

HISTORY OF THE CRABILL HOUSE, BUCK CREEK STATE PARK

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The vicinity near the center of Section 13 Moorefield Township is and always has been called by all Crabills “The Promised Land.”

It was here, high on a knoll overlooking Buck Creek Valley, that they located their cemetery. Tradition has it, that they wanted to face the East on resurrection day. One wonders their consternation, when that day finally comes. According to present plans they won't be in familiar territory.

The first Crabills—David and family arrived in Clark County about 1832. **[WRONG: CAME IN 1808 wagon used later probably by the Thomas V. Crabill when he went to Illinois]** They came in a Conestoga wagon or prairie schooner. This wagon is still in existence. In fact it is not the property of The Clark County Historical Society and is quartered at the Clark County Fair grounds, located on St. R. 41 East of Springfield.

David Crabill settled on Sections 13 and 19 Moorefield Township, which was organized in 1818. An early atlas of this county published in 1870 shows a total of about 656 acres in their name.

The farm extended eastward from Villa to farms on Buck Creek Lane, thence south to the Springfield Township line, which is near the control tower of the new dam. Thence, roughly in a northwest direction to the center of section 19 Moorefield, Twp. However property of W. T. Hough and Croft Mill being excepted. From center of Section 19 which is at the curve on Middle Urbana Rd and juncture with Trimmer Lane, their land ran north and encompassed land now owned by the Conover Family

An atlas published in 1894 shows 80 acres of the S. E. quarter as being owned by Lavinia Wilson, who was a daughter of Thomas V. Crabill. 80 acres of the same quarter section was owned by S. A. Bowman, a Springfield attorney. Also J. S. Nicklin and James Crabill owned 60 or 80 acres and 116 acres of the original tract.

This left about 350 acres, and in the memory of many now living was owned and operated by Pierce Crabill. He was a bachelor and kept a housekeeper—a Mrs. Gard. She had a niece Hazel Rood, who was about the same age as the Frosser boys. They often walked together to the Villa School. To complete the household, there was Rod Kitchen, also a bachelor. He was a typical hired man. Often we went on his farm sled pulled by a team of horses. Rod used the Conestoga wagon for all the farm work, in fact it was the only one on the farm.

Pierce Crabill was not buried in the family cemetery. He was interned at Ferncliff in Springfield. The cemetery on the farm was now enclosed in a cement block wall.

After the death of Uncle Pierce, as everyone called him, the farm was taken over by John Crabill and sons Pearl and Clark.

They were residents of “The Crabill Settlement” near Pitchin. Pearl was a graduate of Wittenberg and Ohio State. He started working for the Foos Gas Engine Co. in Springfield. Soon he was in business for him self—a brass foundry. Later he and partner in business – a Mr. Turner founded The Central Brass and Fixture Co., and began making bumpers and other accessories for the booming auto trade. He

prospered and became a leading financier and banker in Springfield. However he would not allow himself to be classed as a gentleman farmer. Clark Crabill was one of the leading farmers of this county.

All of the aforementioned are now gone, and control of the land passed to Charles Crabill, son of Pearl several years ago. Mention should also be made of Earl McNier, who now lives on the place. Earl came to work there shortly after World War I of which he is a veteran, and has been there almost continuously every since.

Entrance lanes to the homestead are interesting. It is believed the first of such came indirectly from the turnpike now St. Rt. 4. Then later a lane started at the cement block house and running thru the woods to the barn. In 1914 John, Pearl and Clark moved the lane opposite John S. Frosser's gate. This was a neighborly gesture and it also made it easier to trade help with each other.

Lets us now consider the buildings. There is the brick 2 story 6 room plus hall house. It is situated on a high bluff overlooking the proposed lake. A spring supplied water which was carried by hand up a steep hill. This spring served as a springhouse, where perishable food products were kept in running water. Near by was a small barn for cows. Also a chicken house, and no doubt a smoke house. The main barn of hewed timbers sat on the hill above the house. It was outlasted a barn erected in 1914, and could still be remodeled for display purposes.

There was also a shop for their own use. A scale house and stock scales was in the woods. The fact that they had these scales shows that they were stockman. In fact they always had large flock of sheep and herds of cattle.

Speaking of the early buildings, there was a tavern on The Clark and Union Pike, now St. Rt. 4. Also a blacksmith shop at Villa opposite the grocery and post office. Mail was provided on a come and get it basis. Neither the tavern nor the blacksmith shop were operated by Crabills.

In regard to the barn built in 1914, it was John, Pearl and Clark who did that. They installed a sawmill and lumberman's cabin in the back woods. There they sawed white oak for their new dairy barn. A gambrel roofed dairy barn was built, but the timber was not fully seasoned and it warped badly. At the same time a concrete block milk house was built, as well as 3 wooden silos.

A large dairy was established and was operated by the Harry L Kame family. They installed a milking machine also purchased a Huber Tractor, both of which were uncommon in those days. A hydraulic ram was put in service to supply water for the new venture. It was troublesome so a well was drilled and the pump powered by gasoline engine was used. Later a private electric plant was purchased to be superseded by high line electric power in a few year.

It is apparent that the Crabills co-operated with the Croft Family in the establishment of their mill in as much as the mill race & mill were built on land purchased from them. The Croft Mill was located at the railroad crossing on the road named after them. It was and still is the Delaware Division of the Big Four. It was built through the Crabill low lands, in the year 1855. The four passenger trains and numerous freights passed in view of the residents of the neighborhood, provided possibly the only contact with the outside world.

And so with the removal of the R. R. and the filling of the valley with water, another era soon will end.