



## DINNER AT DELMONICO'S



*By the time you read this, "Dinner at Delmonico's," our celebration on April 26, 2007, in honor of the Merchant's House Museum's 175th anniversary, will be but a glittering memory. We feel confident in assuring our readers that it was a grand and glorious success in every respect.*

### Delmonico's Led the Way

Delmonico's opened its doors in 1837 and, for almost a century, was the standard-bearer of fine and fashionable dining in New York. It was the city's, and the country's, first true restaurant, offering patrons a menu (seven pages in both French and English), a wine list, and a private dining room. It fast became a gathering place for high society and, by 1876, four Delmonico's restaurants enhanced New York's culture.

Famous Patrons over the years included Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Queen Victoria and her eldest son, the Prince of Wales, Sir Walter Scott, and Diamond Jim Brady. America's first superstar, "Swedish Nightengale" Jenny Lind ate there every night after her show at Castle Clinton in 1850. President Abraham Lincoln was particularly impressed by the Delmonico's chef's creations at 14th Street and Fifth Avenue.

In 1862, Charles Ranhofer was named Chef de Cuisine. Eggs Benedict, Lobster

Newburg, and Baked Alaska are but a few of Ranhofer's creations. Baked Alaska, in honor of the newly purchased Alaska in 1867, was described as "a cake of frozen cream in a blanket of hot golden meringue". Ranhofer's 1,000 page cookbook, *The Epicurean*, was published in 1894.

### A Fitting Feast to Celebrate our 175th

We think it fitting that the Merchant's House Museum's Terquasquicentennial seven-course dinner was true to Ranhofer's recipes, as prepared by current Chef de Cuisine and renowned culinary master in his own right, Clinton McCann. A traditional and sublime Roman Punch was served to cleanse the palate between the *Truite façon "Bond Street"* and the *Petite Filet Mignon "Vauxhall"*. The meal, which also included *Bisque de la Bouwerije* and *Salade à la Terquasquicentenaire*, culminated with the legendary *Baked Alaska*.

### Dining Decadence

New Yorkers in the 19th century were renowned for their decadent dining habits. Writing in 1850, Mable Osgood Wright described a dinner party that took place only a few blocks from the Merchant's House: "The dinner

party was both large in numbers and sumptuous, as was the food. Menu cards . . . were placed at intervals along the flowered trimmed table that was covered with rich damask and glittered with silver and glass. . . . [The] offering of food was quite appalling,—beginning with large, fat Chesapeake Bay Oysters it meandered through nine courses until it reached a solid wall of plum pudding."

### Celebrity Worship Started Here



Dubbing her the "Swedish Nightengale," impresario P.T. Barnum brought Jenny Lind to America in 1850 for a nationwide concert tour without ever having heard her sing. Barnum's unprecedented media campaign created a Lind-frenzy, and with it a new cultural phenomenon – the celebrity.

## 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.*

## From the Collection . . .

### Dining at Home in the 19th Century

This painted tin (toleware) plate warmer is mute testimony to the use of the downstairs front room of the Merchant's House Museum during the 19th-century. Because it stood for so many years right before the fireplace, laden with heavy plates, it has worn a footprint in the marble hearth, evidence that for many years, the Tredwell family used this room as a dining room.

Today, the custom of warming the plates for family dinners has disappeared, but when the only source of heat in the dining room was the fireplace, it was an everyday occurrence and the plate warmer an indispensable household possession.

The warmer dates to the 1820s, suggesting that the Tredwells probably brought it from their residence on Dey Street. Three shelves hold the plates and the back is open to the fire.



Illustration by Robert Van Nuitt

#### Painted Tole Plate Warmer

*Tinned sheet iron plate warmer, decorated with hand-painted red birds, gilt scrolls, pink and white flowers, and green leaves. Cast iron cabriole legs and paw feet. Circa 1820. MHM 2002.2430*

## Life in the Past Lane

### Rules for 19th-Century Dining

From *True Politeness: A Handbook of Etiquette for Gentlemen*, by an American Gentleman, 1848.

- § Always be punctual to the hour appointed.
- § When dinner is announced, rise and offer your arm to a lady.
- § It is usual to commence with soup, which never refuse; if you do not eat it, you can toy with it until it is followed by fish.
- § Always feed yourself with the fork; a knife is only used as a divider. Use a dessert spoon in eating tarts, puddings, curries, &c.

§ Finger-glasses come on with the dessert. Wet a corner of your napkin and wipe your mouth; then immerse your fingers in the water and dry them with the napkin, but on no account be guilty of the disgusting practice of gargling your mouth and ejecting the water into the glass.

§ If sitting next to a lady, see that she wants nothing without appearing to watch her plate too closely.

§ Should your servants break anything while you are at table, do not appear to notice it. If they betray stupidity or awkwardness, avoid reprimanding them publicly.

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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

## EXHIBITIONS

May 17 through June 25

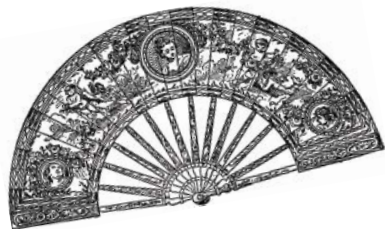
### From Cradle to Altar: Wearing White in the 19th Century

Two Tredwell family wedding gowns from the Museum's renowned costume collection, one from 1820 and one from 1872, will be displayed together for the first time. Additional dresses, related bridal accessories (including lingerie and an invitation to the 1872 ceremony), and a delicately embroidered infant christening gown will also be shown.

July 5 through September 10

### Beating the Heat and Keeping Your Cool in 19th-Century Style

19th-century fans, parasols, dainty gloves, and other personal accessories from the Tredwell collection will illustrate the way people kept cool during the dog days of a New York City summer – before the invention of air conditioners. And the heat wasn't all from the sun; many of these items also carry romantic connotations.



Sunday, May 6, 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.*

Sunday, May 13, Seating at 1:30 & 3 p.m.

### Annual Mother's Day Tea in the Garden

Celebrate this momentous 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. Join us for a tour of the Museum following the tea. *\$50 per couple, members \$40. One additional guest per couple \$20.*

*Reservations and prepayment required.*

Sunday, May 20 & 27, June 3, 10, & 17, Seating at 1:30 & 3 p.m.

### Tea in the Garden: Where Pinkies Find their Purpose

"The mere chink of cups and saucers turns the mind to happy repose." (See Mother's Day Tea, above, for complete description.) *\$50 per couple, members \$40. One additional guest per couple \$20. Reservations and prepayment required.*

Saturday, May 26, 4 p.m.

### Fashion History Talk: Wearing White in the 19th Century

Join Museum Educator and historic fashion enthusiast Eva Ulz as she discusses the white dresses from the Museum's textile collection on display in the exhibition *From Cradle to Altar: Wearing White in the 19th Century*. *Free.*

Sunday, June 10, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

### Salon Music: Songs of Love

Join soloists from the Bond Street Euterpean Singing Society for a program of traditional love songs and classical arias performed in the Museum's Greek Revival parlors. *\$10, \$5 Students & Seniors, Free for Members.*

Saturday, July 14, 4 p.m.

### Flirting with Fans: How to Speak Volumes Without Uttering a Word

The strict etiquette of 19th-century courtship forbade young lovers from speaking openly in public, so ladies learned to communicate their emotions by opening and closing their fans in complicated patterns. Join us for a demonstration of this subtle art, and then try it yourself. *Free.*

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

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