

Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Summer 1999

Ode to Volunteers

They tend our garden . . . AND they guide visitors through the Museum . . . and fold, sticker, stamp, stuff, and seal thousands of pieces of mail each year . . . and answer the door . . . and give our school tours . . . and serve on our Board.

They help catalogue and conserve our collections . . . and organize our archives . . . and make appraisals . . . and take photographs . . . and type, file, and help us unsnarl computer glitches.

At the Oyster Festival in October, they sell T-shirts and tickets . . . and answer questions about the Museum . . . and sweep the streets . . . and hang signs . . . and check ID's.

They do research . . . and give lectures and readings and performances and walking tours . . . and they build storage shelves . . . and straighten and price and sell in our shop.

They help organize events . . . and solicit donations . . . and staff our programs and parties, and clean up after . . . and bake for our teas . . . and design our invitations and stationery.

They are dedicated to preserving our unique 19th-century landmark building and its collections and communicating the story of the Merchant's House to New Yorkers and visitors from all over the world. Need we say more?

Fi Graveler
Executive Director

NoHo-A-GoGo Here Comes the Night!



The Museum's sixth annual Garden Party Benefit, NoHo-A-GoGo will be held on *Ruby Tuesday*, June 22, 6 to 9 p.m. NoHo-A-GoGo will celebrate our historic NoHo neighborhood 60's style—and will raise critical funds for the Museum's public education programs and restoration of our 1832 building.

Only the Strong Survive . . . so we're Wishin' and Hopin' you'll come. Call for your Tickets to Ride. (212) 777-1089. (We Ain't Too Proud to Beg.)



The Garden Issue How Our Garden Grows— An Interview with the Gardener

Over the last four years, we at the Merchant's House have watched in wonder as our back yard has been magically transformed into a lush garden. In the spring of 1995, John Rommel happened to pass by our door. In a recent interview, he told us the rest of the story.

Q. How did you become aware of the Merchant's House back yard?

A. I'd lived in the neighborhood for 20 years, and one day as I was passing by the Merchant's House, the door was open and I realized that this was a good opportunity for me to see this House I'd always wondered about. When I looked out the back window, I saw a garden that needed attention. Right then I decided to offer my services as a volunteer, and the next day I submitted a proposal, which was basically a maintenance plan. Obviously, we've gone beyond that.

Q. Were you already a gardener when you began working in the Merchant's House garden?

A. Yes, I've been gardening for 15 years now. I work with a community garden at Avenue B and Sixth Street and I tend a garden in Queens for my mother.

Q. Would you characterize our garden as a typical 19th-century garden?

A. The garden is sympathetic to the garden style of the 19th century. It's a very formal garden, very symmetrical. We employ an example of earlier 19th-century carpet bedding in a strip border edge along the back parterre area. The perennial border along the sides of the garden is typical of the later style of 19th-century gardening popularized by Gertrude Jekyll. Along the back of the garden in the dry wall, we've planted a rockery. Rock gardening was popular in the 19th century as well.

Q. What is it about gardening that attracts you?

A. It's like painting; it's an open canvas. You get to direct the eye and create form. If you don't like where the yellow is, you just dig it up and move it. The

unique quality of the Merchant's House garden is that it's public space, yet it's a very private space—a secret space. You can create a very intimate garden here. I think the intimacy of this garden is what draws me to it. It's a garden for people to relax in.

Q. How large a crew do you have to help you?

A. There's Zabel Meshejran, who does the rockery; Delphine Oravetz; whose specialty is working with perennial plant matter and seed; and Karen Riehmings, who is British and provides quality control for our Sunday teas, insuring their authenticity. She also works in the garden. Stuart Anthony also volunteers as a gardener and Phyllis Bannick helps with the teas. The teas are very important because they raise funds for the garden.



Q. Do you have a wish list for the garden? What would you like to accomplish in the future?

I'd like to have a cast-iron bench and table for the shady corner of the garden. Eventually, I'd like to replace the chain link fence at the back, which is now covered with Boston ivy and Virginia creeper, with a back wall that would be more interesting architecturally. And I'd like to explore the possibility of opening the garden for other garden groups to come and use for programs.

Q. So, you're pleased with your efforts here so far?

I'm very happy with what we've done here. I'm pleased that people are enjoying the space. I'm satisfied with our efforts: But we're constantly tweaking things, making sure plants are well positioned and fulfilling our visual needs. A garden is never finished.

**See the Merchant's House garden featured in the recently published
Gardens in the City: New York in Bloom, by Mary Jane Pool with photographs by Betsy Pinover Schiff**

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.

It is the City's prime example of a Greek Revival home.

Open Sunday through Thursday, 1 to 4 p.m. Admission \$5, seniors and students \$3.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Summer Exhibit: Fans and Laces from the Collection

Second Sunday Teas In the Garden

Proceeds benefit the Garden Fund. \$35 per couple. Reservations (212) 777-1089. Seatings at 2 and 3 p.m.

Sunday, June 13

Victorian Faerie Tea A light-hearted event featuring butterfly cookies, finger sandwiches, and desserts.

Sunday, July 11

Americana Tea A red, white, and blue collation celebrating American independence.

Sunday, August 8

Summer Days Tea Iced tea, iced cookies, and other cool desserts will be served.

Great New York Writers In Great New York Places

A year-long series of readings celebrating the history of New York City in significant architectural and historical sites. Sponsored by the Merchant's House Museum, The Historic House Trust of New York City, City of New York/Parks and Recreation, and the Library of America.

Reservations (212) 360-1378

Thursday, June 10, 6 to 8 p.m.

New York Diarists:

Philip Hone, George Templeton Strong, and Dawn Powell at The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 124 East 58th Street. \$25

Tuesday, June 22, 6 to 9 p.m.

NoHo-A-GoGo Garden Benefit

The 6th annual garden party to benefit the Museum: a celebration of the Sixties and our historic neighborhood. \$65 for those under 35; \$85 and \$150. Call (212) 777-1089 for an invitation.

Save the Date

Saturday, October 2,
noon to 9 p.m.

3rd Annual New York City Oyster Festival

Oysters, Guinness, live bands, NYC Oyster Shucking Competition, and more. East Fourth Street between Bowery and Lafayette Street.



THE HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST OF NEW YORK CITY

Tour the Old Dominion

This Fall, October 20-24

Visit 18th-century plantations along the James River, see a Palladian villa near Charlottesville, and stop for lunch at a former plantation designed by Thomas Jefferson on this tour of the Old Dominion sponsored by Classical America and the Merchant's House Museum. For information and brochure, call Thomas Hayes (413) 528-9992.



Life in the Past Lane— The 19th-Century Back Yard

Little documentary evidence exists to tell us what the urban back yard of the 19th-century rowhouse looked like. Of one thing, however, we can be sure. During the Tredwells's residency at 29 East Fourth Street, practical imperatives meant that the back yard was primarily a utilitarian space.

There was, of course, the need for a privy, which would have been located at the rear corner of the yard, as far away from the house as possible. A path from the house would have led to the privy and to the gate at the rear permitting tradesmen to make deliveries from the alley.

Laundry posts to which clotheslines were attached would have been located along the sides of the yard. In addition to hanging the laundry, the servants probably escaped the steamy kitchen to perform whatever kitchen chores they could outside. The yard also would have served as an outdoor play space for the Tredwell children.

In the 19th century, back yards were not enclosed but were separated by low fences. Most of the yard was probably grass, and the perimeter may have been planted with flowers.

While we can't be sure what it looked like, our back yard garden in the 19th century was undoubtedly a far cry from the serene haven it is today.

We're in Cyberspace:

www.merchantshousemuseum.
citysearch.com

Merchant's House Museum is the newsletter of the Museum.

Mary Knapp, editor

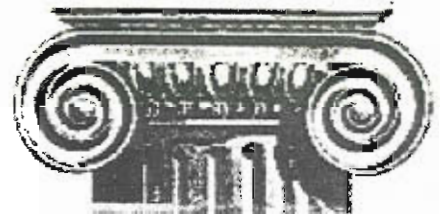
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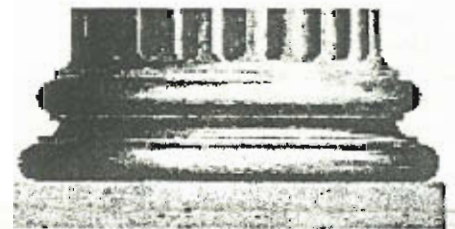
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Won't You Join Us?

Become a member of the
Merchant's House Museum.

A portion of your gift is tax
deductible—and the benefits to you
are many.

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