

The Yonkers Historian

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Miles To Go

By Loren Chaidez

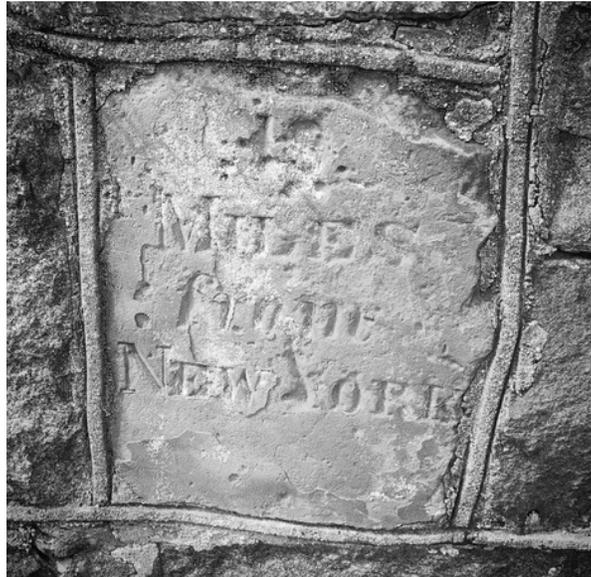
Clues to the past come in many shapes and forms. To the observant eye these can be a sense of wonder when discovered, and to the curious mind spark a bit of research. Just about all of us have seen headstones and grave markers, many of which have existed for centuries and are a reminder of mortals who have passed before. Among other engraved stones are mile markers, employed by the emerging post-revolutionary U.S. government for a specific and very practical use. New roads that were connecting towns and colonies, known as post roads, were initially set up by the British in the late 1600's. These post roads were created to deliver mail, and mile markers served to anticipate travel time as well as serve an ingenious method of calculating how much postage to be charged for mail delivery. At the time postage was paid by the recipient of mail, rather than the sender, and was determined by both the distance it traveled as well as by number of pages in each letter. One main artery for example was a route that ran from Manhattan to Albany, known as the Albany Post Road.

The Albany Post Road ran northward through Yonkers, along what is now North and South Broadway, and mile markers, a few of which still exist, were placed by the side

of the road. On the west side of North Broadway at Constant Avenue is one remaining mile marker in Yonkers that is permanently embedded in a stone wall. It is marked "19 miles from New York" and exactly measures the distance from City Hall in New York

City to that point in Yonkers (see photo).

Benjamin Franklin, who was the first appointed postmaster general of the new U.S. post office, developed an odometer by attaching a dowel inside a wagon wheel that "clapped" at mile intervals and pinpointed where markers were to be set. The markers were made of sandstone and measured about three feet tall and 18 inches wide. There were 159 markers along the Albany Post Road. Through Yonkers there could have been at least four markers along the route, however all of these have not yet been located. Unfortunately, many of them have succumbed to the disruption of development and ravages of time, and no longer exist or have not yet been unearthed. In the 1930's the New York State Department of Public Works began placing markers in protected settings, surrounding or encasing them in stone and concrete. Roads were often moved, however the markers were not, with the possibility of markers that are "off the beaten path" yet to be rediscovered. ■



Mile marker in Yonkers (Photo Courtesy of Brad Jasper)



Mile marker in Staatsburg, NY

Editor's note: Local postman, Brad Jasper, whose delivery route is in Yonkers, recently brought our attention to the North Broadway mile marker. We are grateful for his keen eye that inspired this article.

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TELL US ABOUT YOUR YONKERS FAMILY HISTORY!

There are many families that have lived in Yonkers for generations. We at the Yonkers Historical Society would like to hear about your family story and share it with the community through our quarterly publication *The Historian*. In upcoming 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

LETTER *from the* PRESIDENT

Having been considered and then elected to the post of President of the Yonkers Historical Society (YHS), has been a tremendous honor for me. I look forward to enhancing the organization's mission of keeping the rich history of the City of Yonkers foremost in the eyes of the public. With the guidance and knowledge of the previous President, Deirdre Rylander, the transition of leadership has been a collegial and smooth one. Along with the support of a dedicated board of trustees and volunteers, we will continue our mission of preserving history while addressing contemporary challenges, and being mindful of the future.

Embracing the scope of the new responsibility has had me hit the ground running! The Sherwood House Museum and its maintenance needs are already familiar and tending to them is ongoing. It has been a great pleasure to meet with City of Yonkers officials and local legislators to sustain and increase financial support, enabling us to be responsible stewards of the museum, improve scholarships and school programs and to further public awareness of our rich history. Better organizing our archives, and enhancing data retrieval

will enable the YHS to more easily field information requests from the public. Through regular publishing of the society's newsletter *The Yonkers Historian* we hope to keep the membership engaged and aware of activities, programs, and special events. To that end we encourage our readership to contribute nuggets of Yonkers history, remembrances, special family histories and relevant photos for all to share.

I hope that you enjoy our publication and thank you for your continued support of the YHS. Membership is a vital part of the organization and support now will permit us to continue our important commitment.

To all of our members and readers best wishes for a safe and happy holiday!

Warm Regards,

Loren Chaidez



Loren Chaidez

Andy Romano Steps Down From YHS Board

After decades as a dedicated trustee of the Yonkers Historical Society, Andrew Romano, Esq. stepped down from the board this fall. He served as the organization's legal counsel and treasurer for many years. Andy was very generous with his time and support, donating office supplies, handling mass mailings, and offering the use of his office's conference room for YHS committee meetings. He



was a tremendous help at many of our flea markets, arriving early to set up for the event and to greet vendors. Of the Society, Andy writes: "I will cherish the lifetime friends I have made as well as the historic projects that will forever add to the history of the City of Yonkers." Andy will remain as a member of the society and looks forward to visiting our future events. We thank him for his many years of hard work and commitment to our mission. ■

In Memoriam: Peg Murphy

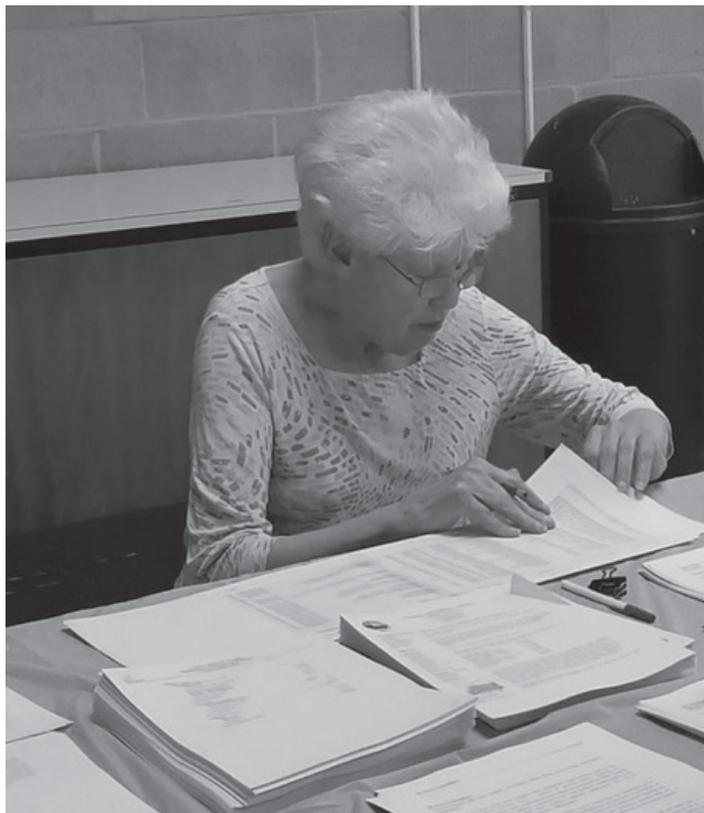
Longtime former member and trustee of the Yonkers Historical Society, Margaret "Peggy" Anne Murphy, passed away on September 16th, 2021 at the age of 77.

Born in Flushing, New York, her early years were enjoyed in Ohio, Florida and then New York City before relocating to Westchester County. Peg worked at St. Mary School in Yonkers and she was married to John Murphy in 1971.



Peg was very active with the Yonkers Historical Society and enjoyed volunteering at Sherwood House as a docent, worked at the candlelight tours as well as other functions including the annual meetings. She was on the annual dinner/luncheon committee and was active at the YHS flea markets.

Peggy is survived by her daughter Anne Elizabeth. ■



Clang, Clang, Clang...

By Richard Mangini

No, this is not a Judy Garland bio. I know there must be one or two of you out there who get the reference.

In the 19th century as the economy of Yonkers shifted from agriculture to industry the need for factory labor increased. The trick was getting said labor to the factory floor. The working-population began expanding outward from downtown as business picked up necessitating longer trips to work places such as the Alexander Smith Carpet Mills and Otis Elevator.

Foresighted city fathers commissioned the Yonkers Railroad Company to construct a trolley system which began operating its first line along Main Street through Getty Square in 1886. Originally a horsecar line, the system rapidly expanded and was electrified in the 1890s. In 1898 The Third Avenue Railway Company, operator of streetcar lines in Manhattan, The Bronx, and other areas in the region, bought the Yonkers company. In 1903 the landmark trolley barn was built on Buena Vista Avenue for car storage and maintenance eventually servicing nine lines operating within the city and beyond. Yonkers with a burgeoning population, humming industries, and a bona fide trolley system could now assume the role of a prosperous city.

There were few private automobiles at the time and although the horse and carriage was still a primary

mode of travel, the trolley was immensely popular not only with the working class, but the general population as well – and why not: it was novel, reliable, operated frequently and no doubt an improvement over riding behind a smelly horse.

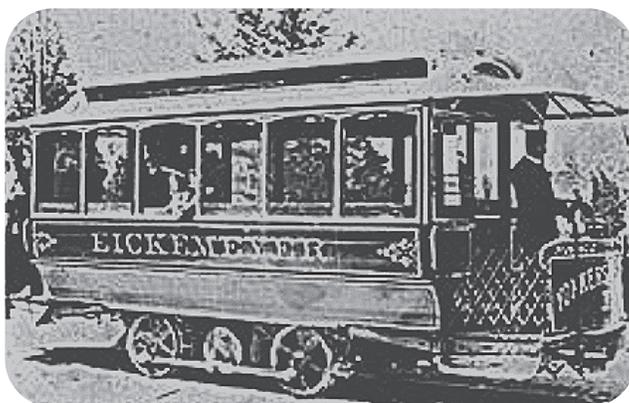
Trolley lines proliferated all over southern Westchester in the early 20th Century connecting with each other, the railroads, and ferries. One really didn't need private transport to get around. The No. 1 Line ran from the subway terminal at 242nd Street, through Getty Square and along Warburton to Hastings. No. 3 connected the Yonkers Station to the 242nd St subway. No. 4 ran from downtown along McLean Avenue to the Jerome Avenue Subway. Other lines along Saw Mill River Road, Tuckahoe Road, and Yonkers Avenue connected to Putnam Line trains and the New Haven Line in Mt. Mount Vernon. Much like San Francisco's cable cars, trolleys were a handy way of negotiating our famous hills.

So, where'd they go? Trolley ridership began to decline in the 20s with the arrival of the affordable mass-produced automobile. As the suburbs developed, busses were seen as more economical and flexible. It was cheaper and faster to add bus lines that did not require the infrastructure of rail systems. The Depression dealt another blow to ridership.

Left: I don't think we're in Yonkers anymore, Toto. The wild wilderness of Warburton on the way to Hastings was nevertheless served by the trolley.



Getty Square in 1930. Just what a vibrant downtown should look like.



An 1886 horse drawn streetcar of the Yonkers Railway Company.

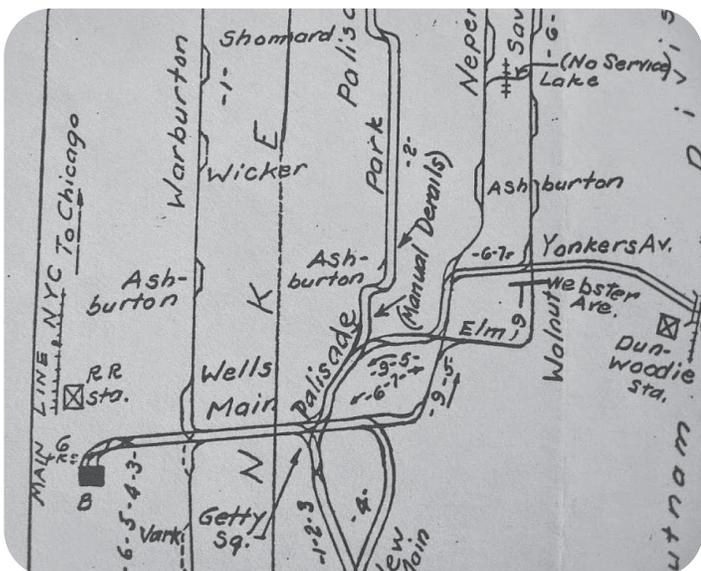




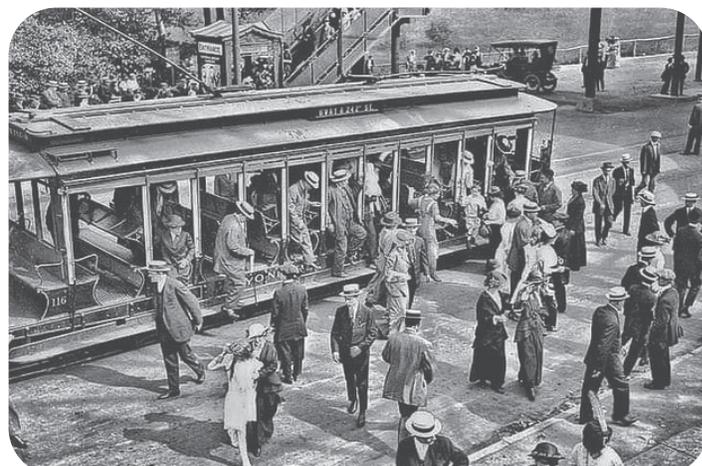
No. 7 coming down Yonkers Avenue having crossed Bronx River Road on its way over to Mount Vernon. (late 40s early 50s just prior to shut down)



On Friday the 13th in March of 1931, an out of control trolley raced down the steep grade on Palisade Avenue wrecking two cars along the way before crashing through the front of a brick building at the foot of the hill. One person was killed and 37 injured. The car was designed to be operated by a motorman and a conductor. Cost saving measures eliminated the conductor who helped with the brakes.



Hand drawn sketch of the downtown portion of the Yonkers trolley routes giving some idea of the complexity of the system.



An open-air, summertime No. 1 trolley meets the subway at 242nd Street and Broadway in 1914.

During WW II gasoline and rubber tire rationing put trolley systems on life support for the time being, but with a little help from GM, Firestone, and Standard Oil in the post war era trolley systems across America were shutting down. By 1952 all the Yonkers lines had ceased operation.

Happily, all nine original Yonkers trolley routes with some modification continue serving the public in the guise of the Bee Line System. The trolley barn, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has been converted to loft-like condos and is also home to the Yonkers Brewing Company. With a nod to the days when things were built to last, forty-two of the "latest" Third Avenue trolleys built in 1939 (perhaps some from Yonkers) were sold to Vienna, Austria in 1949 where they continued in operation until 1969. ■



Last trolley ride, Nov. 12th, 1952.

What's all that activity at Sherwood House?

2021 welcomed a return to “almost normal” as COVID restrictions began to be relaxed, more people were vaccinated and communities felt a bit safer about venturing out into public. At the Sherwood House Museum, activity rebounded and featured outdoor and indoor activities with a hope of hitting full swing by the time spring of 2022 arrives. There was a lot of maintenance work done on the grounds and in the flowerbeds surrounding the museum property, with volunteers working weekly to spruce up gardens. In October, the Yonkers Historical Society hosted a successful flea market that drew a great deal of

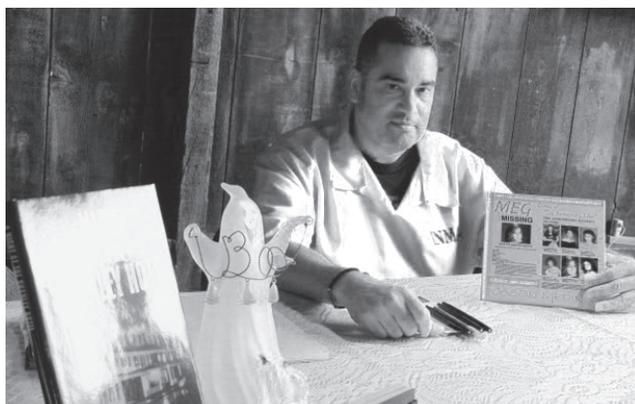


Volunteers replace split-rail fencing at Sherwood House

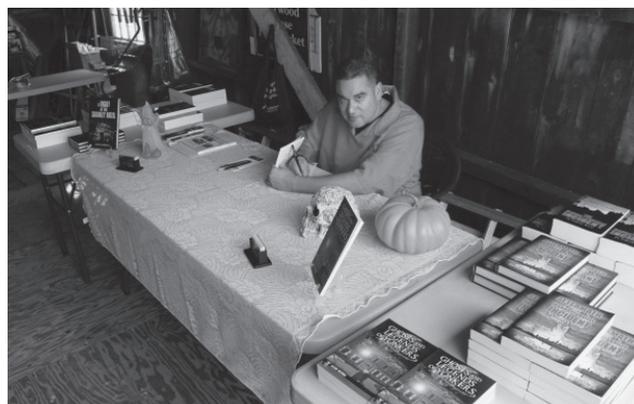
bargain hunters throughout the day. On Halloween Day there was a book signing by local author Jason Medina and patrons enjoyed tales told by the author. The museum was open to the public for the entire fall season with masked patrons able to venture into the building for the first time in a year and a half. Make a date to visit the museum to see what's new, take a tour, and learn about the history of the building and get insight as to what pre-revolutionary life was like in our area. Please be sure to visit the website at www.yonkershistoricalsociety.org for a full list of 2022 spring season dates and events which will commence on April 3rd. ■



Pleasant October day for the big outdoor flea market



Author Jason Medina



Jason Medina book signing on Halloween Day

2022 PATRICIA MANGOLD SCHOLARSHIPS

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: APRIL 4, 2022

This award is to be presented to a high school senior residing in Yonkers who has demonstrated both an educational and a significant personal interest in Yonkers history. The applicant must be planning to pursue further education.

First prize: \$1,000; Second prize: \$500.

Applicants will present a project showing understanding and appreciation of Yonkers history. The project may be in a medium chosen by the student: written essay, photographic montage, video, mixed media, etc. A bibliography or reference list must be included when applicable. Students may choose any topic, but the project should contain more than repetition of facts from the internet or text books. Possible themes for applicants to consider are: presentation of an argument based on Yonkers historical facts; relating Yonkers history to their own family; comparing the past and present in Yonkers; and showing Yonkers part in events of U.S. or World history. Projects are not limited to those suggestions. Several events, institutions,

businesses, organizations and cultures have shaped Yonkers history. People, starting with Native Americans through our most recent immigrants, are all part of this history.

- The application is available on request at yhsawards@gmail.com OR by calling the YHS Office.
- E-mail your application, project and transcript to yhsawards@gmail.com OR drop it off at the YHS Office in the Grinton I. Will Library, 1500 Central Park Ave., Yonkers, NY 10710, when the office is open. Call ahead of time (914) 961-8940 to confirm someone will be there, please leave a message, if necessary.
- If mailed, the deadline is by postmark April 4, 2022. Submit the application form, project and student transcript to:

**Yonkers Historical Society
Attn: Kathleen Ennis
Patricia Mangold Scholarship Awards
P.O. Box 190
Yonkers, New York 10710**

Eagle Scout Project MLK at Sherwood House

On the weekend of October 12-13, 2019, the Scarsdale Eagle Scouts of Troop 2 took time from their schedules to take on several tasks at Sherwood House Museum. All money spent to complete this project came from the combined efforts of the scouts and their parents. The project belonged to young John Tesler. Together with help from his troop, a few parents, and some friends, they painted the front of the Caretaker's Cottage, its porch, the nearby well, added an entrance arrow on the driveway, and they cemented in a metal post to re-hang the beautiful historic sign, which had been knocked down years earlier.

Thank you to his parents, his older brother, Joe, and all who helped with this project!

On Saturday, November 27, 2021, a long overdue Eagle Scout ceremony was held at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Scarsdale to honor John's recent rise to the esteemed rank of Eagle Scout. Representatives from the Yonkers Historical Society were invited to help celebrate the occasion. Jerry Ostroff was an honored guest, who said a few words on behalf of the society. During the ceremony, John received a framed photo displaying his hard work at Sherwood House as a gift. ■



(L to R) YHS member Jason Medina, Eagle Scout John Tesler, with Jerry Ostroff and Jackie Lorieo of the YHS



Scarsdale Eagle Scouts at work at the Sherwood House Museum

Hudson Valley Art Association Presents Elizabeth C. Morgan Award

In 2018 the Yonkers Historical Society partnered with the Hudson Valley Art Association (HVAA) to create the Elizabeth C. Morgan Floral Award to honor docent Betty Morgan after she passed away. It is presented each year at the National Annual Juried Exhibition of HVAA from categories including sculpture, watercolors, pastels, graphics and oil paintings. The 2021 winner was Eveline

Miller for a beautiful fall pastel called *Local Textures*.

The HVAA was founded in 1928 by artists of the Hudson Valley region in the studio of Jasper Cropsey (1823-1900), one of the most celebrated American landscape artists. The studio is in Hastings, NY and can be visited with an appointment. ■



The Ghost of Christmas Past

By Richard Mangini



The observance of Christmas in Colonial America bears little resemblance to the frenzied extravagance of today.

The Puritans who settled Massachusetts wanted to do away with Roman Catholic traditions thought to be excessive. This included Christmas celebrations that had their roots in the ancient Roman winter festival of Saturnalia. Christmas Day was treated like any other day, and anyone found feasting or refraining from work was fined. Since there was no mention of Christmas in the Bible and it's doubtful that Jesus was born on December 25th, the Puritans considered the day a sinner's excuse for goofing off.

Though the English colony in Virginia set aside Christmas Day as a day of rest, celebrations were necessarily curbed by the realities of frontier life. The traditions of holly and ivy and wassailing came to America later. Christmas was so ignored in early America that even after the Revolution the new US Congress met for the first time on December 25, 1789. Ultimately it took almost a century for Christmas to be recognized as a Federal holiday.



Fortunately for us, New York was once New Netherland settled by the more tolerant and worldly Dutch, and the Hudson Valley is steeped in their traditions. While the Dutch did celebrate Christmas Day, the real fun was Sinterklaas, a gift giving tradition when children left their shoes out on the night of December 5th to be

filled by St. Nicholas, the patron Saint of Amsterdam. Nicholas was a 4th-century, red-robed eastern bishop from what is now Turkey who was known for his charity and love of children. No reindeer for Sinterklaas – he rode in to town on a white steed, and good children left hay or carrots in their shoes in exchange for goodies.

The Dutch ate and drank their way through the Christmas season featuring special treats including little cakes known as “koekje” which gave rise to the American-English word cookie. Gradually the traditions of St. Nicholas' Day and Christmas merged and entered mainstream American culture. Through the nineteenth century the finishing touches were put on American Christmas and gift giving, including a revamped jolly old St. Nick courtesy of cartoonist Thomas Nast. ■

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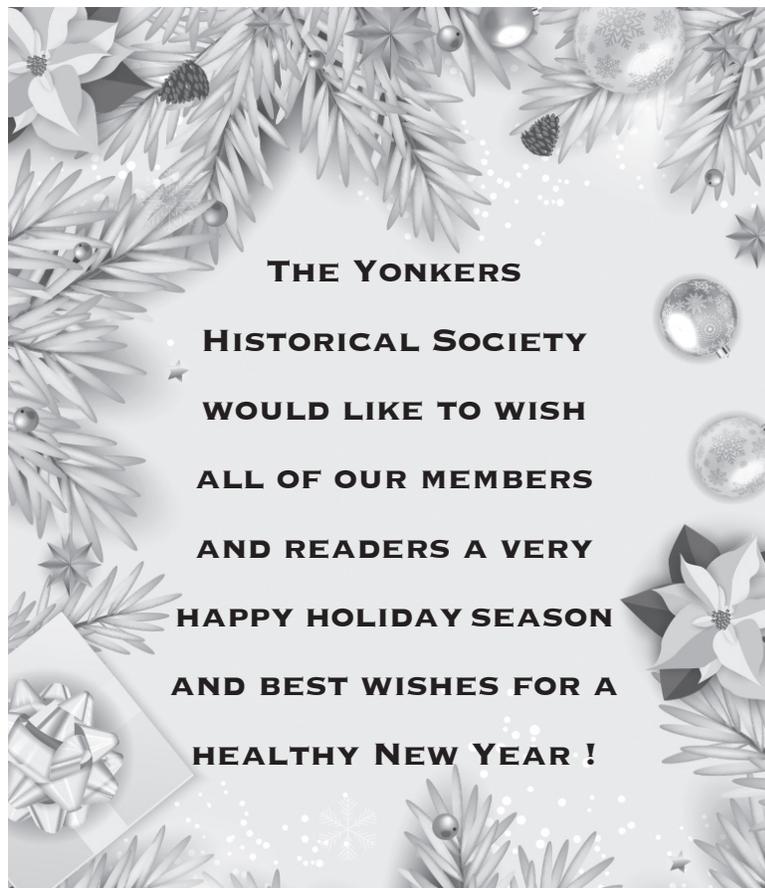
MARIANNE WINSTANLEY

**THE YHS
OPENING HOURS**

The Yonkers Historical Society office at the Grinton Will Library is open Thursday afternoons from 1pm to 5pm and by appointment.

Historic Sherwood House Museum for the 2022 season will be open on Sunday afternoons from 1pm to 4pm from April through June.

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.



**WE RELY ON YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT!
PLEASE RENEW YOUR 2021 MEMBERSHIP NOW!**



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

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