



Loom & Spindle



Windham Textile & History Museum

The Mill Museum

December, 2021

BOBBIN' ABOUT

Upcoming Events

Please check our Website for the most current information regarding Covid-19 precautions.

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Fri.-Sun., Dec. 3-5: **Welcome Weekend.** Be one of the first 10 paying visitors to the Museum and receive a free holiday ornament.

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Sat.-Sun., Dec. 4, 5 & 11, 12: 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. **Holiday Craft Shop.** Support local artisans and The Mill Museum in one convenient stop at the Holiday Craft Shop in Dugan Hall, 3 Union St., next to The Mill Museum, Willimantic.

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Mon., Dec. 6: **Mikulás Day**: The Mill Museum shows how the Hungarians celebrate this festive event. Plan a visit next weekend.

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.Wed., Dec. 8: **Bodhi Day**. One of the traditions explained at The Mill Museum's current exhibit. Visit on the weekend to find out more.

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Sat., Dec. 11: 1 p.m.: **Mill of the Month, Exterior of the Rossie Velvet Mill**. Discover the rich history of velvet manufacturing in Willimantic in a brisk but short walking tour from The Mill Museum to view the outside of the former Rossie Velvet Manufacturing building. \$10 Cash; meet at The Mill Museum, 411 Main St., Willimantic.

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Fri., Dec. 17: **National Ugly Christmas Sweater Day**. All will be revealed later in this newsletter.

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Sat.-Fri., Dec. 18-24: 10 a.m.- 9 p.m.: **Reindeer Gift Wrapping Fundraiser**. Get your gifts wrapped in the East Brook Mall for just a donation! We are also looking for volunteers! Answer the call of your Inner Elf and email themillmuseum@gmail.com for more info.

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Sat., Dec. 18, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. **Drop-in Spinning Bee** with Peggy Church at The Mill Museum's Dugan Hall, 3 Union St., Willimantic. Stop by and bring your wheel. Vaccinations required. All skill levels and visitors are welcome. Free admission. For information, directions, or just to let us know you're coming, email peggychurch@earthlink.net.

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Sat., Dec. 18, 2 p.m.: **Teddy Bear Tea Kid's Club**. Bring your bear to The Mill Museum for a holiday party. Discover how Americans celebrate many traditions that come from all around the world; activity includes a craft and piñata. Masks and distancing are required. Free, but donations are appreciated. Held in Dugan Hall, 3 Union St., next to The Mill Museum, Willimantic.

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Tues., Dec. 21, 7 p.m.: **Merry UnChristmas Virtual Celebration**. Come all ye Scrooges! Learn how the early European settlers of New England treated the Christmas holiday and how the Puritans handled this merry time in a not-so merry way. \$12 for members and \$15 for non-members. Sign up online at <https://millmuseum.org/currentevents/>

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It's also the **Yule / Winter Solstice**, which occurs at 10:59 a.m. in the Northern Hemisphere.

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Fri., Dec. 24: **Last Day** to get gifts wrapped by Mill Museum volunteers at East Brook Mall.

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Fri.-Sat., Dec. 24 & 25: **Christmas Eve & Day. THE MILL MUSEUM IS CLOSED**

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Sun. Dec. 26: **THE MILL MUSEUM IS OPEN**. Find out about **Kwanzaa** at our current exhibit.

Fri., Dec. 31: **New Year's Eve. Hogmanay** begins at midnight. Visit The Mill Museum during the day (noon – 4 p.m.) to find out what that's all about.

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Sat., Jan. 1: **New Year's Day. La Befana**, the Italian gift-giver, will visit The Mill Museum LIVE from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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Sun., Jan. 2: **Last day of "Trees, Traditions & Tiny Treasures"** exhibit. **La Befana** will again be at The Mill Museum LIVE from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

peggychurch2@gmail.com ~ ~ ~

LOOMING AHEAD

The Mill Museum will be closed for regular tours and visits for the rest of the month of January.

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Fri., Jan. 7, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.: **St. Distaff's Day Drop-in Spinning Bee** with Peggy Church in Dugan Hall, 3 Union St., Willimantic, next to the Museum. Stop by and bring your wheel and a covered dish to share. Details to follow. COVID vaccinations are required. All skill levels and visitors are welcome. Free admission. For information, directions, or just to let us know you're coming, email peggychurch2@gmail.com. Snow date: Jan. 8; check the Museum website for up-to-date information: <https://millmuseum.org/>

St. Distaff's Day celebrates the distaff and what it symbolized during medieval times, namely the importance of the efforts and work of women in textiles to society. A distaff is a tool used in spinning to hold the wool or flax before spinning it onto the spindle. It keeps the fibers untangled and makes the entire spinning process easier. There never really was a "Saint" Distaff.

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Sat., Jan. 22, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.: **Reenactors Festival at The Mill Museum**, 411 Main St., Willimantic. Come all ye historians, reenactors, interpreters and the generally curious! Join us for a winter day among historic crafters and vendors, history lectures and more! Tickets are \$10 and include not only admission to this special event, but a free self-guided tour of The Mill Museum! Buy handmade candles, tin items and other supplies for reenacting or interpreting almost every era!

Trees, Traditions & Tiny Treasures.

This year, The Mill Museum welcomes local artist Glenn Martineau and his incomparable display of breadbox miniatures to our holiday celebration of "Trees, Traditions and Tiny Treasures." This limited-time exhibit opens on Saturday, November 27, and closes on Sunday, January 2. Like one of winter's other exquisite creations, the snowflake, its magic will not last.

The trees speak for themselves – from diminutive firs with tiny, sparkling globe decorations to large, imposing trees garbed in red or gold or a profusion of colors. Or the Victorian Christmas tree with its exquisite hand-blown glass ornaments and lovingly sewn decorations in the Mill Manager's Mansion. They capture the enchantment of the season.

The traditions are many, and they represent the tapestry of cultures of those who lived and worked in eastern Connecticut. There is a white Moldavian man's sheepskin jacket embroidered in black and violet, a lacy woman's cutwork vest from the Kalosca area of Hungary, and a full embroidered woman's ensemble from the Posavina region of Croatia. Traditions also include the customs people observed, including some of the lesser known such as Hogmanay, Yule and the gift-givers La Befana and Mikulás. We have also been fortunate to partner with the Wood Memorial Library and Museum's Nowashe Village to create a story-telling display of the area's Indigenous Peoples.

And finally, there are the dozens of Glenn Martineau's tiny treasures – breadbox miniatures that capture everyday life in and around the Willimantic area. You can visit a shoe store or a beauty shop, buy a car or go to a farm stand, see a doctor or visit a barber. Each destination is filled with meticulous detail. There are even shoes in the shoe boxes and clothes at the laundromat!

So visit The Mill Museum this holiday season and experience the magic before it disappears.

FOND FAREWELL

It is with deep regret that The Mill Museum announces the retirement of Education Director Bev York on December 31st. A native of Windham, CT, Bev has devoted her life to preserving the area's history and heritage. After graduating from Windham High School and earning a B.S. in Education from Central CT State University, she met and married Duke York, whom she met on a wagon train on the Oregon Trail, then taught school, and raised two sons.

Bev was an active participant in Windham's Tercentenary and was a founding member of The Mill Museum. When the Museum closed in 1995, she spearheaded a community effort that saved it, becoming its Executive Director for ten years. She later became Director of Education, a position she has filled for 15 years. She has truly been the face of the Museum.

Bev was also Site Manager of the Nathan Hale Homestead for several years, during which time she earned an M.S. in History Education from Eastern CT



State University, where her thesis was a carefully researched history of Windham schools. She has served on the Boards of the CT League of History Organizations and the Museums of Northeast CT. She is also one of Romantic Willimantic's celebrated cupids and is responsible for The Mill Museum's innovations such as Mill of the Month, Kids Club,

Nightmare on Main, Where They Stood, Labor Day Strike reenactments, and a myriad of other projects and programs. Bev has volunteered countless hours, led innumerable school tours, and been a loyal friend, ready mentor, and wise counsel to a succession of Executive Directors. She always has given memorable, engaging programs and educational experiences that have inspired and created many community partnerships. She will be taking a job with Windham Arts and will be creating exhibits and programs at the new Eastern CT Veterans Community Center. An amazing educator and historian, Bev York is a true community treasure. She will be sorely missed.

It's a Small World After All

According to American fashion designer Cynthia Rowley, "Everything looks cute when it's small." And throughout history people have been obsessed with creating tiny replicas of the real world – a world they can ultimately control. The Japanese art of *bonsai* shapes live trees into extremely small dimensions that still maintain their natural look. Setting them in miniature landscapes, called *bonkei* in Japan and *penjing* in China, has garnered worldwide appeal.

In the 18th century *Zinnfiguren* (small, flat, 2-sided military figures) became the forerunners of the toy soldier, enthralling children the world over with their wide-ranging maneuvers. However, containing the miniatures in an established scene, one frozen in time, has its own appeal, and the *Zinnfiguren* were often contained in "dioramas" – a word coined by photographer Louis Daugerre in 1822 to refer to a three-dimensional model representing a scene either life-size or in miniature.

Dioramas, though, go back somewhat further in history. Tatebanko, the Japanese art of paper dioramas depicting popular scenes or themes was very popular in the 17th century. Naturalistic dioramas started appearing in Western museums in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, since they allowed institutions to recreate humans and other animals in their natural habitats.



Famous miniature diorama collections today include: the Military Miniatures Museum in Jaca, Spain, that features 23 exhibits with 32,000 soldiers representing armies from around the world and across time periods; the Ringling Circus Museum in Sarasota, Florida, created by

Howard C. Tibbals, covering 3,800 square feet and containing more than 44,000 pieces; and the Heichal Shlomo Museum in Jerusalem, Israel, with 30 dioramas covering 4,000 years of Jewish history.

The exhibit of miniature dioramas here at The Mill Museum was created exclusively by local artist Glenn Martineau and consists of dozens of breadboxes containing scenes of everyday life – from sewing shops to bakeries set in the not quite fictional town of “Breadsville.” They are sure to enchant and bring out the child in everyone!

SHOPPER'S SHORTLIST

Looking for the perfect place to find unique gifts for the whole family? Tired of the endless trek through crowded malls? This year visit THE HOLIDAY SHOP at The Mill Museum's Dugan Hall, 3 Union St. in Willimantic. You'll find cards, prints, fiber arts, gift baskets, herbals, knitwear, and leather goods as well as scrimshaw art, beaded jewelry, fluid art and doggie fashion accessories. Want a nutmeg grater from the Nutmeg State? We have it. Need a gnome? We have that too, along with an assortment of decorations, stitchery, teas and trees. You'll find what you need among the quality handcrafted gifts by local artisans at The Mill Museum's Holiday Shop. And while you're there, stop by the Museum's regular gift shop for a great selection of books, souvenirs, prints, and other tempting items. HOLIDAY SHOP open: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Sat. & Sun. Dec.

4, 5, 11 & 12. Museum Gift Shop open: noon – 4 p.m., Fri., Sat., Sun. Dec. 3 – Jan. 2.

Mill of the Month

There was 1944's *National Velvet* with a young Elizabeth Taylor playing Velvet Brown, a 14-year-old who trains and rides her horse to victory in the Grand National steeplechase. 2013 saw the beginning of *Velvet*, a romantic drama series set in 1950's Spain. And of course there's the expression, "an iron fist in a velvet glove."

But what IS velvet? It's soft, luxurious, rich. Because historically it was so expensive to produce, it was often associated with the aristocracy. It is first written about in the 14th century, having probably originated in Southeast Asia and traveled along the Silk Road to Europe. It was originally made of pure silk, but today often contains synthetic fibers. The advent of mechanical looms made it affordable to average people.

Learn how this industry came to Willimantic from historian Bev York on the Mill of the Month's Saturday, December 11 trip to the Rossie Mill. \$10 Cash; meet at 1 p.m. at The Mill Museum, 411 Main St., Willimantic.

National Ugly Christmas Sweater Day

There are some things sooooo ugly or over-the-top that they become endearing. Think of the pink rabbit pajamas that Ralphie had to wear in the holiday classic, *A Christmas Story*. Or the bridesmaids' gowns in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Or Billie Eilish's LACMA gala gown. Or Sir Elton John's glasses. Or Dolly Parton's hair. Or Lil Nas X's suits. Sometimes, you've just gotta love it!

Such is the justification for the annual Ugly Christmas Sweater, which seems to have made its debut in the 1980s. It wasn't until 2002, however, that someone threw the first known "ugly-sweater party" in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada to raise money for a friend's cancer treatment. In 2011, this anti-

fashion item got its own national holiday, the 3rd Friday in December, and in 2014 Save the Children partnered with the effort in their “Make the World Better with a Sweater” campaign.

Ugly sweaters feature holiday characters like elves, snowmen, and even reindeer, with as much glitz as a Las Vegas casino show. They are kitschy and tacky, with intentionally clashing colors and are over-embellished with pompoms, jingle bells, tinsel, and anything else festering in the bottom of Granny’s sewing basket. And they are too uniquely awful to hate.



So this season, don’t be drab. Get out the fake holly and the battery-operated ornaments and whatever else strikes your fancy. Make a statement. Make an entrance. Make an Ugly Christmas Sweater!

The Real “War on Christmas”

People today generally have a nostalgic view of Christmas that bears little relationship to reality. Historians disagree as to when Jesus of Nazareth was actually born, and most of the customs that have grown up around the holiday have deep roots in other non-Christian traditions. Bringing in greens in midwinter, for example, was done throughout Pagan northern Europe to symbolize the hope of regeneration and eternal life. Santa Claus is prefigured in the God Odin who rode an 8-legged horse across the skies during the Wild Hunt with his elves and fairies, and who rewarded the good with gifts and punished the bad. Many of these cultural elements evolved into a syncretic whole which we have today.

However, along the way, some people resisted – STRONGLY. The Puritan branch of the Protestant Reformation sought to disassociate itself from all things “Pagan” and “Popish” (Catholic) – two elements it saw as nearly equally evil. Thus, it banned all representational art in its places of worship. These were



called “meetinghouses,” not “churches”; the latter being the congregation, not the building. They also banned any holiday not found in the Bible. Since no specific day is given for either Jesus’ birth or his resurrection, they thought it wrong to celebrate them. So, in 1659 the Puritan government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony actually banned Christmas and Easter until 1681. Of course, that only made the settlers in the Anglican and other colonies celebrate all the harder!

To find out more about this little-known episode in American history, come to a Merry

UnChristmas Virtual Celebration on Tuesday, December 21 at 7 p.m. Cost is \$12 for members and \$15 for non-members. Sign up online at [Mill Museum Events Portal](#)

Heigh Ho, Heigh Ho, It’s Off to Clean We Go!

The Mill Museum will be closed for cleaning and organizing from January 3rd through 31st. Anyone having any personal items (gloves, decorations, jackets, books, etc.) is asked to please take them home before that time so that they are not inadvertently disposed of. We also need volunteers to help pack, move, sort, scrub and do a myriad of other tasks throughout January. Times are flexible, and any help would be greatly appreciated. Please call Volunteer Coordinator Andrea Ader at (860) 742-5234 or email BrickAder@yahoo.com.

Get Woven into the Fabric of Our Museum

You don't have to live in Willimantic or Windham to support the Mill Museum. We're a REGIONAL museum, so folks throughout eastern Connecticut and beyond can learn about the vital role the mills and the people who worked in them played in shaping the area's history. If you've already become a member, THANK YOU! If not, please consider joining our ranks.

At the \$25 COTTON (Individual) level, members receive the newsletter; email notice of the Museum's programs and events; free admission to the Museum, its library and exhibits (special events and fundraisers may be extra); and 1-hour access to staff time for personal research.

At the \$50 WOOL (Family) level, membership extends these same benefits to members of a household consisting of up to two adults and any number of children.

At the \$100 SILK (Patron) level, membership includes all the above benefits, plus invitations to a private, advance showing of exhibits; free personal tours; and 3-hour access to staff time for personal research.

Membership Levels:

Cotton (individual) membership, \$25

Wool (family) membership, \$50

Silk (patron) membership, \$100

Windham Textile & History Museum

411 Main Street, Willimantic, CT 06226

Make checks out to: WTHM

Go to <https://millmuseum.org/join-membership/> and join today or increase your level of membership. Your involvement may be one more thread in a growing tapestry of history.



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