

Hyperbole, Thy Name is Real Estate Developer

By Vic Bary

While researching the article on the summer/Cranford development relationship, I drew heavily on books prepared by real estate developers and an architect published between 1894 and 1925/1926. While these sources provided a wealth of valuable historical information, they also disabused me of any illusions that marketing hyperbole is a 20th century invention. While Cranford is unquestionably a lovely town, the “Cranford” described by these individuals who wished to sell property and homes constructed thereon often strain the bounds of credulity. Let’s start with climate.

The next time you lie awake tossing and turning on a typical, humid, airless, near 100 degree August night, take heart. You live in Cranford, described thusly by architect Frank T. Lent who designed a number of Cranford’s grandest homes:

“The town is built on high ground lying one hundred or more feet above tide water, which elevation is sufficient to raise it above the banks of malarial fog which gather and cling with a sickly grip to the lower lands of New Jersey. The Orange Mountains, a few miles to the north, act as a sheltering wall against the north and northwest winds, and the steady southwest wind which prevails in summer renders the atmosphere delightfully cool. No one ever thinks of lying awake nights because of excessive heat. (p. 2)”

“Nowhere near New York can a more equable and moderate climate be found. It’s just far enough away and just high enough to be free from sea fogs and dampness, and yet not so far as not to be in range of the cooling breezes which each evening set in from the ocean. (p. 8)”

In 1913, the Cranford Board of Trade sounded a similar reframe concerning Cranford (while simultaneously assuring us in the Forward to their treatise that “In publishing this book, the Cranford Board of Trade has been careful to make no statement that would tend to mislead the reader.”):

“...on the southern slope of the Orange Mountains, sheltered from the cold north winds of Winter, and open to the mild southwest breezes that come direct from the ocean only a few miles away. The climate is one of the finest to be found anywhere, It is to these conditions that Cranford owes its delightfully cool summers.” (p. 5)”

Worried about winter snows or flooding? Clearly you don’t live in the Cranford described by The Business Realty Company in 1925/1926.

“Ideally situated in the foothills of Northern Jersey, within the protective shelter of the Watchung range of the Orange Mountains, is the picturesque town of Cranford. Through its center idles the calm and placid Rahway River, its sinuous windings and multiple curves endowing the town with the well-earned sobriquet – “The Venice of New Jersey.” (p. 1)”

Louie E. Henderson assures us in his Cranford Illustrated (1904): that:

“The crooked river, winding its way peacefully through town ... gives the town a natural source of drainage which makes it one of the most healthful places of residence in the State. (p.43)”

Also speaking of the Rahway River, the Cranford Board of Trade simply assured us that “The water is as pure as nature can make it, no sewage or contaminating matter whatever is allowed to enter it...” (p. 13)

The Cranford Board of Trade, which promised to make no statement tending to mislead, also found these *modest* words to describe the river and its relationship to perfection which was Cranford:

“Our river fully expresses the temperament of the people who dwell along its tortuous course. There is a quiet contentment in this town of homes which we sincerely believe is the very paradise of loveliness and natural beauty....”

This Garden spot, resplendent in its gala dress of rich foliage and beautiful flowers, has become the Mecca of all those who sought the quiet restfulness, and freedom from care for which they have been eternally searching. East and West, North and South, they have wandered like Sir Galahad of old until they found the temple of their dreams.... (p.45)”

What more can I possibly say?

Sources:

1. Lent, Frank T., Souvenir of Cranford, New Jersey – First Edition, Cranford, NJ, 1904
2. Cranford Board of Trade, Cranford: “The Venice of New Jersey”, Cranford, NJ, 1913
3. The Business Realty Company, Cranford: The Venice of New Jersey, Cranford, NJ, 1925/1926
4. Henderson, Louie E., Cranford New Jersey Illustrated, Cranford, NJ, 1904