

The Crane-Phillips House Chronicles IV:

Captain Adams Gets His Man

By: Loretta and Don Widdows



Captain E.K.Adams

The files of the Historical Society contain many interesting stories from the pages of Cranford's past. The one that follows is taken from the reminiscences written in 1928 by Emmor K. Adams, a near legendary figure from Cranford's early years and one of the Historical Society's founders.

As many of our readers know, Adams was also Captain of the Cranford Thief Detection Society, a state-chartered private organization that provided a degree of police protection in the town from 1869 to 1889. His story goes as follows.

“While I was connected with this organization [the Thief Detection Society] I became acquainted with Inspector Thomas Byrnes of the New York Police and had an occasion to do some real detective work out here in New Jersey at his request. He offered to pay me for my services but I told him the excitement I squeezed out was pay enough. One case in particular: Frank Cosgrove, one of Inspector Byrnes men, told me he had arrested a forger in New York and had sent him to Sing-Sing, he had served his time and was at large. One of the large life insurance companies had lately been swindled out of a large sum of money and he was sure it was the same man he had put away before. His name

was Julius La Salla, alias Almonte. Cosgrove told me he lived in New Jersey and commuted on the Central Railroad of New Jersey, but had not spotted him yet and asked me to keep an eye out for him after he gave me a description and a photograph of him. Well, to my surprise at the depot one day while getting off the 2:30 from New York, I saw a man dressed as a purser of a steamship, cap, brass buttons and all – and it was the face in the photograph I had in my pocket. Of course I followed him to where he lived and he entered the little house that belonged to Henry Phillips on North Union Avenue opposite the Charles Hansel property. It seemed he had a wife and two little boys who did not know anything about his former arrest. On inquiry, I found out that he had not lived there very long, so I called Cosgrove and he told me he would meet me. The next morning, he came out from New York with another detective named Mulvaney, we went to the Phillips house and the bird had flown. The two detectives returned and instructed me to find out who moved him out bag and baggage and where he moved to. It took me about three days to find out who moved his furniture to a small house in Scotch Plains, so I notified New York headquarters and Cosgrove, Mulvaney and I went up to Scotch Plains and arrested him. He told his wife that he was a purser on a steamship so that he could stay away from home for a long period of time without her suspecting anything.”

While researching the history of the Crane-Phillips House, we discovered in the 1885 New Jersey State Census that Henry and Cecilia Phillips lived at 124 North Union Avenue, and they had boarders Louisa Almerodi and her two sons, Frank and Rudolph. E.K. Adams did not date this particular “excitement,” but we now know that the events must have taken place in 1885.

This is an example of how a story can become more real with the addition of just a few additional facts.