

# TUXEDO PARK

## Lives, Legacies, Legends

Tuxedo Park, one of America's first planned communities, was for decades synonymous with upper-class living. An exclusive gentleman's club founded here in 1886 had among its early members the Vanderbilts, Astors, and Morgans. The tuxedo jacket had its debut in America in this Hudson Valley enclave. Well known for the period houses that were designed by the most renowned architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is a historical community deemed worthy of preservation by the National Register of Historic Places. But more importantly, Tuxedo was home to generations of immigrants – both rich and poor – whose deeds shaped America's culture, society, and economy at the turn of the 20th century.

Indeed, it was the extraordinary legacies of these early residents that earned Tuxedo approbation in history. Women's rights in America were first asserted here by courageous pioneers such as Cora Urquhart, Maude Lorillard, Eloise Breese, Susan Tuckerman, and Adele Colgate; proper manners were encoded by Emily Post; and the look of a century was defined by Dorothy Draper. It was here that a farm boy, whose father worked as an undertaker, founded Orange & Rockland Utilities, while two well-born men came to financial ruin by pursuing a lifestyle of Gilded Age excess. It was a Tuxedo resident who funded Thomas Edison's inventions, and another who donated antique furniture that formed the cornerstone of the American Wing collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It has been said that the 1929 stock market crash was caused by a Tuxedo man, but it was also Tuxedo's philanthropists who built institutions of lasting significance both locally and nationally – from George F. Baker High School, Tuxedo Park Fire Department, and Tuxedo Park Library to Harvard Business School, the artists' retreat Yaddo, The Juilliard School, Dartmouth Library, and more. It was here that radar and the atomic bomb that helped end World War II were first conceived.

The founding story of Tuxedo Park is equally illuminating of the culture and society of the time. The community began when Pierre Lorillard IV, a fourth-generation immigrant, whose Huguenot ancestors came to America in 1760, became disenchanted with horse racing – the passion of his life. For five years beginning in 1885, the development of Tuxedo Park provided the tobacco millionaire with a diversion, before he lost interest and returned to his beloved equestrian pursuits. But one man's passing fancy offered others career opportunities of a lifetime.

It was in Tuxedo that the architect Bruce Price, a third-generation immigrant from Wales and the father of Emily Post, designed shingle houses that became the defining indigenous architectural form. But Price's artistry would have been diminished had it not been complemented by the romantic landscape crafted by engineer Ernest Bowditch. The picturesque works of both men in Tuxedo would be eclipsed by the large, European-inspired mansions built in the first three decades of the 20th century, which paid less heed to harmonizing structure with nature. The houses standing today bear witness to this change in architectural preference that took place across America.

The visions of the early generations of homeowners and the architects who worked for them – however luxurious or avant-garde – would not have been realized without the skilled labor of the thousands of Italians and Slavs, who came to Tuxedo between the 1880s and 1910s. These new immigrants – the Damatos, Mellilos, Modders, Mottolas, Venezias, and others – planted in this Orange County, New York community the seeds of their fruitful American dreams, despite the prevalence of ethnic discrimination during the 1920s. Many of them would fight as American soldiers side by side with their wealthy employers during both World Wars.

Illustrated by some 150 historical images and covering the period from 1885 to 1940, *Tuxedo Park: Lives, Legacies, Legends* introduces the reader to a group of very special Tuxedo men and women. Their lives were both fascinating and inspirational, and their legacies resonate on the national stage as well as shape the character of the local community today.

Chiu Yin Hempel is a publisher who has worked for Macmillan, Pearson, and The Economist Group. She is the coeditor of *Tuxedo Park: The Historic Houses*, which was selected by *HouseBeautiful* as one of the magazine's ten favorite books in 2007. It also won in 2008 an Excellence Award from the Greater Hudson Heritage Network. Chiu Yin has lived in Tuxedo Park since 1992.

*"The author has captured the essence of many of the old family stories of Tuxedo Park. A fun read."*

Christian R. Sonne, Historian, Town of Tuxedo.

Titles of related interest (available from Tuxedo Historical Society):

*Tuxedo Park: The Historic Houses*

Christian R. Sonne and Chiu Yin Hempel

*The World With a Fence Around It*

George Rushmore