

Oakham Historical Association

P.O. Box 236, 1221 Old Turnpike Road, Oakham, MA 01068 • 508-882-3111
www.oakhamhistory.com (*in progress*) E-mail: admin@oakhamhistory.com

March 2016 • Issue 67

The Oakham Historical Museum is one of the town's oldest buildings. Although the exact date on which it was built is unknown, it is recorded in a land transfer on August 25, 1773.



The building has a rich history of revolutionary conspiracies, home of the Fobes family, and as the town's first Post Office.

It now serves as a meeting place for the OHA and a museum for everyone to enjoy.

Officers:

Jeffrey Young, *President*
Ken Housman *Vice-President*
Helen Bechan, *Secretary*
Kathryn Young, *Treasurer*
Linda Housman, *Curator*

Directors :

Wesley Dwelly
Eva Grimes
William Mucha

Work Mornings: 1st Thur, 10am
Regular Meetings: 3rd Wed, 7pm

Upcoming Events

March 10, 10a-12p

Work Morning
at the Museum

March 30, 1p

Fireside Chat

Fobes Memorial Library
Talk by Wes Dwelly

April 7, 10a-12p

Work Morning
at the Museum

May 5, 10a-12p

Work Morning
at the Museum

May 14, 2p

Fashion Show & Tea
Congregational Church

May 19

Annual 20-20 lottery fundraiser ends

May 29, 1-4p

Museum Opens
for the 2016 season;
open on the 4th Sunday of each month through Oct. 23

Added hours: June-October, 2nd Wed, 7-8:30p

May 30

Memorial Day Exercises

OHA coffee & donuts

August 27, 8a-3p

Town-Wide Yard Sale

OHA Documentation Project

At an OHA work meeting last July, Tom Saupe suggested to our curator, Linda Housman, that we really needed to properly document every item in the Museum's collections. Linda agreed, and they discussed **how** and **when** to accomplish this. Their proposed plan received unanimous approval and support.

The project got off to a quick start last September. Tom, being newly retired and armed with a new professional camera, agreed to take pictures of all the artifacts. He downloads the photos from his camera to his computer and prints color photos onto a contact sheet. At the work meetings, the photos are cut apart and pasted onto a two-sided preprinted inventory worksheet. Then the worksheet is completed by volunteers who fill in as much detail about the item as can be found, e.g., who donated it and when, who did the item belong to, what was it used for, and any additional historical information associated with the item. Each completed worksheet is filed in a three-ring binder. As an extra preservation precaution, Tom is backing up the photos on a flash drive. This is the **HOW** of the project.

The next thing was **WHEN** to do this. Customarily, the OHA monthly work meetings have been held on the first Wednesday evening of the month. However, Linda felt that a work meeting in the evening after all the days' business was done would not work as well for this project. She had an idea that a daytime work meeting might be more suitable. She called upon our active retired members and found a good response. Starting with the new year, the work meetings have been held on the first Thursday of the month from 10am to 12noon. Initially, four people came to the morning work meeting, and at the last meeting eight people showed up! As it turned out, we all began to help one another to identify objects. The camaraderie and congeniality turned out to be fun! We miss some of our older active members, as they have much to offer from remembrances of long ago. Perhaps they will be willing to sit in on future work mornings to help us record the past.

To date, Linda has a file of 147 completed worksheets, and all of us have learned more of Oakham's history by researching the many files available at the Museum. With the number of artifacts in the Museum's holdings estimated to be more than one thousand, this historically important documentation project will take many work mornings.

The Oakham Historical Association has been awarded a cultural council grant to help with photographic and paper expenses, and the Association is now putting out a call for more volunteers to help with this vital undertaking. Anyone, whether member, friend, or out-of-towner, is welcomed to join us around the work table. It's the perfect way to learn more about Oakham's rich history and to enjoy a few hours of camaraderie with a congenial group of volunteers! Come once, twice, every other month or as often as your schedule or desire allows. Generally, work mornings are held on the first Thursday of the month; however, the next work morning will be held on **March 10th** from 10am to 12noon at the Museum, 1221 Old Turnpike Road. For more information, people may call 508-882-3990 or 508-882-5225.

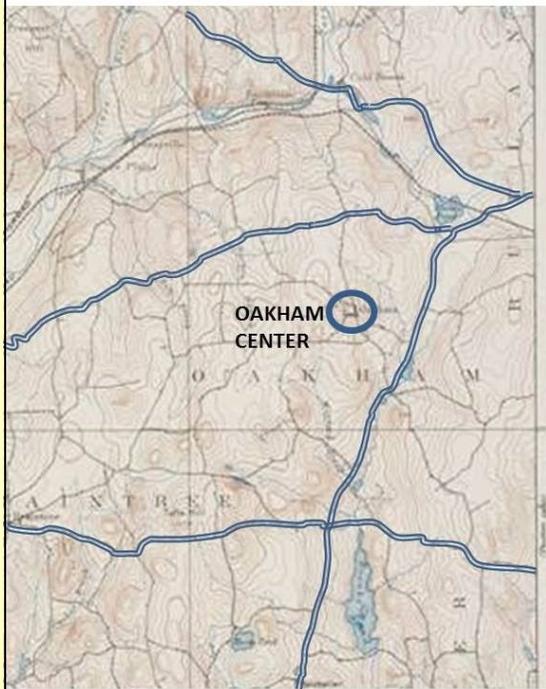
Ken Housman, Edie Mathis



Roads and Religion in Oakham

By Lee Dougan

FOUR COUNTY ROADS IN OAKHAM 1762



When the first Christian radicals (Scotch-Irish Presbyterians) moved into Rutland West Wing (later named Oakham) to escape from the Congregationalists, there were only four well-traveled roads here. A county road from Rutland to Hardwick followed Whitehall Road out of Rutland and onto Old Turnpike Road in Oakham. The county road from Rutland to Brookfield started at Whitehall Road near Muddy Pond and followed North Brookfield Road (Route 148) to the western end of town. In the southern section of town the county road followed present day South Road onto Robinson Road and across North Brookfield Road into New Braintree. In the northern section of town Pine Plains Road from Rutland passed through Coldbrook Springs on its way to Barre center. Just like today, no major roads led to the center of town so none of the original settlers purchased land in the center of town. It was the church that brought these early settlers together.

Initially, church services rotated from house to house at the extreme corners of the Oakham settlement. On May 15, 1761, because of the long travel from one end of town to the other, it was voted to take down their old Presbyterian meeting house, which they had affectionately called “the coffin”, in the Dublin district of Rutland and rebuild it in the “senter” of Oakham. In order to “get to the church on time” roads needed to be built to travel from the four existing county roads to the center of town.

In 1762 James Craige, Arthur Forbush and Alexander McFarland were chosen “surveyors of highways” to take on this monumental task of laying out roads and making bridges. Road taxes could be paid off by donating land to the town for the roads, by donating supplies and/or by donating their time building the roads for their assessment. From 1767 to 1790, virtually

every town road had been completed. The only cost to the town was payment to the chainmen and surveyors.

On March 9, 1767 the town voted to start building two rod wide roads, the first beginning at Patrick Green’s house in the northwest section of town. It started on Old Turnpike Road, went south on what is now Scott Road, then east on Adams Road, along Barre Road to Maple Street and then southeast to the meeting house in the center of town.

The next road was from James Bell’s house to the center of town. This road followed Gaffney Road east onto New Braintree Road and then onto Maple Street. This pretty much completed all the east-west roads that Oakham needed at the time.

The first north-south road went from Old Turnpike Road to the meeting house along the southern leg of Coldbrook Road. Soon after, a road from Coldbrook was built to connect to the southern section of Coldbrook Road. It followed the present-day Coldbrook Road except for one section of the original road which followed what is now a cart road just east of Coldbrook Road, leading to the remains of the Central Massachusetts Railway station. Pine Road and part of Marsh Lane were also constructed to connect the various homes in Coldbrook

The first road constructed in the southern part of Oakham began at South Road and followed what is now Spencer Road, across North Brookfield Road onto Ware Corner Road over Tomlinson Road to meet Coldbrook Road in the center of town. East Hill Road was then built and met with Bechan Road to form an arc from Spencer Road back to Spencer Road.

Crawford Road from Alexander Crawford’s property to North Brookfield Road was the next road on the list. Rutland Road was then built to shorten the route from North Brookfield Road to the meeting house. New Braintree Road was extended from the present intersection with Gaffney Road to the New Braintree town line. It appears that Gaffney Road was extended to present-day Scott Road, then down Crocker Nye Road connecting to Barre Plains Road giving the settlers in western Oakham another road to Barre.

The next construction started at Old Turnpike Road, down Hunt Road, east onto Edson Road, then south on Bullard Road and back to Old Turnpike Road, forming a large rectangle connecting the early settlers to the county road.

At a town meeting on March 8, 1768, more roads were voted on to be built. The next road under construction would be Lincoln Road, connecting New Braintree Road with North Brookfield Rd. Rutherford Rd. broke off of Lincoln Rd. and extended to the New Braintree line. This is the only known road in Oakham that still has some of the original survey stones in place along the road. Barre Road connecting Adams Road to Old Turnpike Road was also built. Another road (now abandoned) just west of Spencer Road on South Road went north until it joined Spencer Road at the intersection of East Hill Road.



The town did allocate money to maintain the roads on a yearly basis; and in 1776 the town voted 20 pounds for schooling and 80 pounds for "mending highways". Apparently, Oakham preferred better roads to better schools. Even in 1776 a person could sue the town for injury or death caused by a "defective road". There were some exceptions, however, such as driving at high speeds; carrying an excessive load or "if one travelled on the Lord's day." Old Turnpike Road became the major highway in Oakham and in 1799 it became the 6th Massachusetts Turnpike. A toll booth was set up in Oakham and every man, wheeled vehicle and animal had to pay their fair share to use the road (I think the owners paid for the animals). Unlike the current Massachusetts Turnpike, all toll booths came down in 30 years and travel through Oakham was free once again.

With all the new roads being built and with more property available with easy access to all parts of town, the population increased at a steady pace. Many newcomers were "warned" out of town but many stayed to become productive citizens of the town. The population grew from the original ten families to nearly 600 people by 1776. The new immigrants weren't like the original settlers. With open borders, the original settlers had no control over who came into town. There was no way to keep the other religions out of Oakham and the new

settlers soon voted to have a Congregational form of government. For all intents and purposes the Presbyterian minister, Reverend Strickland, was warned out of Oakham in 1773, but it would take another 13 years before a Congregational minister would agree to permanently settle in Oakham.

To quote Mark Twain on his experiences in Virginia City, Nevada: "There were wild open gambling places, murders, street fights, riots, a whiskey mill every sixteen steps, half a dozen jails and some talk of building a church. It was no place for a Presbyterian and I did not remain one very long."

Oakham did build a new church to replace the old Presbyterian meeting house, but not until 1815. Although the United States Constitution declared a separation of church and state, Oakham continued to pay Reverend Daniel Tomlinson's salary until his death in 1842, and when the church was moved in 1845 the town offices and town hall were housed in the lower level of the church. It was not until after the Civil War when Memorial Hall was built in 1875 that there was a true separation of church and state in Oakham. But even into the latter half of the 20th century when the weather was cold some town committees chose to meet in the church where it was warmer.

Now after more than 250 years both the roads and church are still in remarkable condition in a town with no "county roads" leading to its geographical, religious and social center.

In most instances, current road names have been used in this article.)

Curator's Corner

A sincere thank you to the following people for their recent donations to the Museum.

Mary Ellen (Mann) Derrick, Oakham: Newspaper clippings, 2 post-cards, and copies of several historical articles, among which are a 1973 prison camp photo, narrative of Mary Rowlandson's capture and release, and write-up of the 1894 Village Improvement Society. These items were collected by Mary Ellen's mother, Marvell Mann, who served on the Oakham Historical Commission in the 1970s.

Lee Dougan, Oakham: Two independent research projects. One file is a time line of events from 1765 to 1781 and Oakham's response to these events, e.g., resolutions to raise men and supplies for the troops. Another file has an alphabetical list of every Oakham Revolutionary soldier, his age, and what alarms or campaigns he was involved in.

Olwyn & Alexander Mong, Oakham: Victorian parasol handle, brown knotty wood with a handcrafted silverplated tip engraved SILVER. Olwyn & Alexander, new residents of the Reed-Gallant house at 1058 Old Turnpike Rd., found it among fieldstones under the attached barn.

Paul & Diane Rochette, Oakham: A DVD of Oakham's 250th Anniversary parade, October 7, 2012.

Fireside Chat at the Fobes Memorial Library Wednesday, March 30, 2016, at 1:00pm

Wes Dwelly, OHA director and local historian, will be the guest speaker at the Library's new, monthly Fireside Chats. He will talk about the way the town center first looked in the mid-1700s and the changes that have occurred over nearly three centuries. You don't want to miss it!

Last month, Jeff Young, OHA president, gave a talk on the town's road names, and why or how they were changed. He also handed out a quiz in which the audience had to match up old names with new ones. Not everyone scored 100 but all had fun!

Tea and light snacks are served.



Fashion Show & Tea May 14 at 2:00pm

The Oakham Congregational Church is celebrating its 250th anniversary with a special event each month throughout the year. The fashion show will take place upstairs in the sanctuary. Church members and friends will model a variety of clothing dating from the mid-1800s, 1920s, 1940s, and 1950s. Hats, gloves, and other accessories will also be featured.

The OHA is pleased to participate in this exciting event with an exhibit of historical attire from the Museum's collection. Because of the fragile condition of this clothing, the selections will be displayed on mannequins rather than worn.

The fashion show will last about 45 minutes, followed by a high-style tea in Fellowship Hall. Earl Grey and scones anyone?

Membership Renewals

A heartfelt thank you to members who have renewed their memberships for 2016. Since we are not part of town government and do not receive any municipal funding, your renewal helps us to maintain the Museum building and supports our efforts to preserve Oakham history. We also sincerely appreciate the extra donation many members include with their renewal, and we are most grateful for the generous matching grants we receive from some members' employers.

Boy Scout Visitor

Olivier Whelan, a Westborough Boy Scout and high school sophomore, contacted the OHA in regard to his Eagle Scout project that involves cataloging and photographing historical musical instruments in collections throughout Worcester County. His advisor is the curator of musical instruments at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Jeff Young met with Olivier at the end of December and showed him the Museum's interesting collection of instruments from Oakham's "big band" era. An intriguing project for this young man and the OHA is delighted to be of assistance.

August 15, 1860: Leap Year Privileges.—

The girls in Oakham are disposed to maintain their leap year privileges as long as they can, and instanced their firm adhesion to their rights by taking the lords of creation out on a huckleberry excursion last Thursday, and on the arrival home, treating them to a supper spread in the Town hall. Of course the girls paid the bills and did the handsome thing generally.

*The Massachusetts Spy, or
Worcester Gazette*

OAKHAM NEWS FROM THE PAST

April 17, 1895: The masquerade ball and supper given by Packard's Brass Band last Monday evening was well-attended considering the weather and travelling. Boyle's Orchestra of North Brookfield furnished good music and an excellent supper was served in the Old Hall by the ladies. The grand march was led by Chas. Paquin Jr. and his sister, Miss M.D. Paquin.

Oakham Herald

April 16, 1902: The young ladies of Coldbrook, to harmonize with the expanding season, will bloom out with a violet party in Clark's Hall the 23rd, a competent corps of patronesses, directresses and aideses will be in full bloom during the evening and Harry E. Brigham's orchestra of Marlboro will discourse flowery music from 8 until 1 o'clock, the silvery dollar being the bouquet for the occasion. Cold comfort and cake will be the midnight menu. The posters, invitations, order of dances and tickets advertising the assembly are all printed with violet ink—Barre Gazette. *Oakham Herald*

March 4, 1891: The farmers' and mechanics' club, at their meeting on Tuesday Feb 24th, reversed their usual order of arrangements; the gentlemen providing the dinner which was done in a remarkably acceptable manner considering their inexperience in that direction. Some enjoyed for the first time any work of the kind. A few friends were present from out of town. They selected Mrs. M.O. Ayres as President for the

occasion who called the company to order about 1:45p.m.. The exercises opened with instrumental music by Mrs. Ayres. Then the children, under Miss Ada Walker's direction, entertained with instructive and pleasing recitations. Mrs. Jesse Allen, Mrs. Bushnell and Mrs. Gardner Dean read original essays on "Woman's Ability to Fill Untried Spheres," "Raising Vegetables and Keeping Hens" and "Poetry in Nature." There were readings by Rev. H.P. Leonard and Miss Orzina Lovell. These were interspersed with songs by Mrs. Bushnell, and the Misses Stones; a banjo solo by Arthur Reed, and a whistling solo by Miss Etta Stone. After a recitation by Stella Wyman the gentlemen were invited to make remarks. Several responded with wit and humor but it was proved that the ladies were not at all behind in responding to their sarcasm. ...The company adjourned to the call of the Secretary of the Club after singing "America."
Oakham Herald

Do You Know... what popular club was introduced to Oakham schoolchildren in 1911? Would you believe—it was the Boy's and Girl's POTATO CLUB! The club was formed by Charles Randall, the Superintendent of Schools for the district, under the direction of Prof. W. R. Hart of the then-Massachusetts Agricultural College in Amherst. More than 30 students signed on. The college provided the seed potatoes, accompanied by printed instructions on how to plant and cultivate. The state strongly supported the increased interest in agriculture, even passing a bill to allocate funds for prizes. In his annual report, Mr. Randall thanked the Oakham Grange for encouraging the children's agricultural interests by sponsoring a fall exhibit and offering prizes. The Potato Club received extra attention at the ninth grade graduation exercises on June 14, 1912, when John O'Donnell read his essay, "The Potato Club." If only the Museum had that essay!

In this issue

- ◆ Documentation Project
- ◆ Roads and Religion in Oakham
- ◆ Fashion Show & Tea
- ◆ Boy Scout Visitor
- ◆ Curator's Corner
- ◆ Fireside Chats
- ◆ Membership Renewal
- ◆ Oakham News from the Past
- ◆ Do You Know...

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