Gas Chandeliers: Keeping Them Hanging On

After more than a year in the planning, the conservation and restoration of the Museum’s matching pair of gas chandeliers is finally under way. Our thanks to historic lighting expert and project coordinator Vincent Plescia for his help in lighting our way.

The chandeliers, believed by many experts to be possibly the oldest domestic gas fixtures in situ in the United States, were taken down in February and are now safely in the Pennsylvania studio of metals conservator Julie M. Baker. Ms. Baker, President of Objects Conservation Associates, has conserved objects from the nation’s foremost collections.

While the gaseliers are dismantled for evaluation, cleaning, and repair, we will explore the possibility of incorporating a fiber optic lighting technology system that would simulate the characteristics of gas illumination, including the color, shape, and movement of the flame. This enhancement would enable us to more accurately depict for visitors how the parlors might have appeared to the Tredwell family and, in turn, will serve as an educational platform for explorations of the role that artificial illumination played in 19th-century life.

We expect the gaseliers will be returned to their rightful place of glory in the Greek Revival parlors in late September. The cost of the entire project will be close to $50,000. A donation in any amount will be an enormous help. Contributors at the $1,000 level – Leading Lights – will be invited to the gala celebration planned for the triumphal return of the gaseliers.

In a Different Lite

While the gaseliers are away, Lite Brite Neon Studio of Brooklyn (www.litebriteneon.com) has generously loaned us a pair of neon glass sculptures. Designed in 2004, the ultra-modern, yet hauntingly similar fixtures inspire visitors to view the rooms in a whole new light. Because of the effect of the ultra violet waves emitted by the neon light, the fixtures will be lit on a limited schedule. Check our website for the next illumination.

Come Hear the Music and See the Light, as We Celebrate Our 70th

Two springtime events will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the opening of the Merchant’s House to the public on May 11, 1936.

A musical prelude to the celebration of the May opening will take place on April 30 when the Museum’s own Bond Street Euterpean Singing Society presents a program of rarely performed 19th-century songs in the Greek Revival parlors. Then, on May 11, we will mark the anniversary of the 1936 opening reception with an open house. On that date 70 years ago, 50 invited guests got their first glimpse of the Tredwell home preserved as a museum.

“In the atmosphere of another century and another way of life pervades it.”


Since that time seven decades ago, we have been committed to our mission of preserving this unique historical treasure. To highlight our most current effort -- conservation of the 19th-century gaseliers -- we will illuminate the 21st-century neon stand-ins. Lighting expert Vincent Plescia will then conduct a tour, explaining the many 19th-century lighting fixtures and lamps on display, and describing what it was like to live in an age when turning on a light meant igniting a flame.

Continued inside . . .
An Affair to Remember
As We Imagine It Would Have Been Reported in Town Topics, March 18, 18--

This city has not yet seen an event so glittering as the one offered by the venerable Merchant's House on the sixteenth of March at the India House in Hanover Square. From the elegance of the ladies' full toilettes to the nobility of bearing of the gentlemen escorts, a more handsome crowd could not be observed in any other American city, nor in many of the European capitals. The appointment of the Rooms was premier, with silver sticks and candles so high, one venerable guest noted, that jewels were shown to great effect. The chairs of the event issued the following statement to the reporters gathered:

In achieving the completion of the oft' arduous but rewarding task of dinner-giving, we must tender our sincerest thanks to those, who through their efforts, and by the sincerest proofs of their affection and loyalty, have aided us in our goals. We thank with the most sincere enthusiasm Rusty Thom- as Entertainment Design of Bucks County in the State of Pennsylvania for the floral tributes and his arrange- ments of the Rooms; Donald Burg of Tugboat Designs, for his paper-goods, including the elegant design of the invitations; and YB Services for the exquisite stampings thereof.

We must also acknowledge the kind attentions of the honorary chairs, Kitty Carlisle Hart, Mr. and Mrs. Schuyler Chapin, and Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Hardy, whose support was paramount. We must also thank the Board of Di- rectors, staff and volunteers of the Merchants’ House, without whom, we profess, we are nothing.

The Merchant's House acknowledges with gratitude the following contributors who were especially generous in their support during 2005:

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

For reservations, call 212-777-1089 or email nyc1832@merchantshouse.org

Saturday & Sunday, April 22 and 23, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Called by the Bell: A Rare Opportunity to 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 lived and did some of their work.
Part of NYC3 annual Immigrant History Week. Tour included with Museum admission.

Sunday, May 7, 10 a.m. to Noon
Spring is Sprung – Annual Plant Sale in the Garden
Plant divisions and seedlings from our historic Garden -- astilbes, epimediums, aquilegias, hostas, sedums and sempervivum, ferns, ivies, herbs and an assortment of shade perennials. Proceeds to benefit the Garden Fund. Free admission.

~ AFTERNOON TEA ~
IN THE GARDEN

Sunday, May 14, Seating at 1:30 and 3 p.m.
Mother’s Day Tea in the Garden
Celebrate this memorable day with a traditional afternoon tea in our 19th-century Garden. Scones served with clotted cream and jam, finger sandwiches, frosted confections, and pots of brewed English tea. Tour of the Museum following tea.

Sunday, June 4 and 25, 1:30 and 3 p.m.
Where Pinkies Find Their Purpose
“The mere chink of cups and saucers turns the mind to happy repose.” See above for delicious details.

$50 per couple, members $40. Additional guest per couple $20. Reservations and prepayment required; cancellations up to 48 hours prior.
Proceeds to benefit the Garden Fund for landscaping and upkeep of our historic Garden.

EXHIBITIONS

Through September 25
Conservation and Restoration of the Gas Chandeliers
The pair of gas chandeliers that hang in the double parlors, believed by a number of experts to be the oldest domestic gas fixtures in situ in the country, have been removed for conservation. In June, they will be back with their original 19th-century bronze finish revealed. This exhibition will track the project with photographs and explanations of the conservation and restoration process, from de-installation to triumphal return.

April 6 through July 3
Alone & Together:
The Tredwell Family in the Religious Community of 19th-Century New York
This exhibition will focus on the religious affiliations and private devotions of the Tredwells. On display will be a number of the family’s well-used religious books, hand-written sentiments from the daughters’ copy books, and pictures and memorabilia from various neighborhood churches attended by the family throughout the 19th century.

Thanks beyond measure to the volunteers & interns who gave so freely of their time and wondrous talents in 2005.
Interns Dawn Assuma, Bianca Cabrera, Lisa Chavez, Alison Clark, Kellie Honeycut, Lindsay Martin, Sarah Zimmelt.

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

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THE FIRST DAY OF SUMMER: ROOFTOP BENEFIT

Wednesday, June 21, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

We’re returning to the rooftop of the historic Arsenal in Central Park, at Fifth Avenue & 64th Street, to celebrate the first day of Summer. Vodka Martini Bar, Kitchen Club chef and owner Marja Samsom and her outrageously delicious dumplings, Hors d’oeuvres, Wines & Spirits, Silent Auction, Live Jazz.

Call for information and an invitation 212-777-1089.

New online at www.merchantshouse.org

360-degree Panoramic Tours

Our just-created 360-degree interactive panoramic tours invite cyber-­visitors to ‘step inside and take a look around’ our authentic 19th-century rooms, arranged as they were when the Tredwell family occupied them for nearly 100 years and de-­scribed by The New York Times as “the real thing.”

Brilliantly captured by photographer Jook Leung, the panoramas are the closest one can get, without actually being here, to the atmosphere of Old New York that pervades the Merchant’s House. A virtual reality.