

Letters My Grandfather Wrote Me: Family Origins

Bryan Crawford

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"Histories can help achieve a sense of identity when we know the background from which we come," states Bryan Crawford, who became interested in his own family history in 1964 while he was working on a school assignment at the age of eleven. He was further intrigued when his grandfather presented him with photos of his great-great-grandparents, from the 1870s. Today, after more than forty-five years of searching for and gathering information about his family, Crawford has sorted and compiled his findings into this massive and interesting history of his family.

A native of New Zealand, Crawford intertwines stories about his ancestors with the history of the times, a strategy that enhances and fleshes out the text. For example, he writes about New Zealand's Maoris and their struggles with the onslaught of European settlers. He also shares the story of his distant relatives' adventures in settling northern Wisconsin in the 1800s.

As the title suggests, Crawford received most of the genealogical information about his distant relatives from personal letters written to him by his grandfather. Excerpts from that correspondence are included in the book, as are reader-friendly guides and other information—the names of direct-line ancestors are in bold print, Maori words are defined, and there is a rather extensive appendix and index. Maps would have been a useful addition, and the book should have been more carefully edited to eliminate spelling and punctuation errors.

The first four hundred pages of *Letters My Grandfather Wrote Me* are a journey through the lives of Crawford's ancestors. He shares heart-warming profiles of many of his relatives and includes more than seventy black-and-white photos within those pages. The next section of the book, however, could have been an entirely separate book. Seventy-five pages about the author's own life, including details of odd occurrences, take the reader off-track from the story of his family history. His conspiracy theories, his criticisms of the British royals, and his personal grievances against organizations such as Air New Zealand are simply not appropriate subjects for this book, his fine writing skills aside.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (March 27, 2012)

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