

Merestead

By MaryBeth Weisner

In Mt. Kisco sits a hidden treasure for our cultural, educational, recreational and visual pleasure. Merestead, a 26-room Georgian Revival Mansion, was built in 1906 by the late William and Frances Crocker Sloane. William Sloane, was the president of W & J Sloane Furniture Company; a furniture business that had been started by his Grandfather in 1843. The Sloane's were part of the "high society" of NYC. In the early 1900's, they lived in Manhattan and were looking for a site to build their weekend home. The 130 acres at 455 Byram Lake Road, Mt. Kisco fit the bill. In 1906, William Sloane retained the architectural firm of Delano and Aldrich to design a home. Merestead, which means farmland in Scottish, was built over the next two years.

In 1910, Francis Sloane gave birth at Merestead to the couple's only child, Margaret. Margaret married a prominent orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Robert Patterson. Dr. Paterson treated many influential people in and around New York area including President John F. Kennedy. Although the Patterson's had no children, they spent much of their married life in the 26-room mansion. Margaret always called Merestead her home. In 1982, in a truly philanthropic gesture, Margaret bequeathed Merestead, all of its furniture, contents, art work and its 130 acres to Westchester County with the understanding that she would live out her remaining days there. Margaret had a vision for Merestead, her wish was that the property be used for "*conservation, education, cultural, intellectual, historical and recreational purposes.*"

Margaret lived at Merestead on and off until her death in 2000. Upon her death, the County took possession of Merestead.

Unfortunately, it remained virtually unused for a number of years. However today, Merestead is open to the public for a variety of events. Andy Spano has been credited with the vision that has taken a homestead and transformed it into part Recreational Park, part Formal Gardens and part Musical Concert Hall. Spano's idea was to link Copland House and Merestead together. And his vision has not only created a wonderful relationship between two organizations, but we the residents of Westchester County benefit tremendously!

I had the opportunity to meet with Michael Boriskin, the noted pianist and the Artistic and Executive Director of Copland House one afternoon at Merestead. Here is the connection: Copland House is an organization that promotes and supports contemporary Classical American Composers, Merestead is a facility that hosts these Composers currently in the form of concerts but futuristically, Merestead will be housing new composers and their entire ensembles of creative contemporaries.

Copland House is based out of the home of the late great American Composer, Aaron Copland. It is located here in Westchester County in Cortland Manor. Copland's home has become part of the White House Save America's Treasures program and it is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Recently, it has been awarded the ranking of a National Historic Landmark. It is open to school groups for Field Trips and through the foundation; hundreds of the most talented contemporary musical artists of our time compete for the very few opportunities to live in Copland's home each year. The artists that are chosen get to spend anywhere from a few weeks to a few months living here in Westchester County in Copland's home in the hopes that they will be inspired to create and compose new music. It is a sabbatical type

environment where composers or musicians can immerse themselves in their craft without outside influences and distractions.

Eventually, Michael Boriskin hopes Merestead will be used as a facility where a composer could stay for an extended period of time with their choreographers, lyricists, set designers and costume designers all under one roof for collaborative purposes. If you have ever tried to be creative and produce or complete a piece of music or a piece of art, sometimes all you're looking for a space where creativity is allowed to blossom and flourish. Merestead is just that place. It is breathtaking, peaceful, quiet, and picturesque with plenty of room to house numerous creative minds under one roof.

Since Merestead was a gentleman's farm, there are many out buildings. The cow barn has been transformed into a performance venue, recording studio and a facility for both webcasting and distance learning. Merestead's living room has hosted concerts. In August, Andrea Marcovicci will be singing songs of the lyricist Johnny Mercer. For Marcovicci's event, "Merestead's tented formal garden will be the exquisite late-summer setting...". The options are limitless and we here in Westchester get to benefit with incredibly low-ticket prices. Boriskin intentionally wants to keep the ticket prices affordable to the public. Other than special fund raising events, the most expensive ticket price is \$25 and those same tickets are only \$10 for students. Boriskin encourages us to bring our children. He wants to exposes all of us to what is currently happening in the Classical music industry.

For ticket information call 914-788-4659 or you may send an e-mail to office@coplandhouseorg. Seating is often limited. Some of these concerts only have room for 100 guests. I recommend calling early and perhaps even buying a subscription series. All 9 concerts at Merestead are \$180! Great music, great prices!!

Copland House supports new Classical composers not just Beethoven, Bach and Brahms, the Three B's that we all think of when we think Classical Music. As Boriskin explained, we didn't all stop reading literature after Chaucer and Shakespeare. We still have bestselling author like J.K. Rowling, Dan Brown and Stephen King. We didn't all stop going to the movies after *Gone with the Wind*. Contemporary doesn't mean less quality, it just means "new". There is a plethora of great Contemporary Composers to hear. The Chicago Tribune stated, "Excellent musicians in vital performances. Copland would have been proud of them all."

For those of us that don't want to go for the music, Merestead offers 2 ½ miles of Westchester County hiking trails. These trails can be found just off the parking lot on Byram Lake Road. The trails are clearly marked and not too hilly, a relatively easy walk. The trails are open daily from 8am to dusk. Tours are given at Merestead and you may find more information on Merestead by going to www.westchestergov.com/parks or www.coplandhouse.org.