



Historically Speaking

with Eastchester Town Historian
Richard Forliano

Hard Times: 1934

As the cold winter of 1934 approached, the situation in Tuckahoe was desperate. *The Bronxville Press* reported on Dec. 12, 1933, that an announcement had been made at Village Hall that there were 500 men out of work. Police squads, a sheriff with tear gas, and firemen with other elaborate preparations assembled to prevent a possible riot by members of a second hunger parade. The march did not materialize, but a feeling of helplessness hung over the village.

In Tuckahoe anger was even directed against the Eastchester Neighborhood Association (ENA), the agency that had worked so tirelessly to help the residents of the community survive the ravages of the depression. An unemployed Tuckahoe man, who only gave his name as “Scrimmer” stated that he

knew of three cases in which women on relief had submitted to operations to be sterilized. Scrimmer also claimed that he knew of 70 other women on relief who were contemplating such operations. Chester McLaulglin, a member of the Eastchester Town Council, put in a resolution calling for an investigation and Christopher Lawrence, head of the welfare committee, was put in charge of the investigation.



An unemployed man in Tuckahoe.

A case study of a battered wife in the records of the ENA partially substantiates Scrimmer’s accusation. The judge of the Children’s Court had referred the husband of the woman known as Mrs. V to the ENA. The judge believed that the husband was incorrigible and that jail time would not stop the abuse. The case worker stated that there was “a long history of ill health, incompatibility, and general inadequacy on the part of the Mr. and Mrs. V to take care of themselves and their children...Both parents were considered to be mentally defective. One child had congenital syphilis, another was an epileptic idiot, a third had an undiagnosed and prolonged illness, and the last died at childbirth.” The caseworker encouraged sterilization. Mr. and Mrs. V resisted partially because of the church’s attitude and their misconception that sterilization would interfere with their sexual activity.

At the beginning of May in 1934 tempers flared during a heated exchange that took place between the Eastchester United Veterans Relief Committee and the Town Board. A. E. Eliot, chairman of the Veterans, said that the relief committee was taking care of 121 families and needed an advance of \$500. The remaining funds would not pay for food for more than a week. Supervisor Richard Bennett told Eliot he should manage the affairs better. Councilman Lawrence suggested that the families should apply for welfare through the ENA and the Public Welfare Officer.

William Collins, a World War I veteran, protested, “I would not go to Miss Amie Dusenberry, town welfare officer, because we were not investigated by a woman when we went to war and I won’t stand for any woman investigating me now.” Councilman Lawrence pointed out he was asking for charity and should swallow his pride.

David Cushman Doyle, a Bronxville resident and the former treasurer of the ENA, was also attacked in the press. Coyle, a member of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Brain Trust, was accused of formulating a revolutionary philosophy. Dr. William A Wirt according to *The Bronxville Press* claimed one of the guests at a dinner at a farmhouse near MacLean, Va. that Doyle attended formulated a “red plot.” Coyle expressed a desire to voluntarily appear before the House Investigating Committee to defend himself.

These were hard times. Divisions took place over income, politics, religion, and ethnicity. But the people of the town moved forward. Fears of riots and communist conspiracies abated. The town and the country survived and would emerge stronger.