

DONORS OF THE MEDALS AND THEIR HISTORIES

The Elliott Cresson Medal - Founded 1848 - Gold Medal

Elliott Cresson\*

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Elliott Cresson, the seventh generation of his family to reside in America, was born in Philadelphia, March 2, 1796, and died there on February 20, 1854. He never married, but resided with his widowed mother.

He engaged in mercantile pursuits until 1824. Thereafter until 1850, he appears in the Philadelphia Directory as a "gentleman." From 1850 until his death, he is listed as Secretary of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society.

After his retirement from business, Cresson was active in philanthropic enterprises. He became a life member of The Franklin Institute on November 4, 1824. He planned a medal fund in February, 1846, and created the fund for the "Elliott Cresson Medal" by indenture or deed of trust made February 18, 1848, and accepted by The Franklin Institute at its meeting on March 16, 1848.

Cresson was an incorporator of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now the Moore College of Art), became a member of its first Board of Directors and its first President.

Cresson was an ardent advocate of the development of Liberia as a place of colonization for free negroes and manumitted slaves.

He also was a stock-holder in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and in the Atheneum of Philadelphia.

A unique bequest in his will was to the Mayor and Councils of Philadelphia, a trust fund, the income to be expended "in planting & renewing, shade trees, especially in situations now exposing my fellow citizens to the heat of the sun, desiring that due care be taken to select the best varieties of fine trees & excluding such foreign trash as the Lombardy Poplar, Ailanthus, paper Mulberry & similar Exotics."

- Dr. Joseph Samuel Hepburn

(First typed from Dr. Hepburn's handwriting on Monday, April 5, 1965.)

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REPORT ON  
THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ELLIOTT CRESSON

By

Joseph Samuel Hepburn

Prepared at the Request of the Committee on Science  
and the Arts, and Read at its Stated Meeting on  
October 13, 1965.

Elliott Cresson was born in Philadelphia, March 2, 1796, the seventh generation of his family to reside in America. His genealogy is given by Jordan(1). The founder of the family in America was Pierre Cresson, who was a native of Picardy, born in 1610, and an adherent of the Reformed religion; he settled in New Amsterdam (New York) about 1659. Next in the direct line was Jacques Cresson, whose widow and children were located in Philadelphia in 1696; they belonged to the Religious Society of Friends. Then came, in successive generations, Solomon, James, Caleb, and John Elliott Cresson.

John Elliott Cresson appears in the Philadelphia Directory for 1814 as a conveyancer at 54 High(now Market) Street. He married Mary Warder. Their eldest child was Elliott Cresson. John Elliott Cresson died in 1814; his wife survived until 1863.

Jordan(1) included in his text information concerning the youth of Elliott Cresson as recorded by the latter in his tribute to his uncle, Caleb Cresson, Jr.:—

"Caleb Cresson was one of the most eminent and highly respectable merchants of Philadelphia. Having amassed a large fortune-----he retired from commercial pursuits; and possessing a strong philanthropic and enlightened mind, devoted his time to objects of public utility and benevolence. -----

"It was with this valued relative I served my apprenticeship. On my coming of age he declined business in my favor, and by aiding me with the loan of a large sum to conduct it prosperously, together with the paternal regard and advice he often extended to me, in great measure supplied the loss I had sustained in the death of an affectionate father."

This Caleb Cresson was a Manager of the Schuylkill Navigation Company.

From entries under "Cresson" in the Philadelphia Directories between 1814 and 1863, these facts appear:

Cresson & Wistar or Cresson, Wistar & Co., merchants were located at 133 High (now Market) Street.

Bartholomew Wistar was a partner in the firm.

Elliott Cresson succeeded his uncle, Caleb Cresson, Jr., as a partner in the firm in 1818.

The partnership apparently was terminated in 1822, not appearing in 1823. In 1824 Elliott Cresson is described as a merchant, thereafter as a gentleman until 1850; beginning in 1850 and including 1854, he is listed as secretary of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, northwest corner of Sixth and Walnut Streets. With a few exceptions, his residence is given as 30(now 730) Sansom Street.

M(ary) Cresson, widow and gentlewoman, appears in the directories from 1822 to 1863 at 30(changed in 1858 to 730) Sansom Street.

Elliott Cresson, who never married, therefore resided with his widowed mother on Sansom Street.

After his withdrawal from mercantile pursuits, Elliott Cresson was active in philanthropic enterprises.

He died at his mother's residence early in the morning of Monday, February 20, 1854. The date and place are given in a death notice and in an editorial, both in the North American and United States Gazette of February 21, 1854(2). His illness was brief; the editorial states that he had attended a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women on the evening of February 14. The Board of Health Register of Deaths(3) records for Elliott Cresson: Date of death, February 20, 1854; disease, gangrene; age, 58 years; attending physician, B.S. Janney; burial ground, St. Andrews. The physician, Benjamin Say Janney, had been graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1813(4); the Philadelphia Directory for 1854 gives his address as 334 North Sixth Street. The manuscript Register of Deaths of Saint Andrew's Church contains the name Elliott Cresson and a date, 1854, February 19; lines were drawn through 19, and 22d. substituted. This was the date of the funeral and interment, for the cited death notice states that the funeral is on Wednesday (February 22) at 10 o'clock, A.M. from his mother's residence.

An account of Cresson's estate in the Orphans Court records payment to St. Andrews Church for use of vault, and payments for lots in Woodlands Cemetery and for the deed for these lots. It has been ascertained from George C. Scholl, Superintendent of Woodlands Cemetery, (29) that its records indicate that the remains of Elliott Cresson were interred in the center of Lots 193-4-5-6, Section D, on June 9, 1854.

During Cresson's last illness, apparently Dr. Joseph Pancost was called as a consultant. The account in the Orphans Court records payment to him for medical services. Pancost had graduated in medicine from the University of Pennsylvania in 1828(4), and was professor of anatomy (1839-1841) and professor of surgery (1841-1874) in the Jefferson Medical College(30).

Elliott Cresson was affiliated with St. Andrews Church. In his will(13), he wrote: "I give and bequeath the sum of Five hundred dollars to my friend and pastor, Rev. Wm. Bacon Stevens." Stevens held the degree of Doctor of Medicine in course from Dartmouth College, became a clergyman, was rector of St. Andrew's Protestant Episcopal Church 1848-1862, became Assistant Bishop in 1862, and served as Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania 1865-1887. St. Andrew's Church was located at the northwest corner of South Eighth and Manning Streets (1823-1923), and is now located at the northwest corner of South Forty-second and Spruce Streets. The building on Eighth Street is now occupied by St. George's Greek Orthodox Cathedral. Several members of the Cresson family were pew-holders in St. Andrew's Church.

Thomas Sully was bequeathed five hundred dollars by Elliott Cresson. Sully (31, 32) painted "head" portraits of Cresson in 1824, 1849, and a copy from a former portrait in 1855. The Franklin Institute has a portrait of Elliott Cresson by an unknown artist, presented by Mary S. Sheuerd Dickey, widow of the Reverend Clement Cresson Dickey, who was a nephew of Elliott Cresson. Sarah Emlen Cresson, a sister of Elliott Cresson, married John M. Dickey(1). In his will(13), Elliott Cresson made a bequest to the three sons of his sister, Sarah: Ebenezer, Cresson, and Clement Dickey.



## Liberia.

Early Lee Fox wrote a history of The American Colonization Society 1817-1840(8). This Society was incorporated by an act of the legislature of Maryland in 1831; the charter was amended in 1837; and the Society was reorganized in 1839. Its chief purpose was the settlement in Liberia of free negroes and manumitted slaves. Among its auxiliary organizations was the Young Men's Society of Philadelphia, concerning which Fox wrote: It "at times was almost completely under the dominance of that quaint, queer, irrepressible Quaker, Elliott Cresson, who whether at home, or in England, or in Mississippe, or in Vermont, never failed to impress his hearers with his untiring energy, and oftimes with his utter disagreement with Garrison as to the method of ridding the land of slavery, although he was as anxious as Garrison to get rid of the whole system."

Fox describes Cresson as "one of the most zealous partisans and certainly the most belligerent Friend the Society ever had," and quotes Isaac Orr(an agent of the parent Society) who wrote, in 1830, that Cresson "has the patronage of Philadelphia under his thumb, to a greater extent than I dare tell him----And woe to the day when that commanding influence shall be in any way broken or thrown aside."

The African Repository(9), the organ of The American Colonization Society, noted Cresson's death, paid tribute to his labors in its behalf, and to his service as its vice-president and as a life director. Mention is made of Port Cresson in Liberia.

The Annual Report(10) of The American Colonization Society described Cresson as "for over a quarter of a century an ardent advocate of Colonization, devoting a large portion of his time, in this country and Great Britain, in gratuitous labors in its behalf. His liberal contributions in life, no less than his remembrance of the cause by will evinced the sincerity of his professions." A memorial minute was also adopted.

Elliott Cresson Was a member of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. He had acquired Share 189 of its stock from Samuel Rhoads Fisher in 1824; and the share remained in Cresson's estate until 1859. Cresson bequeathed one thousand dollars to the Athenaeum.

The major portion of Cresson's life was devoted to philanthropy. His activities may be considered under four major headings:(1) The Elliott Cressen Medal of The Franklin Institute, (2) the colonization of Liberia, (3) The Philadelphia School of Design for Women, (4) other philanthropies.

The Elliott Cresson Medal.

Elliott Cresson was nominated for election to membership in The Franklin Institute on October 20, 1824, and was duly elected on November 4, 1824, becoming a life member. His plan for a medal fund was first announced at the meeting of The Institute on February 19, 1846(5). An indenture or deed of trust was made on February 18, 1848, was accepted by The Institute at its meeting on March 16, 1848(5), and was subsequently recorded(6). The corpus of the trust was a certificate for one thousand dollars of the six percent convertible loan of the President, Managers and Company of the Schuylkill Navigation Company. The deed provides for the award of gold medals and specifies: "The said awards however to be in all instances made either for some discovery in the Arts or Sciences, or for the invention or improvement of some useful machine, or for some new process or combination of materials in manufactures, or for ingenuity skill or perfection in workmanship." The obverse of this medal bears a medallion likeness of Elliott Cresson and an inscription around its margin "Elliott Cresson Medal Founded 1848." The reverse is inscribed around its margin "Awarded by The Franklin Institute of Pennsylvania"; in the center are engraved the date(year), name of recipient, and reason for award.

This medal was first awarded in 1875. Including 1965, 217 medals have been awarded(7).

The part played by Elliott Cresson in the colonization of Liberia is recorded by Archibald Alexander(11) in his history of the colonization of the west coast of Africa.

The deep interest of Cresson in Liberia is revealed in a letter written to Cresson by Gerald Ralston(12) from London in 1848 concerning the pending recognition of the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Liberia by the government of Great Britain.

In his will and its codicil(13) Elliott Cresson bequeathed one thousand dollars to the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, and five thousand dollars to the Mission and Schools of the Episcopal Church about to be established at or near Port Cresson, with an additional bequest of five thousand dollars should a collegiate department for the benefit of the natives and citizens be added to the Mission and Schools aforesaid.

Port Cresson is not mentioned in seven gazettes, published in the period 1856-1958(14). However two clues exist; the cited clause, "Port Cresson in Liberia" in the African Repository(9), and a clause, "Port Cresson, in Liberia, Africa, named after him" in the biographical sketch of Elliott Cresson by Henry Simpson(15).

Since this bequest was to institutions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, information was sought from the National (now Executive) Council of that Church. The Secretary of the Council, the Reverend Canon C. Rankin Barnes(16) could find no reference to "Cresson" or to "Port Cresson" in the Subject Index or in the Alphabetical List of Persons in the master index (1836-1900) of the Church's periodical devoted to missions, The Spirit of Missions, or in all its issues for 1854. Also "Port Cresson" does not appear on accompanying maps of the Liberian coast.

The Reverend David B. Reed(17) of the Overseas Department of the National (now Executive) Council found record of the receipt of a legacy of four thousand dollars during the year 1858 from the estate of Elliott Cresson for work in Liberia. The existing records on the bequest do not include details about Port Cresson.



Further information was then sought from the Right Reverend Bravid Washington Harris, then Missionary Bishop of Liberia. He cited two treatises, each in two volumes, which contain data on the settlement at Port Cresson and its brief history (18, 19).

An island in the St. John River, near its mouth and in front of Edina, was purchased from the Basā (also written Bassa) chief or king Joe Harris. On this island a village, named Port Cresson, was settled by 126 Negro colonists who had sailed from Norfolk, Virginia on October 26, 1834, and arrived at Monrovia on the following December 9. They were artisans—blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, brick-makers, shoe-makers, and tailors. They were sent by the Pennsylvania Young Men's Society. They were pledged to total abstinence from ardent spirits and from the arts of war. The Spanish slave traders, who still possessed great influence over the Basā chiefs incited these chiefs, including Joe Harris to attack the settlement on June 10, 1835. A massacre occurred; 20 colonists—3 men, 4 women, 13 children two to ten years of age—were killed; the houses were destroyed; and the survivors fled to Edina. Another Basā chief, Bob Gray, assisted the settlers of Edina to repel the people of Joe Harris. The Colonial Council intervened; and peace was restored. Joe Harris himself rebuilt the Quaker village on a site farther to the north on the St. John River, where it received the name of Basā Cove. Mention is made of another chief, whose name was "Prince John, or Bottle of Beer." In 1839 Basā Cove and Edina became a part of the County of Grand Bassa.

Bishop Harris(20) mentions several churches in this area, and a day school of long standing, on the elementary level, with a new building, connected with St. John's Church, Lower Buchanan in the Bassa Cove. The only college in his missionary district is Cuttington College and Divinity School which was located at Cape Palmas from 1886 to 1929, and after a lapse of nineteen years, has been at Suacoco since 1948.

The interest of Elliott Cresson in Liberia was also shown by his suggestion, which was adopted by The Franklin Institute on January 17, 1850(21), that silver

medals be struck at his expense from the dies of the Elliott Cresson Medal and awarded for the largest product of coffee, sugar, cotton, and palm oil, respectively, in the year 1851 by the Pennsylvania Settlement in Liberia. The Institute directed that Elliott Cresson designate the recipients. No record of the awarding of these silver medals has been found.

#### School of Design for Women.

The Philadelphia School of Design for Women began as a philanthropy of Sarah Worthington King Peter. She was the daughter of Thomas Worthington, U.S. Senator from Ohio, 1803-1807, 1810-1814, and was the wife of William Peter who was Her Britannic Majesty's Consul for Pennsylvania and New Jersey, stationed in Philadelphia.

The Archives of The Franklin Institute contain an eight-page holographic letter which, on March 27, 1850, Mrs. Peter sent to Samuel V. Merrick, then president of The Institute, proposing "a connection of my school with your Franklin Institute, as a co-operative, but separate branch." In the initial portion of that letter she told of the origin of her school.

"Having, for a series of years, observed with deep concern, the deprivation and suffering to which a large and increasing number of deserving women are exposed in this city, and elsewhere, for want of a wider scope in which to exercise their abilities for the maintenance of themselves and their children, and, after having bestowed much thought and inquiry, with reference to the best means of alleviating the miseries incident to their condition, I resolved, about two years since, to attempt the instruction of a class of young girls in the practice of such of the arts of design as were within my reach. I selected this department of industry, not only because it presents a wide field, as yet unoccupied by our countrymen, but also because these arts can be practiced at home, without materially interfering with the routine of domestic duty which is the peculiar province of women.

"In the month of November, 1848, I gathered a drawing class of some twenty young women, under the instruction of an accomplished teacher - - -."

As a result of this letter of Mrs. Peter, the School of Design for Women was established under the auspices and conducted under the supervision of The Franklin Institute from June 20, 1850 until April 26, 1853. On the latter date, The Franklin Institute severed its connection with the School(22). All the property appertaining to the School was transferred by The Institute to a group of seven gentlemen.

These gentlemen with ten additional gentlemen, one of whom was Elliott Cresson, became the incorporators of The Philadelphia School of Design for Women which was chartered by decree of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia on September 24, 1853; the charter was recorded on October 26, 1853(23).

The new corporation was duly organized on the first Monday of November, 1853(24). Elliott Cresson was among the Directors then elected.

"At the first meeting of the Directors, Mr. Elliott Cresson, who had from the beginning manifested a lively interest in the success of the School, was elected President. His active aid to the school was, however, of short duration; death deprived it of his valuable services within six months of its organization. A bequest of ten thousand dollars to this School, among other noble gifts to different charities, testified to the sincerity of the zeal which through life he had manifested in the cause of human improvement. This important legacy has not yet been received; indeed, it was not to be expected until after a year from the death of the testator."(24). This bequest was for endowment(13).

By decree of Court of Common Pleas No. 2, recorded June 2, 1932(25), the Philadelphia School of Design for Women was merged into the Moore Institute of Art, Science and Industry which had been founded in 1921, and had been incorporated by a decree of the same Court recorded January 7, 1922(26). This Institute was empowered to confer degrees by decree of the same Court recorded November 17, 1932(27). The name of the corporation was changed to Moore College of Art by another decree of the same court recorded October 11, 1962.

Cresson's interest in art is revealed also by his connection with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. An account of his estate in the Orphans Court in 1855 records his ownership of a share of stock in that Academy.

#### Other Philanthropies

In his will, Cresson gave and bequeathed "to the Mayor and Councils of Philadelphia, the sum of Five Thousand dollars in Trust as a perpetual fund, the income from which I desire shall annually forever be expended in planting & renewing shade trees especially in situations now exposing my fellow citizens to the heat of the sun, desiring that due care be taken to select the best varieties of fine trees & excluding such foreign trash as the Lombardy Poplar, Ailanthus, paper Mulberry & similar Exotics."

By Ordinance of Councils, approved June 20, 1859(33) the income of this trust was directed to be expended by the Commissioner of City Property according to the direction of the testator under the supervision of the Committee on City Property.

A Supplement to this ordinance, approved June 1, 1867(34) directed that income be expended in accordance with Cresson's will by the Commissioners of (Fairmount) Park.

In 1870 the legacy was administered by the Board of Directors of City Trusts (35). By an Act of Assembly, approved May 15, 1871(36) the administration of this trust was assigned to the Commissioners of Fairmount Park. Accordingly the principal and accrued interest were transferred to those Commissioners in 1871(37).

Cresson bequeathed "to the Seminary of Protestant Episcopal Church near Alexandria the sum of Five thousand dollars in trust for the endowment of one or more Scholarships in said Institution."

In Goodwin's history of this seminary, this bequest is mentioned twice, once specifically "for the purpose of educating indigent candidates at the Seminary"(38).



According to Robert O. Kevin, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament in this Seminary, this bequest has become part of the general scholarship fund of the Seminary, because of the destruction of individual records in the Civil War(39).

Elliott Cresson held William Penn in high regard as was shown by two bequests which apparently were unfulfilled. One bequest was for the purchase of Penn's Mansion in Second Street and its preservation "as a memento of love & regard for the memory & services of the illustrious founder of Pennsylvania." This mansion was the Slate Roof House which stood on the southeast corner of South Second and Sansom Streets, and was removed in 1868. Tablets on the building now on the site state that it is on the site of the residence of William Penn during the period 1699-1701. The other bequest was "to erect a monument to the virtues & noble actions of Wm. Penn on the site of the Treaty Tree at Kensington or within the City Itself." However, a monument already stood on the site of the Treaty Elm, or Great Elm Tree, which was blown down in 1810. The inscriptions on the monument have recently been recut. They record that it was "Placed by the Penn Society, A.D. 1827, To Mark the Scite of the Great Elm Tree" and of the "Treaty Ground of William Penn and the Indian Natives, 1682." This monument is in Penn Treaty Park, which is on the north side of East Columbia Avenue, and extends from Beach Street to the Delaware River, in the Shackamaxon area of the former District of Kensington. When the gigantic statue of William Penn was erected on the tower of City Hall, in the old "City Itself" in 1894, it was so placed that it looks down upon the treaty ground.

In addition to the bequests mentioned above, and those to certain individuals, Elliott Cresson also made bequests to the University of Pennsylvania, a proposed school of mines, a proposed agricultural college, the American Sunday School Union, the insane department of the Pennsylvania Hospital, the Deaf and Dumb School on Broad Street (now The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in Mount Airy), the Widow



Asylum on Cherry Street (Christ Church Hospital which was at 306-308 Cherry Street from 1819 to 1857), the House of Refuge, a proposed home for aged, infirm or invalid gentlemen and merchants, and the "Refuge for Decayed Merchants."

The great esteem in which Elliott Cresson was held by his fellow Philadelphians is recorded in the following excerpts from the editorial in the North American and United States Gazette(2) upon his death:—

"The whole of his manhood has been a scene of activity and devotion to public interests, and the general welfare of mankind. - - - Possessed of a handsome competency, he was a liberal distributor of the means with which a bountiful Providence had blessed him. - - - As a friend, he was true; as a citizen, spirited and devoted; as a philanthropist, disinterested and generous. In all the relations of life, zeal, ability and intelligence characterized his efforts and services."

In addition to the persons mentioned in the text, the author is indebted also to Irving N. Kieff, Esq., G. Curtis Pritchard, F. Clyde Michel, Milton Kevin, and the late Ronald J. McCarthy who permitted him to examine manuscripts in their custody.

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