

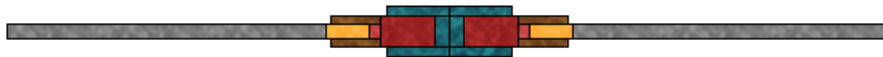


Dorothy Clora Cragen  
August 9, 1891 - December 29, 1983

Dorothy Clora Lathrop was born in Fountain, Shawnee County, Indiana to Nancy Johnson and Robert Bruce Lathrop in 1891. Robert Bruce Lathrop was a veteran of the Civil War and evidence of this service became some of Dorothy's most prized possessions. Dorothy had her father's original discharge papers from the 63rd Indiana Infantry, two daguerreotypes of her father, and a cannon shot her father retrieved from the trunk of a tree that was meant to hit him.

Dorothy moved to Lone Pine, Inyo County, California in the 1930s. She quickly put her college education to good use in the schools of Inyo County. She was later elected the Inyo County Superintendent of Schools for four consecutive terms. After retiring from her educational career she became involved in the operations of the Eastern California Museum in Independence, serving as its Director and President of its association for many years. It is in this capacity that she worked to preserve the history of the area in so many ways over so many years.

Dorothy loved Eastern California and specifically Inyo County with a passion that cannot be sufficiently described in words. She adopted the Owens Valley as the true home of her heart and we honor her for her valuable contributions. It is due to the dedicated work of Dorothy Clora Cragen that the story of Eastern California has taken its righteous place among the greatest sagas of the building of our nation.



### About the Author

Education and history have been the cornerstones of Dorothy C. Cragen's life since she moved to Inyo County in 1928. Serving first as a school teacher and then Supervisor of

Education for Inyo County, she was elected Superintendent of Schools for the county in 1939, a post she held for 16 years.

After retiring in 1955, she went to work for the Eastern California Museum, eventually as its Director. She has belonged to the Eastern California Museum Association, Inc. for 25 years and has served on its Board of Trustees. She is now Membership Secretary and editor of its monthly Newsletter.

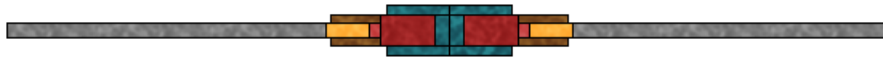
She is also a member of the Inyo County American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Council on Abandoned Military Posts, U. S. A.

Mrs. Cragen has written a column, "Round About the Museum," in the Inyo Independent and other Chalfant papers.

She has researched "The Boys in the Sky-Blue Pants" since coming to Inyo County, "finding the facts," she says, "far more interesting than any fiction that has been written about the country sometimes spoken of as 'back of beyond.'"

Transcribed by Denise S. Flynn, July 12, 2005

Used with permission of Candy Ross, copyright holder.



### Dorothy Cragen Honored at Museum Banquet

Approximately 50 officers and members of the Eastern California Museum Association met at a dinner at the Embers in Bishop, Saturday evening, Jan. 21, to honor Dorothy C. Cragen who has retired as director of Eastern California Museum. She had been director since 1953 and a trustee of the association since 1952.

Silver, desert-holly trees decorated the tables, and the placecards, made by Irene and Lucy Brichaga of Lone Pine were black and shaped as obsidian arrowheads. The holly trees were also made by Irene and Lucy with the exception of one large tree surrounded by other items of the desert at Dorothy's plate that was made by Mrs. Marguerite Carr. This arrangement symbolized the land which Dorothy has always loved and made everyone associated with her appreciate.

William E. Caipen was the master of ceremonies. He introduced the members of the board of trustees, out of town guests, and the various speakers.

Mrs. Marguerite Carr was introduced, and she gave a talk called "Dorothy, This Is Your

Life." She spoke of the many years of service Dorothy has given to Inyo county in various educational positions – as teacher, Supervisor of Education, sixteen years as County Superintendent of Schools, and as director of the museum.

Since 1958 she has built the membership from 100 to 1600, the members representing all parts of California and eight other states. During her years as director, she has made every effort to make the people of Inyo aware of their historical heritage and has helped in every way possible to protect that heritage.

At the end of Mrs. Carr's talk, she presented Dorothy with a little red schoolhouse that contained a money gift.

Other dinner speakers were Mrs. Clarence Cleman, president of Bishop Museum and Historical Society; Frank Parcher, and Henry Miller of Bishop; Dr. George and Hazel Schultz of Oceanside; and Mrs. Elodia Drew of Independence.

The committee for the dinner included Mrs. Ethel Olivas, Irene and Lucy Brichaga of Lone Pine, Mrs. Edith Nolan of Independence, and Mrs. Marguerite Carr of Bishop.

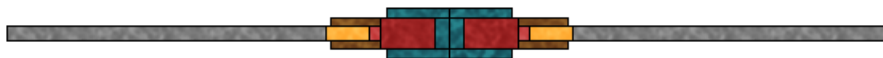
Mrs. Cragen was very appreciative of her wonderful gift and the many well-wishes that accompanied it from her long-time friends and associates.

Mr. and Mrs. John Morris of the Embers, who had served the very fine dinner, were introduced and extended their best wishes to Mrs. Cragen, whom they had known for many years.

Inyo Register, Bishop, Inyo County, California

Thursday, January 26, 1967 – Page Six

Transcribed by Denise S. Flynn for Inyo County GenWeb, July 1, 2005



## From the Banks of the Wabash to the Owens River Valley: A story of the life of Dorothy C. Cragen

by Candy (Slater) Ross

This is a story about my grandmother, my mother's mother, Dorothy C. Cragen. Her life spanned 92 years from the end of the Victorian Age to the Space Age. This is a saga of a woman whose dad was a Civil War veteran, who was a Hoosier born on the banks of the Wabash River, whose family were farmers, who, as a young girl went to a one-room schoolhouse with outhouses and a hand pump well,

whose family kept their food cold in caves with ice in them along the Wabash River, who traveled by wagon to Oklahoma when she was 9 years old. She received her early schooling there, married and had one child, and eventually found her way to the Owens Valley during the Depression years. Here she would be a teacher, supervisor, and eventually serve 16 years as Inyo County Superintendent of Schools, and 10 years as Director of the Eastern California Museum. Besides the admiration I have for her as my grandmother, I feel she led a remarkable life for a woman born August 9, 1891. She pursued higher education in 1909 at a time when few women did so, and the family at the time was living on a \$25 a month pension her mother received as being a widow of a veteran. Her three brothers all began work as farmers at age 14. I remember my grandmother from an early age and even though she was in her 60s at the time, she never seemed like an old lady. We always lived in the same town or within 40 miles of each other. Even in her 80s she was always a tower of strength and will to us all. I always admired her ability to go on in the face of adversity and to succeed and I am convinced that her strong spirit led her from the beginning.

I remember her talking about her father and treasuring the daguerreotype of him as a soldier in the Civil War. He was only 16 when he joined the Union forces as an Indiana infantryman. That was underage and so he had to say he was older to get in. She also saved a cannonball that he dug out of a nearby log, a cannonball that had been shot at him. She had his Honorable Discharge, dated May 3, 1865. The family lived in a little town called Fountain, Indiana (near Portland today). Bruce and Nancy Lathrop had four children, then ten years passed, and they had four more children. The first four children were all destined to die young. Two of the girls had just married and were expecting their first children when typhus hit. Of the second four children, all lived to be in their 80s, and grandma, the youngest, lived to be the oldest, 92. When she was 9 years old, the family had already suffered the tragedies of the deaths of the first four children. Her father, then 54, contracted a cancer on his face. In those days, there was nothing that could be done. He wore a rag around his face and refused to eat with the family. One day when they were outside and he was very weakened by the disease, he put a shotgun on a chair and laid down on the bed and tied a string to the trigger and killed himself to spare his family anymore suffering. Grandma's 14-yr. old brother, Charlie, found his dad. Now Nancy Lathrop had to make her way alone on a \$25 pension and four children to look after. They traveled by wagon to Oklahoma where she had family. Eventually her son, Bingley went back and established his family in Indianapolis, and her middle son, Harvey lived and raised a family in Weatherford, Oklahoma.

My grandmother married at 18 and in 1910 my mother, Mavis, was born. Grandma entered Southwest Teachers College in Weatherford that still exists today. After she became a teacher, she, her daughter, and her brother, Charlie, who was

a carpenter moved to Los Angeles in 1922. Charlie had already been to California and grandma was entranced with the West, so when Mavis was 12, they made the long trek to California in a Model T Ford. My mother's dad was a farmer and he would not leave the land he knew. Grandma got teaching jobs and Charlie worked as a carpenter and they both felt lucky to have work during the Depression years. My mother graduated from Brawley High School and entered UCLA at the young age of 16, graduating as a teacher at age 19. Grandma pursued higher education at USC, earning her administrative credential. In 1928 grandma moved to Lone Pine to take a teaching position. When Mavis came to visit her, she too was offered a teaching job. Grandma taught in the old wooden schoolhouse. The Museum has a picture of it. She remembered one day when they all heard an explosion and she and the kids ran to the window, and it was a "still" that had blown up. My mother taught in the old rock schoolhouse, now in ruins at Cartago, and later at the West Bishop School where the Valley Presbyterian Church is now on Line Street.

Grandma became a county supervisor and ultimately ran for Inyo County Superintendent of Schools. She was elected to four terms and served 16 years. She served during WWII and coordinated school activities with the director of Manzanar during that time. She retired in 1956, having served 42 years in education. She then took on another career that had been a lifelong hobby for her. She loved history. She became Director of the Eastern California Museum and president of its association and built its membership up from 300 to 1500 over her ten years of service. She wrote a weekly column for the Inyo Register for 25 years called "Round About the Museum," continuing long after her retirement. The museum at this time was in cramped quarters in the basement of the courthouse where the Justice Court is today. Before she retired, she approached the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power with the idea of leasing the land the current Museum stands on, and the Dow family for their donation for \$40,000 to build the building. Not long after she suffered a heart attack, but managed to recover (at age 76) and speak at the dedication. She had also made a trip to Los Angeles with County Administrator John K. Smith to purchase the Black collection of baskets for \$6,000, now a priceless collection. During all the past 30 years she had researched a book on Camp Independence and in 1975 at the age of 84, the book was published, called "The Boys in Sky-Blue Pants - The Story of Camp Independence". She had become acquainted with the daughter of General George S. Evans, Hallie Lane Evans, who loaned grandma the diary he made when he entered the Owens Valley in 1862 and established the fort, July 4, 1862. She also gave grandma a nice picture of him and his ivory-handled cane which grandma gave to the Commander's House, after she had worked with a committee to obtain it from DWP so it could be preserved by the museum and run by Inyo County. My mother and I hosted a party for her and it was a very successful book, selling locally and around the country to many museums and history buffs. She gave copies to all the branches of the Inyo County Free

Library, and they still sell at the Museum, Inter-Agency Visitor Center in Lone Pine, Laws Museum, and Spellbinder Bookstore in Bishop.

She was a very active member of the Eastern California Museum Assn., participating in field trips - going to Monache Meadows in her 80s - always going to Death Valley at the drop of a hat! A project dear to her heart and one she pursued for many years after retiring was writing a monthly newsletter to association members. She also served on the State Historical Landmark Committee that placed markers at the Mary Austin home, the Bishop Battlefield and many other sites. Each year the Museum Association held an annual dinner. She invited people like Dr. Louis B. Leakey, and Dr. David B. Slemmons, a noted seismologist from the University of Nevada, Reno, and Ruth D. Simpson from the Calico digs, for guest speakers. The association continues with this tradition today. She also wrote pageants that were enacted as part of the Fourth of July celebrations in Independence. She was an active member of the Bishop Bottle Club and over the years dug up many a bottle at Tonopah and other places. Her collections numbered in the thousands, and for many years, she operated the Ft. Independence Antique Shop from her home. She and my mother purchased the home at 149 Kearsarge St. in Independence from the DWP in 1945. It is the only other existing building from Camp Independence, having been the fort hospital. The two buildings (Commander's house and hers) were moved into town, a distance of two miles around 1888. This home was her pride and joy for 38 years. She loved the history of it and furnished it with many lovely antiques. Both homes have adobe fireplaces, French doors, 12 ft. ceilings, transoms, and other Victorian features. Until well in her 80s she climbed the 22 stairs of the original walnut staircase to her balcony bedroom each day.

In the 50s she published a book of poetry called My Land. The cover was done by Aim Morhardt, who also did the cover on "The Boys in the Sky-Blue Pants". She also wrote the history section of the book, "Deepest Valley", edited by Genny Schumacher.

She had remarkable health during her lifetime, fully recovering from her heart attack at age 76, but after she lost her daughter, Mavis Slater, who endured a 5 yr. battle against cancer, her health deteriorated. She was then 86. She lived with me until she died December 29, 1984.

A few years later I was standing at the cemetery in Fountain, Indiana; therein lie buried her father, Bruce Lathrop, sisters and a brother, and her grandfather and great-grandfather with Civil War, War of 1812 and Revolutionary War markers. The family is now scattered across the nation. But for the girl who was born and raised there, she had come to love another land, that one east of the High Sierra, and as it said in her book of poetry, that is where she wanted to rest at the end of her day.

The blue hills, the purple hills  
O Lord, let me stay  
Where the blue hills, the purple hills  
Call to me each day.

The deep vales, the jagged peaks  
The snowy mountain crest  
Among the at the end of the day  
O Lord, do let me rest.

---

Written by Candy (Slater) Ross  
Edited and transcribed by Denise S. Flynn, July 2005

[Miscellaneous photos can be found here.](#)