

Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Fall 1998

From the Director

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

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—dare I say fun?—way to support the Museum, with sea-fresh Blue Point oysters and perfect pints of Guinness.



Executive Director



Museum's Door No Longer Shabby Chic

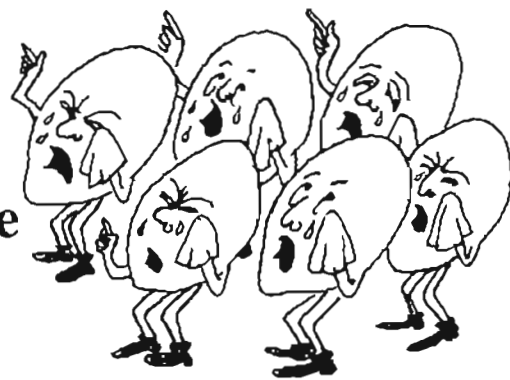
The front door was recently the object of a thorough restorative paint job by John Taylor of Loftus Restoration, New York City.

The restoration is one of the many benefits of our alliance with The Historic House Trust 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.



"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 pints 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.

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 manufactory 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 1832, 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.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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.

Wednesday, September 16, 6 p.m.
Walt Whitman
In Fort Greene Park
 Myrtle Avenue, Cumberland Street, and DeKalb Avenue, Brooklyn. Free public event.

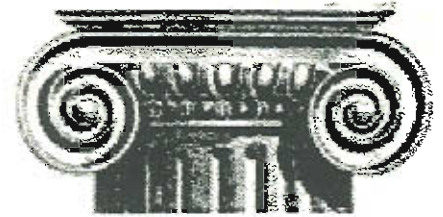
*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,
 October 19, 20, 21, 6 to 8 p.m.*
Edith Wharton
At the Merchant's House
 Famed stage actress Irene Worth will read.
 Reception follows. \$20

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

We Are Grateful to the Sponsors of
 The 1998 Oyster Festival
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Merchant's House Museum is the newsletter of the Museum.
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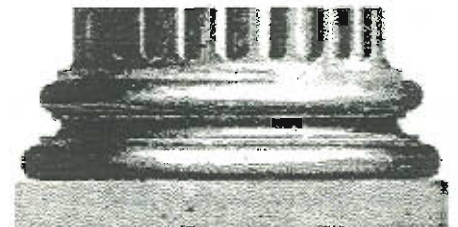


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Win-Win-Win

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.



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