

## Francis Howse Cruess



Francis Howse Cruess, architect and watercolorist, was born Feb. 24, 1867 at No. 77 Dorset St., Hulme, Manchester, England, the son of a reporter and sub-editor for the Manchester *Guardian*, Frederick John Cruess. In the first of many moves, the family left Manchester for Whitehaven, Cumberland, where the father edited the *Whitehaven Free Press* and young Cruess was indentured to the architects Lewes, Banks & Townsend on Lowther Street.

In 1881 the family relocated to Leamington, Warwickshire, where his father edited the *Chronicle*. Francis Cruess attended the Leamington School of Art and produced many impressive early sketches. By this time he had two brothers: John became a school teacher, and Frederick a sea captain who rescued evacuees during the Boxer Rebellion.

Uprooted again in 1887 to Colne, Lancashire, Francis was fascinated by the Roman coins and fosse he saw. He worked several years for Atkinson, Architect and Surveyor. Later he went to Leeds as a draftsman in terra cotta works. His watercolors and drawings depict many scenes in his native England, including paintings of the ruins of Wycoller Hall, which had figured as Ferndean Hall in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Cruess left England for New York City on Sept. 21, 1889 at age 22 and worked in Philadelphia for architects Yarnall & Goforth and Wilson & Co. Here he proudly noted the sale of a watercolor for \$25 through the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. In 1893 he moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to work for John C. Smith architects, who'd just been awarded a commission to design the new Lancaster Theological Seminary. The distinctive, graceful edifice Cruess created still stands, having survived a move to demolish it in the 1970's.

In Harrisburg he met Bertha Connell, who grew up in Columbia, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In 1896 a hurricane destroyed the Camel Back bridge over the Susquehanna River near Columbia, and Cruess painted the scene showing the bridge piers, along with a ferryboat crossing the river and a steam locomotive rounding the hillside nearby.

Bertha Connell's father was from Philadelphia, and her Lancaster County-born mother's maiden name was Rutter. In 1898 Cruess and Miss Connell married and moved to 32 North 56th Street, Philadelphia. The up-and-coming young architect

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went to work for John T. Windrim architects. He also joined the T-Square Club and is listed in its 1899-1900 Catalog of the Annual Architectural Exhibition, held at the Gallery of the Art Club of Philadelphia ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org), last accessed Jan. 2010).

Soon after Helen Rutter Cruess, his only child, was born, Cruess met Goldwin Starrett, designer of the Algonquin Hotel and co-founder of the prestigious New York City architects Starrett & Van Vleck, known for their designs of hotels, skyscrapers and department stores, including Saks.

Starrett recruited Cruess to work for him in New York, and so the family moved to 89 Pierrepont (Pierpont?) St., Brooklyn, where Cruess became a U.S. citizen in 1905. A few years later the family moved to Rutherford, New Jersey, where Cruess lived 40 years.

His name was printed in *The New York Times* of June 4, 1910 as the chief architect in the remodeling of the Hippodrome building on the east side of 6th Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets.

One of Starrett's four brothers, Paul, ran the company that built the Empire State Building, the Flatiron Building, and the original New York Times building on Times Square. Cruess designed the cover for Paul Starrett's 1938 autobiography, *Changing the Skyline*.

When Wall Street crashed Cruess was over 60 years old. During the Depression he worked for the Works Progress Administration's Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). Many of his works are in the Prints and Photographs Collection of the Library of Congress ([www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html)). Among them are his drawings of the Samuel Demarest House in New Milford, NJ ([www.bergencountyhistory.org/pdfs/DemarestHouseScope1.pdf](http://www.bergencountyhistory.org/pdfs/DemarestHouseScope1.pdf), last accessed Jan. 2010; also [http://www.russellversaci.com/Picturing\\_Home.pdf](http://www.russellversaci.com/Picturing_Home.pdf), last accessed March 2010).

Few records survive regarding Mrs. Cruess. In 1947, Cruess alone moved to the home of her mother's cousin, Frances (Rutter) Megargee, 413 Charlotte St., Lancaster, not far from the seminary he designed. His daughter Helen Cruess soon followed, and remained in Lancaster after her father died Dec. 31, 1948. He is buried at Fairview Cemetery, Coatesville, Pennsylvania.

Cruess's works have been shown posthumously at William Penn Memorial Museum, Harrisburg; Provident Bank, Philadelphia; and the Historical Society of Berks County, Reading, Pennsylvania.

His painting *Camel Back* is displayed at the John & Kathryn Zimmerman Center for Heritage at Long Level, York County, Pennsylvania, across the Susquehanna River from Columbia.

## Helen Rutter Cruess



Helen Rutter Cruess was born Oct. 15, 1897 in Philadelphia, the daughter of Bertha Connell Cruess and architect and watercolorist Francis Howse Cruess. By 1904 the family had moved to Brooklyn, and then, a few years later, to Rutherford, New Jersey. She attended Rutherford High School and appeared in its 1913 production of *Twelfth Night*, staged at the Criterion Theatre.

In July 1919 Helen Cruess's art was published on the cover of *English Speaking World*, a New York City-based publication. She was later commissioned to illustrate a book of stories by Hans Christian Andersen. She also illustrated a book which may have been called *Highways Old and New*.

Miss Cruess graduated from the New York School of Applied Design for Women, where she received two of the school's highest awards. She also studied at the Art Students League of New York in Alexander Stirling Calder's sculpture class where she created some outstanding works, including a statue titled *Niija* which she kept all her life. *Niija* was shown Nov. 1939 at the Ridgewood Art Exhibit, Ridgewood, New Jersey, as were two drawings by Francis Cruess: *Window in Kenilworth Castle, England* and *Abandoned*.

Photo evidence suggests the Cruess family often visited relatives in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where Mrs. Cruess grew up. A photo of young Helen Cruess was taken at the Williamson area overlook in Lancaster County Central Park.

In the 1940's Miss Cruess worked in New York City with the Staples-Smith store window display department. Later, she joined her father, whose health was failing, in Lancaster, where they lived in a house owned for more than 50 years by Mrs. Cruess's mother's family, the Rutters, at 413 Charlotte Street.

After Francis Cruess died New Year's Eve 1948, Helen Cruess remained in Lancaster. No records survive regarding when Bertha Cruess had passed away. Her husband's obituary offers no clues. It does mention, however, that he designed the Lancaster Theological Seminary.

Miss Cruess lived at 329 Pearl Street and worked as an illustrator at Hager's Department Store, West King and Market Streets, until the store outsourced the job around 1957. She died Jan. 2, 1977 in the county-owned nursing home, Conestoga View. Although her father had purchased three plots at Fairview Cemetery, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, he alone is there. Helen Cruess is buried in Mellinger's Mennonite Cemetery, Lancaster. Her brief obituary stated that her father designed the Lancaster Theological Seminary.