

Where Isabella Valency Crawford Died

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Among the details known about Isabella Valency Crawford, one of the most clearly recorded is the moment of her death. In her biographical note, Maud Miller Wilson cites a letter from the poet's landlady, Mrs. Charles J. Stuart, in which she recalled how "I caught Miss Crawford in my arms, and she looked up and said, 'What a trouble I am Mrs. Stuart.' Just after that she gave one gasp and expired."¹ Recent studies throw up serious doubts about the length of Miss Crawford's residence at 57 John Street, Toronto, and about her relationship with the owners, Charles Joseph Stuart (who died on 8 December 1903) and Henrietta Cruikshank Stuart (who died on 22 February 1909).² Early statements by J.W. Garvin, by his wife, and by the Stuarts' daughter all indicate a prolonged association. In his *Collected Poems of Isabella Valency Crawford* (1905) Garvin acknowledged the assistance of "Mrs. Charles J. Stuart of Toronto, with whom Miss Crawford and her mother spent the closing years of their lives."³ In 1923 Amelia Beers Garvin, under the name of Katherine Hale, elaborated upon this statement, writing that Isabella and her mother, Sydney, "left Peterborough and went to live in Toronto, taking lodgings over a grocery shop at the corner of King and John Streets, kept by Mrs. Charles J. Stuart, who was a sincere friend to the young poet and her mother."⁴ In her account of the author she included a statement from Mrs. Stuart's daughter, Elsie Anne, by then married to Alban James Hefferman,⁵ who remembered from her youth that "she and her mother lived almost completely by themselves during the years that they lodged with us. . . in the two little rooms upstairs."⁶

¹ M.M. Wilson, MS. in the Douglas Library, Queen's University, cited in M.F. Martin, "The Short Life of Isabella Valency Crawford," *Dalhousie Review* 12 (1972): 397.

² Martin, "Short Life" and D. Farmiloe, "I.V. Crawford: The Growing Legend," *Canadian Literature* 81 (1979), 143-7. Names and dates are from documents in the Land Registry Office for the division of Toronto (No. 63) - officially abbreviated as R.O. No.63: 7443 T and 17556 S.

³ J.W. Garvin, ed., *The Collected Poems of Isabella Valency Crawford* (Toronto, 1905) 4.

⁴ K. Hale, *Isabella Valency Crawford* (Toronto, [1923]) 8.

⁵ R.O. No. 63, 17556 S.

⁶ Hale 12.

The facts plainly contradict these reminiscences. In the first place, the Stuarts did not acquire 57 John Street until 17 June 1881 when they bought it for \$7,800 from Victoria Budge, and to whom they mortgaged it for \$3,300.⁷ The Crawfords could not, then, have moved in with the Stuarts at that address when they first came from Peterborough. Secondly, as Dorothy Farmiloe noticed, the Toronto City Directory gives addresses for the Crawfords from 1882 to 1884 at 214 and 180 Adelaide West. And thirdly, Miss Crawford's autographical account of rents paid from January 1885 to February 1886 includes five payments to a Miss Harrison, whom Miss Farmiloe locates at 216 Adelaide West.⁸ Despite the claim of the obituary in *The Globe*, published on 15 February 1887, three days after the poet's death, that "For the past ten or twelve years Miss Crawford has lived in Toronto with her mother, the last sixteen months of her life being spent at No. 57 John Street," it would seem that they only lived with the Stuarts for some twelve months.⁹

While demonstrable inaccuracies in their statements have aroused scepticism about the reliability of these witnesses, new evidence may restore some confidence in them. A decade ago, in England, I acquired a copy of *Old Spookses' Pass* (1884) bound in salmon-coloured cardboard and with the publisher's advertisement on the back. According to Lorne Pierce there were "some 50 copies" in this binding, "sent out to reviewers."¹⁰ On the recto of the front fly-leaf in Miss Crawford's handwriting and occupying the whole top half of the page, is the following inscription: "To M^r and M^{rs} C. Stuart/ With the best wishes/ of the/ Author/ Toronto - Ontario/ June 3^d 1884." This is during the period that Miss Crawford and her mother boarded with Mr. Thomas Carradice at 180 Adelaide West,¹¹ and proof of a relationship between them and the Stuarts some twenty months before their moving into 57 John Street.

Apparently Miss Crawford was eager that the Stuarts should be among the first to possess her book: 3 June anticipated by a day the earliest published review, that appearing in *The Toronto Globe*.¹² In this copy may be found two clippings from the *Toronto Mail*, one of Miss Crawford's poems "Canada to

⁷ R.O. No. 63, 3086 SW and 3087 SW.

⁸ Farmiloe 144-5.

⁹ Cited in Martin 397.

¹⁰ L. Pierce, MS. note in the Douglas Library, Queen's University, copy, cited in Martin 396.

¹¹ Farmiloe, 146.

¹² Hale 121.

England," published 28 July 1874, and the other a torn fragment of the final twenty three lines of "The Roman Rose-Seller," from 19 August 1874. Although these scraps have nothing to do with the Stuarts, the photograph of their house at 57 John Street, slipped into the front cover, represents a concerted attempt to perpetuate an association between the building and the author.

The date when the photograph was processed is hand-stamped on the back: "APR 1: 1929." The picture shows the west (John Street) side along the length of a stucco-covered building, two stories high, with a full attic, and a two-storied extension to the rear. A small shop occupies the King Street end of the ground floor, the window lettered "RED ROSE TEA" and "S.A. COULTER" (a recent photograph accompanies Donald Jones's article on the house in the *Toronto Star*).¹³ A single hand has written three notes on the snapshot. Of the two on the back, the earliest is in pencil and is partially erased: "home/ late Valancey/ Isabella Crawford/ S.E. cor. King & John/ Toronto." The replacement is in blue-black ink: "Where Isabella Valancey Crawford/ died in 1887/ South East Corner of King & John Sts." After it was mounted, in a now aged hand, the writer has inscribed in ink, "Home of/ Isabella Valancey Crawford died 1887." There is no indication of when the book came into that person's possession.

Firmly establishing this friendship with the Stuarts as far back as June 1884 should place in a fresh perspective the desperate picture painted by Miss Farmiloe. Further, let it be recalled that this period of Toronto saw its heyday. The recently developed western ends of Adelaide and of King Streets were pleasantly situated near to the cultural centres of the city, the corner of King and John being behind the Parliament Buildings on Front Street West, and immediately next to Government House at King and Simcoe, itself directly opposite the old Upper Canada college. The map of 1842 shows the south-east corner of King and John still without buildings, although outlines designate boundaries of building plots.¹⁴ Opposite to west and north, there are fields. Diagonally across, to the north-west, is the old General Hospital. Henry Scadding's account of King and John, published in 1873, describes only the hospital which has by then been removed: "Farther west. . . there was no object possessing any archaeological interest." His next point of focus is on Government House at King and the West side of Simcoe, with

¹³ D. Jones, "Historical Toronto," *Toronto Star*, 29 November 1980, H8.

¹⁴ H. Scadding, *Toronto of Old*, ed. F.H. Armstrong (Toronto, 1986) frontispiece.

Upper Canada College opposite, both in substantial grounds.¹⁵ The luxurious homes north and north-west are treated in his account of his rambles along Queen Street.¹⁶ Not until the Parliament Buildings were demolished about 1904 did this land become free for the industrial development which resulted in the block bounded by John, King, and Simcoe being virtually covered by 1937 with railway sidings.¹⁷

Lodging in these pre-industrial, park-like surroundings in a relatively new building could not have been unpleasant. It would be absurd to charge Miss Crawford with lack of taste in choosing where she lived, in utter contrast to the decorum with which she engaged in artistic pursuits. Elsie Anne Stuart (Mrs. Heffernan) remembered that "She studied piano and played very well indeed, collecting a good deal of music, a part of which she gave to me," and Mrs. Urquhart described the poet's love of music, writing, and of sewing Eastern figures.¹⁸ Evidently she engaged in such activities while at an unknown address, for the base under her model of an elephant and drivers in the Peterborough Centennial Museum is backed with sheets of *The Globe* dated 16 April 1881.¹⁹ There is no doubt that this poet, along with her mother, did not live in the type of vermin infected garret that Miss Farmiloe describes,²⁰ though she would have paid a higher rent for the amenities of her surroundings.

Miss Crawford earned "one to three dollars for each poem" she published in the *Toronto Evening Telegram*.²¹ Her income was supplemented by a quarterly allowance from her uncle, Dr. John Irwin Crawford, M.D., R.N., to whom *Old Spookses' Pass* was dedicated.²² The average Toronto salary in 1884 for a female teacher was \$324 per annum (\$720 for a male)²³ or \$6.23 per week. Miss Crawford, with her mother to help support, earned well below that average, though perhaps not much below the lower end of the teachers' salary scale. No-

¹⁵ Scadding 47-8.

¹⁶ Scadding 240 ff.

¹⁷ V.M. Roberts, "Toronto Harbour," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 15 (1937): 91; Scadding 28, n.9.

¹⁸ Hale 12-13.

¹⁹ My thanks to the archivist, Mrs. McKenzie, for supporting the model aloft for examination of its underside.

²⁰ Farmiloe 146-7.

²¹ Martin 395; Hale 118-7, lists the poems, 10 from June to December 1879, 16 in 1880, 10 in 1881, 10 in 1882, 11 in 1883, 8 in 1884, 9 in 1885, and 1 in 1886.

²² Martin 395; Hale 13, citing Mrs. Heffernan.

²³ M. Filey, *A Toronto Album* (Toronto, 1970) 20.

netheless, her contemporaries plainly told of financial straits, Ethelwyn Wethrald writing that "she proudly and persistently refused to admit that she was poor and needy,"²⁴ E. J. Hathaway that "Her dress was poor, at times almost shabby,"²⁵ and Mrs. Urquhart that "She could not afford to have her poems well bound."²⁶ To these well-established professional acquaintances her income must have seemed impossibly meagre.

Relatively poor Miss Crawford may have been but the account in her hand of rents paid to Miss Harrison cannot support the conclusion reached by Mary F. Martin that "at times she was deeply in debt to her landlady," and the similar contention by Dorothy Farmiloe, without some knowledge of the arrangements between landlady and boarder, or of the required sums and dates of payment.²⁷ The only two figures mentioned, "Paid \$7 on account of rent to the first of May" and "Paid Miss Harrison \$3-50 cents on December 15, 1885," may indicate a monthly rate of \$3.50 per boarder, which would seem to be within the Crawford's means. If it was not, it was because they chose to live in accommodation, however humble, appropriate to women of taste and cultivation.

After Isabella Valancy died on 12 February 1887 the familial relationship with the Stuarts did not cease. When Sydney Crawford made her will on 13 August 1889, leaving her estate to her son, Stephen Walter Crawford, or to his two children if he predeceased her, it was witnessed by Charles and Henrietta Stuart.²⁸ Later, by a circuitous route, they directly benefitted from one of Mrs. Crawford's financial investments. By a mortgage dated 15 November 1890 and registered 6 January 1891, Sydney Crawford loaned \$1600 at 6% for five years to Agnes Meredith and George Edward Meredith, a carpenter, on a property described as the west half of lot 23 on the north side of D'Arcy Street.²⁹ When Sydney Crawford died on 15 March 1894, Letters of Administration of her will were granted to Stephen W. Crawford, then of Iron Bridge, District of Algoma, lumber dealer.³⁰ On 20 June 1894 Stephen Walter, now described as a lumber scaler (measurer), assigned his interest in the mortgage

²⁴ Garvin 16.

²⁵ Cited by James Reaney, Intro to his ed. of Garvin (Toronto, 1972) 16.

²⁶ Hale 14.

²⁷ Martin 398; Farmiloe 145.

²⁸ R.O. No. 63, 16935 GR; in the will her name is spelled "Sidney."

²⁹ R.O. 63, 8164 M.

³⁰ R.O. No. 63, 16935 GR.

in exchange for \$1608.93 to Charles Joseph Stuart.³¹ By 15 November 1895 the Merediths had defaulted in their payments and the west half of lot 23 on the north side of D'Arcy Street, between Spadina and Huron, became Charles Stuart's.³² This property, along with the corner of King and John and a third parcel in Muskoka, passed on his death on 8 December 1903 to his widow Henrietta.³³ On 28 February 1906 she sold 57 John Street for \$9,000, taking back a mortgage of \$5,000.³⁴ The new owner was Sarah A. Coulter, whose name, along with the advertisement for Red Rose Tea, appears in the picture in the Stuart's copy of *Old Spookses' Pass*, in the shop-window of the house where Isabella Valancy Crawford died.

University of Dundee

³¹ R.O. No. 63, 7016 S.

³² R.O. No. 63, 22662 P and 17556 S.

³³ R.O. No. 637443 T (see 7442 T).

³⁴ R.O. No. 63, 22662 P and 17556 S.