

Town of Greenburgh
**ASSISTANT
TOWN HISTORIANS**



———— felicia barber + riley wentzler ————

From Farmland to Shopping District: The Rise of Central Avenue

By: Riley Wentzler & Felicia Barber

Imagine that the year is 1865, and that you live in Hartsdale and want to get to Yonkers to see the horse race. You are surrounded by fields and farms, how do you get there? If your answer was to make a road, how would you do that on a middle-class income? You couldn't. You would need someone wealthy and well connected to do it for you. Enter William Marcy Tweed, more commonly known as Boss Tweed. He can do it for you because he is the leader of the Democratic Party political machine known as Tammany Hall, as such he is arguably the most powerful political figure yet seen in America. Your problem is solved. What follows is the story of the rise of Central Avenue, and how farmland became a major shopping district.

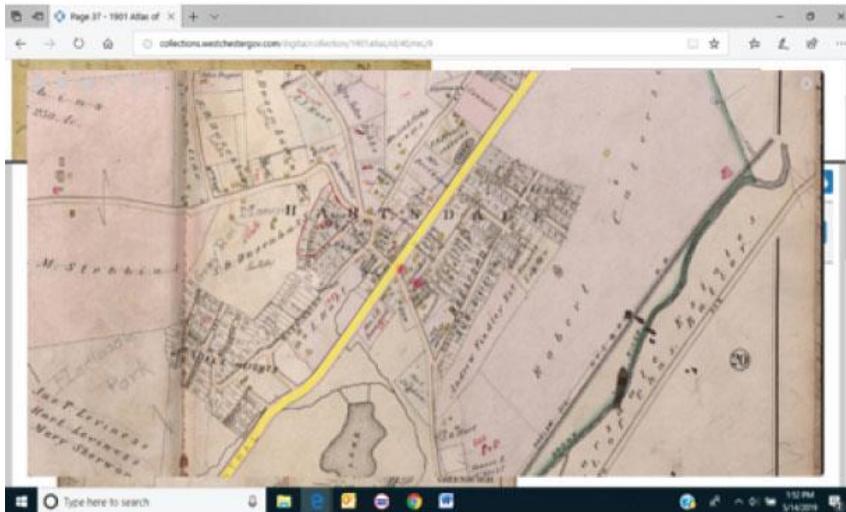
In 1867 or 1868, Boss Tweed wanted to connect New York City to White Plains in order to enlarge his wealth and political influence. The problem was that there was nothing but fields in between these portions of his operation. He proposed the creation of a major roadway to connect his empire. The largest scandal of the

century ensued as Tweed bribed and embezzled his way to get the necessary land and building permits.

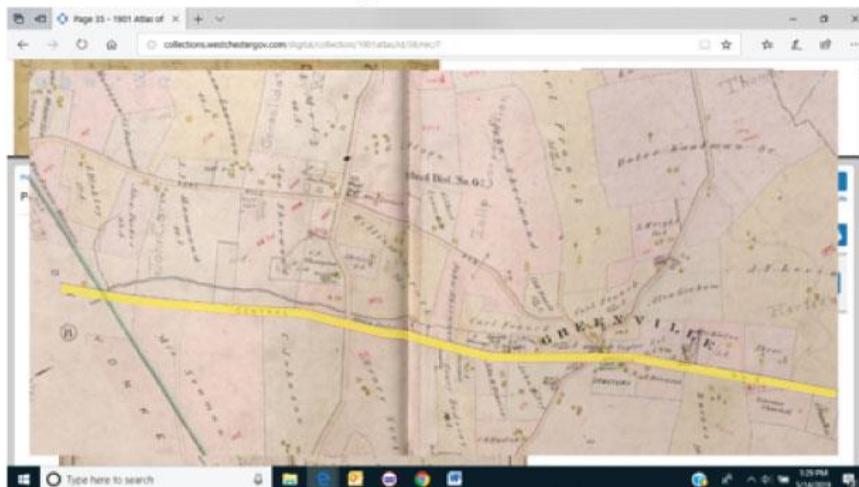
Ironically, this product of corruption would actually be of great benefit to New York City and the surrounding area such as Greenburgh and Yonkers. The ground for the purposed road would be leveled in 1871(Bae 1994 p. 3A). This purposed road would eventually become Central Avenue which would be a boon to both transportation and commerce (Leviness p. 12). Today, Central Avenue runs from Yonkers to White Plains passing through Greenburgh's Villages of Hartsdale and Edgemont along its way (Scarsdale Inquirer, May 17 1912).

Tweed however, would not be around to enjoy any of these transportation or commercial benefits which Central Avenue offers, because in addition to being the year the ground for Central Avenue was leveled, 1871 was also the year his organization was toppled when the extent of his crimes was revealed to the public in an exposé by the New York times (MICROSOFT ENCARTA, 1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation). The article contained data from Andrew Green (<https://nypost.com/2003/06/15/oust-boss-tweed-rename-building-for-a-true-n-y-great/>) as well as numerous political cartoons from Thomas Nast (MICROSOFT ENCARTA, 1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation). After this exposé came out, Boss Tweed was arrested, tried, and sentenced to twelve years in prison (MICROSOFT ENCARTA, 1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation). Somehow, he managed to get released after only serving one year of this sentence, but then he was arrested again on different charges. He briefly escaped to Spain, but was caught in 1876, and died in prison in 1878 (MICROSOFT ENCARTA, 1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation).

Central Ave Hartsdale 1901

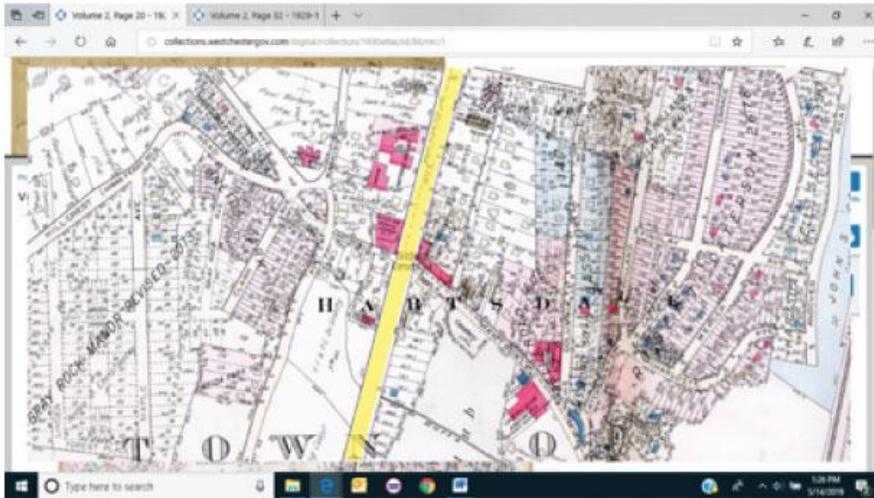


Central Ave Edgmont 1901

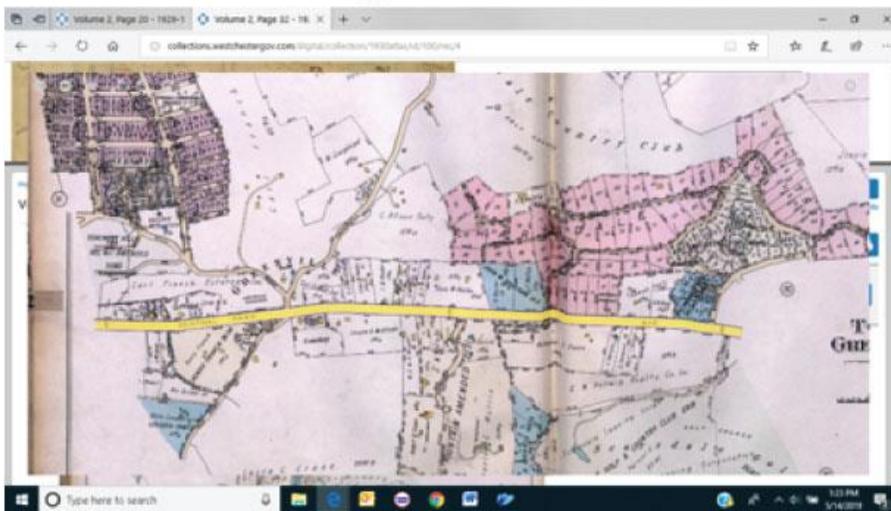


In 1901, only 4 houses existed along the portion of Central Avenue that runs through Hartsdale and no businesses were present. The section of the road that runs through Edgmont didn't even have any houses (1901 Atlas retrieved from Westchester County Archives). The road wasn't graveled until 1906 (Leviness 1968 p. 12). This is probably because; Tweed's arrest and trial halted further developments on the road. In October of 1912, the Greenburgh section of Central Ave. was paved (Scarsdale Inquirer, May 17, 1912).

Central Ave Hartsdale 1930



Central Ave Edgmont 1930



In 1930, the Hartsdale Fire Department Post 1 and Peter Pan Service Garage, and various small businesses appeared along the Hartsdale Section of Central Ave, these were quickly joined by a succession of private homes (1929-1930 Atlas retrieved from Westchester County Archives) and in 1934 the first ever Carvel was founded in Greenburgh at the south side of Central Avenue in Hartsdale (<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Carvel%20History.pdf>). Curiously, at

this time there was no similar development along the Edgemont section of the road (1929-1930 Atlas Retrieved from Westchester County Archives)

In 1950, Central Ave was re-zoned from residential to commercial and the first major department store moved in later that year (Bae 1994 p. 3A). By 1980, it had become a major shopping district. It has remained that way ever since. So ends the story of how farmland became a major shopping district.



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Oh, The Places Your Mail has Gone: A History of The Hartsdale Post Office (3/9/2019) http://greenburghny.com/Documents/Mail%20-%20jlucasey@greenburghny.com_Redacted.pdf

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Greenburgh's BROTHERLY LOVE, RELIEF AND TRUTH: A History of The Freemasons in Greenburgh (9/12/18) <http://www.greenburghny.com/Cit-e-Access/news/archnews.cfm?NID=47212&TID=10&jump2=0>

About the Authors:

We are both Assistant Town Historians at Greenburgh Town Hall and we are engaged to be married and are currently looking for permanent employment.

Riley Wentzler:

I was born and raised in a small rural town in central Pennsylvania. In high school, I took every honors course available including four years of Spanish. I received A's in all of them. I graduated third in my class of 146 students. This brought me to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Once there, I continued my trend of academic excellence. I graduated summa cum laude in Political Science with a minor in Spanish and a Master's in Communication Studies, with a G.P.A of 3.94. It was also there that I met my lovely fiancée, Felicia Barber. My Master's in Communication has promoted public speaking, teamwork, and customer service. My Political Science degree has developed my research skills using computer-based tools and provided me with experience using the Microsoft Office products. My minor in Spanish has facilitated my bilingual capabilities. During my internship at Greenburgh, I created the petition for the State Roads project using website tools. My diverse education and areas of interest have provided me with a wide range of skills. I look forward to finding a career opportunity in business or government. **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com, or to help me find employment, you can contact me at rjwentzler413@gmail.com**

Felicia Barber:

I was born in New York City and raised in Hartsdale, New York. I graduated from Ardsley High School. I recently earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. It was here that I met my fiancé, Riley Wentzler. As a result of my academic excellence, I won a scholarship every year. I learned and applied many graphic design skills to projects during my summer internships and at school. I am proficient in using Adobe graphic design applications including Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. For my Identity/branding course at Edinboro, I created logos to appear on the tee-shirts of Physical Education majors. For a veteran's upcoming event, I used a typeface to focus the reader to the soldier in the poster. For the State Roads Legislative Campaign project, I created the embedded graphic-photo that accompanied the petition I am looking for a job to utilize my skills as a Graphic Designer in an agency, print shop, company or government **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com. To learn more about my artwork or to help me find employment you can contact me at feliciadbarber@gmail.com.**

Two Interviews with the authors:

<https://riverjournalonline.com/around-town/a-love-of-history-and-each-other/13708/>

<https://wcbs880.radio.com/articles/news/stories-main-street-couple-cerebral-palsy-brings-manytalents-town-greenburgh>

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