

# Making History Every Day

March and April, 2021, Volume 3, Issue 2

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

Twitchell Rowland Homestead Museum

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



## Have you dreamed of making history?

Now we have a chance to be a part of our region's day of giving - an opportunity to unite our community around causes in which we truly believe and help non-profit organizations connect to the larger community.

We need your help! Please join our campaign and help us reach our goal of \$1,500! We need you to tell your friends and family members about the important work we do and ask them to join us in restoring Mr. Munn's Schoolhouse.

**Get ready to give! On April 20 - 21**, starting at 7:00AM on April 20, visit <https://www.givelocalccf.org/organizations/oxford-historical-society> and make a donation to us and/or to any of the great participating non-profit organizations. All giving will end at 7:00PM on April 21, so make sure to get your gift in on time!

You Can Help Us Win **GRANT MONEY** **VOTE** **ion**  
**COMMUNITY AWARDS PROGRAM** **TODAY!** **BANK** foundation

If you are an Ion Bank customer, you can help support the Historical Society make Mr. Munn's Schoolhouse a living history center. This is an opportunity to help fund the schoolhouse in a year when opportunities for fundraising have been limited. Voting has begun for the **12th Annual Community Awards Program** so please help us earn grant money! We will receive a \$25 donation from the **Ion Bank Foundation** for every vote we receive! Customers of ION bank can vote for the schoolhouse here:

<https://cap.ionbank.com/CAP/Vote.aspx?ID=184>

## **THANK YOU, OXFORD COMMUNITY SUPPORT COMMITTEE**

Following the submission of a request to the Community Support Committee, the Oxford Historical Society was granted \$15,000 to enhance the renovations of Mr. Munn's Schoolhouse. The funds will be used to frame windows salvaged from two other vintage town buildings. It will also include the construction of some handicapped accessibility elements. The funds will cover replacement siding and clapboards as well.

The Oxford Community Support Committee has been very supportive of the Munn Schoolhouse Project and the society is grateful to know they are behind our efforts for preservation. The committee's objective is 'to provide financial support to individuals and organizations from Oxford that have a positive impact on the community.' Funds given in alignment with specific guidelines.

## *Solving a Mystery* **LEAPING A CENTURY**

*Quaker Farms* August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1896

*Dear Auntie*

I do not know how long it is since I received your letter, but I have a good deal to do. Mrs Hawkins sister is here now. She came last Thursday. She spoke about going home tomorrow. Mrs. Lum is in very good health for her. I was in there yesterday. I think I told you that Maybell

(Continues on next page)

left there over a year ago & her Sister Edith came there to live & now she has gone home to get ready to be married. She is going to marry Harry Carpenter. Mrs. Lum has a girl now by the name of Nellie Barnes. She likes her very well. Philip lives there yet. He has been there going on three years. Bessie was here Saturday & spent the afternoon with me & she said to tell Auntie Shove she would like to have her come to see her. She sends her love. She is just about as sweet as she can be. I went down to Mr. Russell's last month to see Lizzie. He is real good to the child & to Lizzie. It will be a good home for her if she will only do right. I have talked to her & told her she should not keep from sin in her own strength without the help of God. He has said if we will confess our sins he will forgive them. I wish she might give her heart to the Lord. Last night the meeting in the hall was led by two ladies from Waterbury. They was to Theodore's over Sunday. There are some around here that have tried to break up the meetings. They persecute us but we must expect it for they done the same to Jesus. How are you this Summer. I hope better than you was when you wrote to me. How is Uncle George? Give my love to him. Such hot weather we have had this summer. I will send those patterns in a few days. I will send Uncle George a paper. I will send him once in a while if he would like it. Tell him to write. I am thinking about getting as soon as I can some Stories (?) for Mother & the children & I want to get one for Grandmother Hine too and I thought if I got for both I might get them cheaper. I washed today & I am tired. I don't believe you can read this. I will close with much love to all from

*Nellie*

*[Text of the Letter to Mrs. A. L. Shove, Richmond, New Hampshire - Mailed from the Quaker Farms Post office, August 4, 1896]*

It was the stuff of a Nancy Drew or Hardy Boys mystery: a newsy letter mailed from a young woman in Oxford, Connecticut to her Aunt Almira Shove in faraway Richmond, New Hampshire on August 4, 1896 from a tiny rural post office in the Quaker Farms District. Aunt Almira Shove received the message, but dropped the envelope and its contents going up or down her staircase. The letter vanished, and there it stayed until circa 1980 when Ruth Thompson's family lived in the old house.

Then, as Ruth explains it: "My bedroom was on the third floor. It would have been considered an attic. One of the wooden steps going up to my bedroom was worn and cracked. My dad figured he could replace the tread. He and my brother removed the old stair tread opening

up the underneath of the stairs, and there was the letter. It must have slipped through a crack in the side where the stair meets the wall."

Ruth kept the letter for many years, and recently she contacted Oxford Town Historian Dorothy DeBisschop hoping for some answers to the writer, Nellie's, identity and her connection to the name on the envelope, Mrs. A. L. Shove. With some help from the 1890 United States Census and local resources such as *Historic Buildings of Oxford, Past and Present* and *Oxford Past.com*, the story unfolded.

**429 QUAKER FARMS ROAD  
Glenbrook  
ca. 1696 (1976 #15, WPA #43)**



According to page 13 of Oxford's 1890 census, Charles Meigs lived with his sister Jane Lum and hired help at what is now 429 Quaker Farms Road. There were two servants, and one was Nellie Hine, born in Oxford in 1868 and dying there in 1922. She is buried in Brookside Cemetery. We feel she is the Nellie who wrote the letter.

**491 QUAKER FARMS ROAD  
Griffin-Tomlinson House  
1725 (1976 #23, WPA #33)**



Her brother was Theodore, mentioned in the letter. The Meigs home would have been a 15 minute walk from the Quaker Farms Post Office possibly located at the present 491 Quaker Farms Road. The hall where

**297 OXFORD ROAD**  
**District No. 10 Shrub Oak School**  
**Quaker Farms Community Hall**  
**ca. 1845, 1905 (1976 #79)**



Nellie's religious meeting was held would have been even closer, situated at the foot of Hogsback Road, and now moved to 297 Oxford Road.

Since Mr. Meigs' sister was Jane Lum, Nellie surely would have been acquainted with the large Lum family

**467 QUAKER FARMS ROAD**  
**William Tomlinson House**  
**1836 (1976 #18)**



in the area including Mrs. Mary Lum, who lived a few doors away at what is now 467 Quaker Farms Road.

In Richmond, New Hampshire, Ruth was able to supply details about Mrs. A. L. Shove, Nellie's aunt. She was Almira Louise (Parks) Shove, married to Rev. George F. Shove, minister for the Richmond Baptist Church from 1882-83 and the Uncle George mentioned in Nellie's letter. He apparently was a physician as well.

The letter offers glimpses into life in a tiny New England farming town as well. As the hired girl, Nellie would have been responsible for the heavy household work, including the washing that she mentions. Her Christian faith seems very important to her and to her friends who met in the community building for worship, but they were apparently harassed by locals. She maintained close ties with her family and with her neighbors.

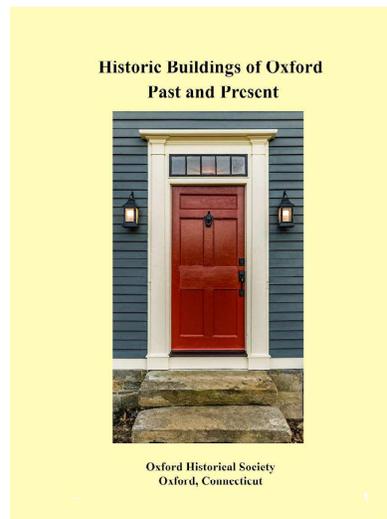
Another history mystery solved! Many thanks to Ruth Thompson for sharing her letter with the Oxford Historical Society.

**Note:** Several of the sites mentioned in Nellie's letter still stand. The Charles Meigs' home at 429 Quaker Farms Road has been greatly renovated, but is still *present* as the oldest house in Oxford, built in 1680. In 1896, the property at 491 Quaker Farms Road belonged to Mary H. Candee Tomlinson, widow of Horace Tomlinson. Thanks to the research of former owner Carol Rex, we know that the USPS site in the National Archives lists Mary as the Quaker Farms postmistress in 1890 and 1891. Whether her contract was renewed or given to someone else after that is unknown. It has proved impossible to determine if Mrs. Tomlinson post-marked Nellie's letter. However, the Tomlinson home and the site of the Quaker Farms Post Office for at least two years remains at the corner of O'Neill and Quaker Farms Road.

The Greek Revival farmhouse of Mrs. Mary Lum continues to be one of Quaker Farms older homes. However, the community hall, once found at the foot of Hogsback Road and Quaker Farms Road burned down, apparently not long after Nellie attended religious meetings there.

It was rebuilt, becoming Oxford's first public facility, and was popular for dinners, dances, and a school classroom for nearby Christ Church.

In October 1967 the hall was moved to 297 Oxford Road and joined with the former District #10 Shrub Oak School for use as the Old School House Gift Shoppe for many years. After that the structure housed the local post office until the Haynes Quarry Walk development was completed. Now it provides working space for a dry cleaners and an oil company.



House photos are by Raymond Paul Doyle from **Historic Buildings of Oxford, Past and Present**, one of a selection of items available for purchase from the Oxford Historical Society. Contact Nancy at 203-888-0230 for information or purchase.



## Vintage Cookery

### BLUEBERRY BUCKLE

*Phyllis Budris (1932-2017) was a lady of many talents. Mother of 6, school bus driver, gifted quilter and seamstress and devoted member of St. Peter's Church, Phyllis was never happier than when she was sharing a cup of coffee and a home-baked treat with family and friends in her homey kitchen. When she passed away, her family compiled some of her favorite recipes in a keepsake booklet for the many people whose lives Phyllis had touched in her special way. The recipe for Blueberry Buckle is from that tribute.*

### BLUEBERRY BUCKLE

Mix:

¼ cup shortening	¾ cup sugar
1 egg	½ cup milk
Add: 2 cups flour	2 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. salt	

Fold in: 2 cups blueberries.

Turn into a 7" x 11" or 9" x 9" greased pan.

Sprinkle the top with a mixture of:

½ cup sugar	1/3 cup flour
¼ cup margarine	1 tsp. cinnamon

Bake at 375 degrees for 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

## FIBER FEST OFF 2021 CALENDAR

The society's annual celebration of all things fiber has been pulled from the events calendar again. In spite of the reduction in COVID cases and the availability of vaccines the decision is the wisest choice for the current time. We are hoping the situation will improve soon and other society activities later in the year may be returned to our schedule. Stay tuned - and stay safe!

## OPEN HOUSES SUSPENDED

Due to the current situation with COVID, the regularly scheduled society Open Houses on first and third Sundays are not being held as the need for social distancing cannot be managed.

## JOIN THE EFFORT TO PRESERVE OXFORD'S HISTORIC RURAL HERITAGE

- Follow us on Facebook: @oxfordhistoricalsociety
- Like our Facebook page to let foundations know the Society has your support
- Join the Historical Society. Download a membership form at <http://www.oxford-historical-society.org/membership.pdf>

### Once COVID conditions improve:

- Visit the Homestead and learn more about our activities
- Sign up for special tours and programs

## MEMBER RENEWALS - 2021

Consider renewing or becoming a new member: Family (\$25), Senior (\$10), Individual (\$15). Forms are available on our Website.

## WE DID WHAT?!?!

In 1850 Connecticut was one of the first states to enact a law protecting non-game birds. It protected insectivorous birds and removed doves from the list of game birds.

In 1898 the Connecticut Audubon Society was founded. The group worked to convince women not to wear hats with feathers.

In 1901 Connecticut adopted a more expansive law protecting non-game birds and prohibited hunting on Sundays. The effort was partly directed to protect birds whose plumage was used to adorn women's hat.

In 1933 the state established a women-only fishing reserve on the Branford River. The Board of Fisheries and Game voted to lease five miles of the river 'for the exclusive use of women.' A women's hunting ground was designated in Farmington. The same year Edith Stoehr was appointed as the state's first female game warden.

*The information above is part of an article in the current spring issue of CT Explored, produced in collaboration with community cultural supporters. The spring issue focuses on natural history aspects of Connecticut living and history.*

