

Facts and Artifacts:

A Progress Report

How the Crail Ranch Conservators use modern technology to catalog Historic Collections

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This article is an update to the preceding article on Cataloging the Crail Collection.

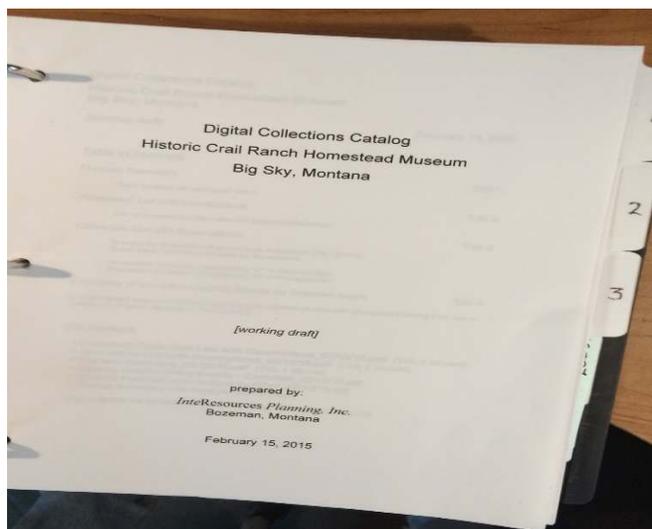
The Historic Crail Ranch Conservators recently announced the "completion" of the Historic Collections digital catalog project. Underway since 2009, this project will never actually be "complete," since Conservators will continue to add artifacts to the database as they are acquired.

In 2004, when the Historic Crail Ranch was under the auspices of the Big Sky Owners' Association, the BSOA entered

into an agreement with the Franklin William Crail family, currently of Redmond, Oregon, to compile an inventory of artifacts the Crails had donated to the ranch.



Scott Carpenter cataloging artifacts on site at Crail Ranch, August 2009



Cover page of Digital Collections Catalog

Beginning in 2009, the Historic Crail Ranch Conservators contracted with Scott Carpenter of InteResources Planning, Inc. in Bozeman. Since that time, Scott has assembled a digital catalog using museum-quality software called PastPerfect. The inventory contains over 1460 objects and photographs, donated to the Crail Ranch since the late 1990s. The 2800 page printout of the digital catalog includes object descriptions, measurements, photographs, donor source, and condition.

"Were we to print out the entire digital

catalog, it would range to over 8000 pages,” advised Carpenter.

Al Lockwood, who chaired the HCRC when they first contracted for this project, reports, “Although the digital catalog was expensive to assemble, it is a key component of a true museum.” Throughout the six years of catalog creation, Conservators learned a great deal about the artifacts’ histories, care, and optimal display. They also learned much more about the Crail Family and life during the Homestead Era. Sue Lindley and Trish Loomis, two conservators dedicated to improving the museum displays, state “The artifact’s background information helps us to better understand the context to present the object or photo.”

The process of cataloging over a thousand artifacts and photographs involves a closer scrutiny of each object. A prime example of this can be seen with a pair of antique baby shoes. The Crail Family donated the shoes in 2004, but no one was sure who actually wore these shoes. While Carpenter was cataloging a photo of the young Crail boys sitting on their mother’s lap in a formal studio photograph taken circa the late 1880s, there were the shoes! “I enlarged the photo, and those definitely are the shoes! Buttons and all. They totally matched the description I had written for the shoes’ artifact entry!” Conservators can now legitimately pair that photo with the baby shoes in a new exhibit being assembled in the east bedroom upstairs in the main home.

Because Conservators believe that history is meant to be shared, their next venture will involve the Online Collections feature of the PastPerfect software, which permits access to those interested in research.

Conservators thank all donors over the past several years. Docent coordinator Linda Meade attests, “We now have so much valuable information, which allows us to be better teachers and give more engaging tours.”

Sample Digital Catalog Entry:



O 004.1.00004 Rifle

Winchester Model 1890 .22 Caliber (Long), pump action rifle, serial no. 647035 A. Octagonal barrel, measures 23" in length. Top of barrel is stamped: “MANUFACTURED BY THE WINCHESTER REPEATING ARMS CO. NEW HAVEN CONN. U.S.A. PAT. JUN26, 09, DEC.6.92, NOV. 27.06. MAY 30.1911 - MOD. 1890.”

Wooden stock and pump grip. Adjustable, pivoting rear sight and fixed front sight. Notch on top of mid-barrel for adjustable sight (missing). All other parts appear to be original and in place. Serial Number is noted as manufactured during 1921 (www.gun-data.com/winchester_Model_1890.htm)

According to Frank Crail, the rifle belonged to his father, Eugene. Cost was \$16.00. Made before the 1910 model which was mass produced at a cost of \$11.00. Photographs 06/29/2009