From the Director

"He was a bold man who first ate an oyster," wrote Jonathan Swift, several centuries ago. Agreed.

The idea certainly caught on. In 1859, when the Tredwells were living in the Merchant's House, residents of the City spent more money on oysters than on butcher's meat. Last year, thousands and thousands came to our first-ever New York City Oyster Festival, consuming 16,000 of the tasty bi-valves. The past in the present—and the start of something Brookingian.

We are delighted and proud to note that Guinness, a founding sponsor of our Festival last year, is creating Guinness Oyster Festivals in 12 cities across the country in 1998. And it all started right here, on East Fourth Street.

I hope you'll be able to come to the Museum's second annual Oyster Festival on October 3 for some more history-in-the-making. We're going for the world record: the largest number of oysters consumed in a day. The Guinness Book of Records will be tracking our success. And what a pain-free—don't I say fun—way to support the Museum, with sea-fresh Blue Point oysters and perfect pins of Guinness.

Executive Director

Museum's
Door No
Longer
Shabby Chic

The front door was recently the object of a thorough restorative paint job by John Taylor of Lotus Restoration, New York City.

The restoration is one of the many benefits of our alliance with The Historic Trust House of New York City, an organization working in partnership with the City of New York Parks & Recreation to preserve and support the 19 historic houses located in parks in all five boroughs.

Mrs. Roberts had worked for the Merchant's House in the 1960s and took the information from Seabury Tredwell's personal ledger. Unfortunately, the ledger itself has long since vanished.

While the information we have is fragmentary, it shows that in 1863 Tredwell owned shares in the New York Central, Erie, Hartford & New Haven, and Michigan Central railroads. He also held a large position in Citizens Gas Light Company in Brooklyn (1000 shares worth $20,000 in 1863 dollars), and was invested in the New York Gas Company as well as the Manhattan Gas Company, the manufacturing that supplied illuminating gas to 29 East Fourth Street.

His real estate holdings were substantial, including five lots in Harlem, a large farm in Shrewsbury, New Jersey, a house and lot on Pearl Street, a lot on 53rd Street, lots in Brooklyn, a factory on Front Street, and of course the Fourth Street house in Manhattan. He had also lent large sums to various individuals.

We are grateful to Mr. Roberts for making this information available to us, thereby adding to our knowledge of the story of the Merchant's House.

The Merchant's House Museum is New York City's only family home preserved intact, inside and out, from the 19th century and Greenwich Village's only historic house museum. A row house built in 1812, it is the City's prime example of a Greek Revival home, a New York City and National Historic landmark, it was home to hardware merchant Seabury Tredwell and family for 100 years. Complete with original furniture, clothing, and memorabilia, it offers an intimate glimpse into the lifestyle of a prosperous New York City merchant family of the 19th century.

Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter Fall 1998

"Guinness Time," Cried the Oysters

Merchant's House Presents
Second Annual Oyster Festival

Join us on October 3 from noon to 9 p.m. when we close East Fourth Street from Lafayette Street to Bowery to celebrate the time when New York City was the capital of the booming northeastern oyster industry and oyster bars lined the streets of lower Manhattan.

Radio and TV host Ian O'Malley will emcee the Guinness Oyster Festival this year, which will feature live music and entertainment, the New York City Oyster Shucking Championship, celebrity appearances, children's activities, and more. Among the featured artists: Black 47, returning by popular demand; Lunasa, making their first U.S. appearance; 5 Chinese Brothers; and Freddie White. You'll know you're in the right place when you see the 40-foot-high inflated pins of Guinness standing guard over Fourth Street.

Life in the Past Lane

The Tredwells didn't have far to go to get their oysters. Tompkins Market, a wooden structure on Third Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets, just around the corner, opened in 1830 with stalls for meat, produce, and fish. Oyster vendors lined the sidewalk in front of the public market. Across the street, farm wagons parked in the triangle that now houses St. Gaudens's statue of Peter Cooper.

Many Market Ups-and-Downs Ago,
Seabury Tredwell Bullish on Transportations,
Utilities, Real Estate

In 1863, two years before his death, Seabury Tredwell was heavily invested in railroads, as well as recently formed gas companies, and—like a true New Yorker—real estate.

Evidence of Tredwell's holdings was recently found by David Roberts of Brunswick, Maine, among his mother's personal effects.
Sunday, September 27, 1 to 4 p.m.
Walking Tour, a 19th-Century Merchant at Home and at Work
Meet at the Merchant’s House for a
tour of the landmarked family home.
Then walk with your guide or take the
bus to the South Street Seaport
Museum, where the tour will
reconvene at 3 p.m. $15, $12 members
of the Merchant’s House or South
Street Seaport Museum.
Reservations (212) 748-8590.

Saturday, October 3,
Noon to 9 p.m. Rain date October 4
Second Annual Oyster Festival
Live music, entertainment, NYC
Oyster Shucking Championship,
oysters, Guinness. Admission free.
Special private champagne and oyster
benefit reception in the garden.
5 to 8 p.m. $125.
Call to reserve (212) 777-1089

Wednesday, October 7, 12:30 p.m.
Life of the Irish Girls
Guided tour with curator Mimi
Sherman focusing on the life of the
domestic servants who lived in the
House. Bring a lunch to eat in the
garden before the tour. weather
permitting. Free. Reservations
(212) 777-1089.

Sunday, October 18, 2 p.m.
Old New York, a Walking Tour
Promenaders gather at the Merchant’s
House to join Henry Hope Reed for a
tour of Renwick’s 1846 Grace Church
and other sites of Old New York. Tour
of the House and reception follow. A
 collaboration of Classical America and
the Merchant’s House.
$10, members free.
Reservations (212) 777-1089.

Saturday, October 31, 7 to 9 p.m.
Halloween Reading and Revelry
Gregory St. John’s bewitching reading of
Charles Dickens’s 19th-century stories
“Sikes and Nancy” and “Captain
Murderer” at 7 p.m. Reception with spirits
(astral and otherwise) at 8 p.m. Back by
popular demand, a special appearance by
Norman Bates’s mother.
$15, members $10.
Reservations (212) 777-1089.

Great New York Writers In
Great New York Places
A year-long series of readings
celebrating the literary history of
New York City in significant
architectural and historical sites.
Sponsored by the Merchant’s House
Museum, The Historic House Trust of
New York City, the City of New York/
Parks & Recreation, and the Library
of America.
Reservations (212) 360-1378.

Monday, October 19, 20, 21, 2 to 8 p.m.
Edith Wharton
At the Merchant’s House
Famed stage actress Irene Worth
will read
Reception follows. $20

Tuesday, November 17, 6 to 8 p.m.
James Thurber
At the Algonquin Hotel
Reception follows. $20.

We Are Grateful to the
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Win-Win-Win
Redecorating? Cleaning Out Closets?
Don’t put retired china, glassware, or
decorative items out with the trash (they’re
too good for that) or try to sell them (more
trouble than it’s worth); donate them to
our new resale shop.
You’ll be able to take a tax deduction,
the Merchant’s House will realize a
welcome monetary contribution, and the
new owner of your donation will be
delighted. It’s a win-win-win situation.
Call (212) 777-1089 for details.