Born 10 April 1835, near Bedford (Lawrence County), Indiana; son of William Crawford, a farmer, and Jane Morrow Crawford, 2 brothers and 1 sister; educated at country schools, read law in Bedford, and attended law school of Cincinnati College (graduated 1858); military experience in Civil War, 1861–64, captain to colonel (brevetted brigadier general) and in an Indian campaign, 1868–69, colonel; married Isabel Marshall Chase, 27 November 1866, 1 son and 1 daughter; religious preference Episcopalian but member of no church; died 21 October 1913 in Topeka; buried in Topeka Cemetery.

At the age of twenty-nine, Crawford became the state's youngest governor—and one of the tallest at six feet one inch. He was the first to have both peacetime service and election to a second term. Crawford had moved to Kansas territory in 1859, locating his law office in Garnett, the county seat of Anderson County. He attended the first Republican convention and was later nominated representative after a territorial residency of only nine months. Crawford was elected to the first Kansas house of representatives on 6 December 1859, but he served only from 26 March to 10 May 1861 because he
was given a commission and granted leave to recruit troops in Anderson and Franklin counties. He was a captain in the Second Kansas Infantry, which fought at the Battle of Wilson’s Creek on 10 August 1861.

In September 1864, although he had been out of the state for more than three years, Crawford was nominated for governor by the Lane faction of the Republican party. He formally accepted his nomination on 30 September and left his position as commanding officer of the Second Kansas Colored Infantry regiment (also known as the Eighty-third U. S. Colored Infantry) in Arkansas. His return to Kansas came shortly before Confederate forces under Sterling Price reached the state’s border. Crawford joined Kansas troops to defend eastern Kansas from Price’s army. No doubt his participation in the Battle of Mine Creek, the biggest battle ever fought on Kansas soil, was of more value politically than personal campaigning: Crawford was elected over the Republican-Union (anti-Lane Republican and Democratic) candidate Solon O. Thacher by a vote of 12,711 to 8,244.48 James McGrew of Wyandotte became his lieutenant governor.49

Crawford’s long absence from the state and lack of civilian administrative experience appeared to be a liability. But he enjoyed unusual popularity, especially during his first year, from both the citizenry and the press because of his outstanding war record. Rapid developments took place during his four years: The war ended, the state’s population almost doubled, and thirty-six counties were created (one named Crawford, with Crawfordville as temporary county seat). Of national interest was Crawford’s appointment of a successor to reelected Senator James H. Lane, who had committed suicide as a result of melancholia. Passing over prominent political figures, he named Edmund G. Ross, whom he had known as a fearless soldier. Ross was to later cast one of the crucial votes for acquittal in the impeachment trial of Pres. Andrew Johnson—to Crawford’s surprise.50

In 1866 Crawford was reelected 19,370 votes to 8,151 over National Union candidate J. L. McDowell. For his second term Crawford picked as his lieutenant governor Nehemiah Green, whom he had first met at the Republican party convention in September 1866. At
Crawford’s behest Green received 366 out of 392 delegate votes, and he proved to be a productive running mate.51

Crawford’s lame-duck term was more difficult for him, yet he looked upon it as coming under “auspicious circumstances.” In his long official message to the legislators he said, “Ours is a government of the people, and when their wishes are made known through the medium of the ballot-box it is our imperative duty to comply therewith.” He showed his partisan loyalty by declaring that the result “of recent elections in all the loyal States, clearly and unmistakably declares that this Government was intended to be, and must and shall be, established upon the eternal principles of freedom and impartial justice, that all their blessings and privileges may be secured.” An important event in this term was the legislature’s election of two United States senators. There was also considerable debate over eliminating references to sex and race in election eligibility during Crawford’s second legislative session. Despite the lack of widespread public opposition to expanding the vote to women or blacks, white male voters would not approve a change.

Governor Crawford was generally anti-Indian, and he opposed the treaty-making procedure for buying the Cherokee Neutral Tract and the Osage lands. His protests, combined with the hostility in the lower house of Congress, led to an end of treaty making with Indians. With increased settlement and the extension of the railroads, more Kansas settlers were killed by Indians during Crawford’s last two years as governor than in all other years of state or territorial history.52 Consequently, he vehemently urged removal of all Indians from Kansas reservations. As protection for settlers, he ordered the recruitment of the Eighteenth Kansas Cavalry and the Frontier Battalion: These troops marched about 2,200 miles in their four months of service, without achieving their goal of tracking down Indians. Laws to permit counties to vote bonds for railroad construction, to provide state taxes to build state buildings, to support forestation in Kansas, and to establish a state geological survey were passed during this administration. Crawford also supported unanimous approval of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution by the state legislature.

After an unsuccessful effort to gain the Republican nomination for
Congress in 1868, Governor Crawford received federal permission to recruit the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry for service under Gen. George Armstrong Custer against Indians in a winter campaign. Thirteen hundred men were recruited in three weeks. Crawford resigned as governor on 4 November 1868—the day after the general election—to take command of the Kansas regiment as its colonel, a post he held until 2 March 1869. Since he was leaving at home a twenty-year-old wife and a four-month-old daughter, the timing of his resignation may have come as a surprise to some citizens. But his action was consistent with his attitude and record concerning Indians throughout his years in the governor’s office. Moreover, his entry into statewide politics had come from his military role: He may have been trying to revive his political fortunes. The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry’s objective was never realized because Custer wanted his own troops to engage the Indians.

When Crawford returned from the winter campaign of 1868–69, he moved his family to Emporia, where he practiced law and was a real estate promoter. In an era when corruption and scandal perme-
ated state and national politics, Crawford joined a Republican reform faction known as the "purifiers." As a candidate of the purifiers in 1871, he was defeated in his try for the United States Senate by Alexander Caldwell of Leavenworth. As a leader of the purifiers in 1872, he won the presidency of the state Liberal Republican convention. This splinter party fused with the Democrats in 1872 but lost. Crawford was politically inactive until 1876 when he became the Independent Greenback candidate for Congress. By the time of that election much of his law practice had moved to Topeka, and he also maintained a branch office in Washington, D. C. In 1878 he was an unsuccessful Independent candidate for a nonexistent at-large seat in Congress, running on the assumption that Kansas deserved an additional seat because of its population explosion.

On 5 March 1877 Crawford was appointed by Gov. George Anthony to the highly remunerative position of Kansas state agent, in which he prosecuted the state’s claims against the federal government for a percentage of the amount received. The fact that he held that position for fourteen years, under five governors and seven legislative sessions, is an indication of his political abilities. All told, he received more than $200,000 from the state for his services. Although Topeka continued to be his home (he erected a business block and built a fine mansion there), he spent much time in Washington, D.C., at his farm near Baxter Springs, and on summer vacations on Nantucket Island. His memories of his glory years in the 1860s were published shortly before his death.

REFERENCES: Castel, 1958; Crawford, 1911; Moore, 1897–1900; Plummer, 1962; Plummer, 1971.