

# YOUR WEEKLY DOSE OF TOWN HISTORY

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Across the street from Depot Square in Tuckahoe on the Yonkers side of the Bronx River stands the second oldest surviving cotton mill in America. How the mill got there and why it is so important is the subject of this article.

At the start of the nineteenth century the tiny village of Tuckahoe would transform the town of Eastchester from a sleepy rural and agricultural hamlet into a place known for its manufacturing and later fine quality marble. During the first decade of the century one of the first cotton mills was built along the banks of the Bronx River. Tuckahoe was responsible for Eastchester becoming one of the first communities in America outside of New England to welcome in the industrial age.

At the outbreak of the American Revolution Great Britain was the first nation to have gone through another revolution, the industrial revolution. England dominated the world's trade with its monopoly on cheap but high quality textiles. In 1789 Samuel Slater, an English immigrant to Rhode Island, smuggled the plans for building a textile mill to Rhode Island and built the first American factory at Pawtucket. Not only had America defeated England in the American Revolution but had now stolen its most valuable possession.

When in 1808 Thomas Jefferson imposed an embargo on all foreign trade, a demand for American-made textiles emerged. Historians believe that a wooden structure similar to the first textile mill built by Samuel Slater in Pawtucket, Rhode Island was built in 1808. Its

location was on the banks of the Bronx River on a 76-acre farm owned by Elizabeth Burpo. It is believed that this original mill burned to the ground. When the British naval blockade during the war of 1812 brought imports of English textiles to a standstill, the demand for domestic American textiles intensified. In 1814 the cornerstone for the present mill was built.

By 1820 the mill employed sixteen men, thirty six woman, and fifty children. Lakeville, the oldest neighborhood in Tuckahoe, probably owes its existence to the mill. Records show that the cotton mill run by the Eastchester Manufacturing Company and the descendants of Elizabeth Burpo was not an overwhelming success. Competition from larger mills like the Lowell mills in Massachusetts and the revival of trade with Great Britain proved overwhelming. But for the first time men, women, children and some men both in Crestwood, Colonial Heights, Tuckahoe, and Eastchester spent time and received wages in the manufacturing of textiles. The mill, despite forfeitures and bankruptcy, continued to operate as late as 1849 when the Eastchester Manufacturing Company was renamed the Tuckahoe Cotton Factory. In the first decade of the nineteenth century the industrial revolution had begun in the sleepy village of Tuckahoe.

Why almost two hundred years after the erection of the first mill were secrets behind the old mill revealed? The answer to that question is simple. A student in my seventh grade Social Studies class at Eastchester Middle School, Keiji Ishiguri, became intrigued about the missing history behind the old mill.



**The second oldest cotton mill in America that was known as first the Eastchester manufacturing company and then the Tuckahoe cotton factory.**

His maternal grand mother had worked at the Lowell mills and he had a burning desire to learn more about the old mill. In the summer of 2001 he spent countless hours at the Eastchester Historical Society, Library of the Westchester County Historical Society, Westchester County Archives in Elmsford, Westchester County Land Records in White Plains, the Old Records Division Surrogate Court and the City Municipal Archives of New York City doing meticulous research. In 2002 he submitted a paper entitled "Secrets behind the Stone: The History of Tuckahoe's Old Stone Mill, Revealed!" to the New York State Archives for their annual competition open to all students in New York State. He won the top prize and a cash award. In the winter of 2003 his paper was published in the historical journal of the *Westchester Historian*.