



Historically Speaking

*with Eastchester Town Historian
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The Eastchester Historical Society and the One-Room School House

Sometime after the end of the Korean War in the late 1950's, a group of wonderful men and women from Eastchester and Tuckahoe bonded together to do whatever it took to let the public know that the township of Eastchester had one of the richest histories of any community in America. The people who would soon found the Eastchester Historical Society (EHS) were born before or during the depression and either went off themselves or watched their loved ones go off to fight in World War II. They shared a common belief that it was their selfless duty to work together no matter what the cost in time and money to do what was necessary to preserve the heritage of one of the most historic towns in America, Eastchester.

In 1958 a notable group of people led by Gabe Rescigno, including the town supervisor and the superintendents of schools of both Eastchester and Tuckahoe, founded the EHS. Gabe Rescigno and Wesley Callender, a teacher, writer, and book editor, were elected President and Vice President respectively. Rescigno was a lifelong resident of Eastchester who served in World War II, was a social studies teacher, guidance counselor, and elementary school principal, first modern town historian, and community volunteer. It would be Rescigno's vision, enthusiasm, and efforts that gave birth to EHS.

EHS faced three daunting tasks. The first was to find the land and a building to house the society. Next was to arrange the grandest celebration that the town had ever seen to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the founding of the town. The last and most difficult was to secure a place to preserve books, manuscripts, papers, photographs, relics, maps, and other artifacts relevant to the history of the town.

In November 1960, the society announced its plans to restore, furnish, and add a utility wing to the one-room school at the corner of California and New Rochelle Road. Society President Rescigno working with the town had the land leased to the historical society. The schoolhouse was built in 1835 at the corner of North Columbus Avenue (White Plains Road) on the opposite side of the street from Devonia Avenue in present day Mount Vernon. Until 1869 children from Bronxville, Tuckahoe, northern Mount Vernon, and all that section of the town east to New Rochelle and north to Mill Road attended school there. In 1869 the Marble School was moved to its present location. At the end of the school year in 1884, the Marble School closed its doors. It later became the property of Valentine Kloefphfer, a pig farmer. In 1952 the Kloefphfer estate bequeathed the school to the Town of Eastchester.

The building was in terrible condition when the Town Council officially turned over the building to EHS in October 1959. Not only was the building falling down but it smelled of pig remains. The cost of restoring the schoolhouse was \$15,000, a staggering sum at that

time. Over the next seven years the society was able to meet its goal through formal but festive fundraising dinners at the Siwanoy Country Club in Bronxville and the old Schwartz restaurant at the Lord and Taylor's shopping center, an annual barn (white elephant) sale, antique sales with vendors, walking tours of Bronxville and donations from the proceeds of plays by the Eastchester Town Hall Community Players.

By 1967 the schoolhouse was restored to its 1835 appearance. The furnishings, which are all authentic, were found in many places after much searching. The school desks came from Proctorsville, Vt., the cast iron stove from Sudbury, Vt., the schoolmaster's desk and blackboard from Newtown, Conn., and the rest of the furniture was donated by local residents. The first public use of the facility was held in October 1967 as part a walking tour of Bronxville. Over the decades countless meetings and public receptions have been held in this building. Next Christmas, the Historical Society will host its 43rd Annual Victorian Christmas Party.

The guardian angel for the one-room schoolhouse was Madeline Dinger Schaeffer. Madeline Dinger was born in Tuckahoe, was the first girl to receive communion at Immaculate Conception Church, and attended the Main Street School in Tuckahoe, now Village Hall. Madeline wanted to be a teacher but when she went to enroll at Waverly High School (the only high school in town for Eastchester and Tuckahoe) she was told that children from Tuckahoe did not go onto college and that she would be placed in the business program. Madeline enrolled in AB Davis High School in Mount Vernon, went to Columbia Teacher's College, and became an elementary school teacher and librarian in the Tuckahoe schools.

Madeline retired from teaching public school and became a dynamic force at EHS. Madeline is best remembered for being the schoolmistress at the one-room school. Madeline conducted school tours for children all over Westchester County for three decades until she reached the age of 90. Madeline passed away in 2004. Fortunately she left detailed notes and a video of her tours. Sally Radin took over for her.

Today Sheila Marcotte, president of EHS and a member of the Eastchester Town Board, not only conducts tours of the one-room schoolhouse for school groups, scouts, and other private groups but also will come to speak about the building in schools and at other meetings. You may contact Sheila at Marbleschoolhouse@yahoo.com

The next article will be on Eastchester's Grandest Celebration, the 300th Anniversary of the Town.