

Wednesday, August 08, 2007

A Description of an Eyewitness Account of Interior of St. Paul's Church in Eastchester During the Revolutionary War

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Following the Battle of Pelham on October 18, 1776, British and German troops occupied the still unfinished church building on the village green in Eastchester. On October 24, 1865, Rev. William Samuel Coffey of St. Paul's Church in Eastchester delivered a "Commemorative Discourse" during the Centennial Celebration of the erection of the church building. In the discourse, published by Perris & Browne in 1866, Rev. Coffey relates a brief eyewitness account of the church building during the Revolutionary War. That account has been excerpted from the Discourse and appears below, followed by a citation to its source.

"The War of the Revolution discovers to us the town of East Chester, with its people greatly divided in sentiment, a severe sufferer between the contending forces. Brothers separate from brothers -- sons from their fathers. Old Col. Jonathan Fowler with as loyal a heart as ever beat to the toast of the King, in sadness sees his son Theodosius a Captain in the American Army, and in recruiting service on this Green, throw down on the drum head the two shillings, which, received, binds the enlistment of some son of one of his old neighbors. Ward is arrayed against Ward, and the Pells across the Creek, best friends of the Church, take up arms against each other. By both the opposing forces, at several different periods, the new building was used for hospital purposes. An eye-witness, our informant, remembered the appearance of the interior during a British occupation of it. There is no floor, the sleepers are not even down, but along the sides of the building are seen large pieces of timber upon which the sick are sitting or reclining. Alas for the ravages of war! the shingle-sided old Church, now about eighty years old, is its victim, but blessed be God, under no more repulsive circumstances than being made use of for fire-wood for the sick and dying in the hospital. But some possible consequences of the destruction have been avoided; for faithful hands have conveyed away the old Prayer Book and Bible, and the bell, and perhaps Church papers, and have safely buried them from view until peaceful days shall again dawn. In what place can they be concealed with greater propriety than upon that of the Vincents? A tribute, to-day, to those secreting and guarding [Page 7 / Page 8] hands, and thanks to a merciful Providence, which has permitted us to be summoned this morning to the Services by that bell, and to conduct them from the pages of those venerable books."

Source: Coffey, William Samuel, Commemorative Discourse Delivered at the Centennial Anniversary of the Erection and the Sixtieth of the Consecration of St. Paul's Church, East Chester, West Chester Co., N.Y., October 24th, 1865, pp. 7-8 (NY, NY: Perris & Browne, 1866).

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Labels: 1776, Battle of Pelham, East Chester, Eastchester, Parish of Westchester Eastchester Yonkers and the Manor of Pelham, Revolutionary War, St. Paul's Church National Historic Site, William Samuel Coffey

posted by Blake A. Bell @ 4:58 AM 0 comments

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

An Account of the Battle of Pelham on October 18, 1776 Contained in The McDonald Papers
Published in 1926

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In 1926, the Westchester County Historical Society published a two-volume set of "The McDonald Papers". The papers were based on 19th century interviews of American Revolutionary War veterans who fought in and around Westchester County. The first volume includes an account of the Battle of Pelham. That account appears immediately below, followed by a citation to its source.

"Finding it a difficult and uncertain game, to lead his army against the Americans by land, General, now Sir William Howe, determined to make a virtue of necessity, by turning a bad position to the best account. Works were thrown up at several places, along the creek and marsh between Throg's Neck, and the mainland of Westchester, as though he intended to force his way across. These feints were continued for five successive days. During this time, he was concentrating his troops upon Throg's Neck. Three brigades, three battalions of Hessians, and other forces were drawn from Flushing, Staten Island and Harlem, and great quantities of provisions and military stores were brought to the Point. On the sixth day after landing, the preparations of the British general for a movement were complete.

Before the approach of day on the morning of the 18th, Sir William reemberked several corps in flat boats, which passed around Throg's Neck, and landed at Pelham Point, below the mouth of Hutchinson's River. The royal guide, for a while suspected of treason, had found means to reassure the British commander of his fidelity. He accompanied the advance guard upon the present occasion.

Among the first of the King's officers that trod the shores [Page 14 / age 15] of Pelham, was Captain George Harris of the grenadiers, who in after days became General Lord Harris, and was celebrated as the conqueror of Seringapatam. In a letter to his uncle, written about this time, he says: 'On the 18th of October at one o'clock in the morning, the van of the army, consisting of the light infantry and grenadiers, embarked at Frog's Neck for the continent, and landed without opposition.'

Soon after daylight, the Americans who were at the Westchester causeway, found that the main body of the British army at Throg's Neck, was under arms, and seemed to be moving toward the pass at the head of the creek. Heath and Washington were soon upon the spot. The division commanded by the former, got ready for action and took up a position which appeared well suited for opposing the enemy. Presently, however, it was found that the Royal forces were marching to the east side of Throg's Neck, where they embarked on board their flat boats, crossing Eastchester Bay, and landing at Pelham Point, with their artillery and baggage, a few hours subsequently.

Colonel Glover of General Lee's division, with a brigade, which he temporarily commanded, lay at this time at Milesquare to watch the enemy's movements. The brigade consisted of four regiments, commanded by Colonels Read, Shepherd, Baldwin and by Glover himself, and numbered in all, less than eight hundred men. Early in the morning, Colonel Glover ascended an eminence that commanded a view of the Sound, and from which he was in the habit of reconnoitring the hostile forces with a telescope. He discovered at once that the King's fleet in the East River, was under way. In a short time upward of two hundred boats filled with troops, and formed into four grand divisions, embarked from the upper part of Throg's Neck and stood across Eastchester Bay in the direction of Pelham Point.

Although a young and inexperienced soldier, Glover saw the urgency of the case and acted promptly. He made his drums beat to arms, and sent an express with intelligence of the movement to General Lee, who was three miles off. He then put himself at the head of his brigade, and with about seven hundred [Page 15 / Page 16] and fifty men, and three field pieces, hastened toward Pelham, to oppose the landing of the enemy.

A detachment of British light infantry, preceded by a small vanguard, was upon Pelham Heights before the American colonel had reached Hutchinson's River. He instantly detached a captain's guard of forty men, with directions to march rapidly and stop the enemy's advance. These orders were executed with celerity and skill, the men running the whole distance. When they approached the enemy, the latter halted. Having by this movement brought the British forces to a stand, Glover left his field pieces behind, upon a hill, crossed the river near Pell's bridge, already dismantled, and ascended the Heights of Pelham. He then made the most advantageous disposition of his followers. Colonel Read's regiment was posted on the left of the road leading to Pelham Point, with Shepherd's and Baldwin's in the rear upon his right. These troops for the most part, were well covered by stone walls. They were supported by Glover's regiment, which was stationed as a body of reserve, under the command of Captain Curtis.

With a modest appreciation of his own ability and a deep sense of the responsibilities about to be encountered, Glover watched in vain for the approach of General Lee or some superior of more experience than himself. The colonel was left to his own resources, and prompt action was requisite. He then rode forward to his advance guard, and led it against the enemy's detachment. When within fifty yards, he received the hostile fire, without the loss of a man, returned it instantly, brought down four of the British and maintained his ground till they had exchanged five rounds. By this time the Americans had two killed and several wounded, while they were much outnumbered by the British, whose two detachments having united, advanced to the charge with bayonets. Glover now ordered a retreat, and his bold captain led the men back without further loss. The enemy pursued with loud huzzas. In great excitement and some disorder, they ran forward to overtake the captain's guard, and in this state approached within thirty yards of the spot where Read's [Page 16 / Page 17] regiment lay undiscovered behind a stonewall. His men then rose up and fired a volley which sent the King's light infantry back to their main army at the Point.

The Americans remained in nearly the same position for about two hours. At the end of this time, a strong force approached, under Brigadier-general Leslie and Sir William Erskine, with seven pieces of artillery. Colonel Read was posted under cover as before. When the King's troops were about forty yards from him, the whole battalion again rose up and fired. The enemy halted, and returned the fire until seven rounds had been exchanged, when Read retreated and formed again, in the rear and on the left of Colonel Shepherd. The Royal forces shouted and pushed on, until they reached the post occupied by the latter, behind a thick double stone wall. Shepherd now ordered his men to rise and discharge their muskets by grand divisions. By this means he kept up an incessant fire, and maintained his ground for a long while; causing his assailants to retreat several times a short distance off, where they formed again and returned to the combat. 'Once,' says Colonel Glover, 'they retired so far, that a soldier of Colonel Shepherd's leaped over the wall and took a hat and canteen off a captain, that lay dead on the ground they had retreated from.'

The officer thus despoiled, was Captain Evelyn of the light infantry belonging to the Fourth regiment, a gallant youth, not then dead but mortally wounded, who at the head of his company, was foremost of the enemy, when first they attacked Colonel Shepherd.

It was not long before the superior numbers of the enemy enabled them to dislodge Shepherd from his

position. After their last repulse, they returned in greater force, brought forward their field pieces and completely outflanked the Americans, who were compelled to retreat and form in the rear of Baldwin's regiment. But they had now retired beyond the old Pell house upon the Heights, where the descending ground gave the enemy an advantage, and Colonel Glover found it necessary to retreat down the hill. He then forded Hutchinson's River and ascended the opposite height where he [Page 17 / Page 18] had left his artillery. The enemy halted upon the commanding eminence they had gained, placed their artillery in battery and commenced a cannonade which was answered, and was maintained by both sides until the approach of night. At dark, Glover received orders to take a new position in advance of the enemy. Here the weary soldiers of his brigade, after a hard day's fight, lay all night long as a picket guard in the open air by the roadside, without food or refreshment. The next morning they were relieved, and marched back to their encampment, where they broke a fast of more than twenty-four hours. Colonel Glover says, he had eight men killed, and thirteen wounded in the action. Some letters from officers of his brigade make the loss greater. From returns made to the British War Office, it would seem, that the King's troops had about eleven men killed, and forty-four wounded, the loss falling principally upon the First battalion of light infantry and on the Seventy-first regiment, the former belonging to Leslie's brigade, and the latter to that under Sir William Erskine.

The only American officer dangerously wounded, was the brave Colonel Shepherd, who received a musket ball in the throat, and underwent a long and painful confinement at Northcastle near Whiteplains, where he was immediately sent, for surgical treatment. Of the British officers, Captain Evelyn of the light infantry, belonging to the Fourth regiment was killed, and Lieutenant-colonel Musgrove and Lieutenant Rutherford were wounded.

General Lee reviewed Glover's brigade the next day, and returned thanks to both officers and soldiers for their adroit and daring conduct throughout the action. General Washington at the same time bestowed high praise upon them in his general orders.

The affair of Pelham Heights was in fact a stand made by Glover's small brigade, against the main body of the British army, and was conducted throughout by the Americans with the greatest skill, coolness and intrepidity. As the story of the skirmish spread abroad, fame exaggerated its importance, and when the news reached the headquarters of the Northern [Page 18 / Page 19] army, General Gates on the 27th, in the general orders of the day, dictated as follows, viz.: 'All the troops off duty to be under arms at one o'clock at their respective alarm posts, when, upon a signal given by the firing a cannon from the northeast angle of the covert way of the old fort, the whole will give three cheers for the glorious success with which it has pleased Providence to bless the arms of the United States on the 18th instant, in defeating the Army of the enemy near Eastchester.'

After this action, the British army marched across the Manor of Pelham, and encamped with the right wing near the village of New Rochelle, while the left extended to Hutchinson's River.

On the next day, the Americans extended their left, in order to keep in advance of the King's forces, and Washington with the main body of his army commenced moving up along the west side of the Bronx. He determined, if the enemy persisted in their attempt upon his rear, to concentrate his troops at once, in a fortified camp at Whiteplains. The retention of Fort Washington having been determined upon in the council of war, it now became necessary to occupy it with a strong garrison. General Heath was directed to leave behind one of his regiments for the defense of Fort Independence.

Stores to a large amount, intended for the American army, were at this time deposited in and near the Church in the village of Eastchester. General Lee was anxious to secure them before they fell into the

hands of the enemy, and accordingly, sent for Colonel Glover on Sunday the 20th, communicated the fact to him, and requested him to devise some plan for bringing them off. Glover found that the enemy had not yet taken possession of them. He sent out to the neighboring farmhouses, pressed fifteen wagons, and when night came, went to the village with his whole brigade, and carried off two hundred barrels of pork and flour. They had to approach so near the British camp upon the occasion, that Glover's advance parties heard distinctly the conversation of the enemy and the music of their bands. The [Page 19 / Page 20] Royal forces received information, unfortunately, of Glover's exploit, and early the next morning, secured the residue of the stores.

About this time the King's army was joined by a strong force of light dragoons, consisting of the greater part of the Sixteenth regiment under Lieutenant-colonel Harcourt, and the whole of the Seventeenth, under Lieutenant-colonel Burch.

On the 21st, the right and centre of the Royal army moved to a position upon the high grounds, about a mile and a half to the northward of New Rochelle village, where they encamped for four days, on both sides of the road leading to Whiteplains. The British commander-in-chief left Lieutenant-general De Heister to occupy the former encampment for the present with three brigades, two of which were Hessians."

Source: Hadaway, William S., ed., The McDonald Papers Part I, pp. 14-20 (White Plains, NY: Westchester County Historical Society 1926) (Publications of the Westchester County Historical Society Volume IV).

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Labels: 1776, Battle of Pelham, Captain Evelyn, John Glover, Pelham Neck, Pelham Point, Rodman's Neck

posted by Blake A. Bell @ 4:41 AM 0 comments
Monday, August 06, 2007

1714 Letter Reporting on the Establishment of the Church at East Chester Built in 1692

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For more nearly two centuries after its first settlement, the sparsely populated rural settlement that came to be known as Pelham had no church of its own. Many Pelham residents traveled quite a distance to attend the church in East Chester. A church building was constructed in East Chester in 1692. That structure eventually was replaced by the structure known today as Saint Paul's Church National Historic Site.

In 1714, a report was issued to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in England describing the construction of the church in East Chester in 1692. That letter is transcribed below, followed by a citation to its source.

"(I) An Account of the building of the churches at East and Westchester enclosed in Mr. Bartow's letter

of 14 April, 1714. (Letter Book S. P. G., IX., p. 226):

'May it please the venerable and honorable society for P. G. we whose names are subscribed doe hereby certify that the church of Westchester was built by a rate layed and levided on the inhabitants of the town in proportion to their estates in the year of our Lord 1700 and that Mr. Morgan a Presbyterian minister of East Chester did sometimes come to preach in it until such time as Mr. Bartow came and took possession of it in the year 1702 since which time it has been supplied by him. We also testifie that the church of East Chester was built in the year of our Lord 1692 by subscription of the inhabitants of the said town and that Mr Matthews a Presbyterian minister for about 3 years and after him Mr. Morgan a Presbyterian minister did preach till such time as Mr Bartow began to preach unto us in the year 1703 since which time it has been in his possession and he comes and preaches at East Chester once in 4 weeks during the winter and once in a week during the space of 6 months in the summer And we further testify that the town of East Chester was made a distinct parish from West Chester in the year 1700. Signed Joseph Hunt, Justice & Ch. Ward., West Chester; Thos Spel, Justice & Vestryman, Pelham; Noah Barton, Justice and Vestryman, Yonkers; Miles Oakley, Justice & Vestryman, West Chester; Dan Clark clerk D. Com. West Chester; Israel Honeyman Junr, Vestryman; Jno Drake of East Chester, Justice; Thos Pinear of East Chester, Justice; Jeremiah Fowler, Church Warden of East Chester; Isaac Taylor, Vestryman; Willm Pinckney, Vestryman.'

Source: Briggs, Charles Augustus, American Presbyterianism Its Origin and Early History Together with an Appendix of Letters and Documents, Many of Which Have Recently Been Discovered, Appendix, p. lxxv (NY, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons 1885).

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Labels: 1692, 1714, Bartow Family, Churches in Pelham, East Chester, Eastchester, Parish of Westchester Eastchester Yonkers and the Manor of Pelham, Saint Paul's Church

posted by Blake A. Bell @ 4:38 AM 0 comments
Friday, August 03, 2007

Abstract of Sale of Lands of Joshua Pell of Pelham Manor by the Commissioners of Forfeiture in the Southern District of New York State in August, 1784

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Following the close of the Revolutionary War, the "Commissioners of Forfeitures in the Southern District of New York State" conducted sale proceedings involving lands of those who were not loyal to the Patriot cause during the War. On August 23, 1784, the Commissioners of Forfeitures sold a 146-acre farm located in the Manor of Pelham that once had belonged to Loyalist Joshua Pell, Jr. Pell served as an officer in the Bugoyne campaigns during the War. (To read his diary, see October 2, 2006: The Revolutionary War Diary of Loyalist Joshua Pell, Jr. of the Manor of Pelham.)

Below is a transcription of an abstract of the Commissioners' records of that sale from abstracts published in The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record in April, 1928.

"ABSTRACTS OF SALES BY THE COMMISSIONERS OF FORFEITURES IN THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK STATE

COPIED AND CONTRIBUTED BY THERESA HALL BRISTOL. (MRS. ROBERT DEWEY BRISTOL), Life Member and Member of the Publication Committee of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society.

* * *

August, 1784. . . .

No. 3. Sold to Isaac Guion of the City of New York, Merchant; a farm in Manor of Pelham; bounded N. by James Pell; W. by Eastchester Creek; S. by Edward Pell; e. by lands forfeited by conviction of John Pell; 146 a.; forfeited by the conviction of Joshua Pell [excepting and reserving thereout to Phebe Pell, widow and relict of Joshua Pell late of Westchester Co., farmer, her right of Dower]."

Source: Bristol, Theresa Hall, Abstracts of Sales by the Commissioners of Forfeitures in the Southern District of New York State in The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, Vol. LIX, No. 2, pp. 108-09 (NY, NY: The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, April 1928).

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Labels: 1784, Aaron Burr, Commissioners of Forfeiture, Edward Pell, Isaac Guion, James Pell, John Pell, Joshua Pell Jr., Phebe Pell, Revolutionary War

posted by Blake A. Bell @ 4:58 AM 0 comments
Thursday, August 02, 2007

Biography of Arthur Middleton Hunter of Pelham, A Descendant of John Hunter of Hunter's Island

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Arthur Middleton Hunter was a descendant of John Hunter of Hunter's Island in Pelham. Like his noted ancestor, he became a noted amateur horseman who enjoyed horse racing and kept a stable of noted horses. Several years after his death in 1918, a brief biography summarizing his life appeared in a publication entitled "The Historical Register: A Record of People Places and Events in American History Illustrated with Portrait Plates". That biography appears immediately below.

"Arthur Middleton Hunter

ARTHUR MIDDLETON HUNTER was born at Annieswood, Eastchester Bay, Westchester County, June 19th, 1856; son of John Hunter, who in the sixties, raced a stable of horses in partnership with W.

R. Travers, and Ann Manigault Middleton Hunter. The first of the family in this country was John Hunter, who came to America from Scotland with his two sons, Robert and George, in 1767. The two sons became successful merchants in New York. Ruth Hunter, widow of Robert, married John Broome, at one time Governor of New York. The next in line, John Hunter, married Elizabeth Desbrosses, and their son, Elias Desbrosses Hunter, was the grandfather of Arthur Middleton Hunter.

Henry Middleton was president of the first Continental Congress, and his brother, Arthur Middleton, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Arthur Middleton Hunter was educated at Hanover Academy. Shortly after graduation he entered Wall Street as a stock broker, and became widely known as an amateur sportsman. When races for amateur jockeys formed a part of the Coney Island [sic] Jockey Club and Jerome Park programmes, Mr. Arthur Hunter was considered the best of the gentleman riders on the flat, and many of the amateur fixtures of that period were credited to his skill in the saddle. He was the first owner of the great race horse, Eole. He was a member of the Union Club and the New York Athletic Club.

He married, June 6th, 1883, Katharine Remsen daughter of Frederick Gebhard and Mary Ann Leverich [Page 116 / Page 117] Schuchardt, of New York. Henry Remsen, her great-great-grandfather, was private secretary to Thomas Jefferson, and was president of the Manhattan Bank in 1755. Mr. and Mrs. Hunter had two sons: Arthur Middleton and Frederick Heyward Hunter. Both sons served in the United States Navy during the World War.

Mr. Hunter died April 25th, 1918. A man whose love for his country, constructive ability and integrity of purpose were constantly in evidence to those who were close to him, and moreover his kindly qualities endeared him to all his associates."

Source: The Historical Register: A Record of People Places and Events in American History Illustrated with Portrait Plates, pp. 116-17 (NY, NY: Edwin C. Hill 1920).

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Labels: Annieswood, Arthur Middleton Hunter, Elias Desbrosses Hunter, Elizabeth Desbrosses, Hunter's Island, John Hunter

posted by Blake A. Bell @ 4:42 AM 0 comments
Wednesday, August 01, 2007
1805 Real Estate Advertisement Offering Prevost Estate in Pelham for Sale

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A small advertisement appeared in the April 24, 1805 issue of the Morning Chronicle published in New York City offering the Prevost estate for sale in Pelham. The pertinent excerpt of the advertisement appears immediately below.

"BY A. & R. S. BARTOW, . . .

At private Sale, . . .

A valuable and pleasantly situated piece of land in the town of Pelham, in Westchester county, about 17 miles from this city, containing 47 1.2 acres, bounded on East Chester Creek, lies opposite a public landing from whence market and passage boats go to N York weekly, and within half mile of the turnpike road, the greater part of it is in good stone fence, a large portion of fresh and salt meadow, an excellent and fruitful apple orchard, and an elegant building spot, commanding a view of the Sound and the adjacent towns. The creek abounds with oysters, clams, fish and fowls, and is a very agreeable situation for a gentleman's country seat. For further particulars, apply to Frederick Prevost, near the premises, or at the auction room."

Source: By A. & R.S. Bartow, Morning Chroicle [New York, NY], Apr. 24, 1805, Issue 787, p. 3, col. 5.

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Labels: 1805, Augustine J. Frederick Prevost, Bartow Family, Real Estate Advertisement

posted by Blake A. Bell @ 4:54 AM 0 comments

About Me

My Photo

Name: Blake Bell

Location: Pelham, New York, United States

Blake A. Bell is Town Historian of Pelham, NY in Westchester County. He is also Village Historian of the Village of Pelham and is a member of the Boards of Trustees of the Westchester County Historical Society (Executive Committee), the Pelham Preservation Society, Ltd., and the Society of the National Shrine of the Bill of Rights at Saint Paul's Church National Historic Site. He is the editor and publisher of the award-winning HistoricPelham.com Web site. He is the author of two books regarding the history of Pelham: (1) "Thomas Pell and the Legend of the Pell Treaty Oak" (iUniverse 2004); and (2) Town of Pelham's 350th Anniversary Celebration: Historian Blake Bell's Articles Published in The Pelham Weekly Plus Photos of Key Events (Pelham Weekly 2006). In addition, he is the author of more than 75 published articles on Pelham history and is a frequent speaker on matters relating to the history of Pelham and surrounding areas. Mr. Bell is Senior Knowledge Management Counsel with 750-lawyer Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP in New York City.

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