



The Yonkers Historian

THE JOURNAL OF THE YONKERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
VOLUME 28, NUMBER 2, 2021

KEYS TO THE PAST



by Loren D. Chaidez

Quite a collection of wonderful items has been bequeathed to the Sherwood House Museum over the years that have significant historic importance. These acquisitions are used to interpret many of the museum's rooms and each room portrays a different time period. For example our museum's Parlor Room is currently appointed with 19th century artifacts and is where families that lived at Sherwood House would have entertained important guests. Within this room stands a piano that upon closer investigation has quite a bit of history itself. This forte-piano, so called because of its interior workings has an overall rectangular shape and harp-like interior mechanism and is marked with a metal label on its front with an insignia of "John G. Klemm, Philadelphia" printed onto it. In the early 19th century, two areas within the growing United States were the premiere manufacturing sites of forte-pianos. These were Boston, where Alpheus Babcock reigned, and Philadelphia, where John G. Klemm and brothers were prominent. In 1829, Babcock relocated to Philadelphia and joined forces with the Klemm Bros. and it is very likely that this collaboration resulted in the creation of this instrument. This particular forte-piano has a stamped number '168' on the inside, which is a sequential production number, or serial number. Records indicate that the full inventory of Babcock instruments numbered from one to about 570, possibly dating this piano #168 to 1829. Soon afterward the interior mechanism of pianos changed dramatically and then were referred to as square pianos.

There was a time in the not too distant past when instruments of this style had fallen out of fashion and were considered not up to date. As upright pianos became popular many older styles were discarded. In an infamous publicity stunt in May of 1904, hundreds of the 'old fashioned' pianos were gathered and burned on the beach at Atlantic City in New Jersey. As the instrument we have at Sherwood House escaped this fate its rarity is notable.

The piano in our possession has a small keyboard of six octaves. It was employed as a solo instrument and was ideal as the backbone of a chamber music group. At the time of its production one might have played popular contemporary music by Schubert, Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart and perhaps some of 'the oldies' by Bach and Handel. American composers had not yet become mainstream. We know this piano is made of mahogany, has details of brass and original ivory keys. Its inner workings are largely intact. The Yonkers Historical Society has been in touch with a piano restorer in Tennessee, that upon preliminary inspection has indicated that we have a piece that is historically important and worthy of a proper restoration. Below is a photo of our instrument in its current condition (left) and a photo of a restored instrument (right). We include this potential restoration project on our list of ever growing goals for enhancing the Sherwood House Museum (inside and out). Look for fundraising outreach in the near future to realize this task.



*Sherwood
House
forte-piano*



*Fully restored
Babcock piano*

Table of Contents

Keys to the Past—page 1
by Loren D. Chaidez

Letter from the President—page 2

**Sherwood House to Open
and
Kilcommons Memorial—page 3**

Made in Yonkers—pages 4 & 5
by Richard Mangini

2020 Mangold Awards—page 6

2021 Mangold and History Awards—page 7

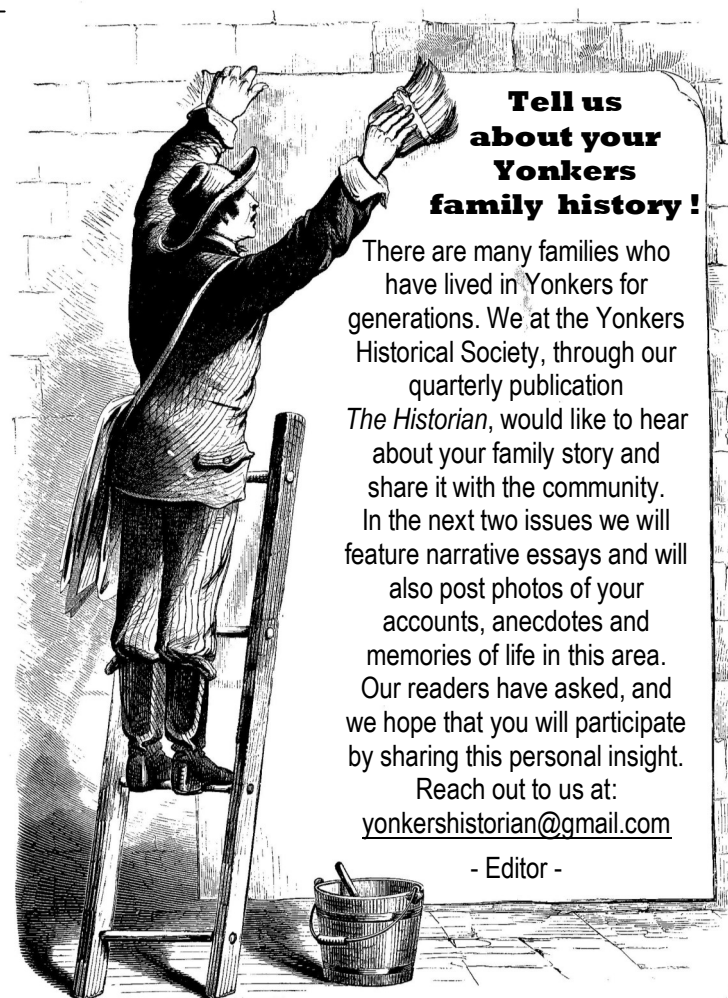
News in YHS Technology—pages 8 & 9
by Ed Sabol and Chris Kenney O'Rourke

**YHS Board of Trustees and
YHS opening hours
and Announcements—page 10**

YHS Membership and volunteer info—page 11

Our Sponsors—page 12

The Yonkers Historian is published by the Yonkers Historical Society at the Grinton Will Library, 1500 Central Park Avenue Yonkers, New York 10710 (914) 961-8940



Tell us about your Yonkers family history!

There are many families who have lived in Yonkers for generations. We at the Yonkers Historical Society, through our quarterly publication *The Historian*, would like to hear about your family story and share it with the community. In the next two issues we will feature narrative essays and will also post photos of your accounts, anecdotes and memories of life in this area. Our readers have asked, and we hope that you will participate by sharing this personal insight.

Reach out to us at:

yonkershistorian@gmail.com

- Editor -

It has been my privilege and honor to serve as President of the Yonkers Historical Society since 2015. I am stepping down at this time for personal reasons, but also to allow new leadership to take the Society forward with fresh energy during these ongoing difficult times. I'm pleased to report that at our special meeting of the board of trustees on August 12, we elected a new President, Loren Chaidez, trustee and editor of *The Yonkers Historian*. Loren brings great enthusiasm, dedication, knowledge and a deep commitment to the Sherwood House museum to his new role, and we are all confident that he is up to the challenge! I want to thank former and current executive team members for their hard work and unfailing support, as well as current and former trustees who I knew I could rely on to help make tough decisions and implement initiatives that allowed us to stay true to, and advance, our mission. And of course many thanks to our tireless member volunteers – you know who you are!—and our generous membership, who are the foundation for all we do. I will remain on the board and look forward to assisting Loren with the transition and to continued collaboration with my fellow trustees.

I'm proud of my tenure and our many joint accomplishments over the past six years. We have brought the society to a new level and to a stronger place; these newsletters, and our recent monthly email blasts, highlight the activities and free public services we've added and continue to provide despite the restrictions limited budgets, and the COVID pandemic, impose. Stay well and make sure we have your email address so we can quickly communicate with you. Enjoy reading this issue and I hope to see you again in person at an upcoming Sherwood House event!

*Letter from
the President*
Deirdre Rylander



Warm regards, *Deirdre Rylander*



Sherwood House to Open this Fall!



After a very long hiatus due to the COVID pandemic we gladly announce that **The Sherwood House** historic pre-revolutionary 1740 building and museum will once again be open to the public for tours. Our dates and hours of operation, for the Fall 2021 season, will be on Sundays - 1:00pm to 4:00pm - beginning on September 12th culminating with our annual Candlelight Tour and Holiday Boutique on December 12th. Look for our bright 'OPEN' banner at the entrance. Also scheduled is our outdoor Flea Market on Saturday, October 2nd (rain date of Oct. 9th). Vendors are welcome to join us for the flea market! Please make inquiries to info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org.

As docent-guided tours of the museum are held indoors we require all participants to wear masks. The museum, barn and cottage, which are all part of the museum and on the same property, are located at 340 Tuckahoe Road, Yonkers, by the intersection of the southbound entrance to the Sprain Brook Parkway. Parking is available right on the site. Your donations are greatly appreciated and are vital to the perpetuation of the museum and the efforts of the Yonkers Historical Society.

► With plenty of dates available we look forward to seeing you. Mark your calendar and join us for this informative outing!

We are very saddened by the loss in June of long-time Yonkers Historical Society supporter Aileen Kilcommons of Riverdale and Yonkers. She was 62. For more than a decade, Aileen was a regular at our annual membership meetings, dinners, flea markets and other special events. An alumna of Sacred Heart high school, she was active in many community organizations, a member of several choirs, and passionate about her Irish heritage and Yonkers history. Aileen wrote a fascinating article, "Remembering Anna Duncan," about her mother's friendship with one of Isadora Duncan's original dancers, for the 2016, Volume 25 issue of *The Yonkers Historian*. Gifted singers, Aileen and her daughter Katie sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" a cappella at our 150th Anniversary celebration of Oakland Cemetery in June 2017. We will miss Aileen's warmth, lively spirit, and quick smile. Our deepest condolences to Aileen's family.



MADE IN YONKERS

by Richard Mangini

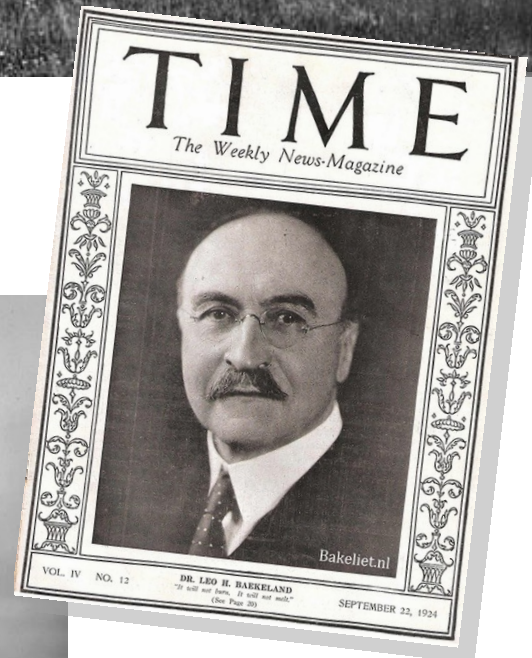
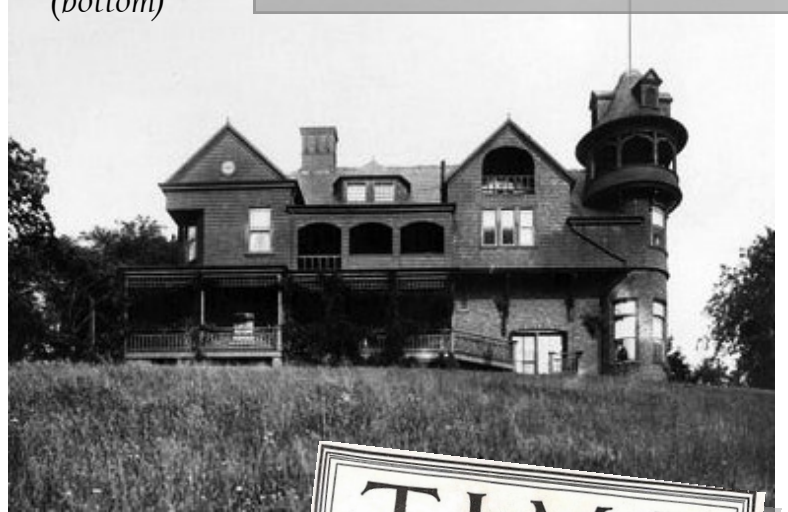
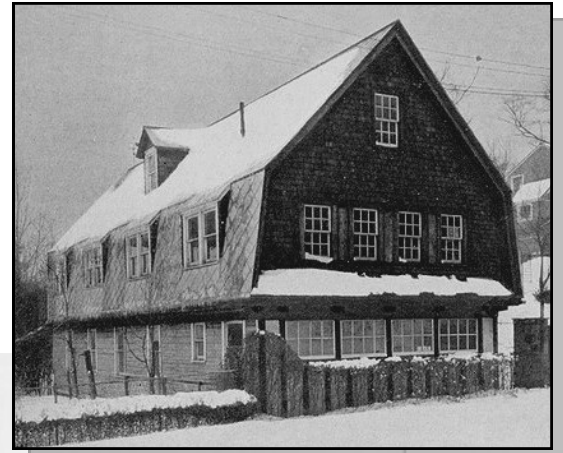
Many indispensable inventions were accidental discoveries. Play-Doh creators were shooting for a wallpaper cleaner. The microwave was inspired by a melted chocolate bar in the pocket of an engineer studying vacuum tubes. And Viagra was developed as a treatment for angina for which it was ineffective (imagine those trials). Yonkers is home to one such invention – Bakelite.

Leo Hendrik Baekeland, a Belgian born chemist, arrived in New York City on a travel scholarship in 1889 with his new wife and settled down on West 14th Street. He quickly found work with a photographic company. By 1891 he had moved to Yonkers and founded the Nepera Chemical Company where he developed Velox photo paper, which could be exposed with artificial light instead of the usual, unreliable sunlight. No one trick pony, he sold the business and patent to George Eastman of Eastman Kodak for a tidy profit. The sale included a non-compete clause barring him from further research in photography for 20 years. He needed to find another area of study.

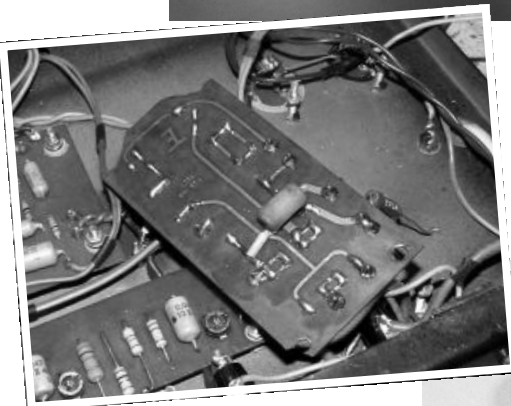
In 1893 with the Velox proceeds he purchased a large rambling house called “Snug Rock” on a hillside overlooking the Hudson between North Broadway and Warburton Avenue adjoining the Untermeyer estate. In true mad scientist fashion, he set up a laboratory converting a barn on the property.

With the smell of organic plastics in the experimental air he became interested in synthetic resins, and looked for a product offering the biggest bang for the research buck. Preliminary goo seemed promising as a synthetic shellac. The real thing, which was made from secretions of the Asian lac beetle had to be laboriously scraped from trees making it relatively expensive. The outcome was Novolak, inferior to the original and not a commercial success, though it still exists today as Novolac.

*Baekeland's
barn/laboratory
in Yonkers (top)
and Snug Rock
(bottom)*



*The Bakelizer applied heat
and pressure to “bake” or
harden the material*



Undaunted, he continued working with polymers (large molecules composed of phenol and formaldehyde) and produced a moldable plastic that under heat and pressure became solid and would not melt or soften. Voila – the 1907 hit Bakelite! It's uncertain if the name is derived from the name Baekeland or the baking required in the production process.

Though most often thought of as colorful jewelry from the 1920s and 30s, Bakelite is a wonderfully versatile material still in use today. Like most plastics it does not biodegrade and if broken apart, its components can release toxins. Mixed with various additives, it could be made to resemble glass, wood, metal, china, ivory, tortoiseshell, AND in myriad colors. Because of its heat resistance and insulation properties the material suggested all sorts of applications. Uses included radio cabinets, buttons, billiard balls, pipe-stems, toilet seats, airplane parts, automobile parts, telephones, kitchenware, electrical parts, game pieces, camera bodies, even electric guitars. During WW II the government considered using it for coinage to conserve metal.

By 1939, though business was flourishing conflicts with his son over financial issues prompted him to sell his General Bakelite Company to Union Carbide. He retired to Florida (where else?) becoming a recluse and devoting his time to an immense tropical garden at his winter home in Coconut Grove. He died at 81 in 1944 at Beacon, NY and is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Snug Rock unfortunately burned in 1957, so a pilgrimage to his lab with Bakelite gift shop is not possible.

2020

Patricia Mangold Scholarship Awards



Amara Valerio

The restrictions imposed by Covid-19 prevented the Yonkers Historical Society from holding an event to introduce the year 2020 recipients of the Patricia Mangold Scholarships. Despite the difficulties faced by our schools and students, there were a number of interesting entries to review.

First prize of \$1,000 was awarded to **Amara Valerio** of Yonkers Montessori Academy for her audio and video narrative "Cross County Center: A Cultural Landmark, Right Here in Yonkers". Amara provided a history of Cross County, from the land as a trading area for Native Americans and early settlers, through planning the shopping mall, and the changes and renovations that have occurred since its opening in 1954. She also interviewed her mother, for her memories.



Brandon Cepeda

Second prizes of \$500 each were awarded to **Brandon Cepeda** of Riverside High School and **JaDonna Williams** of Roosevelt High School - Early College Studies.

Brandon submitted a thoughtful essay about the Yonkers Desegregation case. Guided by "Show Me a Hero", the book by Lisa Belkin and HBO series, he researched journals and newspaper reports to present questions, arguments and conclusions.

JaDonna submitted a video of her interview with Mary Calvi at the Riverfront Library. Her questions and narrative showed appreciation of Ms. Calvi's book, "Dear George, Dear Mary", as well as Philipse Manor Hall and its historic area.



*JaDonna Williams
and her parents*

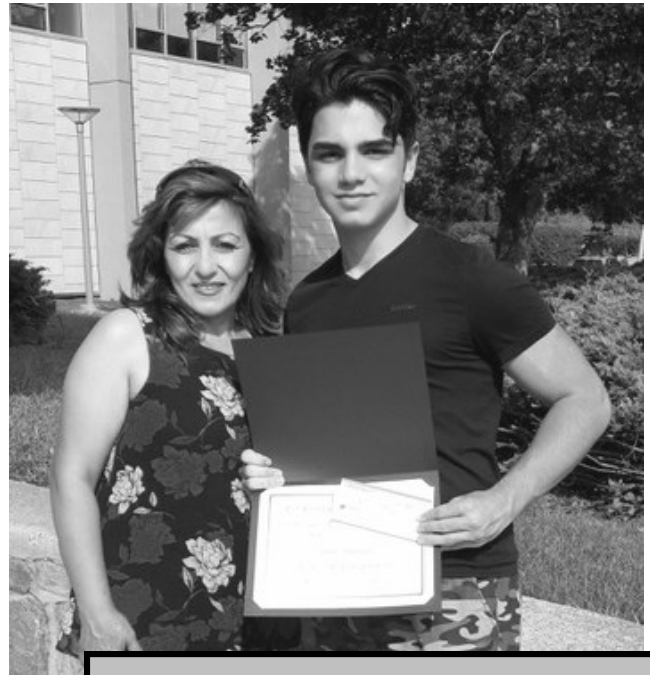
Kathleen Ennis, Education Committee Chair, met the students in their neighborhoods during the summer of 2020 to deliver the awards from the Yonkers Historical Society and certificates of achievement from the Offices of Mayor Mike Spano, the Yonkers City Council, and State Senators Andrea Stewart Cousins and Shelley Mayer.

2021

Patricia Mangold Scholarship Awards

School year 2020-2021 was off to a difficult start due to Covid-19. However, once again, dedicated teachers, devoted school staff, supportive parents and determined students rose to the challenge.

The first and only prize this year was awarded to **Ramez Dababneh** of Yonkers Middle High School, who is headed to SUNY Maritime College in the fall. His power point project showed the growth and development of Yonkers since its early history as a small farming village with businesses such as saw and grist mills, blacksmiths and general stores. He credits inventors of the 19th Century and businesses like Otis Elevator and Alexander Smith Carpet Shop for their major contributions to the growth which continues today with new businesses and residences.



Ramez Dababneh with his mother

Because lingering restrictions this year prevented a public event, Kathleen Ennis, Education Committee Chair, met Ramez and his mother, Suad at the Grinton Will Library. There, she presented his \$1,000 award from the Yonkers Historical Society and certificates of achievement from the Offices of Mayor Mike Spano, the Yonkers City Council, State Senators Andrea Stewart Cousins and Shelley Mayer, and Assemblyman Nader Sayegh.



Nader Sayegh with Kathleen Ennis

NEWS in YHS TECHNOLOGY

by Ed Sabol and Chris Kenney O'Rourke

During the past couple of years, and in the midst of the ongoing pandemic, your Yonkers Historical Society (YHS) has slowly and methodically been updating the technology we use to run the society, to communicate with our constituents, and to manage donations to the organization.

The YHS Technology Committee includes a number of Trustees, including Ed Sabol, Chris Kenney O'Rourke, Judith Waite, and super-member Jason Medina. Just before the pandemic struck, Ed installed a new, more powerful PC in the Society office at the Will Library. The old PC was ancient considering the movement in the technology world and was being backed up unreliably. Especially important to us are our various databases. We are now using a secure, state-of-the-art cloud-based backup solution which ensures our data is always safely backed up. We also needed to update our version of QuickBooks which would not run on the old PC.



RESTORED AND UPDATED OUR WEBSITE

Under the leadership of Ed Sabol, we re-established our web presence. We moved from a .com website to a .org URL, which opened the door to additional benefits, including:

- Firmly established YHS as a non-profit online entity
- Reduced charges for online services, and enhanced our eligibility for non-profit discounts
- Provided an opportunity to align the URL with our email IDs, and consolidate and standardize the YHS email IDs in a way that makes communicating with the Society intuitive.
- Allowed us to implement a new email address: **info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org**.

Please update your contacts to use that email as we are in the process of retiring our old **YHSociety@aol.com** email address

We are very lucky to have Jason Medina available to use his skills to update the website and provide wonderful images of historical spaces and event highlights.

DONATION AND MEMBERSHIP MANAGEMENT

Members of the Technology Committee, led by Treasurer Judith Waite, researched a variety of software packages that would allow the society to record, track and acknowledge memberships and donations. The DonorPerfect package we selected, and which the trustees approved, provides a wide range of features that enhance our ability to generate correspondence, accept on-line donations, allow payment for special events (like reservations for our Annual Dinner) to be made with credit cards, online. We can also now accept credit cards at remote locations, such as book signings at non-YHS venues, or outside the Sherwood House at our Spring and Fall Flea Markets.

The transition from using spreadsheets and a rudimentary Access database to populating a robust DonorPerfect database represented a data-cleansing nightmare. Judith heroically reviewed and fixed more than 700 names and addresses before we were done.

Our DonorPerfect subscription also allows us to use Constant Contact, an application that facilitates the generation and distribution of personalized letters and email newsletters that provide YHS news updates and event notifications between **Historian** newsletter publications.

(continued on next page)

ZOOM

Like the rest of the world, the Yonkers Historical Society made significant use of ZOOM during the pandemic, and continues to do so. With the shutdown of public spaces in March of 2020, YHS Officers and Trustees joined the ranks of homebound workgroups who met virtually in each other's living rooms, dining spaces, libraries and home offices. Trustees maintained our regular meeting calendar, with several working from other states.

During this period, our newest Trustee, Michael Walsh, initiated a collaboration with the Yonkers Public Library to offer regular ZOOM presentations of interest with a historical focus. Programs about the Yonkers Carnegie Library, personal Holocaust experiences, and the Alexander Smith Carpet Company drew notable audiences of home-bound members. Taking a step farther, Michael also created a Yonkers Historical Society YouTube channel so that those who missed these presentations can now view them after the program date. You can visit that YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaoo-GkH-Kq1IOyogxAGLkg>.



REQUEST FOR YOUR HELP!

To help us with our continuous move into the future, we would love for you to send us a valid email address. We promise that it will not be shared, sold or used for anything other than outbound communication with YOU. Please send an email to us at info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org.

2021 AMERICAN HISTORY RECOGNITION AWARDS

Two students from each Yonkers Public High School, who completed junior year in June 2021, were chosen by their teachers to receive the Yonkers Historical Society's American History Recognition Award. We will present their certificates of achievement this fall.

Congratulations to these students, who have demonstrated excellence in the study of American History:



Gorton High School: Amanda Benoit Taveras and Kwadwo Osarfo-Akoto

Lincoln High School: Annly John and Karen Boyce

Palisade Preparatory School: Merail Salmani and Vanessa Vidal Salgado

Riverside High School: Pharrar Lowe and Daniel Leon Silva

Roosevelt High School - Early College Studies:

Jason Silva and Gracy Mitchell Sosa Borjas

Saunders Trade and Technical High School: Ryan Mitchell and Symira Masse

Yonkers Middle High School: Alyssa Lee and Stella Higgins

Yonkers Montessori Academy: Martin Foley and Zaheira Hegazi

The Yonkers Historical Society Board of Trustees

President

Deirdre Rylander

Vice Presidents

Elizabeth Fitzgerald

Susan Blanchard

Mark Silberblatt, Esq.

Ed Sabol

Treasurer

Judith Waite

Secretary

Kathleen Ennis

Trustees

Loren D. Chaidez

Guenevere Dean

Edward Dee

Marguerite A. Delaney

Teresa Hennelly, PhD.

Mary M. Hoar

Jeremiah Jerome

Jacqueline Lorieo

Christine Kenney O'Rourke

Jerry Ostroff

Andrew Romano, Esq.

Nortrud Spero

Michael Walsh

Marianne Winstanley

**We rely on your generous support!
Please renew your
2021 Membership now!**

The YHS Opening Hours

The Yonkers Historical Society Office
at the

Grinton Will Library is open

Thursday afternoons from
1 pm—5 pm and by appointment.

Historic Sherwood House Museum
for the

2021 season will be open on Sunday
afternoons

from 1 pm to 4pm,

September 12th through

November 21st.


Holiday Candlelight Tour
is scheduled for December 12th.

Call the Office at

(914) 961-8940

or email:

info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org
for further information or to schedule
an appointment
or group tour of the house.



ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS!
**WATCH FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE 2022
PATRICIA MANGOLD SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS**

This award is presented to high school seniors residing in Yonkers who have demonstrated both an educational and a significant personal interest in Yonkers history. The applicant must be planning to pursue further education. Current awards are First prize: \$1,000; Second prize: \$500, and are presented based on projects submitted by applicants.

Further details, including the spring 2022 deadline for projects, will be determined soon and distributed to high school Guidance Departments. Information will also be found on our website (www.yonkershistoricalsociety.org).

Questions can be addressed by email:
info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org
or call our office at the
Grinton Will Library (914) 961-8940.



YHS Membership

PO Box 190
YONKERS, NEW YORK 10710
(914) 961-8940
WWW.YONKERSHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

Category	Price	
BENEFACTOR	1000	
PATRON	500	
ADVOCATE	250	
CONTRIBUTOR	100	
HOUSEHOLD	50	
INDIVIDUAL	30	
STUDENT	25	
SENIOR 65+	25	
Total Enclosed		

Please indicate if this is a

☐ New Membership

☐ Renewal

OR

☐ Gift Subscription

► To join, check your membership category at left, complete this coupon, and mail with your check to:

Yonkers Historical Society
PO Box 190
Yonkers, New York 10710



Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State & Zip _____

Telephone _____

email _____

If this is a Gift Subscription, please add the name and address of the recipient:

Name _____

Address _____



Become a Yonkers Historical Society Volunteer!

I am interested in the following Volunteer opportunities:

Sherwood House Gardening (seasonal)	Tuesdays: Mornings ____Afternoons____
Sherwood House Docent and/or Visitor Assistant	Sundays: 1pm - 4pm (April - June and September - early December)
Sherwood House Chaperone for school & group visits	Weekdays TBD (April - June and September - early December)
YHS Archives Project (at Will Library)	Thursdays 1 - 5pm or other times TBD

Name _____

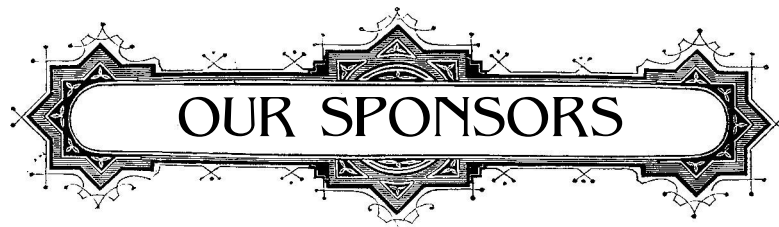
Address _____

email _____ Phone _____

Yonkers Historical Society
PO Box 190
Yonkers, New York
10710

NonProfit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
White Plains NY
Permit No. 7446

CURRENT RESIDENT
or



We are grateful to our sponsors for their continued support of this publication.

Gold Sponsor:

Nortrud Wolf Spero Real Estate



Silver Sponsors:

Elizabeth & Richard Fitzgerald
Flower Funeral Home
Parsons DiSalvo Agency, Inc.
Sterling National Bank



Bronze Sponsor:

John Doherty, Realtor

Visit our website (www.yonkershistoricalsociety.org) and "Like" us on Facebook:
[http://www.facebook.com/YonkersHistorical Society](http://www.facebook.com/YonkersHistoricalSociety)
<http://www.facebook.com/HistoricSherwoodHouse>