



# Historically Speaking

with Eastchester Town Historian  
Richard Forlano

## The Importance of Birthdays

*Eastchester on its 300<sup>th</sup> and 350<sup>th</sup> big days*

Soon after the Eastchester Historical Society (EHS) was founded, leaders in the Town of Eastchester asked the society to spearhead the arduous task of organizing the celebration of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eastchester in 1964. EHS was in the process of converting the old Marble School House on the corner of California and New Rochelle Road into its headquarters. But EHS could not turn down this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to educate the town about Eastchester's rich history.

The longest-lasting legacy of the tri-centennial celebration was the production of a 44-page pamphlet entitled *1664-1964: The Story of a Town*. The book was edited by Robert Creamer, chief editor of *Sports Illustrated* and a lifelong resident of the town. This well-illustrated and meticulously-researched booklet is still the best one-volume history of the town. The pamphlet was paid for by donations from 110 individuals, civic and service organizations, businesses, and corporations. The pamphlet was distributed free to the public.

On the first page of *The Story of a Town* a proclamation was made by the political leaders of the town declaring "1964 to be our Anniversary Year and we call upon all our residents to mark this unusual event with appropriate ceremonies and occasions which shall record our appreciation of our past, our gratitude for our present, and our hopes for a better life for us and our descendants in the years to come."

All original members of the town, Mount Vernon and the upper section of the Bronx and neighboring communities like Pelham were included along with Tuckahoe, Bronxville,

and Eastchester. Groups and organizations of all types helped to plan a wide range of activities to commemorate Eastchester's historical heritage. The pastors, priests, and rabbis of each house of worship were asked to address their congregations to give special attention to this occasion. In a letter that the committee sponsoring the tri-centennial sent to the community about the event, it was stated, "no aspect of the observance could be more appropriate than attention to the religious background which formed the bedrock upon which our forefathers built our Nation under God."

Memorial Day weekend, May 29-31, 1964 was suggested as a time especially fitting to kick off the celebration. Houses of worship placed special emphasis upon the founding of our community. The celebrations consisted of historical exhibits and plays, children's and world's fair day, a costume ball, and a music festival. A tri-centennial film was produced. The high point of the celebration took place from June 29 to July 4. The celebration began with Exhibition

Day at Town Hall followed the next day by a costume ball at the Vernon Hills Country Club, now Lake Isle. On July 1 a music festival took place on the Town Hall lawn. The tri-centennial parade took place on July 4 followed that evening by spectacular fireworks at Parkway Oval.

Much has changed since 1964 but there is much that can be learned from the way the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated. First it is inspiring to look back and see how many segments of the Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville community supported the celebration. Civic and service associations, the clergy, the local government, the schools, the business community, the veterans, and the cultural community took part in the celebration. Many people in the town for the first time learned not only about Eastchester's rich colonial and revolutionary heritage but also about how the town evolved from a sleepy farming community to the diverse suburb of today.

**It is important that the planning for Eastchester's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary start now.** The town of Eastchester needs an updated history. So much new about

Eastchester's history that they did not know about in 1964 has already been discovered. Yet still more needs to be researched and written about. Hopefully the Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville community will rally together as they did in the 1960s and have a celebration to rival the one that the EHS organized in 1964.

We are trampling on so much of our history and don't even know it. Since 1964 so much new has been learned about the history of Eastchester. In addition there are still topics like the ethnic background of the town (Irish, Italian, African American, Jewish, German, etc.) that need further study. Mike Fix presently is working on a massive project recording the history of the veterans who paid the ultimate sacrifice during the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Over the last four and half decades so much new has been learned about the heritage of the town. In five years the town of Eastchester will celebrate its 350<sup>th</sup> birthday. Yet much can be learned from what was done back in 1964 about what the town should and maybe should not do in 2014.

What is needed beyond a shadow of a doubt is an updated and revised history of the town.

### Correcting the Record:

In our Sept. 11 edition, in the "Historically Speaking" column – the restaurant that the Eastchester Historical Society held its fundraisers at was called Schrafft's, not Schwartz's. When Schrafft's closed, it became Alex and Henry's.



A poster describing the activities for the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the town of Eastchester.