

Looking north on Third Av. in 1895, one of the magic lantern views of New York at the Picture Decorator

## Dusting Off Little Old New York

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POST JUL 16 1971

THERE was a time in this city when the talents of architect Stanford White were actually called up to design a Con Ed power station. Nothing was too utilitarian to be esthetically interesting. Somewhere along the path to progress such extravagant notions were discarded.

Now we must make do by reviving lost eras through pictures, prints and other memorabilia. And people are doing that everywhere—framing prints of old New York, pulling out of mothballs grandmother's photo of the Easter Parade, pictures of horse-drawn carriages, cobblestone streets, lawn-circled mansions

### Ruth Preston is on vacation.

—all the evidence that New York wasn't always a dizzying maze of concrete, mass transit and disappearing geometry.

Nostalgia is in. And if you no longer have that Mickey Mouse watch your parents gave you at the age of 16 or if all those pictures of past grandeur have been lost, there are places to find them again.

Two stores offer contrasting opportunities for reclaiming a bit of the past—The Picture Decorator at 35 E. 64th St. and Pageant Book Shop at 59 Fourth Av. At the Picture Decorator, prints, posters, periodical illustrations and magic lantern slide pictures capturing varied aspects of old New York are available.

The Picture Decorator was opened some 15 years ago by the late Ray Austrian, who had been decorating primarily business offices with novel mementos reflecting the trade or location of the office. Autographs or old documents of famous judges might go to a law firm, a beaver hat patent signed by Thomas Jefferson to a hat manufacturer, an early 1900 photo of Wall St. to a financial institution.

Austrian got the idea for the shop when he bought an antique display case at auction and found all the small drawers still filled with a collection of old prints and maps, recalls his wife, Bea Austrian, who with a small, very knowledgeable staff continues to operate her husband's business.

Among the most interesting items found at the Picture Decorator are the more than 50 views of New York between 1875 and 1905 that are black and white or antique sepia photographs made from rare magic lantern slides, the kind used to while away an evening

before the days of TV and the neighborhood movie.

The Picture Decorator has rephotographed and enlarged these slides—they make marvelous wall mural blowups—and included an appropriate dark border simulating the wall on which the slides were once projected. The clarity of detail seems remarkable and these photos can be mounted on masonite to avoid the expense of framing. Small prints—about 6 x 6, unframed—start at \$10. Larger ones average \$40.

Other items available include reproductions of early magazine and old book illustrations—Harpers Weekly, Puck, Frank Leslie's Illustrated; original Winslow Homer wood block engravings, from \$10; framed currency, autographs or documents.

The Picture Decorator finds many people who come in have knowledge of the city to contribute. The store also does its own and outside framing. If you have some old treasured object sitting for many years in a back shelf box, chances are the store will find some ingenious way to immortalize it.

Tools, baby dresses, wishbones, old playing cards, music scores—name it, they've probably already framed them for someone.

The Pageant Book Shop offers a completely different selection and setting to satisfy the fascination with the old. Primarily an old and rare book store since its founding in 1945, Pageant offers a better skelter selection of all kinds of maps—city real estate maps, navigation charts—old book etchings, Victorian fashion plates, church music parchment calligraphy by monks—all starting at under \$5. Currently, they have an interesting assortment of engravings from Diderot's 18th Century Encyclopedia in which all manner of things are finely illustrated.

At the Pageant Book Shop it's very much a find-it-yourself adventure and one can easily pass the day rummaging through drawers and boxes. "People take vacations in this store," notes co-owner Henry Chafetz. The stock is constantly changing and framing is also available. If you don't find anything to hang on your walls, there all those old books to browse through.

If the New York nostalgia bug has really gotten to you, don't miss the exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Av. and 103d St. "How Green Was My City" features paintings, watercolors and lithographs showing New York as it was in the 19th Century, accompanied by matching black and white photographs of the same sites as they appear today.