

*Cover Photo:  
The wetlands of Goose Creek in the Thomas Pell Wildlife Sanctuary.  
Paul C. Berizzi*

*Contributions to this text were made by Anthony Emmerich, Andrew French, David Kunstler, and Harvey Lubar. All helped while working at the Bronx Office of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.*

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# PELHAM BAY PARK

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**Creating the Sanctuaries**

# Pelham Bay Park: Creating the Sanctuaries

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This booklet commemorates the 20th anniversary of the designation of  
the Thomas Pell Wildlife Sanctuary and the Hunter Island Marine  
Zoology and Geology Sanctuary.  
October 11, 1987.



Nestled in the northeast corner of the Bronx is New York City's largest and most varied green space: 2,764-acre Pelham Bay Park.

Named after the region's first English settler and a bay that no longer exists, this park abounds with recreation facilities whose construction subjected planners to mental and physical challenges.

Among these facilities are playgrounds and ballfields that were carved into woods and wetlands, and engineering marvels such as Orchard Beach, which was built over the park's namesake body of water.

But some of the park's most significant—and most often ignored—attributes are its natural areas. This is where students of rocks, trees, birds, and history come to see features that are thousands—and in some areas millions—of years old, and to spot living things that are rare in the region. It is also where one can go for a moment or two of peace and quiet, and to wander a variety of land forms that constitute a microcosm of the borough's land.

Perhaps the most impressive of these areas are the park's saltwater wetlands, where migrating birds breed and rest, and which are remnants of a 5,000-acre marsh that once covered most of the eastern portion of the Bronx.

Wetlands are an important part of our world, playing a vital role in flood control, as well as in the protection of water. They are also essential to fishermen who make their living catching what is spawned in them, as well as to animals that know them as sources of food.

Yet as beautiful and important as Pelham Bay Park's natural areas are, much of them would not be in the state they are in today were it not for the remarkable events of two decades ago.

It was on October 11, 1967, in the Blue Room of New York's City Hall that Mayor John V. Lindsay signed into law two bills establishing the Thomas Pell Wildlife and the Hunter Island Marine Zoology and Geology sanctuaries on 489 acres of the park and an offshore zone.

This ceremony was a harmonious event in which handshakes, smiles, and compliments abounded. It was, however, a calm moment in a struggle that had lasted for almost a year and which in fact would not be fully over until more than another year had passed.

In this struggle were traits found in many of the battles fought during the consciousness-raising 1960s: a group of citizens concerned about the environment and the future of human existence pressured government officials into abandoning unpopular plans.

One noteworthy thing about the fight was that it caused change without producing chaos, a refreshing turn in light of such events of that summer as protests against United States military involvement in Vietnam and riots brought on by racial tension in Newark, Detroit, and New York.

It was a struggle won through the political system. The victors were the educational and environmental communities; City, State and federal officials; and ordinary citizens. Its beneficiaries were the Bronx and nature.

And its battle lines were drawn over an issue which struck at the heart of a growing concern for our environment: where and how our far-reaching and increasingly packaged civilization disposes of its refuse.

Yet this struggle ironically came about because of laws passed to protect other parts of the giant ecosystem known as the Earth.

The Thomas Pell and Hunter Island areas this year reach their 20th anniversaries as protected refuges because concerned people came out in strong and organized opposition to plans to bury garbage there.

It was no small-scale plan. This sanitary landfill ("Sanitary landfill," wrote former Parks Commissioner August Heckscher in his 1974 book, "Alive in the City," "is a euphemism for 'garbage dump' ") would have been the second-largest refuse-disposal site in the City, second only to a 3,000-acre site at Fresh Kills on Staten Island.

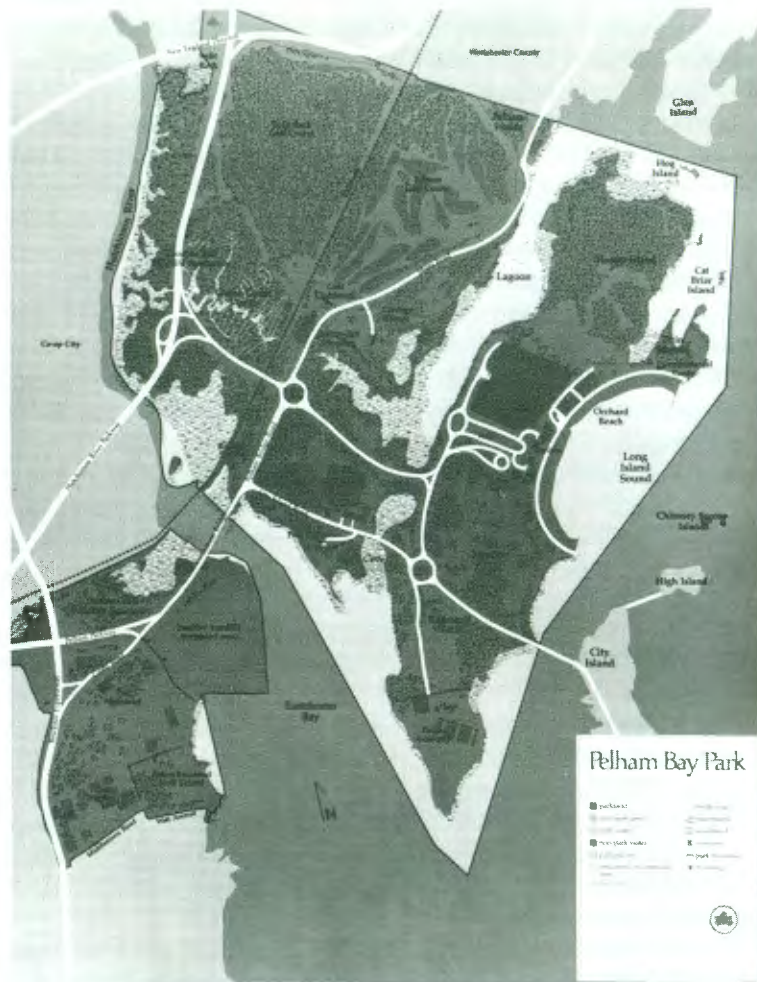
The land within these sanctuaries is among the most beautiful on the East Coast of the United States. Here, 15 miles northeast of Manhattan's Empire State Building, lie the marshes of the Hutchinson River and Goose Creek, and the shores of Hunter and Twin islands, which feature rock outcrops and boulders with scratches graven in when glaciers pushed through the region during the last ice age.

These rocks, which mark the southernmost corner of the New England upland, are believed to be some of the oldest on the East Coast. At water's edge, they form a rocky marine intertidal community, a natural habitat of great rarity within the State.

The salt marshes, which cover most of the sanctuary areas, are grass-dominated wetlands fringing the shore. They are the result of interaction between coastal sedimentation and rising sea levels.

The Pell Sanctuary forms most of the park's western border along the Hutchinson River and Goose Creek. It includes all land west of the Split Rock Golf Course and an adjacent railroad with the exception of the Hutchinson River Parkway. A small section is west of the Pelham Bridge, which spans the river, and includes Goose Island, which is in the river west of the bridge.





New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

The Hunter Island Sanctuary is located north of Orchard Beach and includes the shore and waters north of Hunter Island, Twin Island (which is east of Hunter Island), and tiny Cat Briar Island, northeast of Twin Island.

These refuges have an abundance of living things that startles visitors expecting to see little else but urban blight in the Bronx. In fact, more than 400 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and invertebrates have been spotted within the park they are in. The population of crabs within the marshes alone numbers in the millions.

Often, one can sense this great variety with just a glance. During warm weather days, great and snowy egrets and other herons can be seen stalking fish. Ducks abound in the waterways, where they feed on small plants and insects. The area's abundance of rodents such as meadow mice draws such predatory birds as marsh hawks and short-eared owls.

Rare treats for students of living things include the secretive clapper rail, a long-billed marsh bird the size of a chicken; northern diamondback terrapins (turtles), which have been sighted in the Hutchinson River during spring; and *Amphipoea erepta ryensis*, a moth with light reddish brown forewings and straw-colored hind wings rediscovered in the Goose Creek Marsh in 1975 after not having been seen anywhere for many years.

All of Pelham Bay Park lies atop a foundation of Hartland schist bedrock which surfaces at Hunter and Twin islands and dates back millions of years to the Earth's early days, long before mammals began to roam the planet.

Most of the park's current surface dates back a mere 10,000 to 15,000 years, to when the last ice age was ending. The region's marshes began to form at this time.

As the last glacier melted, the sea rose and submerged the shore along the coasts and tidal rivers. About 9,000 years later, the rising of the sea had slowed and sediment began accumulating along the shore, building sand and mud flats that remained submerged except during low tides.

Saltwater cordgrass, a tall plant tolerant of salt and long-term submersion, colonized these flats, forming the first marshes. Its stems trapped sediment washed in by the high tides, and in time the mud level rose so that much of the inner marsh area was wet only during high tide. Shorter grasses covered higher ground.

Within this environment formed a highly productive food web that has since been extensively exploited by fish, birds, and mammals and contributed to the abundance of animal life in today's park.



After the glacial period, tundra vegetation conducive to human survival emerged, but gradually gave way to a less-hospitable boreal—or northern—forest of conifers. A deciduous—or seasonal—forest emerged 6,000 years ago, encouraging the return of mammals.

Siwanoy Indians were the humans who controlled the area until Europeans arrived. The Europeans found the region's forests open and park-like due to land clearing done by native Americans seeking to hunt and spot enemies. But they also found, through Indian attacks, that they were not welcome.

The first European to successfully hold the land was Thomas Pell, who signed a treaty with the Siwanoy in 1654. Pell's purchase marked the first time a Briton owned a significant piece of property near Dutch New Amsterdam.

England eventually took control of this city, renamed it New York, and granted Pell a royal charter authorizing the creation of the Manor of Pelham. The Pell family built a mansion and started selling small parcels of land to other settlers.

The Pells have since had many of the region's features—including a village, the park, and, 20 years ago, one of the sanctuaries—named for them.

During the 19th century, the land was divided further. In 1804, John Hunter—a politician and collector of fine items, and namesake of the other sanctuary—purchased the island that has also been named for him and landscaped it. There he built the Hunter Mansion, which was known as one of the area's most elegant locations. The building stood until the 1930s.

Efforts to establish a park in the northeast corner of the Bronx started in 1881, when the New Parks Movement proclaimed it was time for New York to increase its parkland holdings. A resulting bill passed by the State Legislature created Pelham Bay Park, five other green spaces, and two parkways in what would become the Bronx. It was signed into law on June 14, 1884, by Governor Grover S. Cleveland.

The natural areas grew undisturbed for the first time in hundreds of years as the Parks Department, responding to the growing popularity of its properties, focused on building easily accessible recreation facilities.

The epitome of the Parks agency's focus on built facilities was Robert Moses' 26-year term as Commissioner. Four years after his 1934 appointment by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Moses had transformed much of Pelham Bay Park, enhancing it with playgrounds, comfort stations, benches, paved paths, and even a golf course.



*Twin Island and its glacial rocks are visible from the north shore of Hunter Island, which is within the Hunter Island Marine Zoology and Geology Sanctuary.*

*Paul C. Berizzi*



*Saltmarsh grasses form the transitional barrier between land and water on Goose Creek within the Thomas Pell Wildlife Sanctuary.*

*Paul C. Berizzi*



His most ambitious project within the park by far, however, was the new Orchard Beach, an \$8-million, 115-acre complex that replaced another beach bearing the same name and which was built largely through the use of the very type of fill that residents of the Bronx banded to fight in the 1960s.

Orchard Beach was by no means the only parkland acreage created in this city through this method. In fact, many of the City's great recreation facilities lie atop sanitary landfill that covers wetlands.

This practice can be traced to two occurrences. The first is the tremendous growth of the City's population. In 1850, New York had 696,115 people living in it. By 1960, its population was 7,781,984, and all of its citizens were generating garbage.

Up to the 1930s, New York City had enough open space around for it to dispose of its garbage without annoying many people. The citizens of early New York either allowed pigs roaming the streets to eat their garbage or burned or dumped their refuse in northern Manhattan.

As the City stretched northward, it started dumping much of its refuse into what seemed like an inexhaustible resource: the sea.

By 1897, the City was concerned enough with the issue of garbage disposal to build an incinerator. It was not long after this that the practice of filling-in land with ashes and refuse was established in Flushing Meadows and on Riker's Island. (Flushing Meadows has since hosted two world's fairs. Today it is the City's second-largest park.)

Sanitary filling was already being practiced at the turn of the century with the ashes from a rubbish furnace at Fresh Kills. This disposal method received increased attention when the City in 1900 suspended dumping at sea during summer months.

The City's reliance upon the sea as a garbage-disposal site led to the second occurrence contributing to the use of City parks for sanitary filling and to a measure that served to intensify the effort to fill much of Pelham Bay Park three decades later.

In 1934, complaints from shore communities spurred the United States Supreme Court to rule that New York's dumping at sea constituted a nuisance and order it halted.

"The City was forced to dispose of its waste on land within the City limits and to establish or expand vast dumps," wrote Parks Commissioner Moses in reference to the results of this ruling. Thus sanitary filling was started in Marine Park in Brooklyn and Great Kills Park in Staten Island in 1940, in Soundview and Ferry Point parks in the Bronx in 1941, and in Kissena Park in Queens in 1948.

Ethan Carr, former City of New York Parks & Recreation Department Historian, said in a recent interview, "The areas most commonly designated as parks originally were swamps. The reason they were used for parks is that they were swamps and not usable for much else. And the best way to develop them for active park use was landfilling."

"Moses advocated the whole idea," he said. "He knew the Sanitation Department was looking for a place to put its garbage, so he and the heads of the Sanitation Department got together."

In the Parks Department Annual Report for 1950, Commissioner Moses, who also designed much of the New York metropolitan area's highway system, said in an open letter that play facilities in all five of the City's boroughs resulted from such activity. "The public," he wrote, "has forgotten the initial discomforts of trucking and handling in the enjoyment of the facilities we have created."

But Moses, in that same letter, indicated he knew there was a limit to the good effects of sanitary landfills. In 1948, he wrote, complaints by residents in the vicinity of fill operations "forced the City to adopt a definite program of construction of facilities for complete incineration, a policy long recommended by this department."

This change, though meant for the better, would create problems for Pelham Bay Park later on.



*Garbage on which Pelham Bay Park's engineering marvel, Orchard Beach, was built awaits burial during construction in mid-1930s. The shell of the beach's pavilion is visible in upper left corner.*

*Construction Aggregates Inc., Chicago, Ill.*



Precisely when the City's departments of Sanitation and Parks chose Pelham Bay Park as a site for a sanitary landfill is not clear. A preparation plan for filling an 80-acre area with garbage was submitted to the City Board of Estimate in December 1961, during the administration of Mayor Robert F. Wagner. Work on this fill started in 1964 in the eastern part of the park known as Tallapoosa Point.

Tallapoosa East, as this site later became known, is located on Eastchester Bay south of the Pelham Bridge. Its name stems from the Tallapoosa Club, a social organization once based in what is now the Bronx and which included Civil War veterans who fought in Tallapoosa, Georgia. The club used the point for picnics and clambakes before the land was purchased by the City for use as parkland.

Prior to the building of Orchard Beach, Tallapoosa Point and the original Orchard Beach were the two popular swimming areas in the park. Until the 1960s, Tallapoosa offered a promenade with a view of Eastchester Bay, Long Island Sound, and City Island, a Bronx community located off the park's shore.

Virginia Gallagher, a civic-minded and active resident of City Island, recalled during a recent interview the time this landfill operation got under way.

She said that although area residents fought this operation, the battle was hampered by the suddenness of the plan's implementation and by the fact that community input on such projects was limited.

"The Sanitation Department simply started a landfill there," she said. "City Island was in the direct line of the odor. We'd have to close our doors and light cigarettes to get rid of the smell."

"It was heartbreaking," she added. "There were no community planning boards yet. Once the City decided to do it, it was an accomplished fact."

Incineration was starting to come under attack as a means of refuse disposal during this time. By 1966, air pollution was a topic of deep concern within the City. Weather balloons and new types of meters were put into use to measure the cleanliness of the air people were breathing, a Public Health Service survey found the City's air the most polluted in the nation, and photographs of Manhattan's skyline during a Thanksgiving smog emergency served to shock many.

It was in April of 1966 that a far-reaching clean-air bill was introduced in the City Council. Among the provisions in the bill, which was signed into law on May 20, was one saying that owners of apartment buildings with at least seven stories must modify their incinerators within one year.



*A beach was located on Eastchester Bay in Pelham Bay Park where the Tallapoosa landfill was built. It was used for swimming until the 1930s.  
New York City Department of Parks & Recreation*

This bill led to Sanitation Department predictions for a refuse-disposal crisis and calls for additional landfill areas. Soon, it was clear that Pelham Bay Park's wetlands were among the areas the Sanitation agency's leaders had in mind for new landfill sites.

This time around, Virginia Gallagher was in a better position for a fight. She was now chairperson of the since-instituted Community Planning Board 10, and had knowledge of the plan long before it was to be implemented.

It was in November of 1966 that Gallagher received a call from Vincent Starace, a former Bronx Deputy Borough President who was settling into a job as an Assistant Commissioner of Sanitation.

"That was when I found out about the plan," she said, "when Starace called me and said, 'Are you aware there's a plan at the Sanitation Department to create 300 acres of landfill in Pelham Bay Park?'"

Thus began one of the most impressive fights by a community in the City's history. "I was outraged," said Gallagher. "I wrote to everyone. There was no avenue I didn't appeal to."

Gallagher's initial actions launched a campaign that accomplished what Mario Merola during a recent interview cited as a textbook example of how a community can fight City Hall.



"The strategy in a case like this is: You've got to sell the idea," said Merola. The landfill issue was one of Merola's first fights—and triumphs—as a City Councilman. Today, he is in his 15th year as Bronx District Attorney. "Start with the local community. Sell the fact that your idea has breadth and depth; that it affects the people. Get people who have a say in life or are important involved. Get people aroused and involved in the fight. If you have something good to say, they will listen."

"I tried to involve every group," Gallagher said. "That was easy for me because of all the different volunteer offices I held." At the time, she not only served as chairperson of the local community planning board and worked in the administrative offices of the Daily News, but also served as president of the City Island Civic Association, a vice president of the Bronx County Historical Society, and Secretary of the Northeast Bronx Taxpayer's Association.

Gallagher supplied the initial momentum to a chain of support that eventually reached Washington and Albany. Among the Bronxites Gallagher called were Bronx County Historical Society President Roger Arca and Pierre Marique, coordinator of the Neighborhood Youth Councils for Greater New York.

(Merola, during the recent interview, credited Marique with being one of the anti-landfill group's prime motivators and hardest workers. "It was Marique who used to contact the politicians," said Gallagher. "He was the contact man and wrote some of our literature." Marique had been injured in World War II, suffering facial disfigurement and the loss of his speaking ability. "He couldn't speak," said Gallagher, "but he sure could write.")

Gallagher also contacted and arranged a meeting with 30 civic associations in the Bronx, who subsequently formed a committee.

Yet perhaps the most valuable time Gallagher spent during the struggle was the moments she spent on one of her first calls. Its recipient: Dr. Theodore Kazimiroff.

"No one will be able to duplicate the services and dedication of Kazimiroff," said Gallagher recently. Said Merola: "Teddy Kazimiroff spearheaded the fight against the landfill. He was one of the primary guys behind the sanctuaries."

Kazimiroff was born in 1914, the same year as the borough of the Bronx. This coincidence is most appropriate for a man who spent his life digging in vacant lots and hiking through dense woods with the goal of documenting the borough's past.

He was a dentist by trade, but his passion for the Bronx had been sparked long before he worked on any patients by Joe Two Trees, an Algonquin Indian he encountered in Pelham Bay Park at a young age.

By the 1960s, Kazimiroff's reputation as a historian had been secured to the point where construction foremen would call him over to excavations and allow him to search for artifacts. Not long after learning of plans for the landfill, he started accumulating support from the educational and environmental communities that would prove to be extremely valuable.

Yet going into that spring, the movement still needed a few things. One was respect.

"When we came up with the opposition," said Merola, "everyone laughed at us. It was us against the establishment. The administration was against this. At the end, they were being embarrassed; they were putting pressure on me to withdraw my support."

Another need was information. After all, how organized could the group be if its members did not know where in the park or when the Sanitation Department planned to start dumping garbage?

The biggest need, however, was political strength.

All three requirements were met in time. Political strength and data on the proposed fill operation were the first to be obtained.

The first step in gaining political support was contacting recently elected Borough President Herman Badillo, a rising star within the Democratic Party.

On March 20, 1967, Badillo sent letters to Sanitation Commissioner Samuel Kearing and Parks Commissioner Heckscher asking for information on the dates and place of the proposed operation.

On April 14, Deputy Mayor Robert Sweet replied on behalf of the commissioners by sending maps and a letter to the borough president. This package gave Badillo a detailed idea of the Sanitation Department's plans. There would be four stages, Sweet explained, with the landfill already under way being designated as Split Rock Phase I. (The phases were named "Split Rock" after a nearby historic feature of the park.)

Sweet said the fill operations in Phase I "are virtually completed" and would cease as soon as the new landfill area was opened "some time in the fall of this year." Work on the area, he wrote, "will commence in the summer of this year and run through until mid-1971," The Split Rock II operation, which was to be sited east of the Hutchinson River near the Pelham Bridge, would take place from then until the end of 1973, he wrote, and the Split Rock III project, in the remote northwest corner of the park, "will complete the cycle by mid-1977."



(According to Gallagher, plans for using the waters off Hunter Island as a landfill site were never specified in official Sanitation Department documents. However, she said, Kazimiroff caught wind of such plans during the early months of 1967 through conversations with Parks and Sanitation officials.)

With data at hand, the Bronxites now needed public attention and more political clout to win their fight. Kazimiroff covered those bases when he contacted Councilman Mario Merola.

Merola's reputation is well known in New York City today: he is a fighter who pulls no punches. Born and educated in the Bronx (he attended New York University when it had a campus in the borough), Merola enlisted in the Army Air Corps for World War II, where he navigated 55 flights into enemy territory. He was voted District Attorney in 1972.

But in early 1967, Merola said, "I was the brand-new kid in the City Council. I thought I had no muscle." He did have incentive. "I was outraged when I learned of the plan," he said recently. "Remember, I grew up in the area and visited what is now the Pell Sanctuary many times."

He said the main reason he got involved was that "parkland should not be made a scapegoat of our refuse problems. To do so means we're bankrupt in intelligence."

The environmental movement had already started in the Northeast. Wetland preservation bills had been signed into law in Massachusetts and Rhode Island in 1965 following vigorous citizens' campaigns. In 1967, Connecticut passed similar protective legislation. In the Bronx, environmentalists were upset that hundreds of acres of tidal marshland adjacent to Pelham Bay Park had been filled in for the construction of the Freedomland amusement park, which was in turn displaced by Co-op City.

This was the setting in which the anti-landfill movement launched its offensive, which started with invitations to Heckscher and Kearing to meet with leading opponents of the landfill plan at Badillo's office on April 24.

With the exception of Sanitation Commissioner Kearing, all parties concerned with the issue attended this meeting. There they saw slides of Eastchester Bay's shore and the adjoining parkland, and heard speakers claim the landfill represented the destruction of an area which was under constant use for outdoor research of nature.

Kazimiroff warned that a May 13 lecture he was to present at the New York Botanical Garden Museum was rapidly being transformed into an "alertness meeting" against the landfill plan.

The 10 days immediately following the April 24 meeting saw three events that had a profound impact on the park's future.

The first was the solidifying by Kazimiroff of support from the academic and scientific communities. The historian did this with a letter sent the day after the meeting urging all concerned with the issue to attend the lecture at the Botanical Garden.

As a result, the anti-landfill movement was soon boasting of having naturalist John Kieran; the American Museum of Natural History; the New York Zoological Society; the New York Aquarium; the New York Botanical Garden; Fordham, Columbia, and New York universities; Manhattan, Mount St. Vincent, Hunter, Queens, and Brooklyn colleges; and the City College of New York on its side.

The anti-landfill movement had gained respect.

"When the environmental community came out, when the college presidents and all those people joined us, that's when we beat them," said Merola recently. "We developed a head of steam. It was the support of the environmental community that glued it."

It was also during this week at the site already being used for landfill and the areas slated for fill that Parks Commissioner Heckscher met with Mayor Lindsay, Sanitation agency head Kearing, and City Planning Commission Chairman Donald Elliot. Heckscher wrote of this meeting in "Alive in the City."

"The sun was casting its last light over the yellow marsh lands where we stood. I recall ending with an emotional appeal. A million years had gone into the making of that rich miracle of soil and water, and a million years would not undo the damage if we were to act unwisely now," he wrote. "John Lindsay stood for while just looking around. Then he turned to me and said simply, 'I guess you win this one.'"

No decision regarding the landfill was made public immediately following this meeting. In fact, actions on the part of both sides gave no hint of the battle being over.



Kearing, for instance, came out of it and told *The New York Times* that he had reached an agreement with Heckscher and that he hoped to start fill operations within two months. (Kearing had been campaigning for additional landfill space since the Clean-Air Act affecting incinerators was passed. In February 1967, he said he expected all of the City's landfills to be filled within eight months, and that the Clean-Air legislation would probably reduce the number of operating incinerators. As the compliance deadline approached, he warned that the City's 11 incinerators would never be modified in time and would have to close. Yet it was not until the day prior to his "agreement" statement that he was quoted as saying he was negotiating for use of large parts of the park for that purpose.)

Kearing's declaration of victory was retracted in the next day's *Times*. "I guess there's no agreement," Kearing was quoted as saying. "I was under the impression we had reached an agreement that there was no alternative but to go into Split Rock reluctantly."

Heckscher said he had only re-examined the matter with Kearing. No mention was made of assurances by the mayor.

The third, and probably most important, event of those 10 days took place on May 2, the day the *Times* reported for the first time of negotiations regarding landfill plans.

That was when Merola submitted a resolution to the City Council calling for the establishment of wildlife sanctuaries at the site of the proposed landfills. The strategy now was not to save the almost 500 acres, but to protect them for all time.

Making the public aware of the sanctuary resolutions was an important step Merola took two days later during a media event. There probably was a great deal of anxiety within the anti-landfill movement that morning. That was when the *Times* ran its "Kearing and Heckscher agree on Landfill for Park in Bronx" story. The group, having no way of knowing a retraction was to come, was probably desperate. But its leaders responded with a smooth presentation.

It was a two-hour tour of the proposed landfill area led by Kazimiroff, Merola, Marique, and historian John McNamara. The setting was a perfect one for which Merola to unveil the details of his resolution.

The public now was fully informed on the issue.

No one had expected when Kazimiroff first called on the area's environmental and educational leaders to meet at the Botanical Garden that this gathering would be held in an atmosphere of confidence. But that was exactly what happened, and there would be no let-up.

The City Council on May 16 agreed to grant Merola's resolution committee consideration. Then came what Merola referred to recently as the deciding blow.

During the week of May 28, Mayor Lindsay received a telegram from United States Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, whom the anti-landfill group had contacted.

"I am deeply disturbed over the decision to use the Pelham Bay Park site for the disposal of solid wastes," it read. It concluded by stating: "I urge your careful reconsideration of destruction of this area and ask you to fully weigh its immeasurable values. It should be preserved."

"We had all the support," said Merola recently. "We had them on the ropes. We had colleges, botanists. When Udall joined us, that was the crusher."

Udall, who served as Interior Secretary under presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, said recently a main concern of his office in matters such as this was being perceived as "meddlesome. After all, a City problem should be solved by the City.

"The most effective way for us to get involved in a matter like that," he said, "is to do what we did—send a telegram."

By June 2, Lindsay had informed Merola that the plan for filling in more than 400 acres in the park would not be implemented. Merola put out a press release that day declaring victory. The concern now was protecting the land for all time.

On September 24, the Parks and Thoroughfares Committee of the City Council approved the local laws creating the refuges. Local laws Nos. 101 and 102, as the sanctuary measures were had been designated, gained final City Council approval on September 26, setting the stage for the October 11 signing ceremony at City Hall.

But the battle for Pelham Bay Park was not totally over. For one thing, the Sanitation Department was still dumping in the original landfill, and the site would before long become a garbage-laden mountain in view for miles around.

And during the summer of 1967, the Lindsay administration began to show interest in a 30-acre tract west of the Pelham Bridge, across from the active fill, as the site of the City's next sanitary fill. This area is known today as Tallapoosa West.

"There was a feeling at the time that something had to be sacrificed," said Gallagher recently. "After all, we had gained 400 acres. My feeling was, 'Why sacrifice anything? Let's fight.' And we did."



The fight for Tallapoosa West was largely a City Island affair. Gallagher, Marique, and Merola spearheaded the effort to save it. In a July 7 press release, Merola said he would "fight to the last blade of grass" to preserve the remainder of the park.

Things seemed bleak for this group on July 27, when the City's Board of Estimate closed hearings on the subject, paving the way for Lindsay to authorize the start of work in the area. (The City reported that this site would provide the Bronx with a year of garbage collection as well as time for incinerator construction. Lindsay said this area would become "a major recreational resource for the community.")

"We were going nowhere in the City," said Gallagher. "We had to fight with the State of New York."

The anti-landfill group placed its attention on a recently adopted State law restricting development of areas adjacent to navigable waters. "We had to prove that the Hutchinson River was a navigable channel," said Gallagher. "We researched the rules and regulations under the Conservation Law of March 20, 1967. That's what we used to win."

Gallagher wrote to State Conservation Commissioner Stewart Kilborne and asked him to send a representative to witness a test of the river's depth.

On September 7, State Department of Conservation Estuarine Biologist for the New York City Area John J. Spagnoli came and saw what Gallagher had orchestrated: a flotilla of motorboats and of canoes led by the City-Island-based Boy Scout Troop 211 drifting into Eastchester Bay, and then up the Hutchinson River past the Tallapoosa West site. The event showcased the depth of two things: the waters off Tallapoosa West, and the community's concern for them.

Spagnoli immediately filed for a public hearing in the Bronx on the matter. This hearing, held October 3, led to half-a-victory. "The state said they could only protect 15 of the 30 acres because 15 acres touched on navigable water," said Gallagher. "I appealed."

Spagnoli helped at this point with an order temporarily halting the City from dumping pending a hearing, which was held March 19, 1968, in Albany.

The main argument the anti-landfill group offered there was that allowing the dumping of garbage at Tallapoosa West would defeat the purpose of the sanctuaries approved the year before. It was the right argument.

Any hopes the City had of dumping more garbage into Pelham Bay Park were dashed on May 13 when the Conservation Department's final decision was handed down: permission to dump in Tallapoosa West was rescinded.

On May 23, Merola began to lobby in the City Council for the addition of Tallapoosa West to the sanctuary area. On May 30, he began to hammer the final nail in the landfill plan's coffin by introducing legislation to the City Council that called for this area to be added to the Pell Sanctuary.

This measure was adopted November 13, two years after Gallagher first learned of plans to dump the Bronx's garbage in large tracts within Pelham Bay Park.

The battle was over.

Throughout the battle for Pelham Bay Park, most of the anti-landfill movement lobbied to get the Sanitation Department to move its filling operations back to Ferry Point Park. That didn't happen; the City of New York has since sent the bulk of the Bronx's garbage to the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island.

However, it also used the original Pelham Bay landfill, which was supposed to wind up in a somewhat flat configuration, until January 1, 1979, when its height was measured at 164 feet.

Protecting our natural resources from civilization and finding a place for our garbage are problems that are yet to be solved.

A recent Federal Environmental Protection Agency survey found that half of the nation's municipalities will run out of landfill space in 10 years, and a barge loaded with garbage had to sail the Western Hemisphere's waters in search of someone willing to take its load.

Meanwhile, our coastal wetlands continue to be under constant attack from development. In the United States, these areas have been lost at a rate of 20,000 acres a year over the past quarter-century.

This year we are celebrating the efforts of citizens who cared enough about the Bronx's natural areas to invest time, energy, and funds in them.

It was a battle that was won. But we must not lose sight of the larger picture. Laws can be changed, and if the planet's garbage-disposal crisis is not dealt with effectively, the day may come when another fight to save Pelham Bay Park's wetlands, or some other precious natural feature, will be necessary.

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