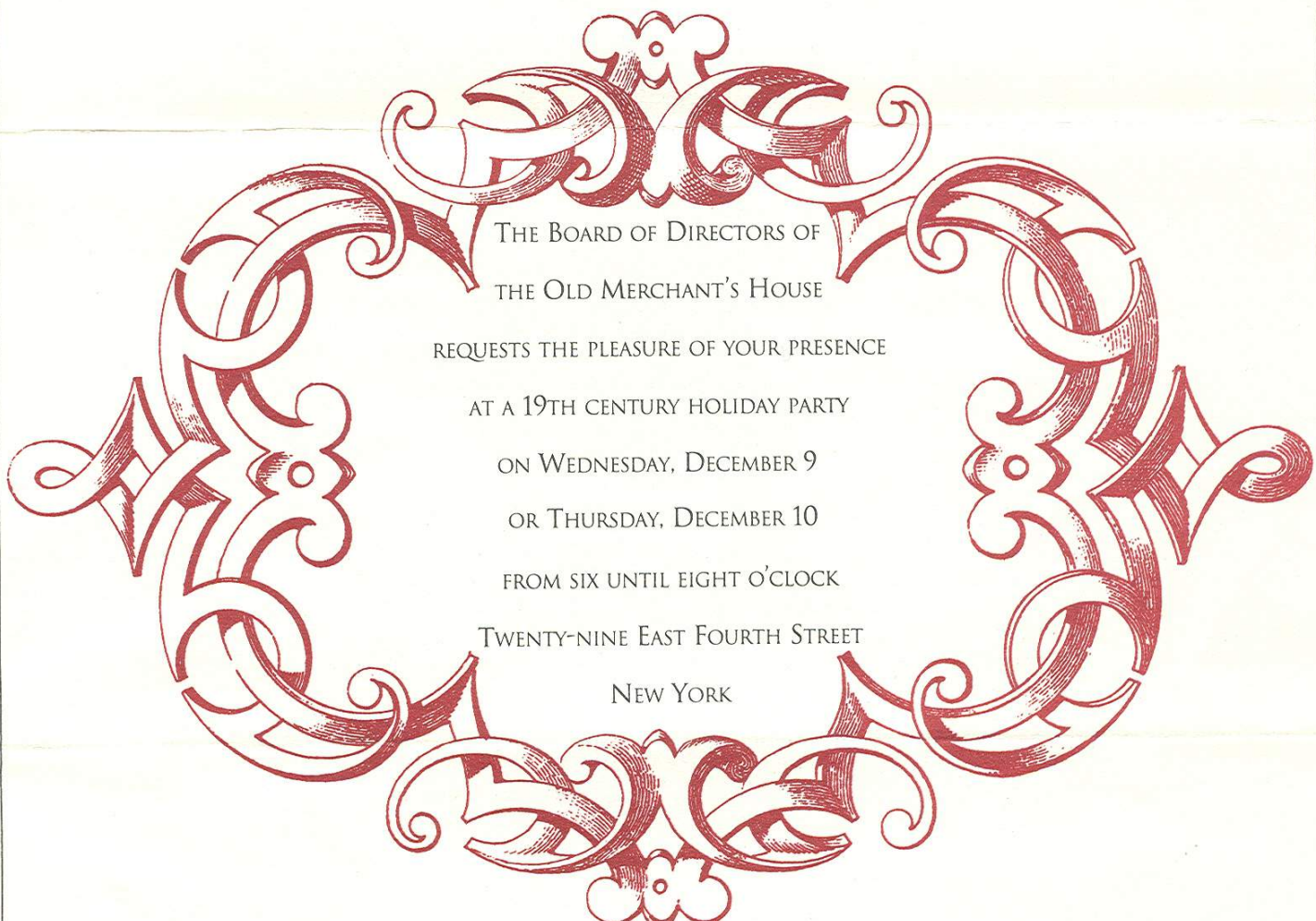


no. 7

# Old Merchant's House

Newsletter

Fall/Winter 1992



THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF  
THE OLD MERCHANT'S HOUSE

REQUESTS THE PLEASURE OF YOUR PRESENCE

AT A 19TH CENTURY HOLIDAY PARTY

ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9

OR THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10

FROM SIX UNTIL EIGHT O'CLOCK

TWENTY-NINE EAST FOURTH STREET

NEW YORK

R. S. V. P. (212) 777-1089

OLD MERCHANT'S HOUSE

MUSIC AND REFRESHMENTS

MEMBERS FREE

NON-MEMBERS \$25.00

*The Old Merchant's House is New York City's only family home preserved intact from the 19th century and Greenwich Village's only historic house museum. A rowhouse built in 1832, it is among the finest surviving examples of late Federal and Greek Revival architecture of the period. Home to prosperous merchant Seabury Tredwell and family from 1835 to 1933, the landmark house, which has been a museum open to the public since 1936, reflects in its original textiles, furniture, and decorative arts the lifestyle of a typical New York City upper-middle-class family of the last century.*

*Hours: Sundays, 1 to 4 p.m., group tours by appointment.*



## Research Reveals 1850 Gasoliers in Parlors Not the First

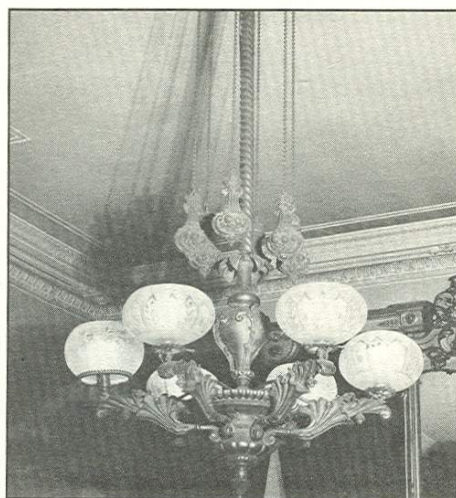
Visitors to the Old Merchant's House invariably comment on the beautiful gasoliers in the parlors. Because use of gas for light is more often associated with the "Gaslight Era" of the later 19th century, people are impressed that these particular gasoliers date to the mid-19th century. This past spring, research led to the striking conclusion that these early gasoliers were probably not the first installed in the house.

It is important to point out that the gas used for illumination in the 19th century was not the clean natural gas with which we are familiar. It was, instead, manufactured from coal. Thus, any site illuminated by gas had to be near enough to the manufactory and its supply pipes, which were laid in the street. The earliest use of gas for lighting was for street lamps. London had gas street lamps from about 1800, Baltimore from 1816, and Boston from 1822. Every evening the lamps were lit individually. Even in the later 19th century, the lamplighter, immortalized by Robert Louis Stevenson in his poem, "The Lamplighter," was a familiar figure in city streets.

New York's first gas manufactory was chartered in 1823 with one Samuel Leggett as President. His home at 7 Cherry Street in Manhattan was the first residence in New York to be illuminated by gas. By 1825, gas lines had been laid under Broadway. Two theatres in the neighborhood of Fourth Street and the Bowery were drawing crowds of people who were as interested in seeing the gas lighting as the theatrical productions. Prior to 1827, New York's streets were lit by oil lanterns hanging from wooden standards. In 1827, these were replaced with cast iron standards and gas burners.

During the major restoration of the Old Merchant's House in 1991, floor boards were pulled up to install the tie rods that would stabilize the building. When the floor boards were removed, gas lines were found in the floor joists. These gas lines could only have been installed when the house was originally built, in 1832. The Old Merchant's House is certainly one of the very earliest homes built in New York City to be illuminated by gas. It must have very few, if any, surviving peers.

As is so often the case, such discoveries raise additional questions. The decorative elements of the gasoliers now hanging in the parlors place their creation in the middle of the 19th century. They were "water slide" fixtures that could be raised and lowered. But they were clearly not the first gasoliers installed in 29 East Fourth Street. One wonders what the first fixtures looked like.



1850 gasoliers in parlors

That question may never be answered, but research is under way in an effort to discover which of the early gas companies supplied this house and whether records of the Tredwell's purchase of gas still exist.

## Museum News

### *Helping Hands*

The museum's dedicated volunteers have been extremely active during the summer and fall. A number of volunteers have undertaken curatorial projects ranging from painting the ironwork outside to researching items from the collection. Others got their hands dirty this summer cultivating our 19th century garden. Volunteers also helped to install a new computer and, utilizing a new software program, are assisting in cataloging the collection. Docents gave generously of their time to lead our new Noontime Tours, introduced this summer, and, as always, to guide visitors through the house on Sundays.

The Old Merchant's House warmly welcomes back this fall a committee from the Junior League of the City of New York. League members assist in giving tours on Sundays and at our many special events. In addition, the committee will implement a program to recruit new volunteers to serve as docents. We are grateful to have the members of the Junior League with us for another year.

We mourn the death this past spring of Douglas S. Dammarell. An active volunteer for many years, Doug brought his enthusiasm and good cheer to the museum on Sunday afternoons. He will be missed dearly by staff and visitors alike.

It is the stalwart efforts of volunteers that allow the museum to accomplish so much. The Old Merchant's House Board of Directors and staff would like to thank all the volunteers for their help. Please consider becoming an Old Merchant's House

volunteer. We need your help. For more information, call the museum office (777-1089).

### *Children Take Up the Cause of Preservation*

Our elementary school program, "Greenwich village: History and Historic Preservation," a joint effort of the Old Merchant's House and the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, is in full swing. A wide variety of schools is participating — public, private, and parochial — including P.S. 41, the Chapin School, and St. Joseph's School in Greenwich Village. The program offers a unique way to introduce children to the important concept of historic preservation. Parents and teachers are urged to contact the Old Merchant's House for more information (777-1089).

### *Museum Welcomes New Board Member*

In the late 1930's, Clarence G. Michalis, the grandfather of new Board member Helen Michalis Bonebrake, joined with his friend George Chapman (a distant cousin of Gertrude Tredwell) to buy the Old Merchant's House, thus saving it from the "wrecker's ball." They set up a not-for-profit corporation to operate as a museum, and Mr. Michalis was Chairman of the Board for a number of years.

In 1968, Clarence F. Michalis succeeded his father on the Board and served for more than 20 years. Accordingly, it is fitting that Helen Michalis Bonebrake succeed her father on the Board of the Old Merchant's House.

Helen and her husband, Mike, are 10-year residents of Manhattan, where Helen owns her own interior design business.

### *Historic Structures Report Completed*

Following two years of research, the architectural firm of Jan Hird Pokorny has submitted a draft copy of the Historic Structures Report (HSR). The HSR examines the history of the house and its inhabitants, the Tredwells; the original construction of and alterations to the building over the years; and the building's condition today. The report also presents a comprehensive view of the historical importance of the building. Additional perspective is provided by archaeological and landscape evaluations. Of note, the HSR also sets forth a master plan, in stages, for addressing the building's restoration needs. The report, which runs over 300 pages, is currently under review by Board members and the staff. In past newsletters, we have



described some of the exciting findings with you (see article in this issue on 19th century lighting) and more information will be shared in future newsletters.

### *West Wall Repairs Begin*

With generous grants from the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Facade Improvement Program; the Vincent Astor Foundation; and the Federal Archives Fund, Community Board #2, Manhattan, we have been able to begin an important segment of work to repair the west wall.

During the summer, repairs were undertaken to stop water from continuing to seep through the west party wall. Water seepage over many years has severely damaged the plaster finishes in rooms on the third and fourth floors. The northeast section of the parapet wall was reconstructed and new protective metal flashing was installed to prevent rainwater from entering the wall through mortar joints. A lower portion of the west party wall brick masonry, where the mortar joints had deteriorated, was rebuilt. In addition, new stainless steel anchors were installed within the party wall brick masonry to provide additional support between the west party wall and the rear facade wall of the house.

After the winter, work will continue on the reconstruction of the west facade wall parapets. New thru-wall flashings beneath the coping stones and new stepped flashings where the parapet meets the roof will be installed. Deteriorated sections of the west party wall brick masonry will be reconstructed and new stone masonry chimney caps will be installed to replace the existing concrete and stainless steel caps on the party wall chimneys.

The complete restoration of the west wall is estimated to cost over \$250,000. Please help by contributing to the Old Merchant's House Restoration Fund.

## Walks In The Past Help Our Future

Spend a memorable afternoon with Marilyn Stults, Senior Tour Guide, Sidewalks of New York, and Greenwich Village expert, for "Enclaves of Elegance...the Old Merchant's House and its Neighborhood — 1800 - 1850."

Take a walking tour through the neighborhood that the Tredwell family knew while they lived at 29 East Fourth Street. Enjoy a special tour of the Old Merchant's House, which will include the top floor servant's hall and other areas not open to the public, and a reception in the 19th century kitchen.

Tours on Sunday, November 15 and December 6. All tours begin at 2 p.m. at the Washington Square Arch. Admission is \$15 per person, two for \$25. All proceeds benefit the Old Merchant's House. Reservations required.



## The Old Merchant's House



### at Home

The magnificent 19th century rooms of the Old Merchant's House are available for rental for private parties, corporate events, still photography, and film shoots.



### on the Road

*For elementary school children...*

In collaboration with the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the Old Merchant's House is offering a school program that teaches the history of Greenwich Village, emphasizing the importance of historic preservation. The program comprises an introductory slide presentation at the school; a walking tour of the Washington Square neighborhood; and a tour of the Old Merchant's House.

*For adults...*

We offer an entertaining and informative slide lecture on the Old Merchant's House and life in 19th century New York. The lecture is highlighted by examples from the museum's extensive collection of original textiles, furniture, and decorative arts.

Please telephone the museum office for information (777-1089).

## STEP INTO THE PAST AND BE A PART OF OUR FUTURE

### \*GOOD NEIGHBOR \$25

Free admission for one during visiting hours. Invitation to 19th century Holiday Party and other special events. Bi-annual newsletter.

### \*PROTECTOR \$50

As above, for two.

### \*CULTURAL HERO \$100

### \*PRINCELY SUPPORTER \$250

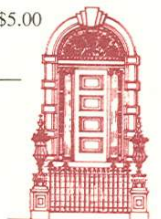
### \*GUARDIAN ANGEL \$500

### \*TRUE FRIEND \$1,500

\* NOTECARDS \_\_\_\_\_ @ 8 / \$10.00

\* POSTCARDS \_\_\_\_\_ @ 12 / \$5.00

\* RESTORATION FUND \$ \_\_\_\_\_



Membership contributions are tax deductible. If you are eligible for a matching gift program, please take advantage of it to increase your gift. Gifts of securities are welcome. Please ask your broker or banker to call the museum office (777-1089).

Make checks payable to:  
Old Merchant's House

and mail with this form to:  
Old Merchant's House  
29 East Fourth Street  
New York, NY 10003

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_



## Museum Calendar



### *Saturday, November 7, 10 to 3 p.m.* **Appraisal Day**

Harold Jaffe, Senior Member of the American Society of Appraisers, will give written appraisals of your decorative and fine arts objects (no jewelry). The fee for each appraisal is \$5. Admission \$3.

*Thursday, November 19, 6 p.m.*  
**Chamber Music in 19th Century Elegance**  
String quartet "Halcyon" plays selections in the parlors. House opens for viewing at 5:30 p.m. Reservations required. \$7 for members, \$10 for the public.

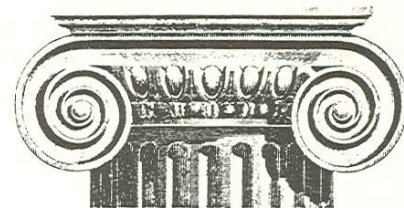
*Wednesday and Thursday,  
December 9 and 10, 6 to 8 p.m.*  
**19th Century Holiday Parties**  
Music, refreshments, and tours of the house, decorated for the holidays. Free for members, \$25 for non members.

*Wednesday and Thursday,  
December 16 and 17, 6 to 8 p.m.*  
**Candlelight Tours**  
Tours of the house displaying charming 19th century period holiday decorations, with refreshments. \$3 for members, \$6 for the public.

*Sunday, December 20, 1 to 4 p.m.*  
**Holiday Reading**  
Dramatic reading of Clement Clarke Moore's 19th century classic, *The Night Before Christmas*. Tours and refreshments. \$3 for members and children, \$6 for the public.

*Friday, January 1, 1 to 4 p.m.*  
**19th Century New Year's Day Reception**  
Celebrate the New Year with tours and refreshments. \$3 for members, \$6 for the public.

*Thursday, January 28, 6 p.m.*  
**Chamber Music in 19th Century Elegance**  
String quartet "Halcyon" plays selections in the parlors. House opens for viewing at 5:30 p.m. Reservations required. \$7 for members, \$10 for the public.

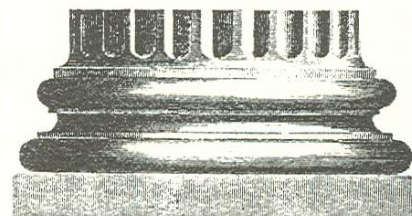


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*Old Merchant's House* is the bi-annual newsletter of the museum. Inquiries may be sent to the Old Merchant's House, 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003. Telephone 212-777-1089.

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New York, NY 10003

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