

BARTOW-PELL MANSION MUSEUM, First floor interior consisting of the Entrance Hall, Drawing Room, Dining Room, Sitting Room, Members' Dining Room, and the entire Staircase up to the Second Floor Landing. Pelham Bay Park, Shore Road (north of Bartow Circle and City Island Avenue), Borough of the Bronx. Interiors 1836ff.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5650, Lot 1 in part.

On February 25, 1975, The Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, first floor interior consisting of the Entrance Hall, Drawing Room, Dining Room, Sitting Room, Members' Dining Room and the entire Staircase up to the Second Floor Landing, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses, including the representative of the International Garden Club which maintains the house, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The architectural decoration of the interior of the Bartow-Pell Mansion is Greek Revival in style, in contrast to the exterior of the building, which is an unusual example of a country seat of the earlier Federal period. The stylistic inconsistency between the interior and exterior of this impressive country residence may be explained by the fact that when Bartow purchased the property from Herman Leroy in 1836, he may have desired a more fashionable, up-to-date residence, in keeping with the social background of the well-to-do Bartow family. The late Federal ironwork at the entrance of the house and the general simplicity of the exterior design point to a date of erection during the Leroy occupancy, earlier than the 1836 date that has previously been assumed. The building was designated a New York City Landmark in 1966.

The history of the Bartow-Pell property goes back to 1654, when Thomas Pell purchased over 9,000 acres from the Indians, commemorated by a tree northwest of the mansion, planted on the spot where that event took place. Thomas Pell became the first Lord of the Manor of Pelham, which was named after him and confirmed by a Patent granted by Governor Nicolls on October 6, 1666. The Bartow-Pell Mansion thus stands on land which was once a part of the Manor of Pelham. The property then passed through successive generations of Pells until 1790, when John Bartow, the son of Bathsheba Pell and Theophilus Bartow, purchased a part of the property from the Pell family.

From 1794 on, Herman Leroy, who had served as the first Consul General from Holland to the newly formed United States, began to purchase property in Pelham. Leroy and his brother-in-law, William Bayard, were among the largest landowners in the City, with huge holdings in western New York State. Founded in 1790, Leroy, Bayard & Company was one of the most highly respected and successful shipping firms in New York. Leroy was a director of the Bank of the United States and president of the Bank of New York. One of his daughters married Daniel Webster and a son married into the Hamilton Fish family. In 1813 Herman Leroy purchased 200 additional acres from John Bartow, a transaction witnessed by Aaron Burr, who at that time was married to a Bartow. In 1836, Robert, a grandson of John Bartow and the husband of Maria Rosina Lorillard, purchased the same 200 acres from the Leroy family. Thus, many of New York's most prominent families — Pell, Bartow, Bayard, Leroy, Fish, Lorillard and Aaron Burr — were associated with the historic Bartow-Pell property.

The interior of this country residence, in its spaciousness and elegance, provided a fitting setting for the life of the prominent families who lived here until 1888, when the property was turned over to the City by Mrs. Robert Bartow. The house was unused until 1914, when restoration was begun by the architectural firm of Delano & Aldrich under the auspices of the International Garden Club.

The floor plan is symmetrical on either side of an axis running east-west and reflects the symmetrical design of the central section of the exterior. The spacious entrance hall is flanked by two small rooms, north and south of the hall. To the east, double parlors with French doors opening to the garden are mirror images of each other.

An elegant freestanding staircase, rising from the entrance hall in curving sweeps, extends from the ground floor to the attic. It is lit by small clerestory windows at the peak of the roof. The graceful balustrade, which terminates in a volute with a turned newel post, is supported by handsome turned balusters. The doors and windows of the hall are enframed by paneled pilasters beneath low pediments of wood. A plaster dentiled cornice and central ceiling rosette of acanthus leaves provide decorative accents.

The small sitting room to the south of the hall is entered through a double set of doors, one behind the other, a frequent device at this time. The doorway and windows are enriched by pilasters and pediments identical to those in the hall. The fireplace with paneled black marble mantel is typical of the Greek Revival period. The corresponding room, north of the hall and now called the "Members' Dining Room," is similar to the sitting room.

From the splendid twin parlors at the rear of the house there is a magnificent view of Long Island Sound. French doors open onto a terrace and sunken garden. These two rooms can be separated by sliding doors. Originally they were both parlors, and were presumably used for large parties; today the rooms are shown as a dining room and a drawing room. They are the most formal and most elaborately decorated of the ground story chambers and open directly from the hall through doors on either side of a central niche. These doorways, as well as the sliding doors, windows and secondary doors, are enframed by pilasters with anthemion medallions. These pilasters are crowned by modified Corinthian capitals which support a pediment. In the drawing room the pediment is enriched with an eagle and in the dining room a cherub fills the triangular space. The imposing drawing room mantelpiece is white marble, while the one in the dining room is cream-colored. Scroll brackets decorated with palmettes support the mantel shelves; the brackets are footed. The center plaster rosettes in both rooms are recessed within the ceiling and, appropriate to these more formal areas, are more elaborate in design than the hall rosette.

The interior of the Bartow-Pell mansion, particularly the hall with its fine staircase and the two large rooms facing the garden, is among the finest examples of architectural decoration typical of the Greek Revival period remaining within the boundaries of the City.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, first floor interior consisting of the Entrance Hall, Drawing Room, Dining Room, Sitting Room, Members' Dining Room and the entire Staircase up to the Second Floor Landing, has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the historic Bartow-Pell Mansion, a New York City Landmark, is one of the most beautifully located country seats in the City, that it was once a part of the Manor of Pelham, that many of New York's most prominent families -- Pell, Bartow, Bayard, Leroy, Fish, Lorillard and even Aaron Burr -- were associated with the house, that the interiors of this mansion display some of the finest examples of architectural decoration typical of the Greek Revival period remaining within the boundaries of the City, that among its most notable features are the elegant freestanding staircase and the splendid twin parlors at the rear of the house which command a magnificent view of Long Island Sound, that the restoration of the mansion was assured in 1914 by the International Garden Club which maintains it as a house museum, and that it is an outstanding example of effective preservation in New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, First floor interior consisting of the Entrance Hall, Drawing Room, Dining Room, Sitting Room, Members' Dining Room, and the entire Staircase up to the Second Floor Landing, Pelham Bay Park, Shore Road (north of Bartow Circle and City Island Avenue), Borough of the Bronx and designates that part of Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5650, Lot 1 which consists of the land on which the described building is situated, as its Landmark Site.