

1654

# HISTORIC PELHAM

today

*Historic Pelham Herald – A Monthly Newsletter on History Happenings in Pelham, NY  
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*Feature  
Story*

## Next Year Marks the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Thomas Pell's Purchase of the Lands that Became Pelham and

### Surrounding Areas

On June 27, 1654, Thomas Pell of Fairfield, Connecticut signed a treaty with Siwanoy Native Americans and purchased 9,166 acres including what we know today as Pelham, New Rochelle, portions of Bronx County and much of the land east of the Hutchinson River northward to Mamaroneck. Sunday, June 27, 2004 will mark the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty signing.

Thomas Pell of Fairfield, Connecticut was among the earliest Englishmen to establish settlements in today's lower Westchester County. He traveled from Fairfield in 1654 to sign the treaty with Siwanoy sachems only eleven years after the Siwanoy massacred another famous settler, Anne Hutchinson, along with most of her family.

Most historical accounts say the Treaty was signed November 14, 1654. It appears from a contemporary handwritten copy of the treaty, however, that it was signed on June 27, 1654. Tradition has it that the white oak beneath which the treaty was signed

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## The Mystery of the Stone Pillars of Shore Road

There are many historical treasures scattered about the Town of Pelham. Most are well documented. The origins of a few are lost in the mists of time. One such mystery surrounds two large stone pillars on each side of Shore Road.

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## HistoricPelham.com Web Site News

According to hosting records provided by the host of the site, during the month of July, the [HistoricPelham.com Web site](http://HistoricPelham.com) received 206,958 hits representing 10,161 page views. In August it received 136,986 hits representing 7,723 page views. Visitors in July downloaded 999 megabytes of data. In August visitors downloaded 654.214 megabytes of data.



A tremendous amount of new material has been added. The text of the [chapter on Pelham in Bolton's 1848 two-volume "History of Westchester County"](#) has been added. The text of the [entire chapter on the Battle of Pelham in Otto Hufeland's 1926 book entitled "Westchester County During the Revolutionary War"](#) has been added. The text of the [entire book published in 1901 by William Abbatt entitled "The Battle of Pell's Point"](#) is being added and is available on the site partially transcribed.

## 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Signing of Thomas Pell's Treaty with the Siwanoy Will Be June 27, 2004

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stood on what today are the grounds of the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum located on Shore Road. The magnificent tree died a fiery death on April 8, 1906 in a fire that began with a discarded cigarette or cigar and perhaps started by a group of young boys.

### Tercentennial Celebrated in 1954

Pelham celebrated the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty signing with a week's worth of events held in October, 1954. Records in the Office of The Historian of The Town of Pelham indicated that the celebration included:

- A guided bus tour of local historical sites;
- A see-it-yourself tour of historic St. Paul's Church;
- A special U.S. Postal Service stamp cancellation to commemorate the anniversary;
- Special decals to celebrate the Tercentennial;
- A special issue of The Pelham Sun as the paper might have been if it were published on June 28, 1654;
- A special Tercentennial meeting of the Town Board of Pelham;
- A Tercentennial Pageant / Production entitled "The Proud Town";
- A dance following the pageant at Pelham Memorial High School;
- A special Board of Trade dinner at the New Rochelle Shore Club;
- A Presentation of a "Fatt Calf" by the Mayor of New Rochelle to a member of the Pell Family as "required" by the agreement between John Pell and Jacob Leisler by which Pell sold the lands that became New Rochelle;
- A Tercentennial dance at Glen Island Casino;
- A Tercentennial-themed costume party at The Pelham Country Club;
- A special meeting of the Pelham Men's Club;
- Sports and Games for Children at Pelham Memorial High School;
- A cross-country children's toy balloon race; and
- A special issue of the Pelham Memorial High School Newspaper (The Pel Mel).



Copy of June 27, 1654 Treaty  
in Thomas Pell's Own Handwriting,  
Courtesy of The Office of The Historian  
of The Town of Pelham

The outdoor pageant "The Proud Town" and certain other events scheduled for Friday, October 15, 1954 had to be postponed because Hurricane Hazel hit the area that day. Still, the commemorative festivities were held and were considered a success.

Efforts are underway to plan a series of commemorative events to be held throughout the year next year in honor of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty signing. There will be much more to come on that . . . .

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### Village of Pelham Fire Department Safe Opened For the First Time Since 1975; Wealth of Historical Treasures Found Inside

According to a wonderful report in the August 8, 2003 issue of *The Pelham Weekly*, a one thousand pound safe that has stood on the second floor of the Village of Pelham Fire House for decades has been opened by specialists for the first time since 1975. It contained a wealth of historical items inside.

The combination for the safe reportedly has not been known for years. Village Fire Chief Robert Glover had been "asking old timers for years about

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## Village of Pelham Fire Department Safe Opened

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the combination” but no one knew it. Chief Glover arranged for experts to open the safe and install a new combination lock. According to The Pelham Weekly, “Chief Glover found minutes of meetings by the Board of Fire Commissioners dating back to 1909. There was also the 1895 deed to the property where the fire house sits on Fifth Avenue. Also in the safe were paid bonds and the original hand stamp for embossing “Pelham Fire Department 1893” on documents.” See Pelham Village Fire Department Safe Opened for First Time In More than 25 Years, *The Pelham Weekly*, Aug. 8, 2003, p. 4, col. 2.

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## The Mystery of the Stone Pillars of Shore Road

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On Shore Road, only about 25 yards south of the boundary that separates Pelham Bay Parkway in the Bronx from Pelham Manor, are two large stone pillars – one situated on each side of the road.



East Pillar, Shore Road



West Pillar, Shore Road

The pillars are solid, hewn stone. They are substantial and are not crudely-made. Each of the four corners is ornamentally-beveled. Each pillar has a pyramid-shaped cap beveled at the base of the cap.

The road-facing side (western side) of the eastern pillar has three square slots, two of which have been filled with concrete. (See photographic detail no. 1 in right column.) The Long Island

Sound-facing side of the east pillar has what is left of a single iron rod embedded within the stone. (See photographic detail no. 2 below.)



East Pillar, Detail No. 1



East Pillar, Detail No. 2

At the top of the east pillar is what is left of a bent iron rod that extends upward from the center of the pyramid-shaped cap. (See photographic detail no. 3.) The top of the west pillar has what appears to be a spot for a similar rod, although no rod is visible and the slot into which such a rod would have fit has been filled with concrete. (See photographic detail no. 4.)



East Pillar, Detail No. 3



West Pillar, Detail No. 4

The road-facing eastern side of the west pillar shows the remains of a square iron rod embedded in it. (See photographic detail no. 5.) The western side has a single slot which has been filled with concrete. (See photographic detail no. 6.)



West Pillar, Detail No. 5



West Pillar, Detail No. 6

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## The Mystery of the Stone Pillars of Shore Road

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Numerous hypotheses about the origins of the pillars have been developed and a substantial amount of research has been done, all to no avail – so far. The most logical explanation would seem to be that the pillars at one time were some form of boundary demarcation for entry into Pelham Bay Park given that they are so near (approximately 25 yards south of) the Westchester County line.

Another less likely hypothesis is based on a passage contained in Robert Bolton's two-volume 1848 edition of the History of Westchester County:

At a town meeting held at the school house in the town of Pelham, on Tuesday the seventh day of April, 1801, for the purpose of electing town officers for the said town to serve the ensuing year, the following persons were appointed to the following offices and places . . . . Joshua Huestis, overseer of highways for the within district of the town, to extend as far north till it come to **the gate between the farms of Mr. John Bartow and Charles Turnbull deceased**, and Elijah Horton, overseer of the highways of the northern district of the town, as far north till it comes to the before mentioned gate.

Bolton, *History of Westchester County*, Vol. I, p. 559 (NY: Alexander Gould 1848). Though the pillars, to the untrained eye, do not appear to be 200 years old, they stand in an area that in 1801 could have been considered the "northern district of the town" of Pelham – at a time when most of the Town of Pelham extended from City Island (which was then part of Pelham) along Shore Road and included lands owned by John Bartow.

Research on the pillars is still underway. If you have any information regarding the pillars, please contact us at [bbell@stblaw.com](mailto:bbell@stblaw.com).

### Did you know?

In 1977, then 10-year-old Elizabeth Delli Carpini told her mother that she was going into the backyard to dig for "Revolutionary War things" near an old stone wall and promptly discovered a half-shell of a cannonball believed to have been fired during the Battle of Pelham.

## More Than 90 Years Ago, A Rickety Trolley Car Running Through Pelham Inspired One of History's Most Popular Comic Strips

Early last century Pelham and its citizens inspired the creative genius of a man named Fontaine Talbot Fox (1884-1964) who created one of the most popular comic strips in the United States that became known as "Toonerville Folks". The strip centered around the quirky inhabitants of a town called "Toonerville" as well as a rickety and unpredictable trolley car that came to be known as "The Toonerville Trolley." The operator of the trolley was known as "The Skipper." The comic strip was based in part on the artist's experience during a trolley ride on a visit to Pelham. The strip ran in hundreds of newspapers from 1910 to 1955 and brought national attention to The Pelhams.



Many local legends and traditions have arisen regarding precisely what happened the day that Fontaine Fox experienced the inspiration that prompted his creation of The Toonerville Trolley. In hopes of resolving some of the conflicting accounts, we have undertaken to research the matter.

Doubtless the best account of precisely what inspired the Toonerville Trolley comes, of course, straight from the pen of Fontaine Fox. He described his inspiration in an article published in The Saturday Evening Post entitled "A Queer Way to Make a Living" as follows:

"After years of gestation the idea for the Toonerville Trolley was born one day up in Westchester County when my wife and I had left New York City to visit Charlie Voight, the cartoonist, in the Pelhams. At the station we saw a rattletrap of a street car which had as its crew and skipper a wistful old codger with

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an Airedale beard. He showed as much concern in the performance of his job as you might expect from Captain Hartley when docking the Leviathan.

### All Aboard for Toonerville

I asked another passenger if he could tell me how to reach Voight's house, and he suggested that I ask the motorman.

"He knows everything," he said.

I appealed to the motorman then and he told me he would stop the car when it was time for us to get off but he did more than that. He got off with us, led the way to the top of a knoll, then pointed to the house and waited to make sure I understood, before he returned to his carload of passengers.

By the time we had returned to our home the idea for the Toonerville Trolley was developed."

Fontaine Fox's story was slightly different seven years earlier (in 1921) when he recounted his recollection of the inspiration for the Toonerville Trolley in an interview with The Boston Globe. Then he said:

"The Toonerville folks,' said Mr. Fox, 'introduced themselves to me first at Pelham. I went there several years ago looking for a friend and had to take a dilapidated old trolley out to his place. On the way out the 'skipper' of that car talked with everybody on the car, woke one man up when he got to his usual stop and commented concerning the absence of one of his regular passengers. He saw some nice looking apples in an orchard along the track, got out and gathered a handful and came back into the car to pass them around to the passengers.

I thought that such a character would lend himself well to cartooning. The characters I got from life and any virtue they have as good comics id sue to the humorous inspirations I got from their originals."

Clearly "The Skipper" of Pelham's H-Line Trolley who so impressed Fontaine Fox on that fateful day was quite a character. In fact, the "skipper" performed a number of services for local residents, not the least of which was supplying the latest news and gossip about the community."

### WHO WAS "THE SKIPPER" THAT FATEFUL DAY?

On August 4, 1937, according to a typewritten script in the collection of The Office of The Historian of The Town of Pelham, two men named Parks Johnson and Wally Butterworth conducted interviews for what was to be a new radio program known as "Radio News Reel" sponsored by Energine Cleaning Fluid. Among the guests interviewed by Parks Johnson was a man named James A. Bailey, described as "gray-haired, blue-eyed and 86, the skipper of Toonerville Trolley the day Cartoonist Fox took his historic ride."

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### History Events of Interest to Pelham

**Sept. 10** – "The Earliest Stones": Take a walking tour of the historic cemetery of St. Paul's church National Historic Site, focusing on the earliest stones in the cemetery, dating to the early 1700's. St. Paul's Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon at 3:45 p.m. For more information contact David Osborn at 914-667-4116 or Sharon Mills at 914-667-4116 or visit <http://data2.itc.nps.gov/calendar/index.cfm?alphacode=SA PA>.

**Sept. 12** – Walking Tour: Church Tower Walk. Participate in an interpretive talk and a walk up the staircase leading to the 1758 bronze bell in the bell tower. St. Paul's Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon at 3 p.m. For more information contact David Osborn at 914-667-4116 or Sharon Mills at 914-667-4116 or visit <http://data2.itc.nps.gov/calendar/index.cfm?alphacode=SA PA>.

**Sept. 14** – Lecture by Dr. David Oestreicher. "In Search of the Lenape: The Delaware Indians Past and Present". The lecture will be held at Yonkers Historical Society and Historic Sherwood House, 340 Tuckahoe Road, Yonkers, NY at 2 p.m. For more information telephone the Yonkers Historical Society at 914-961-8940 or visit its Web site at <http://www.yonkershistory.org/>.

**Sept. 14** – Lecture by Ms. Gaynell Stone. "Evidence of Dutch Culture in Coastal New York". The slide presentation and lecture will illustrate Dutch presence "through village layout, settlement patterns, cemeteries and gravestones" and will be held at the Jay Heritage Center, Boston Post Road, Rye, NY. The event is free, but reservations are required. For more information call 914-698-9275.

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**Sept. 17** – Walking Tour: “Slavery” – A walking tour of the grounds of St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site, focusing on the lives and historical context of some of the former slaves who are buried at St. Paul’s. St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon at 3:45 p.m. For more information contact David Osborn at 914-667-4116 or Sharon Mills at 914-667-4116 or visit <http://data2.itc.nps.gov/calendar/index.cfm?alphacode=SA PA>.

**Sept. 19** – Walking Tour: Church Tower Walk. Participate in an interpretive talk and a walk up the staircase leading to the 1758 bronze bell in the bell tower. St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon at 3 p.m. For more information contact David Osborn at 914-667-4116 or Sharon Mills at 914-667-4116 or visit <http://data2.itc.nps.gov/calendar/index.cfm?alphacode=SA PA>.

**Sept. 24** – 90-Minute Guided Tour of the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum & Carriage House with an emphasis on the life and times of the Bartow family and those who lived and worked on the estate. \$2.50 for adults and \$1.25 for Seniors and Students (free for those under 12). For reservations, call 718-885-1461 or email [BartowPelLED@aol.com](mailto:BartowPelLED@aol.com).

**Sept. 24** – Walking Tour: Revolutionary War Soldiers. Participate in a walking tour of the grounds and focus on the lives and roles of some of the soldiers (on both sides) who fought and are buried at St. Paul’s. St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon at 3 p.m. For more information contact David Osborn at 914-667-4116 or Sharon Mills at 914-667-4116 or visit <http://data2.itc.nps.gov/calendar/index.cfm?alphacode=SA PA>.

**Sept. 26** – Walking Tour: Church Tower Walk. Participate in an interpretive talk and a walk up the staircase leading to the 1758 bronze bell in the bell tower. St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon at 3 p.m. For more information contact David Osborn at 914-667-4116 or Sharon Mills at 914-667-4116 or visit <http://data2.itc.nps.gov/calendar/index.cfm?alphacode=SA PA>.

**Sept. 28** – The Westchester County Historical Society will hold a kick off party as a celebration of the release of its newest publication: “Picturing Our Past: National Register Sites in Westchester County” by Gray Williams. The celebration will be held at Whitby Castle in Rye, NY, from 5 to 7 p.m. For more information, visit <http://www.westchesterhistory.com/Events.html>.

**Oct. 1** – Tour four centuries of Pelham Bay history. One hour walking tour offers a glimpse into the area’s rich heritage. The tour is from 1 – 2 p.m. Please wear long pants and sturdy shoes. \$2.50 Adults, \$1.25 Seniors and Students, free for those under 12. For reservations please call 718-885-1461 or email [BartowPelLED@aol.com](mailto:BartowPelLED@aol.com).

**Oct. 5** – Lecture by Professor J. Ward Regan. “Feet, Hooves, and Rails: Transportation in Nineteenth Century

America”. The lecture will be held at Yonkers Historical Society and Historic Sherwood House, 340 Tuckahoe Road, Yonkers, NY at 2 p.m. For more information telephone the Yonkers Historical Society at 914-961-8940 or visit its Web site at <http://www.yonkershistory.org/>.

### Short Take: A Battle of Pelham Bibliography.

Early on the morning of October 18, 1776, Col. John Glover of the famed Marblehead Mariners stood atop a hill believed to have been located near today’s Memorial Field on Sanford Boulevard in Mount Vernon, New York. Using a “glass” he observed British ships underway transporting 4,000 German and British soldiers to a landing on Pell’s Point. Leaving his own unit in reserve, Col. Glover raced down the hill and ran with about 450 troops along Split Rock Road. He met the British advance guard and the Battle of Pelham followed. Glover and his men fought approximately 4,000 troops from behind stone walls for hours until finally retreating later in the day having delayed the British advance and, some say, having saved Washington’s army. Although an incredible amount of material has been written about the battle, below are some of the principal sources relied on by scholars who study the Battle.

Abbatt, William, The Battle of Pell’s Point (or Pelham) October 18, 1776. Being the Story of a Stubborn Fight. With a Map, and Illustrations from Original Photographs and Family Portraits. (New York: William Abbatt 1901) (considered an inaccurate depiction of location of battle due to reliance on Sauthier Map).

Barr, Lockwood, A Brief, But Most Complete & True Account of The Settlement of the Ancient Town of Pelham Westchester County, State of New York Known One Time Well & Favourably as the Lordshipp & Mannour of Pelham Also the Story of the Three Modern Villages Called The Pelhams Chapter VII pp. 55-61 (Richmond, VA: The Dietz Press, Inc. 1946) (Chapter VII “Battle of Pell’s Point -- Westchester in the Revolution”).

Billias, George Athan, Pelham Bay: A Forgotten Battle, New York Historical Society Quarterly Vol. 42, No. 1 at pp. 20-38 (Jan. 1958).

Dawson, Henry B., Westchester County During the Revolution 233-46 (Morrisania, NY, 1886) (also relies on erroneous Sauthier Map).

Franko, Alfred Michael, Pelham Manor: The Forgotten Battle of the Revolution: Near Mount Vernon, N.Y. (Pelham Manor, N.Y.: The Bicentennial Committee of the Town of Pelham, New York Oct. 1975).

Hufeland, Otto, Westchester County During the American Revolution 1775 ~ 1783 pp. 107-30 (Privately printed 1926, reprinted by Higginson Book Company).