

James Eastmond and “Chimney Corner” - 24 North Avenue East

By Vic Bary

How this Story Began

The origin of this story began with the arrival of a manila envelope addressed to the Cranford Historical Society and postmarked from Manchester, CT, without a sender’s name. Inside the envelop were: a number of photos of a wood paneled dining space, a photo of a man marked “Mr. Eastmond owner”, four photos of a policeman, three photos of downtown Cranford in a blizzard marked “Cranford Police Department Dec. 27, 1947”, a letter from a Kenilworth woman thanking Mr Eastmond for the success of her daughter’s wedding reception, and a large professional photo taken from the Cranford train station platform of a one story brick building below. The building, recognizable as today’s Bar Americana, bore the name “Chimney Corner”.



Chimney Corner 1940s

The unnamed sender of the file said that the photographs had been taken by Janice Neelans who lived in Enfield, CT. The sender said the “police chief” ”may be Harry or Henry” and was not related to Janice Neelans.

Oddly, the CHS businesses files contained no record of Chimney Corner. A search of the Cranford Public Library digitized archives, however, produced 303 hits on “Chimney Corner” and another 34 for “Eastmond”, which allowed for the development of this story.

James Eastmond – Feeding Cranford



James M. Eastmond

A resident of Summit, New Jersey, James M. Eastmond had a decades-long association with Cranford eateries. That association, at least as it can be found in archival records, began in July, 1923 when the *Cranford Citizen and Chronicle* reported that Mr. Eastmond had applied for a permit to operate a lunch wagon on North Avenue in front of the Shapiro property.

Mr. Eastmond doesn't appear to have remained content with just a lunch wagon. At the 24 North Avenue East site he would open "Dinney's Diner" and would later move it to South Avenue and sell it. He then appears to have opened the Blue Ribbon Diner at the same Warner Plaza site. In 1930, Mr. Eastmond came before the Cranford Zoning Board with plans to erect a large building on the site of the Blue Ribbon Diner.

"Chimney Corner"

It must have taken several years to get the necessary approvals (some things never change), but the February 20, 1936 *Cranford Citizen and Chronicle* announced the formal opening of Chimney Corner, with ceremonies attended by perpetual mayor George Osterheldt and others. The newspaper described Chimney Corner as a large, attractive, maple-paneled dining space with a large fireplace and leaded glass windows. It had been designed by the owner's sister, Bertha Eastmond.



Dining at Chimney Corner



Chimney Corner Staff - 1942

An article a month earlier had added that, in front of this “colonial style” dining room, was a separate luncheonette with a counter and tables.

Simply Everyone Dined at Chimney Corner

Over the next decade and a half, Chimney Corner became *the* place to hold your business meetings and events. The Lion’s Club held weekly dinner meetings there, and hosted its annual Christmas dinner for under privileged children there for over a decade. The Kiwanis Club held weekly luncheon meetings there. The Rotary Club, Cranford Clergy Club, Cranford Woman’s Club, Cranford Business Association, and St. Michael’s Church Young Ladies Solidarity, were just a few of those who used Chimney Corner for their meeting and dining events. In April, 1939, the Cranford Historical Society held its election of officers there.

Chimney Corner was also popular with Township government as a site for holding retirement and testimonial dinners. It may be that our unnamed policeman (more about him later) had a testimonial or retirement dinner held there in his honor.

Chimney Corner was also the site of many private celebrations. One of the more poignant was the wedding dinner for local Lucretia Grace Duckworth and Marine PFC Leroy Herbert Roberts, Jr.

of East Orange noted in the July 6, 1945 *Cranford Citizen and Chronicle*. PFC Roberts, Jr. had recently returned from serving 25 months in the South Pacific with the Marines where he saw action in three separate campaigns.

23 North Ave East Restaurants

This address has hosted Cranford eating establishments for nearly 100 years. In 1950, Mr. Eastmond sold the property to two men from Elizabeth (would that make them Elizabethans?) where they had run a restaurant named the “Coach and Horse”. They completely renovated the kitchen and modified the interior of Chimney Corner and opened in February, 1950 as “The Coach and Four”. It was still in operation when I moved here in the mid-1980s, and remained in operation for over 50 years serving fare from a menu that looked like it had been compiled in 1950. In December, 2003, the restaurant was replaced by Cervantes of Spain, which in the author’s estimation, made the classic mistake of dumbing down the spices for what it perceived as suburban tastes. That approach did not appear to be successful and Cervantes was replaced after a relatively short run by Bar Americana. Compare this photo taken in June 2020 to the photo at the beginning of the article. The exterior of 24 North Avenue East has changed little in 85 years.



Bar Americana June 2020

Who was that Policeman?

A careful review of Cranford Police Department publications left little doubt about who the strong jaw and prominent nose in the photographs referred to earlier belonged to. It was Sergeant Harry Page of the Cranford Police Department who was active with it during the correct period.



SGT Harry Page

And for those of you not old enough to remember the Blizzard of December 26, 1947, this photograph taken out of the window of the police department of the parking lot says it all. Yes, those are cars under the mounds of snow.



Police Department Parking Lot Dec 27, 1947

According to the January 1, 1948 *Cranford Citizen and Chronicle*, the storm, which began Saturday December 26, dropped 28.5 inches of snow on Cranford and resulted in a 64-hour battle to clear the streets at a cost of \$6,000.

And you can be sure that a Chimney Corner Business file has been created from this acquisition and research.

Sources:

1. *Burditt file of newspaper entries*
2. *“Cranford Citizen and Chronicle”, various*
3. *“Cranford Chronicle”, various*
4. *Cranford Police Department, The History of the Cranford Police Department 1897 – 1997*
5. *Neelans, Janice, original photographs of the Chimney Corner restaurant*