

Merchant's House Museum

Newsletter

Winter 1999

Celebrating Our Third Century! (With Thanks That Some Things Never Change)

On New Year's Day Step Back in Time

On the first day of the new millennium, come back with us to old New York when ladies dressed in their finest to welcome the gentlemen who called on New Year's Day.

The Merchant's House Museum will celebrate this old Dutch custom with a New Year's Day reception from 3 to 6 p.m. featuring tours of the House, champagne, punch, confectionery, conversation, and—for those who care to join us—guided walks around our historic area will take place throughout the afternoon.

Our promenade will include "calls" at six historic landmarked buildings and the site of an historic and bloody New York City riot.

We will begin at our own front door and proceed to the once-elegant 1845 Greek Revival home of Seabury Tredwell's cousin, Samuel Skidmore.

Then, around the corner, we'll see the imposing building housing Cooper Union, a venerable New York City institution that opened in 1858 offering free higher education for working men and women.

Turning into Astor Place, we will stand at the site of the Astor Place Riots, where in 1849 ethnic and class hostilities erupted. The police and the soldiers of the seventh regiment fired directly into the mob, killing 22.

On Lafayette Street, we'll pause to despair over the condition of the four remaining houses of the former LaGrange Terrace, whose ghostly marble columns recall the grandeur of the once-magnificent row of 26-room homes.

Across the street, we'll see the Astor Library, the first great classical library widely accessible to the public, which today houses the Public Theater, and is an exemplary instance of the adaptive reuse of an historic building.

The Devinne Building will be our last stop. This Romanesque structure housed the presses that printed the influential *Scibner's Monthly*, later called the *Century Magazine*, during the 19th and early 20th century.

Back at the Merchant's House, we'll rejoin the convivial group gathered there to herald the New Year.



*Birth Day of the Year:
A New Year's Song
Composed expressly for
Godey's Lady's Book, January 1851*

*Swell out, swell out, a merry peal,
With gay and joyous cheer,
For morning's fleecy clouds reveal the
birthday of the year.
The little snowflakes gladly dance to
sleighbells' ringing chime,
While icy jewels' sparkling gleam and
merry hearts keep time.*

The Museum To Be Bedecked With Holiday Decorations

The traditional tabletop tree in the parlor with its paper cornucopias filled with candies, its hand-blown German glass ornaments, its candles and its velvet ribbons and bows will set the tone for our period decorations this year.

The House will be adorned from top to bottom with poinsettias, mistletoe "kissing balls," gilded pine cones, garland upon garland of holiday greenery, and centerpieces for the table dripping with dried fruits and nuts and berries.

We are grateful to our friends at The Daily Blossom for helping to recreate the elegance and graciousness of 19th-century holidays in New York.

Our 1999 holiday season, 19th-century style, begins Sunday, December 6. As usual, the House will be open from 1 to 4 Sunday through Thursday with guided tours on Sunday.

See our Calendar below for the events and celebrations we've planned to welcome the Museum's third century.

Holiday Calendar

19th-Century Holiday Party

Wednesday, December 8
6 to 8 p.m.

*The wassail bowl will be filled, and
the House will be alive with music
and holiday spirit. Please join us for
candlelight tours and holiday
savories and potables.*

*"The best 19th-century
holiday party in town"
The New York Times*

\$20, members free
Reservations (212) 777-1089

Saturday, December 11, 12 to 4 p.m.

Winter Greenery For the Holidays

We provide the materials for making swags, wreaths, and Mayapple trees for gifts or for your home. Bring a pair of cloth gloves. Refreshments. \$17 donation benefits the Garden Fund.
Reservations (212) 777-1089

Sunday, December 12, 4 p.m.

A Dickens Celebration

Gregory St. John reads Charles Dickens's 1843 holiday classic, "A Christmas Carol," in the parlor by the decorated tree. Reception featuring port wine and our own "figgy pudding" follows at 5:30 p.m. \$15, members \$10.
Reservations (212) 777-1089

New Year's Day 2000 Reception

Saturday, January 1
3 to 6 p.m.

*The Museum enters its third century
by celebrating the old New York
custom of "calling" on New Year's
Day. We'll toast the future with
champagne, punch and
confectionery and
remember the past with walks
around our historic area throughout
the afternoon.*

\$20, members \$10
Reservations (212) 777-1089

The Numbers Tell the Story— 3rd Annual New York City Oyster Festival Was HUGE

16,000-plus pints of Guinness and 40,400 oysters were consumed, and according to official estimates 35-40,000 people packed East Fourth Street for the 3rd Annual New York City Oyster Festival on October 2. Another typical day for the Museum.

We are grateful to our title sponsor, Guinness Import Company; our lead sponsors, Aer Lingus, Bechive Beer Distributing Company, Boru Vodka, Bowsprit Productions, Fleet Bank, Gotham Seafood, M.J. Meehan & Co., New York Press, Triarc Companies, Inc., proud owner of Snapple Beverages, WFUV, and Wines of Rias Baixas, Spain, Wines of New Zealand, and Cava Sparkling Wine from Spain. And to the Historic House Trust of New York City and the City of New York/Parks & Recreation.

And thanks to our neighborhood sponsors: BBar & Grill, Bond Street Theatre, The Cooper Union, Emigrant Savings Bank, Jean Cocteau Repertory, Phoebe's, Plantworks, Republic National Bank of New York, Swift Hibernian Lounge, Time Out New York, and Tower Records.

And finally to the tireless volunteers, who once again showed the depth of their devotion and dedication to the Museum.

Kenneth Loyal Smith Joins Merchant's House as Curator

Kenneth Loyal Smith, formerly Costume/Textile Conservator at the Museum of the City of New York, has joined the Museum as Curator. Mr. Smith, one of the first Heritage Scholars in Museum Studies at Old Deerfield, Massachusetts, obtained his M.A. in Museum Studies at F.I.T. He worked in various capacities at several New York City museums, as well as at the Pitti Palace in Florence, Italy, prior to his most recent appointment at the Museum of the City of New York.

Did You Know. . .

There are 3024 landmarked buildings in the City of New York, but only 102 landmarked interiors? No surprise, the Merchant's House is both.



THE HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST OF NEW YORK CITY

South Face Lift— Restoration of Our 1832 Windows Has Begun

Thanks to the generous contributions of friends, members, and corporate and foundation funders, we have been able to begin restoration of the windows on the Museum's south facade.

Fifty Three Restorations, Inc., is doing the painstaking work, which will include reinstallation of the original dark green shutters and the incorporation of UV protection. The window frames and sash will be painted a "yellowish white," the original color as determined in a recent paint analysis. Look for the scaffolding to come down around the first of the year.

It's not too late to help restore our windows (the north facade comes next). Please send your check to the Merchant's House Museum, 29 East Fourth Street, New York, NY 10003. All gifts are fully tax-deductible.

Joan Bull

The Board of Directors and staff of the Merchant's House Museum were deeply saddened by the death on August 13, 1999, of Joan Bull, a Board member and friend. Her recognition of the Merchant's House and its place in history, and her extraordinary concern for its welfare evidenced over many years, were key to the Museum's survival.

She was a model of what a non-profit Board member should be: perceptive in her analyses, considerate in her suggestions, responsive to the ideas of others, and prepared always to do her fair share, or more when necessary, for the good of this institution.

Above all, she was a sympathetic and understanding friend to us, and she will be greatly missed.

The Museum's public education programs are sponsored in part through the generous support of the Public Service Award grants program of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Merchant's House Museum is the newsletter of the Museum.
Mary Knapp, editor
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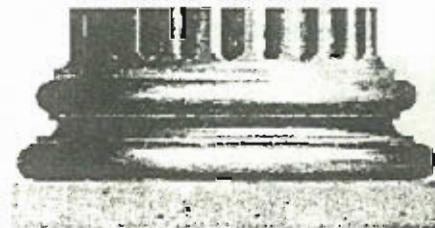


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Attention, Shoppers!

Be sure to stop by the Museum Shop for one or a set of our unique hand-blown German tree ornaments. We also have our signature Museum T-shirts and mugs, original lithographs and scigraphs, as well as a wide selection of antiques and collectibles. And please consider gift memberships for your friends.

Of course, we're making *our* list and checking it twice. Our curatorial department really needs a high-capacity, high-speed computer, and a digital camera, the kind with a removable floppy disk. As we launch into the 21st century, we must be able to record objects in the collection digitally, storing images of items for cataloguing and for research.

Of course, your donations would be tax-deductible. And thanks.



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