

Making History Every Day

May and June 2020, Volume 2, Issue 3

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

Twitchell Rowland Homestead Museum

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

Ben Towner April 2020



The view from here got interesting last summer. It was all a boy could want – watchin’ a big hole get dug. They hit a load of rock and when the boulders were out of the hole and spread across half the backyard – *there* was the cellar hole. But instead of lining the hole with stacked field stone like always, machines poured liquid rock – amazin’! Even made a smooth floor for that cellar.

The days got shorter and colder. And then one bitter

cold morning – lo and behold, here came that little schoolhouse loaded on wheels. Right down the middle of Towner Lane - just like a parade! The next day the old school slowly slid over the new cellar hole and into place.

Next thing I know men were there on the top of the schoolhouse putting the old rafters back in place. Just as the snows began boards were put over the rafters and it all got covered with tarps. Snug for the winter, they even hung evergreens on the schoolhouse door to celebrate an exciting year.

Now the schoolhouse waits for work to resume: shingles need to go on the roof, the floor boards should get relaid and maybe some paint and windows. But it will be a while before Mr Munn’s Schoolhouse can open its doors to students. Some folks can help with that computer of theirs – a donation will help get things done. Maybe I’ll see you soon at a visit to the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead Museum, I’ll be lookin’ for you. And thanks for all you have done!

A timely note from the Historical Society

The Oxford Historical Society hopes that you are managing all right during the Covid 19 pandemic. We understand this is a difficult time of change and adjustment and want to share some thoughts with all our wonderful members and supporters. History teaches us that unexpected events create challenges, and that the people of Oxford have met these challenges by facing them together over the years.

This spring, we are grateful that we were able to move the Munn Schoolhouse to the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead site last fall. We were able to place the building on a solid basement and re-install and cover the roof, thanks to the support of the town, community foundations and organizations, and many individuals.

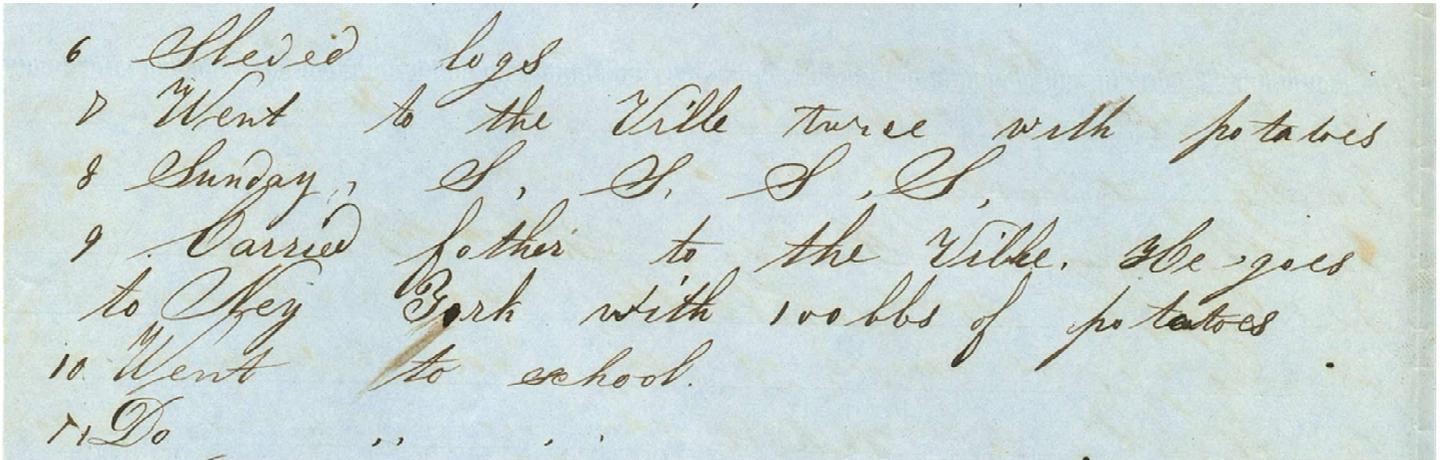
The Oxford Historical Society’s plans for 2020 were for spring fund-raising to ready the schoolhouse for visitors in the coming year. The bad news is that the pandemic and economic hardships upon us make this a difficult time for fund-raising. The good news is that we were able to secure the building tight and dry and it will be safe until we can finish work to open it to the public.

Months ago, we signed up for two online giving programs: Give Local with the Connecticut Community Foundation on April 21 and 22, and Great Give with the Valley Community Foundation on May 5 and 6. We will continue with those plans, realizing that our proceeds probably won’t match the amounts our supporters were willing and able to provide last year.

So, you will receive letters about the online-fundraisers, but we wish to emphasize that the Historical Society feels you should use your resources and judgment as to where you think it best for your donations to go this spring. Local organizations, such as food banks and other groups supporting those facing economic challenges, urgently need help. For now, we thank you for your support in the past and urge you to give to whatever local groups you think most need and deserve your help. We will get through these difficult times by being there for one another, just as Oxford has done during hard times in the past.

With thanks for past support and confidence in the future, we look forward to better days in the future. Please stay safe and well.

Entries from Burton Harger's February 1852 Journal



While so many people were at home during the pandemic, we decided to use this as an opportunity to assist the society and do something helpful for our role to preserve and disseminate local history. We invited members and friends to help transcribe the journal of Burton Harger.

A group of people are working to carefully read the hand-written journal and get it into readable text. When the project is complete, it will be posted on the internet and searchable.

Above is a section of the February 1852 Journal, and the transcribed text for the month is below. DO is used for 'ditto' and Ville is the reference to the village, Oxford Center. Church services were multiple times each Sunday and people were expected to attend them all.

February 1852

- 1 Sunday, S, S, S
- 2 Went to school
- 3 Do " "
- 4 Do " "
- 5 Do " "
- 6 Sleded logs
- 7 Went to the Village twice with potatoes
- 8 Sunday, S, S, S, S
- 9 Carry father to the Ville. He goes to New York with 100 lbs of potatoes Went to school
- 10 Do " "
- 11 Do " "
- 12 Do " "
- 13 Do " "
- 14 Do " "
- 15 Sunday, S, S, S
- 16 Went to school
- 17 Do " "
- 18 The schools were examined at Oxford Center. Mr. Gideon Candee teacher.
- 19 Went to school.
- 20 Do " "
- 21 Do " " School out.
- 22 Sunday Service Service Service Service
- 23 Chopped wood at the door.
- 24 Do " " " " "
- 25 Do " " " " "
- 26 Do " " " " "
- 27 Do " " " " "
- 28 Sunday, S, S, S, chopped wood

Persons who wish to join the transcription project may email dottie@oxford-historical-society.org

Oxford is just Peachy!

Picture this – a warm late August evening in southern Connecticut with the aroma of fresh peaches in the air accompanied by the scent of homemade biscuits and the thought of locally made peach ice cream. Well – you have just conjured up the basic ingredients of the OHS Peach Festival. It's an old-fashioned community social that could have taken place anytime in the past three hundred years, but is on offer annually in 21st century Oxford.



The Oxford Historical Society's Festival was first created in 2007 and photos of the 'Barns of Oxford' filled display boards – some of the buildings now lost to history as damage and decay took over but documented for all time.

In addition other photos presented pictures of the peach industry in Oxford. Yes, there were peach farms on Peach Farm Road as well as a big barn and houses for the peach farm staff and harvesters.

The peach industry developed at the turn of the 20th century when John Hale of Glastonbury, CT met with Michael Coleman at Shelton Grange – and agreed after a tour of the town that Oxford's Moose Hill area was prime for cultivating fruit trees. The scale of the enterprise surprises newcomers and the aerial photo from 1932 at the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead shows the thousands of peach trees marching in rows across the hills of town.

Peach socials were held off and on through the years until they were relaunched by the Historical Society in 2007. Each year the photo exhibit theme changed but the peach industry pictures were always displayed.



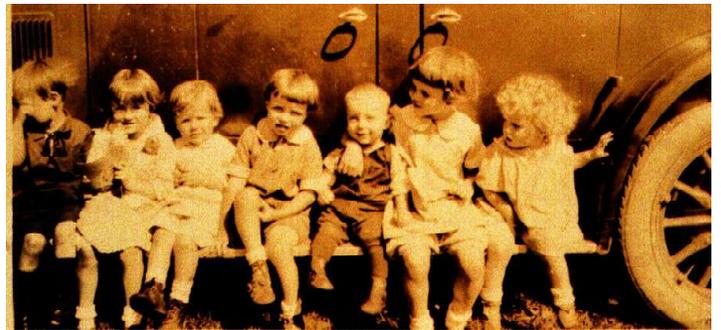
2007 Peach Festival included this barn at 491 Quaker Farms Road

The past fourteen years offer a microcosm of the last century in Oxford:

- 2007 - Barns
- 2008 – Schools
- 2009 – Transportation
- 2010 – Animals & Old Tyme Fair
- 2011 – Families
- 2012 – Stevenson Dam
- 2013 – Children
- 2014 – Military Men & Women
- 2015 - Early Homes
- 2016 – First Responders
- 2017 – A Century Age (WWI)
- 2018 – Schools & Sports
- 2019 – Notables & Rascals



Familiar local faces and places peer from the pictures. The collections of photographs are part of the Historical Society archives.



It is with an optimistic spirit that plans are moving forward for the 2020 OHS Peach Festival scheduled for late August, 2020.

When in need of Good Water go to

Church



THE SIGN OF PLENTY OF WATER



This year the theme is The Legacy of Stephen B. Church, Oxford Benefactor. This savvy businessman left his name all over our town. Come to learn more about him and Oxford's links to him. And while you are there, be sure to sample some of Oxford's local treat: peach shortcake featuring those homemade biscuits, local peaches and Rich Farm peach ice cream with a tower of whipped cream. Better plan to come early – last year we ran out!



An Old Time Stephen Foster Song for a Time Like This

"Hard Times Come Again No More" is an American parlor song by Stephen Foster. Published in New York by Firth, Pond & Co. in 1854 it became popular. The song asks the fortunate to consider the plight of the less fortunate, with the chorus:

'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,
Hard Times, hard times, come again no more.
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door;
Oh! Hard times come again no more.

Let's Hope the Hard Times Will be Over Soon So We Can Celebrate at the 14th Annual Peach Festival

The Society had to cancel our Fiber Fest in April because of the pandemic. We expect our May meeting will have to be cancelled also. The good news is that we have plans for our 14th Annual Peach Festival, slated for August 22 at Great Hill United Methodist Church. It will run from 4 to 7 p.m. and will offer our famous home-made peach shortcake with whipped cream and locally-made ice cream.

Our displays will feature the life and fortunes of one of Oxford's most wealthy men - S. B. Church. A video clip from the movie Freedom, filmed at the historic Oxfordshire will be shown. Also on view will be photos of his life at the mansion, his well-drilling business and his construction of windmills.

Visitors will also learn about some of his many generous donations to the community, including the old Church School (now the American Legion Building), the flag-pole at Victory Memorial Park, and the money for the present Oxford Town Hall.

When in need of Good Water go to

Church



THE SIGN OF PLENTY OF WATER



GIVE LOCAL APRIL 21-22, 2020
Greater Waterbury and Litchfield Hills
Connecticut Community Foundation
givelocalCCF.org
<https://www.givelocalccf.org/organizations/oxford-historical-society>

THE great Give®
MAY 5-6, 2020
A 36-hour, online-giving event
to support local nonprofits
<https://www.thegreatgive.org/organizations/oxford-historical-society>