

A Most Unusual Map - May 24, 1870 A. D. Mellick Jr & Bro. Cranford Property Auction Map

By Vic Bary

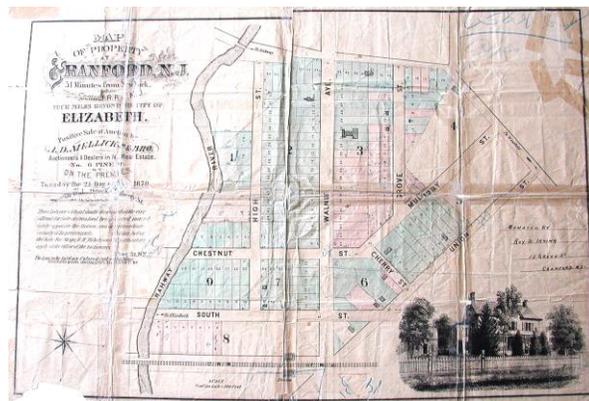
Ever since arriving in Cranford mid-1986, Maureen and I have encountered a Northside/Southside divide, usually raised by a Southerner who would remind us that Northerners were nothing but a bunch of stuck-up silver spooners who simply ignored the South Side, or looked down their long, aristocratic noses at it.

While we chose to buy a house on the north side of town, it was simply because it allowed us to walk to the train or an express bus to our New York City jobs, and because we fell in love with a Victorian house three blocks from the station which allowed us to do so. (The origin of this divide and the intensity with which it manifested itself baffled us completely.) When pushed hard on the subject of the divide, I would remind my tormenter that, other than the 18th century settlers who obtained 100 acre homesteads in the West Fields of Elizabethtown all over the area now known as Cranford, there simply didn't seem to have been much of any residential development south of the railroad tracks before 1900. And 19th century style of architecture was what appealed to us.

The Mystery Map

Imagine my surprise, then, while rummaging through the CHS map collection to find an 1870 map titled as above. The map was a gift from Roy D. Irvin.

The map was unusual in several respects. On a humorous level, it was unusual because the person preparing it for the Mellicks clearly didn't know Cranford and put the compass rosette upside down - with what is today Lincoln Avenue in the north, and the Central Railroad of New Jersey railroad tracks and the station in the south. This misunderstanding was confirmed if one turned the map to the proper orientation. Turned this way, all the street names were upside down, but the streets were properly oriented.



The map was also unusual because, at this early date, it indicated that the Mellick brother's partnership had control of nearly 200 lots, 40 of which were marked as already sold. The lots were in an area bounded on the north by South Avenue, on the west by Union Avenue (marked "Union St." on the map), on the south by the road "To Westfield" (now known as Lincoln Avenue), and on

the east by the Rahway River. The map stated the properties would be offered for "Positive Sale at Auction ... Tuesday the 24 Day of May 1870 at 1 O'clock P.M. Special Train from foot of Liberty St. at 12 O'clock M." The date of the auction would put it in the same time period as the earliest residential development of Cranford by Sylvester Cahill; Dayton, Eastman and Bigelow; and Phineas P. Lounsbury.

Who Was A. D. Mellick Jr. & Brother?

A cruise through *The New York Times* archives uncovered numerous property auction listings in the weekly "Real Estate Transactions" column for the partnership, most throughout New Jersey and Staten Island (although the partnership also sold individual properties in Manhattan). The partnership seemed to have had a number of successful auctions in Roselle, Plainfield, Westfield and other northern and central New Jersey communities. Reports of their activities would appear at least once a week in the *Times*. Articles about particular auctions sometimes would report sales at the auction, and also list properties in towns where prior auctions were held which had recently closed.

The May 24 *Times* entry about the Cranford (misidentified by the *Times* as "Crawford") auction simply gave the time and place of the auction and stated that particulars about the properties offered were in the prior day's paper. I was unable to find the May 23 article in the *Times* archives. Articles in succeeding days' *Times* about A. D. Mellick Jr. & Brother auctions and properties sold failed to list *any* Cranford properties as sold. Since there were no Cranford newspapers as early as 1870 in the Cranford Library digital archives, there was no way to attack the question from that direction. Perhaps the *Elizabeth Daily Journal* may have printed some information, but it is all stored on microfilm and thus is not easily searchable. Was the Cranford property auction a bust? Evidence uncovered so far suggests so.

What Became of A. D. Mellick Jr. & Brother?

Listings for the partnership's activities become more scarce within a year after the Cranford auction, and perhaps reflected a softening real estate market. An entry in the *Times* June 4, 1878 "Local Business Troubles" column informs us of the partnership's eventual fate.

James B. Mellick and Andrew Mellick, Jr., have been adjudicated bankrupt in Newark. They were formerly prominent real estate operators at No. 72 Cedar Street, in this city, and were largely interested in New Jersey property, which they made their specialty. The recent depreciation in real estate embarrassed them to such an extent that the partnership was dissolved, and they sought relief in bankruptcy to get rid of their liabilities, which are heavy. The creditors will meet in Newark June 4, to prove debts and elect an Assignee in bankruptcy.

Anyone with more information about the auction, A.D. Mellick Jr. & Brother, or pre-1900 Southside residential development is encouraged to share it with the editor.

Sources:

1. A. D. Mellick Jr & Bro., "Map of Property at Cranford, N.J.", May 24, 1870
2. "Local Business Troubles", *The New York Times*, June 4, 1878
3. "Real Estate Transactions", *The New York Times*, May 24, 1870