

Manny Tivolilla and Henry Norman

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The colonial and revolutionary history from 1664 to 1783 of the town has been well documented by the Eastchester Historical Society. Research and articles over the last twenty years gives us a clearer picture of what the town was like in the nineteenth century. What is missing is an ethnic history of the town in the twentieth century. One way to collect such information is to look at oral histories of prominent citizens. I have randomly selected two very successful citizens of Tuckahoe, one Italian and the other African American, Manny Tivolilla and Henry Norman. I will let the reader decide to what extent these men represent others in the community.

The original Tivolilla was an abandoned orphan in Italy. His mother left him at on a little table outside a nunnery. The nuns took him in and named him Salvatore Tivolilla, Salvatore meaning savior and Tivolilla meaning little table. Manny father and uncle were two of nine children that lived in Italy, They had a business but it did not support the family. At the turn of the twentieth century both father an uncle come to live and work in Tuckahoe. Work was hard. When they weren't running their soda pop business they worked at Hodgman Rubber plant in the town. Both Uncles fought in WWI and saw lot of action.

Henry Norman was born in North Carolina on a big farm with loving parents and grand parents. When he attended the Main Street School in Tuckahoe he said he never saw so many white people in his life. Henry was an excellent athlete excelling in football and was running. Because of his friendships in school he became part of the Italian community. According to the 1930 census Tuckahoe was 60% Italian and 30% African American..

Henry had no role models when he was young. No body pointed him in any direction. His father couldn't be counted on to support the family. Henry paid all the bills and had complete responsibility for my brothers and sisters. His mother died when he was 22. It was always a case of not enough. Life was not as difficult for Manny. The Tivolilla's had the support of their extended family and never shied away from hard work. They started Leewood Beverage in 1914, in 1920 they moved to 140 Columbus Avenue they were beer distributors.

World War 2 had a profound impact on both men. Henry volunteered to fight in World War 2 as an air cadet in the segregated service. He went to Mississippi for pilot training but wasn't allowed to qualify because quotas were filled up. After the service Henry became a Tuckahoe policeman. Manny was too young to fight in World War 2 but his older brother by ten years, Salvatore, went off to fight. The workers at Leewood Beverage were either drafted or volunteered. Manny's uncle and father did the selling during the day and after school Manny and his four sisters made the soda. It was tough.

Manny echoes the sentiments of many people that have been interviewed. Tuckahoe was great place to live. Most of the people lived and worked in the community. Countless people who have been interviewed claim the ethnic friction in other communities was no where near as intense. That is not to say that there was no friction between the Irish and Italians and other ethnic groups. But the communal experience of fighting in World War 2 lessened that hostility.

Henry Norman is not as generous in his reflections on growing up and living in Tuckahoe. Henry rose up through the ranks and was appointed the first black police chief in Westchester County. He said, "A black fellow is tested more than a white man, but I was able to stand up to it...I ran into problems a white person would not have. I think I left something for my children and grandchildren. I showed other blacks it could be done."

Manny and his brother continued in the family business. After the war a 500 foot artisan well was dug at the bottling plant in Tuckahoe so that they could have their own water. Today Leewood Beverage has a number of distribution centers. Manny and his brother did split. In 1974 the Beverage Mart was opened up in Tuckahoe.

The children of Manny and Henry have all been successful. Henry was able to advance in Tuckahoe through his persistence and a quality somewhat unique to Tuckahoe in regard to minorities; to judge people not by their color but by their character. Manny still runs his successful business and looks back with fond memories of what it was like to grow up in a very special place, Tuckahoe.

Material for this article was taken from an oral interview conducted by Dorothy Zendel with Henry Norman on February 26, 1981 and the oral interview with Manny Tavolilla was done by me on July 1, 2008