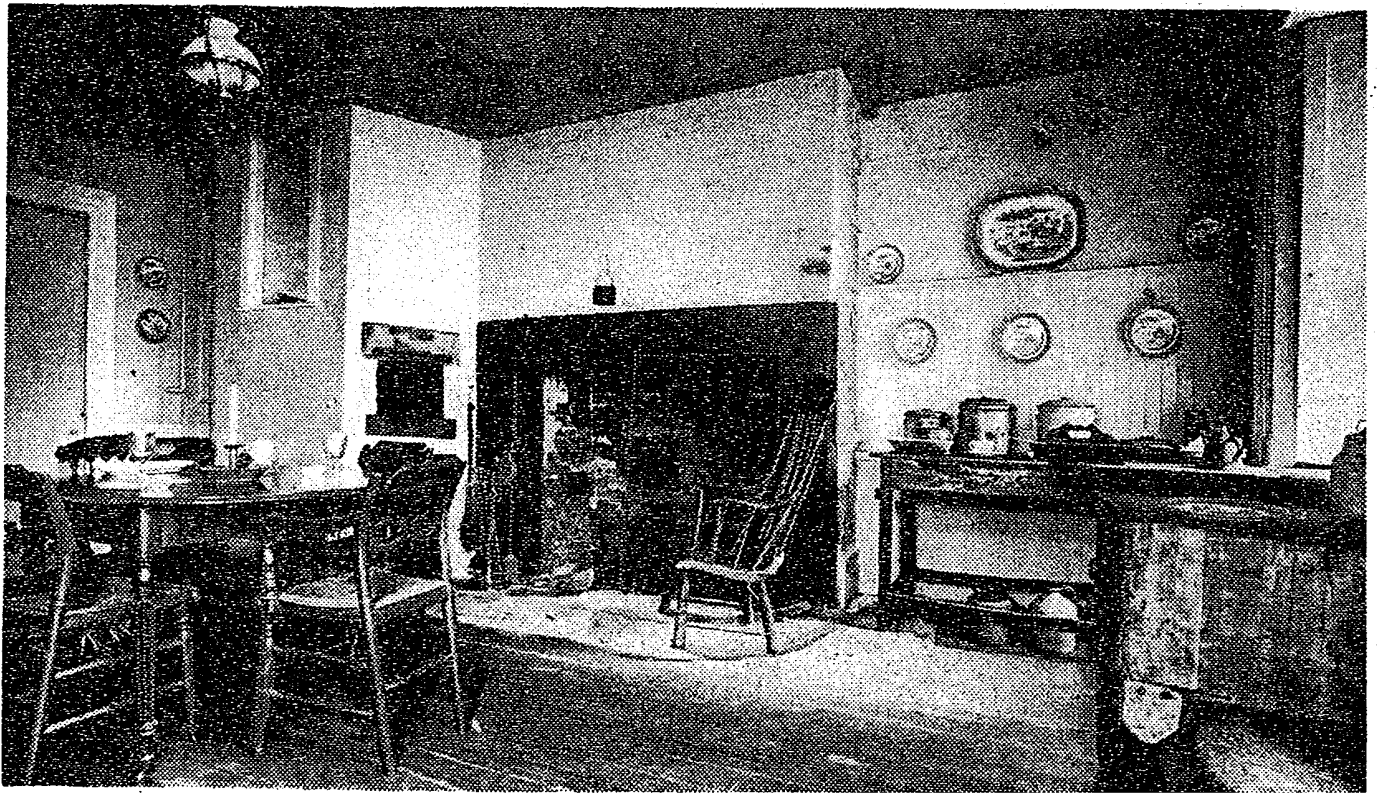


1832 'Village' Landmark Faces Demolition



Kitchen in the Merchant's House, also known as the Seabury Tredwell House, with some of its original furnishings

Past Is Mirrored by Merchant's House, Inside and Out

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The old Merchant's House, one of New York's most important historic houses and the only one with its original early 19th-century interior still intact, is facing sale and demolition, with dispersal of its contents.

The building, at 29 East Fourth Street, is in a badly deteriorated condition, and there are no operating or maintenance funds for it. To keep it open to the public its curator, Randolph Jack, has been paying the heat and light bills out of his own pocket.

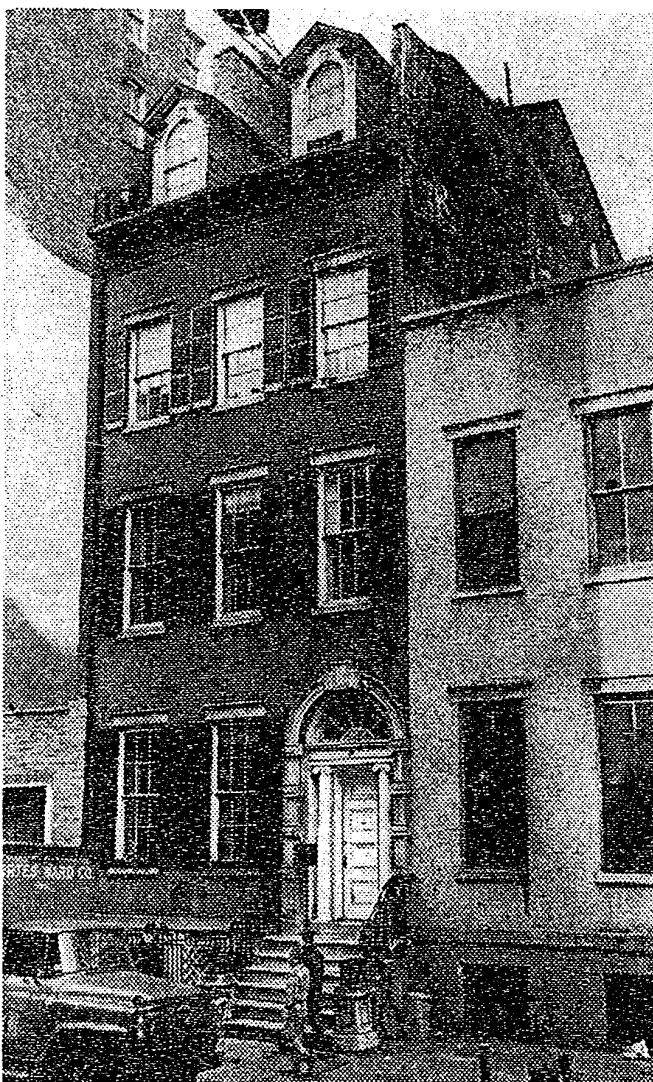
Unless the situation changes, Mr. Jack said yesterday, its owner will be forced to close it and its sale will be unavoidable. Offers have been made for the property. The adjoining East Fourth Street plots are being assembled by a purchaser for commercial use.

Called a Rare Treasure

The old Merchant's House, also known as the Seabury Tredwell House, is owned and operated by the Historic Landmark Society, a privately organized, state-chartered group that has maintained it as a museum since 1936. Attempts to obtain financing from private contributors, or, most recently, through the help of the Decorators Club, have been unsuccessful.

The building is considered a curiosity and rare treasure by preservationists because it has existed for 130 years in its original state, inside and out. Built in 1832, it was occupied continuously from 1835 to 1933 by the family of Seabury Tredwell, a wealthy New York merchant.

The interiors and the 18th and 19th-century furnishings are all of the Greek Revival and American Empire styles, as assembled by the Tredwells in the eighteen-thirties. Everything has remained the same



The New York Times (by Ernest Sisto)

Exterior of house at 29 East Fourth Street. Building faces sale and demolition unless operating funds can be found.

during more than a century of surrounding urban change.

James G. Van Derpool, executive director of the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission, called the house "a document of great importance for its authenticity." Until the proposed landmarks legislation is passed by the city the commission has no official capacity to act.

In 1933, when the last Tredwell daughter died at the age of 92, the house and its contents were rescued from auction by

a nephew, George Chapman, who formed the Historic Landmark Society specifically for its maintenance. From then on it has had a cliff-hanging existence.

Within a short time Mr. Chapman's health led to unexpected financial needs and he wanted to sell the house, but his board of directors would not agree.

Mr. Chapman contended that the furnishings had not been part of his gift to the society, and in an attempt to settle the

Financing Needed to Forestall Sale of 4th St. Museum

legal uncertainties, the board purchased them from him to keep the house intact. Much of the society's small endowment was used to do this, and the rest went quickly on maintenance.

After Mr. Chapman's death in the nineteen-forties the board functioned merely as a holding operation, and the building grew steadily shabbier.

But the shabbiness is infused with the airs and graces of the early 19th century and to step into the dingy hallway is to enter another world. It is complete to the clothing of the Tredwell ladies, including Grecian muslim delicacies and some splendid Worth gowns.

Can Still Be Saved

That world can still be saved, according to Randolph Jack, with about \$75,000 and a miracle. Mr. Jack, an interior designer who is trustee of the society as well as the building's curator, has prepared a repair and restoration budget.

Some years ago he received a promise from the Hale Foundation of Boston to give matching funds if the trustees could raise \$45,000. They have been unable to do so, and Mr. Jack does not know whether the foundation's offer still holds. In addition to the repair budget, a maintenance endowment would be necessary.

Clarence G. Michalis, former chairman and president of the Seamen's Bank for Savings and chairman of the house's board of trustees, who has been on the board since it was formed in the nineteen-thirties, is pessimistic. "We are in a real crisis," he said yesterday.

"For the last 10 or 15 years, the house has been a problem child. We don't want to sell it, but I'm not going to continue this thing any longer," he said. "It's been a big headache for a long time. Something's got to happen or it's the end."