

Introduction to Ten Articles on the Great Depression in Eastchester 1929-1941

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Commentators in the media are saying that the present economic meltdown is the worst in our lifetime. This is not absolutely not true for people who lived through the thirties. The Great Depression of the 1930's was by far the worst economic disaster in American history. The impact of the Depression of the nineteen thirties had a much more severe consequence on the citizens of the town, especially in the village of Tuckahoe.

The next ten articles will be devoted to telling what has recently been discovered about what happened in this town from 1929 to 1941. The physical appearance of the town did not change much over those 12 years. The Greenvale Elementary School was built from WPA (Work Projects Administration) money in 1936 and the Interlaken Apartments were erected at the end of the thirties from private capital as affordable housing for people for lower middle income. There would be no other significant construction in the town.

The present economic situation pales in comparison to what happened in the thirties. The social safety net of local and state relief along with private charities collapsed by 1932. Social security, federal welfare, food stamps, federally subsidized housing, medicare, medicaid, and host of other entitlement programs did not exist. Many people were cold, hungry, and desperate.

In certain parts of the town unemployment reached 33%. Veterans of World War I asked for more relief at a town board meeting. Resentment sometimes appeared between the have and have not. Newspapers mention that two hunger protests took place in Depot Square in Tuckahoe. In some ways the Great Depression heightened divisions within the town. But in other ways it brought the town closer together.

The citizens of the town of Eastchester coped with the Great Depression in their own unique way. People helped others in both little and big ways. Private charities and houses of worship did whatever they could to lessen the suffering. A private charity that dated back to the depression of 1908 known as the Eastchester Neighborhood Association worked with town and village government and other private benefactors to ameliorate the suffering.

The one issue that brought the town together was the deplorable living conditions in tenements that created blighted areas. In 1935 seven-year effort to start the eradication of these slum began. What was so impressive about this drive is that it involved many segments of the community; the Eastchester Neighborhood Association, the oldest and most important

charity in the town, the Lions Club, the Tuckahoe Chamber of Commerce, major civic associations, and village and town government.

A number of years ago I conducted an interview with Bob Creamer, author and senior editor of *Sports Illustrated*. Tuckahoe Village Historian, and president of the Eastchester Historical Society. In the interview I commented that the greatest generation of whom he was a part was the one that got us through World War 2. He politely disagreed. He said that the greatest generation was the one that got us through the Great Depression.

At the time I did not know that his father was the first head of the Tuckahoe Housing Authority that began the eradication of tenements in the town. I use this story to state that there still is much to learn about how the town made it though the depression. What I write about is all based on for as far as I can tell are accurate sources.

Writing twentieth century history is difficult. Everyone has their own image of the past. Much of our history remains buried in people's attics, basements, and trunks.

My mission is to continue to work an updated twentieth century history of the town. Feel free to contact me if you have any insights, documents, photographs, or artifacts that will help documents our town's past.