
Chapter 3

Mr. and Mrs. John L. Crabtree and Family

Amanda Myrtie, Johnnie Abel, LeRoy, Mary Ida



John L. Crabtree.



Ida Emily Higginson Crabtree.

On Christmas Day, 1890, John L. Crabtree, age 35, and Ida Emily Higginson, 24, were married at Sanford, Keya Paha County, Nebraska, by Edward E. Phipps, Justice of the Peace. Ida's brother James H. Higginson and his wife-to-be, Fanny Blake, were witnesses.

John and Ida each had 160 homestead acres, but Ida let hers go back to the government so she would not have to pay taxes. There were fruit trees and berries on John's property. The sandy land was good for growing cottonwood trees, and wild hay for cattle. But the land was bad for farming.

Ida may have continued teaching after she was married, as the last teaching certificate I have of hers is dated August 4, 1890, and certified her to teach second grade for one year.

After they were married, my father built a home of his own. The homes they built were made of sod. They used a plow to plow up wide furrows. The grass they could just pick it up in long strips which they laid up with the grass side down, just one on top of the other. They made sod houses that way. Nearly everybody lived in sod houses at that time.

First year they got along pretty good, I guess. The crops were all right. The next year, the year I was born, they got the crop all in and everything just looked wonderful, the garden was just great, and there came a great sandstorm, the wind blows so hard—the garden and everything.—Myrtie Crabtree Briggs, daughter

In November 1891, Emily Crabtree gave birth to a daughter,

Amanda Myrtie, in the Crabtree soddie. When Myrtie was six months old, they loaded up everything and moved north to Bonesteel, South Dakota.

The assumption is that when they moved to Bonesteel, John sold the homestead to get a stake to buy the businesses there. They seem moved before the Panic and Depression of '93; and before the worst of the drought of 1893–1894. A lot of places were simply deserted by 1895.—*Cal Bivens, great grandson*

In Bonesteel, John was the postmaster for six years. Grandma Myrtie said her parents, John and Ida, owned several lots and their house was the first one in Bonesteel.

I never did find out how he knew how he could be postmaster up there. Anyway, he was. So we were there. It was a very small town. They had about twice as many saloons as they did buildings.

There was a hotel and a store and a post office and my aunt and uncle lived there, Aunt Rachel and Uncle Jim. Uncle Jim barbered people in a room in his own house. There weren't many people there. Grandma Crabtree lived next door.—Myrtie Crabtree Briggs, daughter

Jim Walker, who had married John's sister Rachel, had a barber shop which kept him busy all day.



John and Ida Crabtree's marriage license. There are some mistakes on this license. Ida's father's name was Edward Higginson, and Rachel is misspelled.

But he had a horse and buggy for Rachel and she could go anytime. At that time Myrtie was yet a baby, but Mama kept the post office for the little community, so she didn't get out taking Myrtie out on walks or anything. Rachel came some days to take Myrtie to ride in her buggy. Mama, as you

see, said that sometimes people were thinking Rachel was the one that had the baby.
—Mary Crabtree, daughter

Ida is Very Sick

When Myrtie was around 4 years old, Ida was very sick with quinsy and in a coma for two weeks.

Quinsy or Peritonsillar Abscess

Between each tonsil and the wall of the throat is a space called the peritonsillar. An infection in this area—usually a complication of tonsillitis or strep throat bacteria—can cause a Peritonsillar abscess, also called Quinsy.

If Quinsy is not treated promptly, the infection can spread to the neck, roof of the mouth and lungs.

Symptoms include:

- A very sore throat
- Difficulty swallowing or opening the mouth wide
- Swollen glands in the neck
- Headache
- Chills or fever
- Swelling of the face
- "Hot potato voice"—sounds as if you're talking around a mouthful of hot mashed potatoes.

Quinsy is less common than in the past because tonsillitis now is often treated with antibiotics.

—Louise Smith,
great granddaughter ❀



Bonesteel, the star on South Dakota, is 71 miles from Norden, about a two and a half hour drive by car these days.

Bonesteel, South Dakota



Bonesteel, South Dakota, 1903—The lady third from the right may be Emma Pense, “Grandma” Pense, as she was called in the photo album. The man to her left may be Jim Walker or Ernest Pense. Ida is the sixth person from the right. Next to her is Great Grandpa Crabtree. My grandfather is the boy in the buggy. Myrtle is to the left of Great Grandpa. The man on the far left may be Mr. Kline, who married Hiram’s widow, Ursie. Photo and comment: Cal Bivens.

Bonesteel Postmaster:

John L. Crabtree

Sept. 15, 1893 to Feb. 28, 1899

The second date is when the next postmaster took over, but it supports our story very well. Since the postmaster was an appointed position, Great Grandpa had to have been known to whoever recommended him for the job. That implies that he was established in the area.

—Cal Bivens

Note: From data of Betty Stevick about Gregory County Post Offices on the South Dakota GenWeb site.

John Crabtree: Wheel Wright

“Your great grandpa that fixed wagon wheels was no doubt called a “wheel wright.” They would make a fire in a circle the size of the steel tire, heat it, and put it on the wooden wheel where it would cool and shrink and fit tight.”

—Lloyd Webber, Crabb cousin

The Pense and Kuntz Families

The Pense family were neighbors to the Crabtrees in Iowa, Nebraska, and Bonesteel, South Dakota.

On August 30, 1904, Ernest E. Pense was granted patent deeds on 5 parcels of land, 160 acres at Bonesteel, South Dakota. He owned his farm free and clear.

Ernest was Rachel Crabtree’s next door neighbor, and probably landlord in 1900. Rachel: dwelling number 126, family number 131. Ernest Pense: dwelling number 125, family number 130. John and Ida Crabtree: dwelling number 17, family number 18. Without more information, we don’t know the distance between these places. It may not have been great.

On January 31, 1903, Philip Kuntz, father of Stephen (husband of Mandy, John’s sister, who died in 1891), was granted a patent deed for 160 acres near Bonesteel, South Dakota. I had been told that Stephen remained in contact with the surviving Crabtrees for some years after Aunt Mandy’s death. This lends support to the idea that at least some of his family did just that.—Cal Bivens

Stories from Bonesteel, South Dakota by Cal Bivens

One of the stories handed down

in the family about this period concerns “Doc” Middleton, a gunman and horsethief well known in the Sand Hills region, who also was a former deputy sheriff of Sheridan County. He is said to have stopped by the cafe from time to time to eat. When he came in he always sat with his back to the wall and laid his guns on the table. Reportedly, on one of these occasions, Doc was confronted by a short but feisty farmer who accused him of stealing a harness. The missing harness was pretty well used but it had been the only one the farmer had. The next morning, the story goes, the unnamed farmer discovered a new harness in his barn.

Another story relates how the local doctor acquired the first automobile in Bonesteel. He invited some of the town’s businessmen to take a ride in it. Among them was John Crabtree. John didn’t trust the things and declined the offer. Motor cars were too fast and too dangerous for his liking. He would stick to his buckboard, thank you. ❀

In 1900, five years after Ida was so sick, Johnie Abel Crabtree was born. Another son, LeRoy (pronounced LaROY) Howard Crabtree was born in 1903.

After the Post Office job, John owned a wagon shop where he mended buggies and wagons, and later added a blacksmith shop.

Mondamin, Iowa

Around 1903, John traded his business in Bonesteel for a place, sight unseen, in Mondamin, Iowa, with fruit trees and good soil for growing things.

John and Ida, Myrtie, Johnie, LeRoy, and Grandma Rachel, traveled to Mondamin by train.

In 1906, a daughter, Mary Ida Crabtree, was born in Mondamin, Iowa. Mary weighed 13 pounds at birth according to several relatives.

The soil was very good, and the crops grew very well, but there was information John wasn't told—Mondamin had a major flooding problem.

After three or four disastrous years of drowned crops when the Missouri River flooded, their land was bought and the Crabtree family, including John's mother Rachel, returned to Nebraska.

The Crabtrees Return to Nebraska

On returning to Nebraska, John bought an old homestead of 160 acres with fruit trees and berries, probably from the original owner, Ozro Gillespie. The homestead was in Pine Glen, 18 miles from Ainsworth. John filed the homestead deed with the clerk of Brown County in March 1908.

In November of that year, John's mother, Rachel, died. Rachel had outlived her husband and ten children. She was buried at a place along the road from Ainsworth to Meadville.

Pine Glen Homestead Deed

The document below is the original homestead deed to the Pine Glen place that Ozro Gillespie owned. I didn't copy both sides, but the back shows only that John Crabtree filed it with the county clerk of Brown County in March 1908. There is no indication that there was an owner in between Gillespie and Great Grandpa. The description of the location of the property is given in the body of the deed.



The Crabtree Family at Pine Glen around 1912: John, Johnie, Ida, Mary, Myrtie, and LeRoy.

The deed was issued to Gillespie in February 1891. —Cal Bivens ❀



The John Crabtree Family: Ida, Mary, Myrtie, LeRoy (standing), Johnie, and John.



The Crabtree Family by their Pine Glen home. *Ida, John, LeRoy, Johnie, Mary, Myrtie. A traveling photographer took this photo in 1911.—Mary Crabtree*



Crabtree Family in front of Pine Glen Home about 1912. *John, Ida, Myrtie, Johnie, Mary, LeRoy Howard. This is a photo of our old house that I haven't seen. It's the south end of the house. It shows that the log lean-to ran all away across the back of the house. The other photo shows that it also extended, possibly 10 feet or so, beyond the other end of the house. The direction from the photographer to the bottom photo is roughly north northwest.—Raleigh Emry, Higginson cousin*

The Pine Glen Home of the Crabtree Family

There was a post office in the area, in 1890, called Pine Glen. Apparently, it has long been defunct. The house sits on what was once a 160 acre homestead claim of Ozro Homer Gillespie. John Crabtree bought the place about 1907/08, and filed the original homestead deed with the Brown County clerk in March of 1908.

According to the writings of Gillespie's wife, Minnie (maiden name Cynthia Minnie Painter), she married Gillespie December 11, 1885, at her father's homestead, just across the Niobrara River. She and her new husband settled on his homestead in a log house. "We soon had a nice frame house with running water in it."

The house was built before 1888, as they were living in it at the time of the Blizzard of '88. Minnie wrote that they moved to Madison, Nebraska, in 1891, soon after the homestead deed was issued apparently.

The 1890–91 *Gazeteer*, in its Farmers List, shows Ozro Gillespie at Pine Glen. I don't know if Ozro sold the property or hung onto it. If he sold it when he moved, the buyer never filed it with the county clerk. The only filing information is that for John Crabtree.

—Cal Bivens, great grandson ❁

In 1910 Johnie and LeRoy attended Miss Elsie Murray's class at a Brown County School. In this class were also some of their Higginson cousins: Edward, Signe and Ruth Higginson, and Edith Reynolds. The Crabtree boys' uncle, Ed Higginson, was an official of School District No. 26, in which this was located.

—*Cal Bivens, great grandson*

Note: A copy of the card listing the students mentioned above is in Part II, Chapter 4.

Ainsworth Restaurant

John traded the Pine Glen homestead for a restaurant in Ainsworth. Ida said she would rather feed a hungry man than one with a "coming appetite". The saying meant their appetites kept coming and they ended up eating more.

The restaurant was more trouble than it was worth. John sold it and eventually, he and Ida moved to Long Pine, Nebraska, where John opened up his own shoe shop.

Long Pine, Nebraska

In his last years, my father had an up-to-date shoe repair shop in Long Pine. This time business was real good. He was well known for how perfect his shoes were that he made. Workmen on the Railroad picked up shoes and brought them to him because he did such a good job. Even the conductor of the railroad brought shoes from all along the line to him. Papa made more money than anytime in his life.—Myrtie Briggs, daughter

Pine Glen Home—1945 and 2004

When I was about one year old, in 1945, Mom and Dad bought the old Crabtree place. (The property had changed hands once or twice since John and Ida lived there.) We lived in that old house (one room down, one room up, and a lean-to kitchen that Dad added), when I was a kid.

The house, about 5 miles east and 12 miles north of Ainsworth, Nebraska, in Brown County, is just across the Niobrara River from Keya Paha County. It is about six miles or so south of Springview, Nebraska.

US 183 crosses our land now and goes within about one-fourth mile of the old house. The house is not visible from the highway and is in some canyons just to the East.

The highway hadn't yet been built when we lived there, so there was no way to get to Springview without going up or down river several miles to the nearest bridge. We did our shopping in Ainsworth, although the rural road to Ainsworth was also long and difficult, especially in the winter.

The old house is still standing and I happen to have a photo of it as a screensaver on my laptop computer. No one has lived in the house since we moved to Ainsworth when I was in sixth grade.—*Raleigh Emry*

Note: Raleigh is a Higginson cousin. His mother, Ortha Reynolds Emry, is the granddaughter of Isabelle Higginson Reynolds, Ida's younger sister. Raleigh shared his information and photos of the Pine Glen home. Raleigh and two of his siblings still own the house and property. ❁



The Pine Glen house in 2004.



Higginson cousins, Raleigh Emry and his mother, Ortha Loretta Reynolds Emry.



View in fall 1959 of Niobrara River Valley taken from a hill downriver a mile or so from the same side as the Crabtree home, looking back towards the northwest. Keya Paha County is across the river. Photos: Raleigh Emry.

John Lewis Crabtree's Shoeshop



Great Grandpa John fixed shoes for the railroad men in Long Plne, Nebraska.



John Crabtree in the Long Plne shoeshop.



John and Ida Crabtree in the shoeshop.

John Crabtree, Shoemaker

I can remember this as well as yesterday. I was born in 1906, and this was in 1912. Harry Williams stood by the telephone, Papa had his tool bench by the table. You remember the checkered tablecloth? He had a denim work apron as you see.

—Mary Crabtree, daughter

“Cousin Mary Crabtree sent the original picture of her father. I had some copies made.”

—Ada Mae Reynolds Horton.

The top photo is from my (Louise) mom, although a number of relatives seem to have it.

Photos two and three are from Ron Horton. Ada Mae was Ron's mother and Isabelle Higginson Reynold's daughter. There are photos of Mae and my grandma Myrtie in Part III. ❀

It was probably 1920 or 1921, that Papa had the shoe repair equipment, including the big electrical finisher, moved from his shoe shop on Main Street into one of the rooms in the house. He had the shop for some years there on Main Street down toward the depot. From then on he did what work people brought right there in the house.

Mama would get up early, going to the kitchen and have breakfast ready and the kitchen warm, then go back to help Papa finish getting dressed and walk to the kitchen.

—Mary Crabtree, daughter

John Lewis Crabtree suffered a series of strokes in 1927. The last two weeks he was in a coma. He died on September 27 of that year.

Mama took care of him, doing what she could. When he passed away Uncle Jim Higginson, LeRoy, Mama, and I were there.

—Mary Crabtree, daughter

John's eldest son, Johnie, had left home sometime before this and the family didn't know his exact whereabouts. He may have gone to Colorado briefly with his Uncle Ed Higginson. Or he may have been in Omaha at this time. At any rate, the family had a message for him broadcast over the radio asking that he return to Long Pine for his father's funeral. John L. Crabtree is buried in Long Pine, Nebraska Cemetery.

—Cal Bivens, great grandson

Children of John and Ida:
Amanda Myrtie CRABTREE
 Johnie Abel CRABTREE
 Le Roy Howard CRABTREE
 Mary Ida CRABTREE ❀

Long Pine, Brown Co., Nebraska

Long Pine, a Sandhills Community, is close to Long Pine Creek. The creek is a beautiful stream which winds northward 25 miles through Pine Creek Canyon to the Niobrara River. The name Long Pine came from the Lakotas—*Wazi-honska Wakpala*, or Long Pine Creek.

Long Pine's history includes famous rustlers, railroaders, and many hardworking ordinary folk.

The railroad came to Long Pine in 1881. The city was a major

railroad hub and was home to a "roundhouse," or large turntable, where engines were serviced. It served as a railroad division point and a trade area for area ranchers and farmers. Both passenger and freight trains came over the rails.

The first railroad bridge was over Pine Creek by Seven Springs, where the trains took on water. That bridge burned in 1905. The same year the 115 foot high railroad bridge that now stands was built.—*Louise Smith* ❀



Railroad bridge near Long Pine, Nebraska.



The Long Pine Crabtree Home. John and Emily first rented and then bought the place at Long Pine, some 10 miles east of Ainsworth, in 1920, from John and Anna Schanz. They paid \$1500 for it. Photo and comment: Cal Bivens.



John and Ida Crabtree.



Right to left: Ida Crabtree, John Crabtree, Charley Williams (husband of Ida's sister Carrie), and Isabelle Higginson Reynolds (Ida's sister).

John Crabtree's Obituary

John Louis Crabtree was born near Lodi, Illinois, July 26, 1855, and departed this life Sept. 18, 1927, being at the time of his death, 72 years, 1 month and 22 days old.

He was united in marriage to Ida E. Higginson at Sanford, Nebraska, Dec. 25, 1890, to which union was born four children: Amanda Myrtie Briggs, Sparta, New Jersey; Johnie Able; Leroy Howard; Mary Ida Crabtree, of Long Pine, Nebraska.

He was converted at a very early age and united with the Free Baptist Church of which he was always a faithful member and upon moving to Long Pine, united with the M. E. Church.

He leaves to mourn his loss a loving wife, his four children and three grandchildren, together with a host of relatives and friends. He was preceded to the Great Beyond by his parents, seven brothers, and three sisters.

Note: The three grandchildren were Myrtie's three girls, Laura, Mildred, and Mary. Myrtie couldn't make the trip because it was too close to the arrival of baby John who arrived on October 31. ❀



Great Grandpa John Crabtree.

Letter to Myrtie from her Papa

"Dear Myrtie,
 the why I do not write aint
 because I don't want to or because
 i have forgotten that we have a
 dear Daughter that is not here
 that we think very much of and are
 proud of. I am a poor speller and
 poor writer and don't like to wright
 more than I can help but I often
 tell Mamma things to write. I don't
 want you to worry because you
 disliked to repeat to me when
 I didn't hear. my hearing is no better
 and I guess no worse. I thank you
 verry much for helping me with
 some money in starting a shoe
 business. I am doing fine have more
 than I can keep up with am 3 or
 4 days behind and more coming
 every day. during the blizard west
 of here I lost a lot of time. the trains
 was snow bound and couldn't run
 on time. they are on time now and
 I will have a chance to catch up.

the people in the pine are quite
 sociable and seam to appreciate
 welcome other business coming
 in and act like you are one of them
 and worthy of notice.

if I don't write regular don't
 think I forget you belong to us and
 are verry thankful that you are in so
 good a place and have opportunity
 and the will to help in religious
 doings. We always look for a letter
 from you. Am glad your health is
 good I hope you will keep well.
 ever your Loving Papa" ❀

Dear Myrtie
 the why I do not write is
 aint because I dont want to or because
 I have forgotten that we have a dear
 Daughter that is not here that we think
 verry much of and are proud of. I am
 a poor speller and poor writer and dont
 like to wright more than I can help but
 I often tell Mamma things to write
 I dont want you to worry because you
 disliked to repeat to me when I didnt
 hear. my hearing is no better and I guess
 no worse I thank you verry much for
 helping me with some money in starting
 a shoe business I am doing fine have
 more than I can keep up with am 3 or 4 day
 behind and more coming every day during the
 blizard west of here I last a lot of time
 the trains was snow bound and couldnt
 run on time they are on time now and I
 will have chance to catch up the people in

the Pine are quite sociable and seam
 to appreciate ^{the people} other business coming in
 and act like you are one of them and
 worthy of notice if I dont wright
 you dont want to forget you belong
 to us and are verry thankful that you
 are in so good a place and have oportunity
 and the will to help in religious doings
 we always look for a letter from you
 am glad your health is good I hope you
 will keep well ever
 your Loving
 Papa

Ida, Mary, and Myrtie

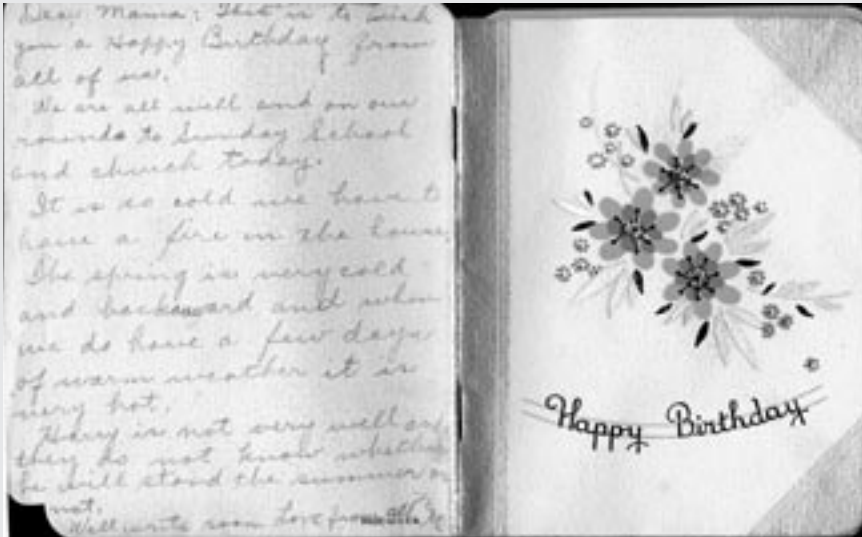


Mary and Ida Crabtree at home on E St. in Springfield, Oregon, 1947.

Ida and her Daughter, Mary

Mary is said to have made a promise to her father on his death bed that she would take care of her mother.

Daughter Mary remained with Emily for many years. They moved to the Eugene-Springfield area in 1937, and lived in Glenwood. By 1940, they lived at F and Water Streets in Springfield. They remained here perhaps until after the war, when they moved to 1258 E Street, where they were living when Emily died on May 21, 1948. She was buried at the Laurel Grove Cemetery in Glenwood, between Eugene and Springfield.—*Cal Bivens* ❀



Card to Ida from Myrtie

"Dear Mama,
This is to wish you a Happy Birthday from all of us.

We are all well and on our rounds to Sunday School and church today.

It is so cold we have to have a fire in the house. The spring is very cold and backward and when we do have a few days of warm weather it is very hot.

Harry is not very well and they do not know whether he will stand the summer or not.

We'll write soon.

Love from all, Myrtie" ❀



Irwin and Myrtle Briggs and Myrtle's mother, Ida Crabtree.

What Was Ida Like? She Looks Rather Stern

Daughter Myrtie Briggs Talks about her mother, Ida:

"Mama was a big woman, about six feet tall and very heavy. She would not get on the scales so when people would say: 'Why, Idie, how much do you weigh?' she could truthfully answer, 'I don't know.'"

"Mama was the one everyone called when they were sick as she had remedies for them and there were no doctors out on the prairie. She also was a midwife. One premature's hand was so small that her wedding band would go on her arm like a bracelet.

"Mama said we make things sound romantic when they developed the West, but it wasn't romantic. It was very hard work. The women had to work as hard as the men building their houses and all that they had to do to make it liveable."

Granddaughter Mildred Briggs Lufburrow, Myrtie's Daughter:

"Grandma Crabtree came out to help Mama before I was born. She got tired of waiting for me. I was several weeks late, and she went back to Nebraska.

"When Grandpa Clinton Briggs died in 1929, our family stopped at Grandma Crabtree's home. Here are a few memories:

"Grandma upset a glass of water at meal time and started laughing, everyone joined in and laughed with her.

"Grandma Crabtree made sugar cookies and put a raisin in the middle of them.

"When my sister Laura and I were quarreling, Grandma Crabtree had each of us sit in a chair to see who could be quietest the longest.

"Grandma Crabtree and Aunt Mary always sent us Christmas presents.

"Grandma Crabtree was a laugher, her Irish sense of humor. She loved to laugh.

"She administered any justice that needed to be done in the family.

"One time Mama [Myrtle] made her mother a dress for a present. She thought it was so pretty, but when Grandma [Ida] opened it, she took one look and said, 'Purple's for old ladies!'"

Great Grandson, Cal Bivens, Leroy Crabtree's Grandson:

"She seems to have been a colorful character. The daughter of Irish immigrants, she shared a lively sense of humor with her brother, Ed. At the same time, when she was serious, she meant business. Aunt Mary (Ida's daughter) told me that, 'When she told you to do something, you did it.'

"She had the no nonsense aspect of her brother Jim, but she also had the keen sense of humor of her brother Edward. I have one photo that was staged where she looks like she is going after Everett McElroy with a hickory switch. We all got a good chuckle from it.

"Once while looking through the old album, Mary, saw the 1910 studio portrait of her mother and giggled, saying, 'Mama looks so fierce.'

"Emily would not wear a black dress to a funeral. Her daughter Myrtie reportedly picked up the habit. Emily was especially fond of the color red and had no reservations about wearing a red dress."



Ida Crabtree.



Irwin Briggs holding son John, Ida Crabtree, Myrtle Crabtree Briggs, LeRoy Crabtree, Mary Crabtree. In front of Ida, Mildred, Laura, Mary.

Granddaughter Mary Briggs Austin, Myrtie's Daughter:

"Ida and her brother, were so funny (Irish wit) that whenever the people would hear their telephone ring, they'd pick up the phones and listen in. That was in the days of the party line and you could listen in on others conversations.

"She made many quilts. Even in her last days when she was sick in bed and couldn't sew anymore, she made her fingers go like she was sewing." ❀



This is me standing in one of the flower beds west of the house. Some of cannas grew taller than I am and the dahlias were almost as tall. The 4 o'clocks were waist-high when blooming none were that tall when the picture was taken.

Back of the card: "This is me standing in one of the flower beds west of the house. Some of cannas grew taller than I am and the dahlias were almost as tall. The 4 o'clocks were waist high when blooming. None were that tall when the picture was taken."
—Ida Crabtree



Back of photo: "This is a cool place. The tree was covered with ice and the snow was shoe top deep so I dug a place to stand in. It was taken in January."
—Ida Crabtree



Ida with her children: Berenice and Johnie Crabtree, Myrtle and Irwin Briggs, Ida Crabtree, Mary Crabtree, LeRoy and Ollie Crabtree behind Mary.