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Lucy Crawford, History of the White Mountains (1846; 1860)

b. 1793, Guildhall, Vermont.
d. February 17, 1869, Lowell, Massachusetts.

Whoe'er thou art, go view the White Mountains,
Their cloud cap't tops and crystal fountains;
Ascend and breathe the healthy mountain air,
And view the prospect spread so wide and fair—
Then view the Notch, my friend, return and tell,
Could you have spent your time and cash so well?
--Crawford House guest, 1825 (72)

Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains deserves its status as a classic due to its stirring tales of Ethan Allen Crawford's early efforts to keep Crawford Notch open as a transportation route, his ascents of Mt. Washington, his confrontation with wilderness, wild weather, and wild beasts, and his successes and ultimate failures as an innkeeper and businessman. His exploits justify her biblical claim that "'There were giants in those days'" (2). Crawford's book is more that a history of her husband and other pioneers in the White Mountains, for it also presents many of the great stories and mythic images that came to define the region and the spirit of New Hampshire and its people. This is an important book for New Hampshire readers who wish to trace the complex associations that compose the state's identity, but it also reveals the important role the White Mountains played in the national psychology. As art historian Robert McGrath writes, "Both as myth and fact the White Mountains persistently played (and continue to play) a central role in the formation and evolution of the national vision of nature" (Gods in Granite, xix). In the pages of Crawford's book, the vision of the American frontier, early settlement, and economic enterprise unfolds against a landscape invested with biblical and artistic associations. Most significantly, it raises questions about the meaning of American freedom and the proper uses of the land.

Lucy Crawford and Ethan Allen Crawford were cousins born in Guildhall, Vermont in the early 1790s. Their family was among the early groups of settlers who moved into the Coos area in the 1770s, establishing farms, trapping, manufacturing potash, and developing trade routes to Portland, Maine and other New England destinations through the notches. Ethan's father Abel moved his family into Crawford Notch in 1792. Ethan grew up on the farm, enlisted under Colonel Stark in 1811 for service in New York, where he worked building roads and at other tasks until his ill grandfather Rosebrook asked him to care for him and the farm in 1817. His cousin Lucy moved into the household to help, and they married in 1818. The book recounts their

early struggles on the farm, including a fire that destroyed their house and nearly killed their first baby, floods, and other losses. It also presents Ethan's early efforts to keep open the road through the Notch, his hunting and trapping exploits, and the beginning of his work as a guide for those wishing to climb Mt. Washington. He cuts the first trail up the mountain and he and Lucy expand their accommodations to house turnpike travelers and tourists. The expansion of their inn into a hotel and Ethan's growing reputation as host and guide are shadowed by financial complications, double-dealing stagecoach drivers, competitive neighbors, injuries and ill health. The Crawfords confront elemental forces in nature and society, both of which conspire to break their fortunes.

The book is full of anecdotes of early visitors, such as Daniel Webster, and of Ethan's exploits. He entertains visitors with his blasts from a tin horn and from a cannon to echo off the mountains. He creates a menagerie of a tamed wolf, deer, and a peacock. He tries repeatedly to keep and tame a bear cub. He becomes a larger-than-life figure for his physical prowess, tall tales, and gracious inn-keeping. One thing he is not is a businessman, and we see him slowly entangled in debt, leading to the foreclosure of their property in 1837. The family returns to farm in Guildhall, but it moves back to the Notch in 1843, where they hope to recover their property. However, Ethan dies in 1846, and Lucy moves shortly afterwards to join a daughter who has set up a boarding house in Lowell, Massachusetts. Lucy never gives up her dream of recovering the family property for the sake of her children.

Lucy Crawford's book is a mixture of her own observations and the story of her husband, Ethan Allen Crawford, told in his voice. At times, the perspective shifts between that of Ethan and Lucy in a single sentence. Lucy had received an early education from her grandmother Rosebrook, and she knew her Bible and some works of English and American literature. She often adds to the facts of her husband's narration her own romantic effusions on the scenery, religious commentary, and didactic moralizations. For example, she gives special attention to fall foliage "while the sides of these hills present all the hues of the rainbow, their summits are capped with snow, presenting a scene of beauty and sublimity" (200). When she accompanied a party of women to the summit of Mt. Washington in 1825, she remarks on the glories of God's creation, and she invites people to visit Crawford Notch to "reflect on the mighty works of God, and think what the labor or man, in a few years, has accomplished" (97). We also see indirectly that Lucy gives birth to and raises ten children while providing food and lodging for guests numbers scores on a given night.

The book was originally published in 1846. As Crawford explains, she kept "a memorandum of things as they occurred, for there seemed to be something very extraordinary in our affairs in life," and she took pleasure in showing their honest dealings. The financial incentive to write the book arose from the hope that its publication and sale could help finance recovery of the farm, but Ethan's death shortly after the publication of the book dashed these hopes. Lucy prepared a manuscript for a new version of the book in order to elicit sympathy for the loss of her mountain, further her children's claims for compensation from the Abbotts whose crafty dealings had induced her and Ethan to sign away their rights, and to provide a more general guide and history of the mountains like the successful book by Thomas Starr King, The White Hills: Their

Legends, Landscape and Poetry (1859). The current edition by Stearns Morse combines these versions and supplements them with additional manuscript materials and illustrations.

Ethan Allen Crawford's pioneering efforts to keep open the Notch road and provide access for early climbers, scientists, pilgrims, and seekers of sublime scenes to Mt. Washington served these visitors well, but the flood of tourist visitors followed the great flood and slide of 1826 that killed the Willey family. As Robert McGrath and Eric Purchase have written, this disastrous loss of the nine members of the family provided Romantic and biblical associations with a scenery just then attracting the attention of America's leading landscape painter, Thomas Cole. Heavy rains and a smaller slide in June led Willey to build a shelter away from the house to which they apparently retreated during the deluge that climaxed with a massive landslide on August 27 that ran over the shelter while leaving the house untouched and deserted, "doors opened and bed and clothes as though they had been left in a hurry, bible open and lying of the table as if it had lately been read" (87). The story caused a sensation, and published accounts drew visitors, including Thomas Cole in 1828, who painted a famous scene of the Notch, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1832, who set his story, "The Ambitious Guest" in the house on the night before the slide. This dark story suggests that a vengeful nature, like the angry God of Sinai will devastate prideful men. An anxiety over the meaning of frontier life is found in the writing of this period, such as Cooper's The Pioneers. Lucy Crawford draws moral lessons contrasting pioneer self-sufficiency and plain living to the luxury of city and grand hotel life.

Other tragedies soon marked the landscape. There is the story of Nancy who pursues the lover who has jilted her through the Notch, despite warnings from travelers, and she freezes to death. Crawford also chronicles the first deaths among the climbers of Mt. Washington. She tells the story of Miss Lizzie Bourne, frozen to death on 9/14/1855, when her husband makes it to Summit House seeking help but she lies dead a couple hundred feet away. "Imagination cannot paint the scene! Pen cannot describe the feelings of those who went to render aid! Her hair wildly flying over her face was carefully brushed aside, when her piercing eyes, fixed in death, caused a shudder to pass over the stout and hardy forms of those whom duty called to the spot. Her cheeks had assumed a pale and death-like hue and were as cold as the unfeeling stones around her" (193). She also thrills readers with the account of the discovery in 1857 of the skeleton of Benjamin Chandler who had disappeared a year earlier: "His ribs had nearly all been gnawed off, his boots and stockings gone. The wildcat, which roams the summit, had evidently caused the destruction of bones. Among the mass of worm-moving rags lay a gold watch, which had ceased its ticking at a quarter before eleven o'clock" (193).

These stories provided richly gothic associations with the mountains, perhaps reflecting psychological fears in American life in the era. Other early visitors requiring Ethan's services were scientists, including botanists and mineralogists, spiritual pilgrims, and rusticators for hunting and fishing. Each group put money in Ethan's pocket, but they also contributed to various sets of associations with the mountains. Botanists sought rare alpine plants for collections and gardens, and Lucy writes of those places where spring flowers are set against the lingering snows of Tuckerman's Ravine. Such rarities bespoke a unique ecology, but they also revealed the variety of God's creation in

America. Mineralogists sought the mythic great carbuncle, a huge outcrop of gold, supposed guarded by Indian spirits. In 1821, Crawford guides ministry students to the summit, who offer the first prayers ever there, instead of the usual toasts with "Black Betts" and "O-be-joyful" (rum). Mountains were associated with God's presence, as in the Old Testament, and in the wilderness of New Hampshire, Thomas Cole claimed that God's voice could yet be heard, or, in Thoreau's famous phrase, one could find "A New Hampshire everlasting and unfallen." Rusticators wanted an experience in the American wilderness, whether hunting the plentiful moose, deer, and bear, catching hundreds of trout or salmon, or making the ascent of Mt. Washington. Women were among the early climbers, including the three Misses Austin, in 1821, the first women to climb the mountain. Not long afterwards, men claim that attempts on the summit should not be attempted by women, but Ethan builds his bridal paths and carriage routes to open the landscape to women. These visitors represent the American belief that the distinguishing experience of American life is that of the frontier, whether in northern New England or to the west.

The association of the White Mountains with freedom developed early in the 1800s, and the expedition under Philip Carrigain in 1820 sealed the association by naming the Presidential peaks. Given that this was the year of the Missouri Compromise, there may have been early abolitionist stirrings, or at least a desire to associate the values and virtues of the Republican founders with the New England landscape. For writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, by the 1840s, Mt. Washington became a symbol of a land free of slaves and slave catchers. William Lloyd Garrision chastised an antislavery colleague for smoking slave-raised tobacco there, saying it would 183 "desecrate his anit-slavery mouth and that glorious Mountain Notch with a stupefying tobacco weed" (Yankee Kingdom, 183). Lucy Crawford's poem, "My Mountain Home," combines freedom and Edenic innocence in the Notch:

"thou art free, my native land, free, fair, and happy, too.
O'er thee our bright stars proudly wave, our banner is unfurled.
Regardless of oppression's pow'r, fair Eden of the world." (226)

The image of White Mountains freedom remained a commonplace in the twentieth century, as Martin Luther King in his "I Have a Dream" speech proclaimed, "From the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire, let freedom ring." For Lucy Crawford, pioneer and plain-dealing Ethan represented the virtues of true mountain people. In Robert McGrath's words, ". . . New Hampshire lays claim to the symbolic locus of the last stand of the Yankee." Yankee Ethan Allen Crawford, however, falls victim not only to losses caused by flood, fire, and physical infirmities but also to the economic forces of land speculation and sharp business practices in the development of the hotel business.

When Crawford visited the house site in the 1850s, she finds desolation and overgrown fields after a fire destroyed the house in 1853 and an arsonist burned the barns afterwards. "There it lies an unprofitable barren waste affording only a subject of contention and plea for jurists." She compares her efforts to redeem her home from speculators to that of the "noble ladies" trying to purchase Mount Vernon. Her lament in 1860 echoes that of many independent New Englanders who felt that the forces of law

and capital had turned decisively against individual freedom: "We were so closely held in these merciless manacles of injustice we were like the reptile under the crushing foot of the sullen serf with not even the power to squirm." Lucy Crawford raises the profound question of who really owns and has rights to the northern lands, those who live in the woods and make their living, the large corporate interests who exploit the natural resources, or the moneyed class from away who want tourist accommodations and unspoiled scenery. This debate, so ably presented by David Dobbs and Richard Ober, shows that the argument over the meanings of the White Mountains is at the core of the New Hampshire identity.

This debate has a great deal to do with the ways in which the mountains are represented and made part of a commercial economy. Robert McGrath recounts how scenery became a subject of consumption, whether through art or tourism, during the nineteenth century, thereby shifting the meanings of the mountains and the experiences desired there from the local to urban centers. As Lucy Crawford writes, "So great has become the celebrity of the many objects of attraction about these hills that the walls of the parlors of private families are decorated with a painting of one or more of the most prominent curiosities—the windows in the cities of the principal vendors of lithographic views are filled—and on the centre table stand the stereoscope, and lying by its side Tip-Top, the Cascades, and the many beautiful views which the artist has gathered" (201). Aesthetic appreciation of scenery is interwoven with financial interests surrounding resource consumption, whether by tourists or by the pulp industry.

If the meaning of the White Mountains lingers in the New Hampshire imagination, so do the stories associated with them, thanks, in large part, to the tradition of tale-telling by Ethan Allen Crawford and the skillful writing of Lucy Crawford. Ethan was a great raconteur, regaling guests with stories of his exploits, including lifting a 500-pound barrel, carrying fatigued or injured climbers, capturing bear and lynx, enduring great cold and winds, disasters, and expeditions up Mt. Washington. As Lucy writes, "Without his presence the White Hills to many lost half their charms." When they lost their farm and inn to foreclosure in 1837, she "expressed a regret to leave the place where we had performed so much hard labor, and had done everything to make the mountain scenery fashionable, and had just got in a way to make ourselves comfortable, and to be able to make our friends feel at home. One of them made her this reply, saying, fifty years hence it will be as in old time; there would be those rise up who knew not Joseph, and it would not then be known who did all these things" (162). Today's visitors to Crawford Notch can discover who did all these things by reading Crawford's <u>History of the White Mountains</u>.

Discussion Questions:

1. What experiences have you had in the White Mountains, and what images, ideas, and values do you associate with the region?

2. Discuss the various uses of nature presented in Crawford's book, from trapping and hunting, to exploration, to pilgrimage and recreation. What values are attached to these activities today? Discuss the similarities and conflicts among ideas of the use of nature in the White Mountains today, from preservation and tourism to logging and snowmobiling.

3. In what ways do Ethan Allen and Lucy Crawford represent American values or heroic types?

4. Discuss the special place of Mt. Washington in New Hampshire life and lore.

Suggestions for Further Reading;

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