

# Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Summer 2000

## *Life in the Past Lane*

### **Summer Seance To Recall 19th-Century Fascination With Spiritualism**

Spirits may come knocking on August 16, when Maria Fix, noted clairvoyant and medium, conducts a seance in the parlor of the Merchant's House.

In the 19th century, the belief that one's spirit survives death and can communicate with the living was widely held. In an age when death often came without warning and frequently to those in their prime, people were attracted to a movement that held the hope of conversing with loved ones who had died.

By the early 1850s, adherents of Spiritualism numbered in the tens of thousands in New York City alone. The movement reached its peak in the United States after the Civil War, declining in popularity towards the end of the 19th century.

Maria Fix is a certified master psychic who has taught metaphysics and has worked with police departments on homicide, arson, and missing persons investigations. She is a fellow of The International Association of Counselors and Therapists and received an award from the Red Cross for her work in grief counseling for the families of the victims of TWA flight 800.

The fee for participating in the seance is \$50. Others will pay \$25 to observe. The seance will begin at 7 p.m., with a reception following. Please call the Museum (212-777-1089) for information or for reservations.

## **In the Family Dining Room Everything Old Will Be New Again**

When water leaked down the west wall of the Merchant's House from the roof parapets in the 1990s, the plaster in the family dining room on the ground floor was so badly damaged that it had to be removed, exposing the underlying brick.

While shabby chic may be the decorating style of choice for some these days, it certainly was not for a wealthy merchant family in New York City in the 19th century. So we all looked forward to the day when the room could be restored to its original look.

Repairs to the west wall were completed in the summer of 1999, correcting the problem that led to the deterioration of the plaster. Our

restoration architects, Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, now tell us that the walls are finally dry and restoration work can begin.

So this summer, the interior west wall will be replastered, and the family dining room will be repainted in the peach color that microscopic paint analysis has revealed to be the original color. The original baseboards on the west wall will also be restored.

Many restoration projects, while absolutely critical, go unnoticed after completion because they address hidden structural problems. The restoration of the dining room, on the other hand, is a project that will delight the eye. We hope you'll come see the results.

## **But the Bad News Is— East Wall Has Serious Water Infiltration**

Now that the windows on the south facade have been restored, and the family dining room is soon to be returned to its original condition, we face yet another preservation challenge. (Will it never end?)

During a recent site inspection, our architectural conservator confirmed our worst suspicions—the stability of the east cellar walls is threatened by water infiltration. In addition, the moisture in the cellar has risen to the ground floor walls and is preventing proper paint and plaster adhesion along the original interiors on the east wall of the House (and the damp has attracted termites!)

To correct these conditions and to insure the integrity of the east wall, we will need to invest approximately \$125,000.

We are determined to meet this crucial challenge, just as we have met so many others.

One of our most reliable sources of support has always been our members. So we are asking you now to renew your membership, or if you are not yet a member, please to join us in our efforts to maintain this priceless New York City landmark. Or, make a special tax-deductible gift to help repair the east wall using the form below. Thank you!

***Count Me In! I want to help preserve the Merchant's House  
by becoming a member with a tax-deductible gift of:***

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good Neighbor—\$50        | <input type="checkbox"/> Family/Household—\$75       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Protector—\$125           | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Hero—\$250         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leading Light—\$1,000     | <input type="checkbox"/> Princely Supporter—\$500    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paragon of Virtue—\$2,500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen/Student—\$25 |

***Here's a special gift in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to help meet  
the emergency need for repair of the east wall***

Please make checks payable to the Merchant's House Museum and mail to 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Tel \_\_\_\_\_

*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.  
Visit Thursday through Monday, 1 to 5 p.m. And visit us on the web: [www.merchantshouse.com](http://www.merchantshouse.com)*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Thursday, June 22,  
6:30 to 9 p.m.

### Dig It!

Our seventh annual garden party benefit will be a blooming celebration!

Lettuce entertain you with the sassy sounds of Peggy Cone and the Central Park Stompers. Special appearance by hot tomato Jacqueline Jonee. Wear garden variety garb and bring long green for the silent auction and raffle.

Nectars and ambrosias.

Tickets for bean sprouts (35 and younger) \$65; Jolly Green Giants \$150; and Sweet Peas \$85. For an invitation, call (212) 777-1089 or e-mail [pi@merchantshouse.com](mailto:pi@merchantshouse.com)

Wednesday, August 16, 7 p.m.

### Summer Seance

Renowned clairvoyant and medium Maria Fix will conduct a seance in the front parlor at 7 p.m., followed by a reception with other spirits. \$50 to participate in the seance; \$25 to observe.

Reservations (212) 777-1089 or e-mail [nyc1832@merchantshouse.com](mailto:nyc1832@merchantshouse.com)

### Great New York Writers In Great New York Places

A year-long series of four readings celebrating the 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, City of New York/Parks & Recreation, and The Library of America

Series \$80, each reading \$25  
Reservations (212) 360-1378

Monday, June 19, 6 to 8 p.m.

### F. Scott Fitzgerald at the '21' Club

21 West 52nd Street  
Reception follows.

Wednesday, August 2,  
6 to 8 p.m.

### World War II Journalists at the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum

Pier 56 at West 46th Street  
and Twelfth Avenue  
Reception follows.



#### Board of Directors

Anne Fairfax  
Chair

Helen Michalis Bonebrake

Frances Eberhart

Margaret Halsey Gardiner

Merrickay S. Hall, Esq.

Scott P. Heyl

Joseph Pell Lombardi

Elizabeth Lugar

Richard F. McKeon

Deborah Spaeder McWilliams

John E. Oden

Kate Burns Ottavino

Richard Franklin Sammons

William Sofield

Karen Treadwell

#### Staff

Margaret Halsey Gardiner

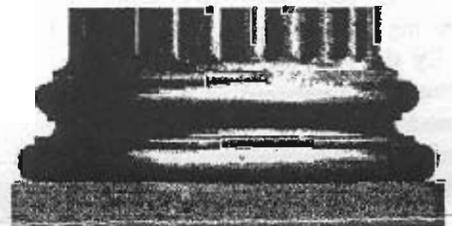
Executive Director

Kenneth Loyal Smith

Curator

Mary Knapp

Education Coordinator



### New in the Garden Something Cool, Something Sweet

On Sundays, June through August, from 2 to 4 p.m., visitors to the Merchant's House Garden will be able to enjoy refreshing glasses of iced tea and cookies. Proceeds benefit the Garden Fund.

The Museum's public education programs are sponsored in part through the generous support of the Public Service Award program of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

Saturday, October 7,  
Noon to 9 p.m.

### 4th Annual New York City Oyster Festival

Perfect pints of Guinness, freshly shucked oysters, live bands all day, the NYC Oyster Shucking Championship, and street theater galore.

Thursday, October 26,  
Through Monday, December 11

### Exhibit: "Minard Lefever and His Circle: The Diffusion of Grecian Architecture in the United States, 1830-1860"

Through architectural models, measured drawings, photographs, books, and artifacts, the exhibit will investigate the pivotal architectural developments in New York City up to 1835 and document New York's subsequent influence on 19th-century architecture in the south and midwest.

Saturday, October 28, and  
Sunday, October 29

### Colloquium: "Minard Lefever and His Circle: The Diffusion of Grecian Architecture in the United States, 1830-1860"

Our Saturday colloquium will amplify the exhibition with lectures and discussion. Lecturers will include Wendy A. Cooper, Kenneth Hafertepe, Richard John, Earl G. Shettleworth, Jr., Thomas Gordon Smith, and David Watkin. Workshops and tours on Sunday. For information and registration, call (212) 777-1089 or e-mail [nyc1832@merchantshouse.com](mailto:nyc1832@merchantshouse.com)

The Minard Lefever events are in conjunction with the exhibition "Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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

Mary Knapp, editor

Merchant's House Museum

29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003-7003

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

[nyc1832@merchantshouse.com](mailto:nyc1832@merchantshouse.com)

[www.merchantshouse.com](http://www.merchantshouse.com)



THE HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST OF NEW YORK CITY



City of New York  
Parks & Recreation

Rudolph W. Giuliani, Mayor  
Henry J. Stern, Commissioner