

# I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION - GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Date November 25, 2024

## Contact Information

Organization Name: Oxford Area Historical Association  
Address: 119 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Oxford PA 19363  
Phone: N/A (484-678-0113, exec. dir. cell)  
Website: <https://oxfordhistorical.org/>  
Year Incorporated: 2000  
FEIN: 23-3045756

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Board Chair Approval (check here): Yes  
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## Organization Information:

### Field/s of Interest:

**Arts, Culture & Humanities**                       Environment/Animal Welfare                       **Education**  
 Health     Human Services     Religion

**Mission:** The mission of the Oxford Area Historical Association is to preserve and promote the historical significance of the Oxford area, educate the community on historical interests, and to encourage the economic vitality of the Oxford area through historic preservation.

**Geographic Area Served** (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served): All of Southern Chester County, based in the Borough of Oxford and the 5 surrounding Townships in the Oxford Area School District

**Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:** The Oxford Area Historical Association (OAHA) is located in downtown Oxford, PA, and serves everyone in the Borough and the surrounding Townships (the entirety of the Oxford School District). In the Oxford area, US Census data from 2020 showed a 22.5% rate of poverty, and 62.5% of the Oxford Area School District's students qualify for the federal free/reduced lunch program. Average per capita income in Oxford is \$23,722. In 2023 and 2024, OAHA served over 3,000 people per year through our programs, events and archives access. With the increased capacity of our new building, and its location next to an elementary and a middle school, we will be able to continue growing that number, specifically with school groups who plan to partner with us throughout each year.

<u>Annual Budget</u> \$140,445	<u>.5</u> # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
<u>82</u> % of budget for program expenses	<u>8</u> # of Board Volunteers
<u>13</u> % of budget for administrative expenses	<u>35</u> # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
<u>5</u> % of budget for fundraising expenses	<u>4084</u> # of Volunteer Hours
<u>100</u> % total	

**Top 3-5 funding sources:** The Oxford Area Foundation, The James S. Herr Family Foundation, The Monomoy Foundation

**Is this grant proposal for:** Capacity Building  or **General Operating**

**Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation:** \$10,000

**Proposal Summary:** Education is about one-half of our overall programming. Our new location has allowed for increased partnership opportunities with local schools in the Oxford Area School District, as well as with Lincoln University. For the past two years we have hosted local teachers as they go through new teacher orientation, bringing them to the History Center to show them what resources we can offer. Over 200 kindergarteners came through the Center last year on the 100th day of school to learn what a school day was like in Oxford 100 years ago. This is the second year of working with three local 6th grade classrooms on collaborative projects. We also worked with an Eagle Scout from Bethany Christian School to create a walking tour of the Oxford area using QR codes on historic buildings. We are excited about the enthusiasm of the students and teachers surrounding these projects and look forward to more collaborations. \$10,000 would allow us to maintain and expand this work.

## II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

### 1. Nonprofit's history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness

#### **History:**

The Oxford Area Historical Association (OAHA) was founded in the year 2000 by Dr. Faye Doyle. The organization is passionately dedicated to preserving the historic significance of the borough of Oxford and the five surrounding townships. Our geographical focus is the entire area covered by the Oxford Area School District in Southern Chester County. OAHA presents monthly programs on a variety of historical topics, records oral histories of long-time area residents, organizes walking tours, sponsors re-enactor programs in the school district, and arranges trips to historical sites. We preserve objects and documents of local historical interest and assist area residents with their own research. We serve as the story-keepers of local history.

Oxford has always been a crossroads where people met and exchanged goods and stories. A place where diverse interests sparked new ideas and energy, and where a community gathered and took root. OAHA shares the area's rich history and compelling stories with our friends, neighbors, and visitors. After the recent devastating fire in Oxford in September of 2023, which took out much of the main downtown block, cultivating these community connections has become increasingly essential to the town's survival.

Ten years ago, an Archives Committee was created to acquire, process and house documents and objects related to the history of the Oxford area. Originally, we rented space from East Nottingham Township to house our collection and to allow our volunteer archivists space to process items. By 2017 we had outgrown the Township building, and we rented space on Locust Street in downtown Oxford. As our collection grew, we expanded into two climate-controlled storage units to safely house the wealth of archives and historical objects we steward. At our Locust Street location, we were limited, because of our size restrictions, in the materials we could accept from residents who wished to preserve the area's history, and we had been looking at expansion options for a few years. In addition, the owner of the mixed-use building we were renting expressed a desire to sell, and OAHA was placed on a month-to-month lease. OAHA knew we needed to start looking for a new location to house our growing collection. During the COVID-19 crisis, space limitations became even more of a concern.

Once the pandemic hit, because our location was too small to put social-distancing measures in place, we lost many long-time volunteers. In addition, because we could not hold in-person programs or events, our essential fundraising efforts were negatively impacted. We knew that we needed to increase both space and the numbers of volunteers in order to keep going and we started looking for a solution.

#### **Long-term goals:**

In March of 2023, we signed an agreement of sale for the former Union School Building at 119 S. 5th Street in Oxford, along with a very affordable five-year lease which will allow us time to raise money to purchase the building. During those five years, the building owner is responsible for all maintenance, excluding grass cutting and snow removal. The owner also generously donated all of the existing furniture in the building for OAHA's use. Recently renovated to include an accessible entrance ramp, handicapped-accessible bathrooms, a full-building HVAC system and a large generator, the building requires very few alterations to make it an ideal location for OAHA's History Center. This location has sufficient space for volunteers to work, residents and students to do research, and schoolchildren and other visitors to tour. The majority of schools in the OASD are within a 5-10 minute walk, so the location will be ideal for working on joint projects with local students. We will be collaborating with Lincoln University to start a History Major intern program, now that we have the space to make that possible.

The new History Center contains approximately 6,000 square feet of usable space (compared with our former Archives building, which had less than 1,000 square feet) and includes a side yard and a 40-car parking lot. There is ample space for both indoor and outdoor activities and events, and room to grow in the future. The building also affords the possibility of sharing second floor space with municipal historical commissions or renting offices to third parties. It is our goal to provide space for the local municipal historic commissions, many of which are struggling to

find volunteers. One central location for archives, with consistent staffing, would help to ensure protection of the information previously obtained by numerous volunteers throughout the region. In the future, it will also be possible to fit out the basement, expanding the usable space to 10,000 square feet.

The community investment needed to make this project a reality is \$1,500,000, which includes a purchase price for the building of \$700,000 or the appraised fair market value, whichever is less. Our monthly rent, which is capped at \$1,000 per month for the entire five-year period of our lease and agreement of sale, does not go towards the purchase. OAHA has already raised \$200,000 towards the purchase price of the building. Once we own the building, opportunities open up for County and State funding for things like an elevator. Owning the building will also free up \$12,000 in general operating funding, as we will no longer have to pay that in rent. We are in the midst of a capital campaign to raise this funding.

## **2. Funding request**

We understand as we raise money for the acquisition of our History Center, we also need to grow our operating capacity, both in the form of people (staff, board and volunteers) and also in the form of increased financial support for a larger building and enhanced programming. **We respectfully request \$10,000 in general operating funding to further our ongoing mission as we work on our capital campaign.**

### **Description of key initiatives**

The Oxford Area Historical Association's mission is to preserve and promote the historical significance of the Oxford area, educate the community on historical interests, and to encourage the economic vitality of the Oxford area through historic preservation. Our vision is to build a shared community legacy for the future by preserving our past. We work in close partnership with many other local organizations to achieve these goals, and our work falls into three main categories:

#### **A. Preservation**

We are working very closely with the County, Borough and Townships to try to consolidate the local Historical Commissions into our History Center. Many local commissions are losing volunteers, and we can house records and provide consistent staffing so that important local historical knowledge is not lost. West Nottingham is the first of the Townships to migrate files and records to the History Center. OAHA started as people in our area brought us items and documents to preserve. As we grow, we are starting to reach out to the community for archival items related to different cultures in our area, to better record and document the histories of the diverse population we serve.

#### **B. Education**

Education is a large part of our mission as well. Our new location has allowed for increased partnership opportunities with local schools in the Oxford Area School District, as well as with Lincoln University. For the past two years we have hosted local teachers as they go through new teacher orientation, bringing them to the History Center to show them what resources we can offer. Over 200 kindergarteners came through the Center last year on the 100th day of school to learn what a school day was like in Oxford 100 years ago. This is the second year of working with three local 6th grade classrooms on collaborative projects. We also worked with an Eagle Scout from Bethany Christian School to create a walking tour of Oxford using QR codes on historic buildings. We are excited about the enthusiasm of the students and teachers surrounding these projects and look forward to more collaborations with other grades and schools.

Our community programming has also grown; we recently moved our monthly programs to the auditorium at Ware Presbyterian Village because we outgrew the space we were renting. We now have hundreds of people in our audience each month, as opposed to the 30-40 people we saw previously. With a larger space, we are also able to welcome more community members in to the History Center to interact with rotating exhibits. We are currently hosting a nationally-recognized exhibit about Women in Old Time Music, many with local ties to Southern Chester County.

#### **C. Community-Building**

Our new location could become an important Chester County destination and bring in much needed tourism dollars to our town and region. Southern Chester County is rich in historic resources, but is often overlooked.

Working with the Chester County 250PA Commission and the County's Heritage Tourism plan, the vision is for our new History Center to be a gateway to Southern Chester County agricultural tourism. We want to bring people into a welcoming space to learn about local history, then give them information about visiting the smaller historic sites and heritage centers which exist in the larger surrounding area. We are working closely with the Oxford Region Planning Committee's Historic Preservation Subcommittee and the Oxford Area Chamber of Commerce to make this vision a reality.

In October, we held our first annual Crossroads Music Festival. This was our first major fundraising event, and it also served to introduce our work to a brand-new audience. We showcased five local and regional bluegrass bands, and highlighted the longstanding history of music in our area of the County.

Additionally, we are seeking community input about current events of future historical interest, such as stories about last September's fire and local residents' experiences of the COVID pandemic. We are actively creating archives of oral histories to preserve the stories of today for the audiences of tomorrow.

### **Specific needs & issues to be addressed**

As the town rebuilds from the fire, we are one of the organizations providing essential community-building programs and events to bring people together. Executive Director Andrea Lowery of the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) recently said this: "Museums and historical organizations connect visitors with people, places, events, and ideas from our collective past, imparting the wisdom learned through hardship and perseverance for future generations. Pennsylvania's museums and historical societies make those connections, and tell our stories, by providing educational opportunities for all and building tourism opportunities for our communities."

### **Why it is important to fund this now**

In March of 2023, we signed an agreement of sale for the former Union School Building at 119 S. 5th Street in Oxford, along with a very affordable five-year lease which will allow us time to raise money to purchase the building. During those five years, the building owner is responsible for all maintenance, excluding grass cutting and snow removal. The owner also generously donated all of the existing furniture in the building for OAHA's use. The agreement of sale is for \$700,000, or the fair market value, whichever is less at the time of purchase on December of 2027. As a part of this agreement of sale, OAHA is required to pay \$50,000 each March towards the building purchase. So far, we have paid \$150,000, and have raised most of the \$50,000 due in March of 2025. In the meantime, we still have to fund general operating expenses so that our educational programming and preservation work can continue.

### **How impact & results will be demonstrated**

During the community interview process of OAHA's strategic planning update, one interviewee commented, "While OAHA doesn't provide food like the Oxford Area Neighborhood Services Center or healthcare like LCH, you help in an equally vital way. The work you are doing helps to make the Oxford area a **community**, rather than simply a place to live, and in these trying times, that is essential." This coming year, OAHA will be collaborating with Oxford Mainstreet, Inc. (OMI) to create street banners which will showcase some of the town's historic buildings, and which will include QR codes to OAHA's website to learn more about each space. OAHA's History Center is strategically positioned to bring additional tourism to our region, as well as to create pride of place in our residents and schoolchildren. After each interaction with school classes, reviews are completed by both teachers and students, and used to improve existing programming and create new. Twenty-five community interviews were also conducted during a recent strategic planning update, and residents were asked specific questions regarding the impact of OAHA's work in the community. That feedback will be utilized to improve and expand existing programming to better meet community needs.

### **III. ATTACHMENTS**

1. Copy of 501 (c) (3) federal tax-exempt letter
2. Charitable Registration
3. List of Board of Directors, with their affiliations
4. 2023 annual report
5. 2023 financial compilation
6. 2024 organizational operating budget
7. 2021-2024 strategic plan (2024-2027 SP is currently being completed)