

# Making History Every Day

January and February, 2020, Volume 2, Issue 1

Oxford Historical Society, a 501 (c) 3 charitable organization

Twitchell Rowland Homestead Museum

P.O. Box 582, 60 Towner Lane, Oxford, CT 06478

## Mr. Munn's Schoolhouse at Twitchell-Rowland Homestead December 27, 2019



Historical Society plans to restore the schoolhouse to provide a living history experience.

### What Did it Look Like?

Details on the early history of Oxford schools are relatively few. There is a chapter in *History of the Town of Oxford* by Norman Litchfield and Sabina Connolly Hoyt that offers a quote describing a school of the period:

"A continuous desk ran around three sides of the room, leaving an aisle next the wall. It had one long continuous bench, over which the scholars had to step, in order to be seated. In the open space in front was the teacher's table."

It wasn't until 1899 that the Board of Education expended \$8.20 for 26 desks.

"The school had but one room, which at first was heated by an open fire place, but which by about 1820, had a cast iron stove. It was the duty of one of the older boys to see to it that a good supply of firewood was on hand throughout the winter, and each school morning he had to be on hand early to build the fire so as to have the room fairly warm before school opened.

"Generally there were two terms, winter and summer. "The winter term began the week after Thanksgiving Day and continued twelve to sixteen weeks...school kept every day in the week except Sunday."

Winslow Homer Paintings illustrate typical rural schools and school furnishings during the 1850s.



The schoolhouse in the above picture called *Snap-the-Whip* resembles the style of Mr. Munn's Schoolhouse. The engraving on paper was in *Harpers Weekly*, September 20, 1873.



The furnishings in *The Noon Recess* were typical of the era in country schools, when teaching duties were being taken over largely by women who were professionally trained. The drawing appeared opposite an anonymous poem which read:

Yes, hide your little tearstained face / Behind that well-thumbed book, my boy; / Your troubled thoughts are all intent / Upon the game your mates enjoy, / While you this recess hour must spent / On Study bench without a friend..."

## Thanks to Friends!

*To everyone who donated online during Dec. 3, 2019 Giving Tuesday and mailed donations to the society – we are grateful for your support and caring. Also thank you for visiting the Homestead and ‘feeding’ our Donation Jar on Open House Sundays.*

Open Houses in December at the Twitchell Rowland Homestead brought lots of folks interested to see the Munn Schoolhouse in its new home at the Oxford Historical Society campus at 60 Towner Lane.

Preservation Carpenter Eric Iott of Seymour worked away through the sun, wind, snow and ice of December to restore the roof rafters to their original positions while adding reinforcements as needed – strategically. Then a deck of new ¾ inch plywood covered the rafters to create a roof to resist the coming winter – covered with a tarp to help with water and ice proofing.

By New Year’s Eve the work was completed. Now we wait for spring to re-roof the building and move on to other repairs.

## Local History in Print

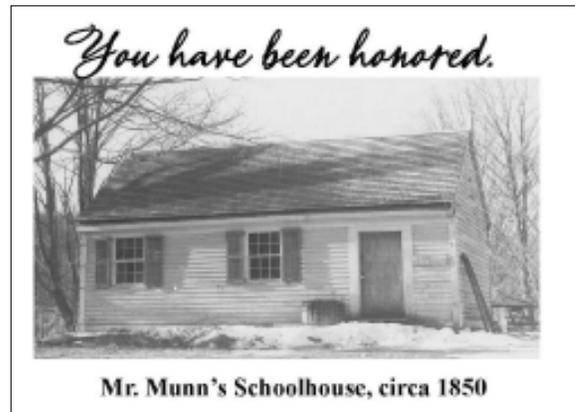
A selection of books is on sale including the new *The Railroad in Oxford* (2019), *World War II Revisited* (2018), *Historic Buildings of Oxford, Past and Present* (2017). Over a dozen other titles are available as well as copies of the 1868 colored town map featuring school districts with notations on businesses and property owners. Maps are \$5, prices of the books vary.

These items are also sold through the Town Clerk’s Office at Oxford Town Hall.



### **NEW! Stevenson Dam Notecards**

A set includes ten different vintage photos from the 1916-1919 construction of this area landmark. Each card is labeled with a unique historic caption on the back. A set of ten with ten envelopes is available for a \$5 donation. Stop into the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead to pick up these and shop from other styles of photo notecards featuring Oxford themes.



Honor an Educator notecards make a great gift or special greeting card for a friend or teacher.

Inspired by a gift of \$2500 honoring the teachers who educated the donor’s daughters to benefit the Munn Schoolhouse Project, the notecards have become popular with local families.

The gift cards also may be purchased in the Town Clerk’s Office or at The Twitchell-Rowland Homestead Museum Open House (2-4 pm) on the first and third Sundays of each month. For further information please call 203 888-0230.

## **TWITCHELL-ROWLAND HOMESTEAD OPEN HOUSE DATES:**

Sunday, Jan. 5, 2 - 4 pm

Sunday, Jan. 19, 2 - 4 pm

Sunday, Feb. 2, 2 - 4 pm

Sunday, Feb. 16, 2 - 4 pm

**ON DISPLAY THRU Jan. 5:** Christmas Collections - Seasonal decorations by the Garden Club plus displays filled with Christmas books, cookie cutters and collectible holiday cards surrounded by vintage glass Christmas ornaments.

**COMING NEXT:** Starting January 19, our next display will feature artifacts retrieved by Oxford resident and scuba diver Doug Reich from the bottom of the Connecticut River.

**FREE Admission Tours available  
Twitchell-Rowland Homestead  
60 Towner Lane, Oxford**

***COME VISIT US!***

**Black History Month:  
Oxford's Ebenezer Bassett  
Saturday, Feb. 15<sup>th</sup> 1:30-3 pm  
Oxford Public Library  
49 Great Oak Road, Oxford**



Meet the area's early black leader who was named America's Ambassador to Haiti in 1869. Born in Litchfield, his family later returned to the Valley. As a child he attended Five Mile School in Oxford where he was an outstanding student. In 1853 he was the first black student to attend the Connecticut Normal School (now Central

Connecticut State University). After graduation, he taught in New Haven and later in Philadelphia.

Appointed by President U.S. Grant, Bassett was the first African-American diplomat and the fourth U.S. Ambassador to Haiti since the two countries established relations in 1862.

The great-grandson of slaves, Bassett's grandfather Tobiah, was sold to John Wooster of Oxford. Tobiah won his freedom through his service in the American Revolution. Tobiah had a reputation for honor and intelligence in both the white and black communities and was elected a black governor, an honorary leadership position, by the black community of Derby in 1815.

His son, Eben Tobias, was also elected and served as a black governor from 1840 to 1845. E. T. Bassett was a black governor in Oxford when he placed the following advertisement for a Military exercise and ball to be held at what is now the Oxford House.

**Attention, Battalion!**

A battalion muster will be held at Mr. D. R. Lum's, in Oxford center, on Thursday, Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>, 1855, at 10 o'clock a. m. At which place all members and volunteers are invited to appear in uniform, for exercise and inspection.

Gov. Homer, of Plainville, and Company, are respectfully invited to attend. Governors Homer and Bassett will be escorted to the Hall, at 1 o'clock p under a national salute.

N. B.—A social BALL will be given in the evening, at which the company of those wishing to attend is respectfully invited.

o11-pd2w38 E. T. BASSETT, Governor.

Seymour Town Historian Marian O'Keefe and a documentary video by U.S. State Department member Chris Teal tells about the life of this remarkable man.

The free program is presented by the Oxford Historical Society and the snow date is Sat. Feb. 29.

**Woman's History Month:  
Oxford's Adeline Gray Featured  
in Rosie the Riveter Author Talk  
Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup> 1:30-3 pm  
Oxford Public Library  
49 Great Oak Road, Oxford**

When the men were mobilized for the war effort women took on jobs they never expected and earned a new nickname: Rosie the Riveter. This program celebrating Women's History Month is presented by Gretchen Caulfield of the CT chapter of the American Rosie the Riveter Association.



Oxford's Adeline Gray, who grew up on Oxford Road across from Center School, is noted as the first to test the non-silk parachute manufactured in the CT parachute factory where she worked during World War II. She was a barnstormer (trick airplane pilot) in her leisure time and a national icon for the war effort appearing in newspaper and magazine ads.

Learn more at this free program presented by the Oxford Historical Society.



**Stevenson Dam Draws a Crowd**

Riverside Fire House in Oxford on Nov. 17 was a full house and John Babina used three screens to amplify the views of his photos of the historic Stevenson Dam.

John added new high resolution photos scanned direct to computer allowing highlighting and enlarging to view amazing detail. Lettering on the side of equipment revealed the name Blakeslee, clothes and faces in group photos showed period styles and garments.

The encore event helped the Society continue to support the restoration project of the Munn Schoolhouse.

## Would YOU vote for Oxford's Rural Heritage?

If you were asked to vote to support Oxford's Rural Heritage, would you join others in supporting the Oxford Historical Society and all their preservation efforts?

Those who bank at Ion Bank have the opportunity to do so in the coming weeks. You can help us earn grant money by voting in the 11th Annual Community Awards Program. The Ion Bank Foundation will give us a \$25 donation for every vote we receive!

The Oxford Historical Society has presented programs on Oxford's history, including the Stevenson Dam. We provide information and support to students and researchers, as well as programs in the schools. We also maintain the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead as a local history and education center. Hundreds have attended our annual Fiber Festival in April and our annual Peach Festival in August.

We are working to increase our program offerings through a restored one-room schoolhouse. When complete, we will be able to offer living history programs for Oxford School children, as well as adults. Today we ask for your support in enabling this valuable program for the future.

Every vote counts! If you are an Ion Bank customer, please visit [IonBank.com](http://IonBank.com) to vote between February 1 through March 31, 2020. You can help the Oxford Historical Society preserve our rural heritage, educate and encourage our residents to value our history and provide programs for residents of all ages.

Many thanks to all those who have supported us in the past. Let's make 2020 our best year ever!

Sincerely,  
***Oxford Historical Society***

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### Our Mission Statement

The Oxford Historical Society, Inc. is dedicated to preserving and encouraging community interest in the history of Oxford, Connecticut. We seek to ensure that present and future generations can share in and understand their rich heritage.

To meet these objectives our goals include:

- 1) Expanding interest in local history by presenting programs of interest to the public.
- 2) Serving as a resource for local history education for both adults and children.
- 3) Encouraging the dissemination of local history information through the news media, publications on local history, and use of the internet.
- 4) Educating the public on the importance of the preservation and protection of buildings and sites of historic interest.

To accomplish these goals, we:

- a) Collect and preserve documents, images, and artifacts representative of Oxford's history.
- b) Establish and maintain a museum, library and educational center to house the growing collections.
- c) Present local history exhibitions and public programs.

To join the Historical Society,  
download a membership form at

<http://www.oxford-historical-society.org/membership.pdf>

### FIBER FEST 2020!

**Saturday April 18 & Sunday April 19**  
**60 Towner Lane Oxford**

Meet a goat. Pet a sheep. Brush a rabbit. Joke with an alpaca. The OHS Living History weekend is on the 2020 calendar and families can visit the Twitchell Rowland Homestead to see live animals, shearing and craft demonstrations. Please see the OHS website ([www.oxford-historical-society.org](http://www.oxford-historical-society.org)) for times and details. Or send an email to [FiberFest@oxford-historical-society.org](mailto:FiberFest@oxford-historical-society.org).



Saturday meet spinners from around the area demonstrating this ancient skill. Adults and kids can try their hand at carding raw wool and spinning yarn, jobs commonly done by the very young and the very old for generations.

On Saturday visitors can also watch the New England Lace Guild members up close to see the work and skill of this long honored handcraft.

Sunday is Knit & Crochet Day! Awesome needlework will be on show, some items are for sale. And crafters will be chatting and sharing.

**Don't miss this unique local experience.**