

## A Tradition Continues

*By Christine Glazer*

This March, the Cranford Historical Society will again be hosting all of the Cranford's third grade students at the Crane-Phillips House Museum. In preparing for this year's tours, we wondered how this tradition began. Looking back through our records, it seems that we are indeed following in the footsteps of a long held tradition.

In earlier times, Civil War veterans like Judge Mendell and others visited classrooms to tell students about history. This lasted until the 1930's. It seems that the early tours began around 1964. The October 22, 1964 *Cranford Chronicle* relates that Roderick Smith, Cranford Historical Society's past President, took 60 second grade students from Walnut and Livingston Schools on a bus trip through Cranford to learn about their local history. The trip included the plaque at the Denman Family 1720 home site, homes that were 100 years old or more, the site of the first one room school house at Lincoln and South Union Avenue, the Old Pepperidge Tree, "old" swimming holes, Droescher's Mill, the river forts at South Union Avenue and Riverside Drive. Also, included in the bus tour were the old Opera House site, the Cranford Municipal Building, historic churches, school buildings, Gallows Hill Road and the Minisink Trail. This was indeed an extensive tour for second graders!

In 1972, Stephan Gmelin, a Cranford Historical Society Trustee and avid photographer, and Alfred Fricke, CHS, began their "Cranford Then and Now" slide presentations as a spring outreach program for fourth graders. Their class visit with slides preceded their museum tour of the Crane-Phillips House. The slides covered topics like river scenes, sports teams, the 1885 River Carnival, the first steamboat on the Rahway River, early clubs, athletic teams, schools, churches, public buildings, mills and the first railroad station. These slide presentations continued until the early 1990's.

In 1982, Dr. Homer Hall began his "History Comes Alive" tours for fourth graders. Standing well over 6' tall with white hair and muttonchops, Dr. Hall regaled students with Cranford history while personifying the "dug up" Josiah Crane. In April 1985, some 50 representatives of the Museum Council of New Jersey recognized his innovative interpretations and joined him for his tour.



### Dr. Homer Hall



Larry Fuhro greets school children, 1988

Dr. Hall was joined by Cranford Historical Society President Larry Fuhro who interpreted the museum for school children after their walk with Dr. Hall. Prior to their walk and visit, Richard Wagner, former school principal, visited fourth grade classes with the “Cranford Then and Now” slides.

Dr. Hall continued his Josiah Crane tours until the late 1990’s. Needless to say, in earlier times, the school visits lasted for a much longer time period than now. Trustees Patricia Pavlak and Barbara Klaus recall walking with students from their schools, visiting and, even, enjoying lunch on museum grounds before returning to their classrooms. Patricia and Barbara have both conducted school tours since the 1990’s.

20 years ago, in 1997, I began helping with the Crane-Phillips House tours. At the time, Dr. Hall was still entralling small children with his stories.

Since then, each spring, the buses arrive at the door of Crane-Phillips House Museum. They’re filled with third graders eagerly awaiting their chance to step back in time by hearing stories of old time Cranford. Most of all, they can’t wait to meet “Handyman Bill,” the mousetrap man, who teaches children about old tools and inventions in a novel way.

The volunteer hours and expertise of so many people, past and present, like Carl Peterson, William Curtis, Stephan Price, Stephanie Williams, Maureen Wakeman, Vic Bary and many others have made these yearly visits possible for hundreds of school children. The contributions of these members have left a permanent impression upon both the Cranford Historical Society and the community of Cranford.

#### Sources:

1. School Daily Records 1918-1930
2. *Cranford Chronicle* Oct 22, 1964; Nov 5, 1964
3. *Cranford Chronicle* Feb 19, 1976
4. *Cranford Chronicle* Apr 18, 1985