

# The Story of the Incorporation of the Two Villages 1898-1902

**By**

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People who follow the history of Eastchester closely often ask why did Bronxville (1898) and Tuckahoe (1902) become incorporated villages and the rest of the town did not. A look at turn of the century maps and study of the federal census of 1910 will show that Tuckahoe had the most people followed closely by Bronxville. The areas of Eastchester outside of Bronxville and Tuckahoe had significantly fewer people and was still filled with farms, estates, and unimproved land. There simply weren't that many people outside the two villages. Even after Tuckahoe became a village in 1902 the town government of Eastchester remained in the village of Tuckahoe until after World War 2.

But why was Bronxville so insistent on becoming a separate village? The answer is not simple. 1890 the exclusive housing development of Lawrence Park was started in Bronxville from which wealthy businessmen took the New York and Harlem River railroad to their jobs in New York City. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the residents of Bronxville joined other upper middle class people in Westchester like Scarsdale, New Rochelle, Rye, Mount Vernon and Pelham among others to develop the first true railway suburbs in America. People moved their dwellings away from New York City to escape the pollution, crime, overcrowding, poor sanitation, and a myriad other social problems to enjoy the bucolic charm of what later would be called suburban life.

New York City like Chicago and Philadelphia was concerned about losing its tax base and began expanding its borders by annexing large portions of land. By 1898 the size of New York City had increased from the four hundred squares of Manhattan Island to three hundred square thousand square miles. Almost all of the Bronx, once part of Westchester County, was joined to New York City as a separate borough. City Island was annexed to New York City from the town of Pelham.

The residents of Bronxville like other Westchester communities did not want to be swept up in the vortex of annexation. Incorporation by the state as a city or a village would prevent New York City from expanding its borders into sections of Westchester. Mount Vernon in 1892 separated from the town of government of Eastchester by being incorporated as a city. But Bronxville had other reasons for becoming an incorporated village separate from the rest of the town of Eastchester.

Many residents were upset with the Eastchester political leadership. They felt they were tax money was being wasted on town projects such as schools, roads, and sewers. Too much of the

revenue went for projects beyond the village of Bronxville. At the beginning of 1898 a petition was filed for the incorporation of Bronxville as a village. Town Supervisor Herbert Lent turned down the petition on the grounds that female signers made it illegal. In its place Lent approved a petition to join both Tuckahoe and Bronxville as one village. A county court reversed Lent's position against Bronxville as well as his decision against the joint incorporation of Bronxville and Tuckahoe.

It is obvious that Bronxville and Tuckahoe were evolving into two very separate communities. Bronxville was an enclave of the wealthy while Tuckahoe was a working class community employed in the declining marble quarries, the Hodgman rubber factory, and artisans and laborers in the building trades. A sizable African American population lived in Tuckahoe, many of whom were employed as servants in Bronxville. A sizable Italian population was moving into the village of Tuckahoe. By 1930 the federal census shows that the population of the village of Tuckahoe was sixty percent Italian, thirty percent African American, and ten per cent other.

Tuckahoe became an incorporated village in 1902 and Herbert Lent became the first mayor. Tuckahoe was a village with very separate needs from its affluent neighbor to the south, Bronxville. The town outside the two incorporated villages was sparsely settled and included farms, the remnants of old estates, golf courses, and unimproved land.

The response of the people of the town of Eastchester to the depression of 1908 would show that the people of the villages of Bronxville and Tuckahoe were still one community. But differences in wealth, class, race, and ethnicity would also create differences.