

Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

The Path to a Remarkable Arizona Frontier Woman

A few weeks ago I wrote about my grandparents, Ambrose and Grace Ring, who in 1905/1906 lived near the old Ruby mining camp in southern Arizona, close to the border with Mexico. Today I'd like to tell you about Ines Fraser - who my grandparents met by chance in Ruby - and how that encounter led my brother and me down another fascinating historical path to a book.

Twenty-three-year-old Ines Fraser, a schoolteacher from Salida, Colorado - just married to miner Jack Fraser - arrived in Tucson by train in August, 1904. Ines and Jack were on their way to the Los Alamos gold mine, near Ruby, where they hoped to strike it rich.

Jack and Ines struggled to make a living in an unforgiving environment. Ines would later recall - in letters to her grandchildren - her "loneliness and isolation." She would also write about meeting new friends, Grace and Ambrose Ring, who unfortunately only remained in the area a short time.

Between 1911 and 1917, Ines had three children. For each birth, Jack sent her to San Diego or back home to Salida - so that she could receive better medical care than was available in Arizona's rough borderland. During those long separations, Ines and Jack wrote beautiful, loving letters to each other - Ines keeping Jack apprised of her condition and hopes to return to Arizona soon, and Jack telling Ines of his difficult, despairing struggles to make the mine successful.

In late 1917, with Ines and the kids back at Los Alamos, Ines experienced "some of the happiest times of her life," as photos in the Fraser family album would clearly show. But the mining troubles continued - Jack wanted desperately to find another occupation. And Mexican bandits were raiding across the border with increasing frequency.

As Ines left for San Diego in mid 1919, to prepare for the birth of her fourth child, Jack was eagerly negotiating to buy the general store in Ruby.

Jack Fraser did buy the Ruby store and was happily awaiting Ines's return from San Diego with his new daughter, Constance, when, on February 27, 1920, he was brutally shot in the store by Mexican bandits.

Ines frantically returned to southern Arizona - reaching her husband's bedside in a Nogales military hospital just after he died. Ines heartbrokenly settled her husband's affairs, sold the store, and returned to San Diego.

Ines raised her four children alone in San Diego during the Great Depression. She spent the rest of her life (she died in 1970) trying to understand her relationship to the

Almighty. She expressed her thoughts in beautifully composed letters, poetry, and later in scholarly articles for national publications.

So how did these details come to light?

Several of the 33 photographs that my grandfather, Ambrose Ring, took during his and Grace's few months in southern Arizona, included pictures of the Frasers. When my brother Al and I started research on our grandparents' history around Ruby, we noted the names of friends Jack and Ines Fraser in Grace's old address book. Who were these people?

After years of trying without much success to trace Fraser family relatives, the breakthrough was Al's finding an obscure newspaper obituary notice for Daphne Fraser, the first of Ines and Jack Fraser's children, who died in 1981 of cancer. That obituary listed surviving relatives including a sister, Constance, and her son, Bruce Kiely.

Al tracked down Bruce on the east coast, confirmed that "Constance" was the Constance Fraser we were looking for, and received Bruce's enthusiastic permission to talk to her about Fraser family history. And guess where Constance was living: in Apache Junction, just east of Phoenix.

Al called Constance (she preferred Connie) and thus began a truly delightful - and certainly fruitful for us - relationship with a wonderful lady. She was interested in our research and writing plans and eager to help.

And what a treasure trove of family history records she had – an example for all us! She showed us scores of old letters, photos, records of all kinds – and she willingly shared these with us.

In 2007, Al and I, along with our partner Tallia Pfrimmer Cahoon, published *Frontier Lady of Letters – The Heroic Love Story of Ines Fraser*.



*Left-to-right: Jack Fraser, Ines Fraser and the Frasers' new friend Grace Ring.
(Courtesy of Ring family, 1906)*



*Ines Fraser adds promising soil to the gold-separation sluice at the Los Alamos mine.
(Courtesy of Connie Fraser Kiely, circa 1910)*