

The Painter–Cranston Family File

A Page-by-Page Description of a Compiled Research Packet, 1859–2008

This file is not a single document. It is a compilation — roughly forty-three scanned pages gathered into one packet by members of the Painter family and passed along for the family archive. What it contains is the working evidence of a family: four ranch stories written down before the men who told them were gone, a dozen vital records pulled from three states, letters between a husband and wife and between grandparents and grandchildren, obituaries transcribed off microfilm, an email argument about the spelling of a neighbor's name, and photographs of a house standing above a river crossing in 1908.

The material spans nearly a century and a half. The earliest item is an Ohio marriage license from January 1859. The latest is a letter written in October 2008. Between those two dates the family moves from Ohio to Illinois, from Illinois and Nebraska onto the open range of Harding County, South Dakota, and from the range out to Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Washington, and New Mexico. The packet was assembled by people who understood that this was worth keeping.

The pages are not in chronological order, and in three places they are not even in their own order — two of the documents were scanned back to front. The description below follows the file as it stands, page by page, so that anyone working from the scan can find what they are looking for. Notes on condition and on conflicting evidence appear at the end.

The Contents, Page by Page

1. “The Fosberry Bull”

A story written by Robert L. Painter about his grandfather, Lewis L. Painter. Shortly before the First World War a Durham bull belonging to a man named Fosberry worked his way north along the Little Missouri, terrorizing every place he passed, and finally settled in among the milk cows at the Painter ranch some twenty miles above Camp Crook. Lewis Painter — known to the cowboys of the open-range days as Jingo Bill — and his oldest son Joe rode the horses Chaska and Upset, one on each side of the bull, with pitchfork tines set in the animal's ribs behind the shoulders and the fork handles braced against the fronts of their saddles. They ran him at a high bank and he went into the river. He came out subdued, fell in with a beef herd bound for the Milwaukee Railroad, and gave no further trouble. Painter closes with the reason it worked: a bull that has been whipped by another bull will run through or over anything in his way, and his grandfather knew it.

2–3. Email thread, “For your Painter Stories,” July 2014

Two pages of correspondence among Carol P. Erickson, Richard and Cathy Dodd, and a wider circle of Painter cousins. The thread is a family fact-check in progress. It records that the “Jingle Bells” story appeared in South Dakota Magazine, May/June 2002, and that the title was wrong — it should have been “Jingo Bill” — and that the name should read Lewis, not Louis. Cathy Dodd insists that the neighbor's name is Ekberg and must be corrected before it goes down in history with the error; Richard Dodd, writing separately, commits to Ekburg. The same thread preserves the story of the gold-leaf mirror that Grandpa Bovell's family brought to Deadwood in the gold-rush days, thrown from the second story of a whorehouse into the back of their wagon and landing in a pile of quilts — one of Grandma Painter's most precious possessions, later stolen from the Rochford place.

4. “Riding with Jingo Bill,” by Kenneth J. Haraldsen

The magazine memoir itself, retyped by Helen Watson from an optical-character scan so that Bob Painter could mark corrections. In the summer of 1938 Haraldsen was fifteen and working for Joe and Mildred Painter on their ranch near Buffalo. He describes Joe's father, Lewis Levi Painter, as the last old-time cowboy in the neighborhood — born in Ohio in 1870, moved at fourteen to Springview, Nebraska, then west to Oregon and Texas before hiring on as a teenager with the CY Cattle Company to trail longhorns north through Casper and Buffalo, Wyoming, and over the Little Missouri into Dakota Territory. Haraldsen's own contribution to the roundup was to be thrown from a hornless saddle with his foot caught in the stirrup. At supper he sat next to the old man without knowing who he was, and Lewis Painter's wife May opened a can of peaches and divided them equally among the riders.

5–7. Letter from Lewis Painter to his wife, “Home, March 26, 1906”

Three pages of a handwritten letter, scanned in reverse order — the closing page appears first and the salutation last. May was away, ill, and had sent a note that did not look good to him; it read as though she were very weak. He reports that Joseph and the rest of her folks were well except himself and John, who had both taken sick after the trial. He will ride to Ashcroft tomorrow to mail the letter and try to borrow fifty dollars so she will have enough to pay the doctor and get home on; there will be about forty dollars left in the bank once the life insurance is paid, and he has given Lute fourteen dollars for staying at the place while he was gone. He asks her to be sure the insurance is attended to before the time runs up. He signs it Lewis Painter. It is the plainest document in the file and the one that says the most.

8. “Marion Painter's Story,” as told to Donna at Tamarin Square, Durango, Colorado

A first-person life account. Marion Josephine Cranston was born in Harding County, South Dakota, on the North–South Dakota line, to Christopher and Elizabeth Cranston, homesteaders; if she was not born in a log cabin it was a snug soddy built into the side of a hill, and she remembers its warmth. Her parents divorced when she was about ten. Her mother remarried Olaf Melby, a Norwegian and a kind stepfather, but the family could not put all the children through high school, so Marion and her sister finished their schooling in La Grange, Illinois, with a cousin named Pearl. She graduated in 1928, attended Black Hills State Teachers College at Spearfish, and taught in the rural schools of Harding County, where she met Preston Painter — a rancher who also sat on the school board. They married in 1934 and raised nine children. She closes by saying that raising a family of nine is no harder than raising a family of three.

9–10. “The Panic of 1907”

Robert Painter's account, scanned with its second page first. In the fall of 1907 Lewis Levi Painter and his neighbors gathered a herd and drove it seventy or eighty miles to Belle Fourche, the nearest shipping point. They arrived into a national money panic. The railroad would not load the cattle because there was no market and the freight could not be paid in advance, so the herd came home — and Joe Painter, born in November 1902, remembered standing with his mother May watching the big steers come rolling off the divide south of the homestead, home three-year-olds still showing their longhorn breeding. The rest of the story is what Grandpa did about supplies. He had three hundred dollars in the bank and the bank would not release it. So he visited the teller daily, leaning on the counter and talking about everything he could think of, until one warm afternoon the man grew sleepy and leaned close to the bars of his cage. Painter was quick. He took him by the collar and necktie and explained that he would choke him to death if the money did not appear. It appeared. He was modest enough not to tell his wife the details; she heard them later from the others who were along.

11. Marriage record: Preston E. Painter and Marion Cranston, 1934

South Dakota State Board of Health, Harding County, registered number 480. Preston E. Painter, age 23, of Ballard; Miss Marion Cranston, age 24, of Willett. Married at Buffalo on September 4, 1934, by a clergyman. This is the document behind the paragraph above, and it is the record that joins the Painter and Cranston lines.

12–13. Funeral card and obituary of Mildred E. Painter, 1997

Mildred Adora Painter, born August 14, 1908, at Delona, Wisconsin, the eldest daughter of Paul Luther and Alice Mae (Sparkes) Ellis; died January 22, 1997, at Spearfish. At two she came with her mother to her father's new homestead at Govert, in the southeast corner of Harding County, and was schooled in that area with her own mother often the teacher. She took a teaching certificate at Spearfish and taught her first year at Windy Flats by the Mackey Ranch. She married Joseph T. Painter on November 21, 1927; they bought the Cleveland ranch adjoining Joe's father's place and lived out their lives there. She helped start 4-H in that country and kept teaching through it for two generations. The card carries the prayer of Saint Francis and the note that the family invited everyone to lunch at the church after the interment at Ladner.

14. Black Hills State University Alumni Magazine, 2012

The page announcing that the descendants of Lewis Levi and May (Bovell) Painter had been named the university's Legacy Family for 2012 — five generations who have attended or graduated from BHSU. Fifteen family members are named in the photograph caption, which makes this page useful for more than sentiment: it is a dated roster of the living family, with married surnames and graduation years attached.

15. Certificate of death: C. E. Cranston, 1905

State of Illinois, Knox County. Charles Edwards Cranston, male, white, age 72, born in Ohio, forty-five years a resident of Illinois, retired; died August 4, 1905, at half past three in the morning at 730 Pine Street, Galesburg. Immediate cause, cardiac paralysis; contributory, fatty degeneration of the heart, of probably several years' duration. Buried at Hermon on August 6.

16. Ohio marriage record: C. E. Cranston and K. T. Park, 1860

A Union County probate court certification of the original register entry, issued in 1977. License issued March 3, 1860; the marriage of C. E. Cranston and K. T. Park solemnized March 15, 1860. The certified copy carries the seal of Judge Robert F. Allen and the signature of the deputy clerk.

17–20. Christmas letters and cards from Aunt Mildred

Four pages of holiday correspondence, from at least three different years. One reports three feet of snow, huge drifts, bitter cold, chicken pox running through the youngest children after Randy started school, and frosted feet for both Joe and Harold. Another, on a Washington Cathedral card, mentions the hired couple in the trailer house and a hand named Paul who married that fall. A third is a full news letter: two carotid operations and a cataract operation in one year, blood pressure that falls when she stands, a new grandson, a granddaughter expected in April, Judy teaching at Rocky Ford on the reservation, and the observation that the family scatters a little more every year. Grasshoppers hit the grass hard again, but it was a fair hay year, which was surely needed. A fourth notes plans to fly east in February because Uncle Fred was not doing well and Alice needed some moral support.

21. Cranston obituaries, transcribed 1982

A typed sheet carrying two obituaries from the Daily Republican Register of Galesburg, Illinois, transcribed from microfilm by Helen Painter Watson on July 10, 1982, with spellings and

punctuation preserved as printed. The first, from September 18, 1902, reports the death of Keturah Taylor Park Cranston of 730 Pine Street, born at Milford Center, Ohio, March 30, 1835, married there March 5, 1860; she had passed into a deep sleep on the Sunday before and did not wake from it for eighty-two hours. The second, from August 4, 1905, reports her husband's sudden death in the night at the same address. Charles Edwards Cranston was born April 19, 1833, near Woodstock, Ohio, son of Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Cranston, and came west in the early sixties to farm near Hermon. Nine children were born to them. Among the survivors named is Christopher Cranston of Hailey, North Dakota — which is the link back to Marion Painter's father and, through him, to the Cranston line of this archive.

22–23. Email thread (duplicate)

The July 2014 correspondence appears a second time in the packet. The pages are identical to items 2–3 above.

24. Nebraska death certificate, copy issued 1977

A certified copy from the Bureau of Vital Statistics at Lincoln, bearing the raised seal and the signature of the director, issued November 30, 1977. The certificate itself is scanned sideways and at a size that defeats reading; the year 1921 is legible, and the parents' names appear to include a Cranston. This page needs to be re-scanned before the record can be identified with confidence.

25. South Dakota death certificate, Willett, 1939

Harding County, registered number 200. A rancher of the Willett neighborhood, born December 17, 1855, in New York State, died January 12, 1939, aged 83 years and 15 days, and buried at Camp Crook. Cause of death given as carcinoma of the chest dating from 1936, with senility as a contributory cause from 1930. The father is recorded as William H. Campbell of Utica, New York, and the mother's maiden name as Mary Sherman. The deceased's given names are only partly legible on the scan.

26. Certificate of death: Keturah Taylor Cranston, 1902

State of Illinois, City of Galesburg. Female, white, age 67, born in Ohio, thirty-six years a resident of Illinois, housekeeper; died September 16, 1902, at 730 Pine Street. Immediate cause, apnoea and asthenia; contributory, apoplexy. It is the clinical record standing behind the newspaper account of her eighty-two-hour sleep.

27. “The Killer Wolf”

Robert Lewis Painter again, writing down a story his Uncle Joe told many times. A killer wolf, he explains, is one that kills for the joy of it — gorges on a carcass, leaves it, and kills again — and Lewis Levi Painter had lost a good deal of stock to one over a winter when there were still wolves in Harding County. Riding out one early morning on Old Chaska, the horse he considered his best, he came on a fresh kill and a lone wolf running. He took down his rope. No record was kept of how many loops it took, but he caught the wolf and had to drag it fast to keep it from biting the rope in two. He came up on George Elger chopping wood and asked him to finish the animal with his axe. Elger was frightened enough of the limp wolf that he made Painter drag it around in another wide circle before he would come close. Elger never became a family hero for his part in it.

28–31. Letter from Rochester, New York, February 11, 1956

Three pages and the envelope. Written to Mr. Robert Painter at 509 Jackson, Belle Fourche, and signed “Grandmother.” She is excited about the new oil well, and Fred is too. There are four

inches of snow at Rochester and it is time for rain to take it off. She is glad Bob can get to the work early, because it is hard to work out of doors in the dark. Peggy is at home preparing to leave for an American college in Mexico for five months, where she will board with a Spanish-speaking family. Ricky does not get home often — three days at semester's end, perhaps Easter. She thanks Bob for the check, which she and Helen cashed the moment the mail came because they were already starting for the bank. She hopes to go to Sara in Texas to meet Sara's father's people and then drive back to Belle Fourche. The third page is badly faded. The envelope carries a March of Dimes polio cancellation.

32. Ohio marriage license: Levi Painter and Fanny E. Kimble, 1859

State of Ohio, Franklin County. The license and the return, dated January 1859, for the marriage of Levi Painter and Fanny E. Kimble. This is the oldest document in the file and it establishes the generation above Lewis Levi Painter.

33. Photograph: Levi and Fannie Painter, wedding portrait

An oval studio portrait of the couple named in the license above — she in a dark dress with a pendant necklace and her hair drawn back into a snood, he in a dark coat with a patterned cravat. Both look very young, and both look directly at the camera.

34. Marriage record: Lewis L. Painter and May E. Bovell, 1902

A certified transcript from the marriage register of Butte County, South Dakota, issued by county treasurer Maude Kendrick on November 10, 1976. Lewis L. Painter of Camp Crook, age 31, and May E. Bovell of Camp Crook, age 29, married at Camp Crook on January 29, 1902, by George Perry, Minister of the Gospel, before witnesses Frank Hagins and Velva Whitney. The return was filed February 4, 1902, and entered in Book A at page 218. Note that the register spells her name May, not Mae.

35–36. Letter from Ruth Painter Henrikson, October 2, 2008

A letter written to the whole family after a reunion, and the hardest thing in the packet to read. She explains why she had not visited her childhood places at the reunion — our Father in Heaven gives us a limited time here so that we have to choose and make priorities, a line she credits to Helen Watson. She describes her daughter Carolyn's dangerous pregnancy, the family's fasting and prayer, and her belief that it was during that fasting that she was moved to check herself and found a lump. The diagnosis moved from Stage I with a full cure rate to Stage IIIB with half that, then back to IIB. She writes about chemotherapy beginning September 25, about losing her hair, about the priesthood blessings she received, and about the loneliness that came after everyone went home. She says plainly that she expects to recover and live years longer, and calls that a statement of faith and hope. She ends by inviting anyone who wants to come and stay in the guest bedroom, and instructs the family to go get a mammogram and fix their teeth.

37–38. Henrikson family record sheet

Two pages recording Ruth Doreen Painter — daughter of Preston Elmer Painter (December 30, 1910) and Marion Josephine Cranston (May 13, 1910) — her marriage to Lee Howard Henrikson on March 6, 1976, and the births of their children and grandchildren, with dates. These pages also carry current street addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses for living people, and for that reason the contact information has been withheld from this description and from the version of the file posted here. The genealogical dates are retained; the directory information is held privately in the family papers.

39. Certificate of Achievement, Preston Painter, 1951

An engraved certificate awarded to Preston Painter in recognition of 1951 Soil and Moisture Achievement in South Dakota, sponsored by the Greater South Dakota Association, the South Dakota Press Association, the State Department of Agriculture, the Bankers Association, State College, and the State Soil Conservation Committee, and signed by the officers of each.

40–41. Identification chart and group photograph

The award banquet portrait and the typed key that goes with it — four rows of men named left to right with their towns, from Volin and Woonsocket to Presho and Trail City. Preston Painter, Bullock, stands in the third row. The chart is the reason the photograph is still worth something: without it, this is fifty anonymous men in suits.

42. Photograph: an older couple, undated

A color snapshot taken outdoors under a tree — a woman in a red coat and a man in a pale western jacket and a grey Stetson, his arm around her, both smiling at the camera. The clothing suggests the nineteen-seventies. The subjects are not identified on the print; family identification is needed.

43. Photographs: the Willett home on the Little Missouri, 1908

Two prints, captioned in ink in the same hand. The first shows a two-story frame house standing on a bluff above the river, with a covered stage coach fording the water in the foreground — “Willett Home in 1908 — Stage crossing river.” The second is taken close in on the house itself: a ladder leaning against the wall, a group of women in long skirts and men in hats standing at the porch steps, and two teams and wagons drawn up alongside. It is the plainest picture anyone in this family left of what the country actually looked like when they came to it.

Notes on the File

Scanning and condition

Three items in the packet need attention. The 1906 letter from Lewis Painter to his wife is scanned in reverse page order, closing page first. “The Panic of 1907” is likewise reversed, ending before it begins. The Nebraska death certificate of item 24 is rotated ninety degrees and reduced past legibility and should be re-scanned from the original. The third page of the 1956 Rochester letter is faded to the point that two paragraphs cannot be read; a higher-resolution scan under raking light may recover them.

Conflicts in the record

Four disagreements should be settled before any of this material is treated as established fact.

Marriage date. Haraldsen's magazine memoir states that Lewis Painter married May Bovell in 1897. The Butte County register records January 29, 1902. The county record governs, and the November 1902 birth of their son Joe supports it.

Spelling of names. Lewis appears as Louis in the magazine. The nickname Jingo Bill was printed as “Jingle Bells.” May appears variously as May and Mae. The 2014 email thread flags the first two as errors submitted to the magazine for correction; the register spelling of May should govern in this archive.

Ekberg or Ekborg. The same email thread asserts both spellings within a few messages of each other. Unresolved.

Cranston marriage date. Keturah Cranston's obituary gives March 5, 1860. Her husband's obituary and the Ohio probate record both give March 15, with the license issued March 3. The court record governs.

Privacy

The Henrikson family record sheet at items 37 and 38 carries residential addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses for living family members. That information has been removed from the posted file and this description, and is retained separately in the private family papers. Anyone consulting the original scan should observe the same practice.