

# Story of the Craigies And Their Drowning



**JAMES G. CRAIGIE**  
With His Bagpipes.

James G. Craigie, who built and operated the first mill in this city, at Balmoral, was a typical Scotchman, and loved his bagpipes. Mr. Craigie with his wife and another woman, was drowned in Otter Tail lake and their bodies were never recovered.

Tragedy and romance are enmeshed in the life of James G. Craigie, the handsome Scottish lander, who built the first mill in Otter Tail county on the little stream that flows into Otter Tail lake at Balmoral. Balmoral, named after Balmoral castle atop Craig Gowan Hill in Scotland, has the distinction of being the only settlement in the county bearing a Scottish name. It is to get back to the history of this beautiful spot, once taken over by the Sioux by the Chippewa, choice hunting and fishing grounds, one must turn back to the sixties. James G. Craigie, who came from Scotland and remained a time in Canada before

1868 or 1869. There he located his claim, built a house and small flour-mill close to the lake. Craigie as thrifty as his Scotch name implies, had acquired a considerable fortune in Canada and was counted "rich" when he located on the shore of Otter Tail lake. He built his dam across the stream, which was the outlet from Crane, Clitherall and East Battle Lake. There was not much of a waterfall but an ample flow of water to run a two or three stone flour and feed grist mill.

Annie, the comely daughter, was well educated, according to the education afforded in those times, and was, to speak in the vernacular, the "apple of her parents' eyes." She was considered a desirable match for any young man, fortunate enough to win her hand.

It chanced that on a nearby claim lived one, Archie McArthur, with whom Annie fell in love. He too was of Scotch descent, industrious and thrifty though it was said he had a taint of Indian blood in his veins. He called at the Craigie home to seek the hand of the Scottish lassie, but her parents objected violently. Annie, nevertheless, returned his love and they were married. Thereupon Craigie forbade the young couple to ever "darken his door" again.

In the meantime, Craigie had written home to Scotland telling of the wonders of the new Balmoral and urging his friends to come here. The letter was published in a magazine in Aberdeen, Scotland, and this glowing account attracted the eye of John Crompton who came to Balmoral to locate. He was well educated and afterwards filled important state and national offices, being receiver

for a time. When he arrived in the new land he brought with him a woman purported to be his wife and for the first year after their arrival they resided with the Craigies at Balmoral. Then they took up land in Becker county, and moved there. In 1872 the Craigies had another visitor from Scotland, who it seems had seen a paper which stated a John Crompton lived at Balmoral in Otter Tail County, Minnesota. This visitor from Scotland was Mrs. John Crompton. She claimed Crompton had left her in Scotland and that he and the woman he represented as his wife had come to America together.

Mrs. Crompton appealed to E. E. Corliss, the county attorney, and was advised to bring suit for divorce; but the divorce was never granted as fate intervened in the nature of a sailboat tragedy on a beautiful summer afternoon. To quote E. E. Corliss in his reminiscences of early county history: "She asked me about a divorce and I advised her to sue. I met her at Craigie's on Tuesday. We had arranged to go to Detroit on Friday of the same to commence proceedings. Before Friday came, however, she, Craigie and his wife, went out sailing in a small boat on Otter Tail lake. The boat, being weighted heavily with stones for ballast, swamped and sank to the bottom."

Exactly what happened when the sailboat upset has been forever a mystery; the solution held fast in the depths of Otter Tail county's largest lake, for their bodies were never recovered.

Immediately on Craigie's death several of his brothers and sisters, some living in Scotland, others in Canada and one brother

estate. A brother, Alexander Craigie came from Scotland and was appointed administrator.

The brothers and sisters claimed that Annie Craigie, the only daughter, who would be the natural heir to the estate of Balmoral miller, was not Craigie's daughter, but, instead, the daughter of one Falkner living in Scotland; that Craigie met and married her mother in Canada on his arrival from Scotland two or three years after the birth of Annie. Evidence was presented to show that Craigie brought Annie up as his child, calling her by his own name, introduced her as his daughter; wrote her name in books given her by him as "Annie Craigie"; wrote her letters signing himself "Your affectionate father" and treated her in all respects as his legitimate child. The jury found for the defendant, Annie Craigie McArthur thus making her sole heir to the estate and their verdict was upheld by the Supreme Court of Minnesota.

E. E. Corliss, who was then county attorney, in Mason's history of Otter Tail county says: "She won this mill and all of Craigie's property. Later the mill became run down and worthless and it was finally shut down and later sold. After losing all their property, McArthur and his wife went to the Indian reservation at White Earth." It was there the Scottish lassie died, and was followed in death a short time later by her husband. Thus all the actors in the Balmoral drama, like the old grist mill, have gone and naught is left to mark the spot excepting the grist stones that slowly ground out the flour and grist for the pioneers who waited as patiently as did their oxen that they might have the meal with