

ArMs 1994.013
4 boxes (3 legal MB, 1 OS)
1.75 cubic feet
4C – 4.1.C, 4.6.C

Cranston Family Papers
1846-1923

Brooklyn Historical Society
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Introduction

The Cranston Family collection comprises 1.75 cubic feet of letters, clippings, books, certificates, and ephemera from three generations of the Cranston and Morehouse families of Brooklyn, N.Y., who witnessed—among other events—the Civil War and Brooklyn’s transition from an independent city to a borough of New York City. The collection was formed by several donations (all entered under accession number 1994.013) from Mrs. Beverly Wright Bastian of Belvedere, California, a descendant of the Cranstons and the Morehouses. The majority of the collection relates to the lives of Alfred Cranston and his wife Elizabeth H. Petford Cranston, covering the period from 1846 to 1923. Alfred Cranston was, among other things, a volunteer firefighter, and fought in the Civil War with the 14th Regiment on the New York State Militia, known popularly as “the Fighting Fourteenth.”

The collection also contains letters, books, and ephemera relating to their daughter Ella Cranston, to the Morehouse family, from which family a daughter, Emma Louise, married the Cranston’s son, Alfred Petford Cranston, and to their relatives, the Oliver and Bellows families.

There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

Biographical Notes

Alfred Cranston (1840?-1919) and Elizabeth Petford (dates unknown)

Alfred Cranston was born in Savannah, Georgia, the eldest of seven children, around 1840, and moved to Brooklyn at the age of four. As a young man he served with Engine 17 of Brooklyn’s Volunteer Fire Department, and in 1861 enlisted in Company 1 of the 14th Regiment of the New York State Militia, known as Brooklyn’s “Fighting Fourteenth,” which was in turn part of the 84th New York Infantry Regiment. He fought in the Civil War from 1861 to 1864, eventually reaching the rank of Captain, and maintained an active correspondence with his fiancée Elizabeth Hollington Petford. Cranston and Petford married in 1864 following his discharge and Cranston became a member of Citizens Lodge No. 628, F. and A.M. (Free and Accepted Masons) in Manhattan. They had three children: Alfred Petford (b.1865), Henrietta, or “Etta” (b. 1866), and Ella Maude (b. 1870). In 1865 Cranston was officially discharged from service as a firefighter during the reorganization of the Brooklyn Firefighters brigades but seems to have remained a member of the Brooklyn Volunteer Firemen’s Association until his death. In 1893 Cranston became superintendent of the Postal Telegraph Building in Manhattan, home of the Postal Telegraph Cable Company, a post he held for five years until he retired.

Alfred Cranston remained active in veterans’ affairs in the years after the war. He served as Secretary of the 14th Regiment War Veterans Association, which held annual reunions and sponsored monuments, including the new 14th Regiment Armory at 8th Avenue and 15th Street in Brooklyn. He was a charter member of the U.S. Grant Post No. 327 of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), Union Veterans of the Civil War. In 1909, the *National Tribune*, the official newspaper of the G.A.R., established a “Veterans’ Colony” in the newly-founded town of St. Cloud, Florida, having taken title to 35,000 acres of land through a subsidiary, the Seminole Land & Investment Company. In 1914, as a G.A.R. member and a Civil War veteran, Cranston received a “land scrip” worth \$25 for purchase of a lot in the St. Cloud “colony.” The Cranstons began to spend summers in the Florida town, which by 1914 boasted the second-largest G.A.R. post in the country. Cranston died in St. Cloud in 1919 at the age of 79. He had been a member of the Baptist church for over fifty years.

Elizabeth Hollington Petford Cranston was the daughter of Henrietta Hollington and the Rev. Charles Petford, Baptist clergyman; the Petfords immigrated to the U.S. from Astwood, England shortly after their marriage. Charles Petford died of pneumonia in 1850 when Elizabeth and her sister Emma were children, and their mother Henrietta later married a man named Richards, who imported needles manufactured in England by the Hollingtons. As Mrs. Alfred Cranston, Petford was active in

the Society of the Wives and Daughters of the 14th Regiment War Veterans, serving as the Society's president from 1893 to 1915, even designing the membership certificates herself. After her tenure as president ended, she was named honorary president of the Society in 1915. She also took part in numerous church and charity activities.

Alfred Morehouse (1838-unknown) and Mary Elizabeth Coward (1838-unknown)

Alfred Morehouse, son of Calvin Morehouse and Elizabeth Van Riper, was born in Brooklyn in 1838. Like Alfred Cranston he served as a volunteer firefighter, and worked in Harding's Tea Store as either an associate or partner. He and Mary Elizabeth Coward (also born in 1838, in Tom's River, New Jersey) were married in 1859 or 1860 and celebrated their golden anniversary in 1909. They had two daughters, Emma Louise and Minnie, both of whom were eventually buried with them in the same plot in Greenwood Cemetery.

Alfred Petford Cranston and Emma Louise Morehouse

Alfred Petford Cranston and Emma Louise Morehouse were married in 1888, and had two daughters—Lillian Elsie and Marion Morehouse—before divorcing circa 1902. Alfred went on to marry his pregnant mistress. Alfred Petford Cranston also worked for the Postal Telegraph Cable Company, as had his father.

Scope and Content

This collection comprises 1.75 cubic feet of material from three generations of the Cranston and Morehouse families covering the period 1846-1923 (bulk dates 1860-1915). The collection is made up of letters, clippings, books, certificates, and ephemera. With the exception of the newspaper clippings and few of the books, the bulk of the material is in good condition. Several items from box 2 have been moved to the oversize box (box 4).

The collection is arranged for convenience into two "series:"

Series 1: Manuscript Materials (1846-1919)

Alfred Cranston (1861-1919)

Elizabeth Petford Cranston (1846-1923)

Other Family Members and Relatives (1851-1912)

Series 2: Books (1849-1906)

Some fragile volumes in series 2 have been enclosed in boxes of acid-free cardstock, and various brittle items have been put in mylar sleeves. Nearly every newspaper clipping in the collection is extremely brittle and yellowed. Many are falling apart and missing pieces around the edges or where they were folded. They have all have been photocopied onto acid-free paper. On a few of Alfred Cranston's letters the ink has begun to lace the paper and have been interleaved with acid-free sheets to prevent damage to the surrounding letters.

Series Descriptions

Series 1: Manuscript Materials (1846-1919) includes all items in the collection except the family's books.

Alfred Cranston (1861-1919) contains all non-book items belonging to Alfred Cranston and all correspondence written by him, including a large number of letters written during his time in the 14th Regiment to his then-fiancée, Elizabeth H. Petford. These letters were transcribed by Mrs. Bastian prior to donation and the transcriptions are included, both in hard copy in accompanying folders and as word-processed files on a CD-ROM. Cranston's pocket-sized edition of the Psalms, probably issued to him during his military service, and a diary from 1864 also date from this period of his life. Cranston's firefighting activities, his employment by the Postal Telegraph Cable Company, and his participation in the St. Cloud Veterans' Colony in central Florida are also represented.

Elizabeth Petford Cranston (1846-1923) contains all items belonging to Mrs. Elizabeth Hollington Petford Cranston, a few of which date from before her marriage, including a single letter to her husband after their marriage and a small amount of ephemera related to her housekeeping, religious, and charitable activities. The bulk of this subseries, however, concerns her extensive involvement with the Society of the Wives and Daughters of the 14th Regiment War Veterans, including handwritten drafts of most of her annual welcoming addresses to the society, the constitution and by-laws of the organization, clippings of the society's participation in various celebrations, membership certificates (and Mrs. Cranston's original, hand-drawn design for them), and a fair number of pieces of printed ephemera.

Other Family Members and Relatives (1851-1912) includes correspondence and ephemera belonging to Ella Cranston (daughter of Alfred and Elizabeth Petford Cranston), and clippings of marriage and anniversary announcements and ephemera from the Morehouse family. It also houses a limited amount of material pertaining to the Oliver and Bellows families (relatives through Alfred Cranston's mother, Susan [Ann] Oliver), primarily relating to the funeral arrangements and interment in Greenwood Cemetery of Sarah Ann Oliver Bellows, a cousin of the Cranstons.

Series 2: Books (1849-1906) contains a collection of books that belonged to various members of the Cranston and Morehouse families. The majority were either inscribed to the owner or labeled with the owner's name by Mrs. Bastian prior to being donated to BHS. Their condition varies from very good to poor.

Related Material

Photographs

BHS Photo Collection accession #V1995.20 contains the following images and items:

Ella Cranston's photo album

Images of Alfred Cranston (cartes de visite)

Sarah Ann Oliver

Mrs. Oliver, Sarah Ann Oliver's mother (and sister-in-law of Ann Oliver Cranston)

Mrs. E. B. Fowler, (cabinet card)

W.H. Tigney and Ramon Cardona (cartes de visite)

U.S. Grant Post No. 327 G.A.R.

G.A.R. 14th Regiment anniversary celebration, including Alfred Cranston.

The Photo Collection also contains a large set of glass negatives that include images of the interior and exterior of Alfred and Elizabeth Petford Cranston's home on Quincy Street, numerous members of the family, friends, city scenes, portraits, and General Fowler's grave in Greenwood Cemetery.

Related books in Othmer Library

A copy of *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* by C.V. Tevis (Brooklyn Eagle Press, 14th ed. 1911), inscribed by Alfred Cranston to his granddaughter L. E. (Lillian Elsie) Cranston Baker, may be found at call number E523.5 14th. The Cranston family copy of *Old Sands Street Methodist Episcopal Church of Brooklyn, N.Y.: An Illustrated Centennial Record, Historical and Biographical*, by Edwin Warriner (self-published, 1885) may be found at BX8481.B8 S4.

Related archival collections in Othmer Library

The Brooklyn Firefighting Collection (ArMs 1989.006) at the Brooklyn Historical Society offers a more in-depth look at the history of Brooklyn's volunteer and professional fire departments. Additionally, the Historical Society holds a number of collections of materials from Civil War soldiers and from veterans' groups, such as the Grand Army of the Republic and various Brooklyn regiments.

See, for example, ArMs 1977.078, the Records of the Henry R. Lee Post #21 of the Grand Army of the Republic, and ArMs 1973.110, Josiah M. Grumman's diary of 1861-1862. Grumman was a member of the 14th Regiment, Co. H., and kept the diary while a prisoner in Libby Prison, Richmond, VA.

Access Points

650 – Subject Headings

Fire fighters – Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)

651 – Geographical Headings

Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Regimental histories

St. Cloud (Fla.)—History

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Veterans

610 – Names – Corporate

Grand Army of the Republic

Postal Telegraph-Cable Company

United States. Army. New York Infantry Regiment, 84th (1861-1864)

655 – Forms and Genre

Books

Clippings

Correspondence

Drawings

Printed ephemera

Container List

Box Folder Title

Dates

Series 1: Manuscript Materials (1846-1919)

Alfred Cranston (1861-1919)

1	1	Letters to E. Petford	1861
	2	Letters to E. Petford: Transcriptions	1861
	3	Letters to E. Petford	1862
	4	Letters to E. Petford: Transcriptions	1862
	5	Letters to E. Petford (1 of 2)	1863
	6	Letters to E. Petford (2 of 2)	1863
	7	Letters to E. Petford: Transcriptions	1863
	8	Letters to E. Petford	1864
	9	Letters to E. Petford: Transcriptions	1864
	10	Letters to E. Petford: Transcription CD	1861-1864
2	11	Cranston Family Tree	undated
	12	Xeroxed Photo and Obituary	undated and 1919
	13	Book of Psalms	1861
	14	Diary	1864
	15	Firefighting Activities	1865- circa 1919
	16	Firefighting Ephemera	undated
	17	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1883
	18	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1884
	19	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1887
	20	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1889
	21	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1890
	22	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1891
	23	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1892
	24	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1893

	25	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1894
	26	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1896
	27	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1899
	28	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1911
	29	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	1913
	30	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Clippings	undated
	31	14 th Regiment War Veterans Association: Ephemera	1887-1915 and undated
	32	U.S. Grant Post No. 327, G.A.R: Clippings and Ephemera	1884-1887 and undated
2	33	St. Cloud Veterans' Colony	1914-1915
	34	Postal Telegraph and Cable Company: Clippings	1911

Elizabeth Petford Cranston (1846-1923)

	35	Letter to A. Cranston	1865
	36	Personal Ephemera	1846-1915
4	37	Marriage Certificate: Alfred Cranston and Elizabeth Petford	1864
2	38	Wives and Daughters of the 14 th Regiment: Welcome Addresses	1894-1923
4	39	Wives and Daughters of the 14 th Regiment: Welcome Addresses	1898-1899
2	40	Wives and Daughters of the 14 th Regiment: Constitutions and By-laws	1899 and undated
	41	Wives and Daughters of the 14 th Regiment War: Clippings	1898-1911
	42	Wives and Daughters of the 14 th Regiment: Ephemera	1894-1915
4	43	Hand-drawn Design for Wives and Daughters Membership Certificate	undated
4	44	Blank Wives and Daughters Membership Certificate	undated

Other Family Members and Relatives (1851-1912)

2	45	Ella Cranston: Correspondence and Ephemera	1877-1884 and undated
4	46	Ella Cranston's Wives and Daughters of the 14 th Regiment War Veterans membership Certificate	undated
	47	Ella Cranston: Sunday School Honor Roll certificate	1884
	48	Ella Cranston: Young People's Comrade newsletter	1877
2	49	The Morehouse Family: Clippings	1888

	50	The Morehouse Family: Clippings	1909
	51	The Morehouse Family: Ephemera	1883-1912 and undated
4	52	Sheet Music: <i>The Oxford Waltz</i> by Emma Morehouse	1883
2	53	The Oliver/Bellows Family: Correspondence and Ephemera	1851-1885

Series 2: Books (1849-1906)

3	1	<i>Christmas Evening Companion, or Tales and Dialogues for Holiday Hours</i> [inscribed to Alfred Cranston, 1854]	undated
	2	Keats' <i>'The Eve of St. Agnes' and Sonnets</i>	circa 1893
3	3	<i>Oh, Why Should the Spirit of Mortal Be Proud?</i> [Emma Petford?]	1876
	4	<i>A Grammar School History of the United States</i> [Emma Morehouse]	1878
	5	<i>The Philpoena: or, Friendship's Offering</i>	undated
	6	<i>Proverbial Philosophy: A Book of Thoughts and Arguments</i> [A. Petford Cranston]	1849
	7	<i>Gold Dust</i> [inscribed to Minnie Morehouse, 1900]	1880
	8	<i>Gold Dust</i> [inscribed to Emma Morehouse Cranston, 1899]	1897
	9	<i>In Black and White</i> [inscribed to Elsie Cranston, 1905]	undated
	10	<i>The Way to Prosper, or In Union There Is Strength</i> [inscribed to Alfred Morehouse]	1851
	11	<i>History of the United States of America, for the Use of Schools</i> [inscribed to W.H. Baker]	1867
	12	<i>One of the Sweet Old Chapters</i> [inscribed to Lillian Elsie Cranston, 1906]	1900
	13	<i>Melcomb Manor: A Family Chronicle</i> [inscribed to Minnie Morehouse, 1878]	1875