

what were courtship customs before marriage circa 1829 in upper merchant classes NYC

Courtship customs before marriage in the **upper merchant classes of New York City around 1829** were highly formal and governed by strict social protocols:

- **Chaperonage and Supervision:** Young women, after finishing their schooling, remained at home under the close supervision of their mothers. They were always chaperoned at public events like dances, theater, or concerts by family members or trusted friends. Unchaperoned meetings between unmarried men and women were strictly frowned upon^[1].
- **Initiation of Courtship:** Courtship could only begin after a young man's suitability was established by the woman's father, who would inquire about the suitor's family, social standing, and reputation. Only after this vetting could the young man visit the family home, where interactions took place in the front parlor and always with a chaperone present^[1].
- **Permitted Activities:** Acceptable activities during courtship included singing, playing piano, engaging in polite conversation, and playing parlor games, often with others present. Supervised carriage rides and outings to social events like picnics or dinners were also permitted, but privacy was limited^[1].
- **Gifts and Propriety:** It was considered improper for a young woman to accept gifts from a suitor before a formal engagement. Only perishable items like flowers, fruit, or candy were acceptable, as these did not imply lasting obligation. Any gifts received had to be acknowledged in the presence of parents to avoid impropriety^[1].
- **Engagement and Public Behavior:** Once engaged, the couple's conduct was still closely regulated. Public displays of affection or exclusivity were discouraged. The couple was expected to maintain decorum, with the man behaving honorably toward all women and the woman avoiding jealousy or possessiveness^[2].
- **Parental Involvement:** Parents, especially mothers, played a central role in monitoring their daughters' interactions and ensuring that courtship followed social expectations. Fathers made the final determination of a suitor's acceptability, reflecting the importance of family alliances and social standing^{[1] [3]}.
- **Marriage as Social Contract:** In these circles, marriage was as much about uniting families and consolidating social status as it was about personal affection. The process was public, formal, and often involved elaborate social gatherings and rituals^{[4] [5]}.

These customs reflected the values of the upper merchant class, emphasizing **reputation, propriety, and strategic family alliances** over romantic spontaneity^{[1] [3]}.

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2. <https://merchantshouse.org/blog/engagement/>
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_courtship_in_the_United_States
4. <https://merchantshouse.org/tag/wedding/>
5. <https://merchantshouse.org/tag/dearly-beloved/>