Gertrude Schill Cram
15 Nov. 1888 - 6 Dec. 1961

Eloise Butler and Gertrude Cram

We don't know when the relationship between Eloise Butler and Gertrude Cram began but we know they knew each other quite well and for some time before Eloise's death in 1933. In her Garden Log as early as 1921 Eloise Butler reported planting various plants from Isle Royal. She also received plants from the vicinity of Lake Superior. The ones from Isle Royal and perhaps some of those from the Lake Superior north shore would have come from Gertrude Cram. We know from correspondence that Mrs. Cram vacationed on Isle Royal each August, staying at the Rock Harbor Lodge. We do not know when she started staying there.

When Eloise returned to the East Coast after the Garden closed, part of her time there was spent securing plants for the Garden to be delivered the following year. Sometimes she would collect them herself and ship them to Mrs. Cram to be "heeled in" in Gertrude's garden until they could be replanted the following year. It was the last such shipment by Eloise, in the fall of 1932, that provided Mrs. Cram with an introduction to Martha Crone. Eloise had mailed from Malden some plants for Mrs. Cram's garden plus, for the Wildflower Garden, some Stiff Aster, *Aster linariifolius*, and Butter and Eggs and asked Mrs. Cram to heel them in until spring. As the letter below indicates, Eloise also talked to Gertrude about Martha and Bill Crone, whom Eloise referred to in correspondence as "the Cronies."

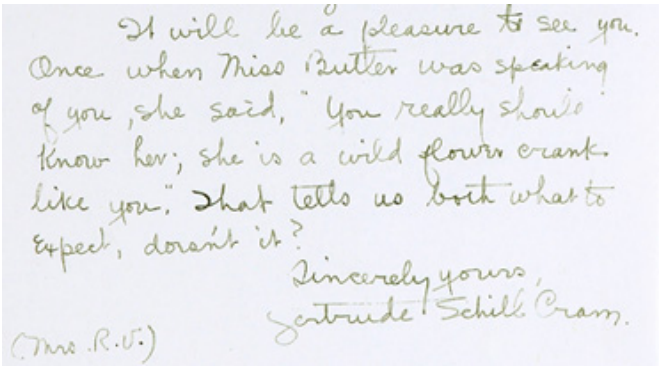
Martha Crone and Gertrude Cram

Mrs. Cram was never formally introduced to Martha Crone by Eloise Butler but Eloise talked to her about Martha. When Eloise died and Martha was given the job of Temporary Garden Curator, Mrs. Cram wrote in a letter to Martha dated April 23rd, 1933 about the appointment and about the plants she was saving for the Garden, including those she received from Eloise in the fall of 1932, and she also wrote in the same letter:

> I have heard so much of you from Miss Butler that you seem like an old acquaintance. I am so glad to hear that you are to be in her beloved garden in her stead. - I trust for more than temporarily - for I am sure it is what she would have desired.[1]

Mrs. Cram then ended with this comment about Martha:

> She (Eloise) said 'you really should know her; she is a wild flower crank like you'. That tells us both what to expect, doesn't it?



It will be a pleasure to see you. Once when Miss Butler was speaking of you, she said, "You really should know her; she is a wild flower crank like you." That tells us both what to expect, doesn't it?

Sincerely yours,
Gertrude Schill Cram.

(Mrs. R.V.)

Gertrude Cram could be hilarious in her correspondence. Instead of being a "gardener" she refers to herself and other gardeners as "dirt farmers."

There is correspondence in the Martha Crone files at the Minnesota Historical Society in which Mrs. Cram communicates from Isle Royal that she has sent certain plants back to the Garden. This indicated that the process that had begun with Eloise Butler continued. Here are two examples:

1. In a letter posted from Isle Royal August 8, 1933 she wrote:

> By the Wednesday boat I am sending you a box of things, a funny one. It contains a sample of a number of plants of which you may or may not want more. . . . This is what Miss Butler used to call a 'surprise' package, I am sure. The tall yellow things on top of the box is (sic), I think, *Lysimachia terrestis,* (Swamp Candles) which Miss Butler asked for last year. The roots go to China. I don't think I got much, for as I was groveling in the muck among sticks and roots I couldn't seem to feel the ends of the ones I was blindly following.[2]

2. In a letter posted from Isle Royal August 25, 1935 she wrote to Martha Crone:

> There will be a box for you in this mail containing the *Pinguicula* and the Fragrant Fern. I have found the latter in only one place and not much of it so I had to be careful about robbing the treasury. It is not listed as rare so maybe in time I'll find more of it, although I have been looking for other places for two years.[3]

The most exciting incident in their relationship must have been on June 13th, 1935; Gertrude had brought over 2 plants of Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) and after planting them, they were held-up at gunpoint at 10:30 AM, by two young men who appeared to be students and robbed them of $7.

Their relationship was to last for a number of years. Martha noted Mrs. Cram's visits to the Garden as late as 1943. In May of 1942 she brought in 3 Showy Orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*) for the Wildflower Garden from her own garden. The Crones took her along on one of their weekly Wednesday visits to their Cabin at Cedar Creek on May 13, 1942[4]. Gertrude Cram passed away in 1961, two years after Martha retired as Garden Curator. She was a Friends member until her death.

References:

Martha Crone Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
1. Letter April 23, 1933, from Gertrude Cram to Martha Crone.
2. Letter August 8, 1933 from Gertrude Cram to Martha Crone.
3. Letter August 25, 1935 from Gertrude Cram to Martha Crone.
4. Martha Crone's diary, 1942 and 1943.

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