

A full-page photograph of a man with grey hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, a purple and white striped tie, and dark trousers. He is standing in a factory or industrial setting, with his hands on his hips. The background shows industrial machinery and a high ceiling with lights.

# GOOD ON PAPER

**LANSING CRANE (LAW'70)  
Has Kept His Family's  
Historic and Renowned  
Stationery and Banknote  
Company Strong and  
Competitive**

By Kelly Cunningham  
Photographs by Frank Curran



Lansing Crane's office isn't what an outsider might expect. It's comfortably spacious, but a far cry from the posh suite the CEO of a legendary company could easily commandeer. Sure, the windows provide a nice view of lush Berkshires greenery and bookcases display framed photos of Crane (LAW'70) posing jovially with U.S. senators. But the desk is standard Office Depot fare, the ceiling low, and the carpeting industrial.

This modest setting wouldn't surprise the vendors who do business with Crane & Co., however — nor would it shock most longtime residents of Dalton, Massachusetts, where the company has manufactured cotton stationery and currency paper since its founding in 1801. These people know the company as a family business loyal to its 1,200 employees, not a flashy, faceless entity. What they might not be as familiar with are the technological advances and international expansion that have occurred under Lansing Crane's tenure and have allowed this local institution to continue flourishing.





## A DIFFERENT PATH

For two centuries, celebrities and dignitaries worldwide have printed formal invitations and jotted notes of thanks on Crane & Co. stationery. The company's nonwovens division has produced specialized insulation and filtration materials for the manufacturers of satellites, high-end cars, and much more since the seventies. But Crane & Co.'s biggest client is the U.S. Treasury, which orders enough currency paper every year to print more than seven billion banknotes.

A mile or so from the sunny, attractively landscaped walkways outside Crane's office, forbidding strands of barbed wire top a chain-link fence surrounding the 165,000-square-foot brick facility that houses Wahconah, the currency mill. Security cameras keep track of everyone and everything entering and leaving the building, and unsmiling armed guards stand watch over the solitary entrance.

Inside the factory, massive thundering machines equipped with glinting blades do nothing to increase the coziness factor. But this place has always been home to Crane, a tall, bright-eyed man whose gray hair is cut in a boyish bowl shape.

"Growing up, I would go into the paper mills with my father, who was head of manufacturing," he recalls. "Skids of paper standing around, the paper machines moving along — it was a fascinating thing for a young boy. More than that, there was a warmth and a relationship between the people in the mill and our family that I observed and appreciated even as a child."

Crane, great-great-great-grandson of the company's founder, Zenas Crane, was the consummate insider from birth. But he decided to forge his own path on the outside. After graduating from the BU School of Law in 1970, he moved to New Haven, Connecticut, where he practiced law and taught courses in psychiatry and law at Yale. "I got involved in representing people in clinical situations — initially psychiatrist-patient

privilege issues," he says. "There was, in the relationship of psychiatrists and patients, very little law that had developed and a lot that needed to be developed, and I ended up representing patients and clinicians and drafting legislation." That legislation significantly increased the rights of Connecticut patients in the areas of confidentiality, informed consent, and the regulation of hospitalization and treatment decisions.

In 1985, the Crane & Co. board of directors asked Crane to join them. "My elders, the fifth generation, felt the need to have some younger blood on the board," says Crane, "and I think they felt that since I'd had some experience that was different from other Crane family members, I could add something." Newly involved in the family business, Crane continued to work as an attorney and an assistant clinical professor, never guessing that in ten years the skills he was honing would combine uniquely to the company's advantage when Crane & Co. finally called him home to Dalton.

## WATER, HORSEPOWER, AND HEAT

The money Americans spend is made mostly of recycled T-shirt and blue-jean trimmings, which Crane & Co. purchases by the ton from garment factories. "Currency paper is three-quarters cotton, one-quarter flax," explains Peter Hopkins, Crane historian for eighteen years, who conducts customer tours of the three Crane mills. "The flax is the rebar to cotton's cement," he adds, straining to tear the corner of one brown-edged sheet to demonstrate its toughness. Other than cotton and flax, "all you need to make paper is three inputs: water, horsepower, and heat."

In 1776, Stephen Crane combined these three elements with worn-out cotton rags collected from local housewives to produce paper at his newly opened Liberty Mill, just outside Boston. He sold his product to engraver Paul Revere, who printed the Colonies' first banknotes on it, and he passed his papermaking skills along to his son Zenas. Zenas took off for Dalton — and the power of the

Housatonic River — to start Crane & Co., in 1801. On Zenas's watch, Crane & Co. mechanized its manufacturing process, replacing hand-forming techniques with cylinder molds for increased productivity and uniformity. By the mid-nineteenth century, the company's reputation for exceptionally fine stationery paper had been firmly established; invitations to the 1886 Statue of Liberty dedication ceremony were printed on the product, as was Jacqueline Kennedy's mourning stationery in 1963.

In 1879, the U.S. Treasury, dissatisfied with its currency paper supplier, put its contract out for bid. On May 27 of that year, Winthrop Murray Crane — a future U.S. senator — sent a telegram to the Crane home office from Washington, D.C.: *You must let me use my judgment about changing the bid. . . . No time to spare.* "They already had the bids in," says Lansing Crane. "He went in at the last minute and bid one-fourth of a penny below the next-lowest bid. We'd never made the paper before, and we weren't sure we could." While Crane & Co. had produced paper for the local banks that issued banknotes prior to the institution of a national currency, the Treasury's specifications were something new. But Crane & Co. got the contract. An additional bit of family lore, according to Crane: the other paper representatives, who were staying in the same rooming house as his ancestor, got wind of his plan to put in a second bid and locked him in his room. "But he was a slender guy. He flipped the transom open, climbed up, and got out to make the bid."

Crane cites such gambles to explain how his family's company continues to prosper after two centuries. "You have to be able to take risks — not crazy risks, but risks. At key points in Crane's history, we've taken risks, and it's paid off. We stayed vibrant. We survived. That's how. Also, we don't ever get too far from our old-fashioned values: integrity, quality, honesty."

Crane's longtime admiration for the family business is the reason, despite his other passions, he decided to take the helm in 1995, at the urging of the board of directors. "I loved practicing law, and I loved teaching. I miss both, even today," he says. "But this is a very special company, and it was an opportunity to make a difference. It's a part of history, and that mattered a lot to me."

## SILK THREADS TO METAL STRIPS

As long as printed currency has existed, someone's been eager and able to fake it. Before the United States adopted a uniform national currency, local banks were allowed to issue their own banknotes, printed by engravers all over the country. In 1847, Crane & Co. began embedding silk threads in the paper it produced for bills below twenties — one thread running through each single, two through each \$2 bill, and so on — in an effort to prevent counterfeiters from "raising" bills to higher denominations. An innovation at the time, the thread system continued to evolve at the hands of Crane & Co.; its current incarnation, the micro-optic Motion

thread, is used in the Swedish banknotes the company manufactures at its recently acquired facility outside Stockholm, while U.S. bills continue to use the security threads — metal strips bearing demetalized characters and encased in polyester — developed in 1991 by Tim Crane, vice president of security technologies and Lansing's cousin.

"Every Crane employee has U.S. government security clearance," says Hopkins, but only a few are chosen to apply the company's anticounterfeit features at the Wahconah paper machine's so-called wet end, behind maroon curtains. Here, the refined pulp mixture is sprayed onto sheets of wire webbing. Before the future paper is fed into the machine, which will dry the mixture and flatten it into sheets, watermarks and security threads are added by methods whose exact details are known only to the initiated.

Lansing Crane hopes that the company's Motion threads, strangely beautiful blue-green strips that create an optical illusion of images sliding in directions perpendicular to the light that catches them, will join the current threads in high-value banknotes one day soon. "It's a watershed security feature," he says, "and a superior solution to the need for a publicly obvious feature for authenticating — hard to counterfeit, but obvious." Crane believes that the advent of Motion thread and Crane & Co.'s 2002 acquisition of the Swedish facility will make the company even stronger. "Our move into the international market is a big deal for us," he says. "It requires more talent and focus, has made us more competitive, and has increased our level of diversification. It's reinforced the company's strengths. I think my predecessors in the family would have understood that and been excited about it, as we are."

Such continued advances have been a priority for Crane since his first day on the job eleven years ago. But now he feels that his work at the company is done, and he will retire next spring. "It's a good time for a transition," he says. "It'll be reinvigorating for the company to have new leadership." He hopes that Crane family members will continue to join the company, but remains convinced that effective leadership often requires an outsider's perspective. "It isn't necessary that a family member lead this company, and my successor may not be a family member. My predecessors, the two before me, were not family members. It's a family business, but it's a business, first and last. And a family can't provide all the talent that's needed."

While he'll leave his office and the mills of Crane & Co. behind, Crane will retain a lively appreciation of paper, instilled when he was a child. "I'm always cognizant of the paper dimension of things," he says. "There is no letter I get where I'm not aware of the paper it's written on. There's a pleasure that goes with fine paper. There's a quality of life that goes with fine paper. I'm very conscious of it. People sometimes take paper for granted — I don't." ■



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