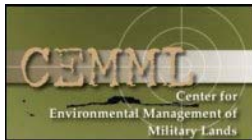


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OAK RIDGE INSTITUTE FOR SCIENCE AND EDUCATION  
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# The LeRay Mansion: Home of James LeRay de Chaumont, the 'Father of the North Country'



No. 2 in the Fort Drum Cultural Resources Series



### *The LeRay Mansion Today*

The LeRay Mansion district was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

Today the LeRay Mansion is used as housing for visitors to the Fort Drum Military Installation. Its present use has allowed for the continued preservation and upkeep of the mansion. The Army continues to do an excellent job of saving the mansion and associated buildings for the American people.



#### *CHAPEL OR OUTHOUSE?*

**T**his building stands at the rear of the mansion. It was once thought to be a chapel by historians. However a letter from the Bell family who lived in the mansion prior to the Remingtons referred to this building as a bath house and four seat outhouse. The true function of this structure with its unusually thick stone walls remains a mystery. Architects Crawford and Sterns stated that they believed the front façade may not be original to the structure, but was perhaps borrowed from another building in the mansion district.

Text and layout by Heather Wagner, CSU-CEMML, former ORISE participant.  
Painting on Cover: LeRay Mansion, watercolor by artist/archeologist Melissa Hooke  
Photographs by Randy Amici and Heather Wagner. Courtesy of Fort Drum Cultural Resources Section of Public Works  
Maps and Technical Assistance provided by Amy Wood, Cultural Resources Program Coordinator and GIS Analyst.  
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CULTURAL RESOURCES SERIES NO. 2

THE LERAY MANSION DISTRICT:  
HOME OF JAMES LERAY DE CHAUMONT,  
“FATHER OF THE NORTH COUNTRY”



**CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGER'S PREFACE**

Every United States citizen owes a debt of gratitude to the French patriots who supported America's war for Independence. One of the key figures in support of the Americans' cause was Jacques Donatien LeRay de Chaumont, a personal friend of Benjamin Franklin. In 1804, Jacques' son James came to the United States hoping to recover some of the new nation's debts to his Family. Instead, he invested in northern New York real estate and established his country home and model farm in LeRaysville, New York.

Since 1941, care of this property has been the privilege and responsibility of the United States Army. Fort Drum Public Works and the Cultural Resources Program are proud to work with the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation to preserve this legacy of the LeRay family as a shining example of Army stewardship of America's treasures.

Laurie W. Rush, Ph.D.  
Cultural Resources Manager  
Fort Drum Archeologist  
May 2003

A PUBLICATION OF THE CULTURAL RESOURCES SECTION PROVIDED BY THE  
DIRECTORATE OF PUBLIC WORKS , FORT DRUM.



**DENTIL WORK ON THE ROOF SOFFIT AND THE TOP OF A COLUMN.**

a single row of dentil work around all sides of the main portion of the house. A stringcourse echoes this dentil work. Originally, a white wooden balustrade graced the roofs of the wings, the portico and the main house. A matching balustrade ran between the main columns and out along the wing facades to form an enclosed gallery and a cellar space below it.” . . .

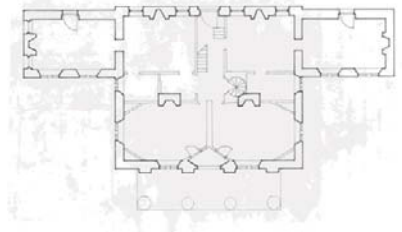
“The three large windows on the upper floor and two full-story windows on the lower floor of the main facade oppose four windows of equal size on both the upper and lower stories of the rear facade. The windows are divided into pairs by the rear entry on the ground floor and by a small balcony with a decorative iron railing between the first and second floors. The rear doorway is of unpainted limestone post-and-lintel construction with a voussoir [a wedge-shaped stone used in the construction of an arch] which serves only a decorative purpose. The fluted pilasters and sidelights of the door are similar to those of the front entry, although there is no

transom light. Iron handrails similar to the balcony grillwork grace low limestone stairs. The fenestration [collection of windows] on the entire house is extremely plain; a narrow gray limestone slab under each window serves as support.

The interior of the house is likewise simple. The octagonal salons of the first floor can be halved by a great wooden sliding door. All interior doors are made of cherry and burl maple. Flooring is soft pine plank. Plaster cornices edge the ceilings. Four fireplaces of gray Italian marble heated the main part of the house entirely by wood. A curved wooden stairway on the left side of the central hallway leads to the second floor. The east wing, originally serving as the library, exhibits an iron stove fitted into the fireplace, a feature that was, for its time, the latest in heating technology and one that can also be found in some of the LaFarge houses in the neighboring Town of Orleans. The kitchen of the home was in the cellar, accessed by a narrow spiral staircase, and was serviced with a dumbwaiter system. The large brick cooking hearth can still be seen in the cellar. Originally the house had no bathroom or plumbing system. The only running water came from a spring outside which flowed through the house in a wooden trough and out the other side.

Rain gutters formerly lined the roofs. Their down spouts fed into a cistern in the cellar with wooden pipes fitted together with mortise and tendon joints.

The Romantic or English style landscaping of the 640-acre Le Ray Mansion grounds included statues, fountains, and a deer park. A circular drive led up to the veranda after crossing a small wooden bridge. A stocked trout pond was dug out to flow into a stream where cheeses and wines were stored. The property was surrounded by a picket fence.”



**FIRST FLOOR PLAN OF THE LERAY MANSION.**

preservation of the mansion prior to the federal government acquiring the property in 1940.

### *Architecture of the LeRay Mansion*

The current two-story Neoclassic LeRay Mansion was constructed of locally quarried limestone. The exterior of the mansion is covered in a white-washed stucco that has been maintained by the US Army.

The mansion was built by Master builder, David Granger of Champion, New York. The architect for the mansion is still under debate. Historian Bruce Sherwood has stated that the mansion was designed by the French architect Joseph Jacques Ramee (1764-1842) who worked for David Parish, a friend of LeRay's who lived in St. Lawrence County from 1812 to 1816 (Bonney 1985). New York State Historic Trust records indicate that the mansion was designed by Asher Benjamin. However, architectural historian Claire Bonney disputes this claim in her detailed research and discusses the evidence that Ramee designed the home.

Historian Bonney describes the mansion architecture in detail. Bonney writes, "A domed portico with four Ionic wooden columns of slight entasis [the slight convex curvature of a classical column that diminishes in diameter as it rises] shades the main facade with its four matching Ionic pilasters. The necks of the columns are decorated with a band of egg-and-dart motif carving. Two one-story wings, each 1/3 of the depth and 1/2 the width of the main house, greatly enlarge the home. A central door framed by a set of fluted pilasters with square capitals is of the native "Cross and Bible" type, so called because the raised wooden panels of the upper half of the door intersect to form a Latin cross, while two recessed vertical panels on the lower half of the door, bisected by a thinner raised panel could be likened to the image of an open Bible. Over the wooden door lintel is a leaded glass transom window with the design of four linked circles and one half-circle at either end, a motif which is repeated in the door's sidelights.

The hipped roof's soffit [the exposed underside of any overhead component of a building] is decorated by



PICTURES OF THE LERAY MANSION FROM THE EARLY 20TH-CENTURY. THE BALUSTRADES ALONG THE ROOF NO LONGER EXIST.



PORTRAIT OF JAMES LERAY DE CHAUMONT (COURTESY OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY).

***The primary mission of the United States  
Military Forces is the defense of the  
United States- its people, its land and its  
heritage.***

The United States Department of Defense acts as steward in protecting the cultural resources of the nation. America's cultural resources are an integral and irreplaceable part of our nation's heritage. The understanding and appreciation of America's current and past cultures are rooted in humanities history. Preservation and archeology are vital to constructing a more complete picture of the past.

Today the DOD manages approximately twenty-five million acres of land in the United States, its territories and possessions. These lands hold tangible reminders of the people, events and ideas that shaped and continue to shape America's character.

The Fort Drum Cultural Resources Program manages the LeRay Mansion Historic District, part of the National Register of Historic Places. This historic district includes the Mansion, farm manager's cottage, 'Chapel', slave quarters and the 'Land Office'.

Today the LeRay Mansion is used for visiting officers, honored guests, and important events. The FMWR (Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Directorate) has transformed the mansion into an Army Model for adaptive use of a historic property. The LeRay Mansion Historic District is now realizing its potential as a living legacy and a North Country treasure.

Hill (Phelps to Hill, March 7, 1894, CM). The "surrounding park" referred to the mansion, a garden near the mansion, the "Spy House lot, so called", a shed and an alley adjoining a horse barn (Phelps to Hill, March 7, 1894, CM).

In 1913, Julia's son Frederick became the absolute owner of the mansion and property until he passed it down to his daughter Mabel Phelps Anderson and her husband Fred. Reportedly they used the mansion as a summer residence while maintaining their residence in Watertown, NY. At her death in 1919 Mabel Phelps Anderson passed down ownership of the mansion to her son Fred Anderson who owned the property until 1936 when the New York Stock Land Bank of Rochester repossessed the mansion and surrounding land.

The Andersons rented the mansion to Reverend H.W. Bell of Christ Episcopal Church in Carthage, New York and the Trinity Chapel in Great Bend, New York. Newspaper articles between 1936 and 1940 indicate that Mr. Bell had moved from the mansion to reside in Clayton, NY. Records indicate that the New York Stock Land Bank of Rochester repossessed the mansion property from Fred Anderson on May 27, 1936. Fred Anderson had placed a sizable mortgage on the property in 1922 that he used to build a new, ultra-modern dairy barn and silo. The new dairy barn made quite an impression on Phillip, the Rev. Bell's son, who enthused that the barn was equipped with individual drinking fountains for each animal.

Rev. Bell's son, Lt. Commander Phillip S. Bell with the US Coast Guard, described the property in the late 1920's-30s as being somewhat "primitive". At the time the Bell Family lived at the mansion, the water supply for the main house was from a spring in a creek above the barn area where water was fed through a pipe to a "ram-jet" pump. The ramjet pump was described as a water-operated pump that required no external power. The pump fed water into a second story tank on the mansion that gave it enough gravity power to feed the upper kitchen. This pump system eventually failed and the Bells' resorted to filling a watering trough outside the kitchen wing on the mansion. All wastewater from the upper and lower summer kitchens was fed into a large crevasse in the limestone bedrock beneath the house. There was a small (two hole) outhouse attached to the wing of the house opposite the kitchen wing and a larger outhouse facility (four-holes) in a separate stone building known as a "bath house," in close proximity to the carriage house or garage structure.

After Mabel and Fred Anderson lost the property during the Great Depression in 1936, the mansion was sold to Harold and Margaret Remington at auction. The Remington's were responsible for much of the restoration and



**AERIAL VIEW OF THE LERAY MANSION  
DISTRICT**

Payen initiated a series of renovation and construction projects. Historians have argued about whether it was this series of construction projects that reoriented the mansion and added the Ionic colonnade to the facade. Fourteen bills for personal effects, materials and labor from Cyrus and William Phelps to Payen date from 1841-1848 (CM Collection Misc. Papers file, JCHS). The first bill is for constructing an aqueduct with a list of materials including the purchase of bricks, logs and lead pipe. A series of construction bills from 1841 that still exist include the painting of the "Spy House," the purchase of planking for a bridge, as well as siding for a new barn. Throughout that year Payen also purchased a large amount of nails, lumber, screws, and shingles. While these purchases imply construction renovations, it is impossible to say whether these renovations were made on the mansion or the farm outbuildings.

In 1850, Jules Payen reported his household in the census. Jules recorded himself as a farmer, age 49, his wife Anna (Annette), age 45, and two French Canadian servants, 19-year-old Jeremiah Dupea and 21-year-old Mary Curting (US Bureau of Census 1850b:n.p.). Jeremy [sic] Dupoy was described in census records as both a "servant" and a "farmer," perhaps suggesting that he rented land from Payen. In the 1860 census, Payen described himself as a "gentleman" and Dupoy described himself as a "farm hand." The household also included Jeremy's 19-year-old brother Oliver, also a farm hand, and one domestic servant, Mary St. Amos, also from Canada.

By 1855, Jules' daughter Julia had married William S. Phelps of LeRaysville. William was from a prominent family in LeRaysville. Prior to the marriage William Phelps and his father, Cyrus Phelps, were employed as master craftsmen for renovations at the mansion.

After Payen's death in 1862 the mansion passed in trust to his widow Anna who occupied the mansion until her death in 1875.

\* Anna (or Annette) Payen did not receive ownership of the Mansion after the death of her husband Jules, but instead had inherited a life interest in the mansion and farm as well as a dowry. Her dowry or curtesy consisted of personal property including both household and farm items (Probate of Jules R. Payen Estate, File P:20, JC Surrogates Court). Given the amount of household goods Anna retained, and the quality of the items, LBA surmised that Anna continued to occupy the mansion rather than one of the smaller homes on the estate.

Upon Anna's death the mansion passed to her daughter Julia Phelps who inherited a life interest in the property. Julia and her husband William maintained their residence in LeRaysville until 1890 when Julia took up residence in the mansion (Child 1890:523). Julia Phelps then rented the entire property, with the exception of the mansion and surrounding park to Mary A.



**JULES RENE PAYEN IS BURIED WITH HIS WIFE, DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW IN SHEEPFOLD CEMETERY**



**EARLY 20TH CENTURY PICNIC AT THE LERAY MANSION**



*The story of the LeRay Mansion is more than the stories of the Families who called the mansion grounds home. The history of the mansion embodies within it the stories of the American Revolution, of pioneers in a new land, of the settlement of northern New York and an ideal farm community, as well as those personal stories that were brought by those who lived there. Just as a Southern Plantation is not simply a home for the wealthy but also represents an icon of an era, a way of life and a business dependent upon slave labor, the LeRay Mansion is not just the home of a wealthy French Family but is instead a tangible reminder of a belief in all peoples freedom and independence (and the hypocrisy inherent in those who owned slaves and preached freedom), an ideal of how life in a new country was perceived, and a pioneer settlement in a land largely unpopulated by European-American settlers. The LeRay mansion remains as one man's vision of what the new America could be and a premonition to what Northern New York could become.*

*To appreciate the history of the Mansion it is helpful to know the history that lead James LeRay de Chaumont to buy land in Northern New York and decide to build a mansion in a largely uninhabited land. Therefore, we will begin our journey with James' father Jacques-Donatien.*

**JACQUES-DONATIEN LERAY DE CHAUMONT  
"FRENCH FATHER OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION"**

Jacques-Donatien LeRay de Chaumont (1725-1803) born in the port city of Nantes, France would later be called the "French Father of the American Revolution" by many scholars. Jacques-Donatien was born to parents René-François LeRay de Clartais and Françoise Bouvet on 1 September 1725. Jacques-Donatien's parents were not considered nobility but rather were called *noble homme*, a term used for prosperous bourgeoisie who perhaps aspired to nobility (Schaeper 2). René-François was a leader in the Nantes shipping trade.

Sometime between 1734-1735 de Clartais purchased an office of the *secrétaire du roi* from the royal French government. The price of this office ranged from 20,000 to 150,000 livres. Offices of this nature were created in order to raise money for the French government. This office carried with it instant hereditary nobility. In documents post dating 1735, de Clartais refers to himself as *écuyer* (squire) and later as *chevalier* (knight), both titles reserved solely for those of noble status.

As Jacques-Donatien LeRay came of age, he began to take over his father's shipping empire and expanded the companies trade routes. With the dowry from his marriage to a French aristocrat, Jacques-Donatien became one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in France.

It is interesting to note that the LeRay Family continued with their commercial business trade even after their status was elevated to nobility. This is in direct contrast to the often oversimplified idea that

James LeRay de Chaumont has earned the title of Father of the North Country. He was one of the original backers of the Saint Lawrence Turnpike, a roadway that connected Sackets Harbor with Plattsburg. During the War of 1812 this road proved to be invaluable to the transportation of arms and supplies for defending the new American nation against British invasion from Canada. His agricultural interests encouraged growth and settlement in the area. However, it was this same entrepreneurial spirit that led to his financial ruin. His backing of the Erie Canal was an outstanding financial failure.

James LeRay de Chaumont was respected and beloved by the people in Jefferson County and in all accounts has been remembered in affectionate and respectful tones. He was a man of vision and liberal encouragement, generous to a fault in sponsoring public improvements and the promotion of schools, churches and community centers. LeRay philanthropically donated land for the construction of both Catholic and Protestant churches. He was a protector over the people who settled on his lands. Stories still persist of LeRay's kindness and benevolence, giving him a place in the permanent memory of the North Country.

***The Payen Family in the Mansion***

After James' death in 1840 Vincent sold the mansion, its contents and over 2,000 acres of surrounding property to Jules Rene Payne in October of that year. Jules Rene Payne was born in Paris, August 31, 1800. Payen studied engineering at the Ecole Royal Polytechnic. Upon completion of his studies, Payen worked for the French government and by 1838 he had become Engineer of the Mines in the Cote d'Or section of France.

What connection, before the purchase of the LeRay mansion, the Payens and the LeRay de Chaumonts had is uncertain. As early as 1823, Mr. Payne had a connection with the Chateau de Chaumont sur Loire when he painted a fine watercolor of the estate.

Jules Payen, his wife Annette (often referred to in accounts as Anne/Ann) and daughter Julia permanently settled in the mansion upon arriving from France. First intending to conduct experiments in the manufacture of gunpowder, Payen gave up this venture after competing chemists began to make rapid advancements in the gunpowder field. Jules Payen then turned his attention to the business of farming.

Shortly after buying the mansion, farm and property Jules



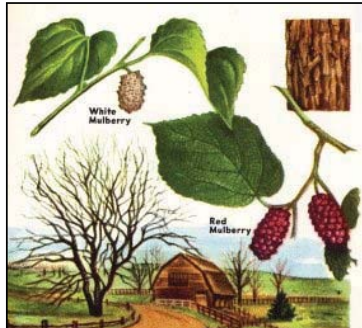
**ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION OF A BARN STRUCTURE NEAR THE TENANT HOUSE WAS DONE IN 1985 BY LOUIS BERGER AND ASSOCIATES.**





What does seem certain is that a fire never occurred at the present mansion, according to a Crawford and Stearns architectural study of the LeRay Mansion complex in 1988. The Crawford and Stearns study also concluded that the entire mansion was built at the same time, discounting other historical claims that the existing mansion is an addition to the original mansion.

What is known is that on December 31, 1823, James LeRay, in the amidst of serious financial difficulty, bequeathed all of his holdings to his son Vincent, except for the LeRay Mansion, outbuildings and grounds. These he leased to Vincent. In the following year Vincent married Cornelia Juhel, the daughter of John and Cornelia Juhel of New York City. Mr. Charles Durham, past historian for Jefferson County, contends it was this match that allowed LeRay to remain solvent and thereby build the current LeRay Mansion.



MULBERRY TREES WERE IMPORTED FROM CHINA AND JAPAN TO AMERICA BY JAMES LERAY DE CHAUMONT IN AN EFFORT TO START A SILK INDUSTRY IN AMERICA.

The five years preceding the completion of the current mansion were said to be a period of elegant hospitality before LeRay's return to France in 1832. Mr. LeRay returned to America in 1836 and spent just a few months at his home near LeRaysville. He made his final return to France in 1840. On the final day in 1840, at the age of 80, full of health and vigor, his mind unimpaired, he was suddenly taken with an inflammation of the chest, which caused his death in five days.

### Slavery and the LeRay Mansion



In a lone plot on the outskirts of the Sheepfold Cemetery along Route 26 is the final resting place of a black woman named Rachel. Oral histories and this stone are the sole remainders of the slave woman who was a nurse to the LeRay children and to Therese's infant daughter Sigit. The barely legible gravestone reads, "Rachel, Loyal and faithful nurse, Died Jan. 10, 1834. This monument is erected to her memory by her loving children Vincent, Alexander LeRay de Chaumont and Therese de Gouvello." The photograph on the right is the slave or servants quarters that stands directly behind the LeRay Mansion. Archaeological investigations suggest that this building may have been more substantial during LeRay's residency, a possible indication of numerous African slaves held at the Mansion.



nobility had no connections in commercial business with the view that it was beneath their station. This idea has been dispelled by a number of notable historians and economists in the past decade and was especially untrue of the LeRay Family.

In 1750, Jacques-Donatien purchased the estate of Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire and the surrounding estate. With this purchase the Family further elevated its status and added 'de Chaumont' to their Family name.

The château de Chaumont-sur-Loire was built in the late 15th- early 16th century. From 1559-1560 the estate was occupied by Catherine de' Medici, Queen of France and wife of Henry II.



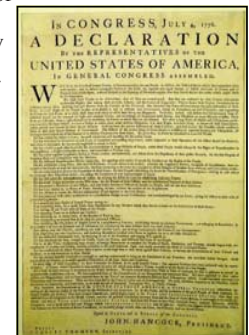
CHATEAU DE CHAUMONT, LOIRE VALLEY, FRANCE

Jacques-Donatien LeRay de Chaumont established château Chaumont not only as the Family's country home, but also as a glassmaking and earthenware factory. In 1772, renowned Italian sculptor Jean-Baptiste Nini was hired under contract by Chaumont to oversee production in the two factories. Nini is particularly well-known during this period for the production of portrait medallions. These portrait medallions were immensely popular miniature sculptures done in terra cotta, usually reserved for the bourgeoisie and European royalty.

Mr. de Chaumont was much more than a successful, wealthy businessman. He also served King Louis XVI at the Court of Versailles as the Governor of the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris and was also the Grand Master of Waters and Lands of Blois.

The events happening in America in the 1770s would change the course of the LeRay de Chaumont Family forever. On July 4, 1776, the fledgling United States government proclaimed its resolve to the world by formally declaring the freedom and independence of the 13 American colonies from England when its released the famous document, the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson stated that this document was the "contractual justification" for independence from a tyrannical English government. This important document was also created to influence opinion both in America and abroad, as well as to gain military support from foreign countries, most specifically France.

Following the Declaration of Independence, America sent emissaries to France seeking financial and military assistance from the French king. The French royal government never officially recognized the American delegation. Chief among the reasons for this was the fact that the American rebellion was a direct threat to monarchy and to global colonization, both key features of French government at that time. However, France and Great Britain had been fierce enemies for hundreds



DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE JULY 4, 1776

of years, and King Louis XVI recognized the opportunity to further weaken Great Britain through indirect support of the American insurrection.

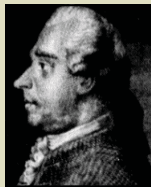
LeRay, like many French, was sympathetic to the American cause. American professor Thomas Schaeper suggests that Jacques-Donatien may have at first become involved in the American cause due to his shipping interests. He utilized his position, not only to act as intermediary between the French government and the American representatives, but also to support the American delegation in various ways. An example of Chaumont's support came when he provided rooms and suites on retainer to the American delegation at the Hôtel de Valentois in Passy, an upper class suburb of Paris.

An American delegation sent to France in 1776 consisted of, the "Pennsylvanian Sage" Benjamin Franklin, the infamous Silas Deane and the diplomat Arthur Lee. When the delegation first arrived in France, Chaumont offered them suites at the Hôtel Valentois, stating that the new American government could reimburse him with a parcel of land once the war was over, in lieu of rent. [Many scholars have stated that Chaumont offered the Americans rooms free of charge but such is simply not the case. Beginning in 1780 Chaumont suffered a series of financial setbacks. At this time he requested the back rent owed him and received it from the American treasury.]



POTAGER OF THE HOTEL DE VALENTOIS

Silas Deane was an amazing and intriguing figure in the story of the American Revolution. A patriot, spy and emissary, Deane was one of the earliest advocates of using revolutionary methods to secure the rights of the American colonists. Deane preceded Franklin and Lee to France on a secret mission that resulted in his securing substantial loans from French capitalists and inducing important French military officers like Lafayette, De Kalb and others to personally serve in the Continental American Army in the war against Great Britain.



In Nov. 1777, Congress recalled Deane because these contracts were deemed extravagant and his financial transactions were put in question. The inquiry into Deane's financial transactions, and the accusation that Deane was a traitor forced him to return to France in 1782 for proof of his activities. However, personal correspondence from Deane to his brother was intercepted and published without his consent. The correspondence implicated the French government in supporting the American war in direct conflict with the French governments official stance. Deane was not allowed into France and was forced to seek refuge in Holland. Impoverished, Deane died in 1789 while traveling from Great Britain to Boston.

In 1842 Congress fully examined his career and vindicated the memory of the diplomat and patriot. As a result, his heirs received a considerable amount of money found due to him.



The baby Sigit is buried at the end of the lawn, just beyond the formal reflecting pond. The inscription on the stone reads, "Sigit/ Clotilde de/ Gouvello died/ Sept 20th 1818 aged/ 1 year and 3 months/ She was endeared to her/ Parents and relatives and/ beloved by all who witnessed/ her fifteen months of suffering life/ Strew flowers on her grave/ but weep not as she numbers/ with the Angels in Heaven."

commissioned by LeRay during one of his stays in France, one bearing the portraits of his two sons Vincent and Alexander, the other likenesses of Therese, Sigit and Rachel.

Although Therese only spent a year at the mansion her presence was greatly noted. Villagers across Northern New York still tell tales of her enormous set of gold gilt porcelain china and the elegant parties she was hostess to while in residence. Oral histories record that Therese brought fifty place settings of the gilt porcelain with her from France. Fort Drum was able to purchase a few pieces of Therese's china from one of the last descendants of the Payen/Anderson family. The beautiful monogrammed porcelain can be seen in the LeRay Mansion parlor display cabinets.



GILT PORCELAIN TEA POT BELIEVED TO HAVE BELONGED TO THERESE DE GOUVELLO

From 1817-1829 LeRay established and became the first president of the Jefferson County Agricultural Society, the second oldest in the state. The Jefferson County Fair was first organized by the Jefferson County Agricultural Society in Watertown, New York on October 25, 1817. The fair came into being due to an existing competition held to inspire local agricultural interest and manufacture in the county. The competition was for the production of the best woolen cloth no less than thirty yards in length that would be judged on texture and quality. James LeRay, having improved the Merino breed of sheep he imported from France, provided the material. LeRay's interests were in promoting every branch of agriculture. This is evident in the working model farm he established next to the mansion. Of particular interest to LeRay was the breeding of horses, rearing of ornamental plants and the culture of hemp and mulberry. LeRay hoped that the experimental mulberry tree groves would aid in the introduction of the silkworm to the area.

The history of the mansion under LeRay's ownership is somewhat uncertain. Historian and author Hamilton Child (1890) argued that the original LeRay home was an unfinished frame house on a rise overlooking the Village of LeRayville that was demolished in 1825 to make room for a new stone mansion. The new mansion, said to have been finished in 1825 (other historians claim 1827) according to Child, measured sixty feet in front with a wing and portico on the south side.

Some accounts have claimed that the original mansion was destroyed by fire in 1822 or 1823. A letter from Vincent LeRay describes the first mansion as a total loss. The letter to his agent requesting insurance for the new house, written on January 17, 1827 tells that the workmen are still building the home and have used "the window sashes of the old house which was pulled down" to use in the new construction (Bonney 2004).

Samuel C. Kanady succeeded him.

Vincent, like his father James, would play an integral role in the history of Northern New York.

In 1812 the Board of Internal Navigation—Gouverneur Morris and De Witt Clinton president and vice-president—appointed Mr. LeRay de Chaumont to negotiate in Europe a loan of six million dollars for the planned construction of the Erie Canal. James LeRay travelled to Switzerland then to Belgium in attempts to procure the loan. The hopes of peace, however, were vanishing. The re-election of President Madison made the continuance of the war certain and the bankers gave a definite refusal.

In 1815, LeRay sold a large tract of land to Joseph Bonaparte, with whom he had long been acquainted, and smaller parcels to Count Real, the duc de Vincence, Marshall Grouchy and others. Local legend has long stated that the exiled King of Spain Joseph Bonaparte as well as Madame Deferiet had long been visitors to the mansion when they were in their local residences. Of particular local fame are the elaborate picnics hosted by LeRay on the mansion grounds.

In the LeRay era, the mansion became a stopping point and destination for various famous people including fifth President James Monroe, New York Governor Dewitt Clinton, Robert Livingston (who represented New York State at the Continental Congress, served as Secretary of Foreign Affairs [the equivalent of today's Secretary of State], and was a negotiator for the Louisiana Purchase), Albert Gallatin (U.S. Secretary of the Treasury from 1801 until 1814 under presidents Jefferson and Madison), as well as other French dignitaries and LeRay contemporaries.



5<sup>TH</sup> PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, JAMES MONROE

When LeRay returned from France in 1816 he brought with him his only daughter Therese and her distinguished husband the Marquis de Gouvello. Therese and the Marquis de Gouvello spent a year at the mansion.

The year was one of heartfelt tragedy for them when they lost their fifteen-month-old daughter Sigit. Sigit was buried on the mansion grounds near the large reflecting pool at the end of the lawn. Sigit's nursemaid, the slave known as Rachel or Aunt Rachel, has been remembered with a great degree of respect. Rachel was remembered for her loyalty; perhaps because of the care she gave the infant girl. It has been noted that two priceless Sevres vases were



LAND DEED SELLING LAND FROM PETER CHANAIIS (SIO TO JAMES LERAY DE CHAUMONT, FEBRUARY 15, 1801)



EXILED KING OF SPAIN, JOSEPH BONAPARTE



### Interesting Note:

While living with the LeRay Family in Passy, Silas Deane, acting as an agent of the Committee of Secret Correspondence, used an invisible ink made of cobalt chloride, glycerin and water, to send back intelligence reports to America. Dr. James Jay, brother of John Jay, later developed a "sympathetic stain" for secret communications. Dr. Jay sent supplies of the 'stain' to George Washington in America and to Silas Deane in Paris.

Benjamin Franklin developed a close relationship with Chaumont and his Family during his years of occupancy at Passy. Scholars of Franklin have agreed that he needed the atmosphere of Family community that the Chaumont's provided in order to be content and productive.

Franklin and Chaumont had much in common. They shared physical attributes. Each man was heavyset, exhibited exuberant good humor and possessed a simple, straightforward style. Both men were experimenters interested more in practical invention than in scientific theory. As a friend to Franklin, Chaumont filled the roles of landlord, host, surrogate Family, translator, unofficial advisor and aide.

Franklin was also close to the rest of the Chaumont family. Mlle Marie-Françoise, the oldest unmarried daughter residing at Passy, ran the household, often working daily with the American residents to honor their requests. Franklin affectionately nicknamed her "mère Bobie" and "ma femme" (my wife). Franklin also had sobriquets for the other 2 daughters residing at Passy. The middle daughter, Marie-Sophie, was termed "mon amie", while the youngest Therèse-Elisabeth was called "mon enfant". Franklin enjoyed an affectionate relationship with the Chaumont Family and also with several French ladies who came to call him "mon cher Papa" (my dear Father).

Franklin and the young Jacques-Donatien, who later Americanized his name to James, also shared a close relationship. The Chaumont *filis*, as Franklin referred to James in his letters, was Franklin's "young friend" (Schaeper 107). Franklin taught James English and how to play chess, one of Franklin's favorite pastimes. James became proficient enough in English to translate many of Franklin's writings into French (Schaeper 107).

With Chaumont's interest in art, especially in his factories at the Château de Chaumont, he commissioned two significant pieces of art in the likeness of Franklin. The Italian sculptor Jean-Baptiste Nini, at the Château de Chaumont, produced several of his terra cotta medallions of Franklin. Thousands of copies of the Franklin medallions were sold across France in the first few months of production. Franklin marveled at the popularity of the medallions in a 3 June 1779 letter to his daughter Sarah:



MEDALLION OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BY ARTIST JEAN BAPTISTE NINI

"The clay medallion of me you say you gave to Mr. Hopkinson was the first of the kind made in France. A variety of others have been made since of different sizes; some to be set in lids of snuff boxes, and some so small as to be worn in rings; and



the numbers sold are incredible. These with the pictures, busts, and prints, (of which copies upon copies are spread every where) have made your father's face as well known as that of the moon, so that he durst not do any thing that would oblige him to run away, as his phiz [i.e. physiognomy] would discover him wherever he should venture to show it (Schaeper 129).”

In 1778, Chaumont commissioned artist Joseph-Suffrede Duplessis to paint what would later become the best-known painting of Franklin during his years in France. By 1779, this painting was the hit of the Salon, a large prestigious venue that occurred every two years at the Louvre. Many of the French wrote declaring Franklin, "one of the world's most handsome men."



PAINTING OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BY JOSEPH-SUFFREDE DUPLESSIS

These two images would become the most famous depictions of Franklin during his years in France. While these were not the only images of Franklin during his French years, they were undoubtedly important to the French support of Franklin and the American cause. How James LeRay de Chaumont perceived these images and Mr. Franklin's popularity is not known, but James was ever a supporter and admirer of the American cause and culture.

To explain Chaumont's involvement in the American Revolution, one must look at his financial contribution to that cause. Chaumont's most important contribution came in the form of trade with the Americans. Chaumont supplied the Americans with arms, saltpeter, clothing and other materials. According to the Chaumont scholar, Thomas Schaeper, "All the evidence available suggests that Chaumont was the number one French trader with America from 1777 to at least early 1781 (Schaeper 202)."

Chaumont's financial ruin was due in large part to his commercial involvement with American trade. In a letter to John Holker (a principal trading associate of Chaumont's), dated 3 April 1778, Chaumont wrote, "But, my faith, the [American] cause is so beautiful that I sacrifice everything to serve it (Schaeper 205)."

Financially, Chaumont was ruined when the value of American currency dramatically decreased. Chaumont had kept much of his funds in American currency so the drastic devaluation devastated him. It was only through his friends in the royal government that he escaped complete ruin and repossession of all his belongings.

In 1789, Madame Chaumont had obtained a *séparation de biens*, commonly referred to as a 'Catholic divorce.' However, the divorce itself did not become legal until 1792. Chaumont's son came to his aid in 1791, agreeing to pay his mother a pension of 8,500 livres a year. Had James not come forward,



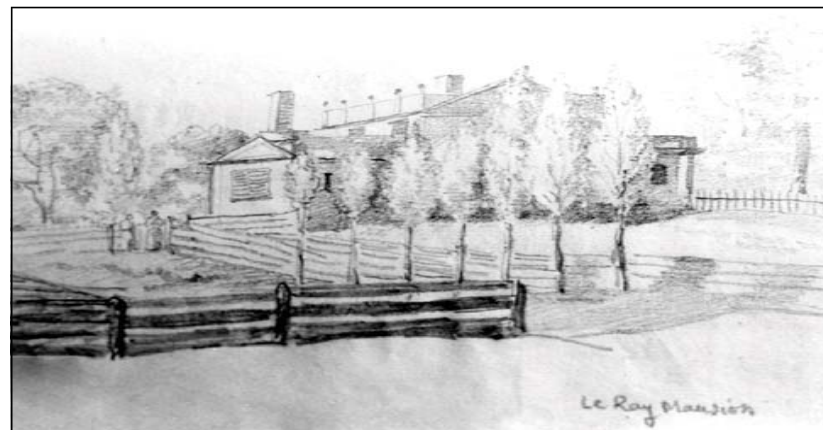
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AT THE COURT OF FRANCE

the pond.

Early historians have made the unsubstantiated claim that the early mansion was built using the plan of the Hôtel de Valentinois in Passy, near Paris but on a much smaller scale and more adapted to the American way of life. To date, no records or remains have been found to indicate the size, stature or architecture of the first mansion so such comparisons are merely hearsay.

Federal census records in 1810 indicate that LeRay listed himself as a resident of Jefferson County, presumably at the mansion now contained on Fort Drum. LeRay reported a household comprised of 35 people: 1 male under 10, 11 males between the ages of 16-26, 10 males ages 26-45, 8 males over 45 and 2 women ages 26 and 45. Three other household members were not reported under any specific heading. The age and predominant gender of the household indicates the presence of laborers. Though whether slave or free was not noted, it is significant to note that LeRay was a slave owner.

When James returned to France in late 1810, he left his estates in his son Vincent's charge (LeRay to George Parish, February 25, 1818, JCHS). Vincent, the eldest son of James and Grace LeRay de Chaumont, was educated in Paris at the Ecolé Royal Polytechnique. Upon finishing his studies in 1808 Vincent left to join his family in LeRaysville, New York. James often remarked to others in his personal and business letter of the pride he felt in Vincent's business prowess. At the time of Mr. LeRay's departure to France Moss Kent, the first agent in charge of the land office at LeRaysville, stayed in the area to assist Vincent in his management needs. Mr. Kent resided with the LeRay Family at the first mansion. Kent remained in the service of LeRay until his retirement in 1816 at which point



EARLY DRAWING OF THE LERAY MANSION. DRAWING MAY REPRESENT THE FIRST MANSION. DATE UNKNOWN.



**G**ouverneur Morris (1752-1816) is an often overlooked but key figure of the American Revolution. Historians have argued in recent years that Morris is the man responsible for writing the majority of the US Constitution. Morris was a close friend of George Washington, a signer of the Articles of Confederation, a member of the Continental Congress (representing New York), a confidant of Benjamin Franklin and is the man who gave the most speeches during the Constitutional Convention (173 to be exact). This native New Yorker is an intriguing figure who was also a friend of James LeRay de Chaumont and a fellow land speculator.

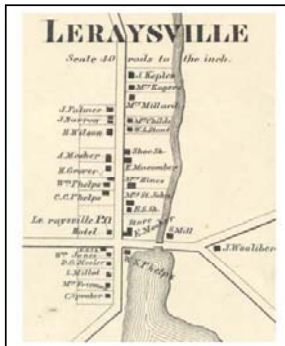
Returning from France in 1807, James commissioned the construction of a home near LeRaysville, New York. Dr. Baudry, a Frenchman, was sent to Jefferson County by LeRay to choose a location for his residence and land office. Dr. Baudry, after seeing Mr. Brown's mill operations in the village later known as LeRaysville, and having made a thorough examination of the area in LeRay's purchase, decided at once the location of the first mansion.



**GENERAL JACOB BROWN**

LeRaysville, originally called Brown's Mill, was first settled by Benjamin Brown, brother to General Jacob Brown, the founder of Brownville and the hero of the Battle of Sacket's Harbor. General Brown was the most important of LeRay's early land agents, serving in that capacity until a land office was established in LeRaysville in 1808 (Clarke 1941).

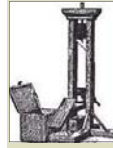
In October 1807 land survey recorded the presence of the LeRay Mansion and associated outbuildings (Survey of LeRay's Mansion Farm, October 1807, Jefferson County Bar Association). Other records indicate that the LeRay Family did not live in the first mansion until 1808 when James' son Vincent arrived from France (Kellogg 1932). In May of the following year, James LeRay wrote to David Parish from his home near LeRaysville stating that he was negotiating construction of a road he believed would greatly enhance the likelihood of attracting settlers to the northern New York region (LeRay to Parish May 3, 1809, JCHS).



**HISTORIC MAP OF THE VILLAGE OF LERAYSVILLE, 1848.**

In the fall of 1806, timber for the first mansion was cut and processed at Brown's mill. Ethni Evans, whom history has assumed was the master carpenter in charge of erecting the first mansion, began construction in 1807. When the LeRay Family came to the area in 1808 the house was not finished but was ready to be occupied. According to Holice Young, the first mansion was at the head of Brown's millpond in a broad opening amongst the forest at the crest of the hill overlooking

*Interesting note:*



**T**he French Revolution began in 1789. This was undoubtedly a dangerous time for French aristocrats, such as the Chaumont Family, as aristocrats were being herded to the guillotine in large numbers. During the Reign of Terror the Chaumont Family was spared from the violence. James, while in France during this time, declared that any action against him Family would be an action against America, since James was an American citizen at this time. Perhaps this declaration and association with America saved the Chaumont Family from death.

his father could have been forced to sell of the remainder of his possessions in order to pay back the bridal dowry to Madame Chaumont.

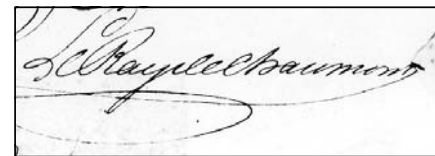
Both Jacques-Donatien and James felt that the only chance of collecting the debts owed to them by the Americans was to travel to the new United States and petition for the remainder of the bills to be paid. Chaumont entitled his twenty-five-year-old son with power of attorney. James LeRay de Chaumont left for the United States in April of 1785 and remained until 1790 to argue in support of his father.

The historical scholar, Thomas Schaeper, asserts that, in contrast to the historical accounts, Chaumont's son did not travel to America to collect huge sums of unpaid debts that the new American government owed his father. Rather, James traveled to America to collect on the money owed when the US Congress devastated US currency.

In June 1785, James went before Congress to deliver a diatribe demanding that his father and other French merchants be repaid in goods or in non-depreciating currency. The speech was a failure. Despite Benjamin Franklin's continued support and petitions in the next five years, James was largely unsuccessful in collecting monies owed his father.

While in America, James became an important presence in elite social and political spheres. In 1789 he wed Grace Coxe of Sidney, New Jersey, becoming a member of one of the most famous and influential families of the era. James LeRay de Chaumont became an American citizen on 19 March 1788. James and Grace had three children: two sons, Vincent and Alexander, and a daughter, Theresa.

In early 1790 James returned to France and took over the remainder of his father's financial assets. James did not return to America until 1802.



**SIGNATURE OF JAMES LERAY DE CHAUMONT**

Historians have argued about how James and his father Jacques wrote their name. From this signature we can see it was written as LeRay de Chaumont in full and not Leray as some have argued.

## JAMES LERAY DE CHAUMONT IN NORTHERN NEW YORK

### LAND SPECULATION

With little or no capital of his own, James obtained credit and loans from various investors. James decided to invest in land in Pennsylvania and New York. With the financial backing of such notable contemporaries as Pierre Chassanais (James' brother-in-law), Gouverneur Morris, Temple Franklin (grandson of Benjamin Franklin), Alexander Hamilton and Judge William Cooper, James became one of the most important landowners in the Northeast. During the 1790s, while in France, James employed land agents who acquired significant, if scattered, lands on his behalf.

Few attempts had been made to settle the vast majority of Northern New York until the end of the Revolutionary war. At the close of the War for Independence, the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee, ceded their lands in New York to the American government. Alexander McComb, an ambitious land baron acquired 1,920,000 acres of land in 1791. The large tract encompassed all of today's Jefferson and Lewis Counties as well as large portions of Franklin and Saint Lawrence counties, with the exception of a small square of land known as Penet's Square. [Penet's square was a ten mile square, with one corner extending to the St. Lawrence at French Creek, reserved by the Oneida Indians in the treaty of 1788 for Peter Penet]. McComb went bankrupt shortly after purchasing the large tracts of land and left his partner, William Constable, to sell off the land in order to recover some of the money owed in debt.



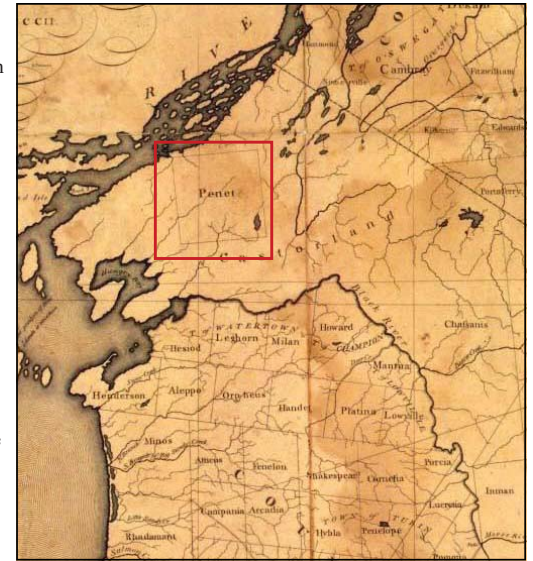
PAINTING OF JAMES LERAY DE CHAUMONT FOUND WITH ITEMS FROM THE CHATEAU DE CHAUMONT RESIDENCE BY A DESCENDENT OF LERAY.

The two largest land companies with which James was associated were the Castorland Company and the Antwerp Company, both of which were located in northern New York State. James LeRay de

Chaumont owned approximately 350,000 acres with these two land companies. The majority of land was located in four northern New York Counties; Lewis, Jefferson, Saint Lawrence and Franklin.

The Castorland Land Company was formed in 1792 when a group of French investors, with the financial backing of some Swiss creditors, purchased a 630,000-acre lot in upper New York State near the present day town of Carthage, to create a colony for upper class French families fleeing from the tribulations of the French Revolution. The name *Castorland* was in tribute to the area's history with the French fur trade, since "castor" is another name for beaver. The "Compagnie de New York" adopted a seal depicting a beaver chewing on a tree and the name Castorland.

The Antwerp Company was a proprietary land company in northern New York. Gouverneur Morris became the first agent, and later, James Le Ray de Chaumont extensively invested in the company. Under his ownership much of the land was settled.



1802 MAP BY SIMEON DEWITT SHOWING PENET'S SQUARE

### JAMES LERAY AND THE BUILDING OF THE MANSION IN THE WILDERNESS

In 1802, James returned to America for two years. According to historian Thomas Wood Clarke in his book, *Émigrés in the Wilderness*, when James LeRay de Chaumont traveled into the wilderness of northern New York State in 1803 to survey his newly purchased lands in Jefferson County when his canoe party "was obliged to stop at Gravelly Point [today's Cape Vincent], two miles above Putnam's [on Point Peninsula] where they pitched their tent . . . (Clarke 1941)." Also according to Clarke, it was during this trip that James became soaking wet and caught pneumonia soon after, an illness he would barely survive. This trip was not without other consequences to James' party. One evening Gouverneur Morris, founding father and signer of the Constitution, slept to close to the fire and his wooden leg was incinerated.



BEAVER FURS WERE HIGHLY PRIZED IN EARLY AMERICA FOR ITEMS SUCH AS THE HAT BELOW

