

Henry Phillips, Charles Phillips and Josiah Crane Jr. Help Build a New School



A historic record book from the early days of Cranford's public schools was donated to the Historical Society's archives recently. The rare journal spans a time period from 1867 to 1880 and is a fascinating look into the time when the "village" of Cranford was just becoming a separate township.

But far more importantly, it has yielded some new information about the people for whom the Crane-Phillips House is named; Josiah Crane, Jr., Henry Phillips, and his brother Charles. All three were involved together in a project to build a new school in Cranford. The book details the project from its very beginnings and tells of the involvement of the namesakes of the Society's Museum in the important civic project.

The first entry in the book is dated June 24, 1867, and is a petition from the residents of the north side of town to the county Supervisor, A.F. Campbell, to split the school district so a new school could be built north of the railroad tracks. With dozens of trains, both passenger and freight, already coming and going everyday, it was extremely dangerous for school children to cross the tracks, which were not elevated until 1930.

The record tells that on February 24, 1868 Henry Phillips and Josiah Crane, Jr. are named the two-member committee to negotiate the split with the existing district and create the new one, and garner financial support for the project. The book then names Dr. Charles H. Phillips as the person who held bond on the money, \$9000, to build the new school. A financial law that no longer exists prohibited one from holding bond in the jurisdiction in which one lived. Hence, wealthy Cranford residents like Alden Bigelow were legally unable to do so. This made Dr. Charles H. Phillips ideal for this important task. With homes in NYC and Connecticut he lived outside the state, but his brother, Henry, lived here and was involved in the project, giving him a direct link. The result was the building of the Grant School, which stood on the corner of Springfield and Holly Street, in 1869.

This discovery gives us more insight into the people who once called our museum home. It shows Henry Phillips becoming involved in important civic affairs immediately upon moving here. It also shows him as interested in education even though he and Cecelia had no children and were never to have any. And it was always surmised though there was never any proof, that the Phillips brothers worked together on different projects. This shows them working together on an important project right here in Cranford. It also gives us more insight into the wealth of the Phillips family. All this occurred *before* Dr. Charles H. Phillips invented Phillips Milk of Magnesia in 1872. But there obviously was more than enough family wealth for him to hold bond on the project and hold Henry and Cecelia's mortgage as well. Despite that wealth, Henry and Cecelia chose to live the modest life they lived here in the cottage that will always be known as "The Little House".

Of course, this record book also shows the Phillips family and the Crane family involved together. It was certainly Josiah Crane Jr. who must have recommended Henry Phillips, to whom he had just sold property, to become involved in the project.

Henry Phillips went on to invent the early forerunner to the modern kitchen rangehood. His brother, Dr. Charles H. Phillips, became even more prosperous after he marketed Phillips Milk of Magnesia.