

Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Summer 2002

The Saga Began in 1945 — Now Newly Restored Ground Floor To Open May 1

When visitors descend the stairway to the ground floor of the Merchant's House on May 1, they will discover an impeccably restored family space, where much of the daily living of the Tredwell family and their servants took place. The rooms will look the way they would have at mid-century.

The work has included repairing and replastering the water-damaged walls and the decorative-plaster ceiling moldings, and painting the rooms in their original mid-19th century colors. The floors have also been repaired and refinished.

The cozy front room was a multiple-purpose room where in addition to dining, the family would have engaged in activities like reading, sewing, and various house-keeping projects, and children would have studied their lessons. The kitchen contains its original bee-hive oven and servant call bells as well as an up-to-date (for the mid-19th century) cast-iron stove.

The flawless work is being done by Preserv Building Restoration Management under the eagle eye of Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, our restoration architects, in consultation with the Historic House Trust.

IT CAME FROM THE WEST

This interior restoration is the culmination of a long and sorrowful history of deterioration and subsequent restoration efforts. It all started almost 60 years ago, in 1945, when the old house to the west was demolished, setting in motion a slow and steady process of deterioration of our exterior west wall.

19th-century rowhouses like the Merchant's House were built with side party walls that were shared by adjoining

buildings. These walls were never intended to be exposed to the elements, so without the protection of the adjacent building, water slowly seeped into our wall, eventually resulting in extensive damage to the interior plaster in the original family dining room. This finally necessitated complete removal of the plaster.

Over the years, attempts at restoration proved to be ineffective, and in one unfortunate instance, the application of a 'state-of-the-art' waterproof coating actually made things worse by trapping the water *inside* the wall. In 1998, we finished the final phase of a three-part restoration of the west wall. But the walls had to dry out completely before we could restore the interior.

WE ALSO GOT HIT FROM THE EAST....

In 1988, the owners of the adjacent building to the east demolished that structure, and similar problems with water infiltration occurred there. So serious was the structural damage to the east wall that the House had to be closed in the early 1990's for emergency stabilization.

Then, in 2000, we discovered termites in the cellar and where there are termites, you can bet there's a water problem. The termites kindly led us to the source of the problem — deteriorated waterproofing at the foundation level. The water infiltration was incessant, creating problems with plaster and paint adhesion along the east wall interiors.

DRY AT LAST

In January, we completed repairs to the exterior east wall and finally, with the walls now watertight — and dry — it became possible to undertake interior plaster and paint



Our most project is the much-needed restoration of the rear extension, which was an enclosed porch in the 19th century where the family took tea. The work will include reproducing the original stairway down to the garden.

repairs. Fortunately, the story of our water woes has a happy conclusion, and with proper vigilance and maintenance of the exterior walls during the years ahead, we can avoid future crises.

NO FREE LUNCH

None of this work comes cheap. We wish to thank all who gave so very generously to our most recent East Wall Restoration Project. Major contributors include:

*American Express Company
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YES INDEED! I (We) Want to Become a Member of the Merchant's House Museum

- Good Neighbor—\$50 Family/Household—\$75 Protector—\$125 Cultural Hero—\$250 Princely Supporter—\$500
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Please make checks payable to the Merchant's House Museum or charge your contribution to

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MATCHING GIFT: You may be able to double your contribution or your membership dues through your company's Matching Gift Program. Check here and enclose the Matching Gift form with your contribution. Mail to Merchant's House Museum, 29 East Fourth Street, NYC 10003.

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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., or at www.merchantshouse.com

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Summer 2002

Mid-April to Mid-May

Bulbs-a-Burstin'

We've planted our garden with over 500 bulbs this year. Come "smell the dirt" and view the brilliance of spring as multiple varieties of crocuses, snowdrops, daffodils, tulips, anemones, and grape hyacinths make their showy appearance in our garden.

For reservations, call 212-777-1089 or e-mail nyc1832@merchantshouse.com

Saturday and Sunday, May 4 and 5
10 a.m. to Noon

Spring Plant Sale

Plant divisions and seedlings from our plantings — including astilbes, epimediums, aquilegias, hostas, sedums and sempervivum, ferns, ivies, herbs, and shade perennials. All proceeds benefit the Garden Fund. Free Admission. Call the Museum for a full list of available plants.

Sunday, May 5 and 19, 1:30 p.m.

Walking Tour: At Home Above Bleecker

Tour of the immediate historic NoHo neighborhood will discuss the social context of New York's first suburban enclave. Meets at the Museum. \$12 (includes tour of the Merchant's House).

Sunday, May 12

Seatings at 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m.

Mother's Day Tea: "The mere chink of cups and saucers tunes the mind to happy repose"
Celebrate the day with our 3-course English 'afternoon tea', including a selection of finger sandwiches, scones with jam and cream, pretty cakes and confections, and brewed English tea. Served in our 19th-century garden. Includes tour of the House after tea. \$40 per couple, members \$30 per couple. Each additional guest per couple \$15.

Wednesday, May 15, 6:30 p.m.

Lecture: *Shakespeare's Globe Theater – Classical and Celtic Origins*

by Alvin Holm, AIA

It has long been assumed that the legendary Globe playhouse was an evolutionary development of earlier Elizabethan theater, and as such the recent restoration in London has been made to resemble a Tudor half-timbered barn. Mr. Holm's research indicates otherwise: a building based on elaborate ancient Roman prototypes and the prehistoric Celtic. A collaboration with Classical America. Reception in the garden follows. \$12, members \$10.

May 20 – 30

Travel Tour: 18th-Century Sweden. The Golden Age of Gustavian Style

During his reign from 1771-1792, Gustav III transformed Sweden from a once-removed

European country into the "Paris of the North." This eleven-day tour includes lectures and guided tours of many of the magnificent palaces, castles, fortresses, and ancestral country homes that reflect the Gustavian style. A collaboration with Classical America. For information and a brochure, please contact Thomas Hayes, V.I.P. Travel, 9 South Street, Stockbridge, MA 01262. (413) 298-3724.

Wednesday, June 19, 7 to 10 p.m.

9th Annual June Garden Party Benefit

An evening of fabulous cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, a silent auction filled with treasures, and dancing under the stars. Proceeds from this year's revelry benefit the restoration of our unsightly rear extension, which in the 19th century was an enclosed porch where the family took tea (think Henry James's *Washington Square*) with stairs leading down to the Garden (and the outhouse). Tickets \$75, \$100, \$150. Call for an invitation.

2002 Great New York Writers in Great New York Places

Our 5th Annual Great New York Writers in Great New York Places reading series, which celebrates the literary history of New York City in significant architectural and historical sites. A collaboration with The Library of America and the City of New York/Parks & Recreation. Series of four readings \$100, single readings \$30. For reservations, call 212-360-1378.

Tuesday, June 4, 6:30 p.m.

Herman Melville at

India House in Hanover Square

Wednesday, July 31, 6:30 p.m.

Baseball Writings at the

American Museum of Natural History

Afternoon Tea: A Month of Sundays

June 2, 9, 16 and 23

Seatings at 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.

A traditional afternoon tea will be served in the Garden. Includes a selection of finger sandwiches, scones with jam and Devonshire cream, and a choice of desserts. A guided tour of the House follows. \$30 per couple, members \$25 per couple (Each additional guest \$15).

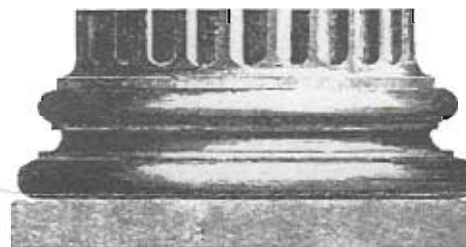


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