



A National Heritage Corridor

**Notes from Historical Collaboration &
Tour of the Mill Museum, Willimantic
Saturday, December 16, 2017**

Ten people attended the Historical Collaboration Program and Tour of the Mill Museum in Willimantic. Organizations that were represented included the Lebanon Historical Society, Franklin Historical Society, Columbia Historical Society, Coventry Historical Society, the Governor Samuel Huntington Trust and Huntington Homestead, Killingly Historical Society, The Last Green Valley membership and the Mill Museum.

We began the program with a group discussion in the meeting area on the second floor of the museum. After brief introductions, Bev York, our host for the program, provided a brief history of the museum.

Now 28 years old what had originally been called the Windham Textile & History Museum is now the Mill Museum -- a move to tell the broader story of milling and textile history. The museum includes two buildings - the former company store and headquarters of the American Thread Company of Willimantic and primary museum building. The second building is a former Union Hall and storage space for fire equipment that now houses collections of textile machinery as well as providing important meeting and program space.

The Mill Museum has two part-time staff, a highly engaged and energized board of directors and many volunteers. Like most museums critical issues are sustainability and finances. The Mill Museum doesn't have an endowment and has relied on outside grants and sponsorships for exhibits and programs. Of concern is the shrinking availability for funds supporting school group visits. To support the organization the museum staff and volunteers conduct fundraisers, seeks grants and corporate sponsorships, a membership program, museum admission fees and proceeds from gift shop sales. Despite the concern for long-term financial stability, the physical structures of both builds are sound, and the museum operation lives within its means. The museum has lots of space for programs and exhibits, can handle lots of school group, has fun and engaging programs for kids, and importantly has a big story to tell. They do it well.

Discussion then followed about the town of Willimantic and opportunity the town provides for active engagement with the museum. Willimantic has Eastern Connecticut Community College and is very close to the University of Connecticut Storrs campus. The town is trying to position itself more as an arts, entertainment and dining destination, has a thriving monthly street festival, a new Whitewater Park in development and other assets that lead to greater involvement and opportunity for the museum.

Topic of conversation then turned to the participants at the meeting with questions for Bev as well as specific areas of interest related to their respective organizations. The round-table discussion component to the Historical Collaboration program is when shared ideas and issues are explored. We had a lively and helpful discussion.

The first area of discussion was preservation of archival materials within collections of the participant organizations. This is an issue with many historical organizations and the Mill Museum has had success with an archivist that has assisted in helping with the collection including photos and blueprints and getting some available on-line.

Group discussion then focused on several organizations and resources that may be useful for members of the Historical Collaborative – especially those located in Connecticut. The following information was provided by Donna Baron of the Lebanon Historical Society following the program at the Mill museum and is based on the list of resources discussed.

Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO) <http://clho.org/> Laurie Lamarre is rather new executive director. She was a grant/contract employee at the Pequot Museum for many years, worked here in Lebanon part-time for three years and is still involved with the Lisbon Historical Society – so she knows eastern CT. CLHO has co-sponsored StEPS-CT with Connecticut Humanities, host a really good and affordable conference each June, has a good e-newsletter and with members all around the state is great about matching organization who can help one another.

StEPS-CT <https://cthumanities.org/resources/steps-ct/> program for heritage organizations and historical societies in CT to improve standards and operation according to nation-way program of the AASLH. Through AASLH, organizations move at their own pace through the various exercises But in CT there have twice been two-year program when a group of organization work through the exercises at the same time and have mentors to help.

American Association for State and Local History <http://about.aaslh.org/home/> THE national organization for heritage and history groups of all sizes and types. Check out

these resources especially for smaller groups <http://feed.aaslh.org/browse?18> and <http://tools.aaslh.org/steps/> (about StEPS)

CT State Library Conservation Connection

<http://www.ctconservationconnection.org/about.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/Conservation-ConneCTion-366731939032/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Conservation-ConneCTion-366731939032/> Kathy

Craugwell-Varda is the program person for Conservation connection activities, She has worked at and consulted with many CT historical Societies and heritage groups, served as a StEPS-CT mentor and is good about answering question. Their newest program is <https://ctstatelibrary.org/traveling-archivist-program/>

For **disaster planning**, the New England Document Conservation Center's on-line D Plan <http://www.dplan.org/> is a time consuming but not difficult way to go

CT Humanities <https://cthumanities.org/> has/had(?) a Heritage Resource Center with a free lending library of all kinds of resources including back issues of a CLHO newsletter with technical information on developing collections management policies and procedure among other things. Contact Scott Wands swands@cthumanities.org

Before wrapping up the group discussion part of the program we discussed possible focus areas for future meetings and well as common issues facing members that may be helpful to explore at future meetings. We all agreed that collections management, from general collection management policies to issues of collections care and conservation was a common focus area to look into.

We then had a very interesting tour of the Mill Museum led by Bev. Our group completed the program and departed by 12:30 p.m.

We are working on planning the next Historical Happenings Quarter Meeting and will be in touch with everyone in early 2018 regarding the next meeting.