



Oscar J Craig (1846-1911)

First President of the University of Montana. He nearly single-handedly managed the university for its first thirteen years. "The University – it shall prosper"

- **1846-Birth.** April 18, 1846 in Madison, Jefferson County, Indiana. He was the son of Miles W. and Mary S. (Feather) Craig. The family was of Scotch-Irish descent. Oscar was the sixth of five sons and two daughters born to Miles and Mary Craig and raised on the family homestead in Indiana.
- **1875-Marriage.** He married Miss Narcissa E. Gasaway on August 24, 1875 in Kansas. They had three children: Mary A. who graduated from Purdue University and became a librarian of the Montana University; William O. who graduated from the University of Montana in 1902; and Vincent W. S. who was a member of the preparatory class of the university.
- **1863.** At seventeen, Oscar enlisted in the First Indiana Heavy Artillery. His command was sent to the Department of the Gulf where he fought in the battles of Baton Rouge, Alexandria, and Fort Balow Louisiana. He was honorably discharged in 1865.
- **School.** Dr. Craig was a schoolman from Indiana and through his disciplines spent the next fourteen years gaining knowledge and education. He earned a Ph.D. from Wooster College, Ohio, where he was named Professor of History and Political Science. He furthered his career teaching and served as academic president at Purdue University.
- **1895.** Dr. Oscar Craig was appointed the as the first president of the newly established University of Montana on June 3, 1895. He moved to Missoula Montana on July 1, 1895. He was the sole administrator with only four faculty to teach the fifty students duly enrolled. Missoula's population was around 4,000 at this time.
- **President.** Craig was the first and one of the longest standing Presidents of the University of Montana serving for thirteen years. His tenure as President of UM began when the doors first opened on September 11, 1895. His yearly salary at the time was \$2,500. Imagine his shock of finding no buildings to conduct school and no land secured as a location for the university. Oscar Craig had a daunting task. He began by working with the City of Missoula to rent a three story public school building where offices, classrooms, gymnasium and dormitory living were held for nearly four years.
- **1896.** Edward L. Bonner and C. P. Higgins donated the acreage for the university. Local groups gathered in celebration of Arbor Day and many of the mature trees you see on campus today were planted at this time.
- **1897.** Dr. Craig influenced campus and building design and was instrumental in the construction of the first two campus buildings: University Hall (Main Hall) and the Science Building. Both buildings broke ground that year. They soon became focal points for travelers going west.
- **1901.** Craig's concern for the safety and comfort of the growing number of women attending the institution resulted in the construction of the first dorm devoted exclusively to women: Craig Hall.
- **1902.** By this time, Oscar Craig had worked to secure entirely through gifts to the university a total of 640 acres of land along the Clark Fork River to the top of Mount Sentinel. He now had what he recognized as a "real campus". He was truly an invested president organizing programs, administrating faculty, working with educators across the state and continuing to teach two or three classes each semester. He truly signified the dedication of the early, traditional, pioneer educators and leaders of these original academic institutions.
- **1908.** Dr. Oscar Craig retired due to illness. He sadly died a short while later.
- **Inspector of the Schools.** Dr. Craig had a passion for equipping Montana school children for college. He traveled extensively to understand the needs of education in the



Montana Territory. Working with Montana Superintendents, Dr. Craig labored persistently at the task of preparing curricula for both elementary and high schools for many years. He was named the official Inspector of Schools for Montana. By the end of his career in 1908, twenty six secondary schools were accredited to prepare pupils to enter college. This was a distinction he was most noted for and one that he cherished throughout his lifetime.

- **1911-Death.** March 5, 1911 from nephritis in San Diego California.

Information researched by Pat Hossle.