

## Dr. Joseph Kerr MacConnell: Cranford's First Physician

*By Vic Bary*



While reviewing an index of articles from “The Mill Wheel” recently, I was surprised to note that there weren’t any about Cranford’s first physician, Dr. J. K. MacConnell. Given his importance to early suburban Cranford, I thought that needed to be rectified.

### Early Years

Joseph Kerr MacConnell was born November 24, 1836 in Tarentum, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania and was raised in Iowa. He married Mary Elizabeth Mintier of Ohio in October, 1862.

According to the 1890 U. S. Census (self-reported) Veterans Schedule, MacConnell served with Union forces for four years during the Civil War as a “Medical Cadet”. The Medical Cadet Corps was authorized by an act of Congress, August, 1861. It sought men age 18 to 22 years who had studied medicine for two years and had completed at least one course of lectures at a medical college.

Given the rank of noncommissioned officer, medical cadets were intended to be wound dressers and ambulance attendants, but often also assisted in operations and administered hospital wards. They were paid \$30 per month and given allowances for quarters, fuel, transportation and daily rations. Upon completion of his service, MacConnell completed his medical education, receiving his MD from Starling Medical College, Columbus, Ohio February 25, 1868.

### Dr. MacConnell comes to Cranford

After a brief stint as the surgeon for the Ohio State Prison Hospital (where he had been superintendent during his medical studies), Dr. MacConnell was attracted to Cranford in 1869 by his brother, Alexander A. MacConnell, pastor of Cranford’s First Presbyterian Church. Upon his

arrival in this village of 800, he became its sole physician and would remain so until at least 1886 - by 1901 Cranford would boast seven physicians.

Practicing medicine here for more than 40 years, Dr. MacConnell addressed a wide variety of medical situations including -injuries caused by trains to passengers, crews, and pedestrians; drownings in the Rahway River, and various injuries and illnesses suffered by both adults and children.

Dr. MacConnell was a member, and one-time president, of the Union County Medical Society, a member of the New Jersey Medical Society, and was town physician as a member of its Board of Health for many years where he rendered service to the town's poor.

**Poor Account.**

Paid Eliza Smith for board of Child.....	108.00
" Jas. Tierney for rent of rooms .....	6.00
" Ira A. Pierson relief of John Wilson..	10.00
" Eliza Smith care of Child.....	31.25
" J. D. Winans for services and Coal...	10.00
" G. O. Totten groceries in 1871.....	13.77
" Pat Shay, rent of rooms.....	8.00
" Dr. McConnell, medicine & attendance	16.05
" G. E. Ludlow, expenses paid for bury- ing dead horse.....	4.00
" Pat Shay rent of room.....	8.00
" G. O. Totten, Shoes .....	2.50
" J. W. B. Hegeman, groceries.....	129.00
" Eliza Smith, care of Child .....	59.00
" Isaac Winans, care of tramps.....	14.00
" Theo. Bluhe, board of C. Kuesen.....	45.00
" Dr. McConnell, medical attendance...	14.25
" Eliza Smith, care of Child.....	108.00
" Isaac Winans care of tramps & sun- dries.....	12.25
" Isaac Winans' Salary.....	60.00

1873 Cranford Township Municipal Budget - Payments from Poor Account

Family Life

The MacConnell's built a large home at 3 Miln Street (site of the current post office) where they hosted many social events. Erection of the house was overseen by Cranford architect Nathaniel. G. Foster.



RESIDENCE OF DR. J. K. MACCONNELL

(After Dr. MacConnell's death in 1917, the house would become Cranford's very popular Hyashi's Restaurant.)

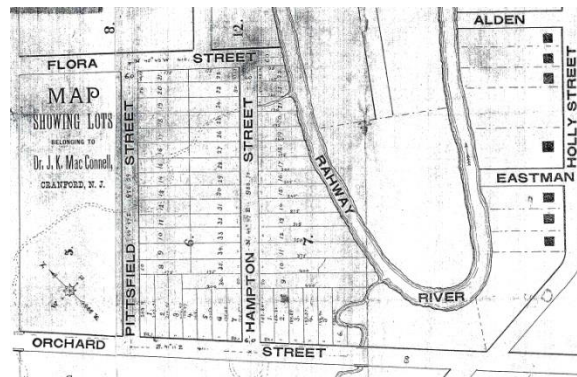
The MacConells would have two daughters – Gertrude and Francis Edith - and two sons – Jay Herbert and Charles Wilbur. Newspaper articles of the time report the children as active in theater and musical productions, as well as with high school and River Carnival athletics. The two daughters would marry and live locally. Charles Wilbur would, himself, become a medical doctor and would practice with his father for a time before setting up his own practice. Jay Herbert would study theology and become a minister in Syracuse, New York.

### Family Losses

Sadly, Mary MacConnell would die at age 55 on April 1, 1894. She was interred in Fairview Cemetery, Westfield. Two years later, her eldest daughter, Francis Edith MacConnell Van Saun died and was also interred at Fairview.

### J. K. MacConnell Land Owner

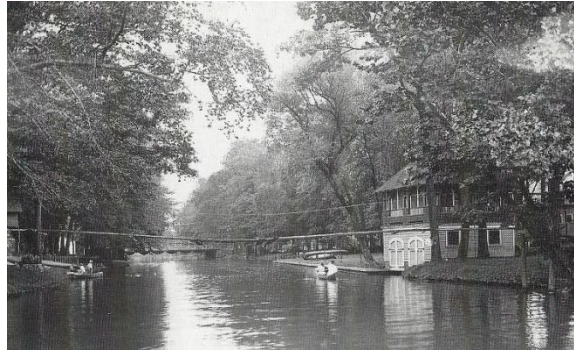
Dr. MacConnell was also active in local land development. An undated map in the Cranford Historical Society’s collections shows him owning a several block section southwest of the Rahway River and above Orchard Street. The undeveloped lots were bounded on the northeast by the river, the southwest by Orchard Street, and on the north by Flora Street (today Berkeley Place). Since Eastman Street is not shown as extended across the river, the map must date from before mid-1895 (when the Eastman Street Bridge abutments were put in).



**Lots owned by J. K. MacConnell**

Dr. MacConnell also owned the small triangular plot directly in front of his house known today as Post Office Triangle.

One of Dr. MacConnell’s more interesting ventures was the suspension bridge he had built across the Rahway River from the Holly Street side to the Central Avenue side. The bridge was built by John Roebling & Sons, builders of the Brooklyn Bridge and manufacturers of the wound steel cable supporting it, the George Washington Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge.



**Roebing built Suspension Bridge**

### J. K. MacConnell – Town Benefactor

Dr. MacConnell made gifts to various charitable organizations in Cranford throughout his life, but it is through gifts of property to the Township that his name endures. In 1906, Dr. MacConnell conveyed the land below Eastman Street where the River loops around and the triangle across from his house to the Township for \$1,500. The former park area would be renamed “MacConnell Park” in 1919 and transferred to the Union County Parks Commission in 1920. (Unfortunately Dr. MacConnell’s name is misspelled on the County Park signage)



### End of an Era

Dr. Joseph Kerr MacConnell died at his 3 Miln Street home August 15, 1917. His friend Reverend G. F. Greene of First Presbyterian Church rushed home from vacation in Rhode Island to officiate at his funeral. Dr. MacConnell was interred at Fairview Cemetery, Westfield.

### Sources:

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3. *Citizen and Chronicle, various.*
4. *Cranford Citizen”, “Obituary- Dr. Joseph Kerr MacConnell, August 16, 1917.*
5. *“Cranford Chronicle, “Death Summons Dr. MacConnell, August 16, 1917.*

6. *Dunkelman, Mark H., "George Bosley: Soldier, Medical Cadet, Assistant Surgeon", Looksmart.com*
7. *Fridlington, Robert & Fuhro, Lawrence, Images of America: Cranford Vol., II, Arcadia Publishing, Dover, NH, 1996.*
8. *Glazer, Steven, Cranford Civil War Veterans files, Cranford Historical Society, Cranford, NJ.*
9. *Medical Society of New Jersey, "Transactions of 1897, L. H. Hardham printer, Newark, NJ, 1897.*
10. *The Annual Announcement of the New York Post-Graduate Medical School and Hospital for 1896-97", New York, NY.*
11. *Ricord, F. W., History of Union County, Newark , NJ, 1897.*