

Conquering the Wilderness

1664- 1682

Article # 4 on the Founding of Eastchester

By

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Every school child learns about the obstacles that the first English colonists faced at Jamestown and Plymouth. Students should be equally fascinated by the dangers on the Oregon Trail that American pioneers faced as they scaled the Rockies in their wagon trains traveling. While no one in the town of Eastchester's first decade either died of disease or were killed by Indians, the families that first settled the town in 1664 faced daunting threats and challenges.

First was the possibility of attack by Native Americans. The first settlers had to be aware of the horrific Indian war that decimated the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam two decades before. In the very first article of the Eastchester Covenant the location of the land where Anne Hutchinson and her family were massacred is mentioned.¹

Eleven years after the founding of Eastchester in the summer of 1674, an Indian uprising known as King Phillip's war, broke out in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Plymouth colonies. This war had the largest number of deaths in regard to total population of any war in American history. This war was twice as bloody as the American Civil War and at least 7 times more lethal than the American Revolution.² There was no guarantee that the fighting would not spread to New York or that the Indian's living in the Eastchester vicinity would not massacre the settlers without warning.³ Eastchester Town Records show that starting in the summer of 1675 two men would stand should stand night watch and in a fort be built for the protection of the town.⁴

The threat of attack by wild animals posed a more real hazard. Rattlesnakes, wolves, bears, and panthers posed real danger. The Eastchester Covenant stated that one day every spring shall be chosen for the destroying of rattlesnakes.⁵ The actual killing of rattlesnakes was done by domesticated hogs whose layers of fat prevented the poisonous bites from infecting them as they eat the snakes. Wolfes were common place. Wolf pits and monetary bounties for their skins were two of the methods used to eliminate these predators.⁶

The most important priority was how to first survive in the wilderness and then eventually prosper without sacrificing those religious and sacred moral principles that first brought the Puritans to the wild shores of America. The very year that the Covenant was signed, 1665, land was given to a blacksmith, John Embry.⁷ No saw mill existed in Eastchester until 1794/1795 but by 1670 one did exist on the Bronx River down by present day 182nd Street in the Bronx.⁸ That same year a grist mill to ground wheat or corn into flour was built by Moses Jackson.⁹

No one was allowed to live in a makeshift shelter. The Eastchester Covenant stated that "every man shall build and live in his home lot before the next winter." To make sure that only the proper sort of people moved into their settlement the Covenant set up a restriction that after living on a lot for over year, the owner could not sell it to a man whom the town did not approve.¹⁰ By the end of the century the town had in addition to having blacksmiths and millers had a tailor and tanner/ shoemaker.¹¹

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The settlers used its two rivers, the Hutchinson and the Bronx, not simply for milling but also as a way to get their crops and livestock to the nearby markets in New York City. By 1676 there were 135 head of cattle, 61 pigs, and 37 oxen.¹² That very same year a dock was built on the Hutchinson River. The Indians had used their canoes on the rivers for travel and fishing. But the larger vessels of the colonists required landings to ship and receive goods, especially to and from nearby New York City.¹³

By the time the last male head of a household signed the Eastchester Covenant in 1682 Eastchester had not only survived but had begun to prosper. Many of the people who came to Eastchester were unhappy with their financial situation. With abundant land, proximity to markets in New York City, and a supportive town government, new opportunities were presenting themselves. But the original people who settled Eastchester were also concerned with the spiritual conditions of their lives.

In the next article the story of how the founders attempted to insure that their religious heritage be preserved.

Please contact us at historian@eastchesterhistoricalsociety.org about any comments or questions you might have about this column. Also any questions about sources of information will be addressed.

Many thanks to Regina Baio for her extensive research, documentation, and written analysis from which much of the material in this article is taken. Regina Baio is the author of "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-2014)* might have about this column.

¹ Article 1 of the Eastchester Covenant reads, "Imprimus that we by the grace fo God sitt down on the track of land lieng betwixt Hucheessons broock whar the house was untell it com unto the river that runeth in at the head of the meados___"

² Nathaniel Philbrick *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (New York: Viking Press, 2006) xv.

³ Lloyd Ulton *The Bronx in the Frontier Era* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1993) 51-64; Regina Baio "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-1214)* 70

⁴ Regina Baio "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-1214)* 70

⁵ Article # 22 of the Eastchester Covenant reads, "That one day every Spring be improved for the destroring of rattellsnackes----"

⁶ Regina Baio "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-1214)* 65; *Eastchester Town Records* Book 1, 12 and 36; Book 2, 36.

⁷ Regina Baio "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-1214)* 60; *Eastchester Town Records* Book 1, 10;

⁸ Regina Baio "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-1214)* 61; Lloyd Ulton *The Bronx in the Frontier Era* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1993) 138.

⁹ Regina Baio "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-1214)* 60.

¹⁰ Articles 9 and 10 of the Eastchester Covenant

¹¹ Regina Baio "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-1214)* 60 and 61.

¹² Regina Baio, "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville, NY, 1664-2014* (Eastchester 350th Anniversary, Inc. 2014, 64.

¹³ Lissa Halen, "A Tale of Two Rivers" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville, NY, 1664-2014* (Eastchester 350th Anniversary, Inc. 2014, 255.