



COFFINS AND CREPE



DEATH IN A 19TH-CENTURY HOME

From October 6 through November 7, the Merchant's House will present *Coffins and Crepe: Death in a 19th-century Home*, an exhibition recreating a 19th-century house in mourning.

Then, life was uncertain; medical knowledge was limited and ineffective in treating disease. Death almost always occurred at home, at times suddenly, often prematurely, and sometimes after a lingering, gruesome illness.

In order to cope with the ever-present anguish and mystery of death, people developed a host of social customs, which are the subject of the exhibition. The authentic setting of the Merchant's House makes it possible for visitors to learn what it was like to experience the death of a family member in the 19th century.

Tableaus will recreate the deathbed and funeral of Seabury Tredwell, who died on March 7, 1865. His funeral was held in the front parlor, as was customary, four days later.

The parlors will be draped in black, the shutters will be closed, and a casket will be in place.

Eliza Tredwell and her eight grown children would have observed mourning rituals that included withdrawing from society for a certain period of time and, for the women, the donning of a special mourning wardrobe. Examples of 19th-century mourning dresses from the Museum's costume collection will be displayed on mannequins throughout the House.

Objects related to mourning, including special mourning jewelry, handkerchiefs, calling cards, and stationery will be on display in the downstairs exhibition cases.

Coffins and Crepe: Death in a 19th-century Home, October 6 through November 7, Merchant's House Museum, 29 East Fourth Street. Thursday-Monday, 12 to 5 pm,

The Ghosts of Pigments Past

A recently completed paint analysis by Richbrook Conservation reveals that the interior of the Merchant's House was painted six times between the time it was built in 1832 and the time it became a Museum in 1936. The Tredwells undertook four of the paint campaigns.

The first finish, of course, was applied by the builder upon completion of the House. It was a temporary water-based paint that allowed the wall and ceiling plaster time to dry.

The second campaign, likely done by the Tredwells after they moved to the house in 1835, consisted of a lead-based paint in neutral shades of cream, tan, and brown. This finish was followed by a partial repainting that focused on high-visibility and high-trafficked areas.

It is the fourth campaign (the Tredwells' third), however, that is the most interesting as it represents the House at the most fashionable point in its history. The Tredwells clearly invested a significant amount of time and money in this comprehensive and very high-end decorative finish campaign.

Throughout the House, the base layer was a zinc white paint, which was not only more expensive than lead-based paint, but also required two coats to cover. This was followed by an application of a glaze specially tinted for each room. Of note, the color palette consisted of the same neutral cream, tan and brown – with the walls painted in a polychrome pattern, highlighting details such as the chimney breasts and the columns in the parlors.

The final Tredwell campaign was again a partial redecoration, evidently undertaken at the time "modern conveniences"—the dumbwaiter, the elevator and the bathroom—were added, for it is limited to the locations where the existing finish would have been disturbed by these renovations.

The sixth, and last, campaign in the survey was undertaken by George Chapman, when he prepared to open the House to the public as a Museum in 1936. We are extremely grateful to Benjamin Moore & Co. for funding this important research. The results of the paint analysis will be a key feature in formulating a comprehensive and even more historically accurate furnishings plan for the House.

Merchant's House Museum

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The Merchant's House Museum is New York City's only family home preserved intact – inside and out – from the 19th century. A National Historic and New York City Landmark, the House was built in 1832 and was home to a prosperous merchant family for 100 years.



HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST
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From the Director

We're on a conservation and restoration roll. The paint analysis (page one) and the tea room (page four) are just two of the many thrilling and gratifying conservation and restoration projects we've been engrossed in at the Merchant's House in recent months.

Conservation of the Tredwell Costume Collection

In the Museum's fourth floor workroom (once the servants' hall), costume conservator Helen Kapodistrias continues the work of conserving and rehousing our extraordinary collection of costumes with a Tredwell provenance. She has completed an in-depth condition report on all 40 dresses and the conservation of 5, including the 1820 embroidered-linen wedding dress of Eliza Tredwell. Currently, Helen is working on a black silk dress, ca. 1846-52, which has so far required over 80 hours of painstaking work. This mourning dress will be displayed in our exhibition, *Coffins and Crepe: Death in a 19th-century Home*, opening October 6.

Computerizing and Digitizing the Collections for the 21st Century

Caroline Drabik, a Kress fellow in Curatorial Studies, has for five months been entering descriptions and photographs of collection objects into a computer database. Using Past Perfect software, which is designed especially to track museum collections, she has so far entered close to 1,000 objects, including over 650 pieces of the costume collection and 130 lighting devices. This is a year-long project administered by the Historic House Trust. In late September, Caroline will move on to another trust property, the Wyckoff House Museum.

General Conservation Survey

Six students from New York University's Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts, and Museum Studies Program have recently completed a collections conservation survey as part of a university course entitled *Preventive*

Conservation & Surveying Historic House Museums: A Survey Course for the Merchant's House Museum. The extensive survey report included an overall assessment of and prioritized recommendations for environmental conditions, e.g., temperature, relative humidity, and light; the objects in the museum's vast and varied collections; and collections policies and procedures.

In-depth examinations of a portion of the archaeological collection – items unearthed in a dig in the early 1990s – and the book collection, which includes many with a Tredwell family inscription, were also undertaken. Alison Clark, one of the NYU students, continued as a summer intern to re-house the books and catalog the collection in Past Perfect.

We are extremely grateful to the many foundations and individuals who have made this work possible, including the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Bay and Paul Foundation, and the Lower Hudson Conference of Historical Agencies and Museums, Conservation Treatment Grant Program.

Looking ahead to the new year, when our funding coffers are (hopefully) refilled, we are planning to conserve the pair of gas chandeliers in the double parlors, and embark on research for a furnishings plan for our historic house in progress.

Margaret Halsey Gardiner
Executive Director

Ps. And, thanks to the Historic House Trust and Parks, the Museum offices were painted this summer—after 30 years. You can only imagine how our spirits have soared.

Life in the Past Lane

19th-century advice for cooks

“To Kill Cockroaches.

Mix 6 oz. powdered borax with 3 oz. castor sugar.

Spread on the haunts of the cockroaches. You can sweep them up in the morning.”

If only.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Call 212.777.1089 for reservations, or email nyc1832@merchantshouse.org

Through Monday, October 3

Exhibition: Understanding Architectural Moldings

An exhibit explaining the grammar and use of architectural moldings using as models artifacts from Federal, Greek Revival, and Italianate townhouses in New York City. Curated by board member and architect Richard Sammons of Fairfax & Sammons Architects, which counts amongst its specialties townhouse restoration.

FALL WINE TASTINGS



Continuing our delicious collaboration with NoHo neighbor Astor Wines & Spirits, we are offering more oenophilic adventures – replete with delectables — in the garden, if weather permits, or in our cozy 19th-century family kitchen.

Wednesday, September 21, 6:30 to 8:30 pm

Gone Organic: Eco-Wine Party in the Garden

Experience the subtleties of wines made from organically grown grapes as we celebrate the last day of summer. Astor Wines & Spirits will pour Earth-friendly favorites while light hors d'oeuvres are served in our charming 19th-century garden. Join us. Taste the difference. \$50.

Tuesday, November 15, 6:30 to 8:30 pm

Boutique Champagne Producers Sparkle

What's more perfect for holiday celebrations than Champagne? Come to the Museum's historic kitchen and taste exceptional bubbly grown by notable and rare producers from France. Light hors d'oeuvres will be served. \$65.

Our thanks to Les Trois Petits Cochons and Dean & Deluca Catering for their generous donations.

*Reservations and prepayment are required;
Cancellations and full refunds accepted up to 48 hours prior.*

Sunday, September 25, 3 pm

Afternoon Tea & Tour: Where Pinkies Find their Purpose

Traditional English three-course afternoon tea served in our charming walled garden. Guided tour of the House following tea. \$50 per couple (additional guests \$20 each) to benefit the Garden Fund.

Wednesday, September 28, 7 pm

Great New York Writers in Great New York Places

Philip Roth: A Retrospective

At the Museum of Jewish Heritage, Battery Place

Contemporary writers and critics will reflect on Roth's bold portrayal of Jews in his early work. Moderated by Judith Thurman, *The New Yorker*, with Ross Miller, editor of *Philip Roth — The Library of America Edition*; Edward Rothstein, *The New York Times*; and David Remnick, *The New Yorker*. Collaboration with the City of New York Parks & Recreation, the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, *The New York Sun*, and *The Library of America*.

\$15 adults, \$12 seniors, \$10 members/students. Advance reservations recommended: www.mjhnyc.org or 646.437.4202.

Sunday, October 2, 5:30 to 7:30 pm

Salon Music: 'Farewell Father, Friend & Guardian'

A musical tribute of songs written in 1865 to commemorate Lincoln's death, with slide lecture of rare sheet music and historical context. Performed in the Greek Revival double parlors by the Museum's own *Bond Street Euterpean Singing Society* to benefit the Pianoforte Restoration Fund. A reception with the artists follows.

Seating is limited. \$15, \$12 members.

Thursday, October 6, through Monday, November 7

Exhibition: Coffins and Crepe: Death in a 19th-century Home

Veiled in black crepe, its shutters closed, the Merchant's House Museum presents an exhibition on death and mourning in a 19th-century home. Ground-floor displays will explain the social customs surrounding death and bereavement during the period. Tableaus throughout the House will include the deathbed of Seabury Tredwell (1780-1865) and his funeral at home in the front parlor.

Friday, October 7, 14, 21, 28, 6 to 10 pm

Death at Home: Ghostly Tales and Tours by Candlelight

Eight family funerals and nine deaths took place in the Merchant's House. Evening tours of the house draped in black crepe and lit by flickering candles will explore the rituals of death in the 19th Century. Then hear tingling tales of the spirits some say still walk these hallowed halls.

\$20, \$13 members. *Reservations and prepayment are required; cancellations and full refunds accepted up to 48 hours prior.*

Wednesday, October 19, 6:30 to 9:30 pm

Psychic Night

Psychic to the Stars Frank Andrews will again gather his 'seeing' friends for this annual benefit evening. Consult world-renown tarot-card readers and astrologers to find out what's in store for you. Horror d'oeuvres, wines and spirits (astral and otherwise) will be served.

\$25, readings \$20 for 10 minutes.

Yes! I (We) would like to support the Merchant's House Museum (Donations are tax-deductible)

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good Neighbor - \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family/Household - \$75 | <input type="checkbox"/> Protector - \$125 | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Hero - \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Princely Supporter - \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading Light - \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Paragon of Virtue - \$2,500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 65/Student - \$25 |

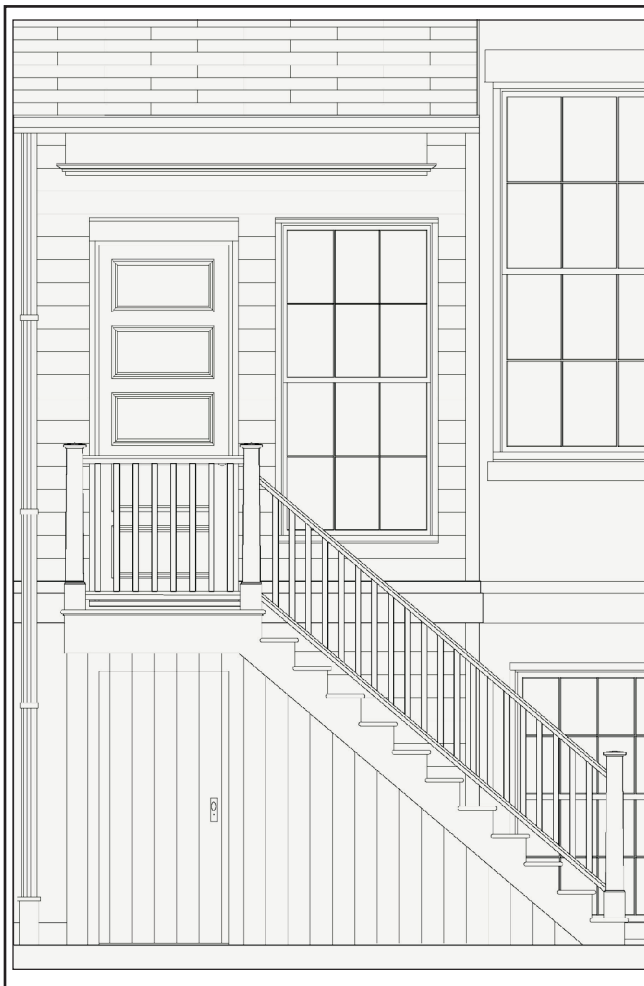
Please make checks payable to the Merchant's House Museum and mail with this form to 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003-7003, or charge your contribution to: American Express Visa Master Card

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We're at the threshold ...

The clapboard is on,
the stairs down to the
garden are in, and the
interior restoration of
the tea room is within
weeks of completion.

Come October, our
"Flight of Fancy"
will be Reality.

Merchant's House Museum

29 East Fourth Street
New York, NY 10003-7003

Tel 212.777.1089
Fax 212.777.1104

nyc1832@merchantshouse.org

Hours

Thursday through Monday
12 to 5 pm
(Closed Tuesday, Wednesday)

Admission

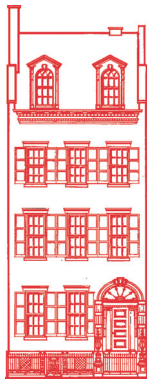
Members Free
Adults \$8
Students & Seniors \$5

Group Tours

Guided tours for schoolchildren
and adult groups are offered
seven days a week by
appointment.

www.merchantshouse.org

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