

Oxford Casino pitches in to help save town's last surviving schoolhouse

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By Nicole Carter

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OXFORD — The campaign to save Oxford's lone remaining one-room schoolhouse has a new benefactor. Oxford Casino and Hotel has donated \$5,163 to the Oxford Historical Society to help save the building, which was built in 1857.

Added to other fundraising, which includes two substantial anonymous donations, the historical society has raised well over \$30,000 to fund the project so far.

The land the schoolhouse sits on is part of former student Evan Thurlow's estate and has been sold to an undisclosed buyer. It was Thurlow's wish that the building be donated to the historical society if the farmland was eventually sold.



Oxford Historical Society President Patricia Larrivee (second from right) accepts a \$5,163 donation from Oxford Casino to help move and preserve Pigeon Hill Schoolhouse, which currently sits on property across the road from the casino. Also pictured from left: Oxford Town Manager Adam Garland, Oxford Selectman Floyd Thayer and Oxford Casino Vice President and General Manager Matt Gallagher. *Supplied photo*

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Historical society President Patricia Larrivee and Oxford's Historic Preservation Committee began negotiating with the town of Oxford last summer on the best way to accept and reconstruct the schoolhouse at the Kay House Museum, which is the headquarters of Oxford Historical Society. But the house and property itself is owned by the town. During initial discussions selectmen had questions whether accepting the gift would require a vote at town meeting,

Given the poor condition of the building, selectmen were also concerned that its restoration would be too hard and expensive to complete, leaving the town responsible for a dilapidated eyesore or pile of debris. There was also concern whether Thurlow's wishes had been put in writing.

Selectmen voted to accept the schoolhouse last summer. Since then Larrivee has enrolled the historical society with the 1772 Foundation, which grants up to \$10,000 in matching funds to nonprofit organizations and started working on grant applications through Maine Preservation and the Davis Foundation.

The historical society plans to rebuild and operate the school house at Kay House and operate it as a permanent living history exhibit for neighboring Oxford Elementary School curriculum and be open to the public. Much of the school's original student desks and other relics are already part of the historical society's archives and would once again furnish it.

Last October Maine Preservation placed the 1867 Pigeon Hill Schoolhouse on [its 2022 list of Most Endangered Historic Places](#), a move that opened up opportunities to pursue other preservation grants.

Currently, Larrivee is working with contractors and engineers to determine the best way and time to move the building. Copp & Sons Building Movers in Cumberland provided a quote of \$25,000 to move the schoolhouse in two sections. However, the sills and floor joists are likely to weak to handle the stress of being lifted onto a trailer.

She is consulting with other parties about blueprinting and dismantling it, including assessments on the condition of the frame, what other materials may be salvageable, and local sources to replicate structural timbers if necessary.

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Furniture from the 1867 Pigeon Hill Schoolhouse will be returned to the historic building once it's moved from Route 26 to Pleasant Street and made into a living history exhibit. The Oxford Historical Society plans to restore the old school on the grounds of the Kay House Museum and create a living history exhibit. *Nicole Carter/Advertiser Democrat*