

organization

Patriotism: Past and present

COLUMBIA MID-HUDSON VALLEY CHAPTER OF THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION CELEBRATES 35 YEARS

San Francisco, 1876: To commemorate the centennial signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1876, a group of male descendants of those who served in or supported the Revolutionary War formed the Sons of the Revolutionary Sires.

United States, 1886: The Sons of the Revolutionary Sires changes its name to the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). In 1906, SAR is granted a congressional charter by then president Theodore Roosevelt, himself a member.

Ghent, New York, 1971: Fifteen men from Columbia County start a local chapter of SAR which will go on to include members from Ulster, Dutchess and Greene counties.

Today, there are over 470 SAR chapters spread across all 50 states with roughly 26,000 members. There are also chapters in Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Switzerland.

This year, the Columbia Mid-Hudson chapter of SAR celebrates 35 years of community service and patriotism. According to the national SAR Web site, <http://www.sar.org/>, the objective of the organization is to "maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom, an appreciation for true patriotism, a respect for our national symbols, the value of American citizenship, and the unifying force of e pluribus unum that has created, from the people of many nations, one nation and one people."

The local chapter of SAR shares in these pursuits, but it also "just likes to do things for the community," said chapter president Rodney S. Andrews, a member since 2001.

Among its local community activities, Andrews



Columbia Mid-Hudson chapter of Sons of the Revolution president Rodney S. Andrews enjoys the camaraderie of the organization.

Among its local community activities, Andrews said the local chapter of SAR works with its sister group, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), to preserve and maintain historical cemeteries, including the dedication of new plaques and monuments. The SAR also hosts a pair of essay contests: one for Eagle Scouts and the other for high school juniors and seniors. Both Revolutionary War-themed contests are culled from local chapters, with winning entries moving up through state and national contests to receive the ultimate crown. For the former, a certificate and pin are the reward. For the latter, a scholarship of an undetermined dollar amount is the ultimate goal.

According to Andrews, the local chapter of the SAR is looking to work with the Senate House, as well as the Boy Scouts of America on future projects.

'A camaraderie'

Three of the original founders of the local SAR are still active members of the group: current chaplain Robert French of Ghent, Charles Barnard of Claverack and Charles Nichols of Philmont. Today the

local chapter is almost 40 members strong.

Although some members have moved from the area, seven of them have retained their commitment to the SAR from their new homes in Florida, North Carolina and Maryland.

"It's a camaraderie," said Andrews of the distant members. "They always have an open invitation."

For Andrews, himself, the local chapter is something of a family affair. His son, Robert Andrews is a member, as is his grandson, Steven Petsche. Petsche, the chapter's Web master, lives in Texas, but is currently enrolled in Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Petsche's mother, Andrews's daughter Renee, is a member of the DAR.

Current and former United States presidents have been SAR members, including: George W. Bush, George H.W. Bush, Jimmy Carter, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Herbert Hoover. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was a member of the SAR, as was Spain's King Juan Carlos I.

Interested? The local chapter of the SAR is now accepting applications from anyone who is interested in joining, though the organization only allows males of "good repute" who can provide written documentation - "State or church paperwork is best," said Andrews - of lineal bloodline descent from an ancestor who was an active supporter of the Revolutionary War. These include descendents of military veterans, including those who served in the Continental Army, Continental Navy and state militias and naval forces. Descendents of signers of the Declaration of Independence and members of the Continental Congress and civilians who provided arms or assistance to the American effort are eligible, as are those who signed oaths of allegiance. Additionally, descendents of soldiers from allied nations such as France or Spain who fought in support of American Independence may also be eligible.

For more information on the Columbia Mid-Hudson chapter of the SAR, visit the group's website at www.geocities.com/cmhsar.

- *Crispin Kott*