Recalling Oxford’s Early History

The Oxford Town Seal is based on this drawing by Foster Sperry for the 1976 Bicentennial of the American Revolution. It contains elements which explain the town’s early history.

The water-powered mill in the foreground depicts early Oxford industry, which was common along the streams and waterfalls of the town. On the ox-drawn cart is a hogshead of molasses, which was moved from New Haven to Oxford for use in area stills. The ox cart is crossing the Little River at an ox ford.

The treaty oak is at left. This was the boundary between the Indians of Chusetown (now called Seymour) and the Indians of Woodbury. Under this tree an early land purchase was made by the white men from the Indians.

The three hills in the background represent the three general hills of Oxford -- Chestnut Tree Hill, Governors Hill, and Good Hill or Pisgah Mountain.

The church between the hills was included as a symbol to show that the first efforts at town government were the establishment of a local parish of Oxford.

The stone wall shows the rocky nature of the land, and a herd of sheep grazing in a field fenced by a split rail zig-zag fence. Sheep and other livestock were driven through Oxford on their way from Litchfield County to New Haven.

Fall Fundraising Focus Shift

Because we are not having our big tent manned by staunch society volunteers at the Polls on Election Day and many folks will be voting by absentee ballot, we are replacing our Election Day booth with the new Oxford Founder’s Day online fund-raiser.

On Tuesday, October 20, we will celebrate the 222nd anniversary of the incorporation of the Town of Oxford in 1798. Look for information on Facebook and on the OHS website with links to the online giving platform.

And thank you to all our supporters and friends for generous gifts that help make our work possible and successful. These funds enable our continuing work on Mr. Munn’s Schoolhouse to create a living history experience for Oxford’s schoolchildren as well as exhibit space for our growing collections.

Honor an Educator

Inspired by a gift of $2500 honoring the teachers who educated the donor’s daughters to benefit the Munn Schoolhouse Project, the notecards have become popular with local families.

The gift cards may be purchased from The Twitchell-Rowland Homestead Museum. 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 the note field.
Community Funders Support Work on Schoolhouse

Oxford Historical Society is pleased to report the Mr Munn Schoolhouse restoration project is moving forward now that 2020 grants have been distributed by area funders.

In July the Valley Community Foundation presented the OHS with $12,400 to pay for the work on the corner post of the schoolhouse. This stage also requires the replacement of the floor beams before the floor can be repaired and floorboards replaced.

This work is continuing with area restoration carpenter Eric Iott of Seymour. Eric did the initial repairs including stabilizing the building before its move from the Oxford Road site where it had been for two centuries.

Additionally notification was received that a request to the Katherine Matthies Foundation was granted. This brought an additional $5400 for the schoolhouse restoration project.

In August the Town of Oxford provided $1500 from its annual budget in support of Oxford Historical Society. This year the funds are going toward replacing clapboards on the schoolhouse.

The Society has received a bid for period appropriate roofing for the schoolhouse. The installation of red cedar shingles will depend on our pending application for necessary funds from a local grant source. The Community Support Committee voted recently to recommend the Board of Selectmen approve $4,800 from funds received from the Power Plant agreement.

OHS also received a bid for replacing missing and damaged clapboards. The funds received so far are inadequate to pay for that portion of the schoolhouse restoration, but there are hopes the Oxford Founders Day online fundraiser will contribute to accomplishing that stage, bringing the school much closer to completion and opening to the public.

Sears Family Memorabilia

Photographs, diaries, receipts, letters, early 20th Century cookbooks, almanacs and newspaper clippings from the estate of Edna Sears were recently donated to the Oxford Historical Society by Ken and Tom Biondi. Miss Sears lived in her family home on Oxford Road near the Seymour border. Daughter of Clayton and Sarah Jeannette Hawley Sears, she was a friend of the Biondi’s stepmother, and gave her the family papers to keep.

Clayton Sears was a lineman for the telegraph company and a mechanic. Among the contents of the box was his early repair manual for motor cars. Of special interest are Clayton Sears’ diaries from the 1930s and a diary kept by Laura Davis Hawley, Miss Sears’ grandmother. It is hoped that these records of everyday life in Oxford will be transcribed and made available to the public in the future.

The Society wishes to thank Ken and Tom Biondi for their generosity and for saving these reminders of Oxford’s past.

From Winslow Homer’s “The Noon Recess.”

Fresh Face for Twitchell-Rowland Homestead

All the work on the schoolhouse does not stop our dedication and continuing work on the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead. We are proud of the fresh face from the recent painting of the Homestead. The work on the west and south sides of the old house was done by Rob Pettinella painting contractor. Rob’s company has done work for many families and area non-profits. The project included scraping and spraying, brush painting window frames and repainting decks and rails, all to make the building ready for a few more decades.

Oxford Historical Society wants to thank Pettinella Painting & Maintenance for their professional support and great work. Thanks so much!
STASH OF ANTIQUE SHOES

When Heather Asplund and Clifford Hudson III volunteered to help a friend move, they had no idea they would unearth treasures that delighted the volunteers at the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead Museum.

While emptying the contents of the attic at 251 Quaker Farms Road, the pair discovered a pile of old shoes, boots and pieces of leather salvaged from other footwear. The owner urged them to throw them out, but Ms. Asplund and Mr. Hudson felt that these remnants of clothing worn in Oxford probably during the early to middle 19th century had meaning as part of the town’s history.

Having followed the OHS Facebook page, they contacted the Historical Society and brought their treasures to the museum.

Underneath well over a hundred years of grime were hand-stitched seams, straps for pulling up boots, hand-wrought cobbler’s nails, and linen lining in women’s slippers.

One woman’s shoe still sported a faded tied ribbon, probably once red, that held it on a long-ago girl’s foot. The stash included women’s, men’s and children’s sizes and styles - perhaps a cobbler saved the shoes and leather, planning to recycle usable portions for repairs or even into new footwear. Several shoemakers worked in the town throughout the 1700s and 1800s.

The Oxford Historical Society is grateful to Ms. Asplund and Mr. Hudson for their unique and much appreciated donation.

Covid-19 Delays Open Houses:

Open houses were previously held on first and third Sunday afternoons; these tours have been suspended due to the constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and limited interior space. The Homestead is too small a space to allow for adequate social distancing and has other space constraints.

We look forward to the future when Open House Sundays can resume and friends of the Oxford Historical Society can visit again.

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

Cooking & Baking

Stand the Test of Time

Enjoy this bite of history:

This Oxford heritage recipe came from the collections of Edna Sears, recently acquired by the Oxford Historical Society. This one was clipped from an unknown/undated newspaper offering “Recipe Suggestions for the Housewife”

BAKED SQUASH

1 summer squash  2 Tbsp butter
1 egg      1 cup bread or cracker crumbs
Salt and paprika

Cut squash in halves remove seeds and bake. When tender remove shell. Add egg well beaten, butter, salt and paprika and three fourths of the crumbs. Mix well.

Put in a buttered baking dish, cover with remaining crumbs. Dot with butter and bake 15 minutes in hot oven.

Sharing town history…

PHOTO TO OXFORD TOWN HALL

S. B. Church’s will provided funds for the building of a Town Hall for Oxford but no picture of him was on display there until now.

Recently the Oxford Historical Society donated a large framed photo. The photograph was a gift to the Society from Cheryl Willis who lived in Mr. Church’s home, Oxfordshire, on Great Hill Road for many years.

A very successful businessman, Stephen Betts Church (1866 – 1951) spent his entire life in Oxford. He founded and operated The Church Company, which specializes in drilling artesian wells.