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Loom and Spindle

The Mill Museum Newsletter

June 2024

Mill Museum To Feature Live Demonstrations, Exhibits on Historic Textile Production

Kicking off on Saturday June 29, Mill Museum will present a ground-breaking exhibit: *Liberty's Daughters in Northeastern Connecticut: Women, Textiles, and the Nonimportation Movement in the Revolutionary Era.*

Over the ensuing months, the museum will present live demonstrations of preindustrial textile technology and other women's homekeeping skills, as well as sponsor related programs and exhibits in the museum's main exhibition room.

The presentations will bring to life the critical role played by women in the birth of the United States. It will explore how women, as makers of textiles, often out of cotton, wool, or flax, contributed vitally to the success of American boycotts against English manufactured goods in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War.

The exhibit, funded in part by Connecticut Humanities, is co-curated by museum Interim Executive Director Jamie Eves, who's also Windham Town Historian, and experienced weaver Peggy Church, who teaches at the museum.

The first live presentation will feature Peggy Church. She will lead a Saturday July 6 program on flax, between 1 and 3 p.m.

She will explain how flax is spun and its historic role dating back to colonial times. Processing flax is an arduous endeavor, according to Peggy Church.

"Once the fibers are spun into yarn, we call it linen. The spun linen thread is reeled off of the spinning wheel bobbin into 'knots' of 80 yards which are further combined into skeins of 20 knots. After bleaching, the yarn was woven into cloth for clothing and household textiles."

Mansfield Historical Society Director Ann Galonska will lead a program on silk worms on Saturday July 13 between 1 and 2 p.m.

Ann Galonska will discuss the early home silk industry, focusing mostly on Mansfield, CT. She plans to bring live silkworms to the presentation.

"Raising silkworms and then reeling and spinning the silk fiber from their cocoons was a profitable cottage industry from the Revolutionary period until the mid-1840s," Ann Galonska recalled.

"Most of the silk produced was made into thread that was marketed or bartered. Some, of course, was used domestically for home sewing or for weaving into cloth. The daughters of William Hanks of Mansfield reportedly produced enough silk to make five gowns," she said.

" Raising silkworms and then reeling and spinning the silk fiber from their cocoons was a profitable cottage industry. "

But things began to change. In 1844, there was a blight on

mulberry trees used to feed the silkworms.

"The water-powered silk mills, already established by this time, continued to operate by using imported cocoons," she said.

Gale Olsen will demonstrate the spinning of cotton on a great wheel on Saturday July 20 between 1 and 2 p.m.

She will discuss the use of great wheels.

"A great wheel is a spindle that is powered by a manually turned wheel about three to four feet in diameter for the purpose of spinning fibers for use in creating textiles," Gale Olsen explained.

In colonial times, the use of cotton was important for clothing and for piece work jobs for women working at home.

Susan Bruno and others from the Association of Traditional Hooking Artists (ATHA), Nutmeg Chapter, will demonstrate traditional rug hooking on Saturday July 27 between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Their exhibit will include a hooking frame fitted with foundation cloth, wool strips, and a hook for people to try. On display will be several rugs.

"Traditional rug hooking is the simple process of pulling loops of wool strips through woven fabric with a hook," Susan Bruno said.

"In pre-Revolutionary times, women would have hooked rugs using clothing and textiles that could no longer be salvaged for their intended use, burlap feed sacks as a foundation, and hooks forged by their menfolk by bending nails. The end product is a fairly thick mat that was used as a rug to warm cold floors or a bed cover to warm feet."

Terri Guerette will discuss and demonstrate handspinning of wool on Saturday August 3 between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

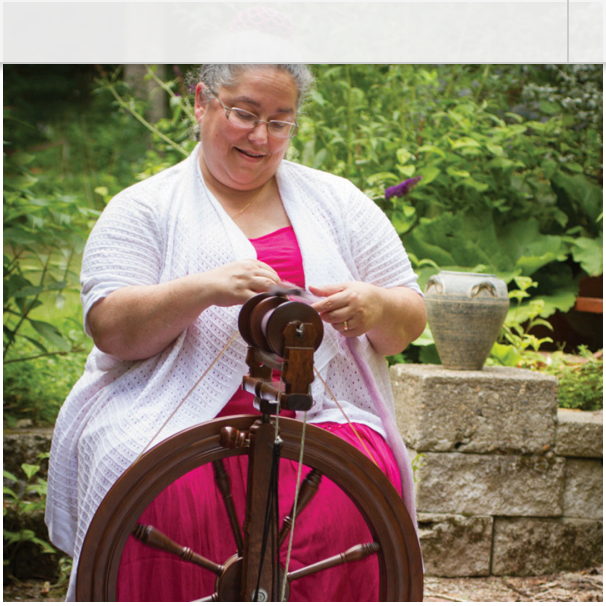
***Terri Guerette**.*
SpinOff Magazine Photo By Susan Dziedzic

Handspinning describes the spinning of fiber to create yarn, according to Terri Guerette.

In her demonstration, she expects to use a treadle wheel. It's a wheel that has a treadle that's used to spin the drive wheel.

"On treadle wheels, the spinner manipulates the treadle by foot.

The treadle is attached to a footman, a bar that attached the treadle to the drive wheel," Terri Guerette said.



Handspinning during colonial times was multi-faceted.

"Not only was it a way to create yarn that could be woven into fabric for clothing and household textiles, but it was also considered to be a very patriotic act," she added. "Patriotic because England wanted its colonies to be a source of raw materials that would be sent to England, manufactured, and sold back to the colonies at higher and taxed rates."

Windham Center Green Spinning Bee to be held on Saturday August 17 between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m.

The Windham Center Green Spinning Bee will recreate spinning bees of old. August's spinning bee will feature some spinners dressed in colonial costumes and modern spinners, too. All spinners are welcome to attend.

In the years before the American Revolution, women came together for spinning bees to make a public statement supporting nonimportation of textiles from Britain, according to Peggy Church.

There were contests to see who could spin the longest thread.

In three sessions, August 10, September 14, and October 19, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., bobbin lacemaking will be explained by Jill Hawkins and others from the New England Lace Group.



Jill Hawkins learned to make bobbin lace in Glastonbury, England in 1985. She's twice been President of the New England Lace Group.

"Bobbin lace is a lace textile made by weaving lengths of thread, which are wound on bobbins to manage them," Jill Hawkins said.

Jill Hawkins, New England Lace Group

"In Europe as well as colonial America, lace had important economic implications for the wearers," she said. "It was a signifier of wealth and fashion as we can often see from period portraits; owning and using lace represented status -- for both women and men."

Over weeks during the exhibit, an ancient barn frame loom will be set up; heddles knitted, pulleys hung, shafts threaded, reed sleyed and warp wound on, and finally linen cloth woven.

In coming months, group and individual tours of the exhibits and attendance at demonstrations are strongly encouraged. The museum's exhibit is scheduled to run through Sunday Oct. 20.

Honoring Those Who Served

By Jamie Eves

Last Juneteenth, I helped organize a ceremony at the Old Willimantic Cemetery to honor local African American and Indigenous soldiers who fought in the Union Army in the Civil War.

Organized jointly by the Mill Museum and the local chapter of the NAACP, the ceremony was brief, but moving, as a group of about 25 attendees decorated the soldiers' graves with Civil War era American (i.e., Union) flags, the flags the men fought under and defended.

This Juneteenth a combination of a hospital stay and general weakness prevented me from organizing another such event, but Kit and I did go and pay our respects.

" The five men were Joseph Davis, Marvin Freeman, Caesar Hall, Lianzo Sekater, and John C. Harris. I touched their stones, thanked them, and said their names. "

Photo by Jamie Eves

Four men buried in two of Windham/Willimantic's cemeteries fought in the 29th Connecticut



Volunteer Infantry (two in the Old Willimantic Cemetery and two in the Windham Center Cemetery) -- three were African American and one was Narragansett. A fifth soldier, also buried in the Old Willimantic Cemetery, fought as a member of the famous 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry.

The five men were Joseph Davis, Marvin Freeman, Caesar Hall, Lianzo Sekater, and John C. Harris. I touched their stones, thanked them, and said their names.

I like to visit local soldiers' graves on Memorial Day and Veterans Day -- and many days in-between -- to assure them that their sacrifices are not forgotten. (I visit the graves of non-soldiers, too, such as my local history heroes, Orrin and Jerusha Robinson.) On Juneteenth, I visit soldiers who fought in the Civil War's so-called "Colored Regiments."

Until the Emancipation Proclamation, service in the United States armed forces was for whites only. President Lincoln moved to accept "Colored" volunteers in 1863, but they served in segregated "Colored Regiments" with white officers. These men fought bravely and well.

> *" The Emancipation Proclamation declared free all enslaved people living in Confederate-held territory."*

The casualty rates for the Colored Regiments were high. Every one of them was a volunteer. They fought for many reasons: honor, glory, pay (although paid less than white soldiers), and -- primarily -- to end slavery, achieve equality, and preserve a Union on the fundamental principle (often stated, if not often honored) that "all men are created equal." As President Lincoln knew -- as Hall, Davis, Freeman, Sekater, and Harris knew -- the Union Army was (until the passage of the 13th Amendment) the vehicle of

freedom for enslaved Americans. The wording of the Emancipation Proclamation declared free all enslaved people living in Confederate-held territory once that territory had been liberated by the Union Army. And that Army included many men of color -- Northern free Blacks as well as Southern Black men.

I posted on Facebook on Memorial Day this year the stories of some of the white soldiers who gave their lives for the Union. Today, I want to remember the non-white soldiers, who also sacrificed. Say their names.

Jamie Eves is Interim Executive Director of the Mill Museum and Windham Town Historian

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News Briefs

CPTV To Feature Mill Museum

CPTV's "Where ART Thou" is scheduled to premiere a half-hour episode at 7:30 p.m. on Sunday July 14 which features the Mill Museum.

When the crew visited, they interviewed museum Interim Executive Director Jamie Eves, as well as experienced weaver and museum teacher Peggy Church.

They recorded scenes in different parts of the museum, as well.

Boom Box Parade Returns

The 39th annual Willimantic Boom Box Parade begins at 11 a.m. on Thursday July 4.

It starts at Jillson Square in downtown Willimantic, marching westbound for two-thirds of a mile to Memorial Park.

In 1986, no marching band could be found for Windham's Memorial Day Parade. Five weeks later, the "Boom Box Parade" concept was born, as WILI radio played the marching band music on the air, while thousands marched and watched, loudly playing their radios.

Lebanon Concert

The Lebanon Historical Society will present a free concert on the Lebanon Green in July.

Featuring the “Dixie Cats,” it will take place on Sunday, July 21. It starts at 5:30 p.m.

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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