



## Crail Ranch Homesteader Inducted into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame

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Ninety years after his death, Frank Crail was honored with induction into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame. Seeking to "honor our cowboy way of life, American Indian culture and collective western heritage," preserving it for future generations, the MCHF and Western Heritage Center selects deserving nominees for this honor. Since 2008, a total of 145 cowboys, cowgirls, Indians, and other Montana icons have been honored with MCHF induction.

Frank Crail's half century of work as a frontier rancher helped to populate Montana during its last territorial days and statehood infancy. His adventurous spirit led him and his family into the Gallatin Canyon Basin, 50 miles upriver from Bozeman. While other Gallatin Canyon and Basin ranches converted to dude ranching, the Crails continuously operated their family-owned stock ranch on more than 960 acres in what is now known as The Meadow. Perhaps more importantly, the Crails helped to establish a small ranching community, a toehold settlement in an otherwise wild yet wonderful environment.

This was Crail's second ranching operation. His first ranch, sited on the western slope of the Bridgers in the 1870s, brought him drought, grasshoppers, hail, water rights lawsuits, and no market for his wheat. He also learned pride, courage, determination, and persistence.

Crail was civic-minded. In 1896, he was elected as the Clerk of the Ninth Judicial District in Gallatin County. When his term ended in 1900, Crail decided it was time to embark on an interesting experiment. Crail had developed a strain of wheat that met the rigors of the short, cold growing season in Montana's high country. He called his wheat "Crail Fife," most likely taking the name of his Scottish ancestors' region in Fife, Scotland. Searching for a new ranch, Crail found the Gallatin Canyon Basin, up primitive roads carved through a daunting canyon.

In 1901, Crail purchased 160 acres and a one-room cabin, for less than \$1.00 per acre. The 61 year-old Crail moved his wife, two young teenage sons, and a 5 year-old daughter. The family lived in the 255 square foot cabin while they built a larger home. They ran sheep and cattle on their homestead and grew Crail Fife wheat, which won 2 bronze medals in 1905 at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. Over the years, they annexed other land and ranched on a substantial portion of what is now The Meadow.

The family survived ranching challenges, in fact they thrived, etching not only an existence but also a community into the forest. Crail died here on the ranch in September 1924. He was an adventurer, a hard-working rancher, a politician, and a devoted family man. Important settlers for Big Sky, the family ranched their lands into the mid-20th century, preserving the area from rapid development. Although Crail's 960 acre ranch is now a mere 1 acre museum with the tiny cabin and ranch home, it stands as testimony to Big Sky's ranching roots and the rigors of ranching in the Homestead Era.