

Francis Marion Crawford & *Love in Idleness* (1894)

Links/notes prepared in November/December 2022. Due to the ephemeral nature of links, we apologize if any of these are broken in the future.

Library/Archives/Collections:

1. Correspondence, mainly with his wife, is archived at Harvard's Houghton Library
2. Manuscripts, and bulk of his collection, at the Huntington Library: manuscripts for seven novels and two plays, partial manuscripts for five works, and outlines and notes for several novels and essays.

PART 1.

Francis Marion Crawford

1854: Born in Bagni di Lucca, Tuscany (Italy) -

He wrote over 40 novels, along with plays, short stories, and non-fiction books. He wrote a lot of romances, but he's remembered now for his horror stories.¹

Francis grew up in quite a cultured household. His father was Thomas Crawford, notable architect (the Capitol building is just one example); he died a few years after Francis's birth in Italy.

His father, Thomas Crawford, designed the Statue of Freedom on top of the Capitol building in DC. "Perhaps no sculptor had more influence on the appearance of the U.S. Capitol Building than Thomas Crawford (1814-1857)."²

"One way to look at Crawford's life is as one of associations. His [mother] was... Louisa Cutler Ward, the sister of Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910), author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and Samuel Cutler Ward (1814-1884), the so-called "King of the Lobby." Further back on his mother's side, Crawford was related to William Greene (1731-1809), governor of Rhode Island, and Francis Marion (ca. 1732-1795), the famed "Swamp Fox" of the American Revolution, for whom he was named. F. Marion Crawford's own sister was Mary Crawford Fraser (1851-1922), also known as Mrs. Hugh Fraser. Wife of a diplomat, she too was an author."³

Mrs. Crawford and Francis and his sisters remained in Italy until he was 12. He learned to speak French, Italian, and English. They moved to the US and he attended St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire, for a few years. They returned to Italy when he was 15.⁴

"His sister Mary judged her younger brother vain and conceited but also a perfect gentleman with a great reverence for women. As he matured, the Crawfords had to dismiss more than one governess who fell in love with the *virilissimo* Marion, a blue-eyed, powerfully built natural athlete with a pleasant singing voice. Mary recalls his tutors fighting over his short attention span."⁵

¹ <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/c/f-marion-crawford/>

² <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/statue-freedom>

³ <https://tellersofweirdtales.blogspot.com/2012/10/f-marion-crawford-1854-1909.html>

⁴ <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1909/04/10/101034721.pdf>

⁵ <https://newcriterion.com/blogs/dispatch/the-fox-of-villa-crawford>

He studied successively at Cambridge University; University of Heidelberg; and the University of Rome. He eventually became fluent in 15 languages.⁶ His interests ranged from mathematics to languages to pugilism to tandem driving.⁷

“In 1879, he went to India, where he studied Sanskrit and edited in Allahabad *The Indian Herald*. Returning to America in February 1881, he continued to study Sanskrit at Harvard University for a year and for two years contributed to various periodicals, mainly *The Critic*. Early in 1882, he established his lifelong close friendship with Isabella Stewart Gardner. His uncle Sam Ward suggested he try writing about his years in India and helped him develop contacts with New York publishers.” - Wikipedia

“[Experiences during his stay in India] provided the inspiration for *Mr. Isaacs* (1882). This story, the tale of a diamond merchant whose sale of a unique stone brings protest from Britain, marked the beginning of Crawford’s prosperous career.”⁸

Crawford converted to Catholicism in 1880 while he was in India, and four years later, married Elizabeth Christophers Berdan in a Catholic church in Constantinople in 1884. She was the daughter of Civil War general and inventor Hiram Berdan.⁹ Together they had four children. In Italy, he lived at Villa Crawford and wrote at Torre Crawford.

“He was hungry for material and found it outside the walls of his writer’s study. He wandered the wild Abruzzi district with a mule as his sole companion. The peasants taught him winemaking. In Prague, he learned Bohemian, his seventeenth language on top of Slavic, Scandinavian, Persian, Arabic, Latin, and Teutonic dialects. He studied the writers of his adoptive homeland: Petrarch, Dante, Machiavelli, Boccaccio, and more. He sailed his little schooner across the Atlantic without assistance from his lone ship’s mate. He learned silversmithing and Venetian glassworking. At Villa Crawford in Sorrento, he was his own architect, tallying the brickwork for new buttresses in his head and designing improvements to the sea wall. He built reservoirs containing a twelve-month supply of freshwater and sweetened the water with a swarm of live eels, an ancient Italian trick.”

“To pay for his butler, footman, servants, and his yacht with well-dressed sailors, he continued to produce five thousand words per day. When he needed complete solitude to finish his books, he retired to the thick-walled tower of San Niccola, an old bulwark against invading Saracens on the coast of Calabria.”¹⁰

PART 2: HIS WRITING

Library of Congress has some of his books digitized, along with Google Books.

⁶ <https://luminosityitalia.com/pages/Francis-Marion-Crawford.html>

⁷ <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1909/04/10/101034721.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/F-Marion-Crawford>

⁹ <https://tellersofweirdtales.blogspot.com/2012/10/f-marion-crawford-1854-1909.html>

¹⁰ <https://newcriterion.com/blogs/dispatch/the-fox-of-villa-crawford>

Beginning with *Mr. Isaacs: A Tale of Modern India*, Crawford published at least one book per year for the rest of his life. In the process, he became one of the most successful and popular of American authors. Many of his books were set in Italy, where he lived from 1883 onward.¹¹

Examples:

Saracinesca: set in Italy; the first in a popular trilogy of his that introduced to fiction the realm of the Mafia

Khaled: A Tale of Arabia: said to be FMC's personal favorite, about a genie that turns into a human

Uncanny Tales/Wandering Ghosts: A collection of horror short stories (including "Man Overboard!," "The Doll's Ghost," "The Screaming Skull," "The Upper Berth")

"Everybody's magazine for August...the publishers have seized the opportunity offered by the universal interest in the selection of a successor to Pope Leo XIII, and have secured a remarkable article upon the subject from no less important a writer than the Pope's official biographer, F. Marion Crawford. Mr. Crawford is said to be the most highly paid writer living. In this article he reveals some of the inside workings of the most perfect organization in the world. He tells what credentials the new Pope must have. He discusses the available candidates intimately..."¹²

PART 3: BAR HARBOR'S GILDED AGE

"F. Marion Crawford, author of romantic and historical novels, plays, and Italian histories, enjoyed enormous popularity during the nineteenth century, outselling Mark Twain, Henry James, and William Dean Howells. George Brett, President of the American branch of Macmillan, affirmed in a letter to Crawford that his novels, which brought in over a million dollars, were responsible for stabilizing the company. Crawford translated people he knew into his forty-four novels, and the people he knew were the most important figures of the time. Among his pages are his uncle Sam Ward, Gladys Deacon, Nikola Tesla, Nellie Melba, Sarah Bernhardt, and Isabella Stewart Gardner, all of whom were admirers of the author. His letters reveal many friendships, among them Henry James, William Waldorf Astor, and J. Pierpont Morgan, who got Crawford, certified captain of his own schooner, into the New York Yacht Club. An adventurer and romantic, Crawford's life was every bit as enthralling as his novels, which, when read carefully, frequently reveal his own experiences."¹³ - Patricia Hageman, who wrote a 700+ page bio of FMC.

"During visits to New York City, Crawford would hear morning Mass and then lunch with his friends Henry James, John Singer Sargent, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and John La Farge at the house of Mrs. Cadwalader Jones, the sister-in-law of Edith Wharton. Crawford teased James by claiming he could discern when he began dictating his novels."¹⁴

Minnie's salon: "The other day I ascended the well worn stone steps of 21 East Eleventh Street and entered the house for the first time in twenty-five years. I waited in the long drawing room, where nothing seemed changed since that morning when I had been a guest at Sunday luncheon. The imposing mahogany doors, leading to the dining room, polished like dark mirrors, reflected a bowl of roses on the table, a watercolor by La Farge on the wall, the books on the shelves. As I waited for the hostess, time and space were wiped out. It seemed that those doors must presently open, showing the table with its fine linen cloth, sparkling crystal, ancient silver, that I should once more see John La

¹¹ <https://tellersofweirdtales.blogspot.com/2012/10/f-marion-crawford-1854-1909.html>

¹² <https://access.newspaperarchive.com/us/maine/belfast/the-republican-journal/1903/07-30/page-6/>

¹³ Patricia Hageman, <https://wordassociation.com/non-fiction%20book%20page/fmarioncrawford.html>

¹⁴ <https://newcriterion.com/blogs/dispatch/the-fox-of-villa-crawford>

Farge with his strange myopic eyes; [Marion] Crawford, lean, worn, and keen as he had looked that day. Yesterday vanishes, today returns. The door leading from the hall opens, the hostess enters, greets me kindly.”¹⁵

Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill (Winston’s mother), Lady Randolph Churchill’s memoir, written in 1908:

“After the dust and heat of New York, Bar Harbor seemed a haven of rest with its fresh seabreezes, lovely drives and mountain walks. As far as I could gather, the life there was very much a second edition of Newport, and consisted of perpetual dressing, dinners, and that horror of horrors, the leaving of cards. It was very pleasant notwithstanding and we indulged in all the amusements of the place. We were invited to dance at the Kebo Valley Club, a charming house thoroughly suited to the country... Mr. George Vanderbilt - a very cultivated man - was then unmarried [so before 1898,] he had a steam-yacht in which he took us to see Northeast Harbor where we had a fine view and a sea below. Close to his house, which faced the sea, was a swimming bath open to the sky, through which salt water was constantly flowing. Here he and his friends of both sexes disported themselves, bobbing up and down, diving and swimming, without shyness - and, I must say without vanity; for it must be owned that women do not look their best under such circumstances. While in the water there was no hilarity or chaff, everything was conducted with the greatest decorum, not to say ceremony, which added to the ludicrous effect upon the spectators. We dined one night with Mrs. Van Renssealaer [sic] Jones to meet Marion Crawford, who was staying with her. Mr. Marion Crawford was the best of company. Tall, dark, with piercing blue eyes, a decided and kind mouth, adorned with a small mustache. I thought him the very best type of a good-looking American. He has a pleasant voice, modulated by his constant use of the Italian language, and talked most agreeably on all subjects.”¹⁶

During one of his Bar Harbor visits, he attended a ball at Kebo Valley, along with the Morgans, Vanderbilts, Astors, and other members of high society. They danced fairy waltzes. ¹⁷

1889– “Mr. Crawford is a singularly fortunate man. His artistic talents are an inheritance from his father, the sculptor, who for many years was a leading artist of Rome. His literary talent was cultivated in the best schools, and that he has traveled far and to good purpose the readers of his books appreciate. He is a splendid man physically. The most careful attention to exercise, especially fencing, has fully developed this giant. He is young, and must be happy.”¹⁸

Bar Harbor (1894)¹⁹

Talks about what it was like to arrive at the pier by steamboat; what Main Street was like, the boardwalk; observations of the shops and what was for sale; Bar Harbor was a dog town back in 1894!; racist, offensive description of the Passamaquoddy. 100% awful.

“Bar Harbor drinks the cup of summer standing.”

Mentions northern lights in Bar Harbor; best hike is up Newport Mountain.

It’s difficult to paint, lack of atmosphere, bright sun makes it seem like a “chromo-lithograph.” As mentioned in *Love in Idleness*.

¹⁵ Maud Howe Elliott, *My Cousin, F. Marion Crawford* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), 260-61

¹⁶ <https://access.newspaperarchive.com/us/maine/bar-harbor/bar-harbor-record/1909/12-22/page-8/>

¹⁷ <https://access.newspaperarchive.com/us/maine/bar-harbor/bar-harbor-record/1894/08-01/page-12/>

¹⁸ <https://access.newspaperarchive.com/us/maine/bar-harbor/bar-harbor-record/1889/11-14/page-7/>

¹⁹ https://www.google.com/books/edition/Bar_Harbor/s7VHAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PP1&printsec=frontcover

“It could never rival Newport [RI].” Too far from New York; it was hard to show off wealth without a central gathering place, or good roads to ride your carriages around on.

He talks about the earlier history of Bar Harbor, when people mostly stayed in hotels and there were far fewer cottages. The cottages often didn’t have kitchens, so residents (called “mealers”) went to the hotel, even though Francis claims they had bad food.

“The first hotel was erected in Bar Harbor in 1867, but the town was not then widely known in social circles. Rapidly word of the scenic wonders of the island was spread, and by the late 1870’s, Bar Harbor was a booming resort, attracting socialites from all over the eastern United States. At first they were primarily boarders in the hotels. Most prominent of the inns in the town were the Rodick House, which had six-hundred rooms, and the West End and the Grand Central, each of which had over three hundred and fifty rooms.”²⁰

“By 1880 the town of Bar Harbor had become the summer social capital of the United States.”²¹
Millionaires building yachts. Diplomats, the clergy, etc.
Horse racing.

Old Bar Harbor Days, by Marion Peabody

“During the gay 90s I doubt if there was a spot in the world where that decade was pleasanter.”

“A popular excursion in early days was to drive to Eagle Lake, take the little steamer which ran back and forth across the lake and then walk through a beautiful hardwood forest to Jordan’s Pond...path through the woods was called “The Carry,” because the Indians used to carry their canoes along it on their heads. We would often row across the pond to the Jordan’s Pond House, dine and drive home in a buckboard by way of Schooner Head.”

“The Kebo Valley Club was the center of all the social life. There we played in tennis tournaments, golf tournaments, rode in gymkhana races, watched baseball games and horse shows, and danced evenings. There were staged elaborate charity entertainments, which consisted of lovely tableaux Vivantes and various dances – Spanish and Scottish or elaborate minuets. Old Mr. Peter Marie came from Newport and had miniatures painted of the prettiest girls for his collection.”

PART 4. LOVE IN IDLENESS

The connection to Reef Point, Minnie Cadwalader Rawle, Beatrix Jones

“To supplement her reduced income, Mary Jones was by now the manager of Henry James’ literary affairs in America, and would be Edith’s agent, and her daughter Beatrix was embarked on her career as a landscape designer.” - Brad Emerson²²

By 1950, the gardens at Reef Point “rambled over six acres of glacial rock, clay, sea sand, and peat. Heath and heather, sweet gale, royal fern, cranberry, and Labrador tea thrived in the bogs, ferns grew in the damp hollows, and masses of azaleas graced the coastline.”²³

²⁰ Rick Savage’s paper:

https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/8103/Bar_harbor_Life-best_quality.pdf

²¹ Rick Savage’s paper: Louise Dickinson Rich, *Coast of Maine* (New York, 1956), p.255.

²² <https://www.newyorksocialdiary.com/edith-wharton-at-150/>

²³ Lady of Reef Point: https://nehlibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/2015/GEN_0527.pdf

EPILOGUE: Crawford's Death, Villa Crawford

“Weak with fever on Good Friday in 1909, he knew that he would soon “die with Christ.” His faithful sailors carried him onto the sunlit terrace at Villa Crawford. After a seaside nap, he asked to be brought back into his library. “I love to see the reflection of the sun on the bookcases,” he remarked, and asked his daughter to read aloud from Plato’s dialogues. Rosary in hand... his last words were “I enter serenely into eternity.”...The village fishermen kept a silent vigil outside the villa. The shops were closed, flags were lowered to half-mast, and every door posted a sign “closed for public mourning.” Over one thousand people attended his funeral Mass on Easter Monday.”²⁴

“F. Marion Crawford is remembered better today in Italy than in the United States.”²⁵

Additional Sources for Notes:

Historic Bar Harbor photos booklet: <https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/items/show/3082>

[https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/8082/The Morning Dawn Bar Harbor-best quality.pdf](https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/8082/The_Morning_Dawn_Bar_Harbor-best_quality.pdf)

[https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/8109/Memories Of Old Bar Harbor-uncompressed.pdf](https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/8109/Memories_Of_Old_Bar_Harbor-uncompressed.pdf)

[https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/8110/Old Bar Harbor Days-uncompressed.pdf](https://jesuplibrary.net/digitalarchive/files/original/8110/Old_Bar_Harbor_Days-uncompressed.pdf)

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²⁴ <https://newcriterion.com/blogs/dispatch/the-fox-of-villa-crawford>

²⁵ <https://tellersofweirdtales.blogspot.com/2012/10/f-marion-crawford-1854-1909.html>