

**Alaska State Library  
Historical Collections**

**Guide to Collection**

**KEPNER/CRANE PAPERS  
1897-1929**

**Concerning  
Circle City-Nome Area**

**A microfiche copy of collections in the  
Stratton Library, Sheldon Jackson College  
and  
Alaska Historical Library**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Kepner/Crane Papers are located in collections at the Stratton Library, Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka and the Alaska Historical Library in Juneau. These collections were donated by Audrey Kepner Dobyns of Florida, niece of Nora Kepner Crane. A cooperative resource sharing project brought the collections together for ready use and availability on microfiche.

Pat Oakes, Alaskan historian and president of the Circle District Historical Society at Central, Alaska, assisted by Florence B. Oakes, arranged and described the collections. The Stratton Library collection includes photocopies of most of the collection in the Alaska Historical Library. These photocopies are designated ASM since they were located for a time at the Alaska State Museum. The photocopies have been filmed with the Stratton Library collection so related material is together. The microfiche of the Alaska Historical Library collection originals may provide an improved reading copy. It also includes some information not in the Stratton Library file, such as a list of the Kepner/Crane photograph collection in the Alaska Historical Library and artifacts or items from the Kepner/Crane family located in the Alaska State Museum and Sheldon Jackson Museum.

Phyllis DeMuth  
Librarian  
Alaska Historical Library

## SCOPE AND CONTENTS

The Kepner/Crane collections include personal letters, business papers, notebooks, legal papers, newspaper clippings and photographs. The papers cover the period from 1896-1929 with the main part of the collection centering on the 1896-1902 period in Alaska's gold rush communities of Circle City, St. Michael and Nome. Three members of the Kepner family of Chicago came to Alaska. Nora Kepner Crane and her husband John Edward Crane and her brothers Harrison Lynn Kepner and Alfred S. "Budd" Kepner. Many of the letters are those written by Nora "Node" Kepner Crane to her mother and family. Of particular interest are letters with Nora's observations on living conditions in the communities, social life of her "set", people coming and going through the camps, shopping lists, hopes and methods of obtaining financial security through her stay in the North. Nora and General Wilds P. Richardson were also friends and correspondents.

These papers also contain numerous reference, to the Weare/Healy operation of the North American Transportation and Trading Company (NAT&T) operations in the gold camps.

Major correspondents or those significant among the papers are:

Nora Kepner "Node" Crane (July 27, 1869-early 1950s)  
Harrison Lynn "Harry" Kepner (October 31, 1875-June 22, 1949)  
Alfred Silverthorne "Budd" Kepner  
John Edward Crane (b.d. February 26, 1864)  
Dr. Spencer Harris, M.D. (died December 20, 1897)  
General Wilds P. "Dick" Richardson 1861-1929  
Samuel C. Dunham

More information on these people follows in the "Biographical Sketches" section.

The Stratton Library collection is organized in twenty folders sorted by author and type of document placed in chronological order.

The Alaska Historical Library collection is comprised of eight folders in Manuscript Collection 95 and a list of photographs in collection number PCA 260.

Patricia Oakes

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Three of Delilah Kepner's children were involved in the Alaska-Klondike gold rush activities in various ways. Their letters to their mother provide the main part of the Kepner/Crane Papers.

The Kepner family of Chicago was acquainted with Porteus B. Weare and other members of the Weare family which had business interests in Chicago, Alaska and the Fortymile-Klondike region. The North American Transportation and Trading Company operated merchandising and transportation facilities in St. Michael and Circle City, District of Alaska, and in Fort Cudahy (Fortymile) and Dawson, Yukon Territory. Alaska headquarters was at Circle City. Ely Weare, C. A. Weare and John J. Healy were principal officers of the company. Porteus B. Weare, also active in Chicago business, was apparently an active and not-so-silent partner. Their friendship with the Kepner family resulted in Budd Kepner's first position in the North around 1895.

The following year, brother Harry came north. He worked for N.A.T.&T. at St. Michael and on Yukon river steamers, until resigning his bookkeeping position to return to Chicago. His family worried about his health, but he apparently continued his medical studies to become a doctor.

Nora Kepner and John Edward Crane were married September 9, 1896. They left the following spring for Circle City, Alaska where Crane was to assist in the management of the N.A.T.&T. store operation. Arrangements had apparently been made through Captain Healy for his appointment as U.S. Commissioner at Circle City in addition to his N.A.T.&T. duties. No background beyond his birth in Maine is available on Crane, nor do the letters reveal much information of his past. He was not trained in legal matters and apparently did his legal work "by the books" until the arrival the following year of his brother-in-law, Budd Kepner, who was trained in law in Michigan. After working for N.A.T.&T. at Circle City and St. Michael, Crane opened his own business in Nome. He and Nora separated sometime after leaving Alaska; no further information appears in the collection on Crane after about 1905-6.

Nora's letters reveal much family history and most importantly, her observation of life in the mining communities and of the people who traveled through them. She apparently led a fairly sheltered life in Chicago and also in Alaska due to her husband's position. Her viewpoint may not be representative, but a researcher can find much of interest in the pages. Her letters include observations on people, her husband's work, social activities, Native life, travel, economic possibilities, fashions and health. Of interest to some will be her requests for her family to ship various items to her which she could not obtain in the North.

After Nora separated from Crane she became, according to her niece, a companion to a wealthy woman who traveled extensively. Nora helped organize a cottage crafts outlet in Chicago and did some writing.

Budd Kepner apparently worked in the North for N.A.T.&T. in 1895-96 and returned again in 1898. He had some interest in mining properties, but spent much time in Circle City working as

an attorney. He left for Chicago, but was side-tracked at St. Michael by the reports of gold at Nome. There he became involved in legal work and mining. His letters comment upon the early municipal government at Nome. From 1905-06 he practiced law at Candle.

John E. Crane is represented by some personal letters to his mother-in-law, Delilah Kepner, and to his wife. He addresses both as "Ma." Crane reveals little of his background except that he was born in Maine. He and Nora apparently hoped to make their fortune in the North and his interests seemed to be mainly commercial. At Circle City, he served as the first commissioner. The community was operating its business through miners' meetings. Crane did not obtain the cooperation of the miners to any great extent, as reflected in the transcript of the miners' meeting in the Dunham file and Nora's later letters. Mining records were kept mainly in the creek books until the appointment of Claypoole as U.S. Commissioner around 1900. By this time the miners seemed more willing to work in cooperation with the commissioner.

Dr. Spencer Harris, an early arrival at Circle City, is represented in the collection by notebooks and news clippings. Harris died at Circle City Dec. 20, 1897, and was buried there. He was apparently an adventurer and reporter in addition to his medical work. He was elected to membership in the Miners' Association of Circle City, a social fraternal order of working miners, but resigned because he was not a working miner. He was then elected by the miners to honorary membership.

General Richardson, a West Point graduate, was stationed at Circle City in 1898-99 and became a friend of John and Nora Crane. He is well known for his work with the U.S. Army and the Alaska Road Commission. He and Nora Crane maintained their strong friendship until his death in 1929.

Samuel C. Dunham, Alaska's gold rush poet, was at Circle City to compile reports on the Yukon mining areas for the U.S. Department of Labor. He later reported on the Nome area gold rush and worked as a court reporter. While in Circle City, he wrote for the YUKON PRESS and exchanged poetic thoughts with Joaquin Miller, who was wintering there also.

Stratton Library, Sheldon Jackson College

KEPNER/CRANE (FAMILY)  
[Papers 1897-1929 concerning  
Circle City-Nome Area.]

Inventory

- Folder 1. Correspondence: Kepner/Crane Papers from Audrey Kepner Dobyns, donor.
- Folder 2. Nora Crane, June 1897-Dec. 1897 (in chronological order): letters include trip from Chicago to Seattle, Seattle to St. Michael, St. Michael to Circle City, Circle City to Dawson and return, settling at Circle City. Letters reveal a woman's viewpoint to her mother and women friends and include references to family, N.A.T.&T. personnel, and life in Circle City.
- Folder 3. Nora Crane, 1898 (in chronological order): describes life at Circle City, visits from family, N.A.T.&T. activities, visit to Dawson in summer, arrival of army troops at Circle City, with references to visitors and friends, including Sam Dunham, Capt. Richardson and Joaquin Miller.
- Folder 4. Nora Crane, January-August 1899 (in chronological order): continues life in Circle City, another Dawson trip, end of Crane years in Circle City and transfer to St. Michael at end of summer.
- Folder 5. Nora Crane, September 1899-March 1900 (in chronological order). Describes activities and living conditions at St. Michael.
- Folder 6. Nora Crane, May 1900-June 1902, plus some later items (in chronological order): includes Nora's description of sled trip from St. Michael to Nome in late April 1900, social and business life at Nome, separation from N.A.T.&T. affairs and operating their own business. Folder includes draft of letter to Crane after their separation as well as two later enclosures, probably to Richardson.
- Folder 7. John E. Crane, 1897-1900 (in chronological order): 1897 letters are to his mother-in-law, Delilah Crane. 1900 letters are to Nora when she was on a visit to Chicago. (He greets both women as "Ma." References to military and civic officials in Nome, including Dunham and Dr. Call.
- Folder 8. Harrison Lynn Kepner, 1896-1898 (in chronological order). Includes his trip to Alaska, friendship with son of Arthur Mayo, boat building and "roughing it" at St. Michael, riverboating on Yukon, letter of resignation to P. B. Weare.

- Folder 9. Alfred Silverthorne Kepner, 1898-1900, 1905-06 (in chronological order): includes activities at Circle City and Nome, with references to early municipal government at Nome. Later letters from Candle.
- Folder 10. Miscellaneous correspondence to Nora Crane and J. E. Crane, including letter from Delilah Crane which has 1887 date but appears to be 1898-99 period from its contents; Nora's sister, Helen; Anna C. Demonet, Mrs. J. L. Prevost (wife of Episcopal missionary at Circle City), Narcissus Thorne, B. B. Wheaton, N.A.T.&T., J. Hansen, P. B. Weare, a military admirer whose signature is unreadable, and autographed program from 1902 Chinese New Years party at Nome with signatures of some present, including James Wickersham.
- Folder 11. Nora Crane: stories, essays, poems apparently written after leaving Alaska.
- Folder 12. John E. Crane: business papers, Circle City period.
- Folder 13. John E. Crane: business papers, Nome period.
- Folder 14. U.S. Commissioner, Circle City, 1897-1900: letters, invoices, records.
- Folder 15. Legal papers, mainly on mining near Circle City and Nome areas. See page 7.
- Folder 16. Dr. Spencer Harris, M.D.: notebooks, news clippings and letter.
- Folder 17. Samuel C. Dunham: poetry, miners' meeting transcript, Circle City and St. Michael.
- Folder 18. Wilds P. Richardson: letters from and about Richardson, plus press clippings. 1898-1929.
- Folder 19. YUKON PRESS: Outer pages of three 1899 issues plus two printed social programs.
- Folder 20. Photographs.

## LEGAL PAPERS

11/9/97	Memorandum of Agreement	R. B. Sleem , George J. Fisher, Prospectors
8/8/98	Claim Conveyance	George E. King to Alice King
6/23/98	Power of Attorney	Alice King to George King
9/10/98	Statement of Attorney	George King to Albert Kepner (including administration of estate of Dr. Spencer Harris)
11/19/97	Power of Attorney	R. Besheer Sleem to George K
11/29/97	Claim Recording	George King. Fred T. Berry, Recorder
11/24/97	Claim Relocation	G. King. James Jensen, Recorder
11/24/97	Claim Location	George King. J. D. Coppersmith. Recorder
	Map of Rock, Switch, Spring and Gem Creeks.	
11/17/97	Claim Recording	W. F. Merle J. H. Gage, Recorder
1/8/98	Coal Creek Association Agreement:	Peter Trout, Geo. Wyles, John E. Crane, Peter McGrath & George King
12/5/ 97	Claim Recording	George King E. W. Bales, Recorder
11/15/97	Claim Recording	Alexander Johnson Jno Charles, Recorder
2/10/98	Claim Recording	Cornucopia HydraulicMining Company G. S. Wyles, Recorder
4/23/98	Deed to Claims	Peter Trout to Geo. E. King
4/18/98	Location Notice & Map	Hiriam W. Sheridan
8/9/98	Claim Location	George King Knadler, Recorder
1/27/98	Deed to Claim	J. E Crane to Alice King
2/25/98	Deed to Claims	Robert Baird to Geo. E. King
2/28/98	Articles of Incorporation:	Cornucopia Hydraulic Mining Co..
11/19/97	Deed to Claims	Alexander Johnson to R. Besheer Sleem & Geo.King
8/7/98	Location Notice	George King
11/15/97	Claim Recording	R. B. Sleem Jno Charles, Recorder Witness: Sam Dunham
2/25/98	Deed to Claim	G. King to Alice King
2/15/01	Claim Location Notice	J. A. Deneen
3/01	Mining Papers	Gamerson/Van Asdale
9/2/01	Articles of Agreement	J. E. Crane & Muhr & Muhr
4/29/02	Agreement	E. S. Walker, J. E. Crane & L. C. Hanson & Co.
6/7/02	Opening Judgment & Sentencing:	U. S. VS Richards & Jourden, Nome
	Jury Fixing Trial	James Wickersham

KEPNER/CRANE (FAMILY)  
[Papers 1897-1929 concerning  
Circle City-Nome Area.]

Inventory:

- Folder 1. Crane, Nora.. Letter (undated to her mother) and 3 notes (possibly written to W.P. Richardson). Poem - "Isn't it odd?" by Murray Leinster.
- Folder 2. Crane, Edward Letter dated June 23, 1898, Circle City to his mother. Letter dated Aug. 16, 1900, Nome to his mother.
- Folder 3. Crane, Nora and/or J.E. Letters received Feb. 12, 1897?. De Funiak Springs, Florida from Mrs. Kepner. July 14, & 17, 1900, Fort St. Michael from J. Hansen. Jan. 21, 1900, Nome from Barney B. Wheaton.
- Folder 4. Crane, John E. Business papers at Circle City and Nome. 1900-1901. 7 items including receipts and letter from J.A. Folger & Co. dated Sept. 23, 1901.
- Folder 5. Crane, John E. Letters, invoices, records concerning his work as U.S. Commissioner at Circle City. 1897-1900. 6 items.
- Folder 6. Legal papers, dated 1901 regarding mining near Circle City and Nome. 5 items.
- Folder 7. Richardson, Wilds Preston (general with U.S. Army and Alaska Road Commission.) Letters to Nora "Node" Crane 1898-1929; letters and material about W.P. Richardson.
1. Letter dated Dec. 23--, from Circle City to Nora. (thank you for Christmas present).
  2. Letter dated Sept 1901, St. Michael to Judge and Mrs. J.E. Crane, Nome. (Richardson gives the Cranes several of his personal possessions in appreciation of their friendship as he is leaving Alaska).
  3. Letter dated June 18--, Seattle. (Richardson had to cancel Alaska trip to have dental work done in San Francisco).
  4. Letter dated Nov. 30, 1928, Wash., D.C. (Sends a money gift for Christmas, feeling better after leaving hospital, remembers Thanksgiving in years past at Circle city).

5. Letter dated March 18 [1929], Wash., D.C. to Nora in San Diego. (Comments on Nora's travels, his health/heart problems mentions sister O.P. and plans to visit Europe, went to dinner at West Point, and plans to see Nora in Chicago).
6. Letter dated April 26, 1929 from Walter Reid General Hospital, Washington, D.C. to Nora in Chicago..
7. Letter from General Richard's sister O.P. dated May 15, 1929 (Writes brother irrational and friends not being allowed to visit, only chance to survive is being quiet; and tells Nora not to come).
8. Telegram from O.P. dated May 15, 1929.
9. Letter from O.P. undated to Nora. (Expresses devotion to Nora and the heartache both sisters and she mutually feel for the loss of General Richardson; also says they should plan a trip to Europe together).
10. Letter from Helen Munson, Chicago, dated May 27, 1929 to Nora. (Conveys shock and sympathy at loss of General Richardson).
11. Newspaper column, The Stroller, by E.J. White with notation by General Richardson.
12. Poem "The Road", from a poem by Roselle Mercier Montgomery. Notation by General Richardson saying "This is my road in Alaska."
13. Clippings regarding W.P. Richardson including his death.

Folder 8. Lists of artifacts at the Alaska State Museum and Sheldon Jackson Museum obtained from the Kepner/Crane family.

KEPNER/CRANE (FAMILY) COLLECTORS  
[Northern Alaska Communities; Eskimos; river steamers. ca.1900.]

1. [Full length portrait of woman and man believed to be Mrs. John E. Crane and her brother Alfred Kepner; both dressed in fur parkas. At Circle City (?) 1898-1899.]
2. [Eskimo woman, with child on lap, seated on beach; umiak on side behind her; clothes hanging in boat; at Nome.] Dobbs photo.
3. [Waterfront, Nome; stores beyond surf.]
4. [Snake River (?), Nome, center; buildings on either side; horse-drawn wagons on narrow bridge.]
5. [Eskimo family of four beside store.]
6. Group of Eskimos in umiak; three men with oars.]
7. [Ice floes in choppy water.]
8. [Three women and two men in canoe which is partly hidden by an iceberg; Nome (?) in background.]
9. [Steamer SARAH unloading at Eagle in 1898 or 1899; houses on bluff, left.]
10. Steamer SARAH and crowd, including Nora Keymes Crane probably at Circle City about 1898 [seven men on dock with Nora Crane].
11. Group of men at Circle City--1898 or 1899 [standing in front of U.S. Marshall's (?) office].
12. NAT&T "mess hall" at Circle City -- about 1898 [exterior view of North American Transportation and Trading Co. building]. Dark image.
13. [Unidentified steamship in open water.]
14. [Eskimo woman beside log building.] Fading image.
15. [Lumber on dock with boats in water beyond dock.] Fading image.
16. North Am. T&T building at Circle City ca. 1898-1899 [front of log building covered with tin siding; U.S. Marshall's office, left].
17. Nulato [and] woodpiles for steamers [steamer, left; wood piles and buildings, right].

18. Lower Ramparts [river steamer, right; log buildings, left; men near lumber pile, center].
19. St. Michael [tents and buildings along shore]. Fading image.
20. BIRD'S-EYE OF UNALASKA [view from above with houses right and center; Russian Orthodox Church, left center; dock, left].
21. Dawson [view from hill on opposite side of river]. T.P. Andrews (San Francisco) photo. Laminated circuit photo.