

# Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Spring/Summer 1997

## \$1 Million Astor Foundation Challenge Grant Awarded To The Merchant's House Museum

The Merchant's House Museum recently received word from The Vincent Astor Foundation that among the final grants being made by the Foundation before it closes this year is a challenge grant to the Merchant's House of \$1 million.

Under the terms of the challenge, the Museum must raise \$500,000 by December 15 to receive the grant. When this requirement is met, we will have secured the largest gift in the history of the Merchant's House, and we will have created a permanent Endowment Fund to insure the survival of this irreplaceable site into the 21st century.

To launch the endowment drive, our Board of Directors has pledged 100% participation. Now we must turn to our friends to ask for your special support. The income generated from a permanent endowment will sustain our public education and cultural programs, provide for the care of our collections, and meet future repair and restoration needs.

Won't you please send a gift to help meet the Astor Foundation challenge, and make our Endowment Fund possible? On page three of this newsletter, you will find a coupon for that purpose.

The Merchant's House is unique; it is New York City's only family home preserved intact, inside and out, from the 19th century. Its collections of family possessions—from the magnificent carved mahogany beds, Duncan Phyfe chairs, period textiles, and personal items such as the daughters' needlework, the family's clothing, and their photographs—make it a veritable time capsule.

As the 21st century nears and the manner of 19th-century life fades from living memory, the importance of the Merchant's House grows ever greater.

Gifts to the Endowment Fund represent a permanent investment in the future of this New York City treasure.



*Mrs. Vincent Astor receives a token of recognition from Henry Stern, New York City Parks Commissioner, at a May 1 press conference where announcement of the Astor Foundation challenge grant and the alliance of the Merchant's House with the NYC Historic House Trust was made. Pi Gardiner, Executive Director, Merchant's House Museum, looks on.*

Photo by Sofia Xethalas

## Museum to Become Member of NYC Historic House Trust

The Merchant's House Museum will join New York City's Historic House Trust, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting historic house museums in New York City.

The Trust, which works in partnership with the City of New York/Parks and Recreation, includes 19 houses located in all five boroughs. Collectively, they provide a three-century illustration of New York City history.

As a result of our membership in the Trust, we will soon begin receiving funds that will cover the costs of basic repair and maintenance, insurance, security, and utilities.



City of New York  
Parks & Recreation

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

Also, to benefit its members the Trust raises funds; provides technical assistance and specialized expertise in interpretation; assists with publicity and advertising; publishes guides to the museums; and coordinates preservation projects.

Each site in the Trust is operated by an independent non-profit organization under a licensing agreement with the City. The Merchant's House Museum will continue to be operated by the Museum staff and the Board of Directors.



## Museum Calendar

Friday, May 30, and Saturday,  
May 31, at 8 p.m.

Sunday, June 1, at 3 p.m.

Tuesday, June 3, through Saturday,  
June 7, at 8 p.m.

### *The Cherry Orchard*

The Heritage Theater presents Chekhov's  
play. \$10, members \$7.

Sunday, June 8, 2 and 3 p.m.

Sunday, July 13, 2 and 3 p.m.

### *Tea in the Garden*

Tea for Two, a typical 19th-century tea at  
tables for two in our walled garden. Two  
seatings. \$20 per table. Reservations  
required.

Thursday, June 19, 6 to 9 p.m.

### *Annual Garden Party Benefit*

*Twilight in the Garden of Good and Evil.*  
Call 212/777-1089 for invitation.

Sunday, July 20, 4 p.m.

### *Reading from Brideshead Revisited*

Pam Garelick reads from Evelyn Waugh's  
novel. \$10, members \$7

Thursday, July 24, 8 p.m.

### *Garden Guitar Concert*

Guitar duo Lisa Spraragen and Josue Perez  
perform in the garden. \$10, members \$7

*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 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 1993, the National Historic and New York City 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.*

Sunday, July 27, 4 p.m.

### *Chamber Music Concert*

Katherine Cok and Friends  
\$10, members \$7

Wednesdays, June and  
July, 12:30 p.m.

Guided curatorial tours. Bring lunch to eat  
in the garden before the tour.  
\$10, members \$7.

Reservations for listed events, (212) 777-1089

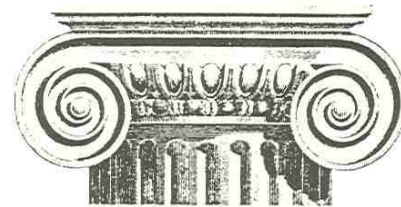
### **"Not Just Socks!"**

### **June 14 Street Fair Planned**

On Saturday, June 14, from 1 to 7 p.m.,  
Cooper Square from 5th Street to Astor  
Place will be the scene of the second  
annual street fair to benefit the Merchant's  
House Museum.

Again this year Al Gilman has organized  
the event, and he tells us it will have  
everything one expects from a good fair:  
music, food, and plenty to buy. "Not just  
socks!" says Al. The Merchant's House  
will have a table where volunteers will be  
handing out information and discount  
coupons for admission to the House, which  
will be open for tours. If you'd like to help,  
call the Museum office. (212) 777-1089.

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



### Board of Directors

Merrikay S. Hall, Esq.  
*Chair*

Helen Michalis Bonebrake

Joan Bull

Michael Connors

Frances Eberhart

Anne Fairfax

Margaret Halsey Gardiner

Howard D. Monroe, Jr.

John E. Oden

Kate Burns Ottavino

Carolyn Roberto (Emeritus)

Richard Sammons

Elizabeth Lugar Schafer

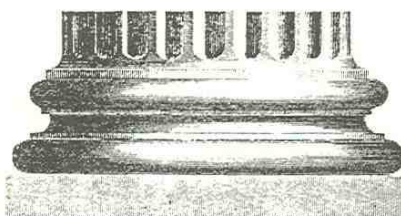
Lynne Stair

Karen Treadwell

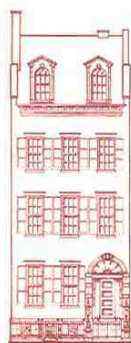
### Staff

Margaret Halsey Gardiner  
*Executive Director*

Mimi Sherman  
*Curator*



*Merchant's House Museum is the bi-annual news-  
letter of the museum. Inquiries may be sent to  
Mary Knapp, editor, the Merchant's House  
Museum, 29 East Fourth Street, New York,  
NY 10003. Telephone (212) 777-1089  
Fax (212) 777-1104.*



Merchant's House Museum  
29 East Fourth Street  
New York, NY 10003

NON-PROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
NEW YORK, N.Y.  
PERMIT NO. 2828



## The House Is Humming

### Merchant's House Does It All—Tours To TV Shoots

Students at every level of education toured the house during the past year. Elementary school children came to us through the program the Merchant's House offers in cooperation with the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, which introduces children to architecture and historic preservation. Adult students of English as a second language came—and came again—to practice their new skills by listening to our guide.

We gave tours to professional groups of architects, designers, and librarians as well as church groups, seniors—and a group of spouses of Dutch bankers.

We were entertained at evening and Sunday afternoon readings, monologues, and one-act plays as talented actors adopted a dazzling variety of personae. Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Emily Dickinson, Dylan Thomas, and Frances Wright, the firebrand 19th-century social reformer, were among them.

In February, The Museum of American Folk Art brought slides and music together for a Valentine's Day program.

In March, the characters of George Bernard Shaw's comic commentary on marriage, *The Philanderer*, inhabited our parlors to the delight of sold-out audiences.

The holiday season brought a popular rendition of choral music in an Hispanic tradition and a charming presentation of the Glass Armonica, an instrument invented by Benjamin Franklin.

There were musical offerings; garden lectures and tea parties; weddings and showers.

We've just hosted our first garden event of the new season: a 19th-century Mother's Day tea which attracted a large and enthusiastic group, and as we write this, *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekhov is being performed in the parlors by Heritage Productions—a red hot ticket!

And finally, in addition to our many visitors from New York City and all over the U.S., tourists came from 25 countries. They hailed from Europe, Scandinavia, Asia, and South America; one hardy soul traveled all the way from New South Wales, Australia.

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



*The formal parlors are considered one of the finest examples of interior Greek Revival architecture in the United States.*

### In The Media Spotlight

On the morning of May 22, the sign on the door read "Don't ring the bell;" the downstairs phones were disconnected, and the Museum staff were quietly going about their work in the upstairs office.

Downstairs in the parlor, Pulitzer Prize-winning author William Kennedy was being interviewed for a four-part series, *The Irish Experience in America* by the Lennon Documentary Group. The documentary, a joint production with station WGBH in Boston, directed by Thomas Lennon, will air on PBS stations nationally in the winter of 1998.

According to Jessica Cohen, production manager, "The Merchant's House is a wonderful place to film these interviews because of the beautiful historical detail of the house. The background provides such depth and color."

Other TV documentaries that have made use of the house in recent months include *New York Underground*, a PBS presentation about the building of the New York City subway and a Channel 9 two-hour special, *Titanic on Broadway*, a behind-the-scenes look at the Broadway musical, which aired in April.

Because of its authenticity and architectural importance, the House is often featured in published works of architects, historians, and designers. The most recent such publication, which features the front parlor, is *Architecture and The American Dream* by Craig Whitaker, published by Clarkson Potter.

### Thanks, Volunteers

We welcome two newcomers to our staff of volunteers: Pat Kaplan and Gloria Withim.

Pat is engaged in archival work, organizing the papers and correspondence of the early days of the Museum. Gloria has initiated a brochure exchange program with other historic houses and museums in New York City and she conducts Sunday tours as well. Many thanks to them for their efforts and to our entire staff of dedicated volunteers.

### How Our Garden Grows—And Grows

First it was the narcissus, then the tulips and the wisteria. Now every day seems to bring new beauty to our garden.

Thanks to the vision and hard work of volunteer and master gardener, John Rommel, and his assistants, the walled rear yard has been transformed into an enchanting outdoor space for entertaining—and relaxing. Admission to the garden and the house, of course, is always free to our members, and brown-baggers are welcome.

To John and his loyal crew, Delphine Oravetz, Stuart Anthony, Zabel Meshejran and Michael Carney, we are very grateful.

### Join Our Curator For A Closer Look

On Wednesdays in June and July, Curator Mimi Sherman will conduct guided tours of the Museum in which she will focus on selected aspects of the collections. Tours will begin at 12:30 p.m. You're invited to bring lunch to eat in the garden before the tour. Cold drinks will be furnished.

On June 4, July 2, and July 30, the subject will be lighting in the 19th century. On June 11 and July 9, Mimi will discuss flora and fauna in the furniture and decorative arts. On June 18 and July 16, she will cover carpeting, window treatments, and upholstery; and on June 25 and July 23, she will provide a behind-the-scenes look at the storage of the textile collection. Admission to each lecture is \$10, members \$7.





## Twilight in the Garden of Good and Evil

### Best Seller Inspires Theme for June 19 Garden Party Benefit

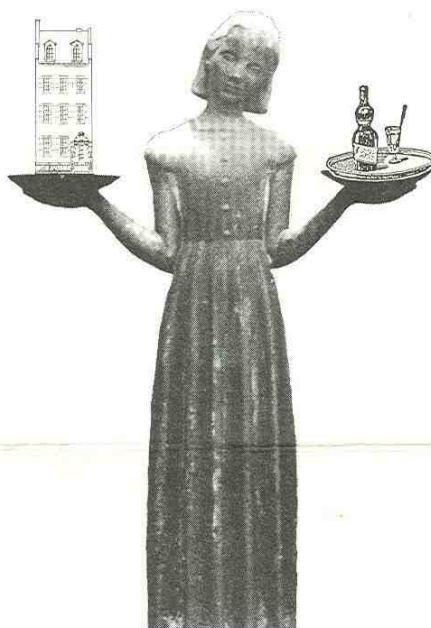
John Berendt, author of the best-selling *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, will co-chair the annual garden benefit along with Cyndi Stivers, Editor-in-Chief of Time Out New York. The gala event, titled *Twilight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, will be held on June 19 from 6 to 9 p.m. in the walled garden of the Merchant's House.

Berendt's book, which serves as the inspiration for the party's theme, has been on *The New York Times* best seller list for almost three years and is currently being made into a feature film directed by Clint Eastwood.

It was hailed by the *Times* reviewer as "elegant and wickedly funny . . . a true-crime book that makes the reader want to call a travel agent and book a bed and breakfast for an extended weekend at the scene of the crime." If you can't make it to Savannah, however, just make plans to attend the 4th annual Garden Party Benefit at the Merchant's House. Like the book, the party will feature extraordinary characters, intrigue, Johnny Mercer tunes, cocktails, and even voodoo.

The garden promises to be gorgeously abloom for the festivities, and if you use your imagination, you can supply some Spanish moss.

Along with the food and drinks and music, psychics stationed throughout the Museum's seven period rooms will confer with the guests on matters of import, and author Berendt has promised to sign copies of his book, which will be available for



*Bird Girl sculpture in Bonaventure Cemetery, Savannah, shown on the jacket of Midnight In the Garden of Good and Evil (slightly adapted.)*

purchase. There will also be a silent auction, which will afford those so inclined with inspired buying opportunities.

Those who attended last year's *Landmark Luau* know how much fun our garden benefits are. This year is going to be the best yet! Tickets are \$125, \$75, and \$60. Mark your calendar now and come join us in the Savannah garden "where the party goes on and on." Call (212) 777-1089 if you need further information.

### Curator Mimi Sherman Presents Paper to Professional Group

"Conservation on a Shoestring" was the topic of a juried paper Curator Mimi Sherman presented at the annual meeting of the Costume Society of America. The group of costume historians, conservators, and museum professionals met in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 29-June 1. The theme of this year's meeting was "Preserving Our Costume Heritage: Documentation, Interpretation, and Conservation." Mimi discussed the techniques she developed to conserve the costume and textile collection of the Merchant's House Museum.

Using slides to illustrate her presentation, she showed how she acquired materials at little or no cost and designed storage solutions that would meet the space and budget limitations of the Merchant's House while measuring up to exacting Museum standards. She also discussed the role volunteers and interns have played in this endeavor and how some funds specifically for conservation purposes were obtained.

The Museum's costume and textile collection includes 40 dresses and some 700 items such as hats, gloves, fans, shoes, women's underclothing, and needlework. Approximately 95% of the collection belonged to the women of the Tredwell family. Items are displayed in the House on a rotating basis on mannequins in the family dining room and rear bedroom and in the exhibition closets in the bedrooms.



## HELP US MEET THE \$1 MILLION CHALLENGE

To make a special gift to the Endowment Fund, please use the coupon below.

Make checks payable to Merchant's House Museum and mail to: 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003

I/We would like to help the Museum meet The Vincent Astor Foundation challenge. Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

You may also pledge a gift. Pledges made by December 15, 1997, will help us meet our goal. Pledges may be paid over two years.

Check box ☐ and mail or fax (777-1104) this coupon and we will send a pledge form by return mail. Thank you.

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

*The Merchant's House Museum is a not-for-profit institution. Contributions are tax deductible.*

**Merchant's House Museum**

**Spring/Summer 1997**