



Historically Speaking

*with Eastchester Town Historian
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The Coming of the Great Depression: 1932

The stock market crash of 1929 and ensuing Great Depression had a profound and devastating impact upon the entire Town of Eastchester. Times were so bad that the Eastchester Neighborhood Association or ENA (that provided a variety of programs mainly for Tuckahoe) had to lay aside all its advances in social work and went back to giving charity. By the second winter of the depression the association had run out of money.

In a full page newspaper ad, the Eastchester Relief Association of the ENA cried out for help. A sorrowful sketch depicted a mother with infant in hand along with two other children cringing against the entrance of a tenement. The ad read:

“They need your help. Will you save them from suffering? Give to a worthy cause... Would you alleviate the pangs of hunger, the worry and distress that face the scores of Eastchester families this winter?...Every little bit contributed to the Eastchester Neighborhood Association to aid the deserving poor of the community will help. It will keep little children from going to bed without suppers. It will supply necessary milk for tiny babies, food for careworn mothers, odd jobs...a day’s work anything... to earn a few dollars..!

To all heads of families who are unemployed.

Register at the Eastchester Neighborhood Association, Main Street, Tuckahoe, N. Y. Everything possible will be done to find you employment.

The situation in the United States was desperate. The unemployment rate was over 25 percent. The social safety net of social security, national welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and other entitlement programs did not exist. Old women were witnessed eating out of garbage cans. The New York City welfare council reported 29 victims of starvation and 110, mostly children, dead of malnutrition. Across the United States a third of a million children were out of school because of a lack of funds. Demands on private charities had dried up their sources of income. Private help by 1932 had dwindled to 6 percent of the money spent on the needy, leaving 30 million to public welfare. Unfortunately, local governments couldn’t handle the burden.

Three thousand hungry men and women had tried to demonstrate outside Henry Ford’s plant in Dearborn, Mich. The police had fired into their ranks, killing four and wounding a hundred others—who were handcuffed to their hospital beds, charged with rioting. Thirty one thousand veterans of World War I and their families marched on Washington D.C. seeking immediate payment of a bonus promised for 1945. The army burned down their dwellings and used tear gas against the Bonus Army. Two infants died of gas asphyxiation.

In the early 1920’s a community welfare fund had been set up in Bronxville to also include Tuckahoe, Eastchester and neighborhoods in nearby Yonkers. Money for the funds was set aside to support Lawrence Hospital and ENA. In 1931 the fund had given the hospital \$20,000 and the ENA \$26,000. The ENA did everything in its power to ease the pain of the depression.

Taxi drivers were asked to drive children to Playland. Constant appeals were made to send children away free to summer camp for healthy food and recreation. Homeowners were asked to provide work for those who so desperately wanted employment. A Christmas appeal was made to fix broken toys so that children would get something from Santa; a milk drive took place so that children would have fresh milk. Storeowners gave away bread and meat. Private acts of charity and good will were common.

People in the town donated plots of ground along with free seed to be used as unemployment gardens or truck farms. The thrift shop in Tuckahoe asked for donations of hats at Easter to make girls look prettier along with dresses. People sewed clothes and donated blankets so that people would not go cold in the winter. Free medical exams were given. Town government responded by providing public works programs.

By the end of 1932 *The Tuckahoe Record* reported the ENA was caring for 1,311 individuals; 300 families. It is an understatement to assert that the four full-time and one part-time worker found the case loads too heavy.

None of this would be enough.