



Loom & Spindle

The Newsletter of the Windham Textile & History Museum / The Mill Museum
411 Main St., Willimantic, CT, 06226 / (860) 456-2178 / themillmuseum@gmail.com
website: www.millmuseum.org Fall, 2018

COMING EVENTS

The Windham Textile & History Museum (also known as the Mill Museum) is open for self-guided tours every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (except major holidays) from February through December. We also have a lot of special events scheduled for the coming months. Here is a list. Regular admission to the Museum is \$7 per person, \$5 for seniors and students; members and small children are admitted free. Special events and programs may have additional charges. Here is some of what we have planned. (Occasionally, we have to change a date, cancel an event, or add a new event, so always call us at (860)456-2178 to confirm.)

Exhibit: "Nightmare on Main: Hauntings: Unearthly Tales from Connecticut's Past." To accompany our Hallowe'en special event of the same name (see below), our staff and volunteers have put together a terrific exhibit of dioramas that explore the history of purported haunted places in Connecticut. What places have Connecticutters considered to be haunted? Why do people think places are haunted? What are the real stories behind the hauntings? Come to the Mill Museum and find out! Opens Oct. 5. Closes Nov. 18.

Exhibit: "Trains, Toys, and Trees." Our annual model train exhibit, co-sponsored with our friends at the Connecticut Eastern Railroad Museum. Model trains! Vintage toys! Decorated Christmas trees! For children of all ages. Opens Dec. 8. Closes Jan. 6.

Exhibit: "Sidonia's Thread." Arriving in Springfield, MA, from a displaced persons camp after World War II with only each other, Hanna Perlstein and her mother, Sidonia, build a world around Sidonia's remarkable talent with a thread and needle, working first in a textile factory, and then as a self-employed seamstress. Although Sidonia became well known in New England for her remarkable skill, she continued to keep her secrets about her past. Determined to craft a life of pride, self-reliance and perseverance, Sidonia taught her daughter, who served as her model, to "stand up straight" in fashion and in life. Based on the book *Sidonia's Thread* by Hanna Perlstein, this exhibit – guest curated by Hanna and by Eastern Connecticut State University costume professor Anya Sokolovskaya – tells the story of Hanna and Sidonia through garments made by Sidonia. Opens Feb. 15, closes Apr. 28.

Special Event: Nightmare on Main: Hauntings: Unearthly Tales from Connecticut's Past. For the fourth consecutive year, the Mill Museum presents a live Hallowe'en extravaganza! See p. 2 for more information. Sep. 29 and 30, and Oct. 5 and 6, 7-9:30 p.m.

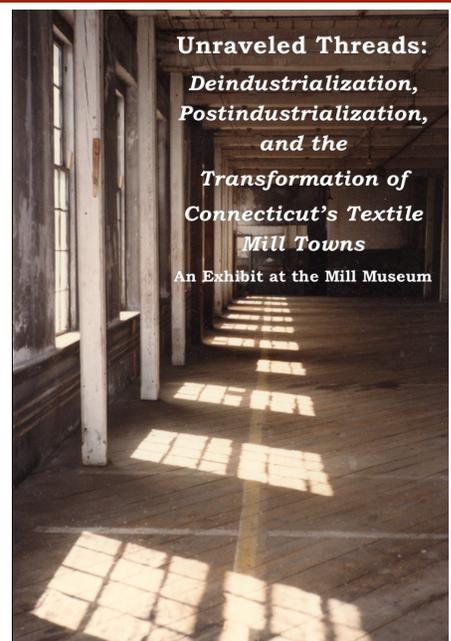
Special Tour: Old Willimantic Cemetery Walk. The Mill Museum participates in Walktober, sponsored by the Last Green Valley. The Museum's Jamie Eves leads a walk through history through a classic Victorian era cemetery with Civil War soldiers, mill managers, and other notable characters. 0.5 miles. \$5 students, \$10 adults. Oct. 13, 1-3 p.m. Meet at the main entrance to the Old Willimantic Cemetery, Main St. (Rt. 66) in Willimantic, across the street from the Stop and Shop.

Special Tour: 19th-Century Irish-American Millworker. Join Jamie Eves as he channels William Smith. Smith was born in Ireland, came to America as a child, took a job in one of the Willimantic textile mills as a teen, joined the Union Army during the Civil War, survived the notorious Andersonville prison, and returned to Willimantic to work in the mills. Oct. 14, 2-3:30 p.m.

Program: Kids' Club, a special program for children from four to twelve years old, organized and led by Bev York. Puppets, haunted houses, and ghost towns. 2-3:30 p.m., Oct. 20. \$5 per child; Kids Club members are free.

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Our recent exhibit, "Unraveled Threads," came down in September to make room for our next exhibit, "Hauntings." But we still have the high quality, rigid plastic exhibit boards. They are available to be used on request as a traveling exhibit.



Coming Events, Cont'd

Program: Museum Lyceum: Haunted Mills and More. Join Bev York for an illustrated talk on haunted mills in Connecticut. 4 p.m., Oct. 21. No admission fee.

Program: Mill of the Month. Bev York leads a field trip to the Talcottville Mill in Vernon/Rockville, CT. Contact Bev at bevishistory@aol.com for more information.

Program: Spinning Bee. Join master spinner Peggy Church for an old-fashioned spinning bee. Spinners are invited to bring their wheels and join in the fun and conversation. Novices are welcome. Oct. 27, 10 a.m.—1 p.m. No admission fee.

Program: Kids Club, a special program for children from four to twelve years old, organized and led by Bev York. Candle dipping. Nov. 10, 2-3:30 p.m. \$5 per child; Kids Club members are free.

Special Tour: 19th-Century Mill Manager. Join Jamie Eves as he channels William Elliot Barrows, General Manager of the Willimantic Linen Co. in the 1870s and 1880s. Barrows revolutionized textile milling in Connecticut by introducing steam and electricity to replace waterpower. He was also a proponent of industrial paternalism. Nov. 11, 2-3:30 p.m. Included in Museum admission.

Special Event: Fall Painting Fundraiser. No experience required. Just pick up a brush and have fun painting the night away. Spiral Art Studio. Nov. 15, 6-9 p.m. More details TBA on website, Facebook. \$35. Please prepay by Nov. 5.

Program: Spinning Bee. Join master spinner Peggy Church for an old-fashioned spinning bee. Spinners are invited to bring their wheels and join in the fun and conversation. Novices are welcome. Nov. 17, 10 a.m.—1 p.m. No admission fee.

Special Event: Holiday Shop. The Mill Museum's Holiday Shop returns. Crafters with wares to sell will set up tables in the Museum's Dugan Hall program room. Dec. 2, 3, 8, and 9, 10 a.m.—4 p.m. No admission fee.

Program: Kid's Club, a special program for children from four to twelve years old, organized and led by Bev York. Gingerbread festival and Mrs. Cratchit's Christmas. Dec. 8, 2-3:30 p.m. \$8 per child.

Special Event: Holiday Gift Wrapping at the East Brook Mall. Look for volunteers from the Mill Museum at the East Brook Mall in Mansfield, CT, Dec. 15-24, wrapping gifts for donations to the Museum. Want to volunteer to wrap? Call Kit Eves at 860-617-4364.

Special Event: Papa Gino's Fundraiser. Bring a coupon to Papa Gino's, order a meal, and 20% of the price will go to the Museum. Stop by the Museum to pick up your coupon, or receive it via email, or find it on the Museum's Facebook page. Dec. 16 (Sun.), 3-8 p.m. Papa Gino's restaurant at the East Brook Mall.

Special Event: Snow Ball. Jan. 26. Save the date! Willimantic's most elegant event of the year, and a fundraiser for the Museum. This year, we will be celebrating the Museum's 30th year! More information TBA.

Nightmare on Main: Hauntings: Unearthly Tales from Connecticut's Past

"Nightmare on Main" will entertain and educate the public again this fall in Willimantic, CT, with "Hauntings: Unearthly Tales from Connecticut's Past." For two weekends an exhibition of haunted places will come to life in the evening with "live" (so to speak) performances of chilling stories. Then, for seven weeks, a museum exhibit featuring dioramas will interpret tales of Connecticut hauntings, including abandoned Dudley Town, Micah Rood's apples, and many more.



One feature story will be the 1909 Ledge Lighthouse that sits prominently in the mouth of the Thames River between the shores of New London and Groton. It was manned until 1987, when it became automated. Who haunts the lighthouse? Could it be Ernie, one of the lighthouse keepers, who became distraught when he discovered that his wife had run off with the captain of the Block Island Ferry? Ernie met his death as he jumped from the roof of the lighthouse, but stories are told that his spirit still inhabits the lighthouse. Numerous reports detail unexplained knocking on the wooden walls, doors opening and closing repeatedly, and the sheets flying off the bed. The live performances will be Sept 29, 30 (Sat. and Sun.) and Oct 5, 6 (Fri. and Sat.). Visitors should arrive between 7:00 and 9:30. Admission is \$10 per person. The event is held rain or shine. Refreshments will be available.

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Hauntings, Cont'd

The daytime exhibit runs from Oct. 5 through Nov. 18 during regular museum hours: Fri., Sat., and Sun., 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Many places in Connecticut are said to be haunted. Over the years, scores of people have said they have seen, heard, and felt unusual occurrences that they cannot explain. Sceptics challenge the validity of these claims. Tales of hauntings are widespread in popular culture. The topics of ghosts, UFOs, psychic abilities, ESP, cryptids, and the like have become a staple in the field of entertainment. According to a 2005 Gallup Poll: 37% of Americans polled believe in haunted houses and 16% are not sure, and 32% believe in ghosts and 19% are undecided. Visitors to "Nightmare on Main: Hauntings" will have to decide for themselves.

The idea of "Nightmare on Main" is to provide both education and entertainment about chilling topics based on true history and real life experiences. Many of the historical topics are based on events from the 19th century, which is the time period of the museum. Past themes have included "Witches in History and Fable," "Confinement: Asylums, Prisons and Sanitariums," and "Death and Diseases in the 19th Century." The events have been attracting participants and visitors from ages 8-18, and 18-40, which are welcome and needed demographics for museums. The amount of research and work that went into creating the sets, props, and costumes have led to the exhibition concept. The main exhibit hall of the Mill Museum becomes a stand alone presentation of the topic with dioramas, displays and interpretation for seven weeks. During the evening performances, small groups are guided through the exhibit hall as an introduction, and then through the rest of the museum, where actors perform stories related to the theme.

Bev York, Museum Educator, explains: "When we did the Witch exhibit, the dioramas gave a brief history of witchcraft from the ancient Greeks to the present day Wiccans. But the evening shows were dramatic performances about the Connecticut witch trials from accusation, jail confinement, trials, and execution of about a dozen people in the 17th-century Hartford area. Almost everything we present is based on accurate research of stories from the past, when people's beliefs, knowledge, and superstitions on death, medicine, punishment, society, and other topics were drastically different from today."



The Mill Museum is undertaking to make its exhibits more accessible, using audio recordings, video recordings, QR codes, and the Cloud. The project is in its beginning stages. Want to help? Contact us at themillmuseum@gmail.com.

Making Exhibits Accessible

Traditional museum exhibits are great. They typically consist of artifacts, images, and explanatory text. But not everyone can see the exhibits and images, or read the text. The Mill Museum is in the early stages of a project that will make our exhibits accessible to vision- and reading-impaired visitors.

Our goal is to partner with CRIS Radio, a not-for-profit organization based in Windsor, CT, which provides radio services for the blind and vision- and reading-impaired. CRIS has developed a program called CRISAccess, which creates "audio exhibits" to accompany regular museum exhibit. Three-minute audio recordings that describe the museum exhibit are put on the Cloud, where they can be accessed by smart phones and other devices via QR codes. The museum writes the text, and CRIS volunteers record and edit it at the CRIS studio, maintain it on the Cloud, and generate the QR codes. Several museums in Connecticut have already done this. The Mill Museum wants to be next.

As a non-profit, CRIS does not charge less for this service than would a for-profit business. In addition, because the Connecticut Lions Clubs donate substantially to CRIS (helping the blind and sight-impaired is the Lions main mission), CRISAccess will give a discounted price to Lions-sponsored projects. So the Mill Museum has approached the Willimantic Lions Club (which donates to CRIS Radio every year) about sponsoring CRISAccess "audio exhibits" at the Museum. The Willimantic Lions Executive Board has approved the project, which awaits only a formal vote by the entire Club at its early October meeting.



In order to increase the number of audio recordings, the Museum asked the Leo J. and Rose Pageau Trust to come on board as a partner. The Trust was interested, and has approved a grant of \$1,500 for the Museum, which includes \$900 for the CRISAccess project. We will be looking for further funds, to be able to make and maintain as many "audio exhibits" as we can.

But we are not stopping there. The Museum's upcoming exhibit, "Hauntings," will have an audio-video component, using the same technology. These recordings will only be available for visitors for the duration of the exhibit. And we have also started work with local volunteers on a long-term project of making a small number permanent video-and-audio recordings for some of the Museum's permanent exhibits, utilizing the Museum's own website as a host.

The Mill Museum

Windham Textile and History Museum

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Email: themillmuseum@gmail.com



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A Time to Give Thanks

As we gear up for the Mill Museum's annual appeal (see insert), we are reminded to be thankful for all of the support we receive from the community.

We are thankful for our 300-plus members who support our mission to preserve and interpret the histories of textile production in Connecticut, the former textile mill towns that dot the state, and the women, men, and children who built those towns. You dues help keep us here.

We are thankful for the many individuals who contributed to our annual appeal last year. In 2017, the Museum's annual appeal raised more than \$5,600. We hope to top that in 2018.

We are thankful for all those who have participated in our fundraisers. In 2018 we had the Snow Ball, Just Desserts Tea, Fiber Arts Day, and Presidents Day at Willibrew, with Nightmare on Main, the Holiday Shop, and Holiday Gift Wrapping at the East Brook Mall still to come.

We are thankful for institutional support over the past few years from the Town of Windham, the Hop Fest, Connecticut Humanities, the Leo J. and Rose Pageau Trust, Historic New England, the Osborne Foundation, the Willimantic Rotary Club, Altrusa of Northeastern CT, the Studio Arts Quilters Association, the Willimantic Lions Club, the Willimantic Brewing Co., the Willimantic Food Coop, Allsleep, Reaching Beyond the Classroom, the Handweavers Guild of Connecticut, and Pfizer Annual Giving.

And we are especially thankful for our nearly 100 volunteers, who do so much to keep us running.

Almost 100 people volunteer at the Mill Museum. They wrap holiday gifts, organize the Snow Ball, give tours, carry out Nightmare on Main, participate in historic reenactments, serve on our Board of Directors, curate exhibits, preserve and catalog artifacts, and all kinds of other things. Top: Peggy Church teaches weaving. Middle: Diana Perkins leads a strike reenactment. Bottom: Brenda Griswold, Sandy Proctor, and others create Nightmare on Main.

