

# General George Crook:

## a Military Man's Ties to Mountain Maryland

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New Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**

In the Western Maryland town of Oakland, a rambling home known as Crook's Crest perches on a hilltop. A short section of roadway below is named Crook Street. One could be forgiven for thinking that a famous outlaw had influenced these names, but the "crook" in this case was General George Crook, renowned for his military skills both in conflicts with Native American Indians in the West and in the Civil War in the East.

Crook was born in Taylorsville, Ohio, near Dayton, in 1830, of parents who had moved there from Maryland. Crook's father belonged to a Baltimore County militia company believed to have participated in the defense of Fort McHenry in the War of 1812. Crook attended West Point, graduating in 1852, and spent the rest of his life in the Army. He seems to have grasped the essence of leadership early in his life. His younger brother, when first placed in command of a military company, asked George for advice on being a leader. Crook's response was, "Learn to command yourself and you will find no trouble in commanding your company."

While in the West, Crook honed wilderness and hunting skills enough to be compared to Daniel Boone; these skills would prove useful during the Civil War when soldiers often had to forage for food and scout unfamiliar terrain. He also rose to prominence in the "Indian Wars" that took place before and after the Civil War.

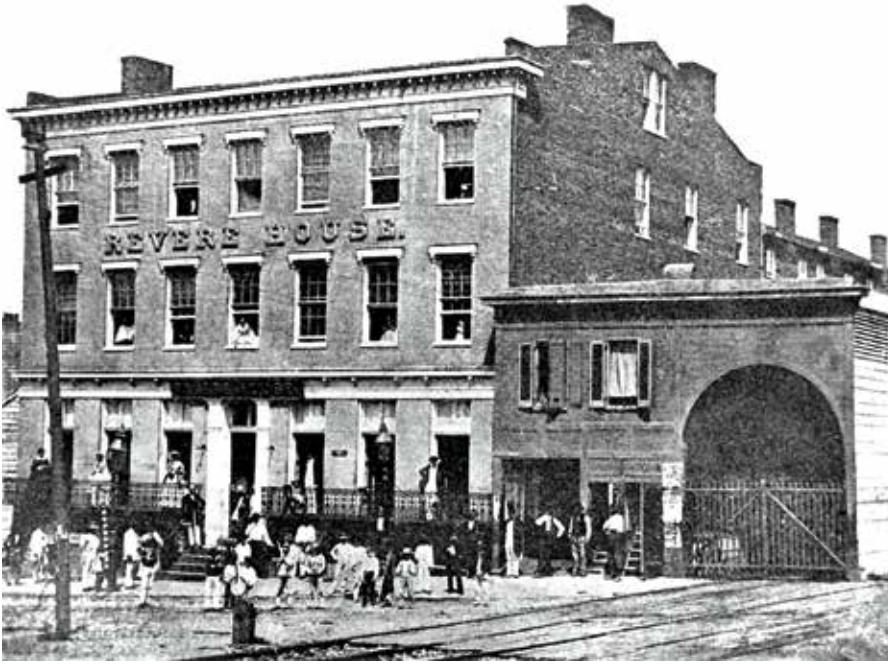
Crook was highly respected for his dealings with Native American Indians. He was successful not only in winning during battles with them, but also in negotiating surrenders and agreements through honest dealing. He wrote an account of his engagement in some of these campaigns, *Operations Against the Apache Indians: 1882-1886*, in



which he emphasized the importance of getting to know the various leaders of the tribes. Crook, who had done very poorly in studying French while he was at West Point, learned several West Coast Native American languages well enough to be able to communicate in them.

Though he was a stern adversary, Crook strove to act fairly in all situations; when Geronimo surrendered, bringing with him a herd of cattle stolen from Mexican ranchers, Crook had the cattle sold and the money returned to the ranchers. He insisted on the U.S. government meeting the terms of its agreements with Native Americans, and he devoted much of his life to working for their rights. The Apache gave Crook the nickname Nantan Lupan, "Grey Wolf." Red Cloud, a leader of the Oglala Lakota, was one of many Native Americans who recognized Crook's integrity: "He, at least, never lied to us. His words gave us hope."

During the Civil War, Crook returned from the West and accepted a commission as colonel of the 36th Regiment



**General Benjamin F. Kelley (above) was captured along with General George Crook by McNeill's Rangers in Cumberland, MD, February, 1865.**

**At the time of his capture, General Crook was headquartered at the Revere House (left) in Cumberland, MD. (Courtesy Albert Feldstein)**

of Ohio, volunteers for the Union Army. He and his men were primarily positioned in the area around western Virginia and western Maryland. Crook believed that “example is always the best general order” and took an active role in the fighting. On one occasion, he dismounted from his horse to wade across a waist-high stream. His riding boots filled with water and he became stuck in the mud, but his men pulled him out. Crook is distinguished for his courage and strategic cunning at Antietam and Cloyd’s Mountain, among other engagements. He was part of the defeated Union forces at the second battle of Bull Run; it was gratifying for him that his forces were instrumental in preventing General Jubal Early’s July 1864 raid on Washington, D.C. Crook was eventually promoted to the rank of general.

General Crook’s autobiographical notes, discovered in military archives in 1942, reveal that he was quite critical of much of the conduct of the Civil War. After offering an example of being ordered to do something impossible, he did not sugarcoat his view. “Such imbecility and incompetence was simply criminal, a great deal of which lasted until the close of the war. It was galling to have to serve under such people. But many of them, by maneuvering in politics and elsewhere, are looked upon by certain people throughout the land as some of our military luminaries.” Nevertheless, there were officers he respected, including his West Point classmate, Philip Sheridan, and General U.S. Grant.

Crook also forged a firm and lasting friendship with Rutherford B. Hayes, who fought in the Civil War before going on to be a Member of Congress, Governor of Ohio, and President of the United States. In his diaries, Hayes referred to Crook as the best military leader under whom he had ever served; Hayes even named one of his sons George Crook Hayes.

One unusual incident that took place during the Civil War secured Crook a place in local history. In late February 1865, while Crook was headquartered in Cumberland, Maryland, at the Revere House, he was kidnapped by a group of partisan Confederates known as McNeill’s Rangers. The raiders “arrested” Crook and another general, Benjamin F. Kelley, headquartered at The Barnum, a nearby hotel. Kelley’s adjutant, Captain Thayer Melvin, was also taken. John H. McNeill, first leader of this guerilla group, held a grudge against General Kelley because Mrs. McNeill had been removed from a train and arrested in Oakland in 1862 while on her way to join her husband in Virginia. When the elder McNeill died after being wounded in an 1864 raid, his 22-year-old son Jesse assumed leadership of the band and revived the idea of retaliating against General Kelley.

The daring raiders, many of whom were natives of the area around Cumberland, succeeded in capturing the officers, eluding Union troops dispatched to find them, and holding the generals in Richmond, Virginia, where they were treated with great courtesy and respect. The Union officers even

had an opportunity to share a meal and conversation with General Jubal Early, an opponent they had battled up and down the Shenandoah Valley. A few weeks later, an exchange was conducted so that Crook could continue to lead in the final months of the war. (For more details of the raid, see “The Capture of Generals Crook and Kelley From Cumberland by McNeill’s Rangers During the Civil War,” by Harold L. Scott, Sr., in the Fall 2005 issue of *Mountain Discoveries* – [www.mountaindiscoveries.com](http://www.mountaindiscoveries.com).)

As an interesting side note, three future Presidents were present in Cumberland at the time of the raid: Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield, and William McKinley. They apparently were not seen as militarily important enough to kidnap.

Several of McNeill’s Rangers were from the part of Allegany County that in 1872 became Garrett County. These included Charles J. Dailey, son of the owner of the Revere House, and sister to Mary Tapscott Dailey. The family, originally from Moorefield, Virginia (later West Virginia), were Confederate sympathizers despite living in a Union state.

It is likely that General Crook and Mary Dailey were acquainted before the raid; in fact, they may have been

engaged. Most historians believe they had already met at social events with dancing held in Cumberland. This seems likely, especially in light of the fact that General Kelley later married a woman he had met while headquartered in Cumberland. Others tell the romantic story of Crook meeting the young woman during his captivity by the Rangers. Whatever the circumstances of George Crook meeting Mary Dailey, they were issued a marriage license on August 21, 1865, at the Allegany County Courthouse in Cumberland. They were married the next day by the Reverend William L. Heyland. She was 23; he was just a few weeks shy of 35.

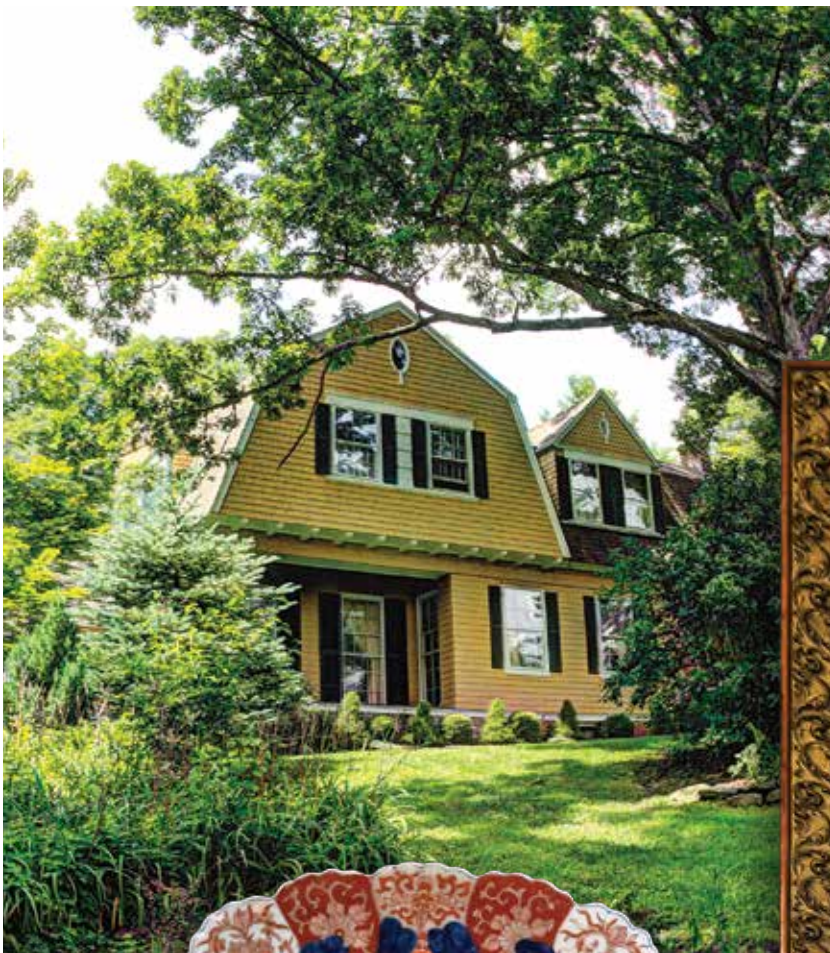
Mary Dailey’s father also owned and managed the Glades Hotel in Oakland, Maryland, considered one of the finest mountain resort hotels of the time. After the Civil War, General Crook continued his military career in the West, but on visits to Mary’s family, the Crooks stayed at the Glades Hotel. Oakland had much to recommend it. It offered proximity to Mary’s family, especially her sister, Fanny, and to friends of the couple. One such friend, Gus W. Delawder, a pioneer in aquaculture and conservation, served the locally available rye whiskey, regarded as superior to other whiskeys, at his fishing camp, but he never allowed guests to take any with them. He made an exception for



**The Glades Hotel in Oakland, Maryland — considered one of the finest mountain resort hotels of the time — was owned and managed by Mary Dailey’s father. Mary and her husband, General George Crook, were fond of Oakland and decided to build a home there in the late 1880s. Unfortunately George died before the construction was complete.**

The Dr. Thomas Johnson family has carefully restored and has resided at the house at Crook's Crest (left) since the 1970s. The lithograph of General Crook on horseback (below) was donated by former owner, Mrs. Nadine Bussey, as a gift to the house.

The platter (below left) was one of Mrs. Crook's favorite pieces. It can be viewed at the Garrett County Historical Society Museum in Oakland, MD.



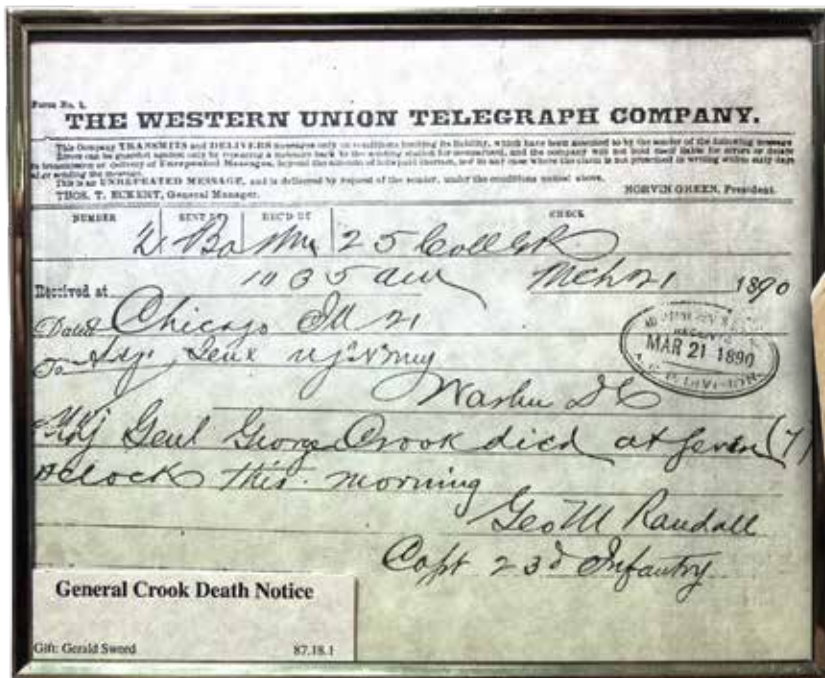
his friend George Crook, sending two barrels to Crook in Arizona. Crook's companion in captivity, General Kelley, and his wife Clara settled in the area, building a house known as Swan Meadow that is still occupied by a local family today. Oakland also had a mild summer climate, much natural beauty, and prolific hunting and fishing opportunities for General Crook.

The Crooks found the area so agreeable that they decided to build a home on some land that had formerly belonged to Mary's father. Because it was at a high point on one side of the town, they had a scenic view of the town and the glade land beyond the town. The property became known

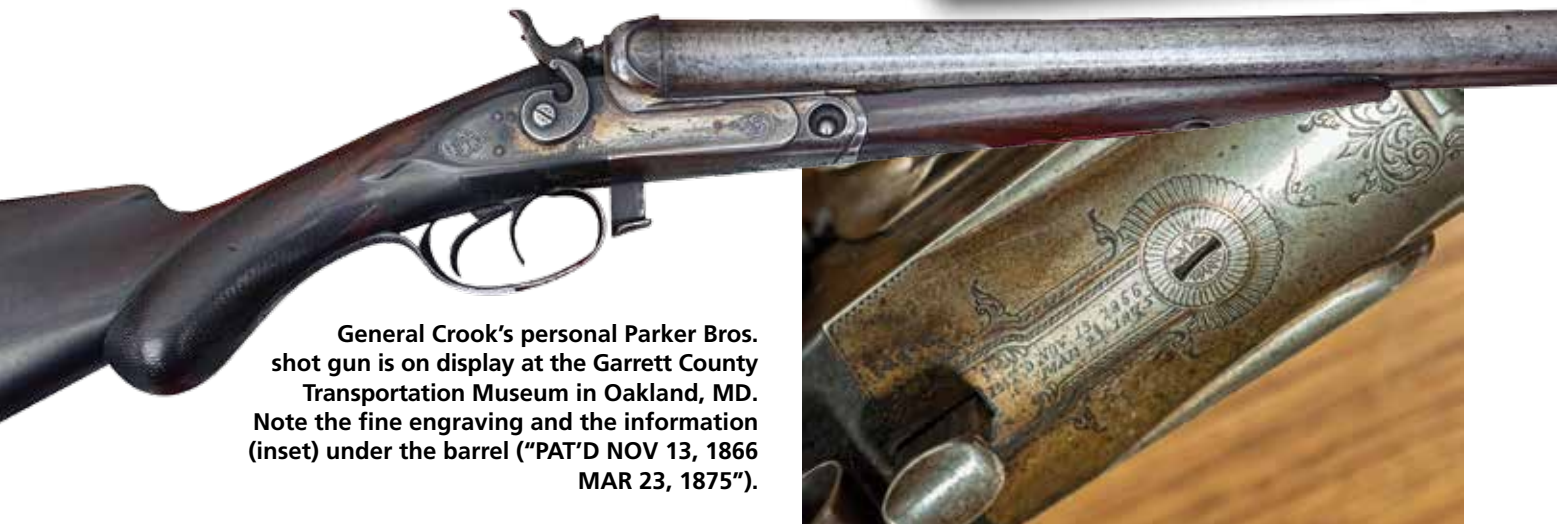
as Crook Crest; most townspeople today refer to it as Crook's Crest.

As the house began to take shape, General Crook was still an active military officer, commanding the largest military department in the West, but he participated in the design and furnishing of the home. Local historians were able to document that he chose woodwork and doors; this helped in the quest to place a commemorative plaque on the property in recent years.

Sadly, Crook died on March 21, 1890, before the construction was completed. He collapsed in Chicago, where he and Mary were staying. He was brought back to Oakland for burial in the Dailey family plot. Among the guests on the funeral train were Rutherford B. Hayes, William McKinley, and "Buffalo Bill" Cody.



A Western Union telegram (above) from March 21, 1890, relating General Crook's death, is on display at the Garrett County Historical Society Museum in Oakland, MD, as well as an original photo of General Crook (right).



General Crook's personal Parker Bros. shot gun is on display at the Garrett County Transportation Museum in Oakland, MD. Note the fine engraving and the information (inset) under the barrel ("PAT'D NOV 13, 1866 MAR 23, 1875").

Local lore holds that Mary Crook and her sister each took one flower from the floral displays at the funeral as a keepsake. The rest of the mourners followed suit and completely emptied the vases. Some speculate that Mary was upset by the townspeople's behavior and for this reason later decided to have her husband moved to Arlington Cemetery. The record shows that both General Crook and his wife were re-interred at Arlington after their deaths, so it is doubtful that overly enthusiastic collecting of floral mementos, if this did actually happen, had anything to do with the burial decision. Crook was, after all, a national military hero.

Though General George Crook never lived in the home, his widow did retain the home until her death in 1895. After Mary Crook's death, her sister Fannie kept the home. Just two months after her sister died, Fannie married Lieutenant Matthew Markland, who had served under General Crook for many years, and the Marklands spent a great deal of time at Crook's Crest.

Ownership of the house after Fannie included the families of A.D. Naylor, E.M. Weeks, and E.L. Bussey. Since the 1970s, the Dr. Thomas Johnson family has resided at Crook's Crest. They have carefully restored and maintained the house on the hill. Crook's Crest still has the woodwork

chosen by the general. Mrs. Nadine Bussey, former owner of the house had acquired a lithograph of General Crook on horseback (Kurz & Allison Art Studio, Chicago) and placed it over the mantelpiece. Mrs. Bussey told the Johnsons that she was leaving the lithograph as a gift not to them, but to the house. The lithograph still graces the wall over the fireplace mantel.

In 1898, both George and Mary Crook were moved to Arlington National Cemetery. An Arizona history of women (where the Crooks lived during part of his military career) claims that Mary Crook was the first woman to be buried in Arlington. Later, Mary's sister Fannie and her husband, Lieutenant Markland, were also buried nearby. General Crook's gravesite is marked with a monument that commemorates his negotiation with Geronimo.

General Crook was important in many parts of the country. His name is attached to counties in Oregon and Wyoming; mountain peaks in the Warner and Cascade ranges; former forts in California and Nebraska; a town in Colorado; a national forest trail in Arizona; a walk in Arlington Cemetery; and a Colorado site of ancient petroglyphs, which locals say show Crook's brand on the horses. The 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division is nicknamed

"Greywolf" in honor of Crook's Apache nickname. The General Crook House at Fort Omaha, Nebraska, where he lived when he commanded the Department of the Platte, is now a museum open to the public. Collections of his letters and other papers are located in several places, including Washington, D.C., and Oregon. Crook has even been included as a character in a 1993 movie, *Geronimo: An American Legend*, and a television series about the West.

However, Oakland has a special place in General Crook's story. He married a woman from the area, he visited Oakland many times, he began construction of a house here where he planned to spend his retirement years, and after his sudden death in Chicago, at age 59, he was buried in the Oakland Cemetery, in the Dailey family plot.

Oakland is justifiably proud of its connection to this illustrious military leader and advocate for Native Americans. Visitors to Oakland today will find photos of the Glades Hotel and many artifacts related to General and Mrs. George Crook. The Historical Society Museum (*see ad below*) on Second Street displays dishes, photos, and many other items. Around the corner at the Transportation Museum, a rifle and wallet and some other items owned by General Crook are exhibited.

Those interested in research will find many materials in the historic society's files, such as more pictures, copies of Crook's writing (including his autobiography, discovered fifty-two years after his death in some military archival materials donated by his military aide's widow), oral history accounts, newspaper articles, and even a note from a descendant of one of McNeill's Rangers certifying that the horse shoe donated to the museum came loose from the raider's horse as the group escaped from Cumberland with the captured generals.

It's also possible to see where the Crook's Crest and Swan Meadow homes are located (still occupied and loved), and the Dailey family plot can be found in the old Oakland Cemetery on Fourth Street near the courthouse.

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*Editor's Note: Crook Crest and Swan Meadow homes are privately owned and NOT available for touring.*



**Garrett County  
Historical Museum**  
107 South Second Street, Oakland, MD  
301-334-3226  
[www.garrettcountrymuseums.com](http://www.garrettcountrymuseums.com)  
Transportation Museum  
Liberty Street, Oakland, MD  
301-533-1044

**Summer Hours:**  
Monday – Saturday 10 am – 3 pm  
Closed Sunday