



*Biography of*  
**Thomas Crane**  
*1803 - 1875*

Thomas Crane, who was of the fifth generation in direct descent from the original Henry Crane who settled in Dorchester in 1642, was born in 1803 on George's Island in Boston Harbor. His father (also named Thomas) had married Sarah Baxter in 1796, and soon after that had moved from Quincy to the island, where he lived and farmed with his family until 1810.

Thomas and Sarah had six children:

- Mary (b. 20 Oct 1798, Quincy, Norfolk, MA)
- Joseph (b. 24 Feb 1801, Quincy, Norfolk, MA)
- Thomas (b. 18 Oct 1803, George's Island, Boston Harbor, Suffolk, MA)
- Sarah (b. 12 Mar 1806 in Quincy, Norfolk, MA)
- Elizabeth P. (b. 4 Jun 1808 in Quincy, Norfolk, MA)
- Caroline Baxter (b. 23 Dec 1811 in Quincy, Norfolk, MA)

During the years that the Crane family lived there, George's Island was a farm, a grazing place for livestock, and a destination for boating parties. In 1810, Crane's father took his family back to the mainland and purchased a farm near his childhood home on Quincy Point in "Old Fields." The region designated as Old Fields had no roads through it, and no connection with the country beyond the Fore River (now Weymouth), until 1812.



Crane family homestead, located on South Street in Quincy Point.

As a small boy, Crane walked more than four miles a day to attend the only school in Quincy, which was located in Quincy Center. The one-room school in which he studied held more than 200 pupils of assorted ages and sizes, including almost all of the children of the town.

Crane was only fifteen years old when his father died and it became necessary that he find work to help support the family. He began working in the granite quarries, where he learned the trade of stone cutter. In 1829, he followed his older brother Joseph to New York City. The story goes that neither of the two brothers knew where the other was in the city until they finally met on the steps of the Universalist church.

Once in New York, Crane again obtained work as a stone cutter, and with other young journeymen he started a co-operative stone yard. He gradually bought his partners out and by 1835 was master of his own business. A fire in December of 1835 destroyed large sections of commercial New York, creating huge new markets for the Quincy granite which Crane sold. He furnished the granite for the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Reservoir, the New York Custom House, St. John's Freight Depot, and the Grand Central Depot. Through this public construction work, Crane became familiar with the city and he began to buy up land. As he grew prosperous he served as a bank director, insurance company official, a leader in the management of the city's street railway and a faithful patron of the Universalist Church.

Crane had always belonged to the Universalist Church. When he was a young man in Quincy the church he attended was about nine miles away, on School Street in Boston, and there was no public transportation between the two towns. Every Sunday he is reported to have walked a total of nearly twenty miles to and from church to hear the Reverend Hosea Ballou preach. Later, in New York City, he attended the Universalist Church again, where he became a close friend of Horace Greeley and an ardent supporter of the famous

editor in the antislavery movement. When the leaders of the Universalist denomination founded Tufts College in 1852, Crane was a generous contributor to its fund and a benefactor of its library. He also served as a trustee of the college from 1852 until his death. In 1906, Crane's son Albert presented the Tufts College Divinity School a gift of \$100,000 in memory of his father. The school was then re-named The Crane Theological School.

Crane was married for the first time in New York City, in 1832, to Sarah S. Munn, of Gill (now Greenfield), Massachusetts); she died a year later. He was remarried in Boston, on November 23, 1836, to Clarissa Lawrence Starkey, who was born in Troy, New Hampshire, on March 3, 1813, and died in New York City. Clarissa and Crane had eight children, including four girls who did not survive childhood, a son who died before his twentieth birthday and another son who died of typhoid fever at the age of thirty eight:

- Thomas (*b. 25 Aug 1837; d. 26 Jan 1875*)
- Benjamin F. (*b. 14 Feb 1841; d. 12 Oct 1889*)
- Albert (*b. 30 Dec 1842; d. 21 Sept 1918*)
- Frances Adelaide (*b. 2 May 1846; d. 11 Feb 1849*)
- Sophia Angela (*b. 1 Nov 1847; d. 18 Aug 1852*)
- Henry Clay (*b. 22 Apr 1850; d. 30 Dec 1869*)
- Ada Augusta (*b. 2 Jul 1852; d. 21 Aug 1855*)
- Ella Florence (*b. 14 Jan 1856; d. 26 Jul 1857*)

Although Crane left Quincy as a young man, lived in New York City and later purchased the estate *Rock-Acre* on Long Island Sound in Stamford, Connecticut, he often returned to Quincy to visit. As his son Albert put it in the letter he wrote to the Quincy Selectmen after his father's death, ".....my father always retained a strong feeling for the town of Quincy, where his family originated and had resided for over a century, and where he himself passed the earlier portion of his life." Albert continued with an offer that would result in the building of the Thomas Crane Library, which became a lasting memorial to his name. As Charles Francis Adams phrased it,

....Of all the many young men who early and late had gone out from the town, Thomas Crane had been the most successful. Dealing all his life in the granite which underlaid his native place, his success had been due to the possession of those qualities which made New England. He was honest; he was temperate ; he was religious ; he was energetic and enterprising and patient. His life was wholly unassuming, and when he died not many in Quincy remembered that such anyone had ever lived there. His name is now and will long be a household word in the place where he passed his youth, and from which he went forth; nor could a better example of native strength and homely virtues be held up before its children for imitation.

Thomas Crane died in New York City, April 1, 1875.

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*General Note:* "Reprinted from *New England historical and genealogical register*, v. 46-47, with additions." Online Access.

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