

We invite you...

...to become part of the docent team at the Oberlin Heritage Center, Oberlin's nationally-recognized history museum, historical society, and historic preservation organization. As a docent, you will help to share Oberlin's unique and powerful history with visitors from around the world.

Docents guide tour visitors—either walk-in guests or prescheduled group tours—through three buildings: the Monroe House (1866), the Little Red Schoolhouse (1836), and the Jewett House (1884). All three of these buildings feature period interiors, and two of the buildings were homes of important figures in Oberlin and American history.

There is also a periodic need for room docents. Instead of moving from room to room with the tour, a room docent stays with his or her room and answers visitors' questions as needed.

Docents help to interpret the Oberlin Heritage Center's historic buildings, and share the stories of the Oberlin men and women who made history. You aren't expected to be a walking encyclopedia of Oberlin history—your primary goal is to encourage an interest in history and pique people's curiosity to learn more!

What is my commitment?

We need docents for walk-in tours (no reservations needed) on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. We also maintain a busy calendar of scheduled group tours, including many school groups. Docents are needed for all of these tours, and to serve as room docents during occasional special events. Some docents commit to a regular weekly time, covering one walk-in slot every week. Others prefer to sign up for scheduled group tours. (And some do both!) We do ask that you commit to giving at least four tours per year.

Am I qualified?

You don't need to be a historian to be a successful docent! The most important characteristics are an interest in Oberlin history, a belief in history's relevance to life today, and a desire to help welcome visitors to our community. Docents must be able to politely engage all visitors and enthusiastically represent the Oberlin Heritage Center!

Please note that tours may involve considerable standing, walking, or stair-climbing, so docents need a fair degree of mobility. Docents must also feel comfortable in crowded and noisy situations, and be able to speak in a loud and clear voice.

We encourage people of all ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and professions to get involved with our docent program. We want you to share your special perspective!

What's in it for me?

The Oberlin Heritage Center gains a lot from your participation in the docent program, yet the benefits aren't one-sided! You'll gain a new appreciation for Oberlin's history and its contributions to American history. You'll learn about historic "material culture"—old houses, furniture, toys, and more. You'll meet interesting people, including fellow docents and tour visitors. You'll develop public speaking skills. And, best of all, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you are contributing to the vitality of Oberlin and the enrichment of the lives of its residents and visitors. What more could you ask?

I'm not good at memorizing dates...

Though the general outline of the tour is determined by the layout of the houses and the placement of photos and other "cues," we do NOT have a script that we hand to docents and ask them to memorize. We provide "talking points" documents and information about the houses and their residents, but to a degree what will be said is up to each individual docent. We encourage all docents to develop their tours with an emphasis on what interests them, and what they think will interest their tour visitors.

How do I become a docent?

All prospective docents are asked first to go on at least one tour. Seeing a tour “in action” gives you a basic introduction to the Oberlin Heritage Center, Oberlin history, and the “end product” of the docent training process. It helps you begin thinking about how to share information with a group and allows you to hear one docent’s special take on the information to be presented.

Interested individuals should then fill out a volunteer application form and arrange for a brief interview with the Museum Education and Tour Coordinator to answer any questions one or the other may have. New docents then attend a four hour training session, designed to present all of the material you’ll need to start leading tours. This training session covers the content you’ll be presenting, and gives some tips on how to successfully communicate that information. New docents are invited to observe more tours and give a practice tour before leading tours on their own.

To help you prepare to give tours, you will be given a Docent Training Manual, which contains information on the houses and their residents, the Oberlin Heritage Center, and the nuts-and-bolts of how to give a tour. As long as you remain an active docent, this manual is yours to study, write in, or take on vacation!

To further develop your skills as a docent, reading materials and docent meetings for continued learning are made available. We also offer occasional field trips for docent “professional training.”

Where do I sign up?

Contact Amanda Manahan, the Museum Education and Tour Coordinator at (440) 774-1700 or send an email to tourinfo@oberlinheritage.org. We will be pleased to answer any questions you may have, and to set you up to begin your docent training.

If, after looking over this information, you’ve decided that being a docent isn’t really your cup of tea but you still want to get involved at the Oberlin Heritage Center, by all means, contact us! There are plenty of other opportunities available for volunteers. Whatever your special skills, odds are excellent that we can find a way to use them. Please join us!

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Become a Volunteer Docent



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