

1654



today

# HISTORIC PELHAM

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

## With Halloween Near, It's Time for a Good Old-Fashioned Ghost Story

Pelham's rich recorded history covers nearly four centuries. It should come as no surprise that such an old area has its share of stories about ghosts, goblins and ghouls. A few of these have been documented. See [Pelham's Ghosts, Goblins and Legends](#) (Oct. 25, 2002). With the end of this month marking yet another Halloween, it seems the perfect time to relate one more Pelham ghost story – one that has not seen the light of day for more than 105 years.

In 1897, GP Putnam's Sons published a book by a man named Charles Pryer entitled "Reminiscences of an Old Westchester Homestead". One of the earliest chapters in the book is entitled "The Mystery of a Pelham Farm-House". In that chapter, Pryer relates a tale told to him by an old local resident about a house that stood in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century on land along what we know today as Shore Road in Pelham Bay Park. The house stood on land that, at the time, was part of the Town of Pelham. According to Pryer, it was impossible to rent the house to anyone in the Town of Pelham because they all knew of its mysterious history. . . .

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## Meet Mrs. Jessie Meinecke – The Toughest Woman Ever To Set Foot in The Pelhams

Who was the toughest woman ever to set foot in the Pelhams? While such a trivia question may never merit inclusion in the board game "Trivial Pursuit", it is of infinite importance (or at least of some entertainment value) for those who live in The Pelhams today. While some might argue the point based on their own personal experiences, there can be little doubt – at least in the mind of this author – that there is only one woman who deserves the title: Mrs. Jessie Meinecke.

Who was Mrs. Meinecke? She was a visitor who made quite an impression on the Town of Pelham in 1896. So much so that her exploits were well documented in *The Pelham Press* on September 30, 1896.

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## HistoricPelham.com Web Site News

According to hosting records provided by the host of the site, during the month of September, the [HistoricPelham.com Web site](http://HistoricPelham.com) received 203,683 hits representing 10,682 page views. Visitors in September downloaded 969.341 megabytes of data.



## A Good Old-Fashioned Ghost Story

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Teamsters who traveled the road and passed the house told stories about what they saw and no one who lived nearby would venture near the home. According to Pryer:

Many are the frightful stories told by the teamsters that passed there on the way to town, late at night or before daylight in the morning. Some said that lights flickered from room to room, and that the whole house shook as though convulsed by an earthquake; others that the house was illuminated as though the owner was giving an entertainment, and that they plainly heard the sound of voices and the rattle of crockery, as though the spirits were having a supper. Others again stated that only one room was lighted up, and at the window of this apartment sat a beautiful lady, with her head resting on her hands and her long dark hair streaming over her shoulders, while her whole attitude indicated dejection.

The owner apparently decided that if no one in the Town of Pelham would rent the home, perhaps an out-of-towner might. He reportedly found a "gardener from the city" who had never heard of the home's reputation. The gardener, his wife and family moved in early one March when snow still lay thickly on the ground. Little did they know what awaited them. As Pryer relates the tale:

The first night passed off quietly, as all were too tired from moving to lie awake much. There were some strange noises heard in the early part of the evening, but as they were attributed to rats nobody paid much attention to them. In the morning the gardener went to his work, and as the scene of his labors was some distance from the house, he took his dinner with him and did not return till evening.

On arriving home about sunset he was met at the door by his wife, who proceeded to tell him, in a frightened incoherent way, how, about noon, all the doors were suddenly thrown open, and fearful noises were heard to resound through all quarters of the house. Thinking this, however, to be only a woman's version of the freaks of a March wind in his too well-ventilated apartments, he only smiled incredulously

and drew a chair to the fire to await supper, the preparations for which were already far advanced. Scarcely had the blazing hickory fire commenced to make him comfortable, when he was startled by hearing a terrific crash in one of the unoccupied rooms upstairs, followed by the violent slamming of every door in the house. Thinking some fearful storm must suddenly have come up, he stepped to the door and looked out, but the evening was serene and beautiful. The boisterous wind that had been blowing all day, had gone down with the sun, and the stars shone brightly in the frosty air. Shutting the door he resumed his seat by the fire, not daring to go up stairs to see from whence the noise proceeded, but

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## Pelham Preservation and Garden Society Board Elects New Officers

On Sunday, September 21, the Board of the Pelham Preservation and Garden Society met and elected new officers for the upcoming year. Those elected to serve were:

President	Charlie King
Vice-President	Randy Kran
Secretary	Faye Erickson
Treasurer	Blake Bell

Congratulations and good luck to the new officers!

The Society has a full plate before it during the upcoming year including:

- Working with Metro North and Pelham's Architectural Review Board on the improvements and plantings underway at the Pelham Station.
- Funding and coordinating the restoration of the Highbrook Avenue Gates in Pelhamwood.
- Bulb plantings (more than 4,000 bulbs) throughout Pelham.

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## A Good Old-Fashioned Ghost Story

*Cont. from Page 2*

thoroughly resolved to give the spirits full possession of the house on the following day.

While thus thinking, the wall of the room opposite to him slowly opened, and a shadowy something seemed to fill the aperture. This vapory mass gradually took the form of a female figure, at first ill-defined, but slowly assuming the proper proportions, and at length stood out in bold relief, as perfect as any living being. It appeared to be a beautiful lady of not more than twenty, with long black hair streaming over her shoulders, but with an air so melancholy and dejected that even the most terrified man pitied her. After surveying for a few moments the mortal seated by the fire, she glided slowly across the room and passed through the opposite wall, without giving utterance to a single sound. Our friend was not troubled more that night by his spiritual visitors, but so terrified was he that the next day he took his departure.



According to Pryer, the house remained empty for the next fifty years – and, he says, thereafter “the benighted traveler will hasten his steps while passing the desolate cottage.”

The haunted farmhouse about which Pryer wrote more than 105 years ago no longer stands. But, might it be possible that its ghostly inhabitants still wander along Shore Road? It is interesting that there are numerous ghost stories associated with sites along the ancient road that once was a Native American trail long before European settlers ever ventured here.

## Pelham Preservation and Garden Society Board Elects New Officers

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- Acquisitions of preservation and gardening books for the Library collection.
- Hosting and coordination of the annual perennial swap.
- Coordination and preparation of state and national historic district applications for the creation of a downtown historic district.
- Development of a historic landmark marker program.

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## Report on Preparations for Next Year's Celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Thomas Pell's Purchase of the Lands that Became Pelham and Surrounding Areas

The Town of Pelham is moving forward with preparations for next year's celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thomas Pell's purchase of the lands that became Pelham and surrounding areas. On September 22, the Town Council held a regularly-scheduled meeting and addressed preparations for the celebration, among other things. Town Supervisor, Joe Solimine, reported that The Town has confirmed the availability of facilities at The Pelham Country Club and The New York Athletic Club where galas in celebration of the anniversary may be hosted the evening of Sunday, June 27, 2004. He noted that the Junior League of Pelham and the Pelham Civics Association each have been asked to host a gala. In addition, Supervisor Solimine reported that he has instructed two Pelham photographers to prepare a pictorial inventory of the Town's principal commercial buildings and important historical sites.

Deputy Town Historian, Blake A. Bell, reported the following to the Town Council:

- An inventory of 54 historically significant items to be considered for inclusion in an exhibition to be hosted in a secure location has been prepared.

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## Report on Preparations for Next Year's Celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

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- A series of boards that lay out the history of portions of the area may be made available in a less secure public exhibition space such as the Guild Room of the Daronco Town House.
- A PowerPoint presentation about the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary and what it will celebrate was delivered to The Rotary Club of the Pelhams on September 17.
- A PowerPoint presentation regarding the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be delivered to the Board of the Pelham Preservation and Garden Society on October 19.
- A book about the Pell Treaty Oak and the Native American land grant to Thomas Pell on June 27, 1654 is nearly 80% complete and will be ready for distribution to local historians for comment and revision by the end of November.
- An initial draft of a heavily-footnoted and well-documented statement for inclusion on a plaque to be placed at the site where the Pell Treaty Oak is said to have stood has been prepared.
- A sketch artist has been retained and is creating a stylized pen-and-ink drawing from a photograph of the Pell Treaty Oak so that the drawing can be used in the book and, perhaps, on banners associated with the celebration.
- A "Today in Pelham History" calendar is being prepared with a large number of date entries associated with important Pelham events.
- A "stable" of articles regarding the history of Pelham and surrounding areas is in preparation for submission to The Pelham Weekly next year for publication if deemed worthy.
- A request has been made of one of the members of the Board of the Pelham Art Center to facilitate consideration of a request that the exhibition facilities of that institution be made available for a short time

for a catalogued exhibit concerning the history of The Pelhams.

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## Meet Mrs. Jessie Meinecke – The Toughest Woman Ever To Set Foot in The Pelhams

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The record of her visit, printed in that early newspaper speaks for itself and is quoted in full:

"A MIDNIGHT HEARING.

Mrs. Jessie Meinecke was in town last Sunday and, as usual, declared her intention of boring Judge Lyon full of holes and then commit suicide. Ex-Judge Karbach made a complaint and Officer Marks, who has a reputation for a total arrest of 4 persons (three helpless drunken women and one boy), was given a warrant issued by Judge Young, and he with his usual importance started to execute his mission. We are informed by persons who claimed to be witnesses of the arrest that Mr. Marks came off second best. Mrs. Meinecke was then taken to the Court House, but all efforts to put her in a cell met with defeat. She remained till 12 o'clock, when Judge Young arrived, and as the complainant failed to appear he was compelled to discharge the prisoner with a warning to get out of town. There is no doubt in our minds that the poor woman is mentally deranged."

Source: *The Pelham Press*, Sept. 30, 1896 (Vol. I, No. 30), at 1, col. 5.

Sadly, *The Pelham Press* story says nothing about poor **Mr.** Meinecke. Happily, at least Officer Marks added one additional arrest to his record. . . .

Did you know . . . .



Pelham's original town hall was located on Shore Road near today's New York City Horse Stables in today's Pelham Bay Park.

## The Mystery of the Stone Pillars of Shore Road – Solved?

Readers will recall that the last issue of *Historic Pelham Herald* posed “The Mystery of the Stone Pillars of Shore Road” (see photos below). The pillars are located on Shore Road, some distance south of the boundary that separates Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx from Pelham Manor – one situated on each side of the road.



East Pillar, Shore Road



West Pillar, Shore Road

The article stated that “[t]he 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.” It indicated, as well, that “[a]nother less likely hypothesis is that the pillars formed part of “the gate between the farms of Mr. John Bartow and Charles Turnbull” in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Pelham Manor resident and local history expert Mark Gaffney, who authored a wonderful article published recently in *The Westchester Historian* regarding the history of the New York Athletic Club’s Travers Island property up to the time the Club purchased the island in 1888, took up the challenge and certainly seems to have solved the mystery. He wrote, in part, that:

I believe that the pillars were put in after New York City bought 1,481 acres of the land [from] the Town of Pelham in 1888, for future development as park land, as described at pp. 63-65 of Lockwood Barr’s “The Ancient Town of Pelham”, to denote the boundary of the purchase. As Barr explains, when the Legislature set the boundary between New York City and the Town of Pelham by statute in 1895, the

municipal boundary was set about 250 feet north of the boundary of the land purchased by New York City, so that 24 acres of privately-owned land that had not been purchased by New York City became part of New York City and what Barr described as “No Man’s Land”, now occupied by homes realtors call “Politicians’ Row.”

The fact that the pillars sit some distance south of the municipal boundary with Westchester County strongly suggests, as Mark Gaffney points out, that the pillars served as some form of demarcation for the entrance to Pelham Bay Park.

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## History Events of Interest to Pelham

**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 [BartowPelIED@aol.com](mailto:BartowPelIED@aol.com).

**Oct. 3** – 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](http://data2.itc.nps.gov/calendar/index.cfm?alphacode=SA_PA).

**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 calendar page located at <http://www.yonkershistory.org/>.

**Oct. 8** – After School Arts (Recommended for Ages 7-12). “Revolution on the River” – Songs and stories from the Revolutionary War in the Hudson Valley performed by folksinger Rich Bala. Free admission, although reservations are suggested. The performance will be held at Philipse Manor Hall, Warburton Avenue & Dock Street (29 Warburton Street), Yonkers at 5:30 p.m. For more information telephone the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site at (914) 965-4027 or visit its Web site calendar page located at <http://www.philipsemanorfriends.org/cal.htm>.

**Oct. 8** – Deputy Historian of the Town of Pelham, Blake A. Bell, will make a presentation to the members of Cub Scout Pack 4 on the “Ghosts, Goblins and Legends” of Pelham. The presentation will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the Siwanoy School gym in Pelham, N.Y.

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## History Events of Interest to Pelham

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**Oct. 12** – Fall Festival: Annual Flea Market and Tag Sale (Vendor Space Available at \$25 Per Table). The Flea Market and Tag Sale will be held at Yonkers Historical Society and Historic Sherwood House, 340 Tuckahoe Road, Yonkers, NY from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. For more information telephone the Yonkers Historical Society at 914-961-8940 or visit its Web site calendar page located at <http://www.yonkershistory.org/>.

**Oct. 12** – “Joy of Collecting” Lecture and Appraisals (Part of the Fall Festival: Annual Flea Market and Tag Sale sponsored by the Yonkers Historical Society). At 1:00 p.m. during the Flea Market and Tag Sale, Ruth Taylor (a member of the Appraisal Association of America and owner of “Mostly Memories Tag Sale Service” in Ardsley) will discuss some of the things collectors need to know. Appraisals will then be available from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m. The event will be held at Yonkers Historical Society and Historic Sherwood House, 340 Tuckahoe Road, Yonkers, NY from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. For more information telephone the Yonkers Historical Society at 914-961-8940 or visit its Web site calendar page located at <http://www.yonkershistory.org/>.

**Oct. 14** – Lecture by Dr. Bruce W. Chambers: “Monumental Memories: Keeping the Past Alive” – an overview of the history of public monuments, with a concentration on the evolution of American Civil War Monuments. The Yonkers Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument on the grounds of the Philipse Manor Hall is part of a long tradition that began in the ancient world and continues today. Dr. Chambers will address the question of what monuments mean and why they are important. This is part of the Fall/Winter Lecture Series 2003. Free admission. The lecture will be held at Philipse Manor Hall, Warburton Avenue & Dock Street (29 Warburton Street), Yonkers at 5:30 p.m. For more information telephone the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site at (914) 965-4027 or visit its Web site calendar page located at <http://www.philipsemanorfriends.org/cal.htm>.

**Oct. 17** – Candlelight Tour & Historic Music Program. A candlelight tour of the historic cemetery, focusing on soldiers and civilians who lived through the American Revolution, and a performance of 18<sup>th</sup> century music by Linda Russell & Companie in the historic Church. Refreshments will also be served. This event is part of the 227<sup>th</sup> anniversary Battle of Pell’s Point encampment. St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon at 7 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>.

**Oct. 18** – 227<sup>th</sup> anniversary Battle of Pell’s Point encampment. This is an encampment that commemorates the nearby 1776 Battle of Pell’s Point. The event includes museum gallery talks on the Revolution, musket firings and militia drills, artillery, a wreath-laying at graves of Revolutionary War soldiers,

period music and dramatizations, Revolutionary War era crafts and more. There will be educational programs for school groups on Thursday and Friday, October 16-17. St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site in Mount Vernon from 10 a.m. until 4 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>.

**Oct. 19** – Sixth Annual Chamber Music Concert presented by the Friends of Philipse Manor Hall. Claremont Strings will perform three centuries of music, from Back to Copeland. The concert will be followed by a “Meet the Artists” reception. Tickets are \$15. Students, seniors and Friends of Philipse Manor Hall, \$10. The concert will be held at Philipse Manor Hall, Warburton Avenue & Dock Street (29 Warburton Street), Yonkers at 4 p.m. For more information telephone the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site at (914) 965-4027 or visit its Web site calendar at <http://www.philipsemanorfriends.org/cal.htm>.

**Oct. 25** – Hudson Line 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tour of Hudson River Towns. Celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MTA’s Hudson Line. The trip leaves Grand Central Terminal at 9:30 a.m. and will visit Yonkers and the Old Croton Aqueduct in Ossining. Sponsored by the Friends of Philipse Manor Hall and the New York Transit Museum. \$35; Friends of Philipse Manor Hall and members of the New York Transit Museum, \$30. Lunch is included and reservations are required. The trip lasts from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information telephone the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site at (914) 965-4027 or the New York Transit Museum at (718) 694-1867, or visit the Friends of Philipse Manor Hall Web site calendar at <http://www.philipsemanorfriends.org/cal.htm>.

**Oct. 26** – Slide Show and Book Signing. “National Register Sites of Yonkers” by well known local historian, freelance writer, editor and photographer Gray Williams. The event is co-sponsored by the Friends of Philipse Manor Hall and the Untermyer Performing Arts Council. The presentation will be held at Philipse Manor Hall, Warburton Avenue & Dock Street (29 Warburton Street), Yonkers at 2 p.m. For more information telephone the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site at (914) 965-4027 or visit its Web site calendar at <http://www.philipsemanorfriends.org/cal.htm>.

**Oct. 29** – 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).

**Oct. 31** – Trick-or-Treating at Philipse Manor Hall. Halloween treats for children at the oldest house in Yonkers. Free admission. The event will be held at Philipse Manor Hall, Warburton Avenue & Dock Street (29 Warburton Street), Yonkers from 4 p.m. until 7 p.m. For more information telephone the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site at (914) 965-4027 or visit its Web site calendar at <http://www.philipsemanorfriends.org/cal.htm>.