



Family Ties: Thanks to Internet, Crail Descendants Connect and Share

By Anne Marie Mistretta

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In the mid-1800s, Augustus Franklin (Frank) Crail left Indiana to homestead in Montana. Except for a few letters Crail wrote to his immediate family in the latter half of the 19th century, he never looked back.

Now more than 150 years later, descendants of the Crails connect with the Crail Ranch Homestead Museum with the help of the Internet. Through the Crail Ranch website (www.crailranch.org) and genealogy sites, Crail family members and Crail Ranch Conservators are "meeting" each other. In each case, the Conservators helped descendants learn more about the family, and in turn, the descendants, educate us.

The Breneman Descendants – this is probably the most moving connection. In 1949, Emmett Crail, who ranched here for nearly 50 years, finally married his long-time sweetheart, Annie Breneman of Anaconda, MT. More than 65 years later, Conservator Al Lockwood, who built and maintains the Crail website, wrote and posted an article about Annie and Emmett. It's a touching story about their long courtship and tragedy in Annie's family (see "*Emmett and Annie, A Gallatin Canyon Love Story*" <http://crailranch.org/emmettandannie.html>). Annie's brother and his wife both died of the Spanish Flu in 1918, leaving three young children without parents. At 32, the Anaconda High School math teacher adopted the older two children, David and Glen Louise. Duburg, just a few weeks old, was adopted by the Frey family and renamed Robert.

Over the years, Robert's daughters, Becky and Pat, searched for evidence of what happened to Annie after she married Emmett. Tapping the Internet occasionally, they never gave up hope of locating Annie. Finally, in 2012, after the story was posted on the Crail Ranch website, they "found" Annie. A tearful Becky attended the Crail Ranch Harvest Festival that summer, with her parents' marriage license in tow and thanked us for helping her fill in the missing pieces of her great-aunt's life.



Becky Frey (right) visits Crail Ranch in 2012

Frank Crail's Great-Great-Grand Niece From Ocala, FL – When he departed Indiana, Crail left two brothers and a sister, as well as nine half-siblings. His sister Fanny's great-great-granddaughter Kathleen Melendez works hard to trace her family through various genealogical sites. Meanwhile, 2400 miles across the continent, the Crail Ranch Conservators engage in the same quest. In April 2013, Anne Marie Mistretta saw blogs and other Internet material that led her to Kathleen. A phone call to Kathleen and subsequent sharing of photographs evoked a squeal from Kathleen, "I know now where I got my curly hair!" Kathleen honored the work of the Conservators by blogging (<http://tracingdescendants-blog.blogspot.com>).

In fact, descendants of 2 of Frank's 3 siblings have contacted us by email, and we've shared photos of their ancestors from the late 1800s. Some descendants of Frank's half-siblings have corresponded with the Conservators, and some have visited.

Eugene Crail's Family – Eugene was the only child of Frank and Sallie Crail who had children. His one biological son, Franklin William Crail (also known as Frank), lives in Oregon. Former Conservators Roberta and Bill Crew located Frank

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in 2004 through an Internet search, and Jerry and Anne Marie Mistretta drove to Oregon to meet Frank and his wife. On the return trek, they carried precious cargo of artifacts original to the Crail Ranch, the first of many that the Crails would generously donate to the museum. Over the last decade, Frank and his wife visited the ranch twice, each time bearing more ranch items that enrich the Crail Ranch Museum collection. More than 60% of the museum's collection is now original to the ranch.



AnnaLee Baker (center) presents painting by her grandfather, Eugene Crail, to Trish Loomis (left) and Sue Lindley (right) representing the Crail Ranch Museum in 2013

Nearly each year, someone from Eugene Crail's family visits the Crail Ranch. During the summer of 2013, Eugene's step-granddaughter AnnaLee Baker came to the ranch for the first time, donating two paintings done by Eugene, which she had inherited. Becky Marcinek, Eugene's great-granddaughter (step), visited with her husband and children. These are descendants from Eugene's wife, Mary Alice Fowler Phillips Crail, whose first marriage ended in divorce. All of these family members attest that Eugene is the only grandfather they knew.

Crail Ranch Museum docents relate that most visitors find some connection to the ranch. Generally, it is not a personal one, but visitors speak of a grandparent who homesteaded, or they find an artifact that resembles one handed down through their own family. The Historic Crail Ranch Museum not only lets us peek into Big Sky's ranching past through historic structures and original artifacts, it also connects present and past through technology.

Have a question or info? Email us at crailranchmuseum@gmail.com.