John F. Cramer (1899-1967), the first president of Portland State College, majored in chemistry at Oregon’s Willamette University, receiving his bachelor’s degree in 1919 and master’s degree in 1920. Cramer then entered the field of education and for over two decades held positions as teacher, principal, and superintendent across Oregon, including head of the state’s second largest school district in Eugene in 1937. During this period of administrative experience and growth, Cramer attained two more degrees, his Master of Education in 1932 and Doctor of Education in 1937, both at the University of Oregon. (He was the first student to receive a Doctor of Education degree at the University of Oregon.) His expertise in administration was recognized in 1943 when he was chosen president of the Oregon Education Association, and in 1944 when he was chosen by the chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education and state board to be dean of the state’s General Extension Division.

In his position as dean during 1946-1955, Cramer served as senior administrator and as Stephen Epler’s superior officer, overseeing the formation of Vanport Extension Center, Portland State Extension Center, and Portland State College. Initially considered by some to be too conservative in promoting the creation of Portland State College, Cramer, as one faculty member exclaimed, “caught the fever” and became a strong advocate (e.g., chaired an advisory committee of citizens and educators in 1952 that recommended Portland State provide undergraduate four-year programs to prepare elementary and secondary teachers).

In 1955, when the state board chose Cramer to be the first president of Portland State College, he was a veteran of the Oregon public school system, well known statewide for his role in heading the General Extension Division, favored for the position by the state board (over Stephen Epler), and was viewed by many as a natural choice for the job. Desiring the new position, Cramer stepped down as General Extension dean to head Portland State, leading to a double ceremony dedicating the College and inaugurating Cramer as president in October 1955.

But Cramer served as president for only three years. In 1958, presumably tired of administrative challenges, he stepped down to become a professor of education. Cramer found teaching to be very enjoyable following his many years in administration. He was passionate in his teaching role, worked hard, took his new position seriously, and gladly assumed various administrative responsibilities when called upon by his successor and the head of education. Cramer resigned in 1967 due to ill health and, in his remembrance, State Hall (Portland State’s first new building) was renamed Cramer Hall in 1969.