

Clementina Barnwall Pell LeRoy

by Lynne Belluscio

Friends recently visited Fort Ticonderoga and mentioned that it was a great place to visit. "You know it has a connection to the LeRoy family," I said. "How's that?" "Well, Edward Augustus LeRoy, who was the son of Jacob LeRoy, and who was born in LeRoy House on June 14, 1833, married Clementina Barnwall Pell, and it was her family who owned Fort Ticonderoga. Her father died at the Fort when he tried to fire an old cannon."

The story of the Pell family and Fort Ticonderoga is interesting. Fort Ticonderoga is located at a narrow spot on Lake Champlain and at one time was known as the Gibraltar of North America.

It played a part in the French and Indian War and during the Revolution, while under British rule, was captured by Col. Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys from New Hampshire. Later, at the end of the war, when the British again had command of the Fort, they attempted to destroy the fortress in a series of explosions before withdrawing.

In 1785, the US Congress turned the Fort over to New York State. In 1802, the State transferred the "Garrison Grounds" to Columbia College in New York City and Union College in Schenectady. In 1820, the colleges sold the site to William Ferris Pell (Clementina's grandfather). An unusual twist to this story is that William Pell, was a merchant at 15 Wall Street in New York City, just around the corner from the LeRoys.

Later he was in partnership with L.M. Hoffman at 65 Wall Street and then at 110 Pearl Street, just a short distance from Wall Street in lower Manhattan. Pell dealt in rare books and "marbles," (probably carved marble busts and statues). He began preserving the Fort which had succumbed to further destruction by people

looking for building stones for buildings and foundations. Pell's work is credited as being the earliest attempt at historic preservation in the United States.

In 1826, he built a hotel for tourists which was known as the "Pavilion." His family lived at the Pavilion and on August 11, 1834, his granddaughter, Clementina Barnwall Pell was born. Tragically, when she was five, her father decided to blow off one of the old cannons to welcome his father back home. The cannon exploded. It was said that old William died of a broken heart after the death of his son.

In the meantime, Clementina played among the ruins of the old fort and she later remembered the neighboring indians coming by and asking if they could spend the night in the Pell's warm kitchen. She said that the whole family spent the night in terror.

Clementina married Edward Augustus LeRoy in New York City at Grace Church on April 10, 1856. By then Edward was a partner in his brother's firm of Thomas Otis LeRoy & Co. on Water Street. (The building is now the Mark Joseph Steak

House and members of the Historical Society will have dinner there in a few weeks).

Edward and Clementina had seven children and lived an affluent life in New York City. According to the 1860 census they had five servants. Clementina LeRoy died after a long illness in New York City in 1912. Her husband, Edward LeRoy, died in 1913. Both are buried at the LeRoy family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx.

Meanwhile, at Fort Ticonderoga, Clementina's family continued to care for the Fort. In 1908, massive reconstruction began under the guidance of Stephen H.P. Pell, William Pell's great-grandson. President William Taft celebrated the opening of the restored Fort in July 1909. In 1931, Stephen Pell established the not-for-profit Fort Ticonderoga Association, which continues to manage the Fort, its museum collections and 2,000 acres of land.



Vintage photo of "The Pavilion" at Fort Ticonderoga where Clementina Barnwall Pell was born.

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