

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC The Old Merchant's House

AND/OR COMMON

The Old Merchant's (Seabury Tredwell) House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

29 East 4th Street

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

New York

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

17

STATE

New York

CODE

36

COUNTY

New York

CODE

61

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Trustees of the Old Merchant's House of New York, Inc.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

29 East Fourth Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

New York County Hall of Records

STREET &amp; NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1936

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress/Annex-Division of Prints and Photos

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old Merchant's House is a four story brick rowhouse, built in 1832 in a transitional Greek Revival style. It is attributed to Menard Lafever. The house is composed of a cellar, ground floor and three upper floors, topped with a slate-tiled gable roof, which is pierced by two dormers. The stairwell and halls run the length of the eastern side of the house. The first floor is entered by a stoop decorated with iron grillwork. The front doorway is framed by Ionic columns which support an arch enclosing a fanlight transom. Just inside the door, the vestibule is being restored to its original marblized appearance. The two main rooms on the first floor are to the west, off of the hallway. The front room is the parlor, and the rear is the dining room. The two rooms are separated by a partition which encloses a pair of sliding doors. The arched opening in the partition is flanked by two pairs of Greek pillars. Both rooms have ornate cornices and fireplaces of Belgian black marble. The parlor is dominated by a massive silverplated chandelier and a combination piano/organ, while the dining table is the central feature of the dining room. The doorways to these rooms are framed with classical pilasters, and the doors themselves are mahogany. Continuing down the hall, one enters an 1850 frame addition, which gives out to the rear steps into the small back yard, which is kept as a garden. The house privy was formerly located under the rear steps, and a subterranean cistern is still extant in the back yard. The second floor is divided into two front and rear master bedrooms, and one smaller, child's bedroom. The larger rooms are furnished with identical four-poster carved mahogany beds. The third floor is composed of the children's bedrooms, and the door frames and furnishings are generally simpler and less ornate than on the floors below. The fourth floor is divided into four servants' bedrooms, leading off a central living room.

The ground floor, which can be entered by a front door under the stoop, contains two rooms: the front room which was formerly the dining room and is now preserved as the children's playroom; and behind that, the kitchen with its massive fireplace with its built-in Dutch ovens. Restoration work has been done to repair the kitchen floor. Below the ground floor is the cellar, which has a rubble floor. Formerly the coal room the basement now houses the house's heating plant.

The Old Merchant's House is presently undergoing restoration, which includes, for a large part, the cleaning of cornices, mending of the wallpaper, and other associated maintenance tasks. Major problems have included the bracing of the front wall which had buckled. The slate roof has been retiled, utilising slate from the original quarry in Pennsylvania. The house continues to an unusual degree, both in its architectural features and in its furnishings, the appearance of a mid-nineteenth century merchant's home.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      1832, 1835                      BUILDER/ARCHITECT              Menard Lafever

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Merchant's House, at 29 East 4th Street in the once-stylish Astor Place neighborhood in Manhattan, is a uniquely preserved specimen of the fashionable townhouse of the midnineteenth century.

Built in 1832, in a transitional Greek Revival style the house was purchased in 1835 by Seabury Tredwell, the owner of a highly successful hardware business. The house continued to be occupied by the Tredwell family for the next century and in that time few appreciable alterations were made to the exterior or the interior. In addition, the furnishings and some of the costumes of the period were preserved and contribute to the house's over-all authenticity.

The four story brick rowhouse is maintained by the Trustees of the Old Merchant's House of New York, Incorporated, as a house museum, and is presently undergoing restoration.

## HISTORY

Seabury Tredwell purchased the house in 1835. Built in 1832 by Joseph Brewster, the building formed one of an extensive row of residences that had been erected as a speculative venture.

When Tredwell bought No. 29, he owned a thriving hardware business. He imported much of his stock. Aside from his economic success, Tredwell walked serenely through life, neither brilliant nor celebrated; rather, jejune and undistinguished. Reflecting the mores of his business and social group, Tredwell avoided social and political distinction as he raised a family that included five girls. The family attended St. Bartholomew's Church at Great Jones and Lafayette Street and in summer enjoyed Tredwell's country place in Rumson, New Jersey. The pater familias commuted between it and the city by sailboat from the Liberty Street ferry.

Like their parents, the children escaped distinction. Three of the daughters remained at home. One of them, Gertrude, lived in the house from her birth in 1840 until her death in 1933. An instinctive museum curator, she changed nothing and kept everything. Thus the house's American federal period furniture, almost all of it purchased before 1860, still graces various rooms. Likewise, dresses and costumes on display also illustrate the Tredwells' taste and style.

The house's architecture confirms Seabury Tredwell's station in life.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Richard S. Bowman, "The Old Merchant's House," Typescript, The Cooper Union, New York (n.d.).

S. Sydney Bradford, "The Old Merchant's House," National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings Special Study, February 26, 1965.

Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York, 1944).

(Historic Landmark Society), "The Old Merchant's House," (New York, 1963).

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 8	5, 8, 5, 0, 8, 0	4, 5, 0, 8, 8, 0, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The Old Merchant's House National Historic Landmark boundaries are conterminus with the boundaries of the house lot at 29 East Fourth Street. Beginning at the southeast corner of the house lot, proceed north along the property line for 110', thence west along the rear property line for 25', thence south along the west property line for 110', thence east along the southern property line 25' to the point of origin. These boundaries enclose the landmark within the limits of the original house lot.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY

STATE	CODE	COUNTY

Landmark

Designated: June 15, 1965

date

CODE

Boundary Certified: George T. Emery

June 15, 1977

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

7/16/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L. Street

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

6/24/77

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

((NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS))

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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CONTINUATION SHEET

1

ITEM NUMBER

8

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Attributed to Menard Lafever, the house is transitional Greek Revival. The prosperous favored that style in the 1830's, and the Old Merchant's House stands as an excellent example of a typical nineteenth-century New York townhouse.

When Miss Gertrude Tredwell died in 1933, the house remained unoccupied for several years. Neglect caused deterioration. Then, when about to be sold at auction, the house was purchased by a grand-nephew of Tredwell's, a George Chapman. He presented it to the Historic Landmark Society who, in turn, conveyed it to the Trustees of the Old Merchant's House of New York, Incorporated. This body initiated the present restoration which is being directed by Joseph Roberto, of New York University. Following completion of the work, the house will once again be opened to the public.