

Cranford Historical Society Founder: J. Stanley Vorhees



J. Stanley Vorhees was a businessman whose avocation was history. He loved to explore the records and explanations of past events. And he had an unquenchable interest in the artifacts of bygone eras.

It bothered him that people did not take much interest in these things. He became particularly distressed when some article of historical significance was lost or destroyed. There was, for instance, the case of Cranford's old fire bell that in the township's earlier years had signaled the firemen and alerted the citizenry in case of fire. Made obsolete by early twentieth century technology, the bell was to be disposed of. Vorhees thought it should be rescued, but what could be done with it? Before he could salvage it, the bell was scrapped and lost forever.

Vorhees could cite many similar examples. The solution, he concluded, was to form a society that could preserve local history, promote and encourage research and collect and preserve relics and historical objects. He discussed it with his family and friends, all of whom thought it was a wonderful idea. And finally, he discussed it with the local newspaper, the *Cranford Citizen and Chronicle*.

The paper enthusiastically endorsed the proposal: "Cranford has history in abundance and it is the only community hereabouts that has never paid any attention to it." Exaggerating a trifle, it appealed to the township's pride by adding: "Practically every town in New Jersey has its local historical society."

The paper urged its readers to "get together" and help Vorhees carry out his idea. "Cranford has a history of which she may well be proud; let us get together for our own enlightenment as well as for posterity."

The response was immediate. Vorhees received “a large number of phone calls” from people commending him on his idea, offering their support and making suggestions. At least one person suggested that efforts should be made to “secure a room in the little yellow house in [sic] Union Avenue, now owned by the Township, and use as the beginning of an Historical Society.”

On February 11, 1927, an organizational meeting of the New Cranford Historical Society was held in Vorhees’ Pittsfield Street home. Joining him in forming the new organization were thirteen well-known names from the Cranford of the 1920’s: Andrew R. Warnock, W.J. McKee, H.J. Chapin, C.F. Manchon, John E. Fisher, Edward Everett, D.C. Newman Collins, Emmor K. Adams, Stanley H. Chadwick, A.C. Woodward, W.F. Hoffman, William D. Bragdon, and Wesley A. Stanger. Stanley Vorhees was elected President; E.K. Adams, Vice President. C.P. Man, Secretary; and W.J. McKee, Treasurer.

Vorhees did his work well. He continued to devote his time and energies to the new organization, which on February 11th just passed, celebrated its eightieth anniversary. The Society did acquire “a room in the little yellow house” on Union Avenue, and today the house, now green, serves as the Crane-Phillips House Museum.

Throughout these eighty years, the Cranford Historical Society has “preserved and perpetuated” the township’s history just as the founders hoped it would. Vorhees’ contribution was recognized by the original members. He was re-elected President each year until his death in 1937.

