

Making History Every Day

November and December 2024, Volume 6, Issue 6

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

Twitchell Rowland Homestead Museum

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

Oxford Historical Society Annual Meeting Saturday, November 16, 2 pm.

Re-enactor Kevin Johnson will be featured at the society's Annual Meeting. Known throughout the state for his view of Connecticut through the experiences of the Black men in its history, Kevin will portray Jordan Freeman, an African American man who helped defend Fort Griswold and New London, Connecticut during the Revolutionary War.

Historians estimate the nearly 500 Black soldiers from Connecticut (at least 3 from Waterbury) were part of 5,000 African American men in the Revolutionary War. Serving in militias, seagoing services, and support activities, some enlisted because they felt it was their duty; others because they were offered their freedom in return for satisfactory completion of a set period of service.

Jordan Freeman was a native of Old Lyme. Although he did not enlist himself, he witnessed key events of the War for Independence while with Col. William Ledyard. Kevin Johnson is an employee of the State Library's History and Genealogy Unit. In addition to portraying Jordan Freeman, he has been presenting as Pvt. William Webb, a soldier in the Civil War, for more than 16 years and has given 688 presentations.

This program is based on extensive research in the collections of the Connecticut State Library and the Museum of Connecticut History at 231 Capitol Ave, opposite the State Capitol in Hartford. The Connecticut State Library provides high quality library and information services to state government and the citizens of Connecticut. It also preserves and makes accessible

the records of Connecticut's history and heritage.

The program is at Great Hill United Methodist Church, 225 Great Hill Road at the rotary in Seymour. The church hall is handicapped accessible and the parking lot is level and large. The program is free for students and a donation of \$5 per person for adults is requested. Refreshments will be served.



Giving Tuesday

Giving Tuesday is December 3. Created in 2012, this is a global generosity movement unleashing the power of radical generosity. Join the movement and give, whether it's some of your time, a donation, or the power of your voice in your local community. Every act of generosity counts and everyone has something to contribute toward building the better world we all want to live in. You can celebrate with a charitable donation to the Oxford Historical Society.



Long-time Member Will Be Missed

The Oxford Historical Society recently lost our longtime supporter and friend, Margaret "Peg" Crowther on October 12, 2024. The stories of her life in Oxford that she shared with us sparked with her intelligence and humor. Our sincere condolences go out to her family. Peg was 92 years old. Her family has directed memorial gifts to the Oxford Historical Society, the Oxford Senior Center and the Oxford United Church of Christ, Congregational.

Annual Election of Officers

The Oxford Historical Society will hold annual elections for Executive Board members at 2 pm on Saturday, Nov. 16 at their annual meeting at the Great Hill United Methodist Church, prior to the program with Kevin Johnson. The following members are up for consideration but nominations may be made from the floor before the vote.

President: Robert Buck; First Vice-President: Eleanor Sturges; Second Vice-President: Elizabeth (Bo) Duncan; Recording Secretary: Chris Lesko; Membership Secretary: Val Nelson; Corresponding Secretary: Linda Scinto; Treasurer: Essie Lydon; Historian: Nancy Farnum; Board Members at Large: Richard Crane and Jane Hulbert.

Anyone interested in serving is welcome to contact a board member for more information. No special education or previous job experience is required. But enthusiasm and curiosity are wonderful assets and membership in the society is required.

Holidays at the Homestead:

Our special Open Houses are on Sundays, December 1, 8 and 15. The Twitchell-Rowland Homestead is open to the public from 2 pm to 4 pm. Open Houses feature our docents chatting about the history of the house and the items found inside as well as other topics of interest to the community. Refreshments will be on offer. Admission is free.



Gift selection: visitors will find a special boutique of gifts as well as books produced by the society and unique notecard sets created using local art and photographs. Proceeds benefit the society's events and activities as well as maintenance of the buildings and grounds.

On display: the Homestead Museum will be decked to the halls for the holiday season thanks to the **Oxford Garden Club**. This year the display cases will feature toys from the past loaned by society members and friends.



Jensen barn loom at work: Special guest teen weaver Heidi will be joined by society members Valerie and Linda to show visitors how this room size frame of lumber, relocated from a local farm and reassembled at the Twitchell-Rowland Museum, was part of life for Oxford families. Usually hung with holiday greenery, this year the loom will be functioning. Normally this treat of working weavers is reserved for the annual Fiber Fest in April.

Community Partners:

Friends of the Oxford Library Annual Fall Book & Bake Sale. Hundreds of books for all ages and tasty baked treats are on offer at the Oxford Library at 49 Great Oak Road. The sale runs on Saturday, Nov. 2 and Monday, Nov. 4, from 9 am to 4 pm. It ends on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 5, from 9 am to 7 pm. Proceeds support library collections, equipment, events and activities.

Society Sign Survives Flood Waters

Nature's Whimsy was on display again. The Oxford Historical Society uses portable street signs with changeable letters to promote events. The annual Peach Festival scheduled for this past August was one of those events and signs were placed on Route 188 in Quaker Farms and on Route 67 across from St. Peter's Episcopal Church.

The flooding in town center on August 18 displaced the sign in St. Peter's field and it was assumed to have been lost in the heavy runoff in that area. In mid October a friend of the society reported something looking like that runaway sign. And – YES! There it was, caught in tall grass and sand at the far end of the field not far from where it had started. After cleaning, only one letter - P for peach - was missing! A little wear and tear was treated with soapy water and some glue; another tale in a chapter already logged in Oxford and Connecticut history.

OHS membership forms

OHS membership forms can be downloaded at the OHS website and checks can be mailed to OHS, PO Box 582, Oxford, CT 06478. Individual memberships are \$10, Seniors and Junior Associates (under 18) \$10, Families \$25 and Business Supporters (\$200).

Not only do member dollars help with society expenses and activities, the numbers of members are used by grant givers as an indication of involvement with the community. Also listed are opportunities for volunteering. Be sure to check those that appeal to you. Being a member really counts for us!

Local History on Offer:

Town Historian Dorothy DeBisschop presents "If You Lived in Oxford in 1919" each year to all the third graders in Oxford to help the students meet their local history state-mandated requirement. The Town Historian is also available to give that talk or similar local history talks to local groups.

Annual Tractor Meet

Our Annual Tractor Meet on Sunday, October 6, ran from noon to 4 pm at the society's Twitchell-Rowland Homestead at 60 Towner Lane. Over 100 OHS members and guests of all ages visited with the equipment owners. Vintage farm equipment, some customized for local needs, were parked on the lawn representing restored, heavily used and currently used examples of basic farm machines. We are grateful for the support of the owners and the community – we'll see you again next year.



Photo by Sal DeFini

Photos by Cathy Helm

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>
- Visit the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead and learn more about our activities.
- Sign up for special tours & programs.



Window Shutters Installed on Mr. Munn's One-room Schoolhouse

Preservation Chairman Bo Duncan stands with Richard Crane. The two volunteers with the Historical Society recently scraped, repainted and then installed the original shutters on Mr. Munn's Schoolhouse.



Heritage Recipe: Election Cake

Unique to Connecticut and originating in Hartford, the Election Day Cake descended from classic English fruitcakes leavened with yeast. After the Revolution, Americans were eager to participate in their newfound democracy, voting both at home and traveling long distances to the state capital to cast their ballots for Governor and Lieutenant Governor. Only men could vote, but women were eager to show their support for their new country, participating by showing off their baking skills. In fact, there was serious rivalry between the ladies to see who could produce the most toothsome cake.

Puritan restrictions still forbid holiday celebrations. Christmas and Easter were normal days. However, the men let loose on March Meeting Day (local elections) and state election days, filling taverns at lunchtime and again in the evening for socializing and carousing. Sometimes Election Cake was served at a church supper. Often it was on offer outside the polls, especially for those who had voted a straight party ticket. The cake was also served locally on muster days when farmers came from the surrounding area for military training exercises.

The cakes were huge, weighing approximately 12 pounds. They were seasoned with dried fruit and spices, and sometimes alcohol was added to keep them from getting dry and stale. In 1771 the Connecticut Colony paid 3 pounds for their Election Cake ingredients and Mrs. Leslie baked it for 2 pounds.

By 1796, a recipe for "Election Cake" was included in Amelia Simmons' 2nd edition of *American Cookery*. It reads as follows:

Election Cake:

Thirty quarts flour, 10 pound butter, 14 pound sugar, 12 pound raisins, 3 doz. Eggs, one pint wine, one quart brandy, 4 ounces cinnamon, 4 ounces fine colander seed (coriander?), 3 ounces ground allspice; wet the flour with milk to the consistence of bread over night, adding one quart yeast; the next morning work the butter and sugar together for half an hour, which will render the cake much lighter and whiter; when it has rise light work in every other ingredient except the plumbs which work in when going into the oven. [That oven would have been a brick or stone beehive oven.]

As the 19th century waned, so did the custom of serving Election Cakes. Christmas and Easter celebra-

tions became popular, replacing Election Day as a holiday. However, it was remembered long and fondly enough that Imogene Wolcott included it in her 1939 *The New England Yankee Cookbook*. Wolcott also recalls a variety of "March Meeting" or "Election Cakes" that were about the size of a pancake, but thicker. The housewife had to get up in the middle of the night to cut them down the middle so that they would not rise too quickly. Unfortunately, she does not list those ingredients.

For today's cook, we are reprinting Marion Cunningham's version of "Election Cake" from *The Fannie Farmer Baking Book*:

2/3 cup warm water	2 teaspoons cinnamon
2 packages dry yeast	1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
3 2/3 cups all-purpose flour	1/2 teaspoon mace
2 sticks (1 cup) butter, softened	1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
2 eggs, beaten	2 teaspoons salt
2 cups brown sugar	1 1/3 cups raisins
1 cup sour milk or buttermilk	2 cups chopped dried figs
1 teaspoon baking soda	1 tablespoon flour

Grease two 8 1/2 in. x 4 1/2 in. x 2 1/2 in. loaf pans.

Pour the water into a large mixing bowl and sprinkle the yeast over. Stir and let stand for 5 minutes to dissolve. Add 1 cup of the flour and beat until well blended: the mixture will be quite stiff. Add the butter and beat until smooth, then add the eggs, brown sugar, sour milk or buttermilk, the remaining 2 2/3 cups flour, baking soda, cinnamon, cloves, mace, nutmeg, and salt, and beat for 3 minutes. Toss the raisins and figs in the tablespoon of flour to coat them, then add them to the batter, and stir to mix throughout.

Divide the batter between the prepared pans. Cover loosely with a towel and let rest for 1 1/2 hours. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees near the end of the resting time.

Bake the cakes for about 1 hour and 15 minutes, or until a broom straw inserted in the center of the loaf comes out clean. Remove from the oven and let cool in the pan for 5 minutes, then turn out onto a rack to cool completely.

Sources:

- "Election Day Cake History and Recipe." <https://whatscookingamerica.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Election-Cake-2.jpg>
- "When Elections in Hartford Were a Piece of Cake," Greg Mangan. <https://connecticuthistory.org/when-elections-in-hartford-were-a-piece-of-cake>.
- *The New England Yankee Cookbook*, by Imogene Wolcott. Coward McCann, c1939
- *The Fannie Farmer Baking Book* by Marion Cunningham. Alfred A. Knopf, 1984