

TEANECK'S MOST PROGRESSIVE 12 YEARS



★ A SUCCESS STORY TO MAKE AND KEEP TEANECK THE IDEAL COMMUNITY ★

★ TEANECK'S MOST PROGRESSIVE TWELVE YEARS ★



"The success of democracy in the
National and State Governments vi-
tally depends upon honest and efficient
democratic local governments."

—Walter S. Jessurun



★ Chapter 1 ★

THE GENESIS

IN 1929, after nine years of increasingly inefficient and costly administration, the local government of the Township of Teaneck finally reached a crisis. In that year the Township reached its liberal debt limit and in 1930 exceeded it by approximately \$1,500,000.00.

In 1929 the Township's gross debt was well over \$6,000,000.00 and the annual interest on it more than \$300,000.00. In fact, the amount appropriated in the annual budget for debt service was more than half the total to be raised by taxation for Township purposes.

The per capita net debt of the Township — that is, the gross debt less the amount of cash on hand available for debt payment — increased from \$237.00 in 1922 to \$480.00 per capita in 1928, or a trifle over 100% in six years.

In the nine years from 1920 to 1929 the annual budget increased 1560 per cent; the per capita cost for the Township's government increased from \$9.10 in 1920 to \$43.30 in 1929, or nearly 400 per cent. The tax rate increased from \$4.29 in 1920 to \$5.97 in 1929, or \$1.68 on each \$100.00 of assessed valuation.

The cost assessed on abutting property for street improvements had risen as high as \$20.00 per front foot. In 1928 the Township paid for engineering fees a total of \$50,000.00. In 1929 it paid for attorney's fees \$10,650.00 and for auditor's fees \$10,040.00.

Prior to 1930, Teaneck's government consisted of a Township Committee under partisan or bi-

partisan control. The people of Teaneck had tried both Republican rule and Democratic rule but saw no improvement in their local government under either party.

In the year 1929, the people of Teaneck awoke to the principle set forth in the Declaration of Independence that whenever any form of government becomes destructive, it is the right of the people to alter it and to institute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

It was in protest against the conditions already recited that Teaneck Taxpayers League was organized in 1929 under the leadership of Capt. John J. Wilkins, a retired U. S. Army officer.

The League's Principles

The only declared object of the citizens who organized Teaneck Taxpayers League was to "secure and maintain a non-partisan, efficient municipal government". To that end they adopted the following thirteen principles:

1. Home Rule;
2. Non-partisan government;
3. Businesslike administration by the employment of a city manager;
4. Reduction of taxes by efficient, progressive and economical government;
5. Employment of qualified, disinterested and efficient public servants;

6. All Township business to be conducted in public, and all Township records to be open for inspection by taxpayers;
7. Detailed financial statements of the Township to be made semi-annually and immediately published in local papers;
8. Public credit not to be mortgaged for private speculation and advantage;
9. Comprehensive planning and execution of public improvements in general interest without extravagance;
10. Streets, sewers and water mains not to be

built without financial protection to the general taxpayers;

11. Zoning ordinances for the protection of the individual home owner;
12. Adequate fire and police protection;
13. Civil service system for subordinate employees.

The avowed object and the principles of Teaneck Taxpayers League were set forth in an application for membership in the form of a pledge which every member of the League was required to sign. The signed pledge-application of each member was filed with the secretary of the League.

★ Chapter 2 ★

THE FIRST CAMPAIGNS

IN THE SPRING of 1930 Teaneck Taxpayers League began its active campaign for the adoption by referendum vote of the New Jersey Municipal Manager Act. An intensive educational program was conducted through the public press and by circular. At the same time a canvass was made to secure the required number of signatures to a petition calling for a referendum election. All sections of the Township were systematically and thoroughly canvassed from house to house during these combined campaigns.

The petition was filed with the Township Clerk on Monday, August 25, 1930. It contained four times the number of signatures required to call the referendum election, which was held, as provided in the Act, on the fourth following Tuesday, namely on Tuesday, September 16th. The League used as its campaign slogan:

"Government is only valuable insofar as it is beneficial to the people. By our united and untiring efforts and with the spirit of sacrifice to the ideals of good government, we will make more valuable our government."

The campaign of only four weeks, following the filing of the petition, was furiously carried on by both the League, as sponsors of the new plan of government, and the political, partisan opponents of this non-partisan form of government, opposing its adoption.

The League did not have among its members a single person then active in partisan politics. Its members were almost exclusively professional and business men and women.

Nearly all leaders of both political parties united in desperate efforts to defeat the adoption. The Teaneck Republican Association

passed resolutions opposing it, and charged in a circular distributed throughout the Township that Teaneck Taxpayers League was a "radical and obstructive organization." They resorted to every political trick. Misrepresentations, threats, whispering campaigns of vilification



"... whispering campaigns of vilification were used."

and appeals to prejudices were all used in their efforts to defeat adoption of a law that would take Teaneck's government out of the grasp of party politicians.

These opponents of the plan contended that government was good or bad only according to the men elected to the governing body; that the form of government was not important.

On the evening of September 10, 1930, these issues were debated at a general-mass meeting in Teaneck High School Auditorium, which was filled to capacity. That the speakers in favor of the adoption, all members of Teaneck Taxpayers League, had won the debate, became evident six days later when the referendum proposal received a majority of fifty votes — 2,279 votes for its adoption to 2,229 against.

First Council Elected

The election of the first Council under the Municipal Manager Act was held, as required by the Act, on the fourth Tuesday following the referendum election, namely October 14, 1930. Teaneck Taxpayers League endorsed five non-partisan candidates, pledged to the principles of the League and to the faithful conduct of the government in accordance with the letter and

spirit of the Municipal Manager Act. Five other candidates who called themselves "The Minute Men" were supported by the local Republican organization. Two others were supported by the local Democratic organization, and there were several additional candidates who had no organized support.

All told there were nineteen candidates. All five of the Teaneck Taxpayers League candidates were elected. The public press in reporting the results of the election said:

"When the smoke of the political battle fought in Teaneck for the past few weeks to rid the community of the tentacles of partisan politics had finally cleared early this morning, the five candidates sponsored by the Teaneck Taxpayers League to insure the success of the municipal management plan, emerged victorious by a large majority. The voters of the community struck a telling blow in the crusade to clean up Bergen County politics by rolling up the biggest vote in the history of Teaneck."

To celebrate the League's success in its first great fight, which was only a mild prelude to the long series of hard fought battles to come, a victory dinner was held on the evening of November 11th, 1930, at the Swiss Chalet — first of the League's annual dinners, which are always held on or about November 11th.

★ Chapter 3 ★

TEANECK'S FIRST NON-PARTISAN COUNCIL

THE first Council elected under the Municipal Manager Act took office at noon on Armistice Day, November 11th, 1930. They had a herculean task ahead of them. Their opponents, bitter over their defeat in the referendum election and again in the election for Councilmen, were determined that this new and inex-

perienced government should fail. The new government was more determined that it should succeed.

The first and most important task of the new Township Council, after organizing, was to complete the formation of the governing body by the selection and appointment of a Township

Manager. Under the Municipal Manager Act the governing body of the Township is composed of the Council and Manager, who is the chief executive of the municipality.

The new Council on the day they took office appointed Mr. Paul A. Volcker as Township Manager. Mr. Volcker is by profession a civil engineer, and had five very successful years as City Manager of Cape May before coming to Teaneck. Prior to that five years he had had fifteen years of experience in public service in New York and in Pennsylvania. The officials of the National Municipal League consider him one of the outstanding municipal managers in the nation. His work in Teaneck has attracted nation-wide attention.

Official State Auditor

The new Council's next important step was to select as Township auditor the Department of Municipal Accounts of the State of New Jersey, and for the first time Teaneck had an independent, non-political auditor. The Township accounts were in such a muddled condition that it took the state auditors almost a year to complete the audit for 1930. They had to go back through various Township and County records to the year 1917 before they could strike a balance.

In making a report of that first audit, the Department of Municipal Accounts said the financial records of the Township's transactions had been found totally inadequate; that some accounts were not complete and others entirely lacking; that it had been impossible to tell at any time the exact financial position of the Township; that expenditures had been made without appropriations; that the accounts did not balance, and that the tax title lien records amounted to just so many sheets of paper.

Under the direction of the Department of Municipal Accounts the new Township officials

installed new records and a new accounting system. They had to set up a complete new set of books to keep the records of tax title liens. Ever since, the books of the Township have been kept in excellent condition, and it is now possible to tell at any time the Township's exact financial position.

The second important task of the now completely organized new government was the preparation of the budget for the year 1931. Under the law, it is the duty of the Township Manager to prepare a tentative annual budget for submission to the Township Council. For the first time in the history of Teaneck, the proposed 1931 budget was prepared in detail with full explanatory remarks, and printed copies were distributed to every home in Teaneck before adoption of the budget by the Township Council.

Every year since then, the taxpayers of Teaneck have had copies of the proposed annual budget laid at their doorsteps in time to study it before its adoption by the Council. The proposed budget sets forth in detail the amounts it is proposed to appropriate for each department of the government for the coming year, and for comparison the amount appropriated the past year for that department. Thus, taxpayers can see at a glance what changes are made in appropriations. No other local government in New Jersey gives to its taxpayers such service.

Copies of the Teaneck Township Manager's proposed budget are on file in the libraries of Princeton, Chicago, Wisconsin, Harvard, Michigan and many other universities, also in many public libraries.

Post Audit Every Year

For the first time the citizens of Teaneck were given a complete check on their government. Since 1930, not only has each year's budget shown the various amounts appropriated for each department of the government, but also an

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independent post audit has shown how those appropriations were expended.

Every business man will appreciate the need of an independent post audit. Every corporation has an independent post audit for the protection of its stockholders. The laws of every state in the union and of the nation provide for an independent state audit of all banks, insurance com-

panies and other financial institutions for the protection of the depositors. But New Jersey does not provide by law for such protection to the people with regard to the finances of their local municipal governments. Thus Teaneck has voluntarily provided all the protection it could for its taxpayers.



"... Teaneck provided all the protection it could for its taxpayers."

Despite mandatory increases in various items aggregating more than \$40,000.00, the 1931 budget showed a net reduction in the total amount to be raised by taxation of more than \$83,000.00 below the 1930 budget. The 1931 tax rate was 62 points below the 1930 rate—a drop from \$6.08 in 1930 to \$5.46 in 1931. This reduction amounted to \$5.00 per capita.

In 1931 Teaneck's statutory net debt was reduced by \$720,000.00, and the net debt percentage was reduced from 9.059 to 4.85. Teaneck was now again within the statutory debt limit of 7%.

The unjust burden of taxation imposed upon Teaneck home-owners up to 1930 was due not only to extravagance and waste in conducting the government and the profligate expansion of street improvements, of which ten per cent of the total cost was charged to general taxation, but also to

gross inequity in the valuations of property for tax purposes. The assessed valuations of income-earning business properties and of large unimproved tracts held by speculators were kept so low that the heavy end of the total tax burden rested on the backs of the home-owners.

Members of the first Township Council elected under the Municipal Manager Act were aware of this condition. They immediately sought relief for the home-owners, first by trying to induce the three members of the hold-over Board of Assessors, temporarily continued in office, to revise their valuations in line with fairness and equity. It soon became apparent that these men did not see eye to eye with the Council, and were not willing to undo the political service they had rendered their former masters, who wanted the assessed valuations to favor their political friends rather than the home-owners.

The Council untied this Gordian knot by terminating the existence of a Board of Assessors and appointing instead a single Assessor. He agreed that justice demanded a general equalization of assessed values and was willing to undertake the job. He found large unimproved tracts entirely surrounded by private homes, but still rated as farm acreages and assessed at farm land values; also business streets that were building up steadily, but where the front foot assessed values had not been raised for years.

Increases Upheld

Chiefly by increasing valuations on these two classes of property to a fair level, a total of about \$1,900,000.00 was added to the Township's ratables. This gave some measure of relief to the home-owners and eventually helped bring the Township's debt percentage down within the limit set by law.

Hundreds of property owners appealed from the increases, formed an organization and en-

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gaged legal counsel to represent them, but in 85 per cent of the appeals the Township's new valuations were sustained by the County Board of Taxation first, and later by the State Board of Taxation. In most of the remaining appeals the reductions granted were less than the original increases.

Since that first general equalization was made effective, much has been done to perfect it and to improve assessment methods in Teaneck. The Township Assessor for the last few years has kept up to date in his office a detailed card record for each improved property, showing the general type of structure and cubic content of each building, also other details of construction that affect cost and value. These records are open to the public, and from them any taxpayer can find out how the valuation placed on his home compares with that of others. If it appears that an adjustment is in order, an adjustment is made.

It is accepted as a fundamental principle of municipal economics that the assessment of property for tax purposes is the foundation of a municipality's entire financial structure. In Teaneck, up to 1930, that foundation was thoroughly unsound, and the home-owners were the sufferers. Under the non-partisan, businesslike municipal manager government in effect since 1930, property assessment has been established and maintained on a basis fair to all.

"Town Manager" Published

Notwithstanding these important improvements in the Township's financial structure, its political opponents kept up a determined and vicious attack against the new government in the hope of eventually undermining and overthrowing the municipal manager plan in Teaneck. They filled the Council Chamber to capacity at every Council meeting, heckling and abusing the Councilmen and creating such a noisy disturbance that

it was almost impossible at times for the Council to conduct the Township's business.

However, Teaneck Taxpayers League brought to the government the staunch support of Teaneck's civic-minded citizens. In order to defend the government against the vicious attacks of partisan politicians and to keep the people informed, the League published monthly a paper named the *"Town Manager"*, containing a complete review of the activities of the government for the month. This paper was distributed free of charge to every home in Teaneck.

The work involved in its publication and distribution was tremendous, but all the work was done by members of the League free of charge. They also raised funds to defray all printing costs. Their unselfish and loyal support of the principles of the League was simply splendid.

In 1932 the tax rate dropped another 40 points to \$5.06, and the statutory net debt was further reduced by \$200,000.00. The net debt percentage was now down to 3.7%.

In 1932 Mr. Ben Howe, chairman of New York City's famous Committee of One Thousand, with a group of professors from Dana College, made an investigation of the Township's new government. They highly complimented the government and Teaneck Taxpayers League for the remarkable accomplishments achieved during the first year of the new government.

In 1932 the Director of the Governmental Research Department of the New Jersey Taxpayers



... Teaneck got out from under a heavy burden of debt.

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Association also made an investigation of the Public Works Department of Teaneck, and reported that it was being conducted economically and efficiently.

In 1932 also the outstanding success of Teaneck's municipal manager government was first accorded national recognition and approbation, when an article appeared in the National Municipal Review telling what the new government had accomplished during its first year in office. Since then the same magazine has carried two more articles on Teaneck's government.

Stories highly commending Teaneck's government have also appeared in the "American City", "Harper's Magazine" and many newspapers in various parts of the United States. On October 19, 1941, the Sunday magazine section of the "Philadelphia Inquirer" contained an article praising the government of Teaneck for its progressiveness and efficiency.

This early success of the new form of non-partisan government greatly alarmed both the local and the county party politicians. As early as the latter part of 1931, partisan political leaders of Bergen County in public speeches began to condemn local taxpayers associations and non-partisan local government as a threat to the two-party system in the county. One of them expressed his disapproval of the non-partisan influence by warning his audience to "leave the new ideas alone, because they might destroy the parties".

An editorial which appeared on November 23, 1931, in a daily newspaper published in Bergen County said:

"Freeholder, County Republican campaign manager in the recent election, does not like taxpayers' associations and their growing influence as a determining factor in county politics. He sees in such groups a distinct menace to the

two-party system of governmental control, and has urged Republican organization workers to vigorously combat the movement."

Political leaders of both parties mistakenly believed that the ideals of Teaneck Taxpayers League represented only a temporary reform wave which had already spent itself, and decided that the infant non-partisan government, born of this reform stimulant, could and must be kidnapped before it grew up and became too strong. So, in the summer of 1932, local party leaders, with the backing of county party leaders, began circulating petitions for a recall election to oust all five Councilmen. Many signatures of good civic-minded citizens were secured, through misrepresentations and false arguments by politicians, and in September, 1932, the petitions for a recall election were filed with the Township Clerk.

The Clerk refused to call the election, holding that the grounds for removal of the Councilmen set forth in the recall petitions were not sufficient under the law. Leaders of the recall movement applied to the Supreme Court for a writ of mandamus to compel the Clerk to call the election, and in June, 1933, the Court ordered that the election be held. The recall election accordingly took place on August 8, 1933. Advocates of the recall tried to create a scare by asking the County Prosecutor to investigate the handling of Teaneck Township insurance. The prosecutor investigated but found no wrong-doing.

Teaneck Taxpayers League came to the support of the Councilmen. In 1933 the tax rate had dropped another 42 points to \$4.64 — 144 points below the 1930 rate. Comparing their tax bills for the last three years the people, led by Teaneck Taxpayers League, defeated this attempt by desperate politicians to destroy the new government, and voted against the recall of the Councilmen by a majority of 2 to 1.

★ Chapter 4 ★

"IN THE FULL TIDE OF SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT"

—Thomas Jefferson, *First Inaugural*, March 4, 1801.

AT THE Township election in May, 1934, there were sixteen candidates for the Township Council. The Teaneck Taxpayers League won an easy victory and elected all five of its candidates. But following this election, the League was torn with a violent internal convulsion, which culminated at the meeting of the League body held on July 11, 1934. At this meeting the League disbanded its executive committee for attempting to meddle in the affairs of the Township Government.

It is a steadfast rule of the League that it is not to interfere in the conduct of the government. The League may commend and give support to the government, or it may criticise and condemn; but it does not meddle or undertake to exercise control.

The fight in the League involved a split in the Council, and two members of the Council deserted the League at that time.

The most important act of the Council elected in May, 1934, was adoption of an ordinance providing for refunding all the Township's then outstanding debts. During the previous four years the gross debt had been reduced by \$1,600,000.00 and nearly \$500,000.00 of bonds had been bought by the Township in advance of their maturities, effecting a saving of more than \$45,000.00 in principal and interest. Yet the Township had to arrange to pay about \$1,500,000.00 still outstanding of the bonds maturing in 1934; about \$500,000.00 more in 1935, and nearly \$500,000.00 more in 1936.

Little then remained in the trust account, which had been largely used to buy bonds in advance of maturity, and it was certain that such

great sums could not be paid out of the current tax collections of those years.

To avert the catastrophe of default and bankruptcy, which threatened only because improvident governing bodies prior to 1930 had issued short-term assessment bonds right and left without considering when or how they would be paid, the Council provided for a refinancing of all of the township's debts, bonded or otherwise, by a \$3,000,000.00 issue of general refunding bonds.

This entire refunding program was planned and successfully carried out by Township Manager Volcker, with only negligible expense to the Township. If it had been handled by a bond house, the cost to the Township would have been at least \$50,000.00 in commissions, and additional hundreds of thousands of dollars over a period of years in higher interest rates.

The ordinance authorizing this refunding operation was passed in Council with the votes of its three members still loyal to Teaneck Taxpayers League. Against it were recorded the votes of the two Councilmen who had deserted the League and its principles.

The average interest rate of the debts refunded was .054. The refunding ordinance authorized no rate higher than .05. Only enough of the refunding bonds were issued in any year to retire bonds maturing that year and for which funds were not otherwise available. Year by year, when bonds were advertised for sale, bids were received at lower and lower interest rates, and finally the last block of \$180,000.00 of these bonds was sold at an interest rate of .03.

Two methods were used to retire the old outstanding bonds: (1) Give newly issued refund-

ing bonds in exchange, where holders of the old bonds would accept them; (2) Sell refunding bonds on competitive bids and from the proceeds pay for the maturing bonds in cash.

In order to make this refunding plan successful, the Township had to convince prospective purchasers of the refunding bonds that it would be able to pay both interest and principal of the new obligations as they fell due. Financial institutions that deal in municipal bonds required knowledge of Teaneck's credit risk, both for themselves and for their investing clients, before accepting or recommending any acceptance of the new bond issue; so they engaged Dr. Thomas H. Reed, an expert on municipal government and municipal finance, to make a survey of both the government of Teaneck and the Township's financial standing.

Full Value for Tax Dollar

Dr. Reed, formerly City Manager of a California city, was at one time professor of government at the University of Michigan, and is the author of various standard books on municipal government.

On August 1st, 1935, Dr. Reed transmitted to the bonding houses that employed him a sixteen-page report. On Teaneck's finances he said:

"In the early part of our report we pointed out the financial difficulties which Teaneck has had to face in the past few years, and which will continue to be a handicap to the township's credit until the refunding operations have been completed. We wish now to express our firm conviction that when the refunding operations have been completed, there will be no municipality of similar size which should, either because of good management or ability to pay, enjoy a better credit standing than Teaneck."

Concerning the Township government, the report said:

"Teaneck adopted the manager plan of government in 1930, and under the able administration

of Paul A. Volcker the township has attained a high reputation for economy and efficiency.

"It may be safely said that the people of Teaneck get the full value of their tax dollar in service.

"Among the most interesting of the achievements of the present administration of Teaneck was its success in having the fire insurance rating of the township raised from Class E to Class C. The saving to the property owners of Teaneck in insurance rates amounts to \$12,000.00 annually." (Subsequently the basic rating was again advanced to Class B, and the saving in insurance costs to all property owners exceeds \$25,000.00 a year.)

"The installation of radio patrol in the police department is another of its brilliant accomplishments. Teaneck now enjoys number one police protection at a minimum cost.

"An incident strikingly illustrative of the activity of the township officials in taking advantage of every opportunity to serve the interest of the taxpayer was the purchase by the fire chief of an aerial ladder truck discarded by the New York City department, for \$135.00. The chief, a man



"... one of the biggest bargains in the history of municipal government."

of many years' experience in fire protection work, followed the auction sales of discarded equipment in the great city and bought this truck from a junk dealer who had bid it

in. Repairs and new equipment brought the total cost of the aerial truck to \$700.00. It is to all intents and purposes as good as a new one. The newspaper reports of this incident sent the commissioner of accounts of New York City scurrying to find why the fire department threw away valuable trucks, but that does not at all diminish Teaneck's credit for making one of the best bargains in the history of municipal government."

Another important matter that demanded immediate attention was the collection of taxes. In

1933 Teaneck was able to collect only 52% of the tax levy for that year. The whole country was then floundering at the very bottom of the economic depression; nevertheless, taxes had to be collected so that the government could carry-on and pay its current bills.

As of December 31st, 1933, the taxes and assessments past due and unpaid amounted to \$2,089,689.57. After the 1934 tax sale, the Township owned 2,344 tax title certificates. Something had to be done immediately to liquidate these frozen assets and to stimulate prompt payment of current taxes. The Township Council decided that a way must be found to force the redemption of its 2,344 tax title certificates, or foreclose those not redeemed.

Tax Title Lien Contract

Prior to 1930 it cost the Township from \$300.00 to \$350.00 in legal fees to foreclose a tax title certificate. At that rate it would cost a minimum of \$600,000.00 in legal fees to foreclose its 2,344 tax title certificates. In order to overcome this apparent impasse, the Township government drew up a contract for disposal of the tax title certificates in bulk, either by getting redemptions, or deeds giving title to the Township, or by foreclosure, and advertised for bids on the contract. This contract provided that all the certificates must be disposed of, and that legal fees, costs, and expenses could be paid only out of the interest accrued subsequent to date of tax sale and collected by the Township from those who redeemed their properties.

This contract provision had three very beneficial results:

- (1) it virtually compelled the attorney who entered into the contract to effect redemptions wherever possible, so that there should be a fund from which he could be paid;
- (2) the Township received intact for its own use

all the back taxes and assessments paid on redemption and interest up to date of sale; and

- (3) since all the costs were paid out of accrued interest collected on redemption and none out of current tax collections, no burden was placed on the annual budget.

Township Collects \$773,434.46

The contract was awarded to Samuel H. Friedman. The Township agreed to pay him \$45.00 for each tax title certificate he liquidated, either by securing payment of the taxes due the Township, by securing a deed to the Township, or by foreclosing the right to redeem and thereby vesting a marketable title to the property in the Township. Awarding the contract was a notice to delinquents that they must redeem their properties or lose them by foreclosure.

Under this contract the Township collected in cash from back taxes, assessments, interest and penalties, paid at time of redemption, \$773,434.46, and received a marketable title to lands having a total assessed value of \$1,134,280.00. Through operation of this contract the Township liquidated \$1,907,714.00 of its frozen assets, totalling in assessed valuations over two million dollars, at a cost of only \$92,700.00 paid out of interest accrued after tax sale. Before the end of 1941 the Township had received in cash more than \$100,000.00 from the sale of property acquired under the contract.

The Township has given to the Board of Education large tracts of land acquired under this contract for present and future school purposes. Still other parcels and tracts of land acquired under the contract are now being used or are set aside for park purposes.

In framing this Tax Title Lien contract Teaneck's Township Council blazed a new trail. No municipality had ever tried any similar method of clearing away its accumulated holding of tax title certificates.

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However, this very important and highly beneficial contract was supported by only three members of the Council, the three League members. The minority members tried to defeat it by every political trick and device at their command. At the insistence of one of the minority members the Bergen County Grand Jury held an investigation of the conduct of the work done under the contract, for the purpose of arousing public opposition to the contract and in the hope that a political indictment might be obtained against the three majority members of the Council.

This minority Councilman publicly charged that the tax title lien contract "reeked with rottenness", and that it was "the foulest act of political trickery ever perpetrated on the community". He also publicly charged that there was fraud in the procurement of the contract, and graft in its execution. The closest investigation revealed that there was not one word of truth in any of his slanderous and malicious charges.

Teaneck Taxpayers League stood firmly behind the three majority members of the Council in their fight in support of this contract.

Very largely because of the refunding program and the tax title lien contract Teaneck re-established itself on a sound financial basis and stabilized the value of all real estate in the Township. The defeat of either of these two policies would have brought serious financial embarrassment to the Township and its property owners. Without the active and vigorous support of Teaneck Taxpayers League both of these financial policies might have failed. The minority members of the Council, with the support of partisan



"... not one word of truth in his slanderous and malicious charge."

politicians, were determined to cripple the Township's finances in order to destroy alike the government, the majority members of the Council and Teaneck Taxpayers League. Any such financial catastrophe would have been blamed first on the form of government, and then on the majority councilmen in control of the government, and finally Teaneck Taxpayers League for supporting the government.

Other Improvements

Some of the other important policies adopted and projects undertaken by the majority members of the Township Council, with the support of Teaneck Taxpayers League, during the years between 1934 and 1942 are:

- (1) prohibiting business on Route No. 4;
- (2) a beneficial revision of the zoning ordinance;
- (3) planning and starting the development of an extensive park and playground program;
- (4) enlarging the public library and expanding its facilities;
- (5) creating a department of health;
- (6) the adoption of regulations controlling the sale of alcoholic beverages; and
- (7) the adoption of an ordinance forbidding operation of pinball games in the Township.

Practically all of these improvements were opposed by the minority members of the Township Council.

At the municipal elections in May, 1938, Teaneck Taxpayers League endorsed and succeeded in re-electing three members of the Township Council. They were opposed by a combination of Democratic and Republican political leaders.

During the eleven years since 1930 Teaneck's non-partisan Council-Manager form of government has been the most progressive, the most efficient, and the most economical local government in all New Jersey. This remarkable success is due largely to the support given the Township

Government by the people through the medium of Teaneck Taxpayers League.

From 1930 to 1940 the amount raised by taxation to run the Township Government *decreased* from \$38.10 per capita to \$21.03, a per capita decrease of 45% in ten years. From 1930 to 1940 the net debt of the Township—that is, the gross debt less cash on hand available for debt payments — *decreased* \$2,376,000.00, or from \$292.00 per capita in 1930 to \$96.00 per capita in 1940, a decrease of 67%. The figures are all taken from official records. They show the comparison between government under partisan political management and under the non-partisan, efficient, business-like management inaugurated and maintained by Teaneck Taxpayers League.

These large reductions in taxes and Township debt have been achieved in spite of the fact that the Township government has more than tripled its services to the people. In 1930 Teaneck had no municipal parks or playgrounds. Today, Teaneck has ten public parks and playgrounds in operation and other land set aside for future development into parks. We now have the park along Route No. 4 at Garrison Avenue, Central Park, Amman Park, Tryon Park, Mackel Field, Glenwood Park Ball Field, Railroad Avenue Ball Field, Town Hall playground, Hart playground and Hackensack River Skating Pond. The Township government has provided recreational directors and park attendants to supplement the use and enjoyment of its parks and playgrounds.

All of the relief load has been paid out of the annual budget; no relief bonds were issued. Both the fire and police departments have been increased, and special guards are now posted to protect the children at nearly twenty school crossings and in winter at many coasting streets.

In the past eleven years there has been a great increase in the number of miles of streets that

must be maintained and now all paved streets are cleaned by motorized sweepers. The Township now has a special shade tree department. It has a trained health officer.

Public Services Increased

All of these services were inaugurated since 1930, and the cost is included in the annual budget. But, as previously said, although the Township government has thus increased its public services threefold and more, nevertheless the taxes have been greatly reduced.

Little has been said in this report about the efficiency of various departments of the government, because this is primarily a story of Teaneck Taxpayers League. Yet it would be a mistake not to mention the fact that each department of the Government has operated efficiently and economically since 1930, largely because they have been subjected to no political interference. The Township employees have proven their ability to do a good job when they are not hampered by politics, and they have likewise proven their loyalty to Teaneck and its taxpayers.

It already has been said that all departments deserve high praise for the kind of service they have been rendering the Township since 1930, and to that statement there are no exceptions. However, conditions warrant special mention here of the fire department, because the changes in the fire department have been most momentous under the municipal manager form of government.

This department has been gradually transformed from a volunteer department to a paid department. In 1930 Teaneck had only ten paid firemen and a part time Chief, who was not in the Township during business hours. It now has thirty-six paid men, including a full-time Chief, all under supervision of the Township Manager as Fire Commissioner.

★ HELP TO KEEP TEANECK THE IDEAL COMMUNITY ★

In 1930 the department's equipment consisted of three one-ton hose trucks carrying chemical tanks, one cities service ladder, and two pumpers with aggregate capacity of 1,350 gallons per minute. Today the department has two pumpers with aggregate capacity of 1,750 gallons and a "quad" (combined hook and ladder truck, pumper with 350 gallon capacity, and hose cart) making total water capacity of 2,100 gallons; a 75-foot aerial ladder; a three-and-a-half ton Mack emergency truck; one hose wagon; one search-light truck and a chief's car.

This improvement in fire equipment has been brought about at a minimum cost through rebuilding old equipment with the regularly employed Township labor, the purchase, repair and repainting of some second-hand pieces, also some minor new purchases, so that Teaneck now has adequate fire-fighting equipment, all in good condition, acquired at a total cost less than one quarter what it would have cost to buy new apparatus equal in capacity and usefulness.

Lower Insurance Rates

As the result of improved fire protection service, the Rating Bureau of the National Board of Fire Underwriters more than six years ago advanced Teaneck Township from Class E to Class C rating, and in April, 1938, again advanced Teaneck to Class B rating. These advances in rating are today saving Teaneck property owners

more than \$25,000.00 a year in the aggregate in the cost of their fire insurance.

The National Municipal League has expressed high praise of Teaneck's government in several of its publications. In a booklet entitled *The Story of the Council-Manager Plan*, published in 1940, it said:

"Teaneck, N. J., is considered a model community, with a top-notch record of excellent services, efficient fire and police departments, and an ideal setting for living 'the good life'. Its fire school, set up to train its own firemen, is only one example of the community's leadership. Many other New Jersey communities send their fire department officials regularly to the Teaneck fire school.



"... population increased 52 percent
... total cost of government decreased."

"Things were not always so ideal in Teaneck. In 1930, under the old form of government, debt and taxes were out of sight and services were notoriously poor. Then the Council-Manager plan was adopted. After ten years, although the population increased 52 per cent, the total cost of government decreased from \$800,000.00 to slightly over \$700,000.00."

★ Chapter 5 ★

"TRUE PATRIOTISM IS OF NO PARTY."

—Smollett.

IN THE early part of the year 1931, Teaneck Taxpayers League adopted a constitution and a set of by-laws under which it has operated ever since. The constitution provides for the an-

nual election of a president, vice-president, recording secretary, corresponding secretary and a treasurer as the officers of the League. It also provides for an executive committee composed of

★ TEANECK'S MOST PROGRESSIVE TWELVE YEARS ★

the officers of the League, a captain from each election district and a representation from the ladies of the auxiliary. Although the executive committee is given broad powers, all of its acts are subject to the approval of the League body.

But Teaneck Taxpayers League is not a political organization, as some people maintain. It is not even accurate to speak of Teaneck Taxpayers League as an organization at all, because the word "organization" used in this way suggests merely a "body of persons" united for a special purpose.

Teaneck Taxpayers League fundamentally is not merely a "body of persons"; it is fundamentally a "set of principles for local democratic government". This concept of the League is an adaptation of a fundamental American political maxim: "measures, not men". These League principles were "organized" as the foundation of the League when it was first formed in 1929. They alone express the League's purpose.

Any person who wishes to actively support these principles may do so either as a League member, or outside the League membership. The "body of persons" supporting the League and its principles as members has been constantly changing. The principles of the League have never changed; they are permanent; they constitute Teaneck Taxpayers League. The only purpose of membership in the League is to permit one to more effectively support the League principles.

To some, especially those who are opposed to it, this description of Teaneck Taxpayers League may seem more euphonic than real. But those who have faithfully supported the League as members for twelve years know that this description of Teaneck Taxpayers League is true and genuine.

To conclude this chronicle of Teaneck Taxpayers League, one more thought should be added. Today the United States is marshaling all her gigantic resources of men and materials in defense of the principles of democracy. On our far-flung island frontiers and in foreign lands men of America are fighting, sacrificing, dying in defense of American ideals. We at home, if we call ourselves true Americans, must prove that our democratic form of government is worthy of their heroic deeds by making the government perform its duty as efficiently, as effectively, and as loyally as those who are fighting to defend it are performing their duty.

The success of democracy in the National and State governments vitally depends upon honest and efficient democratic local governments.

It is therefore the duty of every citizen of Teaneck to help keep Teaneck's government the splendid example of democratic processes that it has been during the past twelve years.



★ A SUCCESS STORY TO MAKE AND KEEP TEANECK THE IDEAL COMMUNITY ★