



Two of Cranford's largest housing developments are Sunny Acres, left, and Osceola Park, between the Rahway River and Centennial Avenue. They're shown in promotional map just before World War II.

### Biggest development evolved into Sunny Acres

The housing development that came to be known as Sunny Acres is one of the largest in town. And it inspired the oldest continuing neighborhood association in Cranford.

It was launched on the eve of World War II as a real estate venture of Sears Roebuck & Co., whose modern homes division based in Newark started here with a nationwide program of low cost homes.

Sears put together the parcel out of pasture land that was part of the 200-acre Thomas Sperry farm. It was just above the large barn on Sperry's Osceola Farm, which coincidentally burned in a dramatic blaze that year.

Sears dubbed the venture the "Cranford Home Club Colony" with two plans. One "club" had 63 homes. The second one had 50 homes. They provided four rooms for \$4,335 and six rooms for \$5,250.

The first 63 homes were built without any purchasers seeing a complete model, only floor plans. They could pick from one of a dozen designs.

Once in, wet basements and other problems caused the newcomers to organize a meeting at the Cranford Casino to iron out problems. The tilt with the developer led to formation of the Sunny Acres Civic and Improvement Association, whose projects have contributed to the neighborhood and the town for four decades. They began with a footbridge across the river, accomplished a bus route with a shelter at the old Winfield traffic circle nearby, provided recreational and social activities and staged a locally famous Baby Parade for many years. One of the founding members was Wes Philo, who is township clerk.

The tribal-based street names led some to call the area "Indian Village," but that didn't stick. The association ran a contest to name the development. George E. Osterheld, mayor, picked the winner, which proved so popular that it came to denote the entire section south of the Lehigh Valley Railroad tracks.

Sears expanded Sunny Acres in three sections westward from the original seven streets to include 170 homes altogether.

A photograph in the Newark Sunday Call in December 1930 shows Cappy Jones moving in to the first home to be built. She's a "pioneer" who still lives on Cherokee Road.

### 'Osceola Park' emerged from farm

The breakup of the farm established by Green Stamp founder Thomas Sperry included two of the largest subdivisions in Cranford. One was Sunny Acres west of the river and the other was called Osceola Park, which focused on Munsee Drive between the river and Centennial.

Osceola Park opened its first homes in 1938. It included 32 of the 200 acres of Sperry's Osceola Farm, which had its barn below Kaxian Road in what is now Winfield. Sperry's son, also named Thomas, was involved in the develop-



Historic home at Eastman and Mill housed one of town's most popular restaurants, Hayashi's, until it was razed in the 1930's for the current post office. It was built and used by town's first doctor, J.K. MacConnell, who arrived in 1869 and practiced there until early 1900's.

### Further reading: sources on local history abundant

For those interested in the history of Cranford, sources abound.

The Cranford Historical Society has archives on many subjects. It also has booklets including Homer Hall's "500 Years at Crane's Ford" and "Centennial Highlights" published in 1971.

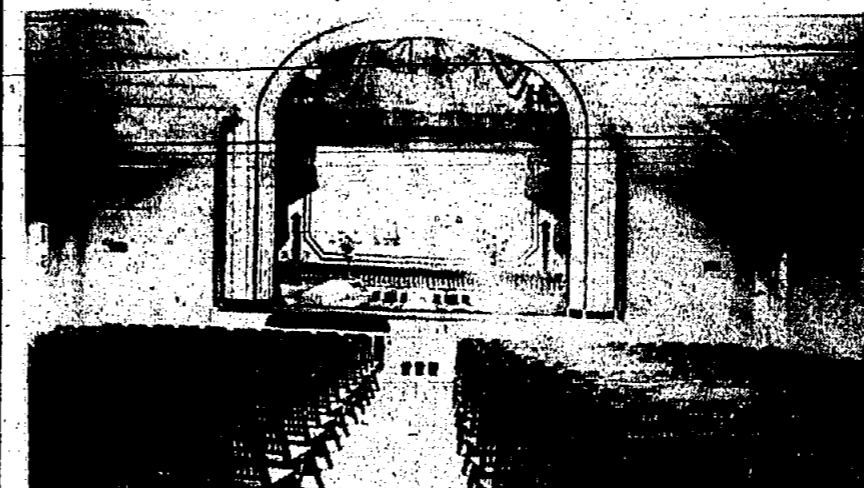
Hall's work, which was adapted for The Chronicle's local Centennial Edition in 1971 and the Bicentennial edition of 1976, is especially strong on early local history. These two editions, plus the 50th anniversary edition in 1943, contain much information on local organizations, too.

The Cranford Public Library houses the newspaper's indexing of The Chronicle from 1883 through World War II, performed by Arthur and Hazel Burditt. The original newspapers are stored by the museum and more microfilm copies are at the library, the newspaper and Rutgers University.

The library also has a number of files about Cranford life including a 1904 booklet by Louie Henderson and a 1912 booklet by the Cranford Board of Trade.

### English Village

English Village was built in 1933 at one of \$426,000. The area was jointly owned by Thomas A. Sperry and after he died the Boardlee family, headed by an officer of General Motors Corp., lived in the large house there. The Boardlees decided on the apartment building and left the original Sperry ironwork around it.



Auditorium on third floor of Opera House Block housed "large entertainments" between 1892 and 1912. Built by the wife of advertising magnate J. Walter Thompson, it held 500 people for cultural events, political meetings and school commencement before Grant School was built in 1898.

### Women's clubs have played important role since 1890's

Women's clubs in Cranford have played an important role in the civic, social and cultural aspects of community life.

The first club, The Wednesday Morning Club, was organized in 1891. It started a subscription library in 1894 and in 1910 when a public library became a reality, the club donated more than 4,000 volumes.

The second major women's club, the Village Improvement Association, was organized in 1896. The VIA's early projects included provisions for refuse collection, street cleaning, snow plowing and park development. It joined with the Wednesday Morning Club in forming a public library.

Here is a listing of women's clubs in Cranford and the date of their establishment:

### A century of dramatic arts

The dramatic arts have been a part of life in Cranford for nearly a century.

The Alceus, an opera company of more than 30 home artists, was active in the 1890's, producing three operas each winter. The fully costumed productions were so popular that the 500-seat Opera House was often sold out. The company was noted for its performances of "Mikado," "Pirates of Penzance" and "Pinafore."

The Cranford Dramatic Club has been presenting plays continually for 64 years. It was organized in 1919 and plays were read in members' homes in the early years. At least one public performance was presented annually, with the first one Shaw's "Getting Married" in 1919.

Public performances were presented in school and church auditoriums and in the Cranford Casino, a building fund drive was started in 1924 and continued for more than 20 years until the CDC Theatre opened on Winans Avenue in September 1937, with "The Solid Gold Cadillac." Four public performances are presented each season.

A second theatre opened in 1972. Celebration Playhouse, founded by Gary Cohen, opened on South Avenue after starting in 1971 with "Play It Again, Sam" in the cellar of a restaurant in Roselle Park. Celebration Playhouse became New Jersey Public Theatre in 1978 under the direction of Richard Dominick. The semi-professional troupe produces plays year-round and is in the process of seeking a larger building with the intention of becoming a professional Actor's Equity theatre.

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