

# The Yonkers Historian

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## Against all Odds

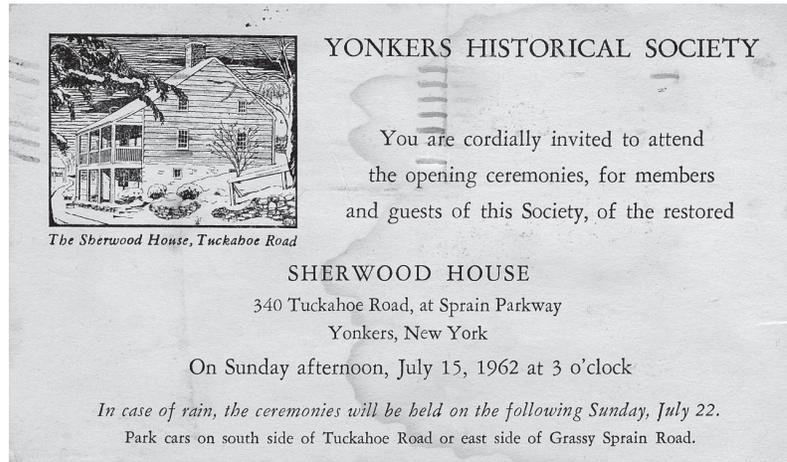
By Loren Chaidez

The adage “everything happens for a reason” is quite apropos relative to what we now know about the resilience of the Sherwood House Museum. How did this farmhouse dodge so many events that could have led to its demise? Sherwood House managed to avoid being burned to the ground during the Revolutionary War as loyalists and the British were ravaging homes and farms throughout our area. The building ultimately eluded the fate of the wrecking ball in the 1950’s, when ownership transferred from Con Edison to the Yonkers Historical Society to preserve it as a museum. Exposure to the elements over a period of almost three centuries has been a constant threat to the physical integrity of the building. Yet, the structure endures, with several strokes of good luck and a lot of tender loving care.

In this year of 2022, we are excited to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of the Sherwood House Museum. The original launch date was July 15th, 1962 when the doors first opened for all to appreciate. (Please be sure to peruse the article written in December of 1962 about the opening day events found on pages 8 and 9 of this newsletter). As always, docent-led tours of the museum are

available to the public, and outdoor activities including flea markets and other special events take place on the property. Ever-evolving displays and collections keep guests looking forward to a return visit.

Perhaps the survival of this humble old dwelling in its incongruous setting and its incarnation as a history museum speaks to the notion that “it was meant to be.” ■



Opening day invitation, July 15th, 1962



Sherwood House as it looks today

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Editor: Loren Chaidez

While every effort is made to ensure accuracy the Society cannot assume responsibility for statements made by contributors.

## LETTER from the PRESIDENT

As life for many of us gradually gets back to normal, and events can once again be scheduled and executed, we look forward to a busy season of catching up and tending to work at hand. The trustees and volunteers of the Yonkers Historical Society (YHS) have been in high gear preparing for the first fundraising dinner in several years. Our dedicated archives committee is continuing to explore stored historical documents and to catalog pertinent artifacts that are relevant to the history of the City of Yonkers. A major push to digitize assets and metadata of material is underway. This will be a tremendous resource, not only for the YHS to handily retrieve info, but for the public to be able to access information and photographs available via our website as well. We will announce further progress of this project this year.

I hope you will continue to peruse our newsletter for event dates to mark on your calendar throughout the

year, as well as visiting our website ([www.yonkershistoricalsociety.org](http://www.yonkershistoricalsociety.org)) for future happenings. Something for students to consider is submitting a project for the 2022 Mangold Scholarship which has an extended deadline of May 10th, Loren Chaidez 2022. (Detailed info is on page 7).

May 14th and June 18th are our scheduled days for the first two outdoor flea markets of which we plan to have three in total this year. Our commitment to keeping the Sherwood House Museum open for all to enjoy is at the top of our list and we hope to see you this year !

Warm Regards,

*Loren Chaidez*



Loren Chaidez

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

The Society seeks volunteers this season to help tend to our Sherwood House gardens (no experience necessary) and to aid docents on Sunday afternoons. We hope you will consider offering some of your time to help out and perhaps gain an insider's view of how the museum is run. We have experienced volunteers that can guide you through the process. An hour or two a week would be of tremendous help! Contact the YHS at: [info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org) or call: (914) 961-8940 Sherwood House is located at 340 Tuckahoe Road, Yonkers.

## 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](mailto:yonkershistorian@gmail.com)

# Dr. Iris de Rode Visits New York

Throughout the week of March 14th Dr. Iris de Rode, a respected and learned historian visited parts of Yonkers, The Bronx, and several other villages in Westchester County to have a first-hand view of sites where decisive meetings were held in 1780-81 that helped to determine the outcome of the American fight for independence. She travelled here from Paris to visit historic places that she addressed in her detailed doctorate thesis of 2019. On Wednesday, March 16th, a presentation was held to impart fascinating detailed accounts of events that took place during that pivotal time in history. Orchestrated by Revolutionary Westchester 250's (RW250) President, Constance Kehoe, and by the Yonkers Historical Society's Mary Hoar, the featured presentation by Dr. De Rode, with co-presenters Nick Dembowski of the Kingsbridge

three speakers covered engrossing aspects of that challenging time in history that gave listeners a comprehensive perspective of the difficulties in battling the British.

The week's events were co-hosted by RW250, The Kingsbridge Historical Society, the Yonkers Historical Society and Friends of Odell House Rochambeau Headquarters. Among the places visited during the week were Philipse Manor Hall, Kingsbridge, Valentine's Hill, our very own Sherwood House, Verplanck's Point and the Odell House Rochambeau Headquarters in Hartsdale. ■

To enjoy viewing the presentation  
"Grand Reconnaissance Event"  
insert this link into your web browser:  
<https://youtu.be/8R-DwR69INo>



From left to right: RW250's President, Constance Kehoe; Dr. Iris de Rode; YHS President, Loren Chaidez; Frank Limocelli; YHS Trustee, Richard Mangini

Historical Society and Dr. Erik Weiselberg, also of RW250, was given to an audience of about 150 fans of history at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers.

The focus of Dr. de Rode's lecture was about her research of the alliance between the American and French armies – the Grand Reconnaissance - a military operation that was carried out by General Washington and Commander of French armies, Rochambeau, in July of 1781. With additional detail conveyed by Mr. Dembowski and Dr. Weiselberg, the



Dr. Iris de Rode and Nick Dembowski

# “Here’s your Croton Highball”

By Richard Mangini

Cheerfully used by old-school NYC waitresses (preferably with Betty Boop voices) proffering ice filled water glasses, this phrase refers to the wonderfully pure and tasty tap water enjoyed by New Yorkers since 1842 from the Croton reservoir in northern Westchester.

Waterborne disease epidemics, and disastrous fires in New York City necessitated securing a plentiful supply of potable water by the early 19th century. Impounding the Bronx River was considered, but the Croton River with greater water flow and fewer locals to displace (and complain) was selected for a reservoir. A 41-mile, gravity-fed aqueduct to convey the water was constructed passing through Yonkers on its way to Manhattan. Increased demand led to expanded storage, and a second Croton Aqueduct (also beneath Yonkers) was completed in 1890.

In the new century a thirstier NYC reached across the Hudson to tap watersheds in the Catskills with an aqueduct tunneled under the river. This system was barely in use before a plan to impound the east and west branches of the Delaware River was initiated in the late 30s adding yet another aqueduct under the river in 1944. The entire system is comprised of 19 reservoirs in seven counties, including Westchester and Putnam, draining some two thousand square miles of protected watershed.

Fascinating, but where does OUR water come from, you say? I’m getting there.

Water initially falls from the sky through the process of evaporation and condensation (better known as rain). Believe it or not, there has been the same amount of water on the planet since the Mesozoic Era. Once in a while a few water molecules wander off through the outer atmosphere, but are replaced by new ones hitching rides on asteroids. All in all, a zero-sum game. So, the same water has been sloshing around for over 250 million years. Unfortunately, much of the fresh water on or under the ground has been rendered unfit to drink thanks to us humans!

Yonkers, not faced with the scale of expanding water demands as New York, made do with wells and surface water sources like the Sawmill River. Growth and industrial development changed all that. An 1869 fire initiated the planning and creation of waterworks to protect the city. The result was the impounding of the Grassy Sprain and Sprain Brooks creating the Grassy Sprain Reservoir and construction of the pumping station on Tuckahoe Road in 1875 (near the Ridge Hill entrance). Small reservoirs and water towers were built on high elevations for distribution. Remains of the Fort Field Reservoir may still be seen next to Saunders High School on Palmer Road. The Nodine Hill water tower built of



*The old Grassy Sprain Road visible during the draw-down of the reservoir. Note remains of bridge, center.*



*Aqueduct interior.*

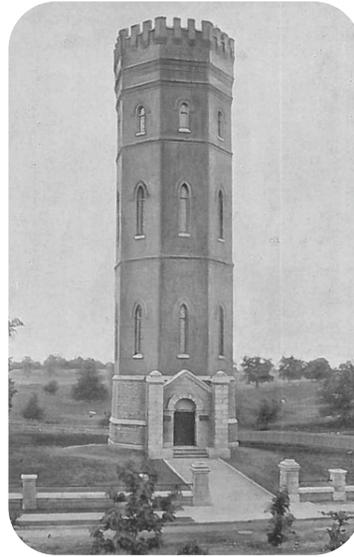
masonry and steel at the top of Elm Street famously collapsed early one windy Saturday morning in 1936 resulting in a 100,000-gallon tsunami washing people out of bed, injuring others, and damaging homes and cars.

Around 1900 a larger dam increased the capacity of the Grassy Sprain Reservoir. Our city was water self-sufficient with surplus enough to sell to New York. Yonkers continued to provide treated drinking water to residents from local sources including the reservoir and Saw Mill River until the 1980s when the state amended water quality regulations. The city then determined it was more economical to buy water from NYC than to build and maintain new filtration and treatment facilities.

The NYC watershed system serves eight million of its own residents and one million in Westchester, Putnam, Orange, and Ulster Counties. Our water is taken from either the Delaware or Catskill Aqueducts, as well as from Kensico



*The last of the keepers' residences along the aqueduct (located in Dobbs Ferry).*



*Lake Avenue water tower.*



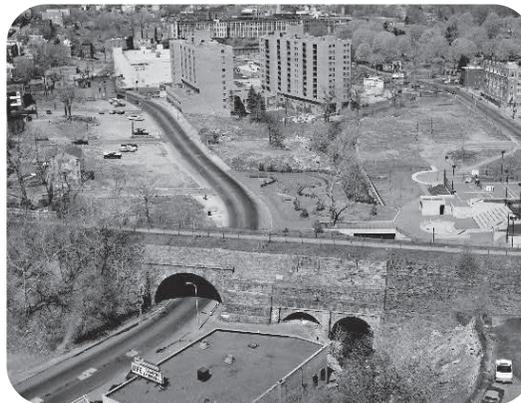
*Nodine Hill water tower.*

Reservoir which mixes water from both those sources with a bit of Westchester watershed added for local flavor. Yonkers uses its own recipe for disinfection and other treatments (see [yonkersny.gov/waterquality](http://yonkersny.gov/waterquality)). Citywide average water consumption is 124 gallons per capita daily costing \$3.79/100 cubic feet or 748 gallons. Compare that to a case of bottled water at the supermarket!

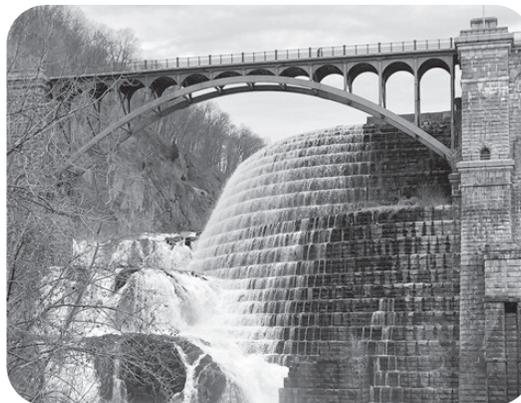
Unfortunately, no Croton water makes its way to our taps. You'll have to go to the Bronx for your highball. You can, however, visit Croton Gorge Park and view the dam and spillway. Just up Route 9, the scene is quite magnificent and a great place for a picnic. Van Cortlandt Manor is on the way, and Croton Point Park is nearby if you want to make a day of it.

Retired as a fresh water conduit in 1965, 26.2 miles of the Old Croton Aqueduct's route from Van Cortlandt Park at the border of The Bronx and Yonkers up to the Croton dam was purchased by the state and is now the Old Croton Aqueduct Historic Trail. The linear state park passing through urban areas and quiet residential communities alike is primarily used for strolling, hiking, and running; though parts are suitable for horseback riding and biking, even snowshoeing and cross-country skiing for the more adventuresome.

In the meantime the draw-down of the Grassy Sprain



*Stone viaduct carried the aqueduct over Nepperhan Ave and the Saw Mill River.*



*New Croton Dam spillway.*

Reservoir, which many of you have noticed, was necessary to allow the city to repair and restore the dam's gatehouse and spillway. Uncovered by the receding waters was the ghost of an old road complete with remnants of a stone bridge. This was a section of Grassy Sprain Road which once crossed the valley (and brook) diagonally from west to east. Today this road is split in two – a dead end stump lies to the west of the reservoir, and East Grassy Sprain Road to the east side just where you'd expect to find it. Work on the gatehouse is almost complete and the lake has been refilling as quickly as mother nature can manage it. ■



*Right: Stone air vents kept the water fresh on its 41-mile journey.*

# Philipse Manor Hall News & Updates

Reprinted from "Friends of Philipse Manor Hall" - January, 2022

As we begin another new year, I wanted to take the opportunity to thank all of our members and friends for their support throughout 2021. Last year was clearly a time of unexpected change for Philipse Manor Hall, as we saw the commencement of an ambitious eleven million dollar renovation and upgrade to the site. Improvements include a complete redesign of the grounds with new lighting, walkways and designated areas of interest. Inside, the house is receiving a well deserved repair and restoration, whilst the addition of an elevator and new bathrooms will certainly go a long way towards bringing the house up to national museum standards. The Caretakers cottage is also receiving a complete overhaul that will, when finished, provide the site with a commercial kitchen space which will be a tremendous asset when hosting events. As many of you know these upgrades have been on our wishlist for many years and will now provide Philipse Manor Hall with amenities worthy of a truly great historic house!

As Yonkers' oldest structure the new museum promises to be a tremendous resource for the people of Yonkers. Technology driven exhibits will be featured throughout the house expanding the historic narrative to include more detailed accounts of the various lives and events that are woven into the history of the site. The extensive exhibition will also retain many familiar treasures such as the famed Cochrane collection of presidential portraits and draw special attention to the various unique architectural features that help make Philipse Manor Hall such a special place. Local favorites such as the popular Community Gallery will continue as will many of the familiar events and happenings that have proven so popular over the years. Suffice it to say, when the doors reopen there will be something of interest for everyone.

We're excited to welcome our members and friends back to the museum later this year, and will in the coming months have more information regarding the special events planned for the museum reopening. With so many new opportunities to learn about and share the history of Philipse Manor Hall, we greatly look forward to seeing you all there and hope you bring your family and friends.

Regards,

*Dave Martin*

Board President

# 2022 PATRICIA MANGOLD SCHOLARSHIPS EXTENDED DEADLINE: MAY 10, 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](mailto:yhsawards@gmail.com) OR by calling the YHS Office.
- E-mail your application, project and transcript to [yhsawards@gmail.com](mailto: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 May 10, 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**

## Art History

In February, several members of the Yonkers Historical Society (YHS) were invited to Yonkers Middle High School to speak with students about a mural project they're working on that combines art with history in a unique way. YHS members Jacqueline Lorieo, Richard Mangini and Loren Chaidez visited the tenth grade sculpture/ceramics class taught by Denise Cachoian to listen to students' ideas and review their research. The students have chosen elements of local historic interest to be communicated in a series of their own hand-made ceramic tiles. The full concept of the project will be realized with the assembly of a relief tile mosaic that represents these facets of history displayed in chronological order. The class is planning to affix the final project to the exterior of the school for all to view. Some of the topics investigated include native American culture, the discovery of the Hudson River, the colonial and early-American periods, and the city's industrial development. The stories and images of home-town iconic figures in various fields such as Ella Fitzgerald, Mary J. Blige, Jon Voight, Art Carney, Edwin Armstrong, and Leo Bakeland, may also be intertwined into the montage. The YHS encourages this creative endeavor and hopes that its two-year projected timeline will come to fruition. ■



*Left: School teacher Denise Cachoian*



*From left to right – YHS members Richard Mangini, Loren Chaidez and Jacqueline Lorieo at work with Denise Cachoian*

# Sherwood House Makes Its Debut

## *Restored Historic Farmhouse Visited by Many Since its Opening in Mid-July*

*Reprinted from "Yonkers Historical Bulletin" - December 1962*

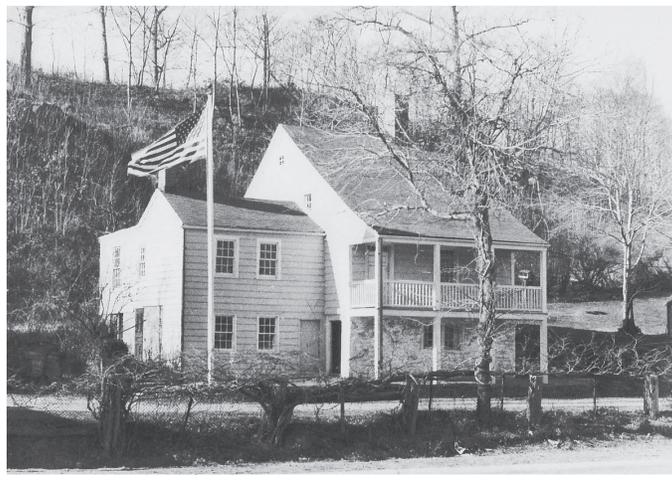
On a beautiful Sunday afternoon last summer—July 15th to be exact—an event took place which had been long and eagerly anticipated by the members of our Society. Sherwood House was formally opened to the public, bringing to a successful culmination the efforts of many people over seven long years.

Work started in 1955, when the society formally took possession of the historic old farmhouse. It had been given to us by Consolidated Edison Company on whose power-line right-of-way it stands, that we might restore and preserve it for the people of this city and vicinity. The work has been carried on; now slowly, now rapidly; now optimistically, now clouded by problems and doubts. For nearly two years work was held virtually at a standstill, first, by construction of the Sprain Parkway in front of the house, then by the erection of a high-tension tower literally in our dooryard. Once these were out of the way, however, we were able to give a giant push to the work hoping to finish it by mid-summer. With the invaluable help of two able and cooperative builders who took a keen personal interest in the work—Reginald and Herbert Woche—and the continued efforts of our own member, Harry B. Farrar, skilled in masonry, things were brought so nearly to completion that we could open on the planned date. True, some things still remain to be done, but they will be taken in stride this next year.

Nearly one hundred people attended the opening ceremonies. Standing or seated in the shade of the old farmhouse they heard President Frank L. Walton give a word



*This view in kitchen shows main door. Note oak beams, stone floor and original hardware.*



*This recent photograph of the restored farmhouse on Tuckahoe Road, was taken from Sprain Brook Parkway which passes in front of the place.*

of greeting, then Chairman R. Irwin Johannesen of the Sherwood House Committee who related briefly the history of the old house and its restoration. Next, Mayor John E. Flynn cut the broad ribbon which officially barred the front door to the public. Sherwood House was open at last!

The guests were taken on a tour of the house. Acting in the double capacity of interior decorator and chief guide, Mrs. Alvah Leeds (under whose experienced direction antique furniture and artifacts had been secured from a wide variety of sources) with Mmes. Farrar, Johannesen, Stallard, Sweet, and Walton and Miss Barbara Thomson took the visitors through the house in small groups, explaining the interesting details of the building and its furnishings. Many persons commented on the charm of the ancient dwelling, the authenticity of the restoration, and the beauty and appropriateness of the antique furniture which had been donated by members

and friends or loaned by such institutions as the Hudson River Museum and Philipse Manor Hall.

Refreshments were served on the lawn under the chairmanship of Mrs. Farrar, and souvenir tiles and copies of Mr. Walton's book "Pillars of Yonkers" were sold in the barn by Dr. Alvah Leeds. Prior to the opening, ladies of the six Yonkers garden clubs had worked on the grounds and set out flowering trees and plants.

From July 21 to October 14 the house was open on Saturday, Sunday and Holiday afternoons from 2 to 5. To guide the public through, a loyal committee of volunteers wearing colonial costumes gave many hours of their valuable



*Mayor John E. Flynn, having cut the ceremonial ribbon, congratulates President Walton (left) and Chairman Johannesen on the Society's efforts to preserve the historic house for the people of this city.*

time. These included the Mmes. Leeds, Farrar, George Daniell, Donald Smith, Robert Cushman and Edward Madden, and the Misses Isabel Scotland and Barbara Thomson.

The interest shown in Sherwood House has been most gratifying. Since its opening, the house has been visited by over 350 people from 17 New York State communities besides Yonkers, and from 12 other states.

Closed now for the winter months, Sherwood House will be re-opened for the 1963 season in late April or early May. Work scheduled for the coming year includes the painting and furnishing of the interesting third floor bedrooms with their wide board wall sheathing, the restoring of the old well-house, the erection of a colonial sign at the entrance, and the planting of shrubs along the driveway.

The accompanying photographs will give the reader an idea of how the house looked at the time of its opening. But they are hardly a substitute for a visit to the house itself. If you have not yet been to Sherwood House, we suggest that you put it at the top of your list of "things to do in '63." ■



*The ancient kitchen of Sherwood House is oldest and most picturesque room. Stone fireplace, bake-oven, hewn beams are original, date from 1740.*



*The parlor, on second floor, is the house's most formal room. Classic mantel, china cupboard and 20-paned window are interesting features.*



*Dr. Ingersoll's office - he was Yonkers' first physician - dates from early 1800's. This ground floor room also served as a family dining room.*



*Owner's bedroom, on second floor, has an unusual mantel. The simple doors and other woodwork show room to be little changed from early days.*

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**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 is open Sunday afternoons from 1pm to 4pm, April 10th, 2022 through June 26th.

Call the office at (914) 961-8940 or email: [info@yonkershistoricalsociety.org](mailto: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 2022 MEMBERSHIP NOW!**



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## BECOME A YHS VOLUNTEER!

I am interested in the following Volunteer opportunities:

- 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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