

The Untold Story of the Groups That Started Eastchester

An Introduction

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Since the start of 2008 sixty six articles have been published in this column focusing on new information about the history of our community. Words cannot express how gratifying it is when people tell us that these articles are not only read locally but also by former residents who have moved to other sections of the country. At this time it is important to reflect not only on why this column was started but also to point out the possible direction of new articles.

The original goal of this column will not significantly change from what was written in the first article published in this paper in January of 2008; “to foster a sense of community by informing the readers about the people and events that make this community unique...Who were the people and groups who created our collective identity...” This initial goal has only been partially reached. The complete story of the major ethnic and racial groups that came to live here has not been fully explored.

The colonial and revolutionary history of the area known as the township of Eastchester that up to 1892 extended from Scarsdale in the north to Eastchester Road in the Bronx in the south has already been told. **However, the stories of the different ethnic and racial groups and their representative families need to be more thoroughly researched and written about.** This will be a difficult but extremely important task.

Some of this history is already known. The story of the English Puritans and the French Huguenots who started this town starting in 1664 is well known. But Eastchester would be radically changed by the devastation from the American Revolution. It would not be until the advent of the marble industry in Tuckahoe beginning in the 1820’s that the population of the town began to revive. 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. A dependable, year round method of transporting both freight and passengers from Westchester to New York City allowed new groups to come to live and work in this community.

The history of Eastchester becomes incomplete starting with the outbreak of the Civil War. Newly discovered sources in the last decade have uncovered a much more prominent role that Eastchester and Westchester soldiers had in the Civil War. But the story of ethnic and racial groups that made up this community has not been thoroughly researched and written about. That is the untold story.

The history of Eastchester will not be complete until the following stories are investigated and written about. There were numbers of Native Americans living here long after the Indian wars that involved the massacre of Anne Hutchinson. **The full story of the Irish quarry workers who came here after the Irish potato famine and their families has not yet been fully told. Between the Civil War and the outbreak of World War 1 Waverly Square was the center of the town dominated by the Irish while Depot Square in Tuckahoe was the commercial center of the community.**

Starting in the 1890's large number of immigrants fleeing the wretched poverty of Southern Italy arrived in Tuckahoe. At the same time African Americans from Virginia and North Carolina also migrated to Tuckahoe and some were employed as domestics in the newly built estates in Lawrence Park in Bronxville. The largest immigrant group in the United States was German and the scope and nature of the German population in the town that needs to be researched and told. In 1936 60 Jewish families lived within three miles of Tuckahoe and that year twenty of those families formed the Genesis Hebrew Society. In May of 1945 at the end of World War 2 the War Production Board gave permission of the building of the first post-war synagogue in the United States in the Crestwood section of Tuckahoe. A significant number of Jewish families moved from New York City to this community and the size of the congregation grew.

Since 1930 the populations of the villages of Bronxville and Tuckahoe have remained virtually the same while the population of the town outside of Eastchester has more than tripled. Other ethnic and racial groups have come to live in the town. To fully understand the nature of our community the cultural heritage of these groups must be studied and elaborated upon.

The task ahead of understanding our ethnic roots is very exciting but not an easy one; census records must be studied, genealogical research must be done, representative families need to be interviewed. Sociological, anthropological, and historical works must be analyzed. This work cannot be done by one person but a team of people must be involved.

In 2014 the town of Eastchester will celebrate its 350th anniversary. That celebration cannot be complete without a more in depth understanding of the groups that settled this town.

In the next set of articles some tentative findings about the largest groups that came to live in this town will be described. In these articles topics that need to be explored will be noted. Every effort will be made to make generalizations based on solid historical sources. Great care will be made to avoid stereotypes of any kind.