

Cranford Girl Scouts

1929–1957

Short History

This history was compiled by Janet Copeland Eschenlauer. Her mother, Mrs. Dwight Copeland, was deeply involved with the Cranford Girl Scouts from 1938 until the council merged with the Washington Rock Girl Scout Council in 1957, serving as volunteer director from 1950 to 1953, then executive director through 1956, while also regularly training troop leaders.

1920s – Founding Era (1929)

The Cranford Girl Scout Council received its charter from the National Girl Scout Organization in 1929, formally organizing the local governing body. Early leadership roles documented from this period include Miss Rachel Robinson as First Commissioner and Ruth Neal as First Director. These officers are identified in retrospective coverage of early council history.

The Cranford Girl Scouts organization was founded in 1929 when local Cranford women met and decided to establish a Girl Scout program in the township, formally organizing what became the Cranford Girl Scout Council. From its beginning, the movement grew as part of the broader Girl Scout expansion across New Jersey in the early twentieth century.

1930s – Establishment and Growth

A major milestone occurred on November 8, 1934, when the Cranford Canoe Club began renting its former clubhouse to the Cranford Girl Scout Council, providing a permanent home for local Girl Scout activities to the Girl Scout Council. In November 1942 the building was formally dedicated as the Neva Sykes Memorial Girl Scout House. The council was active and expanding, including annual fundraising canvasses beginning in 1935.

The Neva Sykes Memorial Girl Scout House and Its Namesake



The Neva Sykes Girl Scout House, photographed in 1951 by Dr. Edward M. Coe

In 1951, Dr. Edward M. Dr. photographed the house and presented a framed copy of the print to Mrs. Copeland who was then the Director of the Cranford Girl Scouts. Her office was in the small extension on the right side of the house.

Neva Sykes

Neva Sykes was an early and foundational leader of the Girl Scout movement in Cranford, New Jersey. She is documented as a charter member and secretary of the Cranford Girl Scout Council, organized in 1929.

Located at 301 Springfield Avenue, the Girl Scout House served for decades as the center of local Girl Scout activities until it was demolished in 1964. The site is now known as Girl Scout Park. Based on the 1942 memorial dedication, Neva Sykes had passed away by that date, likely between 1934 and 1942. Despite later mergers that placed Cranford troops within larger regional councils—ultimately becoming part of today's Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey—her legacy remains central to the history of Girl Scouting in Cranford.

1940s – Wartime and Postwar Expansion

By 1948, Mrs. Dwight (Evelyn Copeland) served as president of the Cranford Girl Scout Council. That same period references Mrs. Howard Best as council commissioner. In November 1942, after the passing of Neva Sykes, a dedication ceremony took place during which the mortgage was symbolically burned, and the property was officially renamed The Neva Sykes Memorial Girl Scout House.

By 1950, the council had grown significantly, with 604 girls participating in 42 troops.

Presidents / Top Local Leaders

- **1929** – Miss Rachel Robinson – First Commissioner
- **1929** – Ruth Neal – First Director
- **1948** – Mrs. Dwight (Evelyn) Copeland – President
- **1950** – Mrs. Howard Best – Council Commissioner
- **1950** – Mrs. Dwight (Evelyn) Copeland – Director
- **1952** – Mrs. Burton Belden – President

1957–1965 – Transition

In May 1957 the Cranford Council joined neighboring councils to form the Washington Rock Girl Scout Council.

Top Local Leaders – 1965–1976

- 1965–1971 – Mrs. Jean Koenig
- 1974–1975 – Mrs. Rita Slowey
- 1976 – Mrs. Katherine Prassas

Note from Janet Copeland Eschenlauer: Mrs. Copeland was my mother, so much of the information in this document has been derived from my memories. My mother was involved with the Girl Scouts from 1939 until 1972, first as a leader then as director. In addition to her administrative duties as Director, she regularly trained troop leaders. Upon her retirement as Director, she began hosting numerous troops of Brownies and Girl Scouts each spring, who came to view the exhibits of her extensive doll collection. During her time as Director, she proposed that the council lease a one-room apartment on the second floor of the Girl Scout house, and this was done three times. The third and last rental was to me and my husband for July and August of 1956, shortly after our June wedding.

A large part of the information in this document came from an article that appeared in the Cranford Citizen and Chronicle when my mother retired. A small amount of the information was found by extensive searching on the internet.

Janet Copeland Eschenlauer (maiden name Janet Elizabeth Copeland) was born in Evanston, Illinois on April 11, 1934, and came to Cranford, New Jersey in November of that year. Except for three years, she lived there (on Cranford Avenue, Doering Way, Hampton Road, and Central Avenue) until 1956. She attended Cleveland Elementary School K-4th grade, (Lexington, MA schools-5th -7th grades), and Cranford High School 8th-12th grades. Janet earned a B.S. degree in Physical Education from Skidmore College in 1956. She and Arthur* were married at the First Presbyterian Church in Cranford in June, 1956 and lived in the apartment at the Neva Sykes Girl Scout House in July and August, before moving to Brighton, MA, where she was a Physical Education dance instructor at Jackson College, Tufts University. In 1958 Janet and Arthur moved back to New Jersey and have lived in New Jersey ever since (except for a year in Singapore, where Arthur managed The Morgan Bank's activities in southeast Asia), first in Rutherford, then in Chatham, and now in Princeton. They raised their children in Chatham, NJ: a daughter, Karen Decker Eschenlauer, b.1959, and a son Arthur Copeland Eschenlauer, b.1961.

*Arthur was born in Cranford at the private Brookside Hospital on May 23, 1934. During his Cranford years he lived on: Bloomingdale Avenue, Columbia Avenue, and Raleigh Avenue. His mother Marion Eschenlauer taught in the Cranford Elementary Schools from 1940 until she retired in 1967.