

East Meadow resident pens town's first history book

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Writing a history book may seem like a dreadful task for many, but not for Scott Eckers, a life-long resident of East Meadow whose love of history inspired him to pen “East Meadow,” the town’s first history book published on Oct. 17.

As a social studies teacher in Syosset, Eckers said he became interested in local history early in life, always collecting historical post cards from the Sullivan County and Catskills area where his family’s vacation house was located. In 2010, he worked with local historians and the community to establish the Swan Lake Historical Pavilion in the Borscht Belt of the Catskill Mountains.

Eckers said while perusing a Barnes and Noble last November, he came across Arcadia Publishing’s “Images of America” series, a collection that chronicles small towns and neighborhoods throughout America. After confirming there was no East Meadow version, Eckers said he took it upon himself to contact the publisher and began the process of writing his first book about East Meadow.

He said the hardest part was not writing or finding the time to write, but locating the 200-plus pictures the publisher requires of the books in this series. He read old newspaper clippings from the East Meadow library, consulted a brief history of the town compiled by the wife of W. Tresper Clarke in 1950, and read through hundreds of newspaper articles from the town and

county archives. He even turned to social media, which surprisingly ended up being the most helpful.

After posting on Facebook about needing original pictures of East Meadow's past, Eckers said he received a number of responses that put him in contact with long-standing East Meadow families. Eckers then collected images and personal history stories from the families. His research even put him in contact with a woman from Florida who mailed him pictures of her family in East Meadow from almost 100 years ago.

He was surprised to learn about the airplane firsts and gilded-aged mansions that once transpired in the town, and the original families who helped developed the area such as the Carmen family, the Vanderbilts and even the Roosevelts.

Eckers researched and wrote the book in only six months, edited it over the summer, and had the finished product by October. He wrote after work, during the holidays, and on vacation, while simultaneously working on his doctoral dissertation. He ended up writing too much for the book and had to cut out about half of each topic.

"East Meadow" focuses on the mid 1800s-1900s and tells the history of the town in over 230 photographs and personal stories. Rather than taking the reader through the historical journey of East Meadow by using words, Eckers decided to use mostly pictures as "a photographic history" of the town.

He said the main reason for writing this book was to get people interested in local history.

"I'm a teacher and on the school board and heavily involved with education, so I'd like it to be something that students could connect to as well," Eckers said.