

GOVERNOR JOHN CHRISTOPH BLUCHER EHRINGHAUS, 1933-1937, n.d.

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John Christoph Blucher Ehringhaus (February 5, 1882 - July 31, 1949), legislator, solicitor of the First Judicial District, and governor of North Carolina during the early New Deal, was born in Elizabeth City, the son of Erskine and Catherine Colville Matthews Ehringhaus. His father was a leading merchant in Elizabeth City and later head of the bookkeeping department of First and Citizens National Bank. His mother died when he was ten years old. On both his mother's and his father's sides, the family dated back to important leaders in the Revolutionary War, though his Ehringhaus ancestors emigrated in 1812 from Germany to Elizabeth where they became involved in banking.

Ehringhaus attended schools in Elizabeth City was graduated from Atlantic Collegiate Institute of that city in 1898. At age sixteen he enrolled in The University of North Carolina, where he obtained a bachelor's degree with Phi Beta Kappa honors in three years. He remained at the university to study for a law degree, which he received in 1903. Admitted to the bar in the same year, he returned to practice in Elizabeth City. In 1905, he won election to the North Carolina House of Representatives as a Democrat from his native Pasquotank County. He continued to serve for two terms, leaving the house in 1908. While in the legislature, he was coauthor of the bill creating East Carolina Teacher's Training School, which later became East Carolina University. He also supported legislation creating a high school system for the state. Both bills presaged his great interest in education, an enduring concern when he later became governor.

In 1910, Ehringhaus was elected solicitor for the First Judicial District, which included the counties of Currituck, Camden, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Chowan, Gates, Tyrrell, Dare, Hyde, Beaufort, and Washington. Reelected twice, Ehringhaus served in this capacity until 1922. Meanwhile, on January 4, 1912 he had married Matilda Bradford Haughton, the daughter of Thomas Benbury and Susan Lamb Haughton. His wife's father had been an Episcopal minister and chaplain in the Confederate Army. The couple had three children: John C. B. III and twins, Haughton and Matilda.

For the remainder of the twenties Ehringhaus busied himself with his flourishing law practice and with civic duties, including the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Elks; and with work for the Democratic party. In 1925, he was active in obtaining a toll bridge to link his native Albemarle area more closely to the rest of the state and to reduce the area's dependence on Virginia, its natural neighbor. He campaigned for Al Smith's candidacy for president in 1928 and for O. Max Gardner, who was elected governor of North Carolina in that year.

In 1932, as the state experienced increasing economic difficulty, Ehringhaus began a campaign for governor with the support of Gardner, an association that led him to be identified with the "Gardner Machine." With A. J. Maxwell eliminated in the first gubernatorial primary, Ehringhaus then won a heated runoff against Richard T. Fountain. In the fall, he defeated Republican Clifford Frazier by the largest majority accorded a Democratic nominee up to that time.

As governor, Ehringhaus was noted for his support of economy in government, of creating a state sales tax, and of the state assuming financial responsibility for the public school system. His stern insistence on economy in government led to an early cut of the budget by nearly one-third. He inherited a deficit of \$15 million in the state treasury but left office with a surplus of \$5 million because of his successful battle for a three percent sales tax in the 1933 session of the legislature. The sales tax provided the necessary funds for the state government to assume the financing of the public school system; Ehringhaus guaranteed a public school education on an eight-month basis for all children in the state. The state's assumption of educational expenses allowed local governments to reduce property taxes and to have sufficient funds to support local government debts. Ehringhaus had inherited a state in which bonds were selling at 60 to 75 percent of face value; he shortly restored the full credit of the state so that bonds could be issued at the lowest rate ever (3.76 percent), thus saving the state hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest. Greatly criticized for his monetary policies, he was so unpopular when he left office that he probably could not have been elected to another position.

Aside from the economy, however, Ehringhaus helped to maintain the educational system at a time when other states had to close schools or pay teachers in temporary scrip. No schools had to close in North Carolina, nor did teachers lose their pay. Moreover, Ehringhaus established a rental system for state textbooks and inaugurated busing for students within one mile of rural schools. He brought reorganization to the prison system, combining it with the highway department and making it self-supporting through the work of prisoners on the highways. He inaugurated a modern parole system and improved the facilities at Central Prison. He also had the highway department purchase the lime deposits in the state in order to provide essential lime to farmers at lower prices. He supported the Rural Electrification Association and saw North Carolina build 4,000 miles of the first 6,000 miles of REA lines built in the nation.

Efforts of the tobacco farmers to raise prices for their crops created repeated crises for the governor. In 1933, he closed all tobacco warehouses until a price system could be worked out under federal statutes. In 1935, he resisted pressure for a special session of the legislature to pass a state compact law for tobacco.

His resistance to a special session of the legislature in 1935 and 1936 was primarily motivated by his fear that the General Assembly would repeal the carefully nurtured sales tax. Also a factor was his long feud with the Social Security Administration to gain acceptance for a state unemployment insurance plan, which did not technically comply with federal statutes. Finally, faced with the certainty that state unemployment taxes would be lost to the federal government, and assured of the election of his successor Clyde Hoey, he called the legislature into session in the waning days of his administration.

Thus, Ehringhaus emerged from his term dependent on perspective to vindicate his efforts. Although in 1937 he briefly served as assistant attorney general of the United States to prosecute some special cases, he soon settled into private practice without seeking other elective offices. The Ehringhauses bought a house in Raleigh where with his son, J. C. B. Ehringhaus, he maintained a law practice until his death. In 1946, he moved from his home to a suite in the Sir Walter Hotel. He died there of heart failure three weeks after suffering an acute attack of rheumatic fever. His funeral was held at the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, Raleigh, attended by overflow crowds. Like the

relative simplicity of his life, his funeral bore no special trappings. He was buried in the Episcopal cemetery, Elizabeth City.

Ehringhaus had been anxious to promote the publication of his official papers. Although prepared in 1940, they were not published until 1950 after his death. The Ehringhaus papers are held in the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh; his correspondence with other prominent people of his time appears in related collections in the archives and other North Carolina manuscript collections. Although many portraits of him can be found throughout the state, a special portrait was hung in the legislative building in 1960.

Source: Morgan, Thomas S., "John Christoph Blucher Ehringhaus," Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, Volume 2, D-G, William S. Powell, ed., Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986, pp. 151-152.

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- Budget Bureau, 1933-1936:**
Appropriation Bill; Aycock Bill, estimates in; Brookings survey; Carteret County Schools, appropriation for extended term; Consolidation of electric service to all State institutions and departments; Correspondence; Governor's Office and personnel; Highway and Public works Commission; Meetings; NRA funds; Orthopedic Hospital; Salaries; Secretary of State allotment request; Special School Building Bonds; State Treasury, cash position and appropriation expenditures for the fourth quarter; Taylor, Annabel, job classification; Taxes.
- Box 145 Charities and Public Welfare, State Board of, 1933-1936:**
Applications, appointments and endorsements; Budget; Census Bulletin; Correspondence, Division of Child Welfare; Correspondence; County welfare departments, funds for; Eugenics Board, Report of; Expenditures

of North Carolina counties and municipalities for Public Welfare and Relief purposes; Jobs; Johnson, Wm. R., recommendation from Governor; Relief Commission, personnel of; Reorganization; Report of investigation of Mecklenburg Prison Camp; Requests for relief; Social Security; Spielmen, Miss Laura V.; State schools, needs in; Welfare Conference.

Confederate Women's Home, 1933-1936:

Appointments; Deed - Miss Mary R. Williams; Fire protection; Meetings and reports; Property belonging to the Home.

Box 146 Health, State Board of, 1933-1936:

Appointments and endorsements; Bureau of Vital Statistics; Conditions at Oteen and Camp Glenn; Correspondence; Crippled children's fund under Social Security; Federal Aid funds in North Carolina; Infantile paralysis epidemic; Infection in Sampson and Harnett County schools; Organization of departments; Dr. Parrott's illness; Preschool child; Sanitary conditions; State Laboratory; Typhoid carrier; Work done in Eastern territory storm areas.

Box 147 Conservation and Development, Department of, 1933-1937:

Applications, appointments, endorsements and resignations; Budget; Chief engineer, need for Coast Guard Station, Cape Hatteras; Commands Department; Correspondence; Deep River Coal Mine; Development possibilities; Ft. Macon as State Park; Information; Jobs; Lands; Meetings and reports; National and State Forests and Parks; National resources, development of; New industry in Elizabeth City; Office space needs; Promote travel in North Carolina; Reorganization; Reports; Slash pine, development of; Soil erosion, Federal project; State Geologist; Storms in Eastern North Carolina; Tennessee Basin Association; Truck Trail across Morrison Training School property.

Box 148 Conservation and Development, Department of:

Game and Inland Fisheries Division: Bird sanctuary at Chapel Hill; John D. Chalk, endorsers of; Correspondence; Emergency conservation work projects; Fish and game protection; Fish hatcheries; Fisheries Commission; Game wardens; Hunting license; Oyster industry; Shad industry.

Box 149 Highway and Public Works Commission:

Appointment of Commission to Investigate and Determine amounts . . . due Counties for Construction of State Highways; Appointments and resignations of Chairman and Commissioners; Appointment and resignation of E. B. Jeffress; Appointment of Capus Waynick; Biennial report and Chowan River bridge; Chief engineers Ames and Waldrop; Meetings and Minutes.

- Box 150 Highway and Public Works Commission:**
Albemarle Sound bridge and inlet; Bridges; Wilmington and Wrightsville causeway Wright Memorial bridge.
- Box 151 Highway and Public Works Commission:**
Caswell Training School driveway; Clear Creek Road, Hendersonville, Gov. Sholtz, Florida; Detours; Edenton-Hackeys Ferry Company; Federal Aid program for highways; Federal Aid program North River project, Camden, Currituck, and Pasquotank counties; Hands Harbor-Stumpy Point road; Marking highways; North Carolina stone for base of flagstaff at graves of Continental soldiers, Washington Crossing Park; Pasquotank Drainage situation; Roads.
- Box 152 Highway and Public Works Commission, Park to Park Highway:**
Appointments and endorsements; Correspondence.
- Box 153 Highway and Public Works Commission:**
Administration and System; Air shows at Charlotte and Greensboro; Correspondence; Diversion of funds; Fact Finding Road Commission; Federal relief of damage done by storms; Highway beautification and safety; Highway trucks used at Christmas by post office; Information; Jobs; Legal Department, Correspondence; Employment of special counsel; Maintenance Division; Political activity; Proposed refinery and wood preserving plant; Rent and sale of equipment; Road building material; Salaries and wages; Salary of Rosalie P. Turner.
- Box 154 Highway and Public Works Commission, Prison Department:**
Agricultural lime production.
- Box 155 Highway and Public Works Commission, Prison Department:**
Appointments and resignations; Automobile license tags; Camps for first offenders; Capital punishment; Convict guards; Correspondence; Criminal insane; Execution, permits, requests for; Farms; Indeterminate sentences; Jobs; Mecklenburg County Prison Camp, Barnes and Shropshire; Personnel; Policy and program; Printing thesis of Mrs. Roma Sawyer Cheek; Prison industries, Prison labor; Prison system.
- Highway and Public Works Commission, Prison Department:**
Prisoner Forsyth County Jail; Prisoners; Proposed new Prison; Receipts and expenditures for fiscal year; Remodeling Central Prison; Report of Prison Commission to Governor McLean and the General Assembly, 1924, copy of; Women's Prison.

- Box 156** **Industrial Commission:**
Appointments; Appointments and endorsements of Medical Board; Budget; Claims; Committee of the Medical Society; Compensation insurance rates; Correspondence; Funds, salaries, and travel expenses; Industrial safety; Jobs; Meetings; Occupational diseases; Report; Salaries of chairman and members of Commission; Workmen's Compensation Act.
- Box 157** **Insurance, Department of:**
Appointments, Building Code Council; Building Code Council; Correspondence; Insurance rates; National Surety Company, New York Veterans of Foreign Wars mortgage bonds; Wiliford L. Whitley; Workmen's Compensation Fund and Insurance Rates.
- Liquor Commission:**
Appointments and endorsements; Correspondence; Jobs.
- Box 158** **Labor, Department of:**
Appointment of Hon. Forrest H. Shuford; Child Labor legislation; Correspondence; Industrial Commission; Inspection service; Legislation suggested; Mine disaster at Fletcher; Reemployment office, appointments; Social Security and unemployment insurance; State Employment Service; United States Employment Service for North Carolina; Veterans Administration, appointment of Board of Review; Veterans of Foreign Wars.
- Box 159** **Local Government Commission:**
Appointments; Bonds; Correspondence; Counties in default; Functions of Commission; Information requested by Governor; Recommendation for George C. Scott & Co.; Refinancing local governmental units; Reports; Tax foreclosures.
- Box 160** **North Carolina Park Commission:**
Appointments; Champion Fibre Company litigation; Correspondence; Litigations; Minutes; Ravensford Lumber Company litigation; Reports; Shenandoah-Great Smoky Mountain Parkway
- Box 161** **Parole Commission:**
Appointments; Budget; Bureau of Identification; Capital punishment; Cases; Correspondence; Jobs; Mecklenburg County Prison Camp; Parole racket; Recommendations; Tyre C. Taylor, resignation.
- Box 162** **Parole Commission, Cases, A-Y.**

- Box 163** **Public Instruction, Superintendent of, State Board of Education:**
Correspondence; Lands belonging to the Board; Minutes; Norden vs. State Board of Education; School Book Depository.
- Public Instruction, Superintendent of, Textbook Commission:**
Appointments; Appointment of Purchase and Rental Commission; Correspondence; Elementary and High School Committee.
- Box 164** **Public Instruction, Superintendent of:**
Appointments; Education by radio; Educational situation; Information; Library Division; Literary Fund; Organization and Administration of schools; Public education; Salaries; Tax reduction fund; Teachers.
- Negro Education, Division of:**
Budget; Correspondence; Interracial Commission meeting; Negro education problem, Commission appointed to study.
- Box 165** **Purchase and Contract, Department of:**
Appointments; Bids and contracts; Blind Commission products; Briefs and reports; Cameron-Thompson bill; Correspondence; Gas Terminal Commission; Gas situation; NRA; Office space needed; Processing taxes; Seed potatoes on Prison farm; School Book Rental System; State purchasing cars.
- Box 166** **Revenue, Department of:**
Appointment of Charles H. England; Appointment of Gasoline Commission; Bootleg gasoline; Commendation; Correspondence; Delinquent taxes and bad checks; General Fund; Jobs; M. C. S. Noble, Jr., endorsements for successor; Personnel; Report on Special Investigation Bus-Freight for Hire and Field Force Divisions, prepared by George G. Scott & Company; Reorganization, proposed; Reorganization.
- Box 167** **Revenue, Department of, Division of Motor Vehicles:**
Auto license; Drivers license; Franchise tax and schedule; Gasoline tax; Income tax; Information; Inheritance tax; Privilege tax; Salary of Hon. Harry McMullen; State finances; Tax collections; Tax Commission Report; Taxes.
- Box 168** **Revenue, Department of, Tax Division:**
Sales tax; Sales tax in Interstate Commerce.
- Box 169** **Revenue, Department of:**
Daily Statement of Collections, 1936.
- Box 170** **Revenue, Department of:**
Financial Reports, 1934, 1935.

Boxes 171-172 Revenue, Department of:
Financial Reports, 1936.

Box 173 Revenue, Department of, Highway Patrol:
Applications for patrolman; Commendations; Enforcement of laws; Information; Organization set-up, change in; Patrolman; Police escort; Reckless driving.

Revenue, Department of, Motor Vehicle Bureau:
Highway accidents; Highway safety; Inspection Board; National Highway Safety campaign; Problems confronting Bureau; Report of Automobile Accidents; State Police Radio System, establishment of; Survey of Motor Vehicle Bureau; Traffic violations.

Box 174 Revenue, Department of, State Board of Assessments:
"Poor" taxes; Correspondence; Reports.

Box 175 Secretary of State:
Appointment of Charles C. Powell; Correspondence; Land in Caldwell County; Nomination of Hon. Thad Euro; Requests for various state laws; Salary cuts.

State Sinking Fund:
Minutes of Commission; Request for loan.

Treasurer, Department of:
Correspondence; Dividend of the North Carolina Bank and Trust Company for account of J. A. Taylor, administrator for the Wilmington and New Hanover County Emergency Relief Association; ERA Fund; Finances; Interest rate charged by banks; Issuing and renewing notes; O'Berry, Captain Nathan, presentation of portrait of; Spanish American war Fund; Spanish American War pensions; State Bonds; State debt.

Box 176 Art Society, North Carolina State:
Appointment of Board of Directors; Correspondence.

State Capitol:
Appointment of Centennial Commission; Laying cornerstone.

Hall of History:
Correspondence; James Iredell, portrait of; James D. McNeill, portrait of.

Historical Commission, North Carolina State:
Appointments; Bentonville Battlefield; Correspondence; Dirt from Andrew Johnson birthplace sent to Poland; Historical markers; Roanoke

Colony Memorial Association and Ft. Raleigh conveyance to Federal Government.

Library Commission, North Carolina:

Appointment.

Library, North Carolina State:

Publications.

- Box 177** **State School Commission:**
Appointments and resignations; Colored School, Wake Forest; Consolidation of schools; Correspondence; Federal projects; Kannapolis school situation; Meetings and Minutes; School machinery act passed by General Assembly; School situation; School transportation; Teachers.
- Box 178** **Unemployment Compensation Commission:**
Appointments; Appointment of Committee to study unemployment compensation insurance; Correspondence; Jobs.
- Box 179** **Corporation Commission:**
Act to abolish Commission; Employment of engineer jointly with Conservation and Development; Interstate Commerce Commission; Request for funds.
- Utilities Commission:**
Advisory Transportation Commission; Appointments; Commends appointments; Commissioner; Fees; Freight rates; Interstate Commerce Commission, testimony before; Interterritorial rates; Louisville and Nashville Railroad; Public Utility Holding companies; Rates; Seely, Fred L., resignation of; Spur track for American Tobacco Company; Telephone litigation; Transportation; Weights and Measures.
- Box 180** **Utilities Commission, Appointments of special police officers:**
American Enka Corporation; Atlantic Coast Line Railroad; Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad; Atlantic and Yadkin Railroad; Champion Fibre Company; Clinchfield Railroad Company; Erwin Cotton Mills; Hannah Pickett Mills and Entwistle Manufacturing Company; Norfolk Southern Railroad; Seaboard Air Line Railroad; Southern Railroad; Washington Mills; Wiscassett Mills Company.
- Box 181** **Press Releases, Speeches, Statements, and Proclamations, 1933-1937.**
- Box 182** **Press Releases, Speeches, Statements, and Proclamations, 1933-1937.**
- Box 183** **Press Releases, Speeches, Statements, and Proclamations, 1933-1937.**