



## Brooke Astor 1902-2007

Brooke Astor and the Merchant's House were friends for a very long time. In the 1970s, when one of her priorities became historic preservation, she saw in the Merchant's House an historic landmark worthy of the support of the Vincent Astor Foundation.

"I took a liking to the place," she once told a reporter. "It was a very nice house," she said, although "it didn't have a proper loo and it's rather nice for a lady to have one."

In 1979, the House had undergone a structural restoration and had been closed for 11 years. Through a series of generous grants, the Astor Foundation was instrumental in refurbishing the interior and reinstalling the collection prior to the grand reopening in December.

Mrs. Astor made it a point to provide funds for only those projects she'd seen first hand. And so she visited us often and we came to know each other well. We were charmed by her friendly, fun-loving spirit. "Charades," she'd say, "we must play a game of charades in the parlors!"

In 1997, among the final grants made by the Vincent Astor Foundation was a \$1 million challenge grant to the Merchant's House Museum for the purpose of establishing an endowment. We met the challenge, and with the largest gift in the history of the Merchant's House were able to realize a long-time dream of establishing an endowment to assure the survival of this irreplaceable landmark for future generations.

According to Linda Gillies, former director of the Astor Foundation, the aim of the Astor trust was "to enhance the lives of the people of New York and give people a sense of the city and its past."

That is what we are all about, and we will always be grateful to Brooke Astor for helping us to fulfill our mission and proud that she had confidence in our stewardship of this unique historic treasure.



*Brooke Astor, right, chats with her long-time friend, the actress Lillian Gish, at the 1981 holiday party, where Ms. Gish entertained guests with a reading of Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol."*

## MERCHANT'S HOUSE MUSEUM

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### And Many Volunteers & Interns

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.

*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.*

## To Council Member Rosie Mendez, Thanks Beyond Measure

The Museum's Board, advisors, staff and volunteers are enormously grateful to New York City Council Member Rosie Mendez for championing a Fiscal Year 2008 City capital budget allocation of \$598,000 to the Merchant's House. This is the largest single investment of public funds in the Museum's history, and it will be used in the year ahead to help us address several major infrastructural needs: restoring our landmarked north façade; repairing and conserving our roof's original wood cornice; and conducting a thorough mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) assessment — the

first such survey of these systems in almost 40 years.

In a wonderful letter to us last June, she wrote: "I know how difficult it is to raise these funds, and how important the exterior work is to preserving your unique property." Please join us in applauding Ms. Mendez for caring so much about the future of the Merchant's House Museum, and for understanding the challenges a small organization like ours faces in securing funding -- especially for "bricks and mortar" projects and such behind-the-scenes efforts as the MEP assessment.

## In the Spirit of 19th-Century Mourning Photography

Earlier this year, artist Hal Hirshorn took a series of 19th-century style mourning photographs in the front parlor of the Merchant's House Museum. These eerie and evocative exposures were made on 8 by 10 inch negatives using an early 20th century view camera fitted with a 19th-century lens. They were printed using the salt print technique, developed by William Fox Talbot in 1840.

In the mid-19th century, when photographic cameras were still in their

infancy, many people commissioned post-mortem portraits of their loved ones. Often this was the only image ever made of the person, especially if the deceased was a child. Photographs in which models acted out sentimental scenes of death and mourning were also popular. One such picture entitled "Fading Away," taken in 1858 by Henry Peach Robinson, depicted the death of a young woman from tuberculosis and was widely shown at exhibitions.



*Hal Hirshorn, 2007*

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

For reservations, call 212-777-1089 or email [nyc1832@merchantshouse.org](mailto:nyc1832@merchantshouse.org)

## 19th-Century Death & Mourning

September 27 through November 5

### **Exhibition: "Behind the Widow's Veil": Living with Death in the 19th Century**

From starkly macabre to heart-rending, experience the eloquence of 19th-century mourners told exclusively through their own words and artwork. Scenes of mid-19th century mourning, including a deathbed and a parlor funeral, will also be recreated.

October 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, Tours every 30 minutes from 6-10 p.m.

### **Candlelight Ghost Tours: "Mourning Becomes Eliza"**

Eerily recreated scenes of 19th-century death will come to life by flickering candlelight, and ghost storytellers will relate true tales of "Manhattan's most haunted house." \$25, \$13 members. Reservations required — this event sells out.

Sunday, October 28, 3 p.m.

### **Mid-19th Century Funeral & Cemetery Tour**

Join us as we recreate the 1865 funeral of Seabury Tredwell in the double parlors and discuss the funerary customs of 19th-century New York City. Then follow the casket to New York City Marble Cemetery where Mr. Tredwell was temporarily interred. 19th-century mourning dress is encouraged. (Black armbands will be provided.) \$10, \$5 members. Reservations required.

Wednesday, October 31, noon to 5 p.m.

### **Trick or Treat, Hallowe'en Open House**

No tricks this year, just a big treat for anyone interested in NYC history or 19th-century domestic life: the Merchant's House Museum will be open for free of charge from noon to 5 p.m.

Wednesday, October 31, 7 & 9 p.m.

### **Spine-Tingling & True: Merchant's House Ghost Stories**

Join Anthony Bellov, master ghost-storyteller of the Merchant's House Museum in the parlors for an evening of candlelit terror. \$15, \$5 members. Reservations Required.

Saturday & Sunday, November 10 & 11, 12 to 5 p.m.

### **Called by the Bell: View the Servants' Quarters**

Come climb the narrow staircase to see the fourth floor servants' quarters (normally off limits to visitors), where the young Irish women who served the family lived and did some of their work. You'll also hear about the hardship of a life 'in service'. *Special tour included with Museum Admission.*



Saturday, November 24, Seatings at 1:30 or 3 p.m.

### **Thanks Be For Tea: Themed Tour & Afternoon Tea**

Celebrate your post-Thanksgiving recovery by tracing the history of this harvest holiday and indulging in a traditional afternoon tea. Dainty sandwiches, Scottish scones, decadent sweets, and pots of freshly brewed tea. \$35 per person. Pre-payment and reservations required; 48-hour cancellation policy.

In our next newsletter . . .

### **A Mid-19th Century Christmas**

The halls will be decked and music will ring in the New Year. Join us for an exhibition of holiday carols, caroling concert, annual holiday party, and New Year's Day Open House.

*The Merchant's House Museum's education programs are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.*

*I (We) would like to help preserve the Merchant's House Museum* (Donations are tax-deductible)

- Good Neighbor \$50       Family/Household \$75       Protector \$125       Cultural Hero \$250  
 Princely Supporter \$500       Leading Light \$1,000       Paragon of Virtue \$2,500       Senior/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

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Company \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email (please!) \_\_\_\_\_

To benefit the 1832 Merchant's House . . .

## Reception at the 1881 Mayer House

*Tuesday, October 23, 6 to 8 p.m.*

The owners, architects, and designers will join us for an open house and reception at the Mayer House, an extraordinarily intact 1881 seven-story brownstone townhouse on the Upper East Side.

Painstakingly restored, this exceptional example of the Aesthetic Style of architecture and interior design is filled with Herter Brothers furniture, dozens of period gaseliers and sconces, antique oriental carpets, faithfully recreated wallpaper, ceiling paper, and stenciling, and 19th-century paintings and ceramics. It also features original tile floors and hearths, and floral relief carved mantels and door casings.

Sponsored by the Historic House Trust to benefit our Historic Furnishings Plan. Cocktails & hors d'oeuvres.

*Tickets \$125, \$250. Call 212-360-8249 for more information and for an invitation.*

### MERCHANT'S HOUSE MUSEUM

29 East Fourth Street  
New York, NY 10003

Tel 212-777-1089  
Fax 212-777-1104

[nyc1832@merchantshouse.org](mailto:nyc1832@merchantshouse.org)

#### HOURS

Thursday through Monday,  
12 to 5 p.m., self-guided tours  
(Closed Tuesday, Wednesday)

#### ADMISSION

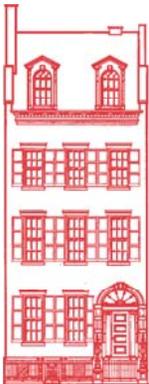
Members Free  
Adults \$8, Students & Seniors \$5

#### GROUP TOURS

Guided tours are offered seven  
days a week by appointment.

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

Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage Paid  
New York, NY  
Permit no. 2828



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29 East Fourth Street  
New York, NY 10003