



The Mill Wheel

News and Notes from the Cranford Historical Society

Summer 2021

Union County, New Jersey

New Series, Number 115

President's Message

Dear Members,

Hope everyone is doing well and enjoying the warm weather. It's great to see all the flower bulbs emerging at this time, especially at the Crane-Phillips House Museum. The Landscaping Committee will be planting annuals in the coming weeks, hopefully. I would like the front of the museum in colors of yellow and blue in celebration of the Township's 150th Anniversary.

Although the museum is still closed due to the pandemic we have continued with the upkeep and hopefully, by September, we can re-open, if all goes well and is safe to do so, with an "Ice Cream Cone Social" like we did 4 years ago.

Our recent Garage Sale was a success, even though the weather wasn't on our side. I would like to thank those members who generously donated items in making this sale a success. Also, thank you to the volunteers who helped me in setting up and working the garage sale.

We recently purchased a Zoom account which will enable us to do more virtual programming during this pandemic. Please look for details on our website in the coming months: cranfordhistoricalsociety.org.

Our website has been re-vamped to give everyone the History of Cranford and new information will continue to be added. We would love to continue to hear your thoughts on the website and if you would like to see any other information, please let us know.

Our 2021 Membership forms have been sent out. Please renew your membership as we need your support in keeping the Cranford Historical Society strong. Your membership continues to allow us to fulfill the upkeep and maintenance of the Hanson House and Crane-Phillips House Museum, our History Award program given to a High School Senior each year and our 3rd grade school tours.

Until our next Mill Wheel,

Stay Well, Stay Happy, Stay Safe, Keep Smiling!

It's time to smell the roses!

Thank you and Happy 150th Anniversary to the Township of Cranford!

Your President,
Margaret Gerlach



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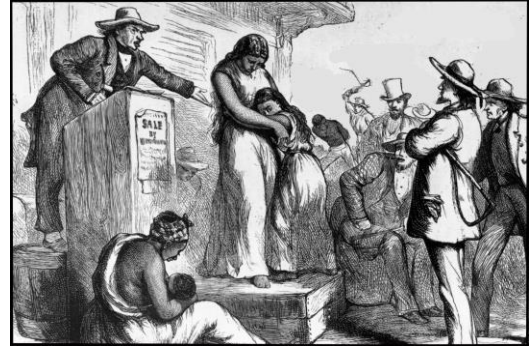
THE MILL WHEEL
Published five times a year for members of the Society

“Stories of Slavery in New Jersey” Presentation

by Jean Kreiling

To celebrate Black History Month, on February 24, the Society held a virtual program "Stories of Slavery in New Jersey." It was presented by Rick Geffken, the author of a new book with the same title. In a powerful and often moving talk, Geffken interwove the story of New Jersey's shameful history of slavery with stories of individuals who suffered under its yoke.

Slaves were brought to New Jersey in the early 17th century by the Dutch patroons and later, by English colonists. They were put to work building homes, tilling fields, running mills and performing every kind of labor that was demanded by their masters who, by forcing them to work for nothing, were themselves able to become wealthy. But as Geffken noted, holding people against their will was difficult because they were always running away. Newspapers carried ads offering rewards for their return and laws were passed detailing severe physical punishments that would be meted out when they were found.



A Slave Auction

Many people who played important roles in New Jersey's history owned slaves. William Penn depended on them to run his mills and farms. Despite this, he is only known to have manumitted one man whose name was Yaff.

George and Martha Washington owned 300 slaves. On his death, Washington only freed one, his long-time personal attendant Billy Lee. When Martha died, she, too, only saw fit to free a single slave.

Abolitionists fought against the evils of slavery, but slave owners fought back. They were reluctant to relinquish their human property. In an attempt to pacify both sides, the New Jersey legislature passed laws promising future change. The 1804 An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery declared that females born to a slave mother after July 4, 1804 would be freed at the age of 21 and that males would be freed at the age of 25. Sadly, this law was often circumvented by wily owners who sold their slaves in the South before their term was up.

In 1846, an Act to Abolish Slavery was passed, but just like the earlier act, no slaves were emancipated. Instead, they were renamed "apprentices for life."

Geffken said that while he was doing research for his book, he became a friend

of Mae Edwards, a 4th generation descendent of a man named Charles Reeves who had been manumitted when he reached the age of 25. In 1850, Charles married Hannah B. Van Cleif and they started a family. Although he was now free, Charles's worries were not over because unscrupulous bounty hunters were kidnapping Blacks and selling them in the South. They could do this with impunity because the Federal Fugitive Slave Law required runaway slaves to be returned to their owners. This must have concerned Reeves because he and several other free Blacks now decided to purchase small lots in a 2-acre cemetery. By doing this, they became property owners and were thereby insulated from kidnapping because it was illegal for slaves to own property.

To take advantage of the fact that money could be made by selling Blacks in the South, Charles Morgan and his brother-in-law Jacob Van Wickle, a Middlesex County judge, hatched a cruel scheme. They gathered together dozens of free Blacks and with lies convinced them that jobs with good wages were available in the South. All they had to do was to board a ship and go to New Orleans. To give their agreements the look of legality, the judge created phony consent forms. The sad end of this story is that these people boarded ships and were delivered into the hands of Southern slave masters. They were never heard from again and Charles Morgan and Judge Van Wickle were never punished.

With the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1885 and its ratification by New Jersey in 1886, slavery was finally abolished. However, it was not until 2008 that the legislature passed a resolution of apology for the wrongs that had been inflicted by slavery. In closing, Geffken

noted that the apology did not include reparations.



(Photo Courtesy Wheatmark Publications)

James S. Avery, Sr. –

A Lifetime of Service

by Vic Bary

Growing up in Cranford

Jim Avery was born March 24, 1923 in a 1,200 square foot house at 47 Johnson Avenue that his father had built in 1904. He was the youngest sibling of four brothers and a sister.

Both his parents were born in Virginia (his father to a former slave) and had limited educations. His father was illiterate and did odd jobs around town. His mother worked as a maid for the Denman family (who kept Jim in shoes with hand-me-downs). Jim remembered Johnson Avenue as a mixed-race Blue Collar neighborhood where everyone socialized and got along

In spite of their limited educations, both his parents stressed the value of education, as well as the importance of hard work and religious values. Jim attributed his later successes to their influence. He fell in love with reading in 5th grade and was regularly driven after school to the Cranford Library by one of his teachers riding in the rumble seat of her car.

Jim would excel at both academics and sports while at Cranford High School. He was a varsity running back, quarterback and kicker for the CHS football team (he was named second best quarterback in New Jersey and first among Group 2 schools) and was State Group 2 220 low hurdles champion. In academics he was National Honor Society, named class president, and in the Spring of 1941, was one of only two students to receive a Union County academic scholarship to attend Columbia University. His mother died that Spring before he left for Columbia.

Columbia University and Military Service

Upon arrival at Columbia, Jim once again busied himself with sports - football, basketball and track, while also excelling academically and working on the side. When his nation went to war in December of that year, Jim felt the call to serve.

In early 1942, with a number of Columbia friends, Jim applied to the Marine Corps officer candidate program. Jim was rejected (the Marines did not accept Blacks). Later in 1942 he joined an Army Reserve unit with call-up to be at the end of the school year 1943.



(Photo Courtesy Wheatmark Publications)

Corporal James Avery

Jim would serve with segregated Army Air Corps units in various personnel positions. He said the United States Army was his first encounter with overt segregation. While in the service he was again active in sports and sung with a group called the “Dreamers”. He married Sue Butler in April, 1945, and was released from service in February, 1946.

Back to Columbia and then Teaching

Jim returned to Columbia to complete his undergraduate degree, and then went on to a master’s degree in History. In 1949, Jim contacted Cranford Superintendent of Schools H. R. Best. Best remembered him favorably as a student and offered him a job at Cranford High School teaching Social Studies. Jim believed he was the first Black teacher in Cranford, and perhaps in all of Union County.

In 1951 Jim added coaching several athletic teams to his duties. In 1954 he was made head of the Social Studies

program. He and Sue had divorced while he was working on his master's degree. In 1954 he married Margaret Nunn of Summit. They bought a house in Plainfield and later moved to Scotch Plains. They would have a daughter, Sheryl, and a son, James S. Jr. (In 1972 Margaret moved out leaving Jim to raise his two children).

In 1955 Kenilworth named Jim Young Man of the Year. That same year, Esso Standard Oil offered Jim a position as head of education and race relations in an 8-state marketing area. He accepted the position effective with the end of the 1956 spring school term.

Esso and Union County

It was at Esso that Jim became so highly involved with the issues of promoting educational opportunity for young Black males (it was the 1950s) and expanding awareness of under-served Black markets. He worked in Manhattan but lived in Plainfield. It was in Plainfield that some of his White Collar neighbors acquainted him with the Omega Psi Phi Black service fraternity. As he made clear in his 2006 autobiography Others Thought I Could Lead (the initial book signing for which was sponsored by the Cranford Historical Society), Omega became the most important factor in his service efforts for the rest of his working life.

At home in Union County, Jim became active with the Union County Psychiatric Clinic, the Evening School Council, the Local Assistance Board, the Human Relations Council's Housing Committee and Frontiers International. In 1958 Esso's Public Relations Department produced a film "The Cranford Story"

emphasizing the oil industry's contributions to science instruction. It was distributed to science teachers and public television stations.

Humble Oil and Exxon: An Expanded Reach

In 1960 Humble Oil took over marketing activities for Esso (allowing Esso to market beyond the limited 18-state area agreed to in a 1911 Supreme Court decision against it.) Esso would rebrand itself 10 years later as Exxon to connote this wider reach.

Humble Oil gave Jim a wider geographical reach. In 1956 he had joined the National Association of Market Developers (NAMD), a group devoted to expanding the Black Market. He became its president in 1963 and its chairman of the board in 1967. In 1956 he had become a member of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), becoming its vice chairman in 1966. During his tenure with UNCF, Humble Oil's grants to UNCF rose from \$50,000 per year to \$150,000 per year.

In 1965 Jim was invited to join the Task Force on Youth Motivation (under the Plans for Progress program). He accepted and was named vice chairman of its Advisory Council. The 65 Black executives would visit predominantly Black high schools and colleges and stress the increasing opportunities in business and industry. In 1967 he was named Chairman of the Advisory Council.



(Photo Courtesy Wheatmark Publications)

Congratulated by President Johnson

In 1971 Humble renamed its Public Relations department the Public Affairs Department and named Jim Manager for his region. Energy supply and environmental issues would be the main focus. In 1977 he was named Vice-Chairman of Public Affairs for the American Petroleum Institute Offshore Subcommittee.

In 1977 Jim married his executive secretary, Joan Horrigan. Shortly after, Exxon closed his Pelham, NY office and moved the operations to Connecticut. Jim moved the family from Scotch Plains to West Hartford. When Exxon closed the Connecticut office several years later and moved operations to Texas, Jim joined the Loaned Executive program at Exxon. He was placed with the Council of Municipal Performance (COMP).



(Photo Courtesy Wheatmark Publications)

Jim and Joan

Jim returned to Exxon in 1983 as a Senior Public Affairs Consultant and retired from Exxon in 1986 after 31 years with them. In 1983 he and his family had returned to Scotch Plains.

In the 1970s Jim had worked with PRIME, a program that identified high potential students in Camden and Philadelphia and provided extra educational opportunities such as summer study programs at local universities. He became Vice Chair of PRIME in 1989 and remained in that position until 1992.

Omega Psi Phi and Local Honors

Jim headed Omega Psi Phi's Second District as District Representative. In 1967 he was elected First Vice Grand Basileus (national VP) on an activist platform. He was elected Grand Basileus in 1970. He placed particular emphasis on drug abuse (Project Uplift) and community health. In 1972, his Project Aspiration focused on higher education goals.

Jim was invited to speak in 1986 at Cranford's First Baptist Church 100th anniversary, where Dr. Deborah Cannon Wolfe was associate minister.



(Photo Courtesy Wheatmark Publications)

With Dr. Deborah Cannon Wolfe

In 1998 Jim was inducted into the Cranford Sports Hall of Fame and his photograph displayed on the “Wall of Fame” in the Cranford High School gymnasium. In 2000 Jim was one of 7 former Cranford residents selected for an award from the Cranford Fund for Education Excellence and the Cranford High School Alumni Awards Committee acknowledging their significant contributions to in education and community endeavors.

National Recognition and Honors

In 2006, Jim Avery received the Jackie Robinson Foundation ROBIE award for lifetime achievement as an African-American trailblazer in corporate America.

In 1993 governor Jim Florio appointed Jim to the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) board of directors. He would chair the board 1997-2000. In 1992, Jim was invited to serve on the Lincoln University Board of Trustees. Founded in 1854, Lincoln is the oldest historically Black American college/university. He served on the board for two 4-year terms.

Final Thoughts

Jim Avery died May 3, 2011 at age 88. He was interred in Fairview Cemetery.

To recount all Jim Avery’s accomplishments and service to others would require far more space than this newsletter allows. What stands out most strongly about his life was his fierce devotion to service to others, together with his insistence on the importance of education, personal effort, and personal values.

Sources

1. Avery, James S. Senior, *Others Thought I could Lead*, Wheatmark, Tucson, AZ, 2006.
2. “Cranford Chronicle”, various.
3. “The Eagle”, 6/30/2005.
4. <http://obit.demarcofuneralhome.com/obitdisplay.html/?task=Print&id=926749&listing>.
5. Murray, Leslie, “A National Pioneer, with Deep Roots in Cranford”, “Cranford Chronicle”, 10/06/2006.
6. Obit.,” Newark Star-Ledger”, May 4, 2011.

Welcome to New Members

The Society extends a cordial welcome to the following new members:

**Finnegan Sezer
John McGovern
Giannina Stivale
James Chaleff**

We hope that they enjoy their membership and that they can participate in the Society’s activities.

Recent Acquisitions

- From Society Member Mary Delano, copies of two *Courier-News* articles written by her sports writer and CHS Trustee Emeritus husband Hugh Delano. The one about local boxer and policeman “Gentleman” Georgie Ward will be used with other resources to build a future “Mill Wheel” article about this well-loved Cranfordite. In addition, she donated several postcards of the second Cranford Casino.
- From Society member Maureen Strazdon: a copy of a sheet of Cranford National Bank banknotes issued in 1904 (national banks could print currency). Also, a small color photo of Vanessa Van Brunt (Cranford’s first female police officer appointed in 1995) and a monochrome painting of Cranford inventor Joseph Hunter Dickinson painted by CHS Trustee Jean Kreiling.
- From a local resident, three nicely framed and matted sepia-toned historic photographs of Cranford. All three have been published in the “Images of America: Cranford” books, and the subjects are identified on the matting of the framed photos. We will try and find wall space for them in the Hanson House.



- The above two items were dropped on our doorstep in the dead of night without explanation of what they were or who the donor was. We reached out to several antique tool museums and associations. The National Building Museum provided the best possible explanations. They identified the first item as a 19th century or early 20th century carpenter/cabinet maker’s C-clamp. They believed the second item, which bore a label as from the Art Palette Company in New York City, was used for home printing. They thought it was either used in linoleum printing, in which a design was cut on a thin piece of linoleum, inked and then rolled over paper to transfer the design or used with copper plates for applying pressure to lithograph stones.



Curator's Corner

- In response to a request from a local scoutmaster for any maps CHS might have of historical sites in town that his troop might use, the following information was provided.

There are no such maps, however, the Cranford Historic Preservation Advisory Board (HPAB) has identified sites and is in the process of getting funding to have the Township erect signs with QR codes for these sites.

A brochure has already been created and is on HPAB web site at this address:

http://preservecranford.com/Audio/images/brochure_draft3-2.pdf

The brochure has a picture of each site with a brief description and a LIVE QR code. The brochure also includes a map of Cranford indicating where each site is. Using a cell phone and this URL your troop can tour the sites.

He was also sent the materials for two HPAB scavenger hunts for historic sites.

- In response to a request from a family member about whether 119 Beech Street was once a Boys Home, the following information was provided.

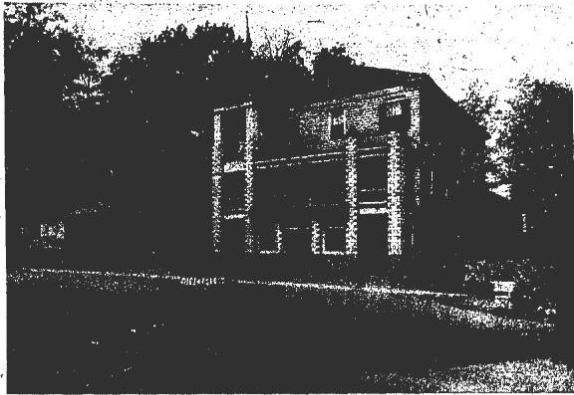
There is no record of this house being a Boy's Home. The house is in the Aeolian Park neighborhood, an area bounded by Brookside Place and West End Place (N to S) and Beech Street and Spruce Street (E to W).

The neighborhood was developed early in the 20th Century to provide Aeolian Company workers housing by the Orchard Land Development Company, which was owned by the Aeolian Company. Aeolian was a manufacturer of both small personal and large institutional organs, and pianolas (a player piano which could also be played like a piano). Their Garwood plant on North Avenue, just west of Lincoln Avenue, was torn down last year to be replaced by condominiums. The castellated office for the plant has been kept and will be an entrance to the condominiums.



- In response to a request for a photograph of the Britz Hall hotel at 438 North Avenue, which later

became the Skandia restaurant, we were able to find one in a 1983 article in the *Cranford Chronicle*.



Famous hotel site owned by Britz family was called Britz Hall and Scandia, and still houses entertainment functions as the Westwood property.

- Responded to a request from St. Michael's church for vintage photos of the church for use when they celebrate their 150th anniversary later this year. Responded with a number of jpegs of the church, the rectory on Bloomingdale Avenue and vintage postcards of the church.
- Responded to a request from the Heritage Walk group about whether the missing pond on the old Kaltenbach estate, near Droscher's Mill, might have been what was referred to as built in 1893 by Crossman Lyon. A review of CHS files for this mill (originally the Williams Mill, then a Vreeland Mill and ultimately the Droscher Mill) indicated that Crossman Lyon replaced the mill wheel with a turbine in 1893, building or extending the tailrace to the bridge to accommodate it. It is most likely this that is the excavation referred to at that date. Our records for the Kaltenbach estate provided no further guidance.
- Responded to a request for sources of old window restoration. Provided the name of a local architectural restoration firm as possibly knowing of local resources. Also suggested checking the web site of the Trust for Historic Preservation and the "Old House Journal" which advertise such services in their magazines.
- Responded to a request from a potential purchaser of a house on Retford Avenue about the property's early history as related to her by a long term neighbor. We were able to confirm that the area had been purchased as lots in 1899 from the Denman farm, and that as late as the 1906 Union County Atlas map of Cranford, there was some sort of "farm" abutting the property where the house stands. The "farm" was gone by the 1922 Sanborn Cranford fire maps publication.
- In response to a request for information we had about Charles Hansel made by his great grandson, Teri assembled a packet of information on this noted railroad inspector from Cranford. The materials included copies of a resolution commending him for his efforts. The great grandson informed her how pleased he was with the information which he was sharing with his 96-year old father.
- Attempted to assist a local teacher with an assignment for one of her master's degree courses calling for extensive information about the Cranford School system. We complied, but the short notice between the request and the

project due date limited what we could research.

- Provided an early photograph of the Cranford Hotel to an individual preparing an article about it.
- Responded to a request to help find information about a great grandfather who appears in Cranford in the 1900 Census. I was able to give her the full transcribed Census entry, but little more. The Union County 1890 Census was lost to fire and he did not appear in the 1910 Census here. A number of 1910 New York City entries matched his name, but not the names and ages of his children. There were no Cranford newspaper or street directory entries for him.

Through a Jewish genealogy group, she uncovered him in New York City appearing in the 1910 US Census and the 1915 State census. A bigamist and possible mobster, he was living life on the downlow.

- Responded to a relayed request from an architectural historian studying Dean Mathey's Hopewell Township farm. While our People file on this local tennis great and investment banker had no information about the farm, I was able to send her a 4-page PR release from Doremus & Company at the time of his death April 16, 1972. It contained information about his interest in early American architecture, publications he had written and historical associations he assisted which I thought might provide her with some leads.

- Responded to a request from a realtor working with a client looking at an older home in Cranford. She wanted to know if there were any restrictions on what could be done with an older home. We assured her there were no restrictions other than those applying to homes of any age.



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“The Mill Wheel” is published by **The Cranford Historical Society**, 38 Springfield Avenue, Cranford, New Jersey. **Newsletter Editor, Vic Bary**. An operating support grant was received from the NJ Historical Commission, a Division of the Department of State. For more information, please call 908-276-0082.