

The One Room School House and the Start of the Eastchester Historical Society

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The Eastchester Historical Society recently celebrated its 50th anniversary; yet for the most part only older residents of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville are aware of the unbelievable and important work that the people who started the society accomplished. Sometime after the end of the Korean War in the late nineteen fifties 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 were born during the depression and either went off themselves or watched their loved ones go off to World War 2. 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 that heritage.

The first project that the society undertook was to restore, furnish, and add a utility wing to the one room school house at the corner of California and New Rochelle Road. The school house 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 the Eastchester Historical Society in October of 1959. Not only was the building falling down but it smelled of pig remains. The cost of restoring the school house was \$15,000, a staggering sum at that time. Over the next seven years the Society though 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 was able to meet its goal.

By 1967 the schoolhouse was restored to its 1835 appearance. The furnishings which are all authentic were found in many places and after much searching. The school desks came from Proctorsville, Vermont, the cast iron stove from Sudbury Vermont, the schoolmaster's desk and blackboard from Newtown, Connecticut, and the rest of the furniture was donated by local residents. The first public use of the facility was held in October of 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 forty third annual Victorian Christmas party.

For decades Madeline Dinger Schaeffer was the school mom for the society. Madeline was born in the village of Tuckahoe, attended the Main Street School (now Village Hall in Tuckahoe), was the first girl to receive first communion at the Immaculate Conception Church, and after being denied admission to the college preparatory curriculum at Waverly High School, attended AB Davis High School in Mount Vernon. She received her teaching degree from Columbia, and taught elementary school and later was the librarian in the Tuckahoe School System. Upon retirement from public school teaching Madeline conducted countless tours of the one room school for children all over Westchester County. Madeline assumed many roles for the Eastchester Historical Society but she is best remembered by the children of the town for being the school mistress for the one room school house until the age of 90.

In 2004 Madeline passed away and Sally Radin took over her job. Today Sheila Marcotte, President of the Eastchester Historical Society and Town Board member, conducts tours of the one room school house. Both Sally and Sheila use much of the information that Madeline Schaeffer recorded on a videotape before her passing on what school was like in the one room school house..

Elementary school groups, private groups, and scouts can register for tours by e mailing the historical society at Marbleschoolhouse@yahoo.com