig, who was 76 years old. He had been away from his office, ill, and had telephoned only a short time before that he would be unable to return for a few days longer. In a little while George Brodbeck, Jr., his assistant, received news of his death.

Mr. Craig was born in India, the son of a Scotch missionary. He received his education, however, chiefly at Norristown, where he lived for almost the whole of his life. He studied law, and after his admittance to the bar, he taught for a while

¹ *William W. Craig, Long U.S. Court Clerk, Dies*, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER (PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA) (Feb. 21, 1918), <http://www.newspapers.com/image/168716021>

in the Faires School of Languages. He was first appointed a deputy clerk in the District Court in 1877, under Charles B. Lincoln, who died in 1901, when he succeeded him.

The labors of these two men, it is said, made the District Court office a veritable mine of reference upon the Federal law. It was the habit of Mr. Lincoln to spend his evenings in the District Court office, going over the day's work and filing and refiling and cross-referencing every case and every decision until a decision in any given case was accompanied almost by a digest of the law bearing upon its particular problem. His copy of the Revised [Statutes] was written over in ink, with annotations, which covered almost every spare inch of space. Mr. Craig continued in this tradition.

Mr. Craig never quite recovered from the shock attending the death of his wife in January. A sufferer from rheumatism for many years, his condition became aggravated after her death, and it is believed this malady at last affected his heart.

Mr. Craig was for many years a United States Commissioner, and he sat in many important cases. When United States Government examiners declared against what they called "dual office holding" he was forced to relinquish this post.

When the District and Circuit Courts were consolidated under the Moon act in 1912, Mr. Craig was retained as clerk and Henry B. Robb, Jr., who had been Circuit Court clerk, as his first assistant. Mr. Robb died suddenly a year or so afterwards. George Brodbeck, Jr., second deputy, who was advanced to first, has been temporarily placed in charge of the office.

Mr. Craig was an active member of the First Presbyterian Church, Norristown. He is survived by Faires D. Craig, a son, and Alda B. Craig, a daughter.

Grief Hastens Death of William W. Craig² Veteran Clerk of U.S. District Court Expires Six Weeks After Wife

William W. Craig, clerk of the United States District Court for the last forty years, died this afternoon at his home, 219 Elm Street, Norristown.

It is believed that his death was hastened by worry over the death of his wife, which occurred January 4. He was taken ill several days ago, but it was not believed that his condition was serious.

Mr. Craig was seldom absent from his post. He expected to return to work today and notified Deputy Clerk Cobaugh to that effect yesterday.

² *Grief Hastens Death of William W. Craig*, THE EVENING PUBLIC LEDGER (PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA) (Feb. 20, 1918), <http://www.newspapers.com/image/163847950>

Despite his seventy-six years he was one of the most energetic [employees] of the court.

In addition to being a fluent linguist Mr. Craig was an authority on court decision and naturalization. Last Monday he complained of feeling ill and informed his subordinates that he would take a few days' rest. Early today Mr. Craig inquired over the phone of one of his deputies as to office work, and said that he had not recovered sufficiently to resume his duties for a few days longer. Shortly afterward word was received that he had died of heart disease.

Mr. Craig was born in India, where his parents had gone to do missionary work. He received his education and lived almost all of his life in Norristown, Pa. He studied law and after being admitted to the bar he became a teacher in the Faires School of Languages. In 1877 he was appointed a deputy clerk of the District Court and served in that capacity until April 19, 1901, when he was appointed chief clerk to succeed Charles S. Lincoln, deceased. When the District and Circuit Courts were consolidated January 1, 1912, by an act of Congress, Mr. Craig was retained as chief clerk, and Henry B. Robb, who had been clerk of the District Court, became Mr. Craig's first deputy. On the death of Mr. Robb in March, 1913, George Brodbeck, who had been second deputy, was appointed to the first deputy clerkship and through the death of Mr. Craig he has been placed as temporary head of the office.

Mr. Craig was also a United States [C]ommissioner for nearly thirty years. Higher Government officials took a stand against what they termed "dual office holdings," and when Mr. Craig's last term expired in 1913, he was not reappointed, although in one other district, at least, a Federal clerk serves also as a commissioner.

Mr. Craig was an active member of the First Presbyterian Church, Norristown. He is survived by Faires B. Craig, a son, and Alda B. Craig, a daughter.