

# Making History Every Day

September & October, 2019, Volume 1, Issue 5

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

**Twitchell Rowland Homestead Museum**

**60 Towner Lane, Oxford, CT 06478**



This stage was underwritten by a recent grant from the Valley Community Foundation serving the lower Naugatuck Valley from its offices in Derby.

The final step of loading the little wooden building onto a truck and trundling it along Oxford Road and then down Towner Lane will be accomplished by Nicholas Brothers. Using cribbing, steel girders and dollies with their prime mover, they will pick up the building from its base on the Sears property and load it onto a trailer.

After a short trip to its new location, the trailer will be backed across the lawn in the back yard of the Twitchell Rowland Homestead and slowly lowered onto the new foundation and basement walls.

OHS is grateful to the Town of Oxford for funding the actual move by the Nicholas Brothers with a Community Support grant.

After coordinating with the CT DOT, the final move date will be set. For now it appears late September or early October are the target dates! Watch the Society's website and Facebook page as time gets closer for further information..

## Step by Step, Slowly....

September is here and the excavation for a foundation and basement for the Munn Schoolhouse at the OHS campus at 60 Towner Lane. The work being done by Sinopoli Construction Company is underway.

Once the roughly 20 by 30 foot hole is dug, the concrete forms will be set up and the pour done. Bolts, pipes, gravel for drains and finish work will make the basement ready to receive the historic building after its trip from Route 67, two miles away.

While this is being completed, historic restoration carpenter Eric Iott of Seymour is spending time in early September removing the schoolhouse's roof shingles. His work includes tagging the sheathing, rafters, etc. before removing the second floor loft. Additionally more than 30 feet of wooden sill will be replaced.

The next stage of prepping the wood frame building for actual transport includes tarping the roof and removing windows and doors to board-up the exterior walls. Then flooring will be removed and temporary floor joists and plywood put in to brace the base of the schoolhouse.



Eric Iott examines the schoolmaster's desk, still attached to the schoolhouse wall.



Students walk to the one-room schoolhouse when Riggs street was a dirt road.



1942. Mrs. E. E. Erwin, teacher



## Riggs Street School a Profile in History

Originally a one-room schoolhouse built on the east side of Riggs Street just south of Jack's Hill Road, this school became so crowded with students that the teacher had to leave by the front door and return by the back door to help students seated at the back of the room. Eventually a second room was added.

Oxford Historical Society President Louise Nyberg Burr entered Riggs Street School when she was nearly seven. Her mother had been a teacher and taught Louise the alphabet and numbers so she started school already knowing how to read and write. That meant she was included with the second graders, as she was the only first grader that year. She was elated to have other children to play with for the first time. They played baseball, hop scotch and jumped rope in the middle of the little traveled road and explored the woods and swampy stream near the rear of the school. Birch trees were bent down and kids climbed up them before they snapped forward, for "a nice ride up and down."

Before they left the schoolhouse at the end of the day, each child had a chore. Once a week they would elect their job: "erasing the blackboards, putting chalk and erasers in place, sweeping the

floor, emptying wastepaper baskets, sweeping the outhouse floors and replenishing the paper, bringing wood in from the woodshed, getting a pail of water to fill the crock at the front of the classroom. The teacher oversaw that all was done; there were no janitors, only us to do the jobs."

The schoolhouse remained in operation until 1944. That year there were only ten students and in June four of them graduated leaving Louise's sister Eleanor as a first grader and only one other student. So the town closed the school and bused Eleanor to Christian Street School until 1947 when the consolidated Center School opened. Until recently the schoolhouse was a private home located at 306 Riggs Street.

This article is taken from the *Historic Buildings of Oxford Past and Present* published by the Oxford Historical Society in 2017. Copies are for sale at the Town Clerk's office in Town Hall and at the Twitchell Rowland Homestead at 60 Towner Lane. It also includes memories of Louise Burr from her family book *It Was Always Interesting* in the collection of the Historical Society.



After serving as a private residence for many years, the Riggs Street School is now a Chiropractic Health Center. This PATCH photo shows First Selectmen George Temple and State Rep David Labriola with Dr. Brandon Cyr, Sr. family at office opening.

## Friends Supporting Us...



### Peach Festival a SMASH....

If you missed out on the delicious experience this year – be sure to mark your calendar for the fourth Saturday in August, 2020. More than 160 people visited Great Hill United Methodist Church to sample the tasty peach shortcakes and view this year's feature articles and photos. In fact the event was so popular that the shortcakes and Rich Farm peach ice cream sold out for the first time ever. The overwhelming response was heartening and helped add to the funds to support the society's Munn Schoolhouse project.



### Railroad in Oxford a Hit!

The July 29 event was attended by over 80 people who were fans of trains and railroads. Former resident Don Woodworth offered an hour long photo presentation that focused on the trains, rails and stations in the Oxford-Danbury-Waterbury area.

Don was fascinated as a youngster with the train tracks and engines in the area that were still visible by the 1960s. He discovered a magazine featuring trains during a newspaper drive and uncovered a trove of issues he treasured which fed his interests. Don was a regular trekking the rails that were no longer in use and was thrilled the old track beds were the basis for the Larkin Trail in northwest Oxford.

Don's work has been compiled in a 40 page booklet full of photos and data. ***The Railroad in Oxford*** is available at the Oxford Historical Society for \$10 per copy.

## Friends We Will Miss....



**Lifetime Member and Longtime Friend Philip Rowland** grew up in the Twitchell Rowland Homestead when it was his family's home. His twin brother Edward and older

brother Fred shared bedrooms and chores when the house was located a short distance up Towner Lane on Christian Street. A sister, Marion, was the daughter of the family.

As an adult, Phil and his wife Loretta were staunch supporters of the Oxford Historical Society and actively participated in the project to relocate the house to its new home and its use as a town museum. The photo history of the move and restoration of the house shows Phil and other Rowland family members painting, shoveling, mowing and working to accomplish the myriad chores that made the house a home – again. Phil and his wife Loretta volunteered at the Society Recycling project until his health prevented them from doing so. Phil Rowland passed away at the end of August and will be dearly missed.



**Barbara Rickman** was a new friend of the society, discovering the enormous Jensen barn loom in 2017. When Barbara attended a Fiber Fest session and tried out the antique room-size loom, she was hooked. She had been hoping

to acquire one and with her family's help put it in working order. This was only one of the ambitious projects undertaken by this enthusiastic crafts woman. Barbara was ready to share anything she had learned and in 2019 had demonstrated with flax she had grown in her yard the previous summer. The Society constructed a flax brake for her to demonstrate a new craft to curious Fiber Fest guests. There was always one more challenge to meet. Sadly Barbara passed away at the end of August. Her friendly help and wonderful sharing of her love of traditional crafts will be missed.

COMING IN THE FALL...  
Stevenson Dam Program  
Sunday, Nov. 17 \* 2-4 pm  
*Riverside Fire House*  
151 Coppermine Rd., Oxford

John Babina returns with fascinating photo and new information to update his popular program on this area landmark and engineering marvel. \$5 admission, children under 12 free. Members \$3. Become a member for 2020 and get member admission price.

The event will include a short annual meeting of the Oxford Historical Society, including election of officers.



COMING IN THE SPRING...  
FIBER FEST 2020  
April 18 & 19, 2020

The celebration of all things fiber is becoming an annual hit and plans for next spring's event have begun. The two new co-chairs for the coming year, Society members Christine Lesko and Valerie Nelson are looking for fiber artists who are interested in sharing their crafts with visitors to this fair. We have weavers and spinners and dyers; rug makers, knitters and felters. New crafters are invited to participate and more information can be found by emailing [FiberFest@oxford-historical-society.org](mailto:FiberFest@oxford-historical-society.org).

Mark your calendars for April 18 & 19.

#### **HOMESTEAD OPEN HOUSE:**

Sunday, Sept. 15, 2 - 4 pm

Sunday, Oct. 6, 2 - 4 pm

Sunday, Oct. 20, 2 - 4 pm

**ON DISPLAY:** In case you missed this, the display cases are still featuring Native American stone axe heads and arrow points found in Oxford as well as a stone mortar (bowl) discovered in a stone wall.

These amazing examples of tools handmade and used by local Indians were turned up in yards, fields and garden excavations with regular tools – and by sharp eyes!

**FREE Admission \* Tours available**  
**Twitchell-Rowland Homestead**  
60 Towner Lane, Oxford

### **Honor an Educator Program Continues**



*As seen in Voices and on Facebook and Valley Independent Sentinel online -*

The Oxford Historical Society has been presented with a gift of \$2500 for the Munn Schoolhouse Project. The gift honored the teachers who educated the donor's daughters. If you wish to donate to remember a special educator, the gift cards may be purchased in the Town Clerk's Office or at The Twitchell-Rowland Homestead Museum Open House (2-4 pm) on the first and third Sundays of each month. For further information please call 203 888-0230.

Mail donations to Oxford Historical Society, PO Box 582, Oxford, CT 06478. Make checks out to Oxford Historical Society, with "Munn Schoolhouse" in note field.

### **Help Preserve Our 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 at <http://www.oxford-historical-society.org/membership.pdf>
- visit the Homestead and learn more about our activities; sign up for special tours & programs