

## A PERSONAL CONNECTION: NORA ELLEN BOWERS



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As a little girl, born and raised in Oxford, I have very vivid memories of Oxford College. We lived in the house catty corner from Oxford College, on the corner of Walnut Street and College Avenue, and the girls who lived in Oxford College passed back and forth in front of our house all day long, going to and coming from classes.

I attended McGuffey School, and I always thought I was big stuff when I would catch up to one of the Oxford College girls walking to class and engage her in conversation.

Over the years, I learned a little of the history of Oxford College – how it had once been founded as a college just for women, Oxford Female Institute (1849), and subsequently merged with Oxford Female College. My grandmother, Anna Matson Shera, who was raised in a home on the same property as I, was graduated from that school with a major in piano performance. I didn't learn until just a few years ago, that her father, Philip D. Matson, a distinguished civic leader, was on the very first Board of Directors of Oxford Female Institute. Anna's husband, Caleb Shera, was on the school's Board of Directors almost 50 years later (1897), after it had been renamed Oxford College (1890). My family had other connections with the college, serving in the administration and also attending the preparatory school connected with the college.

In 1928, Oxford College for Women was acquired by Miami University and used as a residence hall for freshmen women, and subsequently, graduate students.

Now, let's skip to 1981, and the founding of Oxford Area Community Theatre (OxACT). OxACT spent many years performing in "borrowed spaces," Kramer gym, Presser Hall, & Leonard Theatre. Since OxACT was founded, those of us involved dreamed of finding a permanent home, and pursued several venues, but to no avail . . . until in 1998, when Bob & Biz Campbell began to realize their dream of acquiring Oxford College for use as an arts center. With the help of many others, including myself, they began to negotiate with Miami University to rent and renovate Oxford College, which hadn't been used as a residence hall for three years.

The rest is history – this beautiful building, which probably would have been the victim of the wrecking ball because of its dilapidated condition, is now a wonderful arts center – not just a theatre - and it is growing and developing rapidly to serve the Oxford Community with culture and beauty. I am so proud to have been on the first Board of Directors, as my great grandfather was on the first Board of Directors when this building was built and its history began.



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