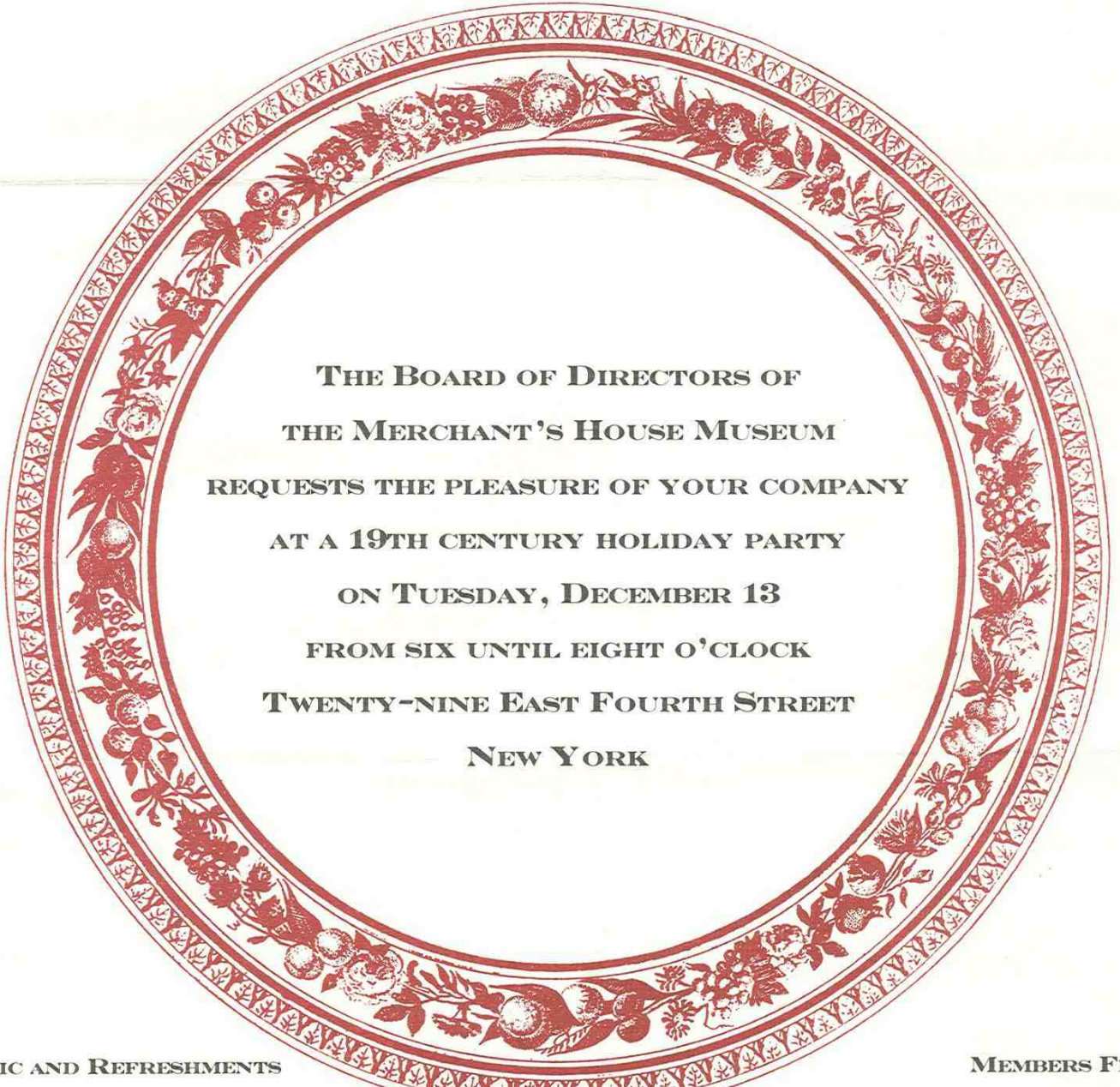


no. **11**

Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Fall/Winter 1994



**THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
THE MERCHANT'S HOUSE MUSEUM
REQUESTS THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY
AT A 19TH CENTURY HOLIDAY PARTY
ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13
FROM SIX UNTIL EIGHT O'CLOCK
TWENTY-NINE EAST FOURTH STREET
NEW YORK**

MUSIC AND REFRESHMENTS

MEMBERS FREE

NON-MEMBERS \$25.00

The Merchant's House Museum is New York City's only family home preserved intact from the 19th century and Greenwich Village's only historic house museum. A row house built in 1832, it is among the finest surviving examples of late-Federal and Greek Revival architectural 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 through Thursdays, 1 to 4 p.m. Group tours by appointment.
Admission: Free for members, \$3 for the public.*

Announcing the Friends

The Merchant's House Museum has launched its first formal major donor program, the Friends, with Board members Timothy C. Forbes and Elizabeth L. Schafer as Co-Chairs. Through their combined generosity, members of the Friends group play a critical role in helping the Museum fulfill its mission to restore, preserve, exhibit, and interpret the landmark building and the original collections that make the Merchant's House Museum unique among institutions devoted to the 19th century.

The Board, staff, and volunteers of the Museum acknowledge with gratitude the leadership contributions of the following charter members of the Friends:

LEADERS

Mrs. Vincent Astor, The Vincent Astor Foundation

BENEFACTORS

Mrs. F. Henry Berlin
Mrs. Joan Bull

SPONSORS

C. Douglas Dillon, The Dillon Fund
Timothy C. Forbes, The Forbes Foundation
Stephen and Cathy Graham
Elizabeth L. Schafer

ASSOCIATES

Helen Michalis Bonebrake
Mr. and Mrs. John Chalsty
Merrikay S. Hall
Mrs. Randolph Hearst
Sandra Jaffe
Howard D. Monroe, Jr.
Kate Burns Ottavino
Mr. and Mrs. David Rockefeller
Lynne Stair
Jeanette and Paul Wagner

To receive a brochure about the Friends program, including information about the special benefits of membership, please telephone the Museum at 212-777-1089 or write to Margaret Halsey Gardiner, Executive Director, Merchant's House Museum, 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003.

We Loved New York in June--And October

Big Crowds Gather at Museum for First Annual June Garden Party and October's "Good Scary Fun"

June truly was "bustlin' out all over" at the Museum on the first evening of that celebrated month. More than 300 people -- many of them first-time visitors to the Merchant's House Museum-- waltzed in for drinks and food to celebrate the approach of summer and stayed to enjoy beautiful, balmy weather in the Museum's garden, which was lit all around by hundreds of candles and from above by the crescent moon.

A dynamite benefit committee helped fill the House and garden and we are grateful to them all, as well as to the many volunteers who pitched in to help things go smoothly. We also want to express our great gratitude to the following for their in-kind contributions. Thanks to these

MRS. VINCENT ASTOR

I have known the Old Merchant's House Museum for many years and remain as charmed by it today as when I first visited. Because it was owned by the same family for nearly 100 years, the house and its furnishings remain as they were in the 19th century. Won't you join me and become a charter member of the "Friends" of the Museum? By doing so you will help ensure a future for this marvelous house and its unique collections.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

B. Vincent Astor

generous friends, virtually all of the funds raised by the Garden Party went directly to support the Museum's activities: Ned Visser and Andy Arons of the Gourmet Garage for terrific food, James Tsiropinas at D'Arcy Graphics for printing the invitation * Dr. Robert H. Vadheim for special party printing on his 19th century handpress * and Neil Mendeloff and the staff at Plantworks for assistance with site preparation out doors.

So successful was the Garden Party that as fall approached several GP veterans came up with an idea that proved irresistible: transform the Merchant's House into the setting for some "good scary fun" in honor of Halloween. With the help of another great committee (augmented by the likes of Norman Bates and his mother, Miss Elizabeth Borden, and Hannibal Lechter), we did just that. On Wednesday, October 26, guests in various states of costume stepped into our freshly cobwebbed corridors where skeletons glowed in the dark, cobras coiled, and spiders, goblins, ghouls, pumpkins, witches, and warlocks abounded. Those brave enough to peer into their own futures sought the counsel of psychics and mystics stationed throughout the House. Some guests seeking respite from the terrors within ventured out into the Museum's own version of "the garden of good and evil" where the moon shone down through dark clouds onto candlelit paths and tombstones.

The party was a scream and a success. For that we have to thank the following for their generous donations of goods and services: the Halloween Adventure Shop at 21 Astor Place for the absolutely fabulous decor * Carillon Importers for the delicious Stolichnaya Ohranj * AquaSource Farmed Seafood for the plump shrimp * the Sullivan Street Bakery for all the tasty treats * TIME Cafe for beer and wine * our terrific committee of seers -- Frank Andrews, Deborah Di Pierro, Christine Jampolsky, Tamala Michaud, Noelle Shalforoosh, and Althea Watson * the donors who wish to remain anonymous but who kindly underwrote the invitation design and

printing * and, last but not least, to angels Ned Visser and Andy Arons of the Gourmet Garage for their special help (again).

Together, the two events raised more than \$27,000 for the Museum's restoration and public education programs! (Remember to keep your Museum membership current so we can keep you posted on future events and programs, including the Garden Party scheduled for June, 1995.)

Planning A Gift

The restoration, preservation, and operation of the Merchant's House Museum and its collections are made possible, in large part, by gifts from individuals. While most of these gifts are received in the form of cash contributions or as donations of securities, planned gifts in the form of bequests also provide crucial operating support. These bequests take several different forms -- gifts of a specific amount of cash; gifts of a fractional portion of one's estate; and gifts of a particular asset, such as real estate. The Merchant's House Museum may also be named as the

sole or partial beneficiary of a life insurance policy, an annuity policy, or a retirement plan. If you and your attorney would like to discuss including the Merchant's House Museum in your estate planning, please contact Margaret Halsey Gardiner, Executive Director, at 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003; telephone 212-777-1089.

Board Elects New Directors

This past Spring, the Merchant's House Museum elected two new members to its Board of Directors. We are extremely fortunate and pleased to welcome Elizabeth L. Schafer and Lynne Stair to the Board. Ms. Schafer is an alumna of Smith College and a veteran of the magazine *Antiques*. For the past several years, she has served on the New York Landmarks Conservancy's board of directors and as a member of the New York Academy of Arts's advisory council. Ms. Stair is a partner in the interior design firm of Mallory Stair Inc. and a special consultant to Christie's auction house. She is considered one of the foremost authorities on late-18th and 19th-century glass, particularly paperweights. Both of these accomplished women have been supportive members of the Museum for quite some time and are especially equipped to help guide us into the 21st century.

Grants Awarded

The Board and staff acknowledge with gratitude the support of the following foundations and government agencies:

The Vincent Astor Foundation
The Bay Foundation
The Dillon Fund
The Forbes Foundation

The L.W. Frolich Charitable Trust
Institute for Museum Services (MAP II)
National Heritage Trust,
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation,
and Historic Preservation
New York City Economic Development
Corporation
New York State Council on the Arts
The New York Times Company Foundation
Office of Manhattan Borough President Ruth
Messinger Tourism Grant
Open Space Institute

Phase II West Wall Repairs Completed

This past summer, we completed the second phase of critical repairs to the west wall to alleviate moisture problems that have plagued the building since the demolition of an adjoining building in 1945. The effects of this moisture are readily apparent in the seriously deteriorated paint and plaster finishes on some of the interior walls and ceilings.

The work accomplished this summer included resetting the original brick masonry, repointing the bricks with a mortar matching the original to allow the wall to "breathe," and installing new flashing at roof and wall junctures.

The Museum thanks the Vincent Astor Foundation and the New York City Economic Development Corporation for funding the first two phases of work. The third and final phase will cost an additional \$100,000. Anyone wishing to help "support" the west wall can do so with a gift earmarked for the Museum's Restoration Fund.

Tredwell Bequest

The Merchant's House Museum is the fortunate recipient of two recent bequests of Tredwell family possessions. Thanks to Mrs. Ruth Stebbins Cadwell, items bequeathed to the Museum by her brother, Seabury Tredwell Stebbins, have been added to our collection.

Mrs. Cadwell, great-granddaughter of Eliza and Seabury Tredwell, has donated a group of fans to the collection, and they are currently on exhibit in the rear, upstairs bedroom. The Museum has also received a circa 1850s dresser with marble top and mirror.

And the portrait of Seabury Tredwell, which has been on long-term loan to the Museum, has now become part of our collection. We are delighted to have these objects which will help enhance the Museum experience for future visitors.

Merchant's House Neighbor Focus of Village Voice Article

We commend the *Village Voice* and reporter Guy Trebay for their excellent story recently about the sorry plight of the Skidmore house at 37 East Fourth Street, the 19th-century landmarked row house one vacant lot away from the Merchant's House Museum.

Years of neglect on the part of its owners, intermittent occupancy by squatters, and a number of mysterious fires have taken a severe toll on this once-lovely Greek Revival building. It is difficult to look at it today without wincing.

The *Voice* article reminds us all of the aesthetic and historic value such distinctive structures of New York's past possess, and how important it is that we not sit complacently by and let these buildings be marginalized, trashed, and destroyed.

Our thanks to the *Voice* and Mr. Trebay for helping refocus attention on this fragile block of East Fourth Street that is home to #37 and to the Merchant's House Museum.

Thank You, Volunteers

Our volunteers are very special people, helping the Museum by donating their time and effort. We thank the growing number of Director's Council committee members, many of whom pitched in this past year to make the June Garden Party such a smashing success. More recently, this dedicated group was found stuffing envelopes and spreading the word about our pre-Halloween Benefit. They continue to serve the Museum by providing daily tours. Hats off to Irvin Gafkin, Jean Guth, Katherine Jacobus, Missy Kostel, Andrea La Russa, Ariane Maclean, Ashley Perry, Mary Squire, and Margaret Zamos.

Other extraordinary volunteers contribute to the Museum in a variety of ways, and we extend our thanks to each: Penelope Bareau continues to make progress in storing the textile collection. Carol Brakebill, Bard Graduate Center intern, assists the Director in marketing the Museum for special events and programming. Jennie Choi, Bard Graduate Center intern, has been cataloguing and transcribing papers from the family of Samuel Lenox Tredwell. John Disposti is cataloguing the photography collection. Anthony Hadaway is frequently found gardening, moving furniture, and sorting slides. Sunah Kim, FIT intern, is furthering the re-storage of the textile collection. Mary Petretti worked wonders with the garden this year, and Peter Vilsak has been a lawn mower extraordinaire. Jessica Waglein shows unwavering devotion as researcher, tour guide, and performer.

Appraisal Team Continues Research

The appraisal of the Merchant's House collection, a massive project that began last winter, is nearing its final stages. We are most grateful to Michael Connors, principal of Michael Connors, Inc., who is directing the project, and to the members of the pro-bono appraisal team, researchers Patsy Blake, Deborah DeVenezia, Nancy McKinven, and Gerry Pivak. Three team members are graduates of the Appraisal Studies Program at New York University and their credentials include work in major museums.

For almost a year, team members have found time each week to visit the house, spending hours examining the myriad objects in the collection. Working in rooms that look and feel much as they did 150 years ago, the team's job has been to document the possessions of the Tredwells, determining not only the value of the things they left us, but also the place of these objects in the history of the house. When was the piece created? When did it arrive in the house? What type of value did it have at the time it was created? These are the types of

questions they seek to answer during their ongoing investigations. By gathering and recording the facts, they are helping to reconstruct the history of the life that the Tredwells created for themselves.

In addition to the in-house examinations of objects, the team has been conducting extensive outside research. For example, in searching for clues and information about furniture found in the house, team members have traveled to Winterthur Museum to attend special conferences and ventured to the State Archives in Albany to hunt through records of 19th-century cabinetmakers.

A recent and most welcome addition to the team is professional photographer Bruce Buck — a long time aficionado of American furniture. A member of the Museum for several years, he volunteered his services as photographer for the appraisal after reading an article about it in the Spring newsletter. He has already completed the photography of the objects on the two lower floors of the house and is creating a much needed room-by-room visual inventory. The combined efforts of these individuals are serving not only to create an important and necessary document, a full appraisal of the contents of the Merchant's House, but also to increase the fund of knowledge regarding its heritage. We are hopeful that the research and photographs generated will form the basis of a published catalogue of the house and its contents.

In Our Dreams

Buckets of money
Podium with light for guest lecturers
Screen for slide projection
Space heaters
Fax
Window air conditioner and 220 volt electric line
Telephone answering machine
Laser printer
Pots of gold



The Merchant's House Museum is now available for private parties, corporate events, still photography, and film shoots. Call (212) 777-1089.

Museum Calendar

Tuesday and Wednesday, December 6 and 7, 6 to 8 p.m.

Candlelight tours

Tour the house, resplendent with decorations and aglow with candlelight. A magical introduction to the holiday season for adults and children. Refreshments. \$6 admission. Members \$3.

Sunday, December 11, 3 p.m.

A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens's classic story, read by actor Gregory St. John in the parlor by the decorated tree. Children will want to bring their parents and grandparents to this continuance of a 19th-century tradition. Reservations required. \$10 admission. Members \$7.

Tuesday, December 13, 6 to 8 p.m.

Annual 19th-Century Holiday Party

Continuing a grand and colorful tradition in the Greenwich Village community, the Merchant's House Museum is alive with music, refreshments, and holiday spirit. Tour the Museum and enjoy "the best 19th-century holiday party in town," as *The New York Times* has raved. \$25 admission. Members free.

Sunday, December 18, 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m.

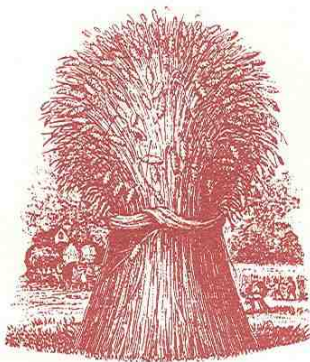
Holiday readings

Take a seat near the tree for the third annual dramatic reading by curator Mimi Sherman of Clement Clarke Moore's 19th-century classic, *A Visit from Saint Nicholas*, and other poems. Parents are encouraged to introduce their children to the holiday traditions of Old New York with a tour of the house, decorated in 19th-century splendor. Refreshments. \$6 admission. Members and children, \$3.

Sunday, January 1, 1 to 4 p.m.
19th-Century New Year's Day Reception

In 19th-century New York City, it was the custom to make calls and exchange gifts on January 1st. Our celebration of New Year's Day continues the tradition of "visiting family and friends." Tours and refreshments. \$6 admission. Members, \$3.

The Merchant's House Museum is open Sunday through Thursday, 1 to 4 p.m. Admission \$3. Members free. Group tours by appointment.



Best routes to the Merchant's House Museum:

By Subway:

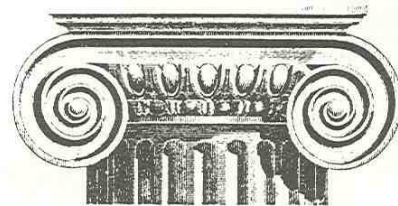
IRT: Lexington Avenue local #6 to Astor Place. Walk South on Lafayette Street to 4th Street and walk 1/2 block East.

BMT: Local R or N to 8th Street. Walk South on Broadway to East 4th Street and walk 1 1/2 blocks East.

IND: D or F to Broadway/Lafayette. Walk North on Lafayette for 3 blocks, then East 1/2 block.

By Bus:

Bus #M5 or M6 to Broadway and 4th Street. Walk East 1 1/2 blocks; Lexington-Third Avenue Bus# M102 to East 4th Street, walk West 1/2 block; Bus #M1 to Broadway and 8th Street, walk South on Broadway to East 4th Street and 1 1/2 blocks East.



Board of Directors

Merrikay S. Hall, Esq.

Chair

Helen Michalis Bonebrake

Joan Bull

Spencer Davidson

Timothy C. Forbes

Howard D. Monroe, Jr.

Kate Burns Ottavino

Carolyn Roberto (Emeritus)

Elizabeth L. Schafer

Lynne Stair

Karen Treadwell

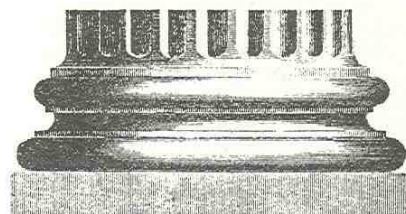
Staff

Margaret Halsey Gardiner

Executive Director

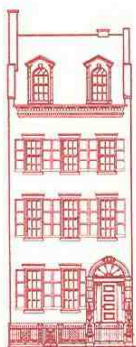
Mimi Sherman

Curator



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

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