

Birth and Growth of Cranford Part III:

Post Roosevelt Manor to the War to End All Wars - Population Grows while Cranford Shrinks

by Vic Bary

While it would be several decades before a development on the scope of Roosevelt Manor would again be attempted, the development of Cranford would continue at a rapid pace up until the Great Depression put an end to most new economic activity. The resulting neighborhoods still carry the names chosen by their developers.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, while Cranford's population would swell during the two decade-long period from the start of Roosevelt Manor until the U.S. joined the WW I Allies in 1917, Cranford would contract physically. How this was possible will be explained within the following pages.

New Developments

Fairview Manor: First among the new developments was Fairview Manor. Developed in 1896 by Frank Winkler, it was built on the former 19-acre Sengtak property. Fairview Manor was bounded by Springfield Avenue, Brookside Place, Willow Street, and West End Place. Winkler divided the land into 75 lots, and originally built houses on 34 of them. The remaining lots would be built on somewhat later.

Prospect Park: In 1900, Winkler followed Fairview Manor with Prospect Park. It was northeast of Roosevelt Manor, and was bounded by Orange Avenue, Lenox Avenue, North Union Avenue, and the never completed Haskins Avenue.

Aeolian Park: In 1901 Aeolian Park appeared. This development of 20 houses was bounded by Orchard Avenue, Brookside Place, Spruce Street, and West End Place. Its formation was tied to the 1899 purchase of land on North Avenue (bounded on the east by Lincoln Avenue and on the south by the Central RR of New Jersey) by the Aeolian Company for the erection of a new manufacturing plant. Aeolian was a major manufacturer of self-playing pianos and organs, as well as pipe organs. The castellated brick plant still stands today on North Avenue, just west of Lincoln Avenue. Aeolian Park was developed to provide housing for Aeolian employees and management.



1903 - Cranford Shrinks as Garwood is Formed

On March 19, 1903, a seven-tenths of a square mile portion of Westfield and Cranford - home to 400 residents and known locally as the "Oakland" section - would secede from those two townships. Under New Jersey Assembly Bill 232, it became the Borough of Garwood. The secession was prompted by Oakland residents growing tired of paying taxes to the two townships, while - in their view - receiving in return few of the promised services (public schooling, roads paving, etc.) The move, perhaps with real estate tax receipts in mind, was vigorously opposed by Cranford, which lost the fight.

Garwood would be comprised of an area built on land acquired by a Jersey Central Railroad land company headed by Samuel Garwood. With its access to the railroad tracks (for easy receipt of raw materials and easy shipping of finished products), it became the largest industrial center in Union County, home to bicycle tubing manufacturer Hercules Tube Works, Hall Signal Works, the Aeolian Company, and Thatcher Furnace. The new Borough of Garwood promoted itself as "A Wide-Awake Town for Wide-Awake People".



1907 - Kenilworth Emerges and Cranford Shrinks, Again

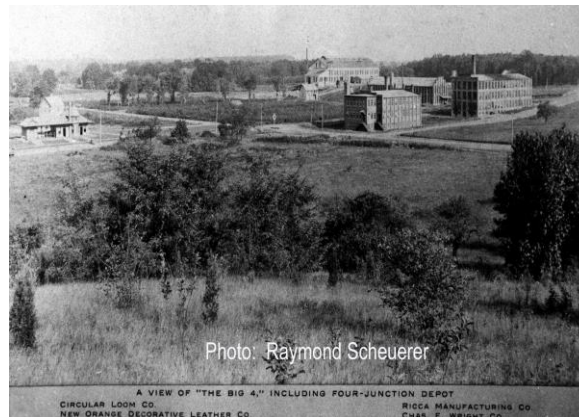
This next story of Cranford's physical shrinkage requires a bit of history, and begins with the utopian dreams of one Charles W. Manahan, Jr.

In the early 1890s, Manahan convinced a number of Elmira, New York notables to invest with him to form a model village which would combine industry and attractive housing for its workers. The workers would have ownership in the resulting Elmira Industrial Association through their purchase of shares. The undertaking was a success, and in 1896 resulted in the formation of the town of Elmira Heights, New York.

In 1894, Manahan cast his gaze southwards to New Jersey, looking for an opportunity to repeat his success, forming the New Orange Industrial Association with a group of wealthy investors. The

Association purchased some 30 farmsteads totaling three and one-half square miles falling into the townships of Cranford, Union, and "Aldene" (what later would become Roselle Park). Its bold plans called for the layout of streets, building a railroad and an electric trolley service, a lake, an opera house, and workers' housing which would be on lots awarded to workers who purchased shares in the Association. It also planned to attract industry to building lots which would be served by the new railroad.

Realization of Manahan's dream progressed slowly. By 1898, the first streets - really graded dirt roads running at right angles to one another - had been put in. The year before, the town's first new building - the John Hiller, Jr. Store - had been erected in anticipation of a population influx. In 1899, new houses were built during the "100 houses in 100 days" period to accommodate the factory workers the hoped-for manufacturing plants were expected to attract. That same year, the first major manufacturer did arrive, the Ricca Musical Instrument Company. It was followed in 1900 by the Charles E. Wright Company. They were followed by 1902 by the Circular Loom Company and the New Orange Decorative Leather Company. As a group, these sizable manufacturers were referred to locally as "The Big Four".



The Association was always under-financed for its grand plans. The industrial recession of 1899 and other economic troubles that followed - including the Stock Market Crash of 1901 and the Recession of 1902-1904 - caused a number of factories to shut down. The deaths of several of the original directors - including Manahan in 1901- put the Association under even greater strain.

In 1904, the New Orange Industrial Association recast itself as the Kenilworth Realty Corporation. At this point New Orange became known by the name "Kenilworth". (The name Kenilworth was borrowed from the directors' literary club, which had borrowed the name from their favorite Sir Walter Scott novel.) By an act of the New Jersey legislature, most of the land holdings in the former New Orange were incorporated as the Borough of Kenilworth. In a referendum held on June 18, 1907, Kenilworth citizens voted their approval to become the Borough of Kenilworth. So, Kenilworth emerged, and Cranford shrunk physically once again.

Cranford Development Continues

Lehigh Park: In 1908, prominent Cranford businessman Shaheen A. Shaheen purchased a T. A. Crane property for this development bounded by Lincoln Avenue, Centennial Avenue, Mansion Terrace, and North Lehigh Avenue. Lots were offered for \$175. Over his career, Shaheen

would build over 200 homes in Cranford, and found Builders General (until recently on Centennial Avenue).

Balmere Park: Built in 1909 by Cranford Homes. To accommodate this development, a circular terrace was built at the northeast end of Tulip Place off Springfield Avenue on the Fett Estate. The builder held a successful auction mid-June 1909, selling all 60 lots. Original plans called for a central plant to provide hot water and heating for 20 of the homes. There is no indication that these plans were ever put in place.

Cranford Heights: Also in 1909, the Manhattan Land Company purchased the Mark Raifle farm property for the purpose of building homes. The property was bounded northwest by Walnut Avenue above the Lehigh Valley RR tracks, north by Blake Avenue, and southeast by the Rahway River. The project was one of several taken over the following year by Reynolds Estates of New York.

Riverside Park: In 1911, Manor Realty bought 27 acres of Crane property for this development abutting Lehigh Park. It was bounded on the west by the Rahway River, on the north by Elm Street, on the east by Mansion Terrace, and on the south by North Lehigh Avenue.

By 1910, the population of Cranford had increased to 3,641.

The next large development, planned on the scale of Roosevelt Manor, wasn't started until 1914. Severin Droesher's plan for a grand exclusive New York commuter residential development - Lincoln Park - included a park along the Rahway River. According to Fridlington and Fuhro, "The anti-German sentiment that accompanied America's entry into World War I destroyed Droesher's plan for the residential park", and the resulting development was far smaller and less grand than Droesher had proposed. But that's a story for the next installment of this history.

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