

**A Life in Art:
Cranford Artists
Alice and Leslie Crump**

By Jean Kreiling

In 1921, Leslie and Alice Crump, a recently married couple, both artists and both twenty seven years old, moved to Cranford, New Jersey. Here they lived and practiced their art for many years, raised two children and enriched the town with their talents and their participation in its social, civic and cultural life. When Leslie died in 1962 at the age of 68, Alice stayed on and continued to paint the portraits which were her trade. She died in 1987 at the age of 93.

(William) Leslie Crump was born in Saugerties, New York on January 7, 1894. He was the son of William Russell Crump a businessman who worked for the Martin Cantine Paper Company and his wife Emma Peters. Leslie had one sibling, a brother James Irving Crump, a writer, who was born in 1887. (In later years, William is reported to have asked his wife, "What did we do wrong to raise two sons who are artists and not men of business?")

By the turn of the century the family, following the paper business, had moved to Brooklyn, New York. Leslie Crump attended PS 26 on Quincy Street and graduated from Erasmus Hall High School on Flatbush Avenue where his brother also graduated. Named for Erasmus, the Dutch humanist and scholar, the school had many famous graduates who today include Mae West, Beverly Sills, Barbara McClintock, Eleanor Holm, Bernard Malamud and Barbara Streisand.



Leslie Crump

Intent upon a career in art, Leslie enrolled at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute and took courses in painting and illustration. He then went to Manhattan's Art Students League where he met his future wife Alice Miller who was studying to become a portrait painter. As she later described their meeting, she had backed up and accidentally sat on her palette. While the rest of the class laughed at her plight, Leslie picked up a rag and a bottle of turpentine and rushed to Alice's assistance. Later, Leslie walked her home.

While Leslie and Alice were completing their studies, the United States was debating whether or not to enter WW I. The sinking of the Lusitania in 1915 with its loss of one hundred twenty eight American lives had roused the public's ire. The Zimmerman telegram of 1917 in which Germany offered to give Mexico part of the United States in exchange for aiding Germany in the war, was the final blow. It resulted in Congress passing a conscription act which required young men to fill out a draft registration card. Leslie duly complied. On his card, he stated that he lived at 23 Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn and was self-employed as an artist in Manhattan. Not long afterwards, Leslie was conscripted.

After basic training, Leslie, found himself in a throng soldiers waiting to board a boat for France where he would join Pershing's First Division in the Third Machine Gun Battalion as a Second Lieutenant. Somehow, he managed to send word to Alice that he would be leaving in an hour. Alice rushed to the pier and when she found him in the crowd, he gave her an envelope containing his savings. "It's all the money I've been able to save in the army," he said. "Please buy an engagement ring against my return."

The Great War ended on November 11, 1918. For a few months, Leslie remained in Germany to police the peace. When he finally returned home, he marched down Broadway in a victory parade with Pershing's First Division. On August 26, 1919, he and Alice were married in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Alice Mary Miller was born in Milwaukee on January 24, 1894. Her parents were Andrew Galbraith Miller, a lawyer, and Martha Elizabeth Goodwin. Alice's family had roots in colonial America. Her ninth great grandmother, Elizabeth Smith was the daughter of Richard Smith, the "patentee of Smithtown" who after a long and difficult struggle with Indian tribes and Dutch and English courts achieved possession of the area now called Smithtown, Long Island in 1666. After Elizabeth's first husband William Lawrence died, she married Sir Philip Carteret the first colonial governor of New Jersey. Another ancestor was Colonel Andrew Galbraith Miller who fought in the Civil War under General William Tecumseh Sherman. A third ancestor was Clement Moore, the author of " 'Twas the Night Before Christmas."

Alice graduated from Milwaukee Downer Seminary, a private girls' school, and was accepted into Smith College. When told she would have to postpone matriculation for a year because of the family's financial difficulties, rather than wait, she decided to heed the advice of her Aunt Alida, her mother's sister who was an artist. Noting Alice's artistic skill, her aunt had prompted her to apply to the Corcoran Museum School in Washington. She did so and once there, enrolled in art courses and joined the women's suffrage movement. Despite its widespread approval among women, most men were appalled at the idea of giving women the right to vote. Alice later recounted the reaction of her date when she revealed to him on the dance floor she was a suffragette. Hearing the news, he immediately stopped dancing, walked away and left her to walk home by herself.



Alice Crump

On March 3, 1913, nine bands, twenty-four floats and more than five-thousand people marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in a suffrage parade organized by Alice Paul. With classmates from the Corcoran Museum, Alice took her place on a float which depicted the downcast state of disenfranchised women. As the float slowly moved off, rotten vegetables rained down on the women. All along the route, while dodging vegetables and worse, the students were subjected to jeers, jostling and shouts of “Go back to the kitchen!” This happened the day before the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, who stepping off a train and asking why no one had come to greet him, was told that everyone was at the parade.

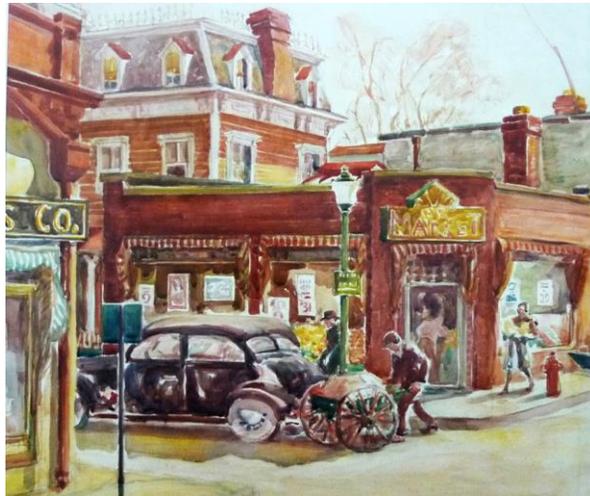
When not campaigning for women’s suffrage, Alice proved her proficiency in portraiture by receiving an award for the best portrait painted at the school. The award, a medal, was presented to her by President Taft. On the basis of her success at the Corcoran, Alice applied to the Art Students League, was accepted and moved to New York City where she studied for five years under the tutelage of some of the country’s finest artists. One of them, the great painter Robert Henri, was a founder of the Ashcan school which emphasized realism and the beauty of ordinary people and everyday life. Henri was a gifted teacher whose students included George Bellows, Rockwell Kent and Edward Hopper who called Henri the most influential teacher he ever had.

After their marriage, Leslie and Alice rented a home in Maywood, New Jersey. A year later, while visiting friends in Cranford, they fell in love with the town. Alice said “it was just about the prettiest town we had ever seen.” They decided to move to Cranford as soon as they could afford to buy a home. As luck would have it, a builder named Cathcart was building a row of small homes on Central Avenue. They purchased #503 and moved in. Several years later, they bought a larger home at 725 Linden Place.

In 1922 their first child Joan Leslie Crump was born. In 1925, they took their daughter and went to Paris where they attended classes for a year at the Ecole Julian. When they returned to Cranford, they opened a joint studio in a room with a skylight in the old Post Office building on the corner of Alden Street and North Union Avenue. In an article in the June 21, 1931, Milwaukee Journal, Alice was asked if sharing a studio with her husband was difficult. She replied: “Strange as it may seem, my husband and I find each other a mutual inspiration. When one of us is tired the other relieves his weariness by chatting about the work in question and offering constructive criticism.

We are invaluable to each other as a source of ideas and suggestions and as a relief from the strain coincident with concentrated long continued artistic effort.”

In 1929, their son Galbraith Miller Crump was born. Leslie was working as a commercial artist for Con Edison and Public Service Electric and Gas and Alice was starting to get commissions for portraits. Leslie’s brother J. Irving Crump, a writer and an editor of *Boys Life Magazine*, lived with his wife and children in Oradell, New Jersey so the families were able to maintain close contact. Leslie’s parents still lived in Brooklyn, New York which was also close enough for frequent visits.



Alden Street and North Union Avenue painting by Leslie Crump

Leslie began to paint covers and illustrate stories for *Boys Life*. Alice said he was a fast worker and used to rush through his work so he could get back to making his paintings. He also began to write and illustrate books for children as well as to illustrate books for others. His first book, *Conscript 2989, Experiences of a Drafted Man*, had been written in 1918. Because he was an unknown writer, his brother had it published anonymously by Dodd Mead & Company.

Leslie had a particular interest in the amateur theatre and joined the Cranford Dramatic Club which held many of its performances at the Casino which was then the center of the town’s social life. For over three decades he was active in the organization and directed many of its productions. Alice also participated and even took a role in the group’s production of Shaw’s *The Devil’s Disciple*. Unable to find a suitable book that would teach him how to be a director, in 1935 Leslie wrote *Directing for the Amateur Stage* also published by Dodd Mead.

During summer vacations in the 30s and 40s, the Crumps rented a cottage on Clear Lake in Beaverkill, New York which was shared with Irving and his family. In a fascinating memoir about Clear Lake in the early 1930s, Timothy Foote, a former editor of *Time* magazine, remembered them well. He said Leslie had taught him how to fish for pickerel, that he was a great raconteur and that he had often told him stories about the war. He also remembered Alice as a fine portrait painter and recalled that Leslie had made several paintings of Clear Lake at sunset.

During the Depression years and WW II, Alice and Leslie were unable to travel outside of the United States apart from a single cruise to the Caribbean. But after the war, whenever they could, they would pack their clothes and a box of watercolors and set off for Europe. England, Belgium and France were their favorite places to visit. While driving, if they came upon an interesting scene, they would pull off the road and make quick watercolor sketches. Back home in the studio, Leslie often used these sketches to make large oil paintings.

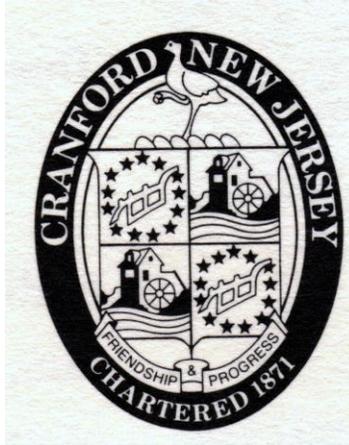
Through the years, the Crumps participated in an astonishing array of Cranford events, clubs and philanthropic causes. They gave lectures on art, took part in art exhibits, judged art contests, presented awards, gave French lessons, gave art lessons, read stories to children, raised money for charity and were officers in a number of organizations. During the bleak days of WW II when attacks from German airplanes were feared, Leslie was an assistant chief air raid warden.

In an interview conducted by Ira B. Dorian in 1968, Alice said that Leslie had been “an all-around painter and could turn his hand to any medium.” She estimated that he had made thousands of oil paintings and watercolors and that she had made about a thousand portraits.



Irvine Portrait

In the summer of 1962, Leslie began work on the Cranford seal. It incorporated the plow of New Jersey, the mill and a crane that holds a stone in its upraised claw. The crane in heraldry represents vigilance. If the crane ever goes to sleep, the stone will fall and the crane will awaken. When Leslie died of a heart attack in October, the seal had not been finished. Alice completed it with Elwood Post who helped with the plaster work. Today it hangs in the Municipal Building.



Cranford Township Seal created by
Leslie Crump

In 1987, Alice Crump donated several paintings and drawings to the Cranford Historical Society of which her husband had once been a trustee. The gift included fourteen paintings by Leslie and two portraits by Alice, one of her husband and the other of Brigadier General William Irvine who had briefly made Cranford his headquarters during the Revolutionary War. Both of Alice's portraits and five of Leslie's paintings are on view at the Hanson House. Nine of Leslie's paintings can be viewed in the Municipal Building where they are on long term loan from the Society.

The following sources were used to write this article:

- Interview with Alice M. Crump by Ira B. Dorian in 1968, oral history cd, Cranford Historical Society
- Archives of *The Cranford Citizen and Chronicle*, Cranford Public Library
- “Beaverkill, Clear Lake and the Early 1930s, A Recollection by Tim Foote”
<http://beaverkillfriends.org/Pages/StoryV2TFooteLake.html>
- Professor Galbraith M. Crump provided valuable information about his parents, contributed the photos and kindly fact-checked the article. I am very grateful to him.