

[View this email in your browser](#)



Loom and Spindle

The Mill Museum Newsletter

January 2026

The Mill Museum will reopen Saturday, February 7!

After its annual January closure, the museum's reopening coincides as in the past with the cherished local Valentine's Day tradition, Romantic Willimantic's Chocolate Festival!



Unmentionables: Undergarments of the 19th Century and the Women Who Wore Them also opens Feb. 7.



This exhibit, the first curated by new Senior Curator Quinlan Kearney, showcases 19th century women's undergarments, the various pieces, and how they were put together under an everyday outfit. The undergarments women were expected to wear in this era were many and sometimes cumbersome, especially by today's standards. They, both the garments and the wearers, were expected to maintain a certain level of decorum and sensuality while also being relatively practical. The exhibit also highlights the differences between undergarments worn by the middle and working classes. Which items were considered necessary and which were too impractical for working class

women?

Thread City, the Museum's Permanent Exhibit

Be sure to see the Museum's permanent exhibition, Thread City: The Rise and Fall of the Connecticut Textile Industry. Jamie Eves researched, curated, designed and installed what he calls a "discovery" exhibit. Following the course of local textile production depicted in each of its five bays (or charettes), visitors

industry origins through its decline: through preindustrial textile production, the Industrial Revolution, labor history, mill cities and towns, to deindustrialization.

Thread City offers a broad overview of the textile industry's deep influence on Connecticut, as introduction and context to the



Museum and its other installations. The exhibit is composed of over 100 artifacts entirely from the Museum collection, including a working eighteenth-century barn loom reassembled and restored by volunteers. Eves emphasized that the exhibition objects 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. The exhibit examines the textile industry's complex legacy through the lens of a local town, Willimantic, exemplifying the rise and fall of industrial Connecticut, inextricably linked with the state's identity.

Executive Director Sought

Former Executive Director Aaron Skarzenski has accepted a new position as manager of an art gallery on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Aaron oversaw the upgrades of the Bev York Room during his short stay at the Mill Museum. We wish him all success and happiness. The search for a new Executive Director is ongoing. In the meantime, the museum board, staff, and volunteers continue to work together on continuing museum operations and upcoming exhibits, and welcome visitors when the museum opens on Saturday, February 7.

[Info](#)

Brook Mall

Held in December to benefit initiatives for both the Mill Museum and Lions Club, it was another great success! This fundraiser lifts the holiday community spirit in many ways. Thanks to everyone who made generous contributions as well as those who gave their time to wrap gifts to help these two valued community organizations. We hope to see everyone again next year!

Textile and Quilting News:

“Quilting Makes My Heart Sing”

by Elanah Sherman

An Interview with Hartford Fabric Artist Edjohnetta Miller

As a young child in Providence, Rhode Island, fabric artist Edjohnetta Miller was mentored by her Aunt Dora, a nurse with a flair for sewing, crochet, and quilting. Her aunt saw “a spark” in Edjohnetta early and encouraged the young child to experiment with the needle arts.



Indigo Night in Kumasi--2021--50" x 50"

Thus began a lifelong journey in highly tactile art forms that are both powered by touch and invite it.

Born in Spartanburg, South Carolina but raised in Providence, Edjohnetta’s was the first Black family on her street. She remembers her childhood as brimming with positivity, fun, and sensory excitement, all of which eventually fueled her ebullience as an artist. The sweet sparkling flavor of Del’s frozen lemonade.

The thrilling, uplifting music spilling onto the sidewalk from Congdon Street Baptist Church. Regular picnics at Goddard Park. Downtown Providence, with its big, crowded department stores from which an imperfect purchase could be transformed, with some soap

Even the job of Ed's father intimated her artistic future. He worked at a dry-cleaning company as a "spotter," an expert in removing stubborn stains. (Her dad developed a formula for stain removal that benefitted the company but never financially benefitted him.) He often worked at home on the glamorous gowns of entertainers. The very young Edjohnetta, already mesmerized by textiles, was admonished to refrain from touching but would slit open the bags anyway just to feel the beading and the weave.

"I couldn't just look," she says. "And when I got real quiet, they knew I was up to something."

If touch provided the direction of Edjohnetta's work, social realities provided the framework for it. The lessons started early and began, like much else, with Aunt Dora. When Edjohnetta was nine or ten years old, Aunt Dora took her to the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. The child immediately commented that no one looked like her, not on the wall and not among the visitors. "That doesn't matter," Aunt Dora responded. "This museum belongs to everybody." Around the same time, Edjohnetta would use her allowance to purchase the New York Times for its fashion sections. Never seeing models who looked like her, she would color the images. She produced about 25 notebooks of these doctored New York Times photographs. This craving for representation would inform much of Edjohnetta's work, especially her quilting.



Joy--2024--50" x 50"

First a weaver, Edjohnetta transitioned to quilting about 25 years ago. She was motivated partly by the ease and "soothing" nature of revision in the quilting process. (She was encouraged to make the transition by Carolyn Mazloomi, founder of the Women of Color Quilters Network.) Her quilts are rapturous explosions of color and graphic ingenuity that often tell stories or make statements. They are in many private and public collections, including the

permanent collection the largest quilt (90' by 110') she has ever made. Among the awards she has received is the prestigious Governor's Arts Award (2003). She exhibits constantly and widely. Edjohnetta is currently working on a quilt that will feature Connecticut's Prudence Crandall and one of Crandall's most celebrated Black students, Sarah Harris. Another quilt will be featured on the cover of a book to be published by the University of Minnesota Press.

Edjohnetta often purchases shirts for use as quilting material, but she does not stop there. According to a November 17, 2002 New York Times article about her, "Ms. Miller has a habit of complimenting friends on their choice of garb in such a way that they present her with the appealing piece."

Edjohnetta's life as an artist is inseparable from her career as a teacher. In 1995, she co-founded the Hartford Artisans Center specifically to provide weaving instruction to older people and people with visual disabilities. The centrality of touch in her own artistic practice was key to her certainty that visual impairment would present few barriers to achievement in weaving, and she was right. Once, after a blind student called her over to consult about a flaw in his work, she responded that she couldn't see a problem. He suggested that she close her eyes and feel the fabric, whereupon she perceived the error. "So, who's the blind person, now," he asked her!



Rites of Passage--2020--60" x 60"

Through the Connecticut-based organization Aid to Artisans, she worked as a design consultant on the marketing of traditional fabrics in Ghana and, sponsored by the State Department, she managed a project in Côte d'Ivoire with artisans, including weavers and carvers of wood shuttles, to create collaborations with each other. For the last few years, in partnership with her daughter, Ayisha, Edjohnetta has been conducting collage workshops for children and adults, helping intergenerational participants

In all these activities and programs – workshops, classes, consultancies, exhibits – Edjohnetta both demonstrates and imparts her Aunt Dora’s motivational wisdom: “Live your passions and your dreams will come full circle.”

For more information about Edjohnetta, including booking information for programs or exhibits, go to Edjohnetta.com.

Interview with Master Artisan Peggy Church

Peggy Church, dedicated teacher and master weaver/spinner/craftswoman, kindly spoke to me on a recent cold winter's day, when I asked how she started out. "I was a maker from the beginning," she said. She was young; her mother made a lot of her clothes, and she herself knit and sewed, even some of her own dance dresses.

Spinning led to her interest in other crafts. One day, she and her husband came to his family's Chaplin farmhouse to insulate the attic floor (this was during the 1973 oil crisis), and in a back room discovered three spinning wheels. Her husband started emptying the attic and found a basket of wheel parts under the eaves. A local woman put the wheels together and gave Peggy a beginner spinning lesson. She gave a great wheel to Peggy, who continued learning on her own. At the time there was less interest in spinning, although Peggy eventually found spinners and dyers in Boston. During a visit to Andover’s Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, she watched a woman weave a checked blanket on a barn frame loom. "It struck me like a ton of bricks," she said, thinking, "I have to do that!" Wouldn't it be nice to spin yarn and weave linens for their 1790 house? Busy with three kids, she didn't have much free time, but once the youngest started school, Peggy took lessons from the museum weaver. She subscribed to magazines and attended workshops, and without formal training, tried to learn as much as possible. Joining the Boston Weaver's Guild, she took classes. After 15 years, the kids grew older, and Peggy went to work (she had a pharmacy degree). Later, after retiring, she went into weaving full-time. "It's a long path from when my mother-in-law offered, 'Would you like to take a wheel home, dear?'"

The most patient of teachers, Peggy clearly loves sharing the extensive information she's garnered over the years. When spinning or weaving, her mind

drop into "the zone" - a deeply focused, more meditative state.

Before her involvement with the Mill Museum, she was a board member and secretary of Lowell's American Textile History Museum, which closed in 2016. Soon after, Faith Kenton, then very active at the Mill Museum, arranged a "Textile Trio" with quilters, weavers, and spinners for a two-day weekend event at the Mill Museum. Looms were set up, and Peggy spun on wheels in the Dugan Room. After her experience at Lowell, she says, "Fate hauled me in at the right time."

Peggy emphasizes that in addition to the existing stitching circle, spinning bee, and weaving lessons, Mill Museum facilities could become an important resource for a broader base of activities. Skills that could bring in a wider audience, like additional craft classes and workshops, could gradually be added. For example, school kids could be taught how to sew, a practical way that reviving these ancient traditions via hands-on experience could benefit lesser-served community members. The museum could partner with local sewing machine and textile supply stores as well as local libraries that have knitting groups, and often accept donated supplies. She points out that the spinning bee has already become a great resource, drawing in new spinners as well as other, more experienced craftspeople (and Museum volunteers!). "Doing this kind of outreach has long-term effects." It's a great social outlet and opportunity to learn about local history, the museum, and the craft from a master!

Bobbin' Around the Museum and Community...

Events at the Museum and the Community

Spinning Bee, 4th Saturday of every month (January 24, 2026, weather permitting), 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! Please let us know you plan to come by contacting [Peggy Church](#). Attendees are also welcome to bring long-abandoned or new pieces of knitting or crochet, or other crafts projects.

after reading an article in [Spin Off Magazine](#). She said the double weave project using linen yarn was "so much fun to weave!"

~~~~~

**Weaving Lessons:** Peggy will start a new series of Mill Museum Weaving Lessons, beginning **Sunday, March 2** (8 three-hour lessons). Learn how to measure the warp yarn and dress a floor loom. Weave a sampler learning different weave structures and learn how to read weaving drafts. Plan a project of your own, choose the yarn, warp the loom and weave it! Class size limited to three students. To reserve your place contact the museum office: 860-456-2178 or [info@millmuseum.org](mailto:info@millmuseum.org). Fee for 8 sessions: \$340. Materials fee: \$30 and includes the text *Learning to Weave* by Deborah Chandler. (Materials fee waived if the student already has the book and some weaving experience.)



~~~~~



The next Stitching Circle is scheduled for Sunday, February 8. (Check the museum events website for updates.) The group meets the **first Sunday of every month, 2-4pm; 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 need some inspiration? Beginners and all skill levels welcome. Join us! Open to all Museum visitors with regular admission; members always free! Bring your

~~~~~

While ambling around town during the Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival (or anytime), stop in and give some love to the [Willimantic Food Co-op](#).

Celebrating their 46<sup>th</sup> birthday, the co-op will feature live music, lots of cake, and door prizes! 91 Valley Street, 10am-4pm.

~~~~~

You can also enjoy some local art and learn about the history inspiring it: The [America Museum Historic Mural](#) walk has QR codes at every mural, taking viewers to further resources and information about individual works.

~~~~~

Also, check out the Mill Museum's virtual exhibit, [Murals of a Mill Town](#).

~~~~~

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

~~~~~

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

---

## 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 |

| Subscribe  | Past Issues | Benefits                                                                                                                                                                                               | Translate ▼ |
|------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 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.



Copyright © 2024 The Mill Museum, All rights reserved.

**Our mailing address is:**  
 860-456-2178 \* 411 Main Street, Willimantic, CT 06226  
 Open Sat - Sun, 10-4  
 themillmuseum@gmail.com

Want to change how you receive these emails?

**Subscribe**

**Past Issues**

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

**Translate** ▼

This email was sent to <<Email Address>>

[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

The Mill Museum · 411 Main St · Willimantic, CT 06226-3173 · USA

