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Loom and Spindle

The Mill Museum Newsletter

July 2025

Strategic Planning Underway

The Mill Museum is looking to a bright future. On July 18, nine members of the museum community, friends, staff, and board members, put their heads together to create a Strategic Plan for the museum. The Strategic Plan will guide the museum over the next five to ten years.

The team looked at current challenges, considered the opportunities. Over the next few months, team members will refine the plan and present it for approval by the Board of Directors.

A message to the Mill Museum community from our new Volunteer Coordinator



Hi, my name is Kate! I'm excited to help out as the new Volunteer Coordinator at the Windham Textile and History Museum. I believe that volunteering can be a meaningful way for individuals to build upon their own unique skills while supporting their local community. I bring experience from working with environmental and historic organizations across Connecticut, including giving tours at a 19th-century gristmill and leading community projects with AmeriCorps. I am currently completing a degree in Environmental Geography and

Sustainability at Central Connecticut State University. Since joining the team, I have been designing new programs to help connect our volunteers with opportunities that further advance not only the museum's mission, but their own. I look forward to connecting with everyone!

Volunteers are sought for archival assistant, among other positions. Visit <https://millmuseum.org/support-us/support>

Boom Box Parade Celebrating our nation's 249th birthday on July Fourth in true Willimantic style

Photo by Sally Whipple

from Jillson Square to Memorial Park, as one of the longest in recent memory. Participants and viewers of all ages, backgrounds, and political stripes made it truly democratic—a lively, colorful community event happily coinciding with temperate, dry weather (after weeks of hot, humid, typical summer days). Amidst the gamut of floats, costumes, and vehicles, Director Aaron Skarzenski, Sam Chace, Michael Mahony, and Irene Barnard represented the Mill Museum, carrying its banner, and Pride and American flags.

Mill Museum Senior Curator/former Director and Co-Windham Town Historian Jamie Eves and his wife Kit Eves marched ahead of the museum group, as 2025's "Co-Cupids."

This one-of-a-kind parade is typical of what makes our area so special!





Edward Francis Gallivan Irish-American Mill Worker By Jamie Eves

We begin our story of Edward F. Gallivan (c. 1868–1959), a Willimantic, Connecticut textile worker, with a brass pocket watch. The watch was awarded to Gallivan by the American Thread Company (1898–1985) in Willimantic, for 50 years of faithful employment. Companies like ATCO frequently presented employees with awards, plaques, occasionally even watches for years of service or for exemplary attendance. Such awards cost the Company little but were appreciated by the workers—even if a raise in wages might have been more appropriate. Many years later, the watch came to reside at the Mill Museum. This is what we were able to find out about its owner.



Civil War—or perhaps in 1869 or 1870, as was recorded at different times by the U.S. Census. He was born in Willimantic and lived there all his life.



Like many people in Willimantic, Gallivan was of immigrant stock. His parents and all but one of his six brothers and sisters had been born in Ireland, possibly in County Kerry. John and Honora Galivan, Gallivan, or Galvin—like many immigrants, their last name would be spelled differently by different people—came to United States sometime between 1860 and 1865, during the Civil War. According to the U.S. Census, John and Honora’s primary language was not English, but “Irish,” or Gaelic—which means

that John had Americanized his first name from the Irish Sean. With John and Honora came twins Daniel and John (Sean), Jr.; Mary; Bridget; and Murty. Two younger children, Lizzie and Edward, would be born in America. John, Sr. worked as a laborer. Honora “kept home.”

All of the Gallivan children worked. In 1880, Daniel was a tinsmith, and John, Jr., Mary, and Bridget each labored in one of Willimantic’s several busy, chuffing cotton mills. Murty was a laborer, like his father, while 15-year-old Lizzie and 10-year-old Edward each worked in one of the Thread City’s small silk mills. None of the children was in school.

All the Gallivan children could read and write English, but going to work at such early ages meant they had only grade-school educations. Unlike the 20th century, in the 19th century it was rare for the children of laborers or mill workers to attend high school. Their families needed their wages. Not only did

“He was born in Willimantic and lived there all his life.”



Map showing Hooker's Lane right of way between Main and Meadow Streets.

Poor people, the Gallivans moved around a lot, living in a series of low-rent, working-class tenements. According to city directories, for a while they lived at No. 9 Hooker's Lane. In fact, Willimantic had no street officially named Hooker's Lane—but an 1897 map shows an unnamed “right of way” (a narrow alley) running between and connecting Main and Meadow Streets, not far from Seth Hooker's grand railroad hotel. The map shows two small,

wooden residential structures tucked mid-block along the alley. It is likely that the Gallivan family lived in one of them. Surrounded by taller brick buildings, hidden from view, it was very much the low-rent district. Even with several incomes, the Gallivan family could not afford much.

By 1891, the family had moved out of Hooker's Lane to 49 Winter Street, near the railroad tracks. Edward, now around 20, boarded at his parents' home, and had already moved on from the small silk mill to the much larger Willimantic Linen Company—which in 1898 became the massive American Thread Company, one of the largest cotton mills in Connecticut.

Edward moved frequently. By 1896, he had left his parents' tenement and moved in with his older brother John, Jr., one door down at 53 Winter Street. The move seems to have been necessitated by Edward's recent marriage to Catherine (or Katherine) Murphy, another Irish American. Unsurprisingly, Edward and Catherine were Roman Catholic. They are buried in Willimantic's St. Joseph's Cemetery.



Winter Street (today)

second child, a son auspiciously named Freeman, was born in 1900—but sadly passed away only 14 years later in 1914. Illnesses were common, and far too many immigrant working-class children never made it to adulthood.

Like other members of his family, Edward continued to work at American Thread, a massive brick-and-stone complex at the other end of town, about a mile east of Winter Street. Over the years, he worked many different jobs, most of them unskilled or semi-skilled: spool turner, janitor, weigher, section hand, guide setter, and watchman. He became a watchman in 1936, when he was 68, 67, or 66—a job often given to infirm older men. His last year of work was 1944, when he was 76, 75, or 74.

“Edward Gallivan lived a long life, full of toil and sorrow.”

Edward Gallivan lived a long life, full of toil and sorrow. Along the way he and Catherine moved out of his brother’s tenement and into a rental of their own at 20 Meadow Street, not too far from Hooker’s Lane. The

building is long gone, razed during the 1970s for urban renewal and now the site of a parking lot. Catherine died in the 1920s, only in her 50s.

But there were successes. Around 1920, Norene married Walter R. Young, a shipping clerk at American Thread, and moved up into Willimantic’s growing middle class. Norene and Walter first lived with Edward and Catherine, but then moved into a house of their own, a small single-family middle-class home at 44 Hayden Street, away from the city center, the mills, and the railroad tracks.



44 Hayden Street

After Catherine died, Edward moved in with his daughter and son-in-law. Norene and Walter had no children.

One by one, Edward’s many brothers and sisters died or moved away, but he kept on. Edward’s brother Murty died in 1937 and is buried in St. Joseph’s Cemetery. In 1959, Edward died, and is also interred at St. Joseph’s.

known Edward Gallivan or his daughter Norene (who died in 2012, still at 44 Hayden Street), who—with nobody else to give it to—passed it along to friends. However it got to us, the Museum is glad to have it, for it tells a story: a story of poor Irish immigrants who spoke Gaelic, of their children who left school to toil in the textile mills, of a lifetime of hard work and humble homes, of too-early deaths, of a mill that dominated a city for more than a century, of an heirloom, of years of living in tenements, and of an upwardly mobile daughter who owned her home.

Bobbin' Around the Museum and Community Events and Happenings

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Special Program: Stitching Circle, Sunday, August 3, 2-4pm; Mill Museum, Bev York Room: Looking for a community with which to stitch? Have an unfinished needlework project you've been meaning to pick up? Ready to start a new needlecraft project and looking for some inspiration? Beginners and all skill levels welcome. Join us! Open to all Mill Museum visitors with regular admission. Museum members are always free! Bring

your own project! Don't have a project to work on? We have a variety of materials, tools, and kits available in the Museum gift shop!

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[Third Thursday](#), August 21, 6-9pm: A most excellent community celebration and street fair on Main Street, Willimantic. Over 140 vendors provide music, arts & crafts, food, and drink. Free parking! Come see us at the Mill Museum table on Third Thursday, then visit the Museum on the weekend!

Spinning Bee, August 23 (4th Saturday, monthly), 10am-1pm; Mill Museum Dugan Hall, 157-B Union St., Willimantic. Park on Union St. or our Main St. parking lot: Experienced spinner and weaver Peggy Church leads this drop-in event. Bring a spindle or wheel, or just hang out. Spinners, please let [Peggy Church](#) know you plan to attend. In colonial Connecticut, women held spinning bees for camaraderie, friendship, and encouragement. Novices learned from experienced spinners sharing skills honed over a lifetime of work. During the American Revolution patriot women organized spinning bees to produce homespun—supporting non-importation of English manufactured cloth, and seizing an opportunity for political expression and participation. All spinners of all ages welcome—from novices to veterans! Free for spinners and Museum visitors. Come watch, ask questions, and try your hand at spinning!



Photo by Peggy Church

Poetry in the Park: Poets Corner, corner of Jackson Street and Curbstone Way, Willimantic. Thursdays 8/28, 6:30pm; 9/25, 6pm. [Curbstone Literary Project's](#) annual summertime poetry series features local and regional poets, and is held to honor local Puerto Rican poet and activist, the late [Julia de Burgos](#). (Listen to faint recordings of de Burgos reading her poetry on this [Spanish-language website](#), translatable to English. Watch this [video](#) featuring local historian Bev York, Education Director at the America Museum and former Mill Museum Director, reading a de Burgos poem in English.)

Mansfield Community Center, 10 So. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, offers classes in art, language, dance; and other activities including fitness opportunities like yoga, basketball, pickleball, and

Photo by Irene Barnard

community artists. Currently represented are the talented and skilled folks from the member-owned [Swift Waters Artisans' Cooperative](#), located at 866 Main Street, Willimantic. If you haven't been, check out this local gem to find unique gifts for loved ones and for yourself! (View artist statements and work via link above.)



Photo by Irene Barnard

The [Willimantic Public Art Mural Walk](#) lets you explore some of the most diverse creative work around on your own time, for free! The organization's mission is to make art accessible to everyone, as a medium for healing and strengthening the community. Stroll along Main Street and side streets at your leisure, then make your way to the Frog Bridge and across the Willimantic River—

once the great source of power for the town mills during its Industrial-era heyday.



Walk in nature more your style? In area crown jewel [Mansfield Hollow State Park](#), you can hike on multiple trails (including paved/accessible?), kayak, fish, or picnic to your heart's delight.

Photo by Irene Barnard





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.

Annual Membership Levels:

Tier	Price	Benefits
Student	\$15	Membership newsletter access, Member pricing for events
Individual	\$30	2 guest passes, 10% discount at the gift shop, Membership newsletter access, Early event registration, Member pricing for events, 10% off rental space 1x per year
Family	\$60	Covers household of up to 4 people, 2 guest passes, 10% discount at the gift shop, Membership newsletter access, Early event registration, Member pricing for events, 10% off rental space 1x per year
Premium	\$100	4 guest passes, 20% discount at the gift shop, Membership newsletter access, Early event registration, Member pricing for events, 10% off rental space 2x per year

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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