

Here Comes the Train *Circa 1850*

By **RICHARD FORLIANO**
Eastchester Town Historian

The single most important event that created the most dynamic and far-reaching impact on the Town of Eastchester was not the devastation created by the American Revolution. It also was not the building of the second cotton mill in America on the banks of the Bronx River nor was it even Alexander Masterton's innovations in the marble industry that would make Tuckahoe Marble a household name. The most important change was the arrival of the New York and Harlem Railroad in 1844.

Why? The need existed for a dependable, year round method of transporting both freight and passengers from Westchester to New York City. Above all, this new railroad had to be reliable, relatively unaffected by weather conditions, inexpensive, and faster than any other method. In 1844, not much more than a decade

after the steam railroad engine had been introduced in the United States, the New York and Harlem Railroad extended its tracks to White Plains. Tuckahoe was the first stop and by 1850 was joined by Underhill Crossings (Bronxville) and First Avenue and Fourth Street in Mount Vernon.

Marble brought the railroad to the town. Some sources believe that the quarry owners and the town raised money to bring the railroad in. In time, spurs ran off the main line directly to the quarries. And then along came Alexander Turney Stewart. Stewart was an extremely successful and wealthy merchant who is said to be the father of the first department store. On Broadway between Chambers and Reade Street he built one of the largest and most elegant stores of his day. The store was known as the Marble Palace, built exclusively from Tuckahoe Marble. He had by now purchased a quarry whose remains are probably just

south of the Leewood tennis courts. He built a spur from the New York and Harlem line and later had a mansion built for himself on Fifth Avenue out of Tuckahoe Marble. His summer mansion was built directly across from the present site of Eastchester High School.

The railroad also brought people, many people. The first census of the colony of New York shows 1,063 people living in Westchester County, a large portion who lived in Eastchester. Almost 140 years later the population remained the same or a little less. But the census of 1850 shows a 50 percent increase in population, many of who were Irish. The first Catholic Mass was held at the Ward House, located at the head of the hill where Winterhill Road (formerly the eastern most extension of Tuckahoe Road) meets White Plains Road. The house had been purchased by James Hall, a local quarry owner, and renamed Marble Hall. The house

served not only as a residence, but as an inn, a stage coach stop, and a post office.

Waverly Square in addition to Depot Square were becoming the two centers of the present town. Both places had their own hotels and inns. Boarding houses sprung up to house the itinerant and semi-skilled quarry workers. The construction of new single-family homes began along with the start of neighborhoods. Houses were built on Highland, Prospect, and Tuckahoe Avenues adjacent to Waverly Square. Farther north houses were built on Orchard Street. Just north of where Eastchester High School stands today a section of boarding houses was built on Water Street near the Stewart quarry.

The marble quarries had brought the train, the train had brought the people, and the town of Eastchester would never be the same.