

Excerpts from a Memoir by Mary Macomber Crook

Mary Catharine Macomber Crook was the step-daughter of Elza Martin. She was born in Davenport, Iowa, in 1855, the daughter of Samuel Macomber and Eliza Ann (Holland) Macomber. Her family moved to Hawleyville, in southwestern Iowa, when she was 2 years old. She was 9 when her father died while serving in the Union Army in 1864, and she was 12 when her mother married Elza Martin in 1867. In November 1872, Mary Catharine married Jackson Crook (and five months later Elza's sister, Lucinda Martin, married Jackson's older brother William R. Crook).

Sometime around 1930, Mary Catharine's "sister" (apparently her half-sister Anna Martin) asked her if she could write down as much as she could remember of her family history. The result was a rambling, 31-page reminiscence that provided a lot of background on her Holland and Macomber ancestors but which also included many recollections of her step-father Elza and her Martin half-siblings. A copy of that manuscript eventually found its way to Mary Catharine's great-grandson Thomas Welch, who spent much time transcribing and annotating it, and adding appropriate illustrations.

Thomas was good enough to send me an electronic copy of his compilation, from which I have excerpted the following passages relating specifically to Martin family history. Inasmuch as we are picking up Mary Catharine's narrative somewhere in the middle, we need to clarify the various relatives she refers to just by their first names or familial designations:

- *Mother — Eliza Ann (Holland) (Macomber) Martin*
- *Wesley — Mary Catharine's brother John Wesley Macomber, born 1858.*
- *Grandmother — Eliza Ann's mother, Mary Smith (Burton) (Holland) Macomber*
- *Uncle George — George Macomber, who was (1) the elder brother of Eliza Ann's first husband and (2) Eliza Ann's stepfather, as he had married her mother, Mary Burton Holland, in 1847 (even though he was 22 years younger than Mary)*
- *Pa — Rev. Elza Martin, Eliza Ann's second husband; Mary Catharine's stepfather.*

*I have added my own annotations to the following excerpts, which take two forms: bracketed inserts [], for short, simple clarifications to the text, and footnotes for additional background information (either, supporting, clarifying, or in some cases contradicting Mary Catharine's narrative). In various places I have omitted material that seemed to have little relevance to Martin history. Ellipses (. . .) indicate omissions within paragraphs; rows of asterisks (* * *) mark places where I have omitted one or more paragraphs.*

—Peter Martin, Lakewood, Colorado, May 2018

Mother Blushes

That year [1866] our grandmother had raised a large garden and we, she and I, had the front yard filled with flowers. It was my delight to gather a small bouquet of flowers for a special friend when they were leaving. One day, Brother Wallace,¹ a minister who lived in Clarinda, stopped to visit a few minutes. He had been to the conference. They asked him who was our new minister for the next year. He told us his name was Martin. He said there were two Martins in the conference and he was not sure which one it was but thought it was a very fine preacher. "And, by the way Sister Ann," he said to mother, "a widower." She said that made no difference to her, but I noticed she blushed. I was 11 years old and beginning to notice some things they didn't think I did. Well in due time he came and we all thought him a good preacher. He had to have a boarding place so he went to Brother Thompson's, the closest residence to the church. Of course we had him to dinner and all made his acquaintance.

About this time Mother began to worry about her money. She asked Uncle George for a note with good security, and he wouldn't give it to her. . . . They talked and he finally promised to build her a house (for the debt), furnished. . . . In the beginning of 1867 Sister Thompson fell sick and could not board the preacher anymore. He came to Grandmother's to board, and it was not but a few weeks until he got sick himself. Of course they had the doctor, but Mother had to nurse him. There was no one else to do it. Child that I was, I could begin to see how things were going. I pointed it out to Grandmother, but she said I was wrong.

First Time Out

The first time they went together was when he went to perform the marriage ceremony of Aunt Belle Flannagin (Uncle Sam [Glassgow]'s sister) and Robert Kelly out at father Glassgow's. Aunt Belle sent word to Mother she wouldn't be married without her. Mother went with the preacher. He owned a fine horse and buggy, and a few weeks later Bill Glassgow married Julia Roberts, a Methodist girl.² Mother accompanied him again. I said "Grandmother, what did I tell you?" She said "Well, he is a nice man." I cried. Along in the late summer he went over to Fremont County to visit his father and when he came back he brought his little daughter³ back with him, I suppose for Mother to see. I was delighted with her and loved her from the first, and we had lots of good times together. We played with a little Negro boy and one day we made a plan to run with him and let go just right to put him in the ditch. He held to her when I let go and it threw her in. Oh-h! It was awful. She was muddy and he didn't get a drop of it.

Uncle George was making our house and we were looking forward to our own home. He took his time.

¹ Probably Thomas Wallace.

² Taylor County, IA, marriage records show that Bill Glasgow married Julia Roberts 12 Dec 1866, but they also show the aforementioned Kelly/Flannagin wedding was not until 4 Feb 1868. Perhaps Mary was remembering a different wedding?

³ Emma, age 8.

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Big Announcement

One day in August, Mother told me she was to marry the preacher the 5th of September. I was nearly heart broken. “Ohh-. Then you and Wesley and I will never live in our little house,” I said. She said “We all will,” and I knew what she meant.

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Preparations

We children fought [grass]hoppers and had Grandmother stop and visit. One day we heard the Preacher bidding them good-bye as he was going away to conference at Des Moines. He said to Mother “I will get back the 4th.” I knew what that meant, for their wedding was to be the 5th of September. Aunt Hannah, Uncle Miles’ wife,⁴ told me they were going to make a big wedding of it and so we girls must stay with her and keep out of the way of the preparations. . . .

Finally the week arrived, and the 4th. The preacher came home. He had been to the conference and been sent back to the Hawleyville work. He was given an assistant since there were several points where they must preach. He had also been to his father’s home in Fremont County, and his father, and brother John, had also come to be present for the wedding. I kept my eyes open and said little. . . .

They had Aunt Lucy, a famous colored cook, to prepare the feast.⁵ In the afternoon of September 5th, guests began to come. Aunt Emma and Uncle Sam, Aunt Serena and Uncle Sam, Uncle Miles and Aunt Hannah, Aunt Belle and Mr. Kelly, Brother and Sister Wallace.⁶ Brother Wallace was the minister who performed the ceremony. Of course the father and brother of the preacher, and fully a dozen or 15 of our own household, counting Aunt Mary’s family.⁷

Sharing a Cry

I think about 3 o’clock September 5, 1867 the ceremony was performed, and soon after the tables were ready. After I had kissed Mother and took the preacher’s hand and called him Pa, I slipped out at the back of the house to cry, and I sure did. Uncle John Martin was out there too wiping his eyes. “What are you crying for little girl?” he asked. “What are you crying for?” I said. He said “I can’t help it. Elza has such bad luck with his women,” he said. “I fear it will be the same this time.” “Women!” I said, “What do you mean!?” I knew he had a wife before. “Yes,” he said, “Sarah, the mother of his

⁴ Eliza Ann’s brother Miles Holland, married to Hannah (Bentley).

⁵ See this [1916 interview](#) to learn about the remarkable life story of “Aunt” Lucy Brown.

⁶ Eliza Ann’s sister Emma and her husband Samuel Glassgow; Sam Macomber’s sister Serena and her husband Sam Churchill; Samuel Glassgow’s widowed sister Mrs. Isabella (Glassgow) Flannigan and her fiancé, Robert Kelly; and (probably) Rev. Thomas Wallace and his wife Ester.

⁷ Probably Eliza Ann’s sister Mary Hannah (Holland) Arrison, her husband William, and their three children.

children died about 3 years ago, but when he was a young man he married a sweet girl named Mary Stone and she didn't live a year. She was an angel. I loved her myself, though only 15 year." "Oh! Well," I said, "the third time's the charm." We went in together and I thought more of Uncle John than I had. I caught Mother alone the next day and asked, "Do you know you're the preacher's third wife?" "Yes," she said."

I don't hardly believe I could have called him father after always calling my own "Father," for I was 12 years old. I called him "Pa" like his own children did. He was always a good father to us in all our childish difficulties. He always listened impartially and talked to us reasonably and with justice. He and mother never punished or touched each other's children in conviction, whether by mutual agreement or not I do not know. Six children between the ages of 9 and 13 must have been something to control, but I guess we got along as well as the average families do.

The Rest of the Family and More Illness

In just a day or two they went over to Fremont County to see Pa's folks and his boys. We knew Emma but had not seen the boys. They aimed to move into Mothers' house as soon as it was finished but Uncle George was busy making a house in the country and seemed in no hurry. . . . In a week or ten days, Mother and Pa came back and he started a revival meeting at another part of his circuit.

I suppose I was actually sick then, but kept going and said I didn't want to play when my cousins insisted on it. . . . I did not go to school that term. I came down with typhoid fever. It must have been toward the last of September when I took sick, for school was to start Oct. 1st. For six long weeks they said I lay in a high fever and raving with delerium. When Pa's meeting closed he came home to help Mother care for me. I knew him and would let him give me medicine while Mother lay down to rest. They said I would regale him with talk about mother. I said she wasn't always gentle. She would whip "youn-uns."

In the meanwhile, Uncle George finished the house. . . . when the fever broke they asked the doctor about moving me and they put me on a couch and covered me, and Pa and Uncle George carried me to the new house. It didn't hurt me any, but I was so weakened that I couldn't walk until after Christmas. They asked the doctor about bringing Pa's children home, as he wanted them in school. The doctor thought it safe. In two weeks Milton⁸ came down with it. The doctor taking it in time he was only sick about two weeks and was soon up and around and able to go to school while I was still learning to walk and couldn't get up a step at the door. My hair all had come out.

During that winter . . . I wanted to go to school but was too weak and too ashamed of my looks. I remember I made an apron and took it to Grandmother for her birthday on March 13th, 1868. She was 63 years old. I spent the day with her and she gave me a knitted net to hide my bald head and told me many things about her own girlhood and her parents.

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⁸ Isaac Milton Martin, 11 years old.

In April, Uncle George came one day and asked Mother to let me come and stay in the store with him. He said school was so near out it wouldn't do me much good any way that year. I knew enough to add up accounts and he would always be working in the back room at his furniture business. It was arranged and I went to clerking and I liked it very much.

That same summer Pa had a letter from his father who had moved to Nebraska that spring that he had bought 80 acres of land for each of his sons in the Sac and Fox Indian reservation south of Falls City at the government sale. He wanted him to come and look at it and see if he could make a home of it. Pa had already decided not to attend conference that year. He had too large a family they thought. He would always preach but not a regular appointment. He rented one of Uncle George's farms for the next year and in August, he and Mother and we girls made the trip to Nebraska to see the new land Gradpap had given him.

After school was out that spring Pa had taken his boys to his people to have them out of town for the summer. John, the youngest, had come with his gradpap to Nebraska. Hannibal, the eldest and Milton were with their relatives in Fremont. Wesley could stay at Uncle George's and we girls could be taken. I think they gave themselves two weeks and maybe a little more for the visit.

Goodbye to Grandmother

In September we got home again. The grasshoppers were still with us. Grandmother had saved her flowers all summer by a trench around the beds. Driving them in and sprinkling them with lime. After they could fly she had taken her bushes and stayed under the tree from dawn till dark again. The neighbors said she had overdrove herself. She was ailing when we got home and she said to me, "You help me now to fight hoppers and we'll save our flowers yet." In two or three days she took a sinking spell and had to go to bed. She was very sick and only lived about 9 days.⁹ Mother and Aunt Mary never hardly left her. Everything was done which could be, but of no avail. She passed away and it almost seemed a miracle, but Aunt Mary gathered the flowers and placed them in her casket as well as a lovely wreath and some cut flowers she had worked so hard to save. 'Twas sure sad days for us. We all missed her so. . . .

Move to the Farm and the Twins Arrive

Mother and Pa had moved to the farm late in the fall to prepare for the next season's crops.¹⁰ There was a district school close by which they all attended. They seemed to learn but said "likin" went with it. Our little home was rented and when

⁹ Mary Burton Holland Macomber died 5 September 1868 and is buried in the Hawleyville Cemetery.

¹⁰ "The farm" referred to here was the one somewhere near Hawleyville that Elza had rented from George Macomber. The family didn't move to Nebraska until the following year. Though Mary Catharine writes "Mother and Pa" moved to the farm, they must have taken her brother and Elza's four children as well, for she says "they all" attended the local school (presumably *not* including her mother and Elza). Her phrasing implies that she herself did not go with them at this time. Perhaps she stayed in Hawleyville to continue helping Uncle George in his store? In any event this would explain what she means when she says, a couple of sentences later, "when school was out I went home."

school was out I went home for Mother needed me worse than anyone else did. Pa would preach when called upon and he had taken mother with him to a village 5 miles away on a Sunday night. His team ran away and threw them out of the buggy and hurt Mother's leg pretty badly. She was laid up for a couple of weeks and we girls did the work the best we could by her directions. Gardening and setting hens and butter gave us plenty to do. I was only 14 years and Emma 2½ years younger. Mother was very poorly from then on. She gave birth to twin babies on the 7th of June 1869. We had a hired girl then for about three weeks. The work kept us all busy and mother took the milk leg.¹¹

I can remember how we all felt that she would never walk again. In about six weeks though, she could walk with her foot in a chair.

The hoppers all left that June and we had pretty good crops after all and good gardens. The girl baby named Eliza Ann¹² was very weakly. We didn't know whether she could live or not and all the family seemed to love her the best and make the most of her.

That made me love the little boy, Elza Asbury, the best of the two. He was healthy and the bottle milk agreed with him. It didn't agree with the girl at all. There were times when we girls took Asbury and his bottle to bed with us and kept him all night, when Anna would be so sick that mother would have to be up and down with her.

Another Big Move

Finally Mother got so she could walk all right and we all rejoiced and planned how much we could do before winter as it was decided we were going to move to Nebraska.

Grandpap had written to Pa that he had secured a rented place we could have until we got his land broken out and built a house.

Aunt Emma had a very serious illness and I had to go there to help out for nearly six weeks. Finally when I could be at home again and I commenced to pack things that we did not have to use every day. Pa had made one trip already with his binder and some plows which he would have to have and yet would not bring anything there. Some other implements he traded for young cattle. When he came back he brought one of his father's teams and wagon. John¹³ could drive them they were so gentle. The other boy met them at a certain place. We were all together again and nearly ready for the start. 'Twas a big 3 day's journey. Two heavily loaded wagons, Mother, and we two girls, and twin babies six months old. I wish I could remember the date, but I do not. It must have been past the middle of November [1869] but the weather was beautiful. Mother had prevailed on Pa to fix a small coop at the end of one wagon for some half grown chickens.

¹¹ Milk leg: a painful swelling of the leg caused by inflammation and clotting in the veins and affecting some postpartum women.

¹² Hereafter referred to as "Anna."

¹³ Elza's son John, then 10 years old.

She had 12 or 15 of them. The old brood of Shanghais and a small box of rhubarb roots from seed. They were driving 9 head of cattle, 3 of them cows as we must keep the same milk for the babies. Anna could take some cow's milk now and was getting better and looking healthier. We knew it would be a hard trip for them at best. We did lots of baking as we knew [we would need] three dinners and maybe suppers before we got through.

We started on a Thursday, I don't know the date. We aimed to make it through to Grandpap Martin's Saturday night. The first day we were to go about 25 miles. The journey was 100 miles the shortest way. The 25 miles would take us to Brother Michael's. He was a good Methodist farmer neighbor. We made that all right. Mother, us girls, and babies stayed in the house, Pa and the boys under the wagons.

The next day we were to reach Uncle Mose Vanness', 1½ miles from the crossing of the Missouri at Brownsville, Nebr.¹⁴ Aunt Lucinda Vanness was Grandpap Martin's sister. She was a small wirey little woman, so kind and so gracious. A hot supper, beds on the floor for the boys and warm baths and greasings for those babies to take the soreness out of them. This was all accomplished so easy and with such a Christian spirit.

Sunday we sure spent in rest. At least Mother, girls and babies had stood the trip remarkably well. The weather had been grand. There had been some cold and frozen ice before we started, but was fine then. . . . I supposed we would go to the rented farm Monday but Pa went to see the owner and make the stipulated agreement. We did not go until Wednesday, I think. The next Monday we were all to go to school except Wesley who was to stay at home to help take care of the twins. There was too much for Mother to do though she was getting better and stronger in this new country.

The little chickens came through all right, only lost one. Pa fixed a good warm place for them and they commenced to lay in the spring almost as soon as some which were on the place when we came. Grandpa Martin was so glad to have us come to Nebraska and when we got to the rented farm, [we were greeted by?] Pa's brother, John, and his sister Jane (Mrs. Humphrey). Both lived in the neighborhood so we had a warm welcome there. The farm was owned by Mr. Joshua Kinsey, a very nice man. His wife had died and he had two children, a girl and boy about ten and eight. They were living with his brother near Salem. We were to have the place two years and he was to board with us when he was not at Salem.

¹⁴ The 1870 Census (compiled a few months after Elza's move) showed Moses and Lucinda VanNess living in Lincoln Township of Nodaway County, Missouri, more than 25 miles from the Brownville Crossing. On the other hand, the same census shows a certain Robert McMichael and family living near the eastern end of the Brownville Crossing in Templeton Township of Atchison County, MO. This may be the man identified above as "Brother Michaels." (The fact that Robert later named one of his children Charles Wesley McMichael suggests at least that he was a good Methodist.) Thus it could be that Elza and his family stayed with his Aunt Lucinda on the first night of their trip and with "Brother Michaels" on the second night.

Back to School

Five of us started to school the next Monday. . . . The school was very large with about 50 pupils of all ages and grades. The building was small for so many but we all learned fast. . . . I had not been regularly at school but I soon caught on and stood at the head of most of my classes.

It was a very light winter. Pa had considerable plowing. I knew he plowed the garden and potato patch and we kicked up about five bushels of potatoes not hurt by frost at all. The winter flew away and in March 1870 on a Sunday, a blizzard struck that lasted 3 days and then turned warm. We had no more winter. There was a grove of maple trees down on the river bank a hundred or more yards from the house. Pa tapped them, the boys tended them and Mother boiled down the sap in buckets and kettles and made a great quantity of maple sugar and some syrup. When we had all been especially good and industrious we had a treat of sugar. Pa raised a good crop that year and broke out 40 or 50 acres of his 80 and planned to build a house in the spring of 1871. Mr. Kinsey was to be married and would want his house though he wanted Pa to farm the ground as he said he was the best farmer he had seen. A house was built or rather enclosed (not lathed or plastered) by the 1st of April.

That winter of 70 & 71 was some colder than the one before. . . . The scarlet fever, in a very violent form struck the country. Grown people even had it in sore throats and coughs. With children it was terrible. Many died. Many were left deaf or with some disfigurement. Wesley and I had had it when I was 6. The rest got it. They had high fevers, sore throats and other symptoms.

Baby Asbury Succumbs

The babies by that time were the sweetest babies in the world according to us all. When John lay sick little Asbury could not be kept away. He loved him and wanted to play peep. About the time John got around, one day the baby boy took very ill. I stayed from school to help care for him for he was contented with me. He was so sick they got a doctor. He gave them no help nor hope. He said that in certain systems it was death almost from the first, and it so proved to be. So awfully fine and healthy as he was he did not live three days and suffered awfully.¹⁵

It was pitiful to see Anna looking around and hunting for him behind chairs, in the stairway and places where they had played. The winter before or rather the spring of 1870, Pa's brother-in-law, the children's Uncle Edwin Morris, a youth of 16 had died of consumption and been buried in our neighborhood cemetery called the Falls City Springfield cemetery.¹⁶ We laid little Asbury there not far from Eddie Morris.

¹⁵ Elza Asbury Martin died 15 February 1871, according to a note in a Martin family bible.

¹⁶ The Falls City Springfield Cemetery is now called the "Nemaha Falls Cemetery," and a [Find-a-Grave listing](#) confirms that Edwin Morris is buried there. Hence this also should be the burial site for little Elza Asbury Martin, although there is not yet any Find-a-Grave listing for him. The Nemaha Falls Cemetery is about 2½ miles southwest of Falls City, about one-quarter mile north of 704 Road, in a wooded area on the east side of 650 Blvd.

I think it was April 1871 when we moved to the new home. Everything was to do of course. There was not a stable or lot. Pa was sure one to accomplish work. The boys were good help. He set out his orchard and fruit trees. He built cow and hog lots and stables. He had dug the well before making the house. Mother got shrubbery and set out and planted flowers. They had wheat and oats in Mr. Kinsey's place and ground for one piece of corn. Mr. and Mrs. Kinsey moved in as soon as we got out. They put corn in the new place and a wonderful crop it made.

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On March 19th, 1872, Mother and Pa had a little son come to them named George Ellsworth. He was a big robust baby and grew fast. Anna was almost 3 years old and was quite healthy at last.

Mother and Pa had saved peach seeds the year before and buried them so that spring they planted a peach tree between every apple tree in the orchard and in three years they had loads of peaches and berries coming in and good crops and flowers everywhere. We had a lovely zinnia bed and I remember Anna picking all of the first buds and bringing them in her apron, "Pretty flowers." We told her to pick flowers only when we were with her, but I guess it helped them for they were truly wonderful.

Anna wet the chickens and greased the cats but we never scolded her for we knew if the little boy hadn't gone what playmates they would have been.

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The year 1877 was an abundant year. It seemed that nature surpassed herself. Pa's eldest son was married¹⁷ and the second had gone to California to their mother's people.

Emma had taught the home school the summer term and now had another further away. Anna had been to school and George was old enough to go and they were extremely bright youngsters. I was at home very seldom, but Mother was not at all well. Emma was away teaching school most of the time. She was not like me, didn't get married just as quick as she could teach a successful term of school.

Mother Needs Help

Mother's health remained so poor that she had to have help in the house. She got along with young girls mostly. Help was hard to get and the very young were cheaper. She trained three or four different ones in the rudiments of good housekeeping. They have told me in after years that they were thankful for her patience and training and had been helped all their lives by it. But they had no idea that people ever did work like Mr. and Mrs. Martin did. They sure did work. They accomplished wonders in that 80 acres of land. They had all kinds of fruit and flowers and such abundant crops. It seemed as though nature out-stripped herself after the lean years. All those years, in addition to the hard work on the farm, Pa would preach. He filled places for other ministers and

¹⁷ Elza's eldest son, William Hannibal, did not marry until 1883.

isolated places without pastors. He was in the Nebraska conference taking regular circuit which required miles of driving from Rulo in the east to old Cincinnati in the s.w. corner of the county,¹⁸ taking in many of the outlying villages. He built three churches that I can recall and fought for their maintenance and support as long as he could. When he couldn't anymore the church board sold one to another church denomination. In the last ten years one of the others has been sold and torn down for the lumber. He preached funerals whenever asked to, and performed marriage ceremonies very often. He said one of the most unique experiences he had was marrying a deaf couple. He used an interpreter, of course, a neighbor and godly man. They lived together almost 50 years. Thus time went on for us all.

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In April [1878], Emma was married to Benjamin Foster and settled down close to Mother and Pa. John had gone away so there were only Mother and Pa and Anna and George at home. They went to school regularly.

* * * * *

. . . In April [1879] Emma and Ben had a girl baby named Elfie. . . .

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In April 1881, Grandpap Martin died. He had lived a long and useful life; teaching, preaching, doctoring, as a pioneer farming always. He left his fine farm to his loved wife, Grandmother Martin for her life. She always lived there, renting it mostly to some of her children.

¹⁸ The village of Cincinnati was actually in Pawnee County, south of Dubois, about half a mile north of the Kansas border.