



## “Tea Room” Investigation: These Walls Can Talk

Until recently, the Museum’s two-story rear extension, which includes the “tea room” as we have traditionally called it, off the parlor floor, was somewhat of a mystery to us. Records suggested that the wooden structure was completely rebuilt using all modern materials during the 1970s. So as we wrestled with how to restore it, we were haunted by nagging questions: Was it built when the House was constructed or was it a later addition? Was it ever an open porch as was fashionable during the first half of the 19th century? Was it *really* completely re-built?

We decided to take a look, asking our restoration architects, Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, to undertake physical probes. In tandem, a paint and finishes analysis was conducted,

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by Richbrook Conservation.

These two independent investigations have provided conclusive evidence that the extension is in fact a 19th-century structure -- and dates to the original construction of the House, in 1832.

We feel like we’ve just discovered Pompeii.

Evidence further suggests it was enclosed very early, if not from the beginning. Here are highlights from the investigation: Taking up the 1970s vinyl

flooring in the tea room revealed floor boards made of southern yellow pine, a wood often used in the 19th century, which matches the flooring used in the ground floor kitchen and family room. Even more important, the tea-room floor boards were found to run under the door frame, ending well inside the main hallway. Clearly, the

floor had to have been installed when the main structure was being completed. Moreover, the floor boards show no damage from exposure to the elements, indicating that it was not an open porch, or at least not for very long.

More evidence was uncovered when a probe of the ceiling revealed flat-seamed sheet metal roof sheathing, which was commonly used in the 19th century. The nails in the roof framing are also old, dating from the early to mid- 19th century. Old nails were also found in the window casings and door frames

Results of Richbrook’s paint analysis confirmed that the windows and door were part of the original structure. Paint samples mirror those taken from the adjacent interior hallway.

At long last the tea-room nut has been cracked: it was indeed part of the Tredwell home from the early years. We are now taking the final research step to determine what the stairs down to the garden might have looked like. And if the money gods look down on us favorably, we will begin restoration work in the fall.

## Life in the Past Lane

We read recently that the average price of a Manhattan apartment has topped \$1 million. Joseph Brewster, a hatter by trade, built the Merchant’s House in 1832 on speculation (some things never change) in the residential Bond Street Area just north of the growing city. As one New York newspaper exclaimed, in 1835, “The elegance and beauty of this section cannot be surpassed in the country.”

That same year, Brewster advertised the House for sale in the *New York Commercial Advertiser*. The original

**FOR SALE.**—The elegant three story dwelling House, No. 361 Fourth-street, (between Lafayette Place and the Bowery.) built and occupied by the subscriber. Lot 24½ feet by 130. House 54 feet deep, and replete with every convenient. It can be seen from 1 to 4 o’clock. Apply to JOSEPH BREWSTER, on the premises, or at 166 Water-street. dec 30 eod2w

house number, 361, changed several times as 4th Street was extended, finally becoming 29 East 4th Street in 1873.

“Every convenient” [sic] included gas piping, a servant call bell system, and a

4,000 gallon cistern in the rear yard to collect rainwater.

Brewster sold the house to Seabury Tredwell for the then-handsome sum of \$18,000 – a mere \$375,000 in 2004 dollars.

## Merchant's House Museum

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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.



HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST  
OF NEW YORK CITY

City of New York  
Parks & Recreation

*From the Director*

## It's an Inside Job

For the entire decade of the 1990s, we faced one bricks-and-mortar nightmare after another, from daunting damage to the structure to chronic water infiltration of both the east and west wall to serious deterioration of our original 1832 windows on the front façade ... yes, we even had termites. But all that, blessedly, is ancient history.

Now we've taken our restoration act inside and are in the throes of a number of thrilling restoration projects related to our landmark interior.

A complete paint-and-finishes analysis of the interior rooms (our thanks to Benjamin Moore & Co. for generously funding this project) has reached the mid-way point. Once the final results are in, we will be taking up our paint brushes to return the walls to their original 19th-century colors. I give fair warning: the walls won't all be white.

Another major project on the near horizon is the restoration of the Museum's two-story rear extension and "tea room" off the parlor floor. Of course, before we could go ahead with any plans, we needed to make sure that our restoration would be historically accurate. Our front-page story describes the juicy results of our investigation.

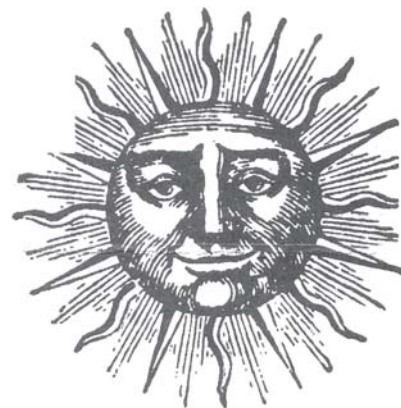
And if all that isn't enough, we are also planning to restore the two gas chandeliers in the parlors. The 1832 fixtures, which are original to the house, represent the earliest form of domestic gas lighting. Experts consider them the oldest *in situ* in the country. The fixtures also have most of their original finish intact, unheard of in the world of conservation, we're told.

Needless to say, I will have much more to report on these projects in our Fall Newsletter. In the meantime, I hope to see many of you at our annual Garden Party Benefit, *A Night in Marrakech*, on Wednesday, June 16. It will be a *Fez*-tive evening -- and is a very painless way to support the museum.

Margaret Halsey Gardiner  
Executive Director

## Getting the Story Straight

Museum Historian Mary Knapp, who is writing the definitive book on the House as a House and as a Museum, continues to unearth new information. Our Back-to-School issue in September will include a story about Mrs. Okills, the exclusive finishing school on Clinton Place (now 8th Street) where the Tredwell daughters were educated.



## Hot Time, Summer in the City

Following a tour on a recent August-like hot day, a visitor asked us where the Tredwells shopped for their food and how they kept it from spoiling, especially during the summer months.

The Tredwells probably purchased their food at Tompkins Market, a public market located at Third Avenue and Sixth Street, just around the corner. There, one could buy butcher's meat, poultry and game, produce, fresh fish, and according to a contemporary source, prepared food "cooked ready for parties, breakfasts, dinners or suppers, cold or warm." (In case anyone thinks 'take-out' is new.)

To store food, ice boxes were available in New York City from about the time the Tredwells moved into the house in 1835. Ice was cut from the Hudson River, stored in ice houses along the river, and delivered to the city by wagon. However, it was scarce—and expensive. By the 1850s, ice cutting had become very efficient, and ice was widely available. The Tredwells surely had an icebox, but we have no record of where it was located in the House.

## Quotable

"Of the estimated 300 Federal houses in Manhattan, the best preserved, inside and out, is the 171-year-old Merchant's House Museum."  
David Dunlap, architectural writer,  
*The New York Times*

## By Popular Demand

You may have noticed that we've expanded our Newsletter, this due to a steady and very gratifying growth in our education programs – lectures, readings, exhibits, tours -- and an across-the-board increase in Museum activities. We have a lot to say.

Due to overwhelming response, weekend tours of the Servant's Quarters, offered for the first time in May, will continue on Saturdays and Sundays in June.

To accommodate the marked rise in the number of visitors to the house, we've expanded our hours and have scheduled tours on the half hour on Saturday and Sunday. New Saturday, Sunday, and Monday hours are 12 to 5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday hours are 1 to 5 p.m. Group tours are offered seven days a week and can be arranged by calling the Museum offices Monday through Friday at 212-777-1089.

Can a Visitor's Center be far behind?

## Department of Rank and Renown

We applaud Board member and architect Kate Ottavino, who in May received the Lucy G. Moses Preservation Award from the New York Landmarks Conservancy. Kate was honored as the co-founder of the High School for the Preservation Arts in Brooklyn – a model program (and one close to our hearts) that provides students with hands-on training in the preservation arts and internships with top firms working on actual restoration projects.

## Any Questions?

We'd like to hear from you. Please email your comments, questions (and offers of help, of course) to [nyc1832@merchants-house.com](mailto:nyc1832@merchants-house.com) or write to 29 East Fourth Street, New York NY 10003.

## O FOR!

**A Digital Projector**  
LCD, Portable, XGA resolution  
and 1,000 + lumens preferred

**Desktop Computer(s)**  
IBM Compatible,  
Up-to-date hardware

**A New Canister Vacuum**  
Kenmore, Miele, or Dyson, please

**Metal Shelving**  
For collections storage

**A Trellis Fence, Heritage Roses,  
Hand Tools**  
For the Museum's Garden

**The Skidmore House**  
37 East Fourth Street

*All donations are tax deductible.*

Established in 1998, the Museum's 1832 Society is a group of members who are actively involved in promoting and supporting the Museum. This winter, Society members strengthened their shared commitment by expanding the Society's service to the Museum to include sponsorship of the annual June Garden Party Benefit and New Year's Day Reception.

In addition to all the regular benefits of Museum membership, 1832 Society Members receive invitations to events held all over the City exclusively for them and their friends. Recent events have included



a behind-the-scenes tour of an historic site and a talk at a Chelsea photography gallery, both followed by a reception. This fall, the American Folk Art Museum and the Morgan Library will host private events for the group.

Chairing the Society is art historian and novelist Nick Nicholson. His first novel, *Object of Virtue*, was published in April. He is currently at work on his second, *Astor Place*. Nick is a relative of both the Seabury and Tredwell families through his descent from John Irish, and the Southworth family of Duxbury, Mass.

## Help ( !! ) the Merchant's House Museum (Your donation is tax-deductible.)

- I'd like to join as a Member. Please call me so I can learn about the different levels and benefits of membership. My telephone is \_\_\_\_\_. (You may also call us at 212-777-1089 or visit our website at [www.merchants-house.com](http://www.merchants-house.com) for membership information.)
- I'm really interested in becoming more *actively involved* in promoting and supporting the Museum. Enclosed is \$100 to become a Member of the 1832 Society.
- I'd just like to make a Contribution now of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to further your outstanding work.

Please make checks payable to the Merchant's House Museum and mail with this form to 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003-7003, or charge your contribution to:  American Express  Visa  Master Card

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Company \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

# MERCHANT'S HOUSE MUSEUM

Summer

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2004

Call 212-777-1089 for reservations, or email [nyc1832@merchantshouse.com](mailto:nyc1832@merchantshouse.com)



Sundays in June, 1:30 and 3 p.m. seatings

## Afternoon Tea in the Garden:

"The mere chink of cups and saucers tunes the mind to happy repose."

June 6: Mad Hatter's Tea

June 13: Flag Day Tea

June 20: Fan Tea

June 27: Tussie-Mussie Tea

Tea includes Finger Sandwiches and Buttermilk Scones with Clotted Cream and Jam, followed by a selection of Desserts. All with pots of brewed English Tea and served at individual tables in the Garden. Tour of the Museum follows.

\$40 per couple, Members \$30,

\$15 one additional guest

Wednesday, June 16, 7 to 9:30 p.m.

## Garden Party Benefit:

### A Night in Marrakech

Kasbahs, caftans, couscous, and caravans. We're rounding up the usual suspects and taking the high road to Morocco this year. Join us for a very Fez-tive evening of wine, romance, and belly dancing under the sheltering sky. Cafe Maroc pre-party reception, 6 to 7 p.m. Play it again, Seabury. Call for an invitation.

## SUMMER WINE TASTINGS IN THE GARDEN

Tuesday, June 29, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

### Think Pink! Rosés with the Roses

We'll gather in our garden this early summer's eve and welcome back sommelier/wine educator extraordinaire Rose O'Dell King as she leads us through a tasting of the pick of this year's rosés from around the globe, including selections from beautiful Corbières and Minervois. In collaboration with our NoHo neighbor Astor Wines & Spirits.

Wednesday, July 21, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

### A Romp through the Vineyards of Italy

Sharron McCarthy, a noted food and wine expert and Vice President of Education at Banfi Vintners, will present a tasting of the most delectable wines from the Banfi family vineyards in Brunello di Montalcino, where the Brunello grapes are transformed into remarkable world-class wines. Banfi is perhaps the most respected red of Italy. We'll also be tasting a few exceptional sparklers from Castello Banfi's sister winery in Piedmont.

\$35. Reservations must be paid for in advance; cancellations and full refunds accepted up to 48 hours prior.

## Summer Sunday Promenades

Join us on summer Sundays for guided walking tours of our historic Bond Street neighborhood.

June 20, 2 p.m. Honor Thy Father

"Be kind to thy father, for when thou wert young who loved thee so fondly as he?"

July 4, 2 p.m. Parade around the Neighborhood

Flags provided for all as we celebrate the red, white, and blue.

August 15, 2 p.m. Dog Days

Still in town? Bring your favorite canine for a walk back in time.

\$8 for the walking tour, \$12 includes a tour of the House. Members \$4 and \$6.

## ON EXHIBIT

### Highlights from the Collection: Women's Work

This display focuses on artifacts documenting the domestic world of the Tredwell women in the 19th century.

Through July 22

### The Changing Silhouette of Fashion: Six Decades of Tredwell Costumes, 1830-1880

Fourth in our parade of fashion is a one-piece day dress of chocolate brown silk faille with long pagoda sleeves from 1861-1864.

## COMING FALL ATTRACTIONS

September 23-26

### The Berkshires: Great Country Houses of the Gilded Age

During the Gilded Age, The Berkshires, with idyllic villages like Stockbridge and Lenox, bucolic lakes and rolling hills, vied with Newport and Bar Harbor as a resort colony for the wealthy and socially prominent.

We invite you to step back into the Berkshire's glorious gilded age for an extended weekend tour of architecture on the grand scale. Tour highlights include visits to Edith Wharton's The Mount and Stanford White's Naumkaeg, lectures by architectural and social historians, and receptions and events exclusive to the tour.

For information and an itinerary, please contact Lani Sternerup, Classical Excursions, P.O. Box 724, Stockbridge, MA 01262, 413-298-3399, [lani.sternerup@classicalexcursions.com](mailto:lani.sternerup@classicalexcursions.com).



## Today's Writers on Yesterday's New York

In our new three-part reading series, we will explore New York's past through the eyes of contemporary writers. Non-fiction and fiction authors will read from their works in the Museum's Greek Revival parlors, offering us a glimpse of the hidden charms and horrors of yesterday's New York.

Thursday, September 23, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

### Robert Sullivan: Rats - Observations on the History and Habitat of the City's Most Unwanted Inhabitants

The author reads from his new book. Followed by a booksigning and Rodent Jubilee.

In October

### Kevin Baker: Paradise Alley

Watch for details in our next newsletter.

*Ready, Fête, Go!*



2004 GARDEN PARTY BENEFIT

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 7 TO 9:30 P.M.

CAFÉ MAROC PRE-PARTY RECEPTION, 6 TO 7 P.M.

SENSUOUS AUTHENTIC FARE PROVIDED BY LE SOUK RESTAURANT

CALL FOR AN INVITATION

## Merchant's House Museum

29 East Fourth Street  
New York, NY 10003

Tel: 212-777-1089

Fax: 212-777-1104

nyc1832@merchantshouse.com

### Hours

Saturday, Sunday, Monday  
12 to 5 p.m.

Thursday, Friday  
1 to 5 p.m.

(Closed Tuesday, Wednesday)

### Admission

Members Free

Adults \$6

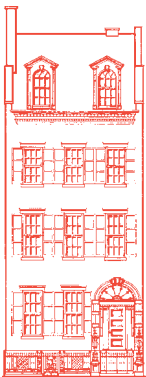
Students & Seniors \$4

### Group Tours

Guided tours for schoolchildren  
and adult groups are offered  
seven days a week by  
appointment.

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

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