

Part II: Generation Two

Myrtie's Parents

John George Lewis CRABTREE
Ida Emily HIGGINSON



A photo of an unknown Nebraska town that is in the family photo collection.

Nebraska Land

(sung to the tune of Beulah Land; I found the words in Grandma's papers, in her handwriting.)

I've reached the land of corn and wheat
Of pumpkin pies and potatoes sweet.
I got my land from Uncle Sam
And now I'm happy as a clam.

My chickens are all Plymouth rock
My horses perch on Norman stock
My cows are Jerseys very fine
And Pole and China are my swine.

Chorus:

O Nebraska Land, sweet Nebraska Land
As on the highest bluff I stand
I look away across the plain
And wonder if it ever rains
And then I turn to view my corn
And think I'll never sell the farm.

Chapter 1

John George Lewis Crabtree

Birth to Marriage, 1855 to 1890



Young John Lewis Crabtree.

John George Lewis Crabtree, Myrtie's father, was the fifth child of Arnold and Rachel Crabtree; the only one of their 11 children to live past the age of 33.

Great Grandpa John was well loved by his daughter Myrtie, my grandmother. John L. Crabtree, (he dropped the George at some point), was a shoemaker, a wheelwright, a blacksmith, and owner of a restaurant. I found it interesting that he was left handed.

Great Grandpa John was born in July of 1855, near Lodi, Illinois, now called Maple Park.

Starting in the early 1840s, John's parents, his grandparents, and most of his aunts and uncles moved to Illinois from New Brunswick, Canada. Elijah and Priscilla Crabtree, John's maternal grandparents, were the last to arrive in 1859.

When he was about six years old, John had polio. His symptoms were a bad fever and a headache. The polio left his right leg drawn up and paralyzed. At one time he walked with two crutches, but eventually he used only one. Using a crutch did not stop him from anything he wanted to do.

John's schooling did not go past the third grade, even though Illinois had a free public school system that had started in 1854. That is the story told.

I'm not sure what happened during the Civil War years in John Crabtree's family, as I can not find his father, Arnold, listed as fighting in the Civil War. It seems the Higginson and Crabtree families knew each other and I've included a couple stories Grandma told me about those families and the Civil War in Part III.

Family information says that two years after the end of the Civil War, in 1867, John's Grandma Priscilla died in January, his baby brother Haskell died in May, and his grandpa Richard died in June.

Story County, Iowa

By January 1869, when John's youngest sister Amanda was born, the Crabtree family, including Uncle/Grandpa Elijah Crabtree, had moved and settled in Nevada, Story County, Iowa.

John attended school in Iowa, although, I don't know what grade, or how long. His father wanted him to learn a trade, but John wanted to do something else. In the end, John learned several trades, that of a blacksmith, a wheelwright, a wagon repairer, and a cobbler or shoemaker.

There is a photo of John Crabtree and John Higginson taken in Iowa, in Part III, Chapter 4. It seems from the photo that they must have been good friends. Both John's were born in 1855, in Illinois, and both families moved to Iowa. John Crabtree, as you probably know, married John Higginson's sister, Ida Emily.

Four years after baby Amanda was born, in 1873, when John Crabtree was only 18, his father Arnold died. Five months later, John's brother Charles died at age 13. In 1875, two more brothers, Arthur Elijah and Truman Orlando died.

Back to Illinois

John, his remaining siblings, Rachel, his mother, and Grandpa

Elijah, seem to have moved back to Chicago. Perhaps it was after 1880, as they are in Iowa in the 1880 census.

In 1881, John, lived in Chicago, Illinois, at 803 Fulton Street, a previous home to his Aunt Sarah Crabtree Gill. Sarah was a sister to John's mother Rachel. In Iowa, in 1880, John worked in a shoe-shop. Now in Chicago, John did apprentice shoework and had his own shoestore.

One story said John learned shoemaking so he could make shoes to fit himself and others who needed specialty shoes. Apparently, he was a very skilled cobbler.

In Chicago, John was a member of the Fourth Baptist Church at 891 Jackson Street, as were his mother, brothers, and sisters. He had at least one portrait made at the Robinson Studio at 631 Lake Street.

My father was in Chicago. He had a good trade and a good place there, but the family heard about all this land out there in Nebraska, and they were well acquainted with the other families, so they all got in a covered wagon and came out there, too.

The whole family went west; Got 160 acres each—proving up, after you lived so many years.

They must have had more than one covered wagon because there was my grandmother and her children. That'd be Rachel and Aunt Mandy and my father and a brother—all went out there to take up land.—Myrtie Crabtree Briggs, daughter.

*“He had to run off to be with the girl that lived with the Indians.”
—Aunt Sarah Crabtree Gill*

Note: Grandma Myrtie enjoyed telling me what Aunt Sarah had said. Apparently, Aunt Sarah was not happy her nephew John moved to Nebraska. Ida Higginson, the

young lady Aunt Sarah was referring to, and her family had moved to Keya Paha County, Nebraska, from Iowa.

John was 11 years old when Ida was born in Lodi, Illinois. Both families had moved to Iowa, a couple years after the Civil War. Ida was about 14 when John and his family moved back to Illinois. Although there were Indians in the area of Keya Paha County, Ida didn't actually live with them.

—Louise Smith

The Crabtrees Go to Nebraska

By June of 1885, John, his mother, and sisters, Rachel Lilly, and Mandy, were settled on their homesteads in Keya Paha County, Nebraska. They lived near Darnall, a post office in the central part of the county. Brother Hiram had a place near Springview.

The Higginson family members, Charlie and Carrie Williams, Ed Higginson, Mary and Ida Higginson as well as Jim Walker, (the husband-to-be of John's sister, Rachel), lived near Darnall, also. Ida's brother, James Higginson settled at Meadville.

John Crabtree had 160 acres of land that was unimproved: houses, fences, buildings valued at \$400; farm implements and machinery valued at \$110; \$225 worth of livestock including 3 horses.

On December 15, 1886, John Lewis Crabtree filed a claim for a homestead at the US Land Office at Valentine, Nebraska.

—Cal Bivens ❀



John L. Crabtree.

Nevada Story County Iowa

In 1853, Joseph Thrift, a California Forty-niner, was one of the Iowa Commisioners who decided on a site in the center of Story County, Iowa, for the county seat. Mr. Thrift named the new town, Nevada, after the Sierra Nevadas which he greatly admired.

The Crabtrees were living in Nevada, Iowa, the population center of Story County by 1869, which was a few years after the first railroad had arrived in Story County, in 1864. 1864 is the year that the state of Nevada joined the union, 11 years after the city of Nevada, Iowa, had been named.

—Louise Smith ❀



Nevada, Story County, Iowa.

Keya Paha County, Nebraska

Keya Paha County

Keya Paha County, Nebraska, was created from Brown County, in 1884, which was about the time the Higginsons and Crabtrees arrived in the area.



John L. Crabtree 1881.

The Lakota name, *Keyapaha*, meaning Turtle Hill, may have described the many small rounded hills. The *Keyapaha Wapka*, or Turtle Hill River, runs through the northeastern portion of the county where the Lakota once hunted.

Soon after the Sioux Indians were placed on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations, in 1878–1879, the white men began to establish ranches along the two nearby rivers, using the fine upland meadows for grazing.

Railroad companies advertised rich rewards to those who would take chances on life in the west. Homeseekers, arrived from as far east as New York and Pennsylvania, during the early 1880s.

Keya Paha County was at times the battleground between the

lawless and the law-abiding and the scene of crime and tragedy.

The outlaws stole horses from farmers as well as the Indians in the area. The stolen stock was brought to an isolated area and hid until time to sell. At one time, David C. "Doc" Middleton and his band of horse thieves had headquarters in the Niobrara Valley, Keya Paha County.

Darnall, Nebraska

A family, by the name of Darnell, homesteaded in an area about two miles west and one mile north of Springview. This was in kind of a valley and it became known as the Darnall Valley, which also had a Post Office.—from Ron Horton, taken from a book about Keya Paha County ❀



Homestead Certificate for John Crabtree for land in Keya Paha County, June 1892.