Maintaining the Miracle . . .

$598,000 Restoration to Begin in April

One hundred and seventy-eight years is a long time for an old house to remain standing in this city, much less in its historically accurate state. Some would even call it a miracle.

The preservation of our 1832 landmarked building began in 1933, when the last Tredwell family member died and the house was being turned into a museum. From the beginning, maintaining the historic integrity of the building has been the aim of those entrusted with its care.

We are grateful beyond measure to Council Member Rosie Mendez for the appropriation of $598,000 from the FY 2008 New York City capital budget for a six-month restoration project. These funds will enable us to continue to preserve one of New York’s most important historic structures as well as to update aging utilities.

Face Lift for the Rear Facade

The rear façade will be painted after repairs are made to the cracked stucco. The 1832 windows will be removed and restored (with UV protection) and the gutter and cornice repaired to correct poor drainage.

Original Look for Garden Walls

At the rear of the garden, a 19th-century-style wooden wall will replace the unsightly cement block wall and chain link fence installed for security during the 1970s. The east garden wall will have the original brick “ventilators” replicated. The Department of Environmental Protection rebuilt the wall in 2008, following damage from the water tunnel construction next door.

And Inside the House

Interior plaster finishes in the front bedroom and study, caused by water infiltration from the roof, will be restored. (The roof was repaired in 2006).

Finally, the electrical system will be upgraded and a sprinkler system installed in the cellar.

The work is slated for completion by early fall, 2010, but rest assured, Museum activities will go on as usual while the work progresses.

Getting Started on Our New Historic Furnishings Plan

While structural restoration is paramount in maintaining the house, it is the décor, the furniture, and the family possessions that transport us most dramatically to the era before the Civil War, our core interpretive period.

With thanks to the Gerry Charitable Trust, we have now begun to implement the recommendations in our recently completed Historic Furnishings Plan.

White Walls Begone!

One of our first projects will be to recreate the original wall finishes of the 1850s. A new scientific paint analysis, generously funded by Benjamin Moore, has revealed that the walls throughout the house were never white, but were finished with color-tinted decorative glazes.

The Rest of the Story

Another important first step in implementing the Plan is to explain more fully how the Tredwells’ Irish servants fit into life on Fourth Street. This key chapter of our story will involve painting and furnishing one of the dormer rooms on the fourth floor where the servants slept, as well as showing how they performed their many and varied duties thought the house.

More Research, Too

And we are still learning. Where the original floor coverings have disappeared, we are continuing our research to determine what would be appropriate. And the suite of Rococo Revival front parlor furniture needs to be reupholstered, so we are examining fragments in our textile collection. It’s all just the beginning. Stay tuned.
COMING ATTRACTIONS
Unless otherwise noted, all events require reservations. Call 212-777-1089.

Exhibition: Tending the Fires — Photographs by Hal Hirshorn
Evocative salt-print images taken with an early 20th-century view camera and a 19th-century lens recreate one of the most humble chores performed by the family's Irish servants. Included with regular admission. Reservations not required.

Wednesday, March 17, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., tours begin every 15 minutes.

St. Patrick's Day Celebration, ca. 1855
Tour the House, including the fourth-floor servants’ quarters (usually off limits to visitors), taste food and drink made from 19th-century Irish-American recipes, and tap your feet to traditional harp and bagpipe music. $25, $10 MHM Members.

Saturday & Sunday, April 17 & 18, 12 to 5 p.m.
Tour the Fourth-Floor Servants’ Quarters (Usually Off-Limits)
Come climb the narrow steps to see where the family's Irish maids lived and did some of their work. Included with regular admission. Reservations not required.

Sunday, May 9, 5:30 p.m.
Sing It With Flowers:
19th-Century Serenade to Mother
19th-Century songs performed live in the Museum's Greek Revival double parlors by members of the Bond Street Euterpean Singing Society as part of the museum's ongoing period music series "Salon Music." $25, $10 MHM Members.

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

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