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# *Loom and Spindle*

## *The Mill Museum Newsletter*

August 2025

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### **Volunteer Consultants Evaluate Museum**

by Elanah Sherman

On August 22, three members of the Southeast Connecticut Community Center of the Blind visited the Museum to evaluate its accessibility to people with visual disabilities.

*Museum educator Emma Welty (center) presents an educational selection of fabrics, with different textures, to (left to right) Kevin Harkins, Margaret Palmer, and Tammy Paradis. Several years ago, the Museum started offering tactile experience to visitors.*

Organized by Museum volunteer/accessibility consultant Elanah Sherman, who is a member of the Center and joined the tour, this event represents an important partnership that will expand the Museum's scope in



consumers.

Museum Executive Director Aaron Skarzenski and Lead Educator Emma Welty hosted the meeting, which ran from 10:30 AM–2:00 PM, including a break for pizza. Emma led a tour through all but

the upper floor of Dugan, taking copious notes on comments as they moved through the spaces. Although the Museum has made significant progress in the last few years in broadening its accessibility, this event proved there is no substitute for direct critique from guests.

Evaluators Kevin Harkins, Margaret Palmer, and Tammy Paradis, all of whom have different degrees and kinds of visual disability, made suggestions regarding both physical accessibility and policies, from adding raised lettering to the buzzer at the accessible entrance to creating procedures regarding tactile exploration of Museum objects (a goal already receiving attention from Museum staff). Emma showed the evaluators the fabric and fiber samples that are routinely offered to Museum guests, with and without disabilities, for tactile reference.

*“I had a wonderful time and truly appreciate the feedback from the group . . . I look forward to working on some creative tactile solutions in the galleries and on guided tours.”*

*- Emma Welty*

The tour went beyond formal evaluation, though. For example, Emma, an accomplished fabric and needlework artist, took the time to provide a detailed tactile introduction to several looms, educating evaluators on the weaving process. Kevin called this experience "a godsend" after years of wondering how looms actually work. Elanah said, "This is the power of accessibility, and the transformative power of museums."

including the group's driver, made purchases!

[Additional photos of the visit.](#)

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## New Quilt Exhibition Coming Soon!

The Mill Museum is excited to announce a major new exhibition, Contradictions of Freedom, Part II—2025, opening Saturday, October 4. As the inaugural exhibit in our newly renovated Bev York Room, it consists of some 20 quilts made by [Sisters In Stitches Joined By The Cloth](#). Sisters In Stitches is the only New England quilting guild dedicated to preserving the art, culture, history, and traditions of African American quilting. The exhibit coincides with the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution, and some of the quilts depict African American involvement in the Revolution. It is mounted in appreciation of Mill Museum colleague and friend, the late Ed Silverstein, a career journalist and devoted member of the museum board and his community. For further details, exhibit dates, and times, check the [Mill Museum website](#).

The exhibition hall now features fresh paint, flooring, and lighting, in addition to new temporary walls. The Museum team and volunteers have worked together to provide a renewed environment with multiple possibilities. The space has been reimaged to encompass a new permanent exhibition space as well as continued use for temporary exhibits. This elevated experience of our first floor also includes new exhibition walls to better guide interaction and facilitate ease of access, as well as new lighting to provide for better visibility and more dynamic uses.

Learning about and honoring their ancestors is an integral focus of Sisters In Stitches. An ancestor of guild cofounder Susi Ryan, [Venture Smith](#), was a formerly enslaved man kidnapped as a child from West Africa, who later freed himself, then his family, settling in Stonington, and later in Haddam, Connecticut. He wrote the earliest published narrative of slavery in the Americas. To find out more about Ryan and Smith, read CT Public's [article](#). Its

commemoration of his life, will be held this year on Saturday, September 6, 1-4 pm at the First Church Cemetery, 499 Town Street (RT. 151), East Haddam.

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## Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteering is a wonderful way to connect to your community, learn new skills, and meet different people. On August 16, the [Windham Center Fire Department](#) hosted a volunteer expo at their firehouse. Mill Museum representatives Kate and Irene met with the public and the hardworking people from other organizations to share information, how-to's, and ideas—and all of them welcome volunteers! Windham Fire presented demonstrations on CPR, and extricating injured people from a car using the jaws of life. The volunteer fire

department will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2025! Also present was the recently-formed Willimantic [Latino Lions Club](#) (an offshoot of Lions Club International), which puts on charity events such as handing out backpacks and school supplies for the new school year, and is collaborating on putting on a Breast Cancer and Diabetes



Walk in October. [Windham/Willimantic Cares](#) and the [Willimantic Elks Lodge #1311](#) were also at the event—all actively seeking young people to educate them about the value of giving back to their community. Connecting with each other through volunteering makes this a more vibrant, representative place to live!

Kate, Museum volunteer coordinator, is seeking to fill this current open volunteer position.

Volunteer Opportunity: Front Desk Attendant

#### Description:

The Front Desk Attendant plays a vital role in creating a welcoming experience for visitors. These volunteers are responsible for greeting visitors, answering visitor questions, assisting with sale transactions, and keeping the gift shop looking tidy. This position is perfect for those who enjoy engaging with the public and interacting with a diverse group of people.

#### When:

Front Desk Attendants are needed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Volunteers can choose to sign up for the following time slots: 10am-1pm; 1pm-4pm

#### To Apply:

If you are interested, please reach out to Kate at [volunteering@millmuseum.org](mailto:volunteering@millmuseum.org) or stop by the museum to learn more!

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

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## In Memoriam

On a sad note, Museum historian Jamie Eves shared that long-time Museum member Tora Steregaard has passed away. She also will be remembered with appreciation for donating her extensive collection of books on quilts, other textiles, and Connecticut history to the Museum. She was a great scholar and will be missed.

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## Bobbin' Around the Museum and Community...

**Spinning Bee, 4th Saturday of every month.** 10am-1pm; Mill Museum Dugan Hall, 157-B Union St., Willimantic. Park on Union St. or our Main St. parking lot:



drop-in event for spinners of all levels. The August 23rd bee was a lively gathering, with Peggy sharing various textile samples collected over the years, such as soy silk, tussah silk, and color-grown cotton.

In addition, Peggy will begin a new series of Mill Museum Weaving Lessons, beginning Sunday, September 14th. There are 8 three-hour lessons in the series. 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; one open space remains. To reserve your place contact the museum office: 860-456-2178 or [themillmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:themillmuseum@gmail.com). Class fee: \$340 + materials fee: \$30 (includes the text Learning to Weave by Deborah Chandler).

**Stitching Circle, 1st Sunday of every month.** 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!

**Poetry in the Park:** Poets Corner, corner of Jackson Street and Curbstone Way, Willimantic. Thursdays August 28 at 6:30pm; September 25 at 6pm. [Curbstone Literary Project's](#) annual summertime poetry series features local and regional poets, in honor of local Puerto Rican poet and activist, the late [Julia de Burgos](#). (Listen to de Burgos reading her poetry on this Spanish-

historian Bev York, Education Director at the America Museum, reading a de Burgos poem in English.)

**Third Thursday:** This year's final [Third Thursday](#) will be held on September 18, 6-9 pm. 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 to



*August Third Thursday's Mill Museum had a table hosted by Aaron and Isabel.*

Third Thursday, then visit the Museum on the weekend!

[Joshua's Trust](#), the largely volunteer-powered conservation nonprofit (speaking of volunteering!) protects over 5,000 acres in northeastern Connecticut. The local organization holds group hikes and maintains numerous trails of varying lengths/difficulty and terrain. They

also administer historic sites at the Gurleyville Grist Mill and Atwood Farm, hosting docent tours and special events like the fall celebration featuring cider-making in an antique apple press. Volunteer to help them with invasive plant removal, office work, or trail maintenance. Or just visit their trails to treat yourself to a crisp, early autumn walk!

## 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

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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