

THE ELUSIVE FEMALE

By Dani Crossley



Feminine mystique and charm may have come to mind after reading the title, but it's our society's custom of the wife's taking the husband's surname after marriage to which I refer. Looking back several generations of your family tree, do you notice that all the pertinent information for the men shows up while across from their sisters and daughters, there are big empty spaces? Depending on birth age as it relates to a census year, it's usually not too difficult to follow a growing family through two or three censuses. Along about the second census, the women begin to drop off. Where did they go? Whom did they marry? Did they die young?

If your elusive female married before 1885, the year the counties began keeping marriage records, you will have to take a more indirect route to finding your quarry. Ezekiel Crossley, born circa 1795 arrived in the Columbia County area from Lehigh County in the early 1820's. He married Margaret Nafey before 1825. They settled in the Devil's Hole area in northern Pine Township (then Madison Township). Five children were born to this couple: Mathias, 1825; Peter, 1828; Elizabeth Jane, 1830; Catharine, 1838; and George Washington, August 21, 1839. My husband descends from George Washington. I have been researching this family for over ten years and have slowly gathered information on the Crossleys in Columbia and Montour Counties.

Mathias married Mary Margaret Swisher and had three children. He died of dysentery July 1865 in the Long Island area of New York after serving two years in the Civil War. Peter married Margaret Brunner, had five children, and lived most of his life in Sullivan County. He died in 1904 and is buried with his wife in Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Lycoming County. George Washington married Catharine Swisher in 1860, and they had fourteen children, only one dying in infancy. George died in 1926

and is buried in Lungerville Cemetery. What about Elizabeth Jane and Catharine? I didn't have a clue.

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS		MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH.			
1. PLACE OF DEATH. County of <u>COLUMBIA</u> Township of _____ or Borough of <u>BLOOMSBURG</u> or City of _____		COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS. Registration District No. <u>413</u> Primary Registration District No. <u>1200</u> File No. _____ Registered No. <u>161</u>	
2. FULL NAME <u>Anna Catharine Swisher</u>		[If death occurred in a Hospital or Institution, give its NAME instead of street and number.]	
3. SEX <u>F</u>	4. COLOR OR RACE <u>W.</u>	5. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED <u>married</u>	16. DATE OF DEATH <u>Dec 11 1914</u> (Month) (Day) (Year)
6. DATE OF BIRTH <u>Dec 25 1837</u> (Month) (Day) (Year)		17. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <u>Dec 11 1914</u> , to <u>Dec 11 1914</u> , and that I last saw him alive on <u>Dec 11 1914</u> , and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at <u>11:30 P.M.</u> The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows: <u>Stuffy degeneration of heart & dropsy</u>	
7. AGE <u>76</u> yrs. <u>11</u> mos. <u>19</u> ds. If LESS than 1 day how many...hrs. or...min.?		(Duration) <u>1</u> yrs. <u>3</u> mos. ds.	
8. OCCUPATION (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work <u>Housewife</u> (b) General nature of industry business, or establishment in which employed (or employer)		Contributory (SECONDARY) <u>Out-patry</u> (Duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. ds.	
9. BIRTHPLACE (State or Country) <u>Pa</u>		(Signed) <u>J. S. Johnson</u> M. D. <u>Dec 14 1914</u> (Address) <u>BLOOMSBURG</u>	
10. NAME OF FATHER <u>Mathias Crossley</u>		*State the DISEASE CAUSING DEATH; or in deaths from VIOLENT CAUSES, state (1) MEANS OF INJURY; and (2) whether ACCIDENTAL, SUICIDAL, OR HOMICIDAL.	
11. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or Country) <u>Pa</u>		18. LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (FOR HOSPITALS, INSTITUTIONS, TRANSIENTS OR RECENT RESIDENTS). At place of death _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds. In the _____ State _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds. Where was disease contracted, _____ If not at place of death? _____ Former or usual residence _____	
12. MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER <u>Margaret Wephey</u>		19. PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL <u>New Resonant Cemetery</u> DATE OF BURIAL <u>Dec 14 1914</u>	
13. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or Country) <u>Pa</u>		20. UNDERTAKER <u>G. S. Baker</u> ADDRESS _____	
14. THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE. (Informant) <u>Mrs. Perry Swisher</u> (Address) <u>BLOOMSBURG</u>			
15. Filed <u>Dec 14 1914</u> <u>J. B. Amos</u> Local Registrar			

It is very unusual at this stage in the game for me to come across any new information regarding this Crossley family, but more and more resources are being indexed and being made available to members of Columbia County Historical & Genealogical Society. So, I keep looking. When I come across a Crossley name I can't place, the antenna goes up. I was checking the Columbia County Death Certificates for a specific date in the 1916-1918 era. [These records were in the Columbia County Prothonotary and Clerk of the Courts Office at the time when the author wrote the article. They have since been transferred to the Columbia County Historical & Genealogical Society under a custodial care agreement. They are currently being processed and will be available in the near future.] When I have to look at these records, I always take the time to notice other names in the same book, to see if there are any records with information I need. During one of these afternoons, I came upon

the death record for Charles Edward Swisher, July 29, 1858 – July 7, 1916. Since the Swishers intermarried with the Crossleys, I always perk up when I see this surname. I was more puzzled than perky when I noticed Charles' mother's name was Anna Crossley. The deceased's mother's **maiden name**, when known, is included in these records. Who was this woman? I recorded Charles' father's name – Oliver Perry Swisher, his COD (Cause of Death), burial location and continued my search.

I really became obsessed with placing this woman when another of her children appeared in the death records: Thomas E. Swisher, March 3, 1865 – November 12, 1947, child of O. P. Swisher and Anna C. Crossley. This Anna Crossley wouldn't leave my mind. I kept going back and staring at her name and possible connection. Since her son was buried in New Rosemont Cemetery, I reviewed those records at the Society again. Yes, there they were: Swisher, Oliver P., 1825-1918 and wife Annie C., 1838-1914. Only now I had a middle initial, a birth date and a death date. In all the census records, Catharine Crossley was never referred to as Anna, but it was too much of a coincidence. She must be Anna Catharine Crossley Swisher. I headed back to the courthouse and my favorite perch on a rickety chair in a dimly lit corner of the archival area of the basement of the Prothonotary's Office. The Columbia County death certificate records are divided into two groups – the northern Columbia Co. area (Millville, Pine, Madison, and Greenwood Townships) and the Bloomsburg area. I knew I had scoured the northern Columbia books as soon as I was aware of their existence. This area was the regular haunting grounds of the Crossleys descended from Ezekiel. I had never checked this particular time frame of the Bloomsburg books. My anticipation increased as I slowly turned the pages, not wanting to miss anything and hoping against hope that I would find what I was looking for before I reached the end of the 1914 records. There, on December 11, 1914, she was: Anna Catherine Swisher, December 25, 1837 – December 11, 1914, daughter of Mathias Crossley and Margaret Naphey. This threw me for a moment, as Mathias was her brother, not her father. I looked at the informant and as it was Anna's daughter-in-law, I realized she had just been mistaken. Anna Catherine was indeed buried in New Rosemont Cemetery. Now that I knew her last name, I was also able to find her obituary through our website's index of the Benton Argus. Even though it didn't mention her maiden name, I gained additional information regarding her children. Everything fell into place, and I now had matched up one of the two elusive females. On our next walk through Rosemont

Cemetery, Wally and I located the Swisher headstones close to the road and paused a minute to reflect on his great-grandfather's sister and her family.

I realized I had stumbled upon an important way to identify these married women – through their children's death records. In most cases, the women themselves died before these records were kept. I was successful in applying this research technique to the other elusive female, Elizabeth Jane. After expanding my routine death record searches to the Bloomsburg area books, James C. Polk's death record loomed large on the page. The information was sketchy – no birth date and an estimated age of 73 when dying on November 30, 1931. He was the son of Thomas Polk and Jane Crossley. His son, Reamer Polk, was the informant. I couldn't get home fast enough to find this family in the census records. Sure enough – right location, right age. There was a good chance I had located Ezekiel's last daughter, Elizabeth Jane. Studying the census records, it appeared she had died between 1900 and 1910. Hmm, this one could be trickier. Death records began in 1906. Fortunately, our county began recording deaths in 1893. They were recorded by township and forwarded to the county seat annually for transfer into the master records. The name of Jane Polk was somewhat familiar. I pulled out my old research tablets and that evening in front of the TV, began paging through. On about the third tablet, I found my hen-scratched notes. Trouble was, I had been in such a hurry whatever day I originally transcribed them, I couldn't be sure what I had written. Another trip back to dusty, heavy tome in the courthouse basement confirmed what I just knew to be true. Jane Polk, age 64, a widow, born in Madison Township, had died of dropsy in Pine Township on April 7, 1901. She was buried in Salem Cemetery in Unityville.

The Pointer Sisters' *"I'm So Excited"* music has faded. The happy, happy genealogy dance in the kitchen has wound down. After a deep breath and a sense of accomplishment, I'm ready to take on the next great ancestor mystery.



The author, Dani Crossley, is a member of the Columbia County Historical & Genealogical Society Board of Directors.

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