

CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN PROFILES
PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY
WITH PEOPLE, EVENTS & PLACES
By Jeannie Watson

GRACE FINLAY CRAIG

Grace Finlay Craig was an original pioneer of Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan who migrated with her family, from Scotland to Oneida Co, New York in 1832, and then to Southwest Michigan in 1842. She was the wife of James Watson. Grace was a strong, determined woman, who met the challenges of a settler's wife, raised her children, and survived the uncivilized wilds of early Michigan. Her family remembered her most for the rich Scottish traditions she brought to Wayne Township, her woven tartans and her story telling. Based on the family legends, she used to entertain her children and grandchildren during cold Michigan winter nights, Grace's ancient ancestors were members of the Craigie Clan and had connections to two Scottish Castles. Her colorful tales became part of Wayne Township's early oral Scottish history, and a favored way to spend quiet nights during Michigan's snow bound winters.

Craig was a topographical place name in Scotland, referring to the prominent rock projects which were rough and steep regions where the Craigs lived. Craig means "rocky hill" in Gaelic. The surname has evolved from Craigievar, to Craigie, to the Americanized Craig.

The "Clan Craig Association of America acts as the official representative of the Craig Clan in Scotland," because it currently has no hereditary male chief or laird to inherit the title. To be legally recognized by the Lord Lyons King of Arms, a line of male heirs must be proven. If daughters carry on the blood line, the lineage still remains, but the entitlement fails. Many family surnames in genealogy face similar fates, because daughters were the only survivors to reproduce.

A number of Grace's relatives and clan played major roles in Scottish history. John Craig of St. Andrews University in Scotland was a relative of Grace. In the early stages of the Reformation, he "was imprisoned by the Catholics for adopting Protestantism," and sentenced to death. He "escaped and joined John Knox," living to see the Scottish Reformation triumph." Based on family lore, her father shared ancestors with Isodor Craigie, wife of Sir William Forbes (Craig), the 1st Baronet of Craigievar. In the early history of Scotland, when a marriage took place between prominent families, the more prestigious of the surnames was used to identify the new family. In this case, Isodora Craigie's clan were the superior land owners, even though her merchant husband was wealthier, so William took the Craigie name, as did all children. In 1610, William Forbes Craig bought Craigievar, a partially built Craig strong hold. In 1626, he built onto the old structure and made it Craigievar Castle, now owned by the National Trust for Scotland. It is located in the Old Barony of Craigie, 4 miles southeast of Kilmarnock. The Craigs of Craigfintry, were later called "Riccarton." Tales of this castle were part of the oral Scottish history of Wayne Township, as told by Grace.

Grace's bloodline came from a younger son, so her side of the family had no claim on inherited titles or lands, and had to make their own way in the world. This is a common practice in the British Commonwealth of Nations, where only the oldest living son can inherit entailed lands, titles, and real property. Entailment requires "an unalterable succession of heirs." However, Craig family lore claims a direct connect to a second castle that is in ruins in Scotland, Castle "Kragy" or "Craigie Castle Ruins."

Craigie Castle Ruins is one mile southeast of Craigie Village, in Parish Craigie, South Ayrshire, Scotland; the area in which Grace was born. Surrounded by ditches and lochans (water channels), it was built in the 15th century atop 12th and 13th century Craig fortification ruins. This is where Grace said was home to her

ancestors before the Lyndesay Clan (Lindsay), Wallaces and Hoses took over ownership. In ancient times, the Scottish would claim possession of a castle in battle, and such property might change ownership many times. Today the ruins is a historic site.

Grace Finlay Craig was born on September 9, 1804 in Craigie Village, Parish of Craigie, Barony of Craigie, South Ayrshire, Scotland to Lazarus Craig (1781-1820) and Susannah Cuninghame (1783-1839). Grace Craig's ancestors were Scottish whiskey distillers.

Grace Finlay Craig was raised and educated in Muthill Village, Parish of Muthill, Scotland. In 1822, at age 18, Grace Craig wed James Watson in Aberdeen shire, Scotland. The marriage produced 12 children: (1) James, Jr. (1823-7/14/1849), (2) Julia (11/3/1823-8/19/1878) who wed Samuel Scott, (3) Joseph (1825-1903) who married Mary Louise (born 1829) and is buried in Burr Oak Cemetery, (4) Jane H. (12/11/1827-1/27/1874) who wed Alfred Atkins, (5) Janett (12/11/1830-5/7/1911), (6) Elizabeth (born 1832), (7) Margaret (1833-5/19/1856) who married Edwin Pierce, (8) William (8/28/1835-1912) who wed Esther Ann Smith, (9) Mary Ellen (2/25/1838-10/22/1858) who died of pneumonia, (10) Grace Catherine (1840-1851), (11) John C. Watson (1842-1923) who married Viola A. (1849-1926), and (12) "Alex" Alexander Watson (6/12/1846-4/25/1914) who wed Julia (1855-1878) and wed Mary J. Smith (1853-1908).

The family migrated to New York Mills, Oneida County, New York, from Scotland in 1836. It was there that they heard about the opportunities to own large tracks of land in Michigan. In 1842, the group moved by oxen and horse drawn wagons to Michigan. In one wagon, disassembled and carefully packed, was Grace's wool weaver's cloth tartan hand loom, and thread spinning wheel. The family first founded and settled in what came to be known as Watson Settlement, a small Scottish community north of Dowagiac, Michigan. After improving the wetlands there, they then sold out, and moved to Section 14 of Wayne Township. Her husband built her a "single story log cabin that was 30 foot long by 15 foot wide." It was replaced with a lumber built farm house, when the steam powered saw mill came to Glenwood.

Grace raised her children with "good old Scottish values." "Thrift, persistence, appreciation of hard labor, pride in a accomplishment, resilience, and honesty were her rules." Her children walked to the one room rural school house everyday, regardless of the weather. They did their daily chores on the farm, and learned the trades of their father (farming and the conversion of wetlands to "bottom land"). She tended a vegetable garden, kept chickens, and raised a flock of sheep. Her husband would shear the sheep for their wool. She would spin the wool into thread, dye it various family colors from natural sources, and then weave it into tartans on her loom. Even after her husband became highly successful, and she could live the comfortable life of her choice, Grace Craig continued to do what she enjoyed most; weaver tartans.

Scottish Tartans are specially designed cloths, with plaid stripes of different colors and sizes at right angles, with repeating patterns, of woven wool (or cotton) fabrics, that are easily recognized for their clan affiliation. In Scotland, "every clan had a different tartan and could be recognized by the weave," just like a badge or sign identified different groups of people in America. "Tartan weaves were the pictorial equivalent of a surname." Many Wayne Township family members, and Scottish friends, wore Grace's tartan fur lined coats, scarves, and gloves. She would make long tartan skirts for her daughters, and plaids (shirts for dressy occasions) for her boys. She was, also, known for her wool tartan blankets, plaid curtains, and tartan table cloths. Grace, her friends, daughters and grand-daughters practiced that weaver's skill for three generations. It was as if, somehow, the tartan helped them hold onto their heritage.

The Watson Tartan (of Wayne Township) was a plaid cloth of royal blue squares with red stripes, surrounded by navy blue and black threads, around which were green and yellow stripes. The Craigie (Craig) Tartan (of Wayne Township) was a green, gray, red and black plaid. One of the friends who learned to weave these two tartan cloth from Grace, besides her own daughters, was Emily, the wife of John Shook. Emily was

very industrious in this pursuit, and enjoyed using the tartan cloth to make apparel for friends.

In 1834, John Shook had migrated from Ohio. After Grace's husband, James Watson, bought land in Section 12 of Wayne Township, the Shook family rented a section of the land. They stayed on the property until their deaths, many years later. Emily Shook was the best friend of Grace Finlay Craig Watson.

It should be pointed out that during the summer months, on very special occasions, the original Scott men, women and children pioneers of Wayne Township would get together for special dinners and competitive games. The men would put on kilts (a short Scottish pleated skirt worn by the males for dressy occasions). It was made of the clan plaid tartan. By tradition nothing was worn under the kilt and shoulder drape, but a white shirt. After a few generations, the Scottish community of Wayne Township became fully Americanized and lost touch with its Scottish heritage. The only thing that remained were old family records, yellowing with age in hot attics, and the oral history passed from parent to child, which was finally recorded.

Grace Finlay Craig and James Watson appear on the U.S. Federal Census of 1850 and 1860 in Wayne Township, with their family. On the 1870 Census, she was 66 years of age. She and James were still living in Section 14 of Wayne Township. Her youngest son "Alex" Alexander Watson had taken over the family farm homestead, and was listed as head of the household. Grace spent her final years surrounded by her children, and grandchildren.

Grace Finlay Craig died on March 3, 1874 in Wayne Township. She and her husband are buried in Section "33/34 P" of the South Wayne Chapel Cemetery on Gage Street, Section 24, Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan. The tombstone for the couple is weathered and broken, but still readable. Most of her children rest in eternal slumber nearby, as well as many other descendants.

Grace loved poetry, and would spend many hours reading the works of popular writers of her era. Heirs found the following favored tattered poem in her personal papers. The sentiment sums up her philosophy of life. For the sake of her descendants it is recorded here:

I SHALL NOT PASS THIS WAY AGAIN
by Stephen Grellet (1773-1855)

"I expect to pass through this world but once,
Any good, therefore, that I can do,
Or any kindness I can show,
To any fellow creature,
Let me do it now,
And not defer or neglect it,
For I shall not pass this way again."

In conclusion, Grace Finlay Craig was an original pioneer of Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan, arriving in 1842. She was of Scottish descent, a devoted wife, and a loving mother. She raised her children with firm old country Scottish values. She was a descendent of the Craigie Clan of Scotland, a weaver of fine wool tartan cloth, a skilled textile seamstress, and a friend to many. Grace was a story teller, who entertained her children and grandchildren with tales of Scottish ancestors, heroic knights, family castles, and family legends. While she was alive, she maintained the heritage of her past. Many of her descendants still survive today in Cass and Berrien County, Michigan. Grace lived to be 70 years of age. She was a part of Cass County's ethnic past, which slowly faded, to be replaced with Americanized descendants. Grace has earned her rightful place in local history.

Special Thanks: Special Thanks to the Scottish Registry of Tartans, National Archives of Scotland, for allowing a screen capture of the current Craig and Watson Clan Tartans in this non-profit profile.

RESEARCH

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