

Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Spring 1999

Life In the Past Lane

NoHo—From 19th-Century Suburb To 21st-Century Cutting Edge

When Seabury and Eliza Tredwell and their seven children moved into their new home at 29 East Fourth Street in 1835, red-brick and marble rowhouses lined the streets between Bleecker and Fourth. The Bond Street Area, as it was then called, was on the northern outskirts of the city. Since the 1820s, this elegant suburb had provided an area where wealthy merchants were able to escape the congestion of downtown. Omnibuses ran down Broadway and Bowery to Wall Street and the South Street Seaport, making it possible for the City's first commuters to get to and from their places of business.

Lafayette Place was an exclusive two-block-long enclave extending only from Astor Place to Great Jones Street. At mid-block on Lafayette, around the corner from the Tredwells, stood one of New York City's most magnificent residences—Colonnade Row (also called LaGrange Terrace), nine marble town houses unified by a common facade comprising 28 Corinthian columns two stories tall. Today, only four of those houses remain, hinting dimly of their former grandeur.

Across the street, extending northward to Astor Place, was Vauxhall Garden, an outdoor retreat where couples strolled along gravel paths among trees and flowers and enjoyed theatrical presentations and fireworks at night.

And on the northwest corner of Lafayette and Fourth Street, the Middle Dutch Reformed Church was just going up—a Greek Revival structure with 25-ton

granite columns across the front.

By the late 1840s, commercial establishments began to replace the residences along Broadway as New York City marched northward.

After the Civil War, area residents continued to abandon their rowhouses for more fashionable precincts uptown.

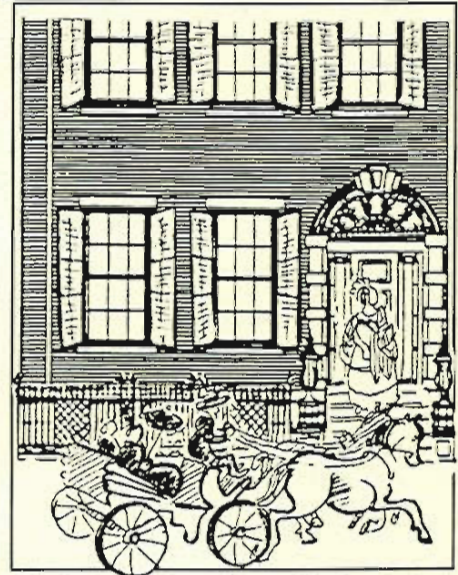
In the 1880s, Lafayette Place was extended south to City Hall, and commercial traffic began to rumble through the once-serene streets of Great Jones, Bond, and Bleecker. The Middle Dutch Church was demolished in 1887; once elegant houses became stores, and manufacturing lofts dominated the area.

Through it all, the Tredwells stayed in their Fourth Street home. Outside their doors, the world hurtled toward the modern age; inside very little changed.

In recent years, the neighborhood north of Houston has experienced a rebirth—today NoHo is historic, and hip. Tourists and native New Yorkers alike are drawn to the area for its cutting-edge shops, restaurants, and theaters, not to mention historic sites.

Eleven New York City landmarks are located in NoHo, including 19th-century cast-iron buildings like those that have made neighboring SoHo world famous.

The venerable New York institutions of New York University, Cooper Union, and the Public Theater are here. And after 167 years, the Merchant's House continues to stand proudly at the center of the NoHo universe.



The Merchant's House, built in 1832—the only family home to be preserved virtually intact from the early days of the NoHo neighborhood.

Around Our House

◆ We are thrilled to report that the restoration of the west wall has been completed. The final phase of a lengthy and involved three-step process to repair the severely water-damaged wall and to prevent further infiltration of water was the latest accomplishment in what Christopher Gray of *The New York Times* has called "the pristine preservation of the Merchant's House." Our thanks, once again, to Preserv, Inc. and Jan Hird Pokorny Associates for their superb work, and to The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts, American Express Company, the Felicia Fund, and the Historic House Trust of New York City's Landmarks Preservation Fund for generously funding this critical project.

◆ Our thanks to Catherine Stone, Mary Tredwell Botway, and Richard Tredwell, who responded to our Wish List with generous donations. Ms. Stone has provided the Museum with a powerhouse PC and printer. This spring a holly bush and pink camelia, a gift from Ms. Botway, will be planted in the garden, and a bold new banner will soon announce our presence in the neighborhood, thanks to Mr. Tredwell. (Wish list flash: now we need a new fax machine—please, anyone?)

6th Annual June Garden Party Tuesday, June 22, 6 to 9 p.m.

NoHo A Go Go

The Merchant's House Museum is New York City's only family home preserved virtually 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.
Open Sunday through Thursday, 1 to 4 p.m.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Tuesday, April 13, 6 p.m.

Thomas Jefferson Birthday Celebration

Illustrated lecture by Richard Franklin Sammons, architect, Fairfax & Sammons Architects, P.C., followed by T.J.'s Birthday Party featuring some of Jefferson's favorite foods (PEAS!!) \$60, members \$30. Reservations (212) 777-1089.

Thursday, April 22, 4 p.m.

"Kykuit:

The Rockefeller Home"

An illustrated lecture by Ann Rockefeller Roberts and her daughter, Mary Louise Pierson, author and photographer of *The Rockefeller Family Home: Kykuit*. In conjunction with the Beaux Arts Alliance. Lecture will be held at 115 East 74th Street. A book-signing and reception will follow. \$20, members \$10. Reservations (212) 777-1089.

Sunday, May 9, 2 and 3 p.m.

"Hearts and Flowers"

Mother's Day Tea

Scenes, tea sandwiches, heart-shaped desserts, and tea will be served in our walled garden. Two seatings. \$35 per couple. Reservations (212) 777-1089.

Sunday, May 16, 2 p.m.

"The New York of Henry James": A Walking Tour

Meet Henry Hope Reed at the Merchant's House for a walking tour of Henry James's world—from Union Square to Grace Church via Washington Square. Gathering in the garden follows. In conjunction with Classical America. \$15, members \$12. Reservations (212) 777-1089.



THE HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST OF NEW YORK CITY

Tuesday, May 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

John Berendt Reads Henry James
Best-selling author John Berendt (*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*) reads a personal selection from one of the authors he loves most, Henry James. Reception follows. \$50, members \$25. Reservations (212) 777-1089.

Great New York Writers In Great New York Places

A year-long reading series celebrating the literary history of New York City in significant architectural and historic sites. A reception follows each reading. Reservations (212) 360-1378. \$30 each reading, \$100 for the series.

Thursday, April 29,

6 to 8 p.m.

James Fenimore Cooper at the Museum of the American Indian

Thursday, June 10,

6 to 8 p.m.

The Great Diarists of New York at the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society

Tuesday, October 29,

6 to 8 p.m.

Willa Cather at the Salmagundi Club

Monday, November 15, and

Tuesday, November 16,

6 to 8 p.m.

Runyon, Liebling, and Mitchell at Chumley's

Merchant's House Museum is the newsletter of the Museum.

Mary Knapp, editor

Merchant's House Museum

29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003

Telephone (212) 777-1089 Fax (212) 777-1104

E-mail NYC1832@aol.com



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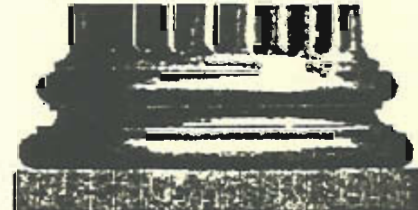
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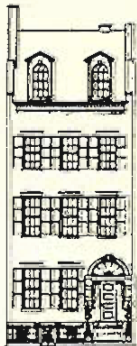
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