



Historically Speaking

*with Eastchester Town Historian
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Divisions within the town: c. 1930

During the first three decades of the 20th century the town outside of Eastchester and the villages of Bronxville and Tuckahoe had evolved into three very separate communities. The town was divided by issues of ethnicity, income, class, race, and public schooling. The clearest evidence of these divisions could be seen in the three distinct high schools in the same town 1.5 miles apart.

The Waverly School had been the only public high school for students in Eastchester and Tuckahoe until 1929. Up to 1923 the vast majority of students in Bronxville attended private boarding schools and the rest attended high school in Mount Vernon or Yonkers. In 1924, the present Bronxville High School was opened. Three years later, the cornerstone for Eastchester High School was erected and in 1929 Tuckahoe began construction on their school. Why were two high schools built in the same town less than a mile and a half apart within the span of two years?

The late Madeline Schaeffer grew up in the village of Tuckahoe, attended the Main Street School, and was the first girl baptized at the Immaculate Conception Church. She went on to be a teacher and librarian in the Tuckahoe schools and later a president of the Eastchester Historical Society. Her story gives an answer to the question of the differences between Eastchester and Tuckahoe.

When Madeline tried to enroll in Waverly High School in the academic college-bound program after the completion of her eighth grade education at the Main Street school in Tuckahoe, she was told that people from the village did not go on to college. She was encouraged to enroll in the business program. Madeline would not be deterred from her goal. Instead she walked up the hill to Waverly Square where she took the trolley to Mount Vernon. Madeline graduated from AB Davis High School and eventually received her teaching degree from Columbia.

It is more than likely that there was a bias against many of the people of Tuckahoe based on income and ethnicity. Tuckahoe was the poorest of the three communities in the town and its economy was in decline. In 1930 after a huge fire, the last marble quarry closed. In 1925 the Hodgman Rubber Company, the major employer in the village for decades, was shut down (During World War I Hodgman employed 1,700 people, mostly from Tuckahoe).

The population of Tuckahoe in 1930 was 60 percent Italian and 30 percent African-American. Many of the African-Americans found employment in Bronxville as servants. According to a social worker writing her master thesis for Smith College, "Italian laborers who were brought to Westchester for the construction jobs in the development of the county's real estate settled in Tuckahoe" and culturally did not seek employment in domestic service.

Ethnic friction existed between the descendants of the Irish who lived up the hill in Eastchester and the Italians who lived down in the village in Tuckahoe. Bob Creamer, son of a mayor of Tuckahoe, a president of the Eastchester Historical Society, and a senior editor of *Sports Illustrated* told an interesting story on how he witnessed Italian boys being picked on by the Irish. After mass at the Immaculate Conception Church in the 1930s Irish boys would throw rocks at the Italian boys and tell them to go back down the hill where they belonged.

There were no people of color to speak of in the Eastchester Schools until the 1990s. John Fix Jr. as a young boy remembers a march by the Ku Klux Klan down White Plains Road in the late thirties. Agreements between realtors and sellers made it impossible for a person of color to purchase a home in Eastchester. Even more restrictive covenants made it impossible for many ethnic and racial minorities to buy homes in the white Anglo-Saxon neighborhoods of Bronxville.