

YOUR WEEKLY DOSE OF TOWN HISTORY

The First Great Real Estate Boom 1850-1860

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Despite the presence of thriving marble quarries, the Town of Eastchester was primarily composed of farms until 1850. Their products brought good prices and were easily delivered by boat and wagon. In the 1840s, the New York and Harlem Railroad was extended to White Plains, and stops were added first at Tuckahoe and then at places where the Village of Bronxville and the City of Mount Vernon would be located over fifty years later. Farms still existed throughout the town but homes of people employed in other pursuits began to dot the landscape.

The first great real estate boom in the history of the town had begun. John Stevens, a merchant tailor and head of the Industrial Home Association, bought five adjoining farms in southern Eastchester consisting of 365 acres. Stevens' plan was to allow people of sound moral character fleeing the exorbitant rents of New York City to buy affordable homes. By 1853 the newly-formed Village of Mount Vernon consisted of 300 homes, a population of 1370, a hotel, a railroad depot, and a church.

Wealthy businessmen began to build prominent houses and estates on large parcels of land throughout Eastchester. The first great estate was the property of Alexander Masterton, the man who made Tuckahoe marble nationally famous. At one time the estate of Alexander Masterton grew to 100 acres. The Greek revival house that he built at 90 White Plains Road with a foundation of Tuckahoe marble looks much as it did in 1835. In 1850 Francis Edmunds, a financier and artist, had his home built by stonemasons who worked for Alexander Masterton in the Tuckahoe marble quarries in what would later become Bronxville. Commanding views of the tower gave the house its name, Crow's Nest, after the lookout platform on a ship's mast. This well-preserved Gothic revival villa is still standing. The present Crow's Nest Woods neighborhood of Bronxville just behind the Bronxville library evolved around this magnificent house.



Photo/ Maria Bonasia

The house on the Fairview Estate on the corner of Ridge Street and Rose Avenue in Bronxville Manor.

Still standing in Bronxville Manor on the corner of Ridge and Rose is the original house of the Fairview Estate. The land was originally owned by Stephen Ward, the patriot town supervisor during the American Revolution. In 1847 the property was transferred to the Alijah Morgan family. By 1867 the Allerton family acquired the present house. The property included a racetrack for trotters where Tuckahoe High School is today. There was also a tennis court and swimming pool. The last race took place on Thanksgiving, 1895. The barn on the estate burned down the following year and the racetrack closed. The daughter of the famous naturalist, John Muir, lived in the house in the early

twentieth century. The estate was renamed Glen Muir.

Other estates dotted the landscape. Hotels were built in the Town of Eastchester and the villages of Mount Vernon and Tuckahoe. Fledgling neighborhoods started around Waverly Square, Highland, Prospect, and Tuckahoe Avenue, and Orchard Street.

Under Masterton's guidance and with the help of the New York and Harlem Railroad the Eastchester Marble industry was still going strong. Unfortunately the textile mill on the Yonkers side of the Bronx River called the Eastchester Cotton Factory went bankrupt. In 1853 the Hodgman's Rubber Company bought the mill and surrounding 46 acres. For the next sixty years Hogan's Rubber produced knapsacks and rubber cloth for pioneers moving westward, raincoats for Civil War and World War I soldiers, and

ponchos for the general population.

Marble had brought the railroad and the railroad had brought the people. The first great real estate boom in the history of the town had started. Rubber had replaced textiles at the mill. To the farms and forest that dotted the landscape would be added estates, one-family homes, and the start of the first neighborhoods.

Editor's note: The photo of the old cotton mill in Tuckahoe featured in the July 18 edition installment of "Your Weekly Dose of Town History" was taken by Maria Bonasia. We inadvertently failed to credit her snapshot.