

The Bartow Pell Mansion

by Lynne Belluscio

I really don't remember how I discovered the Bartow Pell Mansion. I was probably doing a google search for Herman LeRoy and discovered that Herman LeRoy, Jacob LeRoy's father, bought 200 acres of land overlooking Pelham Bay in 1813. This property adjoined other property that Herman purchased twenty years earlier.

Originally, in 1654, 9,000 acres of land had been purchased from the Sinwanoy Indians by Thomas Pell. He became the first Lord of the Manor of Pelham which was confirmed by a patent granted by Governor Nicolls on October 6, 1666. During the American Revolution the land served as a buffer between the British-held New York City and rebel-held Westchester. It was the site of the Battle of Pell's Point where Massachusetts militia held the advancing British. The stone wall where the militia held their position is visible at the park's golf course.

The property passed through the Pell family until 1790 when John Bartow, the son of Bathsheba Pell and Theophilus Bartow, purchased a portion of the Manor from his mother's family. When Herman LeRoy purchased the property in 1813, it was witnessed by Aaron Burr, whose wife was a member of the Bartow family. Herman owned the property until 1836, when he sold it to Robert Bartow, a grandson of John Bartow. (Just a curious note. When Jacob LeRoy left town, the LeRoy House was sold to a member of the Bartow family.) It is generally believed



that the Bartow Pell Mansion, which is located on the former LeRoy 200 acres, was built by Robert Bartow, although I have read that some people believe that Herman LeRoy had a home on the property and that Bartow enhanced the old LeRoy house.

It is considered to be one of the best preserved Greek Revival structures in the style of Minard Lefever remaining in the United States and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

Minard Lefever was trained as a carpenter in upstate New York and came to Manhattan in 1828 and was considered one of the most talented American designers

of his time. The exterior is simple – almost severe. The interior floor plan is symmetrical with a spacious entrance hall and freestanding spiral staircase. On the second floor are floor to ceiling windows.

The mansion remained in the Bartow family until 1888, when it was sold to New York City and became part of Pelham Bay Park. The lagoon nearby was once part of Pelham Bay and was called LeRoy's Bay "in Colonial times" (for Herman LeRoy?) The lagoon was widened and dredged when it was chosen as the site of the 1964 Olympic Rowing trials.

For more than 25 years, the house and gardens deteriorated. Other grand architecturally important houses over-looking Long Island Sound were razed yet the Bartow Pell Mansion survived. It served briefly as a home for disabled children. In 1914 the house was restored and the sunken garden was added.

Funds were raised to continue the restoration and to plant the

formal gardens. It was one of the earliest restorations in the country, predating Monticello in 1923.

In 1936 Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia used the mansion as his summer office. The house and grounds, which include formal terraces, a fountain, an herb garden, a perennial garden, and the 1840s stone carriage house are owned by the City of New York and is operated by the International Garden Club, Inc. The Mansion opened to the public as a museum in 1946.

The Mansion is furnished to the early 1800s and is the primary destination of the LeRoy Historical Society's fall trip on September 16-18. Other sites included on the trip will be Kykuit (the Rockefeller home), Phillipsburg Manor, a lantern tour of the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, and other historic homes in the area. If you are interested in joining us for the trip, call me at 768-7433 and I'll be able to give you more information.

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