

Making History Every Day

November and December, 2021, Volume 3, 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

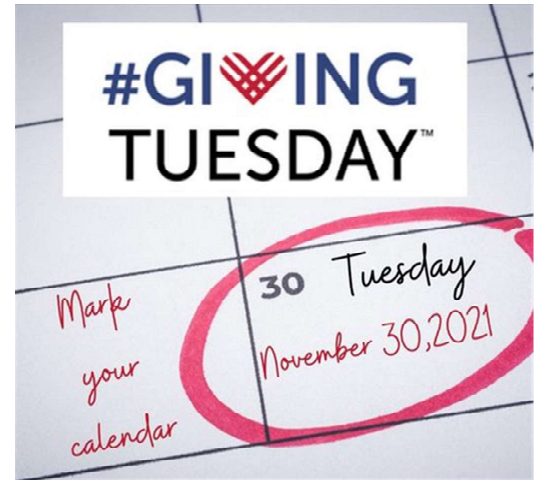
“Every act of generosity counts and everyone has something to give.”

November 30, 2021 is the international day marked for support of local non-profits. Following the traditional ‘Black Friday’ holiday shopping marathon and the Saturday ‘Buy Local’ in support of local businesses and retailers, ‘Giving Tuesday’ taps into the generosity of community members to support local non-profit organizations through activities and financial donations.

Using the Oxford Historical Society’s website (<http://www.oxford-historical-society.org>) and Facebook page (@oxfordhistoricalsociety) donations can be made with Paypal and credit cards. Checks can be sent to the Society at OHS, PO Box 582, Oxford, CT 06478.

This year the funds will go to defray costs to stabilize and reinforce the ceiling of the Munn Schoolhouse. The photo below shows the broken ceiling plaster and the laths that originally supported the plaster that has come loose through the years. Our preservation carpenter has met with the building inspector and agreed to a plan to replace the falling plaster and install a new ceiling and reinforce the ceiling beams. Once done, interior work can continue to finish the walls and bring the school closer to readiness for school students, area families and the community. The exterior of the building is also scheduled to be painted by springtime.

The society’s usual fundraising has been limited by the Covid hazards of group events and inside programs. With this in mind the support of the community is doubly valued. Society members are hoping to offer more program options in the coming year including the popular April Fiber Fest featuring live animals and fiber crafters. We are hoping that work can progress enough that visitors will be able to get their first look at the schoolhouse on that April weekend when the crafters, animals and visitors return to the homestead for a celebration of our historic rural heritage on April 9 and 10.

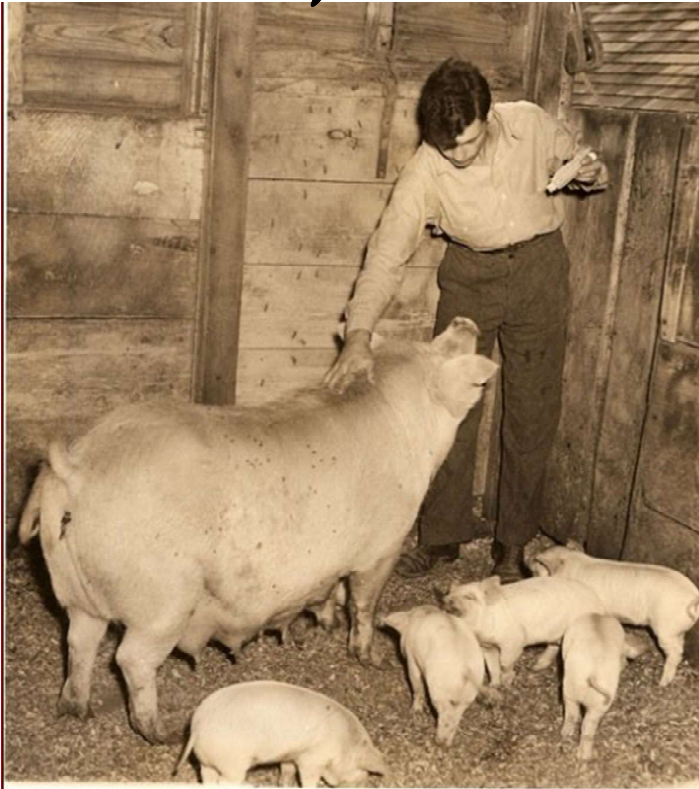


Fiber Fest to Return

The Oxford Historical Society plans to hold our Fiber Festival April 9 and 10, 2022. Ron East will again shear animals at the event. Val Nelson and Chris Lesko are the co-chairs..

Persons interested in demonstrating a fiber craft or being a fiber craft vendor may email Val Nelson (fiberfest@oxford-historical-society.org) expressing their interest. We expect that many of those who have exhibited in the past years will again be able to share their talents and appreciation with our visitors. As usual, there is no charge for vendors or guests at our annual celebration.

Looking Back...



Young Fred Rowland caring for pigs at his boyhood home on Christian Street.

Heritage Recipe - **CHOCOLATE TOMATO SOUP CAKE (BLACK MAGIC CAKE)**

It's a Sunday afternoon at the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead, and a repeat visitor is huddled over a box of antique tools. Suddenly he looks around. "Is that guy here that I talked to the last time?" he asks. "I really enjoyed chatting with him about his tool collection."

"That guy" is Fred Rowland, neighbor, benefactor, and docent emeritus at the museum. The Homestead was the house he grew up in with his twin brothers Phil and Ed and his sister Marion. The land where houses now sit along Rowland Farm Drive was pastures, corn fields, gardens, barns, pig pens and chicken coops where Fred worked at everything from gathering eggs to moving cattle up and down Christian Street. The plot where the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead Museum is located was part of that farm, and without Fred's and his wife Myrtle's generosity and vision, there would be no museum on Towner Lane where Fred shares his special knowledge with the guests.

"Where's Fred?" bellowed one man coming through the door. "I want to hear about the heating system when he was a boy!"

Social life in Oxford when Fred was a young man

revolved around frequent parties, dances, and performances at the Grange on Route 67. Fred spent lots of time there with his friends, taking the job checking coats at dances because he was rather shy. Beautiful brunette Myrtle Potter from Ansonia had other ideas and took it upon herself to get him out on the dance floor.

Romance blossomed. They married in 1949 and had more than 60 busy, wonderful years together. The pair built their house at 62 Towner Lane and had 3 children: physician Dr. Fred; Gordon, a musician and music professor at Ithaca College, and Charlie who is the vice-principal at WAMOGO and who farms the land next door.

It is impossible to buttonhole Fred's abilities and interests. Want to know how to prune the raspberry bushes you bought last spring? Fred can tell you. Car problems? Fred was a mechanic for many years. Want to chat about engineering and slide rules? Fred spent many years creating precision-manufactured machinery at Kerite and the Moore Company. He's also flown airplanes and helped rehab vintage tractors. He plays the organ and sang in the St. Peter's Church choir until the COVID pandemic hit.

He's also a born story teller, and has so many memories of life in the Homestead to share. One favorite recounts how he went up on the roof to shovel off an accumulation of heavy snow after an especially severe storm. That trip didn't end well when he fell off and broke both legs. There was no sympathy waiting for him at home. Myrtle didn't think he had any business up there in the first place and told him so.

Around 1950, the Rowland farmstead was sold out of the family. By 2004, it was empty, stripped of copper pipes, and threatened with demolition. The Oxford Historical Society was determined to move it, but where?

Fred and Myrtle Rowland provided the answer in 2006, donating an acre of their land at 60 Towner Lane so that the house where Fred grew up would have a new home.



They were among the Society members and well-wishers who followed the building down the road and into the lot the day it was moved, watching it settle on I-beams over the cellar hole.

That was only the beginning. Fred worked with life-long friends like Rob Robinson, Don Rich and Fred Schiavi to drill a well and create the foundation. He and Myrtle were there to welcome the Museum's first guests when it opened in 2010, and he continues to visit on open Sunday afternoons, driving his green 'Gator to the parking lot and offering visitors insights into long-ago life in the Homestead that no one else can give.

On December 14, Fred and his family will mark his 96 th birthday. When asked about his favorite cake to hold all those candles, he promptly answered "chocolate tomato soup cake" which Myrtle always made for him. A recipe for that moist, gooey, rich dessert from Food.com follows.

BLACK MAGIC CHOCOLATE CAKE

1 ¾ cups flour	2 cups sugar
¾ cup cocoa	2 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder	1 tsp. salt
2 eggs	1 (10 ounce) can condensed tomato soup
1 cup buttermilk (or 1 tsp. white vinegar in 1 cup milk)	2 tsp. vanilla
½ cup oil	

Mix the dry ingredients together. Add to the dry mix the eggs, tomato soup, buttermilk, oil and vanilla. Beat till all is moist and well blended, about 5 minutes total.

Pour into a greased 9 x 13" pan and bake at 350 degrees for 35 – 40 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Frost with your favorite frosting: Fred's is vanilla buttercream.



Fred, Philip, Edward and Marian Rowland with their parents in the Twitchell-Rowland Homestead.



A Sign for YOUR House

Make your mark in your neighborhood. Or give a local homeowner a one-of-a-kind holiday present. Order a custom made sign with name and date while supporting the Oxford Historical Society.

Now available - locally made signs: 11 inches by 18 inches of painted board with pre-drilled holes allow easy mounting. You choose two lines of text. Each sign costs \$100 payable to the Oxford Historical Society, which includes a donation to the OHS.

Usually sought by old house owners to show the year of their house construction, the text can be customized to any name or year. Choose the year your family built your house - or moved into your 'home sweet home' and start making history.

Information and ordering: Marilyn Stebar, 203-888-3469.

Twitchell Rowland Homestead is OPEN!

Homestead Open Houses are back! First and third Sundays from 2-4 pm society volunteers are opening the doors and answering questions. Since vaccines are widely available, face masks and social distance are effective - we feel safe and Governor Lamont has opened the state.

Look for us on Sunday Nov. 21 and then December 5 and 19. We'd be happy to see you.

The Oxford Historical Society Executive Board is now holding monthly meetings on the third Sunday at 2 pm and the public is welcome. If you are curious about how things get done, please drop by.

Gift Ideas - support your local Historical Society

The Oxford Historical Society has multiple books for sale including *Images of Oxford*, *Oxford History Remembered*, *The Railroad in Oxford*, *World War II Revisited* and the unique *Historic Buildings of Oxford Past and Present*.

There are tee shirts in two styles and colors, various notecards featuring photos of the Stevenson Dam construction and historic landmarks in town plus sketches of local houses.