



## The Crail Family of Gallatin Canyon

**Historic Crail Ranch** is operated and administered by the Big Sky Community Corporation, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization which exists to promote, acquire, preserve, and maintain land, parks, trails, and easements for the use of the people of the Big Sky Community and general public. Material in this publication was prepared by members of the Historic Crail Ranch Conservators Committee. Information is on our website [www.crailranch.org](http://www.crailranch.org).

### Introduction

The unique log structures of the Historic Crail Ranch are some of the oldest original buildings still standing in Big Sky, Montana.

Historic Crail Ranch preserves the story of the **Augustus Franklin Crail family** and their life in the Gallatin Canyon Basin in the early 1900s.

For more than 50 years, Crail Ranch was an active ranching operation with herds of cattle, sheep and horses, and wheat and hay fields encompassing 960 acres in what is now the meadow area of Big Sky.

### Before the Crails Came to the Canyon

The Big Sky area and the Gallatin Canyon were first explored by various bands of Indians. In particular the Shoshone band, known as the "Sheepeaters," passed through the area while moving from the Madison Valley to the west to the Paradise Valley to the east. They, and other Indian bands, occupied this area mainly during the summer months.

Beginning in the late 18th century Spanish, French and British trappers left their mark on the area with place names like Spanish Peaks and Yellowstone (from the French *roche jaune*).

In the early 1800s, Lewis and Clark ventured to the confluence of rivers that formed the Missouri River near what is now Three Forks, Montana. They named the easternmost river the Gallatin after Albert Gallatin, the Secretary of the Treasury who had worked to fund the expedition. Neither Lewis nor Clark explored the Gallatin River far enough to reach the Gallatin Canyon or the Big Sky area.

In the first half of the 19th century a few "mountain men," such as John Coulter and Jim Bridger, passed through the Big Sky area in search of streams and rivers to trap beaver, mink and other fur-bearing animals. Some mountain men stayed in the area for a period of time – "Yellowstone Vic Smith" and "Rocky Mountain Dick" Rock ran a dude ranch near Black Butte and advertised themselves as hunting outfitters in Bozeman's *Avant Courier*. "Buckskin Charley" Marble was the mountain man to ranch and guide here the longest, living near Sage Creek.<sup>1</sup>

## The National Park, the Railroads, the Loggers, and the National Forest

With the establishment of Yellowstone Park in 1872, and the coming of the railroads to the Bozeman area in the 1880s, the move to open a road up the Gallatin Canyon at last gained momentum. The first crude roads were cut to facilitate logging of pine trees for railroad ties. The loggers, called “tie-hackers,”<sup>2</sup> would dam up the small feeder streams in the fall and early winter and float logs into the ponds. When the spring runoff came, they would blow their dams and let the water carry the logs downstream to "Salesville" (aka Slabville), and which is now called Gallatin Gateway.

Under the Land Revision Act of 1891, the Federal government set up the Gallatin National Forest in the Canyon, carefully leaving flat meadow lands, including much of what is now the Big Sky Meadow Village area, available for homesteading.

By the 1880s, ranchers began moving herds of sheep and cattle up the logging road in the summer months, seeking the meadows in what are now the Big Sky, 320 Ranch, Taylor Fork, Daily Creek, and Black Butte drainages. By the late 1890s, under the provisions of the Homestead Act, a few ranchers, such as Augustus Franklin Crail and his family, had begun the process of building cabins and establishing 160-acre homesteads in the Big Sky area.

### The Crail Family<sup>3</sup>



**Augustus Franklin Crail** (known as Frank Crail) was born in Decatur County, Indiana in November of 1842 to Samuel Spencer Crail II and Catherine Weaver. He had two brothers, John and Albert, and a sister Fanny. In 1857, Frank's mother died. His father remarried a year later, fathering nine more children. Seven years later in 1865, Frank Crail left a guaranteed inheritance of a farm in Tipton County, Indiana, and traveled to the frontier at St. Joseph, Missouri. There he joined a wagon train and ventured forth to the Montana Territory.

Frank was first a farmer, homesteading in the current Springhill section of Bozeman. The railroad did not come to Bozeman until 1883. So, with no outlet for his farm products, he leased his land and worked as a freighter between Miles City and Fort Benton. After just a few years, he resumed ranching.

In 1886, he married Sallie L. Creek. He served as District Clerk of the 9th Judicial District in Gallatin County from 1896 to 1900, elected on the Democrat Ticket against a

Republican endorsed by the short-lived Populist Party.

His District Clerk term completed, 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.

In 1902, Crail moved his family up the Gallatin River after he purchased a small cabin and a 160-acre homestead from Daniel Inabnit for less than one dollar per acre. Crail and his sons Eugene and Emmett annexed a number of homesteads and ranched on a substantial portion of what is now the Meadow Village area of Big Sky. (The Crail family retained their home on West Main Street in Bozeman and returned there each winter.)

The ranch had many structures, including barns, a forge, a hay barn for 50-60 tons of hay, a piggery, and a spring house over the creek for cold storage. After 20 years of raising sheep, the Crails started raising cattle. They grew their hay on the east side of the North Fork of the Gallatin River. They also ran a lumber mill to supply their ranch with the wood needed to construct buildings. They grew his Crail Fife wheat, which won 2 bronze medals in 1905 at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis.

When Frank Crail died in September, 1924, his two sons inherited the land, apportioning the land based upon the acreage they had each owned before their father's death. Augustus Franklin Crail is interred in the Sunset Hills Cemetery in Bozeman.

**Sallie Creek Crail**,<sup>4</sup> was born in 1864 in Platte County Missouri. Prior to marrying Frank Crail in 1886 at age 22, Sallie taught music at Female Orphan School (now William Woods University in Fulton, Missouri). The school had been established for the continuing education of young women orphaned by the Civil War. Sallie taught guitar, piano, and organ. The Historic Crail Ranch Conservancy has a guitar with marked frets that Sallie used when teaching.

Sallie also was an accomplished quilter. Also on display at the Crail Ranch is a quilt that Sallie finished in 1901, which the Crail family states won first honors at a quilting competition in Chicago. The quilt is dated by a phrase stitched into the quilt, "Lilian Crail - 5 years old". Lilian was five in 1901. A second quilt dates from 1886, authenticated by political ribbons stitched into the quilt.

Sallie Creek Crail died in September, 1914 and is interred in Sunset Hills Cemetery in Bozeman.



## The Crail Children: Eugene, Emmett and Lilian



**Eugene Crail (approximately 1918)**

**Eugene Crail** was Sallie and Frank's oldest child. He was born in 1887 when his father was 48 years old. Eugene initially worked as a carpenter and joined the carpenters' union at age 17, one of the youngest members. His formal education ended at Grade 8.<sup>5</sup> He studied architecture for 8 years through correspondence courses. Family lore credits him with a degree in Steam Engineering; however there is no evidence of that.

As a Red Cross surveyor and architect during World War I, Eugene was in charge of building Red Cross hospitals in England. Upon his return to Gallatin Canyon, he built the first Ophir School in 1929, the Lone Mountain Ranch Lodge, and the first four cabins at Lone Mountain Ranch, which was then called the B-Bar-K.

Eugene married Mary Alice Fowler Phillips, a divorcee with two boys, Wray Leslie and Leo Winfred. At 48 years of age, Eugene fathered a son, Francis William Crail, the only biological grandchild of Frank Crail. The family lived on a farm on West Babcock Street until Eugene left Bozeman in 1943 to work first in Idaho and then Port Angelis, WA, where he supervised carpentry in the shipyards in Port Angelis, WA during World War II.

At his retirement, Eugene was honored by the carpenters' union for continuing to pay his dues to the union for 80 consecutive years, thus designating him the oldest union carpenter with the most consecutive years in the United States. He died in 1985 at the age of 97 and is buried in Oregon.

**Emmett Crail**, Augustus Franklin and Sallie Crail's second son, was born in 1888. While the rest of the family returned to Bozeman in winter months, Emmett stayed on the ranch, tending the livestock. It is largely due to Emmett's dedication as a rancher that the Crail Ranch remained a working stock ranch, while other ranches in the area became dude ranches.

For decades, Emmett courted Annie T. Breneman, daughter of David and Annie T. Williams Breneman. Annie graduated in 1907 from the Montana College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (now MSU), with a degree in Physics and Mathematics. She taught high school in Anaconda until she retired in 1949.

Emmett worked the Crail homestead until age 60, when he sold the ranch shortly after he married Annie. Many of the photos held by the Historic Crail Ranch Conservancy depict Emmett accompanied by a niece and a nephew, children of Annie's brother and sister-in-law, who died in 1918 from Spanish influenza, leaving three children orphaned. (For more information, please access "Emmett and Annie.")



**Emmett Crail  
(Approximately 1918)**

Once Emmett sold the family ranch to Jack and Elaine Hume of Oakland, California, Emmett and Annie moved to Bozeman Hot Springs, where he worked in a saddle shop before retiring completely. After Annie died in 1958, Emmett moved to Salem, Oregon, but he eventually settled in Butte, living with Glenn Louise, the orphaned niece of his deceased wife. Emmett died in 1975 and is buried in Bozeman.



**Lilian Crail** (who spelled her name as shown) was born in 1896, just a few years before her parents acquired the ranch. Lilian grew up on the ranch during the summer. Like most ranch women of her day, Lilian was as comfortable riding a horse and handling a gun as she was with needlework and cooking. Like her mother, Lilian loved animals, as we see in many of the Crail family photos placed with the Historic Crail Ranch Conservators.

Lilian's brothers, Eugene and Emmett, "set up" or annexed land to the original homestead. Eugene purchased 160 acres in 1911 and an additional 160 acres at another point. Emmett bought 160 acres in 1912. When Augustus Franklin died in 1924, he willed the ranch lands to his sons proportionate to the percentage of their prior ownership. Lilian did not share in the land as she had received money from her father for her study in nursing at the Illinois Training School for nurses, from which she graduated in 1921.

After serving an appointment as Floor Director at Cooke County General Hospital in Chicago, Lilian moved to Long Beach, California.

Lilian met Hal DeWaide while working as his mother's private nurse and caretaker. Hal was an aircraft engineer and inventor who worked for Lockheed Corporation. In 1957, at age 61, Lilian married Hal, who had never been married before as well. During their retirement, Lilian and Hal moved to Salem, Oregon where Lilian died in 1981. Her final resting place is in Huntington Beach, CA, where her ashes are encrypted with those of Hal and his family.

## **The Last Crail Leaves the Ranch**

After the death of Augustus Franklin Crail in 1924, his son Emmett continued to operate the Ranch. Emmett married in 1949 and shortly thereafter sold the Ranch to the Hume family and the Boa family.

The Humes in 1955 expanded the holdings to include the B-K and renaming the entire ranch the Lone Mountain Ranch. They called the Crail Ranch section the "Old Crail Ranch,"<sup>6</sup> and they operated the ranch partly as a dude ranch until the early 1960s, with Jack and Phyllis Bowles serving as ranch managers. In 1962, they sold their holdings to a cattleman named Sam Smeding.

It was Smeding who was approached by Chet Huntley and his consortium when they began to assemble properties for what became the Big Sky Resort.

During the 1970s, the Big Sky Resort used the Crail Ranch property as lodging for workers. By 1980, the buildings were largely abandoned, but a community effort saved the Ranch from the wrecking ball and succeeded in having the buildings placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

After massive restoration, the Ranch opened for tours, and a Ranch Host program was established in 2001. After that, the Ranch became popular during the summer months for community events such as quilt shows and bake sales.

Throughout the late 1990s, the Gallatin Canyon Women's Club subcommittee, the Historic Crail Ranch Restoration Committee, worked to have the ranch turned over to them in order to expand its availability to the Big Sky community. The Big Sky Resort agreed, and eventually gave control of the ranch to the Big Sky Owners Association. In 2006, the BSOA ceded the Crail Ranch to the Big Sky Community Corporation (BSCC).

In 2006, the BSCC chartered a committee, the Historic Crail Ranch Conservators, to oversee the preservation and maintenance of the Crail Ranch and to make it available as an educational and entertainment resource for the Big Sky community and others interested in the history of the Gallatin County area.

Today the Historic Crail Ranch is open weekends during July and August, allowing visitors to step back 100 years to the days when Big Sky was a part of the homestead movement that opened up the American West.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Strickler and Anne Marie Mistretta. *Images of America: Big Sky*. Charleston, South Carolina: Acadia Publishing Co, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Janet Cronin and Dorothy Vick. *Montana's Gallatin Canyon, a Gem in the Treasure State*. Mountain Press Publishing Company, November 1992, p 101.

<sup>3</sup> Material on the Crail family was assembled from primary sources by Anne Marie Mistretta, Ph.D., of Big Sky, and other members of the Historic Crail Ranch Conservators.

<sup>4</sup> *Sarah, Sallie and Sally*. In the US census of 1870 for Platte County, Missouri, Sallie Creek is listed as "Sarah," age 5. She is called "Sallie" in most other locations noted to date. Her name is spelled "Sallie" on her headstone and on 1900 census forms, and "Sally" on Eugene Crail's death certificate and in a 2009 note from her grandson, Frank Crail.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census 1940. (This information, supplied by Eugene Crail to the U.S. Census, contradicts information provided by the family that was reported in *Images of America: Big Sky*.)

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Hume, "Life At The Crail Ranch," 1992.