



Historically Speaking

with Eastchester Town Historian
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Success for Slum Clearance: 1937-1941

The Eastchester Neighborhood Association was not the only group in the Town of Eastchester concerned about the tenements in Tuckahoe. The Tuckahoe Chamber of Commerce with the aid of several other organizations hired Hayward Shackett, a former Bronxville resident and a professor of architecture at Pennsylvania State College, to conduct a townwide survey on housing. The result of that survey was that the riddance of slum districts, mainly in the Village of Tuckahoe, was the main problem facing village and town officials.

In late August of 1935 Mayor William Crouch of Tuckahoe asked Joseph J. Ferone, president of the Tuckahoe Chamber of Commerce, to appoint an independent citizen's committee to study the problem and make recommendations. Ferone stated that the committee would be composed of interested leaders from all sections of the town. Town Supervisor Richard Bennett signified that the Town Board would cooperate with all agencies to make Eastchester a "modern town."

By 1937 the town was ready to move into action. An article in the February 18, 1937 edition of the *Tuckahoe Record* read, "Tuckahoe Lions to Rally town on slum riddance. Meeting to be called in next few weeks to force action...Slum conditions are to be brought before at a mass meeting to which civic associations will be asked to send representatives, it was announced at a weekly meeting of the local Lion's Club." Edgar Turner, member of the Lion's Club better housing committee told the paper, "The prevalence of slum areas and the number of men, women, and children occupying quarters totally inadequate for human habitation though out the town are hardly realized."

The list of civic associations to be asked to participate in the meeting include the Eastchester Neighborhood Association, Eastchester Residents Association, Crestwood Plaza Association, Parkview Heights Association, Crestwood Plaza Association, Bronxville Manor Association, Westchester Park Women's Club, Bronxville, Women's Club, Green Knolls and South Scarsdale Associations and the various political clubs.

The article went on further to state that "Paul Luersen, President of the Lions, stated

that the club committee on better housing is going ahead as rapidly as possible and that the club is ready to join a general movement in the town looking toward the building of adequate quarters for families occupying outworn tenements and shacks." The community had been mobilized but it would take four years before their plans would begin to take shape.

Records show that by 1939 the Tuckahoe Housing Authority had been started. Joseph J. Creamer, a future mayor of Tuckahoe, was made chairman. The authority was asking for a million dollars for a low-cost housing project in the village. Federal agents instructed the authority that it was necessary to establish that there was a need for better housing. In an article of the *Tuckahoe Record* written on August 8, 1937 it stated "Joseph Creamer appointed two investigators to complete a survey required by the federal government...One of the investigators is Martha Creamer, daughter of the chairman...The investigators started the survey on Monday. By the middle of the week they had contacted 100 people in the slum areas. During the following week they hope to have two hundred families to complete the survey."

The Tuckahoe Record reported on April 18, 1940 that the Tuckahoe Housing Authority with Mayor William Crouch in attendance, "Selection of a suitable site and the appointment of an architect to complete the application of a sixty unit slum clearance project in the village...The project that, which is estimated at \$300,000 is intended to cleanse slum conditions on Washington Street and Columbus Avenue."

On April 12, 1941 a bill providing for a loan of \$325,000 was signed by President Roosevelt. On April 13, 1941 the *Tuckahoe Record* reported, "The President's signature climaxed nearly three years of work by members of the Housing Authority...One of the provisions of the government loan provides that 60 slum units be demolished...There will be no cost to local taxpayers for erecting and maintaining the development...Loans would be paved through profits through rentals."

This was one of the last loans given because of the need for defense spending for what would become World War II. Alexander Brown, secretary of the Tuckahoe Housing Authority, best summarized the importance of the housing project when he was quoted in the paper, "A few of the benefits which the community will receive are elimination of slums, rehabilitation, less of a need for police and fire protection, elimination of breeding place of disease, an improvement of properties in the vicinity of the project, and a chance for better living for the 60 families who will tenant the project."

Rentals would start at \$6 a room.