

The Vanall Family

My father's mother's family has been residents of Springfield for over 177 years. My grandfather Jesse James Cox Sr. was born in Longview, Texas, and raised in Louisiana. He relocated to Springfield during the 1940's. My grandmother Cornelia Ann Cruse Cox (1929-2003) was born and raised in Springfield. Her father William H. Cruse (1888-1947) was a full blooded Sioux Indian who had been born in New Jersey; outside his ancestral homelands (the Dakotas). William worked as a bond boy as a child to help support his family. He moved to Springfield in 1928 from Connecticut. In 1929 he married Elsie Ann Vanall, the widow of Frank Alexander. William was a laborer and a building watchman for the St. James building, which still stands today. He purchased a home for his new family on 55 Oak St soon after his marriage to Elsie. Elsie was born in Springfield on October 30, 1898. Her mother Cornelia Ann Carter (1861-1940) was from Tyringham, Massachusetts. In the 1880's she and her parents, and brother Frank moved from Otis, Massachusetts to Springfield. Cornelia's father Edward was an ex-slave from Virginia. Her mother Nancy M. Carter was born in New York, and was the daughter of Irish and Black parents. In the 1890's Cornelia met and married Howard Vanall, Cornelia brought a son to the marriage, William Edward Elkey. William would become a photographer during the Harlem Renaissance. He photographed many famous Afro-Americans; such as Bessie Smith, Florence Mills, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes. William changed his last name to Elcha while living in New York. Howard and Cornelia had six children together: Edith, Charles, Elsie, Mary, Carrie, and Eva.

Howard S. Vanall(1859-1916?) was a porter who was born and raised in Springfield. His paternal grandfather Lot Vanall(1793-1862) was a farmer and landowner, who came to Springfield from New York sometime during the 1820's. Lot's son Henry was a porter who owned a house on 52 Monroe St in the Old hill section of the city. The Vanall family married into other families in Springfield and over time the family name has all but disappeared. However many descendants both White and Black still reside in Western Massachusetts; specifically Springfield and Westfield.