

Making History Every Day

January and February 2021, Volume 3, 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

MUNN SCHOOLHOUSE GETS A NEW ROOF!

OHS' 1850 one room Munn Schoolhouse was braced on the inside during December. The work continues by Seymour restoration carpenter Eric lott. This essential repair was needed to allow further work on both the interior and the exterior of the school.

This stage was slowed as construction materials have been harder to source following issues impacting the industry caused by the Covid19 pandemic. Ultimately lott located a timber of the size needed in a town near Oxford and in December it arrived and was installed.

The installation of the corner post made it possible to proceed with the roofing project. By late December the new cedar shingle roof was installed by Davelaar & Sons of Oxford. The funding for that portion of the restoration was provided by a grant from the Oxford Community Support Fund.

We are still awaiting another large beam that is required in the basement, and a search for a sawmill to provide it is still on. Unfortunately, the pandemic has limited the amount of large custom oak timbers. The society has been able to work with a local homeowner to salvage flooring to construct a replacement floor when interior repairs move to that stage.



New cedar roofing on Mr. Munn Schoolhouse.

Warm weather will bring clapboard repairs and replacement as needed, and other improvements. Grants and donations are the key to bringing Mr. Munn's one-room schoolhouse to a new life as a living history center for children and adults.

If you are an Ion Bank customer, you can help 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 of fund-raising have been limited. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.**

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>

Join the Effort to Preserve Oxford's Historic Rural Heritage

- Follow us on Facebook: @oxfordhistoricalsociety
- Like 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 pandemic conditions improve:

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

FROM THE OHS FILES:

A recent review of local documents uncovered a copy of a petition from April 18, 1871 to the Connecticut General Assembly. It was signed by residents of Bethany, Oxford, Seymour and Naugatuck. Their request was '...inhabitants of said portions of said Towns hereinafter described requires that said territory and the inhabitants there of should be erected and incorporated into a New Town to be called the town of Home....your petitioners alledge the following to wit Near the Center of said territory and on both sides of the dividing line between the towns of Bethany and Oxford to wit the Naugatuck River is situated a large and densely populated manufacturing village known as Beacon Falls so called said village is rapidly increasing in wealth and population and will continue so to do and already contains a population of about Seven Hundred inhabitants and including the surrounding territory being described containing a population of about One Thousand inhabitants. And said Village is convenient and easy of access to and is the natural market and business center for the inhabitants of said described Territory and now has a Church, Post Office, Rail Road Depot and Telegraph Office and Ten Stores etc.'

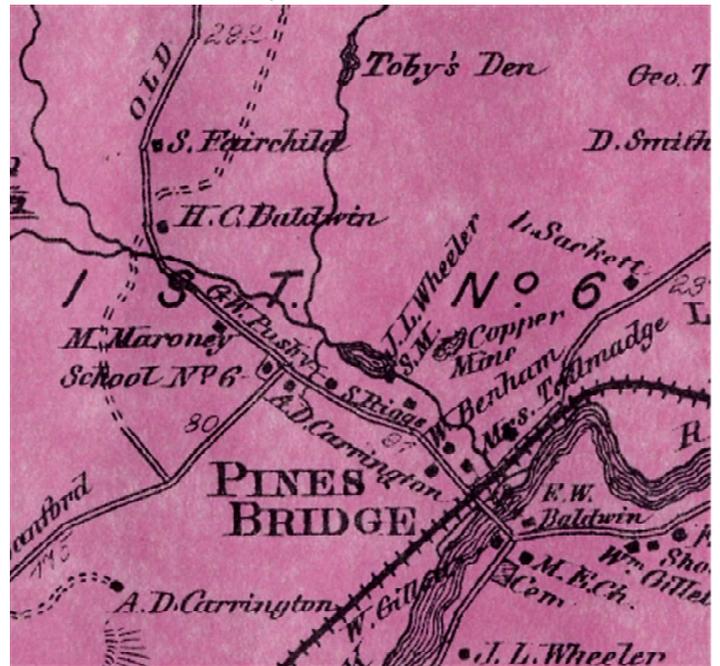
The petition went on to describe the hardships put on residents of the four petitioning towns when they were required to conduct business necessary in their town centers '... only accessible to them by passing over a rough, difficult and dangerous road running over the range of high and steep hills that rise above the Naugatuck River....'

What is more the state would benefit as '...the grand list of said New Town will amount to the sum of Five Hundred Thousand Dollars or more.'

Further support for their plea went on '....said Village known as Beacon Falls is situated on both sides of the Naugatuck River, the boundary line between the Towns of Bethany and Oxford and suffers much in its police regulations from the fact, that said portions of said Village are neither the jurisdiction of different towns to wit Bethany and Oxford and are far from the Centers of said Towns.'

Then the proposed boundary lines in each town were defined. The points specified such landmarks as Cotton Hollow Brook, the houses of Ebenezer Seely and Ebenezer Riggs, H.C. Baldwins house, various highways, the house of Miles Culver, deceased; Skokorat road about eight rods north of the house of Naman Peck and continuing to Pines Bridge School District and also the Nymph School District...said boundary line to be more fully indicated by a map of said territory to be submitted to your honorable Body.'

The 52 signers must have had some success. The Town of Beacon Falls, CT is planning to celebrate the 150th anniversary of their incorporation in 2021.



Beacon Falls was incorporated in 1871 from the four towns described in the petition. In 2018 its population was 6182. The town is named for Beacon Hill, the lookout used by colonists to monitor Native American activities and movements. The proposed name of 'Home' for the town came from the Home Woolen Mill a major employer in town from 1853 to 1916. Their buildings on the main street of the town were converted to residential use and in 1984 were listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Open Houses are suspended during the Covid 19 Pandemic. The tours of the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead usually are available first and third Sundays from 2-4 pm; they will resume once requirements for social distancing have been lifted. We appreciate all the support the community has shown through our Facebook and online presence. We miss you all - but, please stay safe.

FEBRUARY IS MEMBER MONTH

We love our members! Please Join us!

Member renewals have been mailed and forms are found on the society website as well. Please renew or consider joining - your support shows the community funders the strength of the society in the area. Thank you!\

Vintage Cookery

KENNETH ROBERTS' GRANDMOTHER'S BAKED BEANS

This is the traditional method of cooking baked beans, handed down from the days when women baked their breads, cakes and pies in their wood fired bake ovens first, and then added a pot of beans to simmer in the cooling oven overnight. Baked beans and brown bread would have appeared on many Oxford supper tables on Saturday night. If you do not have a bean pot, any good sized ceramic casserole or Dutch oven will easily substitute.

This recipe is taken from "A Book of Favorite Recipes", compiled by the Episcopal Church Women of Christ Church in Quaker Farms. It was submitted by Walter Dann who lived nearby at 511 Quaker Farms Road for over 50 years. He was a devoted member of Christ Church and served as their treasurer.

3 cups dried beans (preferably yellow-eyes)
½ pound salt pork (or bacon)
1 onion, peeled
1 tsp. mustard (dry) scant ½ cup molasses
½ tsp. pepper
¾ tbsp. salt

The day before, cover the beans with water; soak overnight. In the morning, heat in saucepan until white scum appears on the water; drain. In the bottom of bean pot place salt pork, slashed through the rind, and onion. Pour in beans. Put in mustard, molasses and pepper. Fill bean pot with boiling water; cover and put in a slow oven (300 – 325 degrees). After 2 hours, dissolve salt in more boiling water and pour over beans so as to keep beans covered with water. About 1 hour before supper, remove cover. Pull pork to the top and let brown.

Oxford Historical Society items are available

by calling 203-888-0230. Get item details and arrange payment and pickup.

BOOKS

- Historic Buildings of Oxford Past and Present
- Images of Oxford
- Oxford History Remembered
- Railroad in Oxford
- World War II Revisited

NOTECARDS - sets of ten notes with envelopes

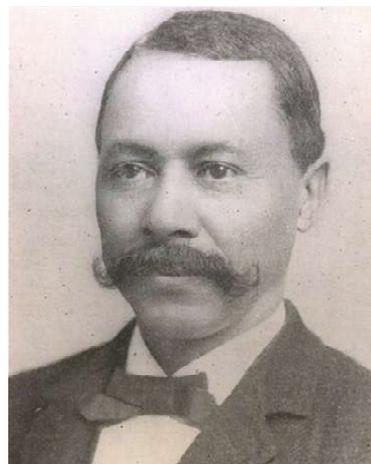
- Oxford Postcards - vintage photos (5 shots, 2 of each)
- Stevenson Dam - vintage construction photos
- Pettycoat Farm - black and white sketch (all one design)

T SHIRTS

- limited sizes still available - contact us for details.

Honoring a Historic African American

Ebenezer D. Bassett spent part of his childhood in Oxford. He became America's first Black diplomat when appointed ambassador to Haiti by President Grant. Central Connecticut State University paid tribute to Bassett, its first African American graduate, by naming a building in his honor.



Bassett's family roots were in the Naugatuck Valley. While serving in Haiti, he successfully saved the lives of many people by making use of the embassy as a sanctuary during a violent period in Haiti.

Bassett's Connections to Oxford:

Bassett's grandfather, Tobiah, was a slave owned by Oxford tavern owner John Wooster, who was sympathetic to the British during the American Revolution. Nevertheless, Tobiah served the Patriot cause and was granted his freedom for helping to win American Independence.

Tobiah's son, Eben Tobias was born in 1805. He married Susan Gregory, a Native American from the Pequot tribe. The family lived for a while in the Litchfield area but later returned to the Naugatuck Valley with their three children, Charlotte, Ebenezer Don Carlos and Napoleon.

There are references of the young Ebenezer attending school at the Five Mile Hill School in Oxford where he impressed Nathan J. Wilcoxson, Oxford's School Visitor, who encouraged his studies, and kept a correspondence with Bassett over many years.

Bassett's sister Charlotte remained an Oxford resident in later years.

For more about Bassett's life, see:

- American Foreign Service Journal: <https://afsa.org/ebenezer-bassett-legacy-americas-first-african-american-diplomat>
- Documentary video: A Diplomat of Consequence: <https://vimeo.com/185246039>

Oxford Historical Society welcomes new business member

Pat Blanko Group, LLC

Pat Blanko is a realtor in Oxford and we appreciate her backing in the society's 2021 activities and events.