

## Finding Aid to the Robert D. Crawford Papers

### **Crawford, Robert D., 1871-1964**

Robert D. Crawford papers, 1881-1963

.8 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 290

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[Biography](#)

[Scope and Content](#)

[Box and Folder List](#)

### **OVERVIEW**

**Access:** The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

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### **BIOGRAPHY**

Robert David Crawford was born September 17, 1871 at Rochester, Minnesota the son of John Mand and Louisa J. (Gorham) Crawford. They were pioneers coming from Vermont and settling at Rochester. The family moved shortly thereafter to Eyota, Minnesota where his father was employed in a lumber yard. In 1881 the family moved to Wahpeton, Dakota Territory and took out a homestead west of Wahpeton. Here Mr. Crawford helped on the farm, attended school and in 1894 rented his father's farm. He also attended Fargo College for several years. In early 1895, Mr. Crawford moved to Akron, Ohio and became employed in an electrical engineering factory as an apprentice. He also attended night school in

electricity at Fort Wayne, Indiana, the Lewis Institute in Chicago, and the International Correspondence School.

On June 24, 1903, Mr. Crawford married Alice Ward, the daughter of William T. and Martha (Denniston) Ward of Mooreton, North Dakota. She was born May 6, 1874 near Newburgh, New York. They continued to live at Akron and had four children; John, Robert, Helen, and William. Mr. Crawford later became a sales engineer and retired in 1952. In retirement and earlier he spent much time gathering information and writing about his and his parents' pioneer days. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford later moved to East Setauket, New York to be closer to their children. Mrs. Crawford died July 28, 1963, and Mr. Crawford February 16, 1964 and were buried at Newburgh, New York.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The [Correspondence Series](#), arranged chronologically, consist of two parts. The first part consists of 127 letters dated from 1867 to 1880. It is comprised of letters between John and Henry Crawford, who were brothers, and other family members. The early letters recount when, in 1867, Henry Crawford assembled about 80 sheep from various farmers in the Putney, Vermont area to ship to Chicago in order to sell them at a profit. Unsuccessful there, he continued on to Madison, Wisconsin and finally Rochester, Minnesota. He later returned to Vermont and John Crawford went to Rochester to take over the sale of the sheep. He also worked in the area and decided to stay in the west. In 1870 he returned to Vermont to marry Louisa Gorham. They settled in Rochester and later moved to Eyota, Minnesota where they lived until 1881 when they homesteaded in Dakota Territory.

The letters document very well their life in Rochester and Eyota as well as their families in Vermont. The other part of the correspondence series consists of 42 letters dating from 1881 to 1894 covering the "Dakota period". They consist mainly of letters Robert Crawford and his father wrote to their relatives in Vermont, and are very descriptive of pioneer life in Dakota for that period. Several of the letters are copies written by Mrs. Crawford while at the Jamestown State Hospital. The 1943 and 1950 letters are copies and relate to comments on *The Checkered Years*. The later correspondence is with Mr. Leonard Sackett concerning the donations of the papers as well as biographical material.

The [Manuscript Series](#), the major part of the collection, consists of Mr. Crawford's manuscript relating the life of his parents and himself in Minnesota and North Dakota. It is a handwritten, 734 page manuscript which is quite legible. He used these family letters and his memory to recount this history. It is very detailed and gives an excellent look at the life and problems of a pioneer farm family. The first fifty pages are devoted to Vermont and genealogical information. Pages 52-151, approximately, concern his uncle and father in Minnesota and the family at Rochester and Eyota. The Dakota era, up to 1893, is related from page 152 until the end. Subjects of note (with beginning page) include Breckenridge, Minnesota and Wahpeton, North Dakota (p. 176), Fort Abercrombie (p. 185), breaking sod (p. 235), mirages (p. 201), farm building (p. 259), threshing (p. 280, 326, 385, 633), prairie fires (p. 335), blizzards (p. 358, 515, 586), Bonanza farms (p. 369), mail order catalogs (p. 398), women pioneers (p. 404, 685), alcohol (p. 570, 643), wildlife, fowl (p. 436, 476), insects (p. 496A), and the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 (p. 721).

Another manuscript by Mr. Crawford is “The First Pioneer Years in Dacotah Territory, 1881-1882” which is a typed 28-page copy recounting pioneer experiences. It was written in 1951 with portions published in the Wahpeton newspaper. The other manuscript is a 34-page, typed copy of notes by Mr. Crawford related to the book *The Checkered Years*, which is excerpts from the diary of Mary Dodge Woodward while living on the Dodge bonanza farm in Cass County. This manuscript includes comments, clarifications, and contradictions of Mrs. Woodward’s book as well as comparison events in his own family. The final item is a list by section, township, and range of property in Richland County owned by the Dwight Farm and Land Company.

| <b>BOX/FOLDER</b> | <b>CONTENTS</b>                       |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1/1               | Biographical material and Finding aid |

**Correspondence Series**

|      |            |
|------|------------|
| 1/2  | 1867       |
| 1/3  | 1868       |
| 1/4  | 1869-1870  |
| 1/5  | 1871-1872  |
| 1/6  | 1873-1875  |
| 1/7  | 1876-1877  |
| 1/8  | 1878       |
| 1/9  | 1879       |
| 1/10 | 1880       |
| 1/11 | 1881       |
| 1/12 | 1882-1886  |
| 1/13 | 1887-1891  |
| 1/14 | 1892-1894  |
| 1/15 | 1943, 1950 |
| 1/16 | 1954-1963  |

**Manuscript Series**

|      |                             |
|------|-----------------------------|
| 1/17 | pp. 1-30                    |
| 1/18 | pp. 31-51                   |
| 1/19 | pp. 56-69, August 1867-1872 |
| 1/20 | pp. 70-93, 1872-1877        |
| 1/21 | pp. 94-115, 1878            |
| 1/22 | pp. 116-137, 1879           |
| 1/23 | pp. 138-151, 1880           |
| 1/24 | pp. 152-175, 1881           |
| 1/25 | pp. 176-205, 1881           |

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2/1  | pp. 206-215, 1881   |
| 2/2  | pp. 216-234, 1882   |
| 2/3  | pp. 235-258, 1882   |
| 2/4  | pp. 259-277, 1882   |
| 2/5  | pp. 278-302, 1882   |
| 2/6  | pp. 303-325, 1883   |
| 2/7  | pp. 326-348, 1883   |
| 2/8  | pp. 349-372, 1884   |
| 2/9  | pp. 379-401, 1884   |
| 2/10 | pp. 402-425, 1885   |
| 2/11 | pp. 426-459, 1885   |
| 2/12 | pp. 460-485, 1886   |
| 2/13 | pp. 486-510, 1886   |
| 2/14 | pp. 511-549, 1887   |
| 2/15 | pp. 550-585, 1887   |
| 2/16 | pp. 586-627, 1888   |
| 2/17 | pp. 628-650, 1889 - March 31, 1890                            |
| 2/18 | pp. 651-671, 1889 - March 31, 1890                            |
| 2/19 | pp. 676-695, April 1, 1890 - December 1890                    |
| 2/20 | 696-706, 1891   |
| 2/21 | 707-720, 1892   |
| 2/22 | 714-734, 1893   |
| 2/23 | "First Pioneer Years in Dacotah Territory, 1881-1882", 28 pp. |
| 2/24 | Notes on <i>The Checkered Years</i> , 1943                    |
| 2/25 | Dwight Farm lands   |