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Loom and Spindle

The Mill Museum Newsletter

December 2025

Thread City, the Museum's Permanent Exhibit, Is Now Open!

The Museum's new permanent exhibition, *Thread City: The Rise and Fall of the Connecticut Textile Industry*, is officially open to the public. A festive opening reception was held on December 7, giving Museum visitors the opportunity to hear Senior Curator Dr. Jamie Eves speak about the exhibit. Eves guided new visitors, members, and old friends through what he called a "discovery" exhibit, giving detailed background about the course of the local textile industry depicted in each of its five bays (or charettes), and letting visitors experience a trip through time in chronological order: from preindustrial textile production, through the Industrial Revolution, labor history, mill cities and towns, to



panels in the Museum's renovated Bev York Room.

Thread City offers a broad overview of the textile industry's deep influence on Connecticut. As both introduction to the Museum and context to the other installations, it traces the story of textile production from the industry's origins through its decline. The exhibit is composed of over 100 artifacts entirely from the Museum collection, like the working eighteenth-century barn

loom reassembled and restored by volunteers, led by Peggy Church, who with other weavers dressed the loom to prepare it for use. Eves emphasized that the exhibition objects are not random, but are connected to each other by the stories they tell. QR codes will later be added to link visitors to online activities, the Museum's online catalog and other objects, and the websites of other museums that tell similar stories.

Twenty years earlier, Eves got the idea from Bev York, then undertook the exhibit's research, design, and installation. His dedication to public history and education have made *Thread City* a meaningful resource for all visitors, well into the future. The Museum proudly invites the community to join in examining the textile industry's complex legacy through the lens of a local town, Willimantic, as an example of the rise and fall of industrial Connecticut, inextricably linked with Connecticut's identity.

Witness Stones Project

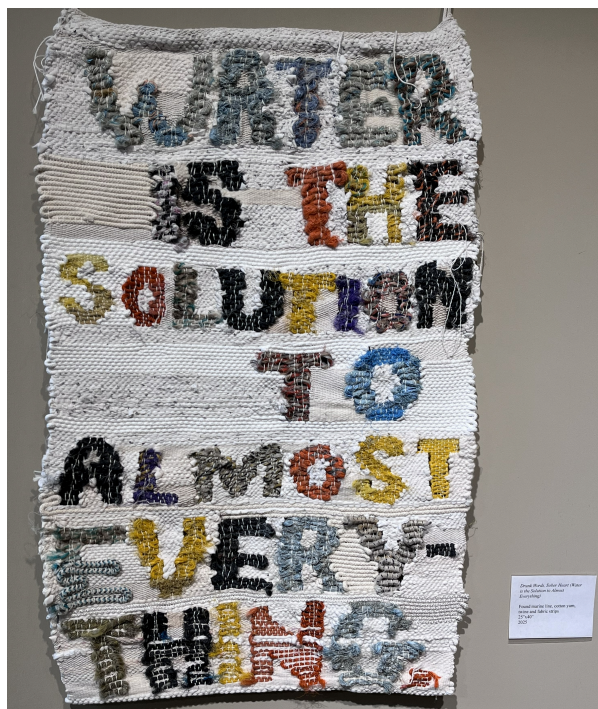
Eves said he is interested to work next with the [Witness Stones Project](#). Over the years he's researched and is interested in so commemorating one or more local historical figures including Lyman Jackson, who lived on Jackson Street, later named after him; brothers Job and Jesse Leason, soldiers who came to

Jonathan Cates, his English enslaver (who has been hailed as a town founder, but who should actually share that credit with Ginne). Quilter Susi Ryan of the Sisters In Stitches Joined By The Cloth guild was a subject of Witness Stones work.

Now under the umbrella of Historic New England and its Stopping Stones program, the project aims to honor, and restore the history and humanity of, the enslaved people who built our communities. Through local archival research, teacher development, classroom curricula, and public programming, it helps chronicle the local history of slavery. Researchers explore enslaved individuals' lives through primary sources like account books, wills, church and town records, manumission deeds, obituaries, and other archival material, creating biographical sketches. The community then comes together to install Witness Stones, permanent bronze markers memorializing enslaved individuals where they lived, worked, or worshiped. Together the community honors them, sharing their stories through art, poetry, essays, and other media.

New Exhibit of Fiber Art by Emma Welty

Emma Welty, Museum Lead Educator, has installed her new exhibit in the temporary exhibit space, on view through December. In *Water Is the Solution to Almost Everything*, Welty incorporates found marine line, cotton yarn, twine, and fabric strips, and in other pieces uses different techniques with fiber to illustrate larger themes like water and waterways like the Mediterranean Sea. The exhibit also consists of exquisite pieces of *janyak*, Armenian needle lace, that Welty created using fishing





For centuries, janyak has linked Armenians in their homeland and around the world, including genocide survivors emigrating to places like the US (Los Angeles hosts the largest Armenian community in diaspora). This intricate art form, both portable and enduring, passes down culture and values through generations. Armenian women carried it with them into exile and their new homes, fabricating the deceptively simple artwork using just needle and thread to meld technical precision and creative imagination. These decorative

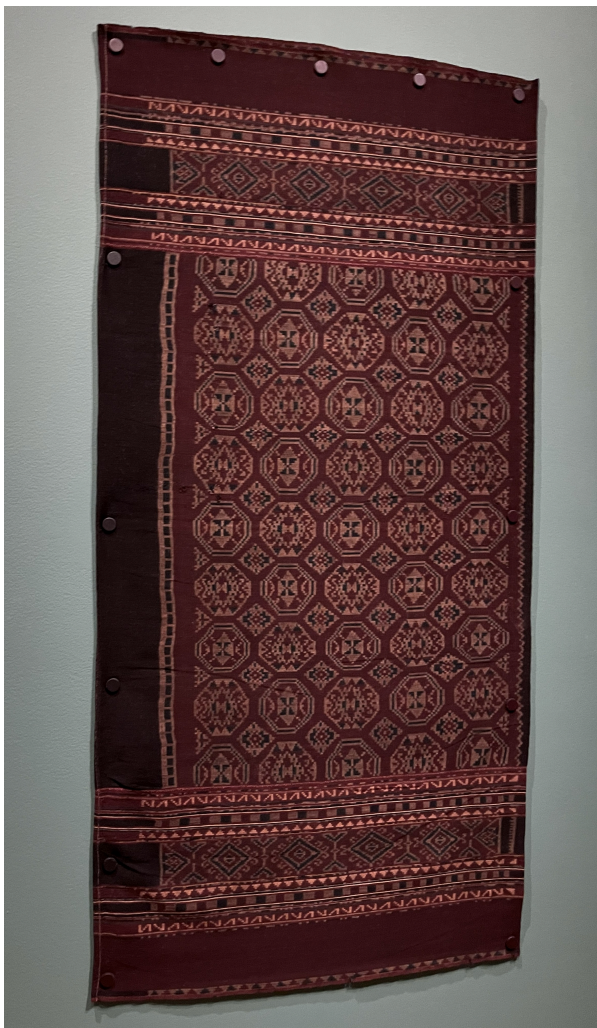
objects were an important part of home and family life. Each piece of lacework incorporates in its symbols and patterns memories of survival and endurance, both in Armenia and its diaspora.

Textile and Quilting News:

Indonesian Textile Exhibit at Yale

Exploring another region linked by water, this one across the globe, [Nusantara: Six Centuries of Indonesian Textiles](#) is now open at the Yale University Art Gallery through 1/11/26. The vast exhibition highlights the elaborate textile heritage and ancient inter-island links of the immense maritime region of Indonesia. Thanks to Museum friend and spinner/knitter/dyer/crafter Nancy Shoemaker for telling me about this show! Over 100 examples of exquisite craftsmanship and artistic innovation reveal to visitors the profound cultural and historical significance of Indonesian textiles. The 14th-20th century textiles are

collection of pieces from Indonesia and Sarawak (Malaysia). This includes Southeast Asian weavings, which are not only artistic creations but also important ceremonial and ritual objects indicating gender roles, social status, identity, and heritage. The textiles show the rich cultural diversity, from regions throughout Indonesia. Vibrantly colored with natural dyes like indigo and noni (Indian mulberry), the pieces are incredibly detailed, often featuring minuscule motifs of plants and animals.



Indonesia has historically been at the confluence of major trade routes, combining Indigenous and foreign influences such as Indian, Chinese, and later Islamic cultures, transforming borrowed motifs into uniquely Indonesian traditions. Nusantara is the original name for the Indonesian archipelago, and this exhibit showcases the breadth of imagery and technical mastery of the remarkable textiles of this region.

2025 marks 40 years since the first HIV/AIDS cases were reported, taking over 700,000 US lives (over 40 million worldwide). The [NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt](#) was conceived in San Francisco in 1985 by gay activist Cleve Jones. Weighing an estimated 54 tons, as of 2020, it's the largest piece of community folk art in the world. Touring the country starting in 1988, it's been displayed on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and in 2020, returned to San Francisco. Now, all 50,000 panels and their moving stories have become available via an [interactive online experience](#). Viewers can explore the Quilt online, and a [PDF guide](#) helps them search for loved ones who may be among the nearly 110,000 names sewn into its panels.

Since the 1978 assassinations of gay Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone, Jones helped organize an annual candlelight march in their honor, as prejudice and stigma prevented many AIDS victims from receiving funerals. In 1985, when Jones learned that over



1,000 San Franciscans had died of AIDS, he asked fellow marchers to write on placards the names of loved ones they'd lost to AIDS. They later taped these to the walls of the San Francisco Federal Building, all the names resembling a patchwork quilt. Planning a larger memorial, Jones later created the first Quilt panel in memory of a friend, and in 1987, joined a small group of friends and lovers to gather in a storefront to memorialize those who had died of AIDS, documenting them for posterity and to help people understand the devastating impact of the disease. This was the foundation of the NAMES Project and its AIDS Memorial Quilt. Immediately, the public responded, and people in Atlanta, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco—US cities most affected by AIDS—sent panels to the San Francisco workshop. Donors supplied sewing machines, equipment, and other materials, and many volunteered their time. Since then, [other groups have constructed their own memorials](#) to spread awareness of critical medical and political issues.

[The Quilt Index](#) is a research and education project of Matrix: The Center for Digital Humanities & Social Sciences at Michigan State University. The open access digital repository of thousands of images, stories, and information about quilts and their makers (including the AIDS Memorial Quilt) is drawn from public

contributed to this work, dedicated to preserving and making quilt history accessible since 2003.

Speaking of quilting, an upcoming newsletter article profiles renowned Hartford fiber artist, [EdJohnetta Miller!](#)

2025: A Big Year for the Museum

As 2025 draws to a close, the Museum looks back on an extremely eventful year full of exciting changes: new Executive Director Aaron Skarzenski was hired, as former director Jamie Eves transitioned to work as Senior Curator, installing the permanent exhibit. Fiber artist Emma Welty joined the Museum as the new Lead Educator, creating art while devising crafts projects for visitors and teaching. Former Museum Archivist Quinlan Kearney was recently hired as Senior Curator; he'd spent time with Eves (who has now stepped down), learning the intricacies of the Museum's extensive collection. Kate Terrio stepped up to serve as the Museum's Volunteer Coordinator, volunteering herself and reaching out to engage local students, seniors, and others in the community in critical tasks like landscaping, museum cleanup, and holiday gift wrapping. New volunteers began working on multiple large projects, such as friend of the Museum Charles Olsen, who helped with installation of new lighting, making exhibits more accessible to the public, and revamping technology infrastructure. Charles has also assisted Museum Assistant Isabel Butterick as she modernizes and improves the Museum's website.

Skarzenski learned on the job from staff and board members, forging ahead through both scheduled and unforeseen repairs. He coordinated contractors and, along with Museum Board Vice President Michael Mahony, did much of the work himself, pressing forward with the major renovation of the Museum's main exhibition hall. The Bev York Room was repainted, recarpeted, new adjustable track lighting was installed with brighter lights to better showcase exhibits, and Mahony constructed walls panels that offer easier accessibility, with wider spacing to move through exhibits. "The new space will accommodate several activities at once," said Eves. *Thread City* shares space with changing

The first new temporary exhibit, the quilt show *Contradictions of Freedom Part II*, by quilting guild Sisters In Stitches Joined By The Cloth, opened in October to great success; followed in December by the greatly anticipated permanent exhibit, *Thread City!*

Thanks to staff, board, members, friends in the community, and volunteers, who together accomplished much!

Bobbin' About

Events at the Museum and the Community

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### The Museum will be closed through the month of January

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Spinning Bee, 4th Saturday of every month (December 27, 2025), 10am-1pm; Mill Museum Dugan Hall, 157-B Union St., Willimantic. Park on Union St. or Main St. museum parking lot. Master spinner and weaver Peggy Church leads this free monthly drop-in event for spinners of all levels, whether you're a wannabe or an expert! Attendees are also

welcome to bring long-abandoned or new pieces of knitting or crochet, or other crafts projects. Join us and keep cozy at this wintertime gathering!

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**The Stitching Circle** will not meet in January, when the Museum will be closed.

**This Holiday Season, please consider local community businesses for gifts on your list:** Unique Willimantic shops include the Willimantic Food Co-op's visiting vendor tables; Main Street's Swift Waters Artisans' Cooperative, Spiral Arts Ceramics, the Kerri Quirk gallery, and more. The River Room performance space on River Road offers gift cards.



The Museum's annual **Holiday Gift Wrapping Fundraiser** in cooperation with the Willimantic Lions Club runs December 14-24, 2025 at Eastbrook Mall, Storrs/Mansfield (on route 195, north of Willimantic). Volunteers wrap presents for the community 12-6pm (12/14-12/19), and 10am-8pm (12/20-12/24). We gratefully accept donations of gift wrap, tissue, boxes, ribbons, and bows. Whether shopping at the mall or if you need help wrapping gifts purchased elsewhere, stop by our table!

If you have time to volunteer through December 24, please email [volunteering@millmuseum.org](mailto:volunteering@millmuseum.org) to sign up. It's a wonderful opportunity to help the community, the Museum, and to meet staff and other volunteers!



**Museum [memberships](#) also make great gifts!**



**Coming this spring: the Museum will host a juried quilt show!**



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## 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.

| 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                                     |

### 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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