



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of American History*  
*Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the Forman H. Craton Papers, 1902-1983

NMAH.AC.0454

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Forman H. Craton Papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.0454
<b>Date:</b>	1902-1983
<b>Extent:</b>	4.15 Cubic feet (13 boxes)
<b>Creator:</b>	Craton, Forman H., 1902-1983
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Summary:</b>	Diaries and memoirs, profusely illustrated with photographs and other mementos, which describe Craton's life, education and work experience as an engineer at General Electric in minute detail, and include his comments on the culture, current events and politics of the times; and correspondence, mostly letters from Craton to his wife and to his mother.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Gift to Smithsonian from Mrs. Willette Craton, October 9, 1992

### Processing Information

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### Preferred Citation

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## Biographical / Historical

### Childhood and Youth

Forman Craton, an only child, was born on June 23, 1902 in Syracuse, New York. His mother, Annie Fairbanks Hutchison was the granddaughter of General Orrin Hutchison, a man of some prominence in Onondaga County, New York. His father, Dr. Samuel Boyce Craton, was the great grandson of Joshua Forman, the founder of Syracuse, New York. Dr. Forman earned his medical degree at Syracuse University and became an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist. Somewhat later he confined his practice to diseases of the eye.

Mr. Craton's memoirs recount several unpleasant memories of a dark, gloomy house on McClennan Ave. in Syracuse where he spent his earliest years. Among them were the death of a brother who was a "blue" baby, a series of colds, coughs, sore throats and other respiratory complaints, getting sick on street cars, fear of dogs, and fear of being banished from home for misbehavior.

About April 1, 1908 the family moved to 326 Highland Ave., a socially better neighborhood where they spent the next 7 years which are described by Mr. Craton as among the happiest in his life. The long winters offered a multitude of winter activities for children. They built snowmen, snow forts, snow houses. There were few cars so the streets were not cleared and youngsters went sledding and tobogganing on nearby hills. The tennis court at the Sedgwick Farm Club was flooded for skating and hockey. Indoors the children played "house" with appropriate rearrangement of the furniture or hide-and-seek in houses with large attics. In good weather, hopscotch, baseball and football took over along with climbing trees and riding bicycles.

Burten Holmes' travel pictures, special movies such as "Birth of a Nation" and later Jack London's "The Sea Wolf" as well as books and records were part of the cultural scene. Magazines too, "St. Nicholas", "Boys' Life" and "American Boy" were available. At his mother's instigation young Craton began a stamp collection.

Most of the neighborhood families, including his, belonged to the Sedgwick Farm Club, two and a half blocks from his house. It had large rooms, bowling alleys, a squash court, tennis courts, a children's playground. Dancing school which he attended was held at the club once a week. He also attended Sunday School regularly.

After one term at a private school young Craton transferred to Lincoln, the neighborhood public school, where he finished the 8 grades in 6 years. In summarizing his early years Mr. Craton remarked on the varied backgrounds of his school friends and the fact that rich and poor children mixed well and played together. He mentioned being conscious of class distinctions as early as 1912 and this awareness reappears throughout his life.

The comfortable life of young Forman's early years changed abruptly with the untimely death of his father, Dr. Craton, on February 26, 1915. The family income dropped from \$10,000 to \$12,000 annually, a very good one for that period, to about \$1,500 a year from his father's estate. Shortly after his father's death the boy and his mother moved to 410 Douglas St. It was a "nice flat" but the lad was aware that the neighborhood was not as good as Highland St. Forman gradually lost touch with his old playmates (his mother resigned from the Sedgwick Farm Club to save money) and the boy soon became part of the Douglas St. crowd.

The young Forman began his high school days at North High School. Two of the city's characteristics were important to him during this period. The NY Central R.R. ran through downtown Syracuse and watching the trains was a fascinating pastime. The Erie Canal on which boats were hauled by horse through the city competed with the NY Central for his attention. Although too slight for competitive sports he was

an enthusiastic fan of the football and baseball teams at school. His lone outside activity at school was dramatics.

Work experience during his high school years included several one or two day-at-a-time jobs shoveling snow for the NY Central, laboring work at a steel company, tips for errands at the State Fair, and Christmas clerking at a men's store. His first full time job was as gardener for the Calthop sisters during the summer of 1919, at 20¢ an hour. In the fall of 1919 he got a job working after school and on Saturdays at Bardeen's, a book publishing company. The summer before university he was a machinist's helper at Solrag Process Co. That summer he and his mother moved to a flat at 205 Waverly Ave, a block from Syracuse University where he enrolled in the fall.

To his bitter disappointment the young man was not asked to join Phi Delta Theta, his father's fraternity and this caused great unhappiness in his early days at the university. Because of the necessity to be practical about earning a living for himself and his mother he put aside his interest in writing and cartooning, and majored in mechanical engineering. He excelled in his college work, and was invited to join several honorary fraternities in engineering and mathematics. He made a number of friends both male and female and in spite of his early bitterness over his rejection by his father's fraternity had a satisfying college career. After intercession by a friend of his father's about which Forman later wrote that he was ashamed, he received and accepted a bid from Phi Delta Theta in the middle of his college years.

In August 1923 the Cratons vacationed at Star Island, in the Isles of Shoals, New Hampshire, where young Forman quickly became friends with Willette Flitschner, from Louisville, KY. whom he would marry in a few years.

#### Young Manhood

During his final year at college an interview with Mr. George Pfeiff who was recruiting for a new course in Factory Management at the General Electric Co. led to a job offer in Schenectady, NY. After some soul searching about leaving his mother in Syracuse he left for the job at General Electric in Schenectady. His career at General Electric lasted 38 years.

Homesickness was a serious problem as Forman Craton began his career with the company. With the exception of vacations he had spent all of his young life, including his college years, in Syracuse. He went directly from a vacation at Star Island where Willette was also vacationing to a plant employing 22,000 people in a city in which he was a stranger. His proclivity for introspection, always strong, and his sensitivity to people and his surroundings are clearly evident in his letters to his mother and to Willie in August and September, and recur frequently throughout the years. He turned to poetry at this time for solace, particularly Sara Teasdale. The year 1924 ends with two letters to Willie declaring his love.

Because the young man had been recruited for the Factory Management Course he was moved from spot to spot in the plant, some assignments lasting a week, others several weeks. In 1925 Forman enrolled in an accounting course at G.E. that involved home work. That and almost daily letters to his mother and Willie left him little free time. Still troubled by home-sickness and unhappy in his work, after much agonizing he asked for a transfer to "test" which in effect meant starting again.

He had become convinced that his interests lay in engineering rather than in manufacturing and the test course pointed its members toward design, application engineering and technical sales.

A young Mr. Craton left for the General Electric facility in Erie, a plant with 5000 employees, on January 10, 1926 and never looked back. The transfer brought him immediate satisfaction and pleasure in his work and began a lifetime career. He found Erie and its people interesting, began attending the Unitarian Church where he met and enjoyed knowing a number of young people. His early months there were spent in rented rooms but late in the year he rented an apartment at 1308 W 9th Street in preparation for his marriage to Willie.

## Family Life

Forman Craton and Willie Flitschner were married January 27, 1927. He made his first trip for the company, the first of an endless number, in 1927. The year 1928 was a banner year for the young couple. A daughter named Barbara and always called Bab was born on August 28 at Hamot Hospital. His salary having been increased to \$42.00 a week in February, they bought a secondhand, dearly beloved Dodge for \$225. In late June Forman wrote the first paragraph of his first short story, in an endeavor to follow through on his interest in writing. The year 1928 was also the year that the Graf Zeppelin which had left Germany in October 13 arrived in New York on October 15. In November the Cratons voted for Herbert Hoover who won the presidency by a large electoral majority. His Democratic opponent was Al Smith.

On May 24, 1932 a new baby, Roger Phelps Craton, was born. As the depression hit bottom Mr. Craton's salary was cut to \$1900 a year, his work week to 4 days and he felt lucky to still have a job.

The death of Willie's mother made 1935 a sad year for the family. Increasing responsibilities at GE as business improved kept Mr. Craton busy at the plant and frequently out of town. As his responsibilities increased the necessary and expected business entertaining increased keeping him away from home often during the evenings in Erie. He was out of town more frequently also and business entertaining often involved drinking and late nights.

The war years meant greater responsibility at the plant and long working hours for Mr. Craton and the restrictions felt by all families as rationing affected family eating habits and recreation, especially the use of automobiles.

For several years after the children were born Mr. Craton's mother either lived with the family or visited for long periods of time. His mother had become harassed by worry, fears and discontent

and no effort by Mr. Craton seemed to assuage these. This situation continued through out the thirties. On November 19, 1939 Mr. Craton wrote "all of this makes life at home unnatural, strained, unpleasant and nerve wracking."

Mr. Craton's frequent and long business trips made the responsibility for his mother especially difficult for his wife. It was January 1944 before the elder Mrs. Craton left the Craton house to reside at St. Margaret's Home with many misgivings on her part and Mr. Craton's.

His mother's death occurred on September 28, 1947 and an inheritance of about \$20,000 from her made building a longed for new home possible in 1948.

Another crisis in their family life was the suicide of Willette Craton's father, "the Colonel", on April 10, 1946. Long widowed he had remarried at age 70, apparently not very successfully. He was also driven by financial worries. What estate there was went to the second wife with only the proceeds of a \$1,000 insurance policy to Willette Craton, causing some feeling of resentment.

Graduation from university were important family occasions as were the children's marriages.

Thanksgiving was generally spent with Bab and Tom Moore and their family, Christmas with Roger and Joan and theirs.

## Children and Grandchildren

A daughter named Barbara and always called Bab or Babbie was born on August 28, 1928 at Hamont Hospital. Her brother, Roger Phelps Craton was born on May 24, 1932.

Both children did well in school, received good grades, and were a source of pride and satisfaction with their behavior, appearance, and accomplishments. Bab wanted a year at Southern Seminary in Buena Vista, Virginia before entering college. Despite their concern about the expense the Cratons agreed

because they feared she could not get all the necessary credits in the Erie public school. Her graduation from Southern Seminary was an important family occasion which involved visiting the Robeys and other relatives living in the area.

Bab left Erie in late September 1946 for her first year at Syracuse University. By 1949 she was a senior at Syracuse University and Roger was a senior at Strong Vincent High School and well-thought of as a young sailor at the Erie Yacht Club.

Bab graduated from college in June, 1950 and she and Tom Moore, an architectural student, were married in August. Since he had one more year for his degree in architecture she went to work in an office in Syracuse. Roger graduated from high school that year and entered the University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 1975.

The first grandchild, Elizabeth Forman Moore, was born on September 15, 1952. Her father Tom joined an architectural firm in Berea, Ohio where they lived for a time before moving to Brecksville, Ohio. A second grandchild, Peter Moore born in 1955 was followed by another girl, Margaret Joanna Moore, born October 2, 1957 and called Peggy.

Another Moore grandchild, Charles Andrew, born July 3, 1965 shortly became a cause of much

family concern and anxiety because of his failure to thrive and respond developmentally. By April 1970 he was placed in the Sunnyhaven Home in Columbus, Ohio. He was transferred to a state hospital in Breckville in the spring of 1973. Sunnyhaven felt he could no longer be helped there and he had become more difficult to manage. Mr. Craton never became reconciled to Charles' retardation or the fact that he was born to his adored daughter.

Peg Moore the youngest child was thinking about college during the annual Thanksgiving visit in 1974- she was interested in one with a strong art curriculum. Peter Moore was an increasingly excellent football player in high school, winning several awards. He planned to enter Wooster College in the fall, having graduated from high school in 1975 the same year Elizabeth graduated from Bowling Green University. She was attending classes at the Univ. of Georgia, working in the Admissions Office and living at 2511 Planthersville Road in Decatur.

Roger Craton at the University of Pennsylvania joined the fraternity to which his father and grandfather belonged. He was active in Masks and Wigs and also played lacrosse. He graduated with high honors in 1954 and married Joan Gibson the following November.

Roger and Joan Craton moved to Detroit, he to work in a bank and finish his M.A. degree at night.

By 1960 Roger was working for the Ford Motor Company. His first child, a boy named Lincoln after Joan's father, was born May 30, 1960. Cynthia, his second child was born on August 1, 1962. Both of these children attended private schools and lived in London for the several years during which Roger Craton worked for Ford in London.

By 1971 Roger had returned to Ford in Detroit, and had bought a large home in Bloomfield Village, Birmingham, Michigan. He had been appointed comptroller of Ford's North American Automotive Operations, a 30 million dollar a year business.

On July 5, 1980 Roger phoned his parents that he was leaving Ford to become chief finance officer with a seat on the board of directors of Chesebrough-Pond Corporation effective August 1, 1980. His new annual compensation was to be \$300,000. Thus meant that the Roger Craton family would move to Greenwich, Connecticut in June 1981 when Cynthia Craton would graduate from high school.

A Thirty Eight Year Career At The General Electric Co.

The following account of Mr. Craton's career was written by him in November 1978 at the request of Milton Wise of the class of 1924 of Syracuse University, who was compiling a book on the surviving members of their class at the College of Applied Science.

"On July 7, 1924 I reported in Schenectady for General Electric's new Factory Management Course and thus began a rewarding GE career that was to span the next 38 years. However, a year on this course convinced me I was slanted more toward engineering than manufacturing. So I transferred to the "test" course, which pointed its members toward both design and application engineering as well as technical sales. It proved to be a good move.

Long fascinated by trains and discovering GE's deep involvement in rail transportation apparatus, I soon transferred to the Erie, Pa. plant where I finally headed traction motor test nights and later took locomotive test. The latter was an impossible dream come true, involving electric locomotive riding and operation on the 4-mile test track. In November 1926 I moved into railway control engineering at Erie to design circuitry for gasoline-electric cars and various types of electric-drive locomotives. Also I had an indoctrination course on traction motor design and application.

In 1930 the Lackawanna suburban electrification out of Hoboken was inaugurated. It included two 3,000-volt trolley-battery-diesel locomotives for transfer freight service between the Jersey City and Secaucus yards. I'd done the control engineering on these locomotives and helped put them into service, This included the thrill of operating the locomotive pulling a 105-car freight train up grade out of Jersey City, through the Bergen Hill tunnel and on to Secaucus, to me an incredible experience. This assignment was my first intimate exposure to railroading and years later I wrote an article about it which appeared in TRAINS Magazine.

In 1931 I moved from design into locomotive application engineering and commercial work, the two functions being combined at Erie. However we were fast sinking into the abyss of the Depression. By 1932 the only active job we had was apparatus for the Pennsylvania Railroad electrification; if you weren't fortunate enough to be working on that, and I wasn't, it was touch and go whether you'd be short-timed or dismissed. I got down to four days a week and 157 per month with a wife and two children to support but I hung onto my job. That was the bottom. In 1933 things began to improve slowly, I was assigned the New Haven Railroad commercial work at Erie. The New Haven was progressive and interested in dieselization as well as possibly extending their electrification to Boston. We made extensive diesel-switcher studies culminated by an initial order for ten units. This was followed in 1937 by an order for six 3,600-hp 216-ton 11,000/600-volt AC/DC passenger locomotives for operation into Grand Central. On September 21, 1938 while running freight tests on these, we found ourselves in the middle of the hurricane of that date, another experience I wrote about for TRAINS.

In the late 1930s GE and American Locomotive Co. were partners in the diesel business; they built 100 tons and up using our equipment and we anything below 100. I was assigned promotion of our diesels with the New England railroads. This meant extensive traveling involving memorable episodes. My experiences on the Boston & Maine, where we had a demonstrator, were particularly noteworthy and were covered by a TRAINS article entitled "Joy & Pain on the Boston & Maine."

In 1940 I became manager of Industrial Haulage at Erie which had responsibility for the GE mining and industrial locomotive business, about to come on strong with World War II in the immediate offing. This was my first managerial job. I became active in the Mining & Industrial Electric Locomotive Section of the National Electrical Manufacturers Association and was chairman of the section. Also I spent much of 1942 in Washington as a dollar-a-year man on the War Production Board and was responsible for scheduling the manufacture of all locomotives in the U.S. below 100-tons; these included both diesel and steam as well as the military requirements. I made a 2-month trip to Hawaii in early 1945 to appraise the postwar market for diesels in the sugar industry.

In 1945 I became assistant general sales manager and in 1947 general sales manager of GE's locomotive and transportation equipment business. The product line included electric-drive locomotives of all types



and sizes, electrical propulsion equipments sold to other builders for locomotives, subway and rapid-transit cars, trolley cars and coaches, off-highway vehicles, and a large parts business. After the war we had a period of inflation and labor trouble including a 9-week strike which made pricing and shipping promises difficult. Also as 1950 approached we struggled to get our business up to \$100,000,000 annually, which would keep about 5,000 employees busy at Erie. So it was a challenging and interesting time.

In the early 1950s due to rapid growth the Company was reorganizing, decentralizing and establishing new measurements. In 1953 a study team was formed to recommend how the Company's foreign operations could be blended smoothly into all this. On the team were four from international operations, four from domestic, and the chairman, an international man. On this team I represented the Company's heavy apparatus business. The nine of us holed up in a New York hotel for over a year on this when we weren't traveling around on interviews including a 3-week trip to Central and South America. It was one of the most fascinating of my business experiences.

After this I returned to my marketing job at Erie, the position having been upgraded slightly from "sales" to "marketing" in the reorganization. In 1956 I spent three months taking the Company's Advanced Management Course. Back in Erie again, I headed a team to study the reorganization of our own business. We spent four months on this and presented our report in May 1957. We recommended the business be split up into three decentralized sections: 1) Locomotives; 2) Equipments; 3) Parts sales. Our recommendations were adopted and the department reorganized. I became general manager of the equipment business, a position I held until my retirement on July 1, 1962 at age 60.

Equipment doesn't sound as glamorous as locomotives but actually is more so. We'd adapted our locomotive propulsion apparatus to oil-well drilling which put us into that business; I've visited an oil-well drilling platform 60 miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. With expansion of open-pit mining and the proliferation of heavy off-highway vehicles, our motorized-wheel business was booming. Mass transit was promising an even greater future. Also we supplied electrical equipments to Alco and Baldwin as well as our own associates in the Erie Plant. These lines along with parts kept some 2,500 people busy in our Equipment Section."

#### Finances

It took 17 years thanks to his early career change and the depression for Mr. Craton's salary to reach \$5,000. The next step up meant that he was eligible to join Elfun, an investment fund for G.E. managers and executives.

With the end of the depression and the increasing industrial activity caused by war production Mr. Craton's salary had risen to \$6,700 a year. Overtime and extra compensation brought this to \$8,500. By November 1946 several increases had raised his base salary to \$9,000 and following a long strike at the plant this figure was raised to \$9,720. A March 13, 1946 journal entry noted that Mr. Craton's income tax for 1945 was \$1,800 -- "more than he used to make". One of the satisfactions of these increases was the purchase of a small boat that added a great deal to the family's recreation.

Mr. Craton became eligible for the GE stock plan in 1953 and was authorized to purchase 900 shares of company stock over the next 10 years at \$71.00 a share. His stock in GE enabled him to retire at age 60 instead of 65. He noted that the 2500 shares he owned in 1965 for which he had paid about \$60,000 over the years had a market value of \$300,000. It was the income from the Elfun trusts and the dividends from G.E. stock, substantial contributions to his retirement income, that made the extensive travel during his early retirement years possible.

Despite the post-war salary increases and his investment income that appeared to keep pace with the inflation of those years, inflation was an abiding concern for Mr. Craton.

#### Leisure Time

As a young single man much of Mr. Craton's social life revolved around the Unitarian Church. He enjoyed the young people he met at church-related social affairs and found them interesting.

After their marriage the Cratons played bridge with friends, occasionally played poker for small stakes, went to movies, and attended lectures and concerts at Chautauqua during the season. They entertained and were entertained by friends for cocktails and dinner and made weekend visits to friends living out of town. Swimming, walking the beach and picnics at Peninsula, a local recreation area, were important when the children were young. They were regular television viewers with a number of favorite programs. The Watergate hearings were watched daily during the second Nixon administration and all space shots were followed with interest. The week-end sports programs were watched with anticipation and pleasure. Mr. Craton's interest in opera is well-documented and he was a regular radio and television fan of the Metropolitan Opera performances. He also bought and played frequently recorded arias.

A friendship with the Brightmans developed into a more active social life than usual but this subsided after the Brightmans left Erie.

Recreation during the years from 1945 to 1964 was centered in the Yacht Club which Mr. Craton joined when he bought a small boat. Boating then became a major recreational activity. Young Roger quickly became an excellent sailor, participating in sail boat races with skill and enthusiasm. The first boat was replaced by a larger but still modest one. Mr. Craton's interest eventually resulted in his being elected commodore of the Erie Yacht Club, a highly prized distinction. The Cratons participated in all of the Yacht Club activities, using it for dinner, dancing, and special occasions, even after Mr. Craton sold his boat.

Mrs. Craton joined a local book club in 1928 and was still a member in 1982.

Most of the home repair and upkeep was done by Mr. Craton, a careful and persistent workman who was proud of his results. He was indefatigable in searching for parts and pleased to avoid what he considered outrageous charges, particularly by plumbers. Mrs. Craton did most of the gardening but he helped with the heavy work.

During periods when Mr. Craton was keeping a diary on a daily or weekly basis much of his spare time was devoted to writing it. He also spent many hours in creative writing in an effort to get published and for a brief period in drawing cartoons for possible publication.

Mr. Craton became an avid photographer and gave it special emphasis after the children were born and during vacations. He also used a movie camera for some occasions.

During his retirement years Mr. Craton was a regular attendant at the YMCA Friday speakers luncheon, lunched with a friend on a weekly basis and he and Willie enjoyed frequent dinners out with the Reeds and the Ogdens, friends of long-standing.

For a period of years immediately following retirement Mr. Craton was actively engaged in fundraising for the United charities campaign, particularly among G.E. retirees and played a major role in a capital fund drive for the Booker T. Washington YMCA.

### Religious Life

As a small child Mr. Craton went to Sunday School at the May Memorial Unitarian Church in Syracuse where the minister was the Reverend John H. Applebee. After his father's death when he was twelve years old he went to the church service with his mother. In his teens he also belonged to the Young People's Religious Union. He was one of two delegates from May Memorial selected to attend the Unitarian Laymen's Third Annual Institute at Star Island, Isles of Shoal, off Portsmouth, New Hampshire, July 28 - August 11, 1923 where he first met and fell in love with Willette, his wife.

In Schenectady as a young man on his first job Mr. Craton attended All Souls Unitarian Church. He liked the people and the minister, the Reverend Ernest Caldecott, very much and depended heavily

on the church for his religious and social life during a period of severe loneliness and homesickness. He began however to have some problems with Unitarianism. Although he enjoyed the sermons as lectures he found them lacking in spirituality. During this period Mr. Craton was also unhappy with the factory management course at General Electric. He felt he was not suited to the manufacturing part of the General Electric Co. although he was much impressed by the vast scope of the company. He finally worked out a transfer from factory management to "test" that resulted in a transfer from Schenectady to Erie, PA and the real beginning of a satisfying career in GE.

The Unitarian church in Erie was neither as large nor as socially well-connected as that in Schenectady but the people were hospitable and the Reverend Charles Judson Dutton an interesting minister. Despite his concerns about the lack of spirituality he continued to attend the church until the children were ready for Sunday School. Both Cratons felt that the children needed a different Sunday School for their religious initiation.

The Cratons tried St Paul's Episcopal for a time and then the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant in the early 40's. There they remained first they attended without joining the church. His attendance was spotty because he was overwhelmed with work and travel. Later the yacht club activity took up the weekends and attendance dropped to Christmas and Easter. The Cratons finally joined the Presbyterian Church because they wanted Bab and Tom Moore to be married there. His retirement did not get Mr. Craton to resume regular attendance but Mrs. Craton was a faithful volunteer in the church library for many years.

#### Health

Mr. Craton's health as a child seems to have been unexceptional. There were coughs, colds, upper respiratory complaints and several of the common childhood diseases but nothing out of the ordinary.

As a young man he developed an intermittent bladder problem that medication helped some and that seemed to be more nuisance than serious. This was life-long. There was also a chronic urethritis that he noted with concern. While he recorded a number of minor ailments in his journal he lost little or no time from work. The first hospitalization was for an appendectomy in 1947. Mr. Craton's care and concern about his own health carried over to his wife and children. He seemed excessively upset about the children's routine childhood illnesses.

Once Mr. Craton reached the management level at the Corporation he made annual visits to the Mayo Clinic for physical examinations paid for by the company. These were continued for many years after his retirement when Mrs. Craton became a Mayo patient also. The Clinic findings for both of the Cratons are recorded in some detail.

Having disregarded a doctor's advice about a car trip to Florida in 1969 Mr. Craton spent several weeks hospitalized there and several more recovering enough to return to Erie. A detached retina in the summer of 1970 resulted in hospitalization, surgery and a long period wrestling with double vision. Much dreaded prostate surgery occurred in 1971 successfully.

The annual visit to the Mayo Clinic in 1973 brought a diagnosis of angina pectoris, use of nitroglycerine, orders to cut his drinking to one drink a day, to cut down on sweets and to walk every day.

Chronic emphysema was beginning to interfere with Mr. Craton's physical activity and to diminish his pleasure in those he pursued.

Another detached retina meant another hospitalization and recovery period. This was followed by ambulatory surgery for a fracture of a hand. A severe bronchitis took Mr. Craton back to Hamot Hospital again in the first week of February. By this time Mr. Craton was almost living the life of an invalid whose physical condition dictated his activity or lack of it. In May of 1982 there was another hospitalization for tests all of which negative. Following the second retina surgery Mr. Craton in his words "developed a post-operative nervous condition that lasted for months, that required doctoring, extensive use of Valium...For

months I had to fight depression, apprehension and the jitters. I had no appetite and lost perhaps as much as twenty pounds". (Special note at beginning of Diary for the year 1978)

During his working and retirement years there were a number of dental problems that seemed to be exacerbated by his objections to the dentist's charges. He continued with the same dentist year after year and also continued complaining about him.

#### Mr. Craton's Writing

Mr. Craton had interests from a very young age in writing and in drawing cartoons. The interest in writing was life-long, that in cartoons short-lived. Because of the necessity to be practical about earning a living for himself and his mother, Mr. Craton put aside his interest in writing and cartoons and majored in mechanical engineering. Throughout his life however he continued to try to write for publication and document his life whenever he could find the time to do so. In June 1927 for example, six months after his marriage he wrote his first short story. In 1934 after a vacation trip to Canada he tried another short story. The memoir itself is testament to his writing interest. The diary sometimes abandoned for lack of time was always returned to -- once after a lapse of 27 years. This gap was filled during his retirement years when he also wrote extensively on particular periods of his life or special activities such as boating.

A number of statements scattered throughout the memoirs indicate that regular entries were important to him, helped him cope with problems and enhanced his enjoyment of his good times.

Mr. Craton also tried persistently when he could find the time to write and rewrite for publication. While he had no success with his interest in short-story writing and none with the cartoons he submitted to Collier and the Saturday Evening Post for publication, he did succeed with several articles about trains and railroads. An article about diesel electric locomotives in industry resulted in a check for \$35.00 and publication in the magazine Purchasing in 1944. Another milestone was the publication in Steel of an article for which he was paid \$55.00.

Yankee, a magazine with a circulation of about 350,000 accepted and paid \$250 for an article entitled "Candle Light" that was based on visits to the Isles of Shoals when Mr. Craton was a young man. Trains also accepted a railroading article "Joy and Pain on the Boston and Maine" for which it paid \$45.00 and in December 1970 published "Tarzan Jr." and paid \$125.00 for it. The published articles were a source of pride and satisfaction.

#### Travel

Travel was an important part of Mr. Craton's life. His business trips were frequent and often lengthy, taking him away from wife and family. They included time spent in Hawaii, Australia, Mexico and Venezuela on G.E. business.

Family travel included frequent trips of short duration to visit family or friends, annual trips to the Mayo Clinic combined with visits to family or friends, and trips to Buena Vista, Virginia where cousins, the Robeys lived and operated Southern Seminary, a girls preparatory school. The earliest vacation trip of note was in 1931 to Colorado. This was by car, driving an average 300 miles per day for a total mileage of 3,940 miles. Gasoline averaged 15¢ a gallon, oil 25¢ a quart. There was a trip to Canada in 1933, a Great Lakes Cruise in 1936.

During the war Mr. Craton was sales manager for locomotives for industry, the military, the Maritime Commission and underground mining. Because G.E. thought there was a potential post-war market in Hawaii, particularly in the sugar fields Mr. Craton was sent there while wartime travel restrictions were still in effect to determine the design of a standard diesel electric unit for use in Hawaii.

This trip began a life long love affair with the islands that resulted in seven more trips of several months each with Mrs. Craton after he retired.

During those seven years the Cratons spent two or three of the worst months of the Erie winter in Hawaii.

Mr. Craton's retirement at age 60 meant a real emphasis on travel that started with a nine week trip to Europe in 1962 and included Holland, Germany, Switzerland and Italy and was followed by several months in Florida in early 1963. In 1964 there was a South Sea Island cruise followed by several months in Hawaii, in 1966 a trip of 80 days around the world and in 1967 a return to Europe, with close friends, Barbara and Charles Reed. 1968 saw a trip to the North Cape, the Scandinavian countries, Russia and Ireland.

A trip to Florida in 1969 was an unfortunate one. Mr. Craton spent much of it in hospital and recovering from a back problem. There was a return to Hawaii in 1971 but a planned return in 1972 had to be cancelled because a bleeding intestinal tract sent Mr. Craton into the hospital again. Several months were required for recuperation.

In June 1972 the Cratons returned to Canada, this time to Banff, Lake Louise, Jasper and Vancouver, and again in January 1973 returned to Kapaemahu, Kauai, Hawaii where they spent Erie's worst winter months each year from 1973 through 1977.

A second detached retina for Mr. Craton prevented any winter travel in 1978 but by June of 1978 the Cratons were able to visit Joan and Roger Craton who by then were living outside London. It was a memorable trip with a number of short trips beyond the London area.

Mid March of 1979 took the Cratons on a trip to the American south. Their first stop was to see their great-grandchild Carrie, and then on to Charleston, Savannah, Hilton Head and Jekyll Island, where they visited their friends the Bauschards. Mr. Craton did not enjoy much of this trip, would have preferred being home but realized that his wife needed both a change and less work and more rest than she got at home. They cut the trip short by a week and returned home.

The last recorded trips were to see Joan and Roger and their new home in Connecticut in late March and Roger's summer place in Good Hart in July 1982.

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## Scope and Contents

This memoir is the autobiography of a man whose entire career from college graduation to retirement was spent working in one of the giants of American industry, the General Electric Company. His life spanned more than three quarters of the twentieth century and the detail in which it has been recorded provides much scattered historical, cultural, social and economic information about the period.

It is part contemporaneous diary written on a daily or weekly basis, part a record of chronological periods of Mr. Craton's life reconstructed from notes, scattered diary entries, sketches, photographs and memory and part a record of specific experiences, for example the family's boating years, Mr. Craton's time at the War Production Board, his religious life. Mr. Craton referred to it as "my 40-volume autobiography-----a continuous story of my life since birth. I estimate there are at least three million words in this record-----" in a two page autobiographical account written November 28, 1978 for Milton Wise, a former classmate.

References to Mr. Craton's work at G.E. appear in the daily and weekly diary entries but are in separate sections in the record of Mr. Craton's life that was written after his retirement. The story of those years is divided into two sections, one relating to home, family and friends and another to his career at G.E. These sections on his work contain a significant amount of information on the company's transportation interests and the manufacture and merchandising of locomotives and locomotives parts as well as descriptions of Mr. Craton's colleagues.

The year 1942 spent in Washington as a dollar-a-year man at the War Production Board and his account of his trips to Washington immediately before and immediately afterwards paint an interesting picture of war-time Washington, its hotels, restaurants, and cocktail lounges and the social life of which they were a part. They also give some indication of a Federal government rapidly expanding to meet war-time needs at home and abroad.

Major current events occurring during Mr. Craton's lifetime are also noted. They begin with the arrival of the Graf Zeppelin in New York In October 1928; the election of Herbert Hoover as president in that year as well as subsequent presidential elections were recorded as were the depression of the thirties and its effect on family life, and World War II. Developments in the space program and the landing of the astronauts on the moon were watched on television and noted in the memoirs.

The record is replete with Mr. Craton's disapproval of labor unions and their activities and his bias about Jews and Blacks, and reference to social classes that he considered his inferiors. Entries throughout the years from childhood on describe friends, acquaintances and fellow workers in minute detail. They also describe every woman with a pretty face or good figure noticed on the street, in a store, restaurant or hotel and document the drinking that was one aspect of recreational life at the time among some groups.

Looking back on the period from 1949 to 1963 from the vantage point of 1977 Mr. Craton divided it into 3 periods. In the one he entitled "Emancipation" there is a lengthy description of their friendship with the Brightmans, biographical details of the members of the Dinner Club, a detailed account of Bab's wedding and the birth of the first grandchild. This record of friends, family and activities is heavily illustrated with photographs and clippings.

Numerous references to the family's daily living and travel expenses show the changes that occurred in the price level over the years and caused Mr. Craton major concern about inflation.

The memoirs are profusely illustrated with photographs of family, friends and places visited as well as with magazine pictures, menus, programs, and other mementos.

Much of the collection is typed on 8-1/2 by 5 inch notebook sheets. Much is handwritten in a small, neat script. Photographs are labeled.

The Container List indicates by folder whether the contents are diary or memoirs written after the fact.

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## Arrangement

The collection is divided into two series.

Series 1: Memoirs, 1902-1983

Series 2: Correspondence, 1923-1982

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Electric engineering -- 20th century  
Electrical engineers

Types of Materials:

Diaries -- 20th century  
Letters (correspondence) -- 1920-1930  
Memoirs  
Personal papers -- 20th century  
Photographs -- 20th century

Names:

General Electric Company

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Memoirs, 1902-1983

- Box 1, Folder 1-2      Memoir, 1902-1933; 1934-1940  
[Image\(s\)](#)  
An account of Mr. Craton's life from his birth on June 23, 1902 to January 1, 1924. Written in 1972, from old letters, genealogical materials collected by Mr. Craton's mother and memory.
- Box 1, Folder 3-4      Memoir , 1924 - 1927  
[Image\(s\)](#)  
The years 1924-1927 are based on a diary kept in 1924 and part of 1925, letters to and from his mother and Willette, and memory
- Box 1, Folder 5      Part diary, part excerpts  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 1, Folder 6      Memoir , 1927 - 1927  
[Image\(s\)](#)  
Based on diary, letters to his mother, written in 1973
- Box 1, Folder 7      Diary 1928, 1928  
[Image\(s\)](#)  
Based on letters to his mother, eleven days of diary entries and photographs. Written in 1973 based on sixteen days of diary, photographs and memory. Subdivided into home and friends and Mr. Craton's experience at GE Co.
- Box 1, Folder 8      Diary , 1930-1931  
[Image\(s\)](#)  
Based on a few diary entries, letters to his mother and memory. Divided into Home, Friends, and the General Electric Co. Written in 1973.
- Box 1, Folder 9      Diary , 1932-1933  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 2, Folder 1      Journal about vacation trip, 1934-1935  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 2, Folder 2      Diary , 1936-1937  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 2, Folder 3      Diary , 1938-1939



	<a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 4-5	Handwritten diary, 1939 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 6-8	Handwritten Diary, 1940 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 3, Folder 1	Diary , 1941 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 3, Folder 2-3	Diary , 1942 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 3, Folder 4	War Production Board , 1942 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 3, Folder 7-8	Diary, 1944 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 4, Folder 1	Diary, 1945-01-01-1945-01-21, 1945-03-29-1945-12-31 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 4, Folder 2	Wartime trip to Hawaii , 1945-01-24-1945-03-28 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 4, Folder 3-4	Trip to Hawaii in 1945 <a href="#">Image(s)</a> A very complete record of the 1945 trip to Hawaii describing people, scenery and events, lavishly illustrated, undertaken as a writing project in 1980 during Mr. Craton's retirement. Typed.
Box 4, Folder 5	Typed diary, 1946-01-01-1946-10-25 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 4, Folder 6	October 26, 1946-December 31, 1946: Typed diary
Box 4, Folder 7	January 1, 1947-July 23, 1947: Typed diary. Summary of the remainder of 1947 written years later. Summary of 1948 written in 1976. Annual summaries of years 1949-1962. Typed diary <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 5, Folder 1-2	Summary of years , 1949-1953 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 5, Folder 3	Diary, 1953-09-09-1954-02-05

- [Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 5, Folder 4 A record of a trip to Latin America in 1953 in connection with the assignment noted above. Written in 1975 from notes kept during the trip. Typed  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 5, Folder 5 Summary of 1954-1956: divided into Home, Family and Friends and the G.E. Co. Typed. Lavishly illustrated  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 5, Folder 6-7 Diary Summary , 1957-1962  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 6, Folder 1-2 Hawaiian Trip, Volume II, 1960
- Box 6, Folder 3 Volume III, 1957-1962  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 6, Folder 4-5 The Cratons' first European trip , 1962-08-29-1962-11-08  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 6, Folder 6 Pictures relating to 1958 cruise  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 6, Folder 7 Summary of 1961 trip to Australia on General Electric Co. business. Typed
- Box 7, Folder 1 February 7, 1963-April 4, 1963: Handwritten Florida diary. Summary of remainder of 1963-1964 Typed  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 7, Folder 2 Jan. 29, 1964-April 15, 1964: The 1964 South Seas Cruise, Handwritten diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 7, Folder 3 1965-1966: Several short trips in the U.S. and a long one to India, Singapore and Japan. Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 7, Folder 4 February 2-December 31, 1967: Diary partly typed, partly handwritten
- Box 7, Folder 5 February 14, 1968-June 19, 1968: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 7, Folder 6 June 20, 1968-Dec 31, 1968: Includes trip to the Scandinavian countries. Typed diary

- [Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 7, Folder 7      January 14, 1969-December 31, 1969: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 8, Folder 1      January 3, 1970-October 27, 1970: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 8, Folder 2      October 28, 1970-December 31, 1970: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 8, Folder 3      January 6, 1971-May 26, 1971: Includes Hawaiian trip. Partly typed, partly  
handwritten diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 8, Folder 4      May 27, 1971-December 31, 1971: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 8, Folder 5      January 1, 1972-August 8, 1972: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 8, Folder 6      August 9, 1972-October 16, 1972: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 8, Folder 7      October 21, 1972-December 31, 1972: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 9, Folder 1      January 6, 1973-March 17, 1973: Includes a trip to Hawaii. Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 9, Folder 2      March 18-June 15, 1973: Includes remainder of above trip to Hawaii. Typed  
diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 9, Folder 3      June 16, 1973-December 31, 1973: diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 9, Folder 4      January 1, 1974-February 25, 1974: Includes part of another trip to Hawaii.  
Partly typed, partly handwritten diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 9, Folder 5      February 26, 1974-July 13, 1974: Includes remainder of above trip to Hawaii.  
Partly typed, partly handwritten diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 9, Folder 6      July 14, 1974-December 31, 1974: Typed diary

- [Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 10, Folder 1      January 4, 1975-June 5, 1975: Includes another trip to Hawaii. Partly typed, partly handwritten diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 10, Folder 2      June 6, 1975-December 31, 1975: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 10, Folder 3      Record of 1975 trip to Great Britain written after return from notes made during trip  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 10, Folder 4      January 3, 1976-March 18, 1976: Includes the annual trip to Hawaii. Partly typed, partly handwritten diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 10, Folder 5      March 19, 1976-August 21, 1976: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 10, Folder 6      1976: Volume 2 European trip to France. Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 10, Folder 7      1976: Completion of trip to France and then to England. Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 11, Folder 1      January 4, 1977-September 10, 1977: Begins with annual trip to Hawaii. Partly handwritten, partly typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 11, Folder 2      September 17, 1977-December 31, 1977: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 11, Folder 3      1978: Includes trip to England. Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 11, Folder 4      January 6, 1979-May 12, 1979: Typed diary  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 11, Folder 5      Diary , 1979-05-19-1979-12-31  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 11, Folder 6      Diary, 1980-01-05-1980-12-30  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 12, Folder 1      Diary , 1981-01-03-1981-12-31

- [Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 12, Folder 2      Diary , 1982-01-02-1982-07-30  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 12, Folder 3      Diary , 1982-07-31-1982-10-26  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 12, Folder 4      A poem by Cynthia Craton, 1983-04  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 12, Folder 5-6      The Boating Years, 1945-1964  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 12, Folder 7      Erie Yacht Club Handbook, 1982  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 12, Folder 8      Religious Life. , undated  
[Image\(s\)](#)

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## Series 2: Correspondence, 1923-1982

### Correspondence, 1923 - 1924

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Box 13, Folder 1 | Letter from Mr. Craton to Willette October 25, 1923   |
| Box 13, Folder 1 | Letter from Forman Craton to his mother. May 20, 1923. Fragment<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a> |
| Box 13, Folder 1 | Fragment of letter written by Forman Craton, undated  |
| Box 13, Folder 1 | Letters from Forman Craton to his mother, July and August, 1923 and June and July, 1924     |
| Box 13, Folder 1 | e) List of photographs and sketches from Star Island, undated<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>   |
| Box 13, Folder 2 | Famous Writers School material, 1961-1965<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>                       |
| Box 13, Folder 3 | Cards to Mr. Craton, 1982<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>                                       |

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