

Three School Systems in the Same Town 1899-1929

By

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In the first thirty years of the twentieth century the development of the separate public school systems in Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville would accentuate their differences. After the Civil War the schools that were established in the town resembled the ones that were established in towns and villages all across the country. One room school houses dotted the landscape. Children of varying ages were taught in one room by one teacher. In 1835 a new building constructed of marble from the quarries replaced a wooden structure that instructed students who today would live in present day Bronxville, Tuckahoe, Chester Heights, and parts of Mount Vernon . In 1869 the same one room school was moved at a cost of one thousand dollars to the intersection of California and New Rochelle Road where it stands today. The Eastchester Historical Society maintains the school today and gives tour to local schools and other interested groups.

During the Civil War a one-room school built of marble was erected north of Waverly Square. That building was later incorporated into a larger wooden structure. Bronxville built its first one room school in 1870. These schools were not much different from rural schools all across America. Students of varying ages learned reading, writing, and arithmetic through a combination of independent work and group recitation. There was a strong nondenominational religious component to this instruction. Tuckahoe had its own school building on Jefferson Street. Records are unclear when that school was started.

The start of the twentieth century would witness the start of three separate school systems in Eastchester, Bronxville, and Tuckahoe. In 1899 Eastchester was incorporated as a separate school district. Waverly High School was the high school for Eastchester and Tuckahoe. Vince Bellew reminisced about the old high school when he commented:

“Going back to the old days the Waverly School was the hub of all community activities. The Waverly Schools has always been a distinguished landmark to the people of old Tuckahoe. In those days Tuckahoe was known as the entire town of Eastchester ... Everyone went to the Waverly School as it was the only high school serving the entire town. Boys and girls walked down from the North end and up from the Depot to attend Waverly High School. Waverly High School graduated its last class in 1928.”

There were three courses of instruction: academic, business, and vocational.

In 1903 residents of Bronxville voted to incorporate their own school district. Village taxes would fund village schools. Three years later school trustees in Bronxville voted to tear down their one room school house and build a two-story one room school house of yellow brick with separate classrooms for grades one through eight. At the completion of eight grade most students went to private boarding schools. Those students who wanted to continue their public

schooling either went to Yonkers or Mount Vernon, not Waverly. Bronxville did not graduate it's a high school class until 1923, a year before the present Bronxville High School was completed.

The newly formed school district of Tuckahoe built the Main Street School in 1907 and around the same year Bronxville trustees voted to build an identical k-8 school in their village. At the completion of eight grade students could attend Waverly High School or another school system. Madeline Dinger Schaeffer, now deceased, became an elementary school teacher and librarian in the Tuckahoe School system. Upon her retirement until age 89 she ran classes for school children all over Westchester County at the one room school still run by the Eastchester Historical Society. However, when she wanted to enter the academic program at Waverly high School she was told that people from down in the village did not go onto college. Madeline would not be deterred. Instead she went to high school at AB Davis in Mount Vernon and on to Columbia for college. Was Madeline was being discriminated against because of sex, class, or bot .

The school systems continued to go their separate ways. In 1924 the present Bronxville k-12 School complex was completed. The Bronxville School System, unlike Pelham, Scarsdale, and Eastchester followed the progressive philosophy of John Dewey. The Main Street School (now Tuckahoe Village Hall) continued until 1960 when it was replaced by the William Cottle Elementary School. The cornerstone for the present Eastchester High School was lain in 1927 and the construction for Tuckahoe High School began two years later.

When Governor Roosevelt made a speech in the Parkway Casino he made an initial comment about the severity of the economic depression. He alluded that the depression could not be that serious if the people of Tuckahoe could build a million dollar high school. Roosevelt would soon change his impression of the worst economic event in this nation's history. Regardless as the the town of Eastchester entered the great depression of the 1930's they were operating three very separate school systems.