

# Making History Every Day

September-October 2026 Volume 8, Issue 5

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

**Twitchell Rowland Homestead Museum**

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

## Vintage Vehicle Rally –

**Sunday, October 11, noon to 4 pm**

Tractors, all makes and models of all ages, will be on display at the Oxford Historical Society's campus at 60 Towner Lane in Oxford. Free admission and parking are available for this all ages event. Visitors can take a close look at tractors fresh off the fields of Oxford, including restorations and custom redesigned models. All have owners happy to share tales of challenges of farm work and Yankee ingenuity's value in outsmarting failing motors, balky transmissions and other moving parts. If you have a tractor or other farming implement to share contact Bo at 507-476-2078 or Ed at 203-305-9632 – to be sure there is room to fit you on the field.

At the Tractor Show, Oxford Historical Society will unveil its plans to build a barn at the back of the Towner Lane campus. This will house our ever-growing collection of agricultural equipment and other 19th and 20th century machines and implements that were part of everyday life on the farms that dotted our town. An architectural drawing, a site plan, and a model of the Oxford History Center will be on display along with photos and examples of artifacts that the society plans to showcase in this facility. Visitors can see an additional, more extensive display of tools inside the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead which will be open for tours.



## Connecticut Revolutionary History

**Saturday, November 7, 2-4 pm**

First person interpreter **Kevin Johnson** will portray Jordan Freeman, an African American man who helped defend Fort Griswold and New London, Connecticut during the Revolutionary War. Known throughout the state for his view of Connecticut through the experiences of the Black men in its history, Kevin will be featured at the society's **Annual Meeting**, hosted by the Oxford Historical Society at Great Hill United Methodist Church hall at the rotary of Great Hill Road and Rte 188 in Seymour. Refreshments are provided and the meeting is free and open to all. A brief election of the society officers will be held before the program.

Historians estimate the nearly 500 Black soldiers from Connecticut (at least 1 from Oxford) 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 re-

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## Thank You for Your Support.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Peach Festival hosted by the Oxford Historical Society at the Great Hill United Methodist Church, Seymour, was a success again thanks to the friends and members of the society who were part of the preparations or who came in for the homemade peach shortcake that featured local ingredients.

The Festival photo display highlighted Oxford's patriots who served either in military or civilian roles during the Revolutionary War. The materials will become part of the Historical Society's America 250 collection preserving all the records uncovered during our research. Results will be available in print and digital formats when work is completed. Research will continue to cover the full term of the conflict from 1775 through 1783.

## Annual Meeting Hosting Kevin Johnson as Jordan Freeman

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turn 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. He has given more than 688 presentations. 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 Professor James H. Williams, an escaped slave who fought in the War of 1812 and spent his final years as a beloved janitor at Trinity College.

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.

## ~ *Heritage Recipe* ~

### JOYCE NIESTEMSKI

Joyce Niestemski considers herself a rare resident of Oxford. She is one of the "originals:" a person who has lived in town for an entire lifetime. Joyce's maternal grandfather, Michael Magda, emigrated from Poland

through Ellis Island. He got a job and eventually brought over her grandmother, Anna. Many people from their town in Poland came to the United States at the same time and settled in the Oxford area, staying friends forever. Michael and Anna bought a farm at the end of Chestnut Tree Hill Extension, planting a garden to help feed the family they raised there. Anna lived to be nearly 100, cared for by her cousin, Annie Ives.

The children were all baptized as Catholics. Joyce's grandfather wanted them to continue going to church, but at that time there was no Catholic Church in Oxford. Since they could walk to St. Peter's Church, they became members there. Later, Anna and a daughter returned to Catholicism and married Catholics, but the sons remained at St. Peter's.

Joyce's father, Alphonse, from Naugatuck, married her mother, Victoria, originally from Seymour, in 1941. They loved Oxford, says Joyce, and were very involved in it. Victoria was a charter member of the Center Fire Company Auxiliary, marching in parades with the other volunteers. She also was very active in the Grange and in the Ladies Guild at St. Thomas Church.

Alphonse worked as a tool and die maker for the Bronson Company, but his evenings were spent holding a remarkable number of town positions. He was Third Selectman for a time and served as assessor, a job he loved because he could see Oxford grow. He was a member of the Board of Education, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Elderly Commission. He was treasurer of Center Fire and worked as a sheriff for New Haven County, serving legal papers. Joyce says he liked seeing things done right.

When Joyce was growing up, family structure was  
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The first town-owned Center Firehouse was built, using parts of the older Center School. The center for the firetruck was new construction, and the section at right was used for fire company meetings. The public library was in the section at left, and upstairs on the left side was the Selectmen's office.

## Heritage Recipe

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important. Family get-togethers were held at their grandmother's house. There was lots of land and a brook to swim in. Everyone brought traditional food and there would be cookouts. Joyce's grandmother and aunt would make Polish dishes like cabbage and kielbasa or cabbage and noodles. Her grandmother knew how to pick the wild mushrooms that grew on the farm, a skill she remembered from Poland.

The daughters helped at harvest time, canning sauces and pickles. Anna kept a crock in the basement for making her crunchy dill pickles. A beloved recipe for chili sauce was never written down and is now lost forever. All of this was part of family camaraderie.

The family also supported St. Peter's fundraisers including their chicken barbecues. When the Grange held minstrel shows where local talent would perform, they were in the audience. Ladies from the Grange also taught young girls, including Joyce's mother, to sew and garden.

Joyce and her brother Gerald grew up in the same house on Chestnut Tree Hill Extension where she lives now. Hers was the first class to use the infamous campus buildings built on the hill above Center School. She remembers plenty of mud and walking on boards laid across it to keep her shoes clean. The structures were cold in the winter and hot in the spring and fall. However, her teachers were excellent. Children got a good education in the Oxford School System, Joyce asserts.

When she reached the Ninth Grade, certified teachers including a Latin instructor were brought to Center School for two years. At the end of that time, Oxford signed a contract with Southbury Schools, and the small class of students made a seamless transition to that town to complete high school. When she graduated, Joyce got what she describes as a "great education" at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, returning to a career teaching health and physical education at Southbury High School for 44 years.

Children in the 1940s and 1950s had an incredible amount of freedom compared to today. Joyce describes walking and riding bikes on Route 67. Neighborhood children met at Center School to play basketball or just hang out. A visit to Steinecker's Store located across the street was the highlight of the day. The kids stopped there or at Charlie Kirk's garage next to the present Center Firehouse for ice cream and candy treats.

The youngsters also spent time at the Public Library, first housed where the present police station is located, later moved to a room in the firehouse and finally situated in the basement in the new Town Hall. They met friends there and sat and read. Some worked to help librarian Mary Kennedy, volunteering to shelve books.

Now retired from teaching at her former alma mater, Joyce loves working at the Oxford Senior Center. The staff wants to make people happy, she explains. "When you see smiles on people's faces, that says it all." She is also Chairperson of the Elderly Commission. She scores Pomperaug High School basketball and volleyball games, but above all, she is loyal to Oxford. Nothing pleases her more than her community connections, spending time with childhood friends and chatting about old times.

## OXFORD HERITAGE RECIPE :

### VICTORIA NIESTEMSKI'S CABBAGE AND NOODLES

|                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2 onions                    | 4 tbsp. oil              |
| 1 large head of cabbage     | 4 tbsp. butter           |
| 1 can sliced mushrooms      | Salt and pepper to taste |
| 1 box or bag of egg noodles |                          |



Chop onions and fry in oil until browned. Core the cabbage and cut into ½ inch strips. When onions are tender, add cabbage. Put in ½ cup of water for moisture.

Boil egg noodles until tender according to package directions. When cabbage is tender, add drained noodles, butter and mushrooms. Add salt and pepper. Stir to combine until hot. Enjoy.

*The Oxford Society thanks Joyce Niestemski for sharing her memories of her family and her life in Oxford.*

## American Revolutionary History Research Continues

Help us make more history as the Oxford Historical Society's America/250 Project documents the lives and records of Oxford's veterans of the American Revolution for preservation. Currently a dozen local volunteers of all ages have researched period records in print and online. Better weather this spring has allowed shifting efforts to locating veterans' headstones in local cemeteries and cleaning the stones to allow reading of the words in some cases nearly illegible for years. Local veterans' associations will add American flags to the newly located graves this fall.

Our list now includes 98 whose service record and connection with Oxford has been verified, mainly from church and government records. Of these 90 provided military service, and five of them made the ultimate sac-

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## Ongoing Revolutionary Research

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rifice. We also list eight who provided non-military service, such as serving on the Committees of Inspection. Research will continue to cover the full term of the conflict from 1775 through 1783.

The patriots listed were at one time, either before, during or after the war associated with Oxford or were buried here. The borders of the Parish of Oxford and the Town of Oxford were changed over time. Most lived within Oxford Parish before the town was separated from Derby along with parts of Waterbury, Woodbury and Southbury.

Using the newly verified and expanded information people will be needed to expand records: photographers, readers and writers, video/sound recorders and tombstone cleaners. People who are willing to transcribe the original pension applications are our biggest need right now.

America/250 may offer volunteers options for fulfilling community service, Eagle or Gold Scout, or Capstone project requirements. History buffs are especially welcome. Membership in the Oxford Historical Society is not required. Interested persons may call Dorothy DeBisschop at 203 910-4574.



**Open House:** Sept. 20, Oct. 4 and 18; closed Sept. 6 for Labor Day. Each month on the first and third Sunday from 2 to 4 pm the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead is open to the public. Docents chat about the history of the house and the items found inside as well as other topics of interest to the community. Admission is free, all ages welcome.

Books produced by the Society are available for purchase as well as unique notecard sets created using local art and photographs. Proceeds benefit the society's events and activities plus maintenance of the buildings and grounds.

### 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.



## Who's That? A History of Oxford Road Names: Hogsback Road.

While it is one of two major routes to access Oxford Center from the heart of Quaker Farms, there is no documentation for the origin of the name of Hogsback Road. It is shown on early Oxford maps, including the one produced in 1868 by F. W. Beers. This is noteworthy because it is unnamed there. This may have been an oversight, or Hogsback Road may not yet have been assigned its picturesque title.

By the 19th century, the forests that once covered Oxford had disappeared, cut for lumber or firewood or cleared for agriculture. In spite of the tremendous population growth in our town, our landscape today is far greener and tree-covered than it was then. One can speculate that the profile of the denuded hill travelers climbed and went down on horseback or by oxcart to get from one side of town to the other reminded them of the steep silhouette of the large pigs in their pens at home - therefore the name Hogsback Road

Town Historian Dorothy DeBisschop adds that wild hogs were not unknown. Escapees from the pigsty beside a barn grew large and dangerous in the wild within a few generations and are still a problem in parts of the United States.

The following is an article from *The Seymour Record* dated February 23, 1899:

*William Aldrich and Henry Loveland of Stevenson were attacked and gored by a boar yesterday afternoon and received severe injuries. Aldrich was the more seriously injured, as the tusks of the animal penetrated his groin, and it is believed that he is internally injured. Loveland was bitten in the leg and one of the bones was fractured.*

*Dr. E. T. Sharpe of Derby was summoned and spent several hours in attending to the injured injured men. Mr. Aldrich was unconscious when the doctor arrived.*

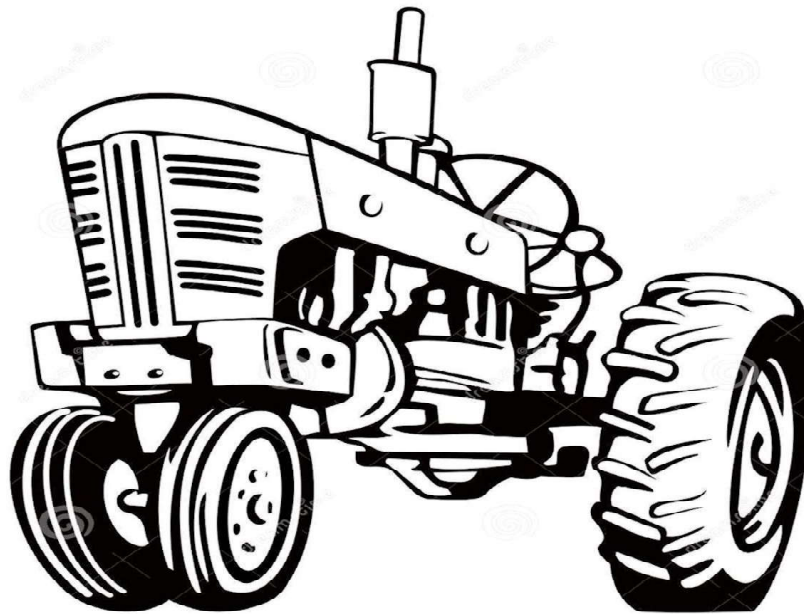
Road names were not important in Oxford's early years, and they often developed through common use. It was not until the town applied to the State of Connecticut for aid for maintenance costs that names were officially assigned.

Mrs. DeBisschop shared her memory of a resident of Hogsback Road who petitioned the town to change it to something more civilized. Old habits persisted and no action was taken. The first selectman of the time was "a pretty stubborn old Yankee when it came to tradition."

### Community support preserves our history and prepares us for the future.

- Online gift through our website <https://www.oxford-historical-society.org>,
- Checks mailed to the Oxford Historical Society P.O. Box 582, Oxford, CT 06478

**Vintage TRACTOR MEET**  
**Sunday, October 11**  
**Noon to 4<sup>pm</sup>**  
*(Raindate: October 18)*



**Fun for All Ages.**

**FREE Tours of**  
**Twitchell-Rowland Homestead**  
**Oxford Historical Society**  
**60 Towner Lane • Oxford, CT**