

# Alexander Thom Cringan (1860-1931) 📄

**ATC: Scottie . . . teaching funny kind of music!**

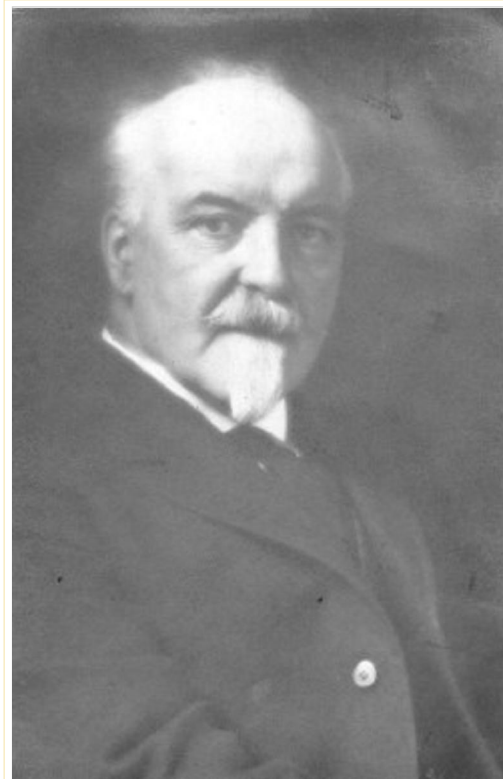
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## Children

Name	Birth	Death	Children of PARENTS NAMES
Robert Ellis Cringan (1883-1907)	Aug. 10, 1883 Carluke, Lanarkshire, Scotland	August, 1907 Windermere, Muskoka, Ontario, Canada	
John Waugh Cringan (1885-1949)	July 23, 1885 Carluke, Lanarkshire, Scotland	April 18, 1949 Toronto, Ontario, Canada	
Agnes Rennie Cringan (1887-1968)	March 31, 1887 Toronto, Ontario, Canada	Jan. 25, 1968	
Janet Thom Cringan (1889-?)	Feb. 27, 1889 Toronto, Ontario, Canada	Mar. 10, 1972 Toronto, Ontario, Canada	
Lillias Waugh Cringan (1890-?)	Dec. 20, 1890	July 13, 1967	

## Alexander Thom Cringan (1860-1931)




👤 Added by Old Buzzard

<b>Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Birth:</b>	Oct. 13, 1860
<b>Death:</b>	Feb. 1, 1931
<b>Father:</b>	Robert Cringan (1821-?)
<b>Mother:</b>	Janet Thom (1826-?)
<b>Spouse/Partner:</b>	Lillias Rennie Waugh
<b>Marriage:</b>	Aug. 18, 1882

Elizabeth Russell Cringan (1893-1983)	Dec. 20, 1893	Oct., 1983
Isobel Margaret Cringan	Jan. 31, 1895	Jan. 30, 1966
Annie Clark Cringan	Feb. 3, 1897	Dec. 4, 1977
Helen MacDonald Cringan	June 11, 1899	Feb. 2, 1924
Marie Alexander Cringan (1901-1992)	July 31, 1901	Jan. 11, 1992
Catherine Gartshore Cringan	April 25, 1907	March 13, 1960



Family of A. T. & L. R. W. Cringan,  
c1904

 Added by Old Buzzard

## Ancestors of Alexander Thom Cringan (1860-1931)

Alexander Thom CRINGAN was born at one hour five minutes a.m., 13 Oct. 1860 at Clyde Street, Carluke [1] . On 1 Nov. the birth was registered at Clarkston, Newmonkland Parish, Lanarkshire by his mother's sister, Margaret Merrilees, who signed the register with her X. (1)

Alexander Thom CRINGAN's parents were Robert CRINGAN (1821-18XX) and Janet THOM (1826-18XX) both of Newmonkland Parish who were married 1 Oct. 1841 at Clarkston by the Rev. MINOCH. (2) At the time their first child, Janet was born 15 Oct. 1842 Robert was a miner. (3) By 14 Oct. 1849 when Elizabeth was born, Robert was a General Dealer in Airdrie, Newmonkland. (4) When Robert Jr. was born 14 Nov. 1851 Robert CRINGAN and Janet THOM had moved to Stewart Street~ Carluke. (5) When Margaret was born 25 Feb. 1854 (6) they had moved to Clyde

Street, Carlisle where Jeanne was born 25 Mar. 1858 (7) as well as Alexander Thom.

The parents of Robert CRINGAN (1821- ) were Robert CRINGAN, tailor, and Elizabeth ELLIS of Leadhills, Parish of Crawford. (8) The parents of Janet THOM ( 1826- ) were Alexander THOM, miner, and Janet JACK. At the time Janet THOM was born 9 June 1826 they lived in Highridge, New Monkland. (9)

## Emigrating from Scotland to Canada

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A. T. CRINGAN visited Canada in 1885-86 (on the Circassia, g in New York Oct. 19, 1885), then returned to Britain where he completed his Licentiate at Curwen's Tonic Sol-Fa College in London. In 1887 A.T. and Lillias WAUGH with sons Robert CRINGAN and John CRINGAN came to Canada in a ship powered by both sails and engine. Near Newfoundland the rudder of the ship broke and the ship foundered for six weeks before they were rescued. Six weeks after they arrived in Toronto Agnes Rennie CRINGAN was born.

The Toronto Directory lists the addresses of Alexander Thom CRINGAN as follows:

1887 - 168 Robert Street,

1888 354 Huron Street,

1890-92 - 23 Avenue Road,

1893 - 34 Sussex Street,

1898 - 633 Church Street,

1920's - 1262 Broadview Avenue, East York.

This note concerning ATC's earliest days in Toronto is from John Russell's memoirs:

"I have mentioned earlier that Grandma Clark was living in Sussex Avenue with her family - Egbert, Harold and Annie. One evening (this would be about 1890-91) the boys came home with the news there was a Scottie teaching a funny kind of music. This was the Solfa System of reading music as opposed to the traditional Staff. It was expressed to Grandma that this Scottie seemed lonely. "Well then," said Grandma, "invite him for supper." And so Alexander Thom Cringan came for supper and so happy was he with the hospitality and homeliness that he asked the boys, "Do you think your ~other would take me as a lodger?" Thus Alex Cringan came to stay at Sussex Avenue. He had been Precentor in Bloomgate Church, Lanark, afterwards called Cairns Church. He had left there and emigrated to Canada to make a new life. By a strange coincidence I became Organist and Choirmaster of this Church exactly forty years later. Many of those who were in his Choir were still attending Church and the children of some were in my Choir. Vncle Alex, or Uncle Zander, as my father called him, was married before he emigrated and he left behind him his wife and two boys, Robert and John - the first two of eleven children."

## Biographical Note from *TORONTO ART AND MUSIC (1891)*

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The leader of the choir of the Central Presbyterian Church, Mr. Alexander T. Cringan, was born at Carluke, Lanarkshire, Scotland, October 13th, 1860. Receiving his early training at the local Grammar School, he got his musical education at the Tonic Sol Fa College, London, Eng., where he took the special subjects of harmony and voice training and the art of teaching music. Mr. Cringan is a graduate and licentiate of the Tonic Sol Fa College [2] , having the degree of G.L.T.S.C. In 1887 he was appointed Superintendent of Music for the Toronto Public Schools. He was conductor of the Tonic Sol Fa Society during 1886-7. Since 1887 he has been identified with the Scottish Select Choir and the Summer School of Music of the American Vocal Music Association. Mr. Cringan is the author of the Canadian Music Course and Teachers' Handbook. He conducted with marked ability the school children's concert in the Pavilion Music Hall, March 21st, 1890, and the Carnival Concert in the Crystal Palace in the same year. Since 1887 he has been choirmaster at the Central Presbyterian Church.

## MUSIC WORLD BEREAVED IN DEATH OF A. T. CRINGAN

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Veteran Teacher Was Known to Toronto for 45 Years

### YOUTHFUL SPIRIT

By Augustus Bridle [3] (From Toronto Daily Star)

Music to him was never old. Enthusiasm was never dim. Interest never flagged. He loved as much to sing at the age of 70 as he did at 25. The art of music as a language remained to him as tremendous as it had been when, in 1885, he came to Toronto as the first chief of music in the public schools.

Surviving are a brother, Robert, in Los Angeles, California; a son, John W., Toronto; eight married daughters, Mrs. William C. McIntyre, Ogdensburg, N. Y.; Mrs. James W. Gardner, Hamilton; Mrs. Rhoderick (sic) Macdonald, Windsor; Mrs. Ewen S. Campbell, Detroit, and Mrs. R. C. Trimble, Mrs. Lloyd Morrow, Mrs. Walter S. Taylor, and Mrs. Joseph Atkinson Jr., all of Toronto. Another daughter died eight years ago to-day.

The body will be in Rosedale Presbyterian church, Huntley and South Drive, for half an hour on Tuesday afternoon previous to the service which is to take place at three o'clock. A private service will be held at 1.15 o'clock in the home of Mrs. Trimble on Inglewood Drive.

### Recall First Appearance

Thousands of fathers and mothers all over Canada recall the days when the young Scot from Edinburgh with the tenor voice, the fine Scottish accent and the glowing evangelism in a new cause stood before them in the classroom. His message to them was the alluring tone relations between the five whole tones and two semitones in the diatonic scale. With a wooden pointer he traced out on the modulator the outlines of a melody - sometimes two pointers at once, one for the "air," the other for the second part in harmony. He showed them by ear and eye the almost personal characteristics of these tones.

Because this was news, Cringan liked it. To hear children sing was always, to him, one more proof of heaven upon earth. To help them discover tone, pitch, melody, simple harmony, was in him a sensation of the divine element in man.

Years ago a speaker on art told how once upon a time he had tried to teach seven races of children unable to speak English in a western school the colors of tones in the scale by using seven colored cardboard notes to imitate the rainbow.

"I was glad to hear you make that point," said Cringan with a rare Scottish twinkle. "But it was not you that discovered it. Neither did I. But I read it years ago in a magazine."

Not much that was new in singing ever escaped this master of teaching children to sing, who had reared ten children of his own in a home whose constant atmosphere was the joy of music.

### **Had Perennial Optimism**

It is almost perfunctory to say that A. T. Cringan was one of the few musicians left in Canada of the older nineteenth century school besides Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Blight, E. W. Schuch and Edgar Doward. But when musicians older than himself might recall the good old days of oratorio and Torrington and Adelina Patti, he could always take a grander joy in the musical joys of the present and the future. I have met many musicians; never one of finer perennial optimism than A. T. Cringan.

He was born and educated in Lanarkshire, married in Edinburgh, and took his earliest music training in the Tonic Sol-Fa college in London. He came to Canada in 1885; returned to Edinburgh in 1886 to finish a college course; became choirmaster first of Central Presbyterian church on the corner of what is now Bay St. and Grosvenor St. - torn down when Bay St. was extended and widened. In 1897 he became choirmaster of Cooke's church, four years after it was dedicated. He was one of the charter members of the Mendelssohn choir in 1894, when A. S. Vogt conducted part-songs and motets in Massey Hall with a chorus of less than 100.

For several years after his retirement from the directorship of music in public schools he had a vocal studio at the Toronto Conservatory, while he continued to teach music to classes in the Toronto normal and model schools.

In his later years he became inspector of music for Provincial normal and model schools and remained in that capacity until his death.

Cringan was not merely a musical educator; he was a lifelong apostle. He did for School music in Toronto very much what Torrington did for church music and oratorio. He was a pioneer. Before he came here, music in schools was a Cinderella of the curriculum. It was his job to liberate it by scholarly enthusiasm.

### **Won Recognition**

He was one of the few musicians of the last decade of the 19th century to gain the degree of Mus. Bac. in the University of Toronto.

He was not content to be an evangel of the Tonic Sol-Fa; he would demonstrate that a man who believed in this rather revolutionary system for schools was as competent to pass technical and academic tests as any of those who believed there

was nothing good in music outside the treble and bass clef. As one result of this he became one of the first presidents of the Toronto Clef Club at a time when perhaps no other member of the club had any use for Tonic Sol-Fa at all.

He believed mind and soul in a system which had its origin in England and by which, to this day, even in Toronto, many Britishers sing; the system which got its fundamentals, not in arbitrary lines and space and ABC as on the keyboard, but in the scale itself, that could be shifted up and down on the lines and spaces as a man climbs a ladder.

In the '60's and '70's this Tonic Solfa notation based in its scale upon an old Italian do-re-mi or solfeggi system, became all the rage in English schools. Children learned to sing at sight by means of it, much more easily than by the use of notes on lines with dots and tails and what not.

It was Cringan's self-imposed and at first unpopular task to teach this system. He believed in it because he had learned by it. He succeeded in teaching children to become interested, not in a mechanical art of reading by the mere sense of pitch from the staff but to be conscious of the tones in the scale itself; the family of five tones and two semitones each related to the other by a sort of mystic bond.

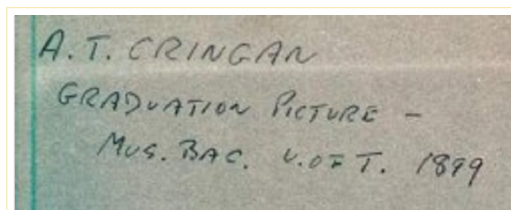
For years all the choruses that Cringan trained for school concerts sang from Curwen's Tonic Sol-Fa sheets. Later he adopted a modified system, using the Tonic Sol-fa for a scale only and teaching classes to sing to the staff notation by means of the movable Doh. But he never gave up his early belief that scale is the great thing, that the ear is more fundamental in music than the eye. The system taught in junior classes to-day, not only in Toronto but all over Ontario is essentially what Cringan taught when he came here in 1886.

### Trained Chorus for Royal Visit



Graduation Photograph, A. T. Cringan, Mus. Bac. 1899

Added by Alex Cringan



Inscription, reverse side above photograph, written by John W. Cringan

Added by Alex Cringan



Photographer's imprint, obverse side above photograph; "Simpson Bros." likely an early branch of what later became the Robert Simpson Co.

Added by Alex Cringan

When Massey Hall was opened in 1894 one of the programs was taken by a chorus of 700 children trained and conducted by Cringan. When the present King and Queen visited Toronto in 1902 he was asked as a compliment to conduct the great chorus of 6,000 children who sang in honor of the visit. He was then teaching music in model and normal schools and had passed his Mus. Bac. Tor.

Nearly twenty years ago I was shown a copy of the Ontario archaeological report of which one of the most interesting chapters was a record of how A. T. Cringan in 1897 had anticipated all the present-day Indian folksong collectors in Canada in transcribing by ear a number of Indian melodies, a thing never before done in Canada.

Patiently he listened to an Indian chief from the Munceytown reservation sing the old Five Nations melodies; and he set them down. In this baffling melodic feat he found the enormous value of the ear training he had received in the Tonic Sol-Fa. It made no difference exactly on what pitch the chief had his Doh, the melody was taken down as parts of the scale. making with students at the summer school which he regularly conducted at the University Training school here.

These students were all teachers of music. To him they were all youths like himself, gloriously venturing upon fresh musical discoveries in an age when most of the marvels of music are in mechanism.

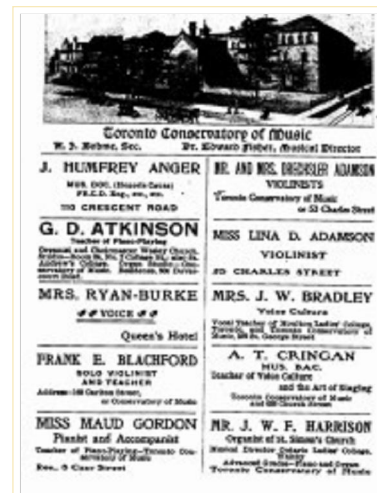
He made an entire phonograph collection of Indian melodies which he transcribed in the report [4] ; and for years later his reports covering a total of 100 Iroquois melodies , formed a valuable item in the annual book issued by David Boyle the Ontario archaeologist.

Mr. Cringan delivered a series of lectures on this subject in Canada and Great Britain, and he also wrote a series of practical works on the teaching of music. He was always ready to prove a point. He loved discussion rather than argument. He was always learning from experience and from the successes of other people.

### Aided Mendelssohn Choir

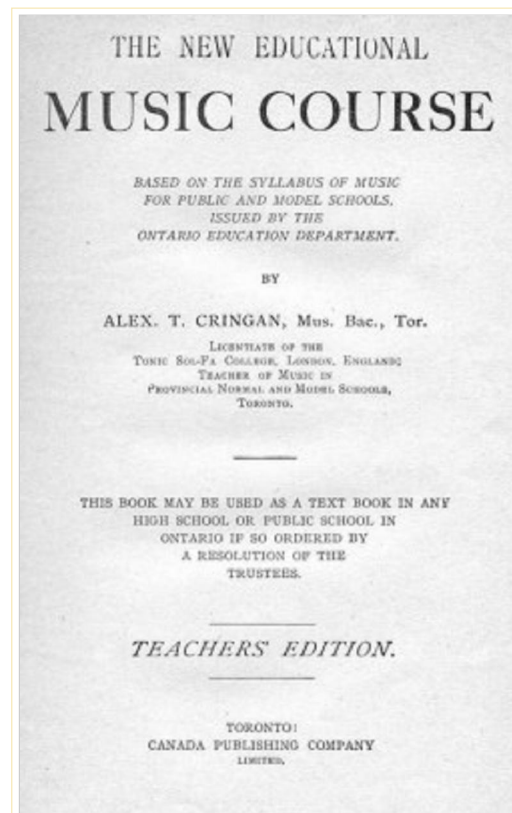
To the Mendelssohn Choir he devoted several years of his leisure hours. He seldom missed a rehearsal. In the great works of the choir he found direct inspiration and was one of the most emphatic in declaring that here was a new gospel of choral music. After lessons at the Conservatory he used often to walk up with Vogt through Queen's Park, discussing the works of the choir.

"I think Brahms must have been a tenor singer," he said once, discussing the Brahms Requiem. "He makes the tenor parts of his works so beautiful."




Advertisement for Toronto Conservatory of Music, circa 1900, including ATC's ad; from collection of Beth Campbell

 Added by Old Buzzard



Title page of one of text books written by A. T. Cringan

 Added by Alex Cringan

Music to him was life. For it he never felt that he was sacrificing anything. With his courage, zeal, mental ability and tireless industry he might have been much more materially successful in a business. But he was born to teach, to sing, to be an evangel. In days when the material rewards of music were low he brought up a family to all of whom he gave a good education, and, what was more precious, the example of a character who always saw more good than evil in others, was always ready to devote himself to a cause, remained a consistent member of the church and was always ready to help some one less experienced than himself.

In music he did a pioneer work in Canada second only to that of Torrington and Vogt. When Torrington was king of music here, Mr. Cringan was one of his ablest helpers. He taught many a school choir patriotic pieces for Torrington to conduct. When Vogt took the more modern leadership, he became a still greater enthusiast for the new works.

The death of his elder son, one of Canada's most promising violinists, was a severe blow to one who loved both music and family so deeply.

The death of Mrs. Cringan last year removed one who had been much more than a good mother. The Cringan home was always a place of gladness in which music had a wonderful part. In that home, or in the school, in the choir loft, in the chorus, in the studio, Alexander T. Cringan was always a man of extraordinary warmth of personality, whom it was a pleasure to meet because he was not only a great enthusiast, a merry soul and a real gentleman, but also had the genuine qualities of a vastly original character. *The foregoing is from Trimble's article on ATC in Trimble (1990).*

ALEXANDER THOM CRINGAN (From a Toronto Rotary newsletter)

A kindly gentleman has left us, and though our hearts are sore because he has gone, yet was there no sorrow in his leaving, for he was glad to be away to be with one whom he missed sorely. He loved his music, he loved his garden with its flowers, his pipe and his game of curling, but best of all he loved the gentle little woman whom he called Mother - she who had stood by his side through all the years, the mother of his children and in very surety his partner.


He was too good a soldier to show his grief over being left behind when she went on, but his heart is happy now, because he is with her. His son and his daughters have the happy memory of a good father and a Christian gentleman, and we in Rotary the knowledge that Rotary is poorer because he has gone, but richer because of the imprint his life left on the history of our Club. Alex. Cringan carried in his life all those attributes of a good Rotarian and the example he left us will be ever an inspiration to his fellow-members that they should pattern their lives likewise.

## References

Russell, John Clark. 1976. The Russells: Part III of a trilogy, the Russell-Clark Narrative. Typescript published privately,




A. T. Cringan, Os-ke-non-ton (Running Deer) of the Mohawk Tribe, and Dr. Ratcliffe, Principal of the Toronto Normal School, 1919.

 Added by Alex Cringan



Caption, above photograph, from Toronto Daily Star.

 Added by Alex Cringan

Glasgow, Scotland. 60 pp.

Trimble, Dorothy Irene Robertson. 1990. The heritage if the past: Settlers: Alexander Thom Cringan and Lillias Rennie Waugh. Published privately, Toronto.

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New York Passenger Lits 1820-1957, Microfilm Roll M237\_490, List Number 1294

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