



# Loom and Spindle

THE MILL MUSEUM OF CONNECTICUT / WINDHAM TEXTILE AND HISTORY MUSEUM

**COMING EVENTS:**

**The Victorian Parlor: Victorian Furnishing and Furniture Exhibit.** May 23 to Sep. 7.

**Descendants of Textile Workers of America Annual Meeting.** July 20. 1:00 PM.

**Drawing for Quilt Raffle.** Sep. 6.

**Lyman Orchards Pie Sale.** Oct. 1 and 15.

**Walktober Walking Month.** Begins Oct. 5. The Museum will sponsor a walk through the old American Thread Company mill grounds in Willimantic, led by Educational Director Bev York.

**Downtown Country Fair.** Oct. 5. Willimantic Food Co-op and Jillson Square.

**Sock Hop.** Oct. 24. 6 PM. Old Kramer Middle School in Willimantic.

**Kids' Hallowe'en Party.** Oct. 26.

**Ghost Stories.** Oct. 29. 7 PM.

**VICTORIAN FURNISHINGS EXHIBIT**

The intricate styles, patterns, and tones that characterized the furniture and home furnishings of the Victorian era can be seen the Museum's elegant new exhibit, "The Victorian Parlor: Furniture and Furnishings," on display in the Museum's Bev York Exhibit Room through the rest of the summer.

Planned and curated by Robert and Pamela Horrocks of the Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association (with a big assist from Michele Palmer, chair of the Museum's Exhibit Committee), the exhibit fea-

tures more than 100 examples of furniture, clothing, fabric, silverware, dishes, jewelry, and other items from the Victorian age, almost all of them loaned by Willimantic area residents and institutions.

In the United States, the term "Victorian" usually refers to the years

between the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and U. S. entry into World War I in 1917. It was a time of unprecedented prosperity, triggered by phenomenal industrial growth and the rapid rise of the middle class.

The core of the exhibit is Eastern Connecticut State University's extensive collection of Victorian furniture, arranged into vignettes representing rooms in middle-class



Victorian homes: a parlor, a dining room, and a library, among others.

meat servers, crumbers, lettuce servers, salt scoops, sugar sifters, and tea trays.

There are also cameos, and a display of jewelry that belonged to the William Niles Potter family, which owned a shoe store in Willimantic from 1870 to 1936.

There are fainting couches, a tea cozy, quilts, William Morris wall coverings, and a

large-wheel bicycle, designed to be mounted in the same way one would mount a horse. The wall coverings are ornate, with intricate floral and geometric designs.

For the rising middle class, the Victorian era was a time of refinement and display. Thanks to industrialization, the middle class now had access to inexpensive mass-produced consumer items like upholstered furniture, plush carpets, colorful wallpaper, prints, ornate tables, and specialty silver — items that previously had only been available to the wealthy few who could afford expensive handcrafted furnishings.



The parlor was the Victorian home's best room, featuring colorful, elegant chairs and sofas arranged in circles and center tables with interesting displays to stimulate thought and promote conversation (the word "parlor" comes from the French *parler*, to speak).

Dining rooms featured large tables with complex arrays of dishes and silverware. Among the interesting pieces of specialty silver on display in the exhibit are

nut picks, pastry servers, pastry forks, fruit knives, cheese servers, souvenir spoons, hot meat forks, lobster and oyster forks (oysters were very popular in Connecticut 100 years ago), olive and pickle forks, mustard ladles, ice tea spoons, soda spoons, fish servers, sauce and gravy ladles, vegetable servers,



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## NEWS AND NOTES

**Grant for CT Inventions and Inventors High School Curriculum; Audio Tours of Museum and Historic Neighborhood**

The Museum has been approved to commence the second year of a generous, two-year, \$30,000 grant from the SBM Foundation. This year will focus on high school and adult education. The project — spearheaded by Professors Maureen Mulroy and Meg DeAngelis of the University of Connecticut and the Museum's Education Director Bev York — will build high school curricula around the topic of Connecticut Inventions and Inventors. For the adult education component, Mulroy, DeAngelis, and York are working on creating an audio tour of the Museum, as well as audio walking tours

(and a map) of Willimantic's historic mill neighborhoods.

**Polish Americans in Willimantic**

In May the Polish American Historical Association (PAHA), a national association of scholars specializing in Polish American history, held its annual meeting in Willimantic. As part of the meeting, PAHA gathered in the Museum's Dunham Hall Library to listen to two scholarly lectures. One of the presenters, Dr. Emil Pocock of Eastern Connecticut State University, discussed his research on Polish migration to Willimantic from 1900 to 1920. The lectures were open to the public, and several members of Willimantic's Polish American community eagerly joined the

PAHA scholars. Dr. Anna Kirchmann of ECSU is PAHA's current president, as well as a member of the Museum's Board of Directors.

**Quilt Raffle**

The Museum is holding its annual quilt raffle fundraiser. Each year Larissa Keyes of Quilters' Dreams in Willimantic graciously donates an exquisite quilt to be raffled off to raise money for the Museum. Tickets are only \$1 each, and are available at the Museum, Liberty Bank, the Charter Oak Credit Union, Williard's, Quilters' Dreams, and other locations. The drawing will be Sep. 6. The quilt is valued at \$550.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As my term as President of the Museum draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on the big picture: where the Museum is, where it was, and where it needs to go.

Three years ago the Museum was almost ready to close its doors.

Today, the Museum is in the black. It has money in the bank, and its finances are in solid shape. A lot of the credit goes to the Museum's volunteer Treasurer, Joe Duval, who did a fantastic job reorganizing the Museum's finances. But thanks also go to Bev York, the Museum's previous Director, whose frugal spending had left the Museum without major debts, and to Andrew Gibson, Susan

Johnson, Murphy Sewall, Maureen Mulroy, Bob and Pam Horrocks, and the many, many others who worked tirelessly on fundraising projects like the Snow Ball, the Garden Party, and the Sock Hop.

The Museum has a new Executive Director, Brooke Shannon. In her first year on the job, Brooke set up the Visitor's Center, reorganized the Museum's gift shop, cleaned the Museum from top to bottom, and organized several successful events.

Bev York remains as the Museum's Education Director, a vital resource.

The Museum has a fine core of dedicated volunteers.

As for the future, that's up to the community.

I think the Museum is a great investment in our future. It brings visitors to Willimantic — folks who dine and shop while they are here. It enhances the community's reputation as an education and culture center, which in turn brings in businesses.

Our biggest need is people. We need volunteers to staff the new Visitor's Center. We need volunteers to help research and write grants. Come join us — we will welcome you.

*Kit Eves*

## DUGAN MILL EXHIBIT BEING REFURBISHED

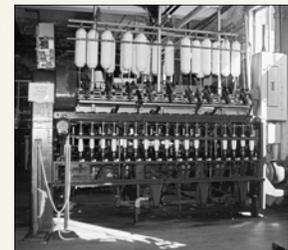
Volunteers and staff are hard at work cleaning, painting, and redesigning the Museum's Dugan Mill exhibit.

"The Dugan Mill is where the Museum exhibits its collection of mill machines and tools," said Dr. Jamie Eves, the Museum's volunteer Curator of Collections and a history professor at the University of Connecticut, who is spearheading the effort. "In recent years Dale Plummer, the

Norwich town historian, and the late J. A. Atwood did tremendous work to add working machinery to the exhibit. Thanks to their fantastic efforts, the Museum has a working spinning frame and three working winders. Now it's time to improve the space where those machines are displayed: to paint the walls, add signage, put together a display of mill tools, and reconceptualize the basic story the exhibit tells," Eves explained.

The room is being painted in two shades of gray, typical of 20th-century mills. Interpretive signs are being designed, with captions and illustrations. Tools are being put behind glass, so they can better be preserved.

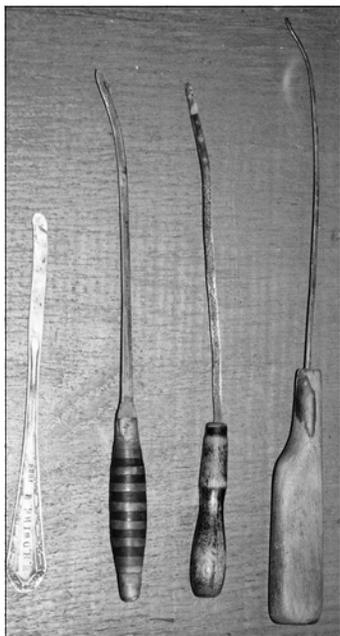
"The story will focus on both the machines and the workers, on the dangers the workers faced, and on the differences between men's and women's work," Eves said.



**This working 1952 spinning frame is one of the centerpieces of the Museum's Dugan Mill exhibit. The exhibit remains open even as the room is being refurbished.**

## FROM THE ARCHIVES: MILL WORKERS' TOOLS

*Women weavers often made their own sley hooks; the Museum has one constructed from a fork or spoon.*



The Museum owns a fairly large collection of mill workers' tools. These fall into many categories, from the obvious to the obscure. For the purposes of this article, tools will be defined as objects small enough to be carried, as opposed to machines like spinning frames, carding machines, printing presses, and winders, which were larger and heavier.

Among the more obvious tools were machinists' tools. Machinists worked primarily in metal, rebuilding gears and other machine parts. The Museum owns a lathe, of course. It also has a machinist's tool box. Like most mill workers' tool boxes, it is quite large, a wooden chest about 2' x 2' x 2 1/2'. It came to the Museum with a wide array of machinists' tools inside: lathe bits, drill bits, metal punches, wrenches, files, and more. It also contains pencils, washers, and a tray full of odd machine screws.

The Museum also owns additional wrenches, files, and pry bars used by mill machinists, including one iron wrench and one iron pry bar stamped "W. L. Co.," for the Willimantic Linen Company, the forerunner of the American Thread Company.

In addition to machinists' tools,

the Museums also owns dozens of machined gears and other parts crafted by the machinists at the old American Thread Mill in Willimantic. Most of these are brass, but some are iron or steel.

The Museum also has a plumber's/handyman's tool chest and a carpenter's tool chest. While machinists worked primarily in metal, carpenters worked mostly with wood.

In addition to carpenters' tools, the Museum has a collection of several hundred carpenters' wooden patterns. Patterns were full-size, 3-dimensional replicas of various machine parts. If the real parts broke, machinists used the carpenters' wooden patterns as models to make new, metal parts to replace the broken ones.

The Museum also has tools used by fixers, who mended broken machines.

Oilers were responsible for lubricating the mill machines. The Museum owns a number of their oil and grease cans.

Like many mills, the American Thread Company owned its own print shop. Consequently, the Museum has a number of printers' tools: brushes, mallets, and wooden spacers.

Traditionally, well-paid and highly skilled workers such as machinists, carpenters, fixers, oilers, handymen, and printers were men, and only boys were permitted to apprentice with them. But women workers had their tools, too. These included sley hooks, shown in the photograph to the left, which weavers used to manipulate threads in power looms; screwdrivers to tighten sewing machine parts; thread cutters; and even beeswax.

Children working in the mills also used tools, such as feather dusters to clean the machines.

Interestingly, mill workers sometimes viewed the tools they used as their own property, not the mills'. In fact, women weavers often made their own sley hooks; the Museum has one constructed from a fork or spoon! Even when the mills provided sley hooks, workers became so accustomed to the size, shape, and heft of their own hooks that they regarded them as personal property and kept them in their aprons. Likewise, machinists and carpenters often owned their own intricately built tool chests. And one oil can in the Museum's collection has the worker's name on it.

### MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL SUMMER 2008

If you have already renewed your membership, thank you!

Student/Senior, \$10 \_\_\_\_\_

Sustaining, \$50 \_\_\_\_\_

Individual, \$15 \_\_\_\_\_

Patron, \$100 \_\_\_\_\_

Family/Household, \$25 \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor, \$250 \_\_\_\_\_

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Additional Donation \_\_\_\_\_

We are a 501(c)3 organization. Your donations are tax deductible.

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## VISITOR'S CENTER DEDICATED AT MUSEUM

A festive crowd gathered at the Museum on Thursday, June 19, to celebrate the grand opening of the new Windham-Willimantic Visitor's Center in the Museum's gift shop.

The Center will provide information about restaurants, hotels, entertainment, and other business and cultural activities for people visiting the Windham-Willimantic area.

The Center's web site is  
[www.windhamwillimanticvisitorscenter.com](http://www.windhamwillimanticvisitorscenter.com).

Among the many dignitaries in attendance were State Senator and Senate President Pro Tem Donald E. Williams (D, District 29), State Representative Walter Pawelkiewicz (D, District 49), and Windham First Selectman Jean DeSmet.

Also present were Patricia Kleine, Dean of Education and Professional Studies at Eastern Connecticut State University; Mona Friedland representing Windham Memorial Community Hospital; Emma Pietrantonio from the office of U. S. Representative Joseph Courtney (D, District 2); Donna Simpson, the Executive Director of Mystic Country/CONNECTICUT; and Rosemary Bove and Mary Donohue from the Connecticut

Commission on Culture and Tourism.

Pawelkiewicz and Williams presented the Visitors Center with an Official Citation from the Connecticut Legislature, while Pietrantonio bestowed a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from Representative Courtney.

Attendees listened to music by Chuck and Noreen Morgan, toured the Museum's elegant "Victorian Parlor" exhibit, and cheered lustily as the dignitaries cut a large red ribbon.

"The Windham and Willimantic area has long needed a Visitor's Center, and we're glad that the Museum can provide one," said Robert Horrocks, the Museum's Vice President. "The location is ideal. It's easy to find on Main Street in Willimantic, it's in the Museum, and it's right across the street from the Garden on the Bridge, the Windham Mills State Heritage Park, and the future site of Willimantic's planned river rapids and kayaking park."

"The Visitors Center will be an integral part of the ongoing renaissance of Willimantic from a 19th-century mill city to a 21st-century arts, culture, history, and education center," Horrocks added.

The Visitors Center received \$7,000 in funding from the Thread City Development Corporation.



**From left: Windham First Selectman Jean DeSmet, Museum Vice President Robert Horrocks, Museum Executive Director Brooke Shannon, State Senator Donald E. Williams, State Representative Walter Pawelkiewicz, Museum Assistant to the Director Denis Gamache, and Museum volunteer and docent Carol Buch.**