



## The Gifts of Christmas Past: A Mid-19th Century New York Holiday

For the 2005 holiday season, the Merchant's House will recreate in its Greek Revival double parlors scenes from a mid-19th century Christmas in New York City. The exhibition, which is based on literature and diaries of the period, will display rarely seen costumes and objects from the Tredwell collection. It opens on November 25 and runs through January 9, 2006.

Mannequins wearing dresses and fancy silk aprons from our costume collection will represent the Tredwell sisters as they entertain at tea and make gifts to be given on Christmas and New Year's Day.

As usual, the traditional table-top tree will shine with candlelight, and the house will be swathed in greenery.

Downstairs, in the kitchen, a display of faux food created by culinary historian Cathy Kaufman will showcase traditional 19th-century holiday delicacies.

Rarely seen personal items from the Tredwell family collection, including books, toys, and needlework, will be on display, illustrating typical gifts that the Tredwells might have exchanged.

Festivities for the Tredwells began a few days before Christmas. Gifts were carefully selected or made by hand. On Christmas morning, Gertrude Tredwell, who was 10 years old in 1850, discovered what Santa Claus had left in her stocking. Most gifts, however, were exchanged on New Year's Day. They might appear on the breakfast table or be hidden around the house for children to find.

And in the 19th century, gifting relied more on ingenuity and thoughtfulness than extravagance and quantity. Each person might receive only one or two items. Typical gifts included books, sewing tools, monogrammed handkerchiefs, or trinkets made by a loving hand. Servants were not forgotten either; a holiday bonus often accompanied their present.



Photograph by Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc., 1944

## The Merchant's House through the Lens of Samuel H. Gottscho

In 1944, the Merchant's House was featured in a national publication for the first time when *House and Garden Magazine* commissioned noted architectural photographer Samuel H. Gottscho to photograph the interiors for an article in its February issue. The photographs will be on view at the Merchant's House January 5 through February 27, 2006. The originals are now located in the Library of Congress and can be viewed through the American Memory section of its web site, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

Another famous New York photographer who captured the Merchant's House on film was Berenice Abbott, whose well-known 1936 WPA photograph of the doorway will also be on display.

The Merchant's House exhibit coincides with "*The Mythic City: Photographs of New York by Samuel H. Gottscho, 1925-1940*" at the Museum of the City of New York. 150 of Gottscho's dramatic views of New York City buildings and interiors are on display there until February 20, 2006.

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## 19th-Century Benefit Dinner: "A Different Affair"

*"But a big dinner, with a hired chef and two borrowed footmen, with Roman punch, roses from Henderson's, and menus on gilt-edged cards, was a different affair, and not to be lightly undertaken. As Mrs. Archer remarked, the Roman punch made all the difference not in itself but by its manifold implications--since it signified either canvas-backs or terrapin, two soups, a hot and a cold sweet, full décolletage with short sleeves, and guests of a proportionate importance."*

On Thursday, March 16, 2006, the Board of Directors and Honorary Chairs Kitty Carlisle Hart, Catia and Schuyler Chapin, and Tiziana and Hugh Hardy, among others, will be hosting an elaborate candlelit supper of the sort that the Astors and Vanderbilts might have shared with their peers — and Edith Wharton wrote about in *The Age of Innocence*. Our setting will be the magnificent Delano & Aldrich ballroom at India House, on Hanover Square. Renowned chef Eberhard Müller — former top toque at Lutèce — is creating a sumptuous multi-course menu especially for the occasion.

*Tickets start at \$350. For more information and to reserve early, please call 212-777-1089.*

*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.*

29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003 Tel 212-777-1089 Fax 212-777-1104 [nyc1832@merchantshouse.org](mailto:nyc1832@merchantshouse.org)  
Open Thursday through Monday, 12 to 5 p.m. Admission: Members Free, Adults \$8, Students & Seniors \$5

[www.merchantshouse.org](http://www.merchantshouse.org)

# AN APPEAL AT YEAR'S END

YES, I want to help preserve the Merchant's House Museum, a unique landmark of 19th-century New York.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_  \$1,000  \$500  \$250  \$100  \$50

Please make checks payable to the Merchant's House Museum or charge your contribution to:

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



*Please Join Us*



### Annual 19th-Century Holiday Party

*Wednesday, December 14, 2005, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.*

The halls will be decked, crystal prisms and figured mahogany will dance in the candlelight, and the Bond Street Euterpean Singing Society will sing carols throughout the house. Join us for a collation of holiday fare and a "bowl of bishop," a libation frequently offered to holiday callers. And for your shopping delight – a Silent Auction & Gift Bazaar. Take home a photo with your family and friends by the decorated tree in the 19th-century parlors. (19th-century garb provided, but optional.) \$25 admission, members free. (If you're not already a member, now is the perfect time to join.)

*February 2 through February 27, 2006*

#### **Exhibition: 19th-Century Valentines**

An exhibition of ornate and extravagant lace cards, the humorous 'vinegar valentines', and the mass-produced 'penny valentines' that made the 19th century the Golden Age of Valentines.

*Thursday, February 9, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.*

#### **Lucky in Love? A Night of Psychic Readings**

Consult world-renown tarot-card readers and astrologers to find out what Cupid has in store for you – is the best yet to be? Hors d'oeuvres, wines and spirits (astral and otherwise) will be served. \$25 admission, readings \$20 for 10 minutes.

*Sunday, February 12, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.*

#### **Salon Music: Love in the Parlors**

A pre-Valentine's Day salon program of songs and arias by 19th-century composers. Performed in the Museum's Greek Revival double parlors by Bond Street Euterpean Singing Society artists. A reception with the artists follows. Seating is limited. \$15, \$12 members, seniors, and children 12 and under.

*The Museum's Salon Music series presents performances of period music throughout the year as a benefit for restoration of the Tredwells' 1845 Nunns & Fischer pianoforte. Purchased by the family for the House, it still remains today in its place of privilege in the front parlor.*

*The Merchant's House Museum is owned by the City of New York, operated by Old Merchants House of New York, Inc., and is a member of the Historic House Trust.*

## Merchant's House Museum

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