

## Emmett and Annie – A Gallatin Canyon Love Story

**One of the happiest days in the Gallatin Basin**, long before it became the Big Sky Resort, was quite possibly the day in June 1949 when Emmett Crail married his long-time sweetheart, Anaconda school teacher Annie Breneman.

According to Janet Cronin and Dorothy Vick's **Montana's Gallatin Canyon: A Gem in the Treasure State**, Emmett and Annie had been sweethearts for twenty-five years, and on their wedding night, friends from all over the Canyon came to the Crail Ranch and sang them to sleep.



**Emmett Crail**



**Emmett Crail** was the second child of Augustus and Sallie Crail. He was born in Bozeman in August 1888, and he was just thirteen years old when his family established their homestead in the meadow area of what is now Big Sky.

Emmett's father, Augustus Franklin Crail, came to the Gallatin Basin area with the clear intention of establishing a productive ranching operation. He was interested in proving the viability of his own strain of high-country wheat and in making money by raising cattle and sheep for the market.

Emmett's older brother, Eugene, studied steam engineering at what is now Montana State University in Bozeman and took up carpentry as his life's occupation. In 1935, he married a woman named Alice Fowler Philips. They had one child, a son named Franklin Crail in memory of his grandfather.

Sister Lilian was an outstanding student and went to Chicago to become a nurse. During the 1950s, she married an engineer from California named Hal DeWaide.



Emmett, however, stayed at home and learned the ranching business with his father.

After his father died in September of 1924, Emmett remained on the Crail Ranch and continued to raise cattle and wheat. He engaged in a number of other activities in the community, including the Karst asbestos mine endeavor. Although unmarried and childless, he also served as chairman of the local school board.

Emmett seemed to enjoy his solitary ranching life, and he remained a bachelor for many years.

### ***Annie Breneman***

**Annie Breneman** was born in 1886 in Montana, the oldest child of David and Annie Breneman. During Annie's early years, the family lived in Montana.

We know that Annie trained as a school teacher and taught school in Anaconda.

### **Tragedy befell Annie's family in 1918.**

On November 8 of that year, Annie's younger brother, Duburg Breneman, and his wife, Rilla, gave birth to their third child. Three weeks later, both Duburg and Rilla Breneman were dead of Spanish Influenza. Their graves, in the Breneman plot in the Bozeman cemetery are evidence of their sad story.



The infant, a boy whom they had named Duburg, survived and was adopted by a family from Anaconda, who renamed him Robert Ernest Frey.



**Headstones of Rilla Breneman and Duburg Breneman in Bozeman cemetery showing their deaths on November 18 and 22, 1918**

The two older children, a boy named David, age 5, and a girl named Glen Louise, age 2, were taken by Annie's parents with the understanding that Annie, who was 32 and working as a school teacher, would see to their upbringing.

The US Census for 1920 finds Annie Breneman living with her father and mother in Bozeman. Her niece and nephew are also shown in the family group.

### ***How Emmett met Annie...***

Exactly when and how Emmett Crail and Annie Breneman met, we do not know. However, information given to the Crail Ranch Conservators by the Crail family tells us that Annie and her nephew and niece became frequent visitors to the Crail Ranch during the 1920s and 1930s.



This photograph, showing Emmett with David and Glen Louise Breneman, is hand-labeled "The Bunch" in the Historic Crail Ranch collection.

### ***Marriage at last...***

Emmett Crail was a legendary procrastinator. Janet Cronin and Dorothy Vick noted that "Neighbors often wondered how Emmett ever got his work done because he moved so slowly -- one mild year Emmett put up the last load of hay on Christmas Eve." [p.73]

Whether it was Emmett's slow ways, or perhaps Annie's wishes, the two did not marry until 1949, when Emmett was 61 and Annie was 63.

Long-time Canyon resident Shirley Luhrsen says that her parents often talked of the wonderful time they had at the shivaree for Emmett and Annie Crail.



Emmett and Annie lived together on the Crail Ranch for just a short time. In 1950, again for reasons on which we can only speculate, they decided to sell the ranch and move to Bozeman.

Sadly, their married life together was fairly short. Annie died in 1958 and is interred in the Bozeman cemetery.

***But the story of Emmett and Annie does not end there...***

By 1970, Emmett and Lilian had lost their spouses and were once again single. In July of that year, Frank Crail, son of Eugene Crail and the only grandchild of the original homesteaders brought Eugene and Emmett back up the old road to visit the Crail Ranch.



Emmett, age 82, left, and Eugene, 83, and Eugene's wife Alice, at the Crail Ranch in 1970. Frank Crail is at right.

At that time, the main cabin had been set up to house workers building the new golf course for Chet Huntley's planned resort. Frank, Emmett and Eugene were not allowed to go inside the cabin, but Frank's wife, Carole, took a picture of Emmett, Eugene and his wife Alice, along with Frank Crail standing at the southwest corner of the old ranch house. As far as is known, this is the last time any of the original homestead children saw the Crail Ranch.

### ***To Oregon, and back to Montana....***

After the last visit to Crail Ranch, Frank Crail moved his father Eugene, his uncle Emmett, and his aunt Lilian to his ranch near Salem, Oregon, where he hoped they could spend their final days.

Eugene and Lilian lived on the ranch in Oregon for a number of years. Lilian died in 1981, and her remains were taken to Long Beach, California to be interred with her husband. Eugene died in 1985 at the age of 97, and is buried in Oregon.

Emmett Crail stayed in Oregon for only a few years. In the early months of 1975, he asked to return to Montana to be once again with Annie's niece and nephew. Emmett Crail died in June of 1975, at the age of 86. He is buried with his wife, Annie, in the Breneman plot in Sunset Hills cemetery in Bozeman.



***NOTE: The story of Emmett Crail and Annie Breneman is based on information provided to the Historic Crail Ranch Conservators by the Crail family. If you have additional information pertaining to this story, please contact the Conservators through the Historic Crail Ranch website at [crailranch.org](http://crailranch.org), or by mail to Historic Crail Ranch, PO Box 161315, Big Sky, MT 59716-1315.***