



# News from the Mill

SPRING - SUMMER 2025

## Celebrating Arlington 250

As the United States celebrates the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution, the Old Schwamb Mill has prepared the exhibit *The Road Where It Happened: Revolution Comes to Menotomy*. It remains on display through May 31.

Known today as Massachusetts Avenue, the road to revolution travels through Cambridge, Arlington (Menotomy), and Lexington on the way to Concord. On April 19, 1775, some 2,000 British regulars marched to Concord and back again as more than 3,000 colonists from Menotomy and more than 30 nearby towns also gathered along the road to fight for independence from years of British rule.



"Retreat from Lexington, Battle at the Foot of the Rocks," by Aiden Lassell Ripley (1896-1969). Courtesy of Unum Group, Private Collection, Chattanooga, TN.

The rugged rocks and ridges of western Menotomy, known as the Foot of the Rocks, and the roadway stretching east to Arlington Center and Spy Pond saw the day's worst fighting and deaths on both sides. Many accounts of the day's heroes — Paul Revere, Samuel Whittemore, Jason Russell — are enshrined in local folklore. But, the road itself is also a hero.

The road through Menotomy holds the geologic history of the entire Boston Basin. Volcanos, earthquakes, and glaciers churned and scraped the Earth's landforms to create the steep hillsides surrounding Mill Brook and adjacent marshlands. The fault line under the brook is key to understanding how this landscape has influenced the patterns of growth in Arlington over millions of years.

Native peoples inhabited the abundant woodlands, meadows and waterways for millennia before the English colonists began arriving in the 1630s. By 1775 the village of Menotomy was a small enclave with a church, several mills, stores and taverns, and around 100 homes and farmsteads. The people of Menotomy were as diverse and interesting as their landscape. Through some of their stories, we share the deep history of a road that spanned years of natural and manmade changes to arrive at the dramatic events of April 19, 1775.



The Old Schwamb Mill hosted a reception and talk in March for representatives from towns that sent militias to join the fight against the British regulars in Menotomy, Concord and Lexington on April 19, 1775. More than 70 guests attended from historical societies in Arlington, Chelmsford, Chelsea, Danvers, Dedham, Dracut, Lexington, Lincoln, Lynnfield, Malden, Needham, Peabody, Stow, Watertown, and Wayland.

# Exhibit Research Uncovers Some Surprises



Producing an exhibit can be fun, exhilarating, and endlessly challenging. Tangents are followed; tedious details

run to ground; and main points whittled to size. The Old Schwamb Mill's 250th exhibit, *The Road Where It Happened: Revolution Comes to Menotomy*, merits all of those adjectives. The diligent research by head curator Doreen Stevens and other exhibit committee members revealed a number of fascinating surprises.

## The “Old Men”



Despite being repeated in many standard histories of April 19, 1775, some parts of the story of the “Old Men of Menotomy” and their capture of British supply wagons

seem to be a myth. Using the genealogical information in William Cutter's *The History of Arlington*, we found their ages to be between 24 and 55, meaning they were well within the age range for militia service.

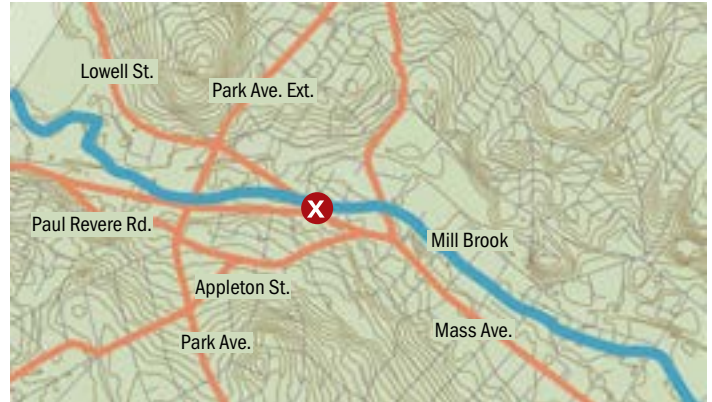
## David Lamson

The purported leader of the group, David Lamson (c. 35), was identified as a mulatto by Samuel Abbott Smith, the abolitionist Unitarian Minister of the West Cambridge church, in his 1864 account of Menotomy in 1775.

However, when Lamson's parentage was checked in other sources, he is described variously as full Indigenous, half Indigenous, and (presumably) half Indigenous and half white. He was never identified as Black or enslaved.

## Who Captured the Wagons?

Another “discovery” was the massive confusion over attribution of responsibility for the capture of the British supply wagon or wagons. Who gets the glory? In addition to David Lamson, Reverend Phillips Payson of Chelsea claimed the honors and various other local historians attribute the capture to Reverend Edward Brooks of Medford, the Malden militia, or the Lynn militia. British sources give no details about the event.



Detail of Menotomy/Arlington map showing contour lines and roadways near the Foot of the Rocks (X).

## The Bog

One of the most rewarding discoveries was to learn the reason behind Massachusetts Avenue's (Battle Road) original route though Arlington Heights — known as the Foot of the Rocks neighborhood. In 1775, Mass Ave. heading east followed the course of today's Paul Revere Road across Park Avenue and down Appleton Street to rejoin current-day Mass Ave. We scratched our collective heads over this strange routing until we found an *Arlington Advocate* article in which an old-timer made reference to Mill Brook and an immense bog along the north side of the road that prevented travelers from using the more straightforward path.

## Geological History

Finally, in background reading on the geological underpinnings of Arlington, we found that Turkey Hill on the northern side of Battle Road is made up of different types of rocks than Circle Hill (Peirce Hill/the Heights) on the southern side. The narrow roadway corridor paralleling the Mill Brook valley is essentially a fault line separating the hills created millions of years ago.

These and many other accounts of Menotomy's history and its important role in the early days of the American Revolution can be found in the text panels, videos, rock display, 3-D contour map, and other elements of this multi-media exhibit.



*The Old Schwamb Mill is honored to have received a \$5,000 matching grant from Freedom's Way to support this exhibit.*



## IN THE GALLERY



### The Road Where It Happened: Revolution Comes to Menotomy

Exhibit continues through Saturday, May 31

### The Mill's Power Systems from the Colonial Era to the Present

*Closing Reception and Talk*

Saturday, May 31 / 2:00 pm

Board member Bob Tanner will present a talk on the Mill's power systems, including water, steam and electricity, followed by a behind-the-scenes-tour of Mill's basement, Barn and Dry House.

## SPECIAL EXHIBIT-RELATED EVENTS

### Painting the Town 250

April 2 – May 31

*Curators' Talk and Reception*

Saturday, May 10 / 2:00 pm-3:30 pm

The Mill is partnering with ArtsArlington to show examples of diverse public art projects to be installed around Arlington as part of the 250th commemoration of the American Revolution. The artworks include 12 banners on light poles along Mass Ave., painted horses and utility boxes, sculptural pedestals, and a timeline project connecting past and present. Public



Arts Curator Cecily Miller will lead a discussion of the challenges, complexities and rewards of developing public artworks for Arlington 250. See [www.ArtsArlington.org](http://www.ArtsArlington.org) for more information about the artists and other public art projects.

One of the banners designed jointly by Liz Shepherd, Suzanne Moseley, Lily McDonald and Andrew Palladino.

### Celebrating Arlington 250

Saturday, Sunday and Monday, April 19-21 / 10 am-4 pm

The Mill will be open for tours and for viewing the exhibit *The Road Where It Happened: Revolution Comes to Menotomy* throughout the weekend of 250th celebrations that mark the start of the American Revolution. Reenactments and special events will be held in Lexington and Concord on April 19, and in Arlington on April 20. Patriots' Day and the Boston Marathon are on April 21.

### Arlington 250 Program for Children

Saturday, April 26 / 11:00 am

An arts and crafts program for children ages 5-10 highlighting the Arlington 250 celebration and the history of Menotomy.

### Poetry Makers at the Mill



The Old Schwamb Mill is presenting two poetry readings in conjunction with Arlington 250 and National Poetry Month in April. The poets will share their current work and read other Arlington-related poems. Organized by Arlington's Poet Laureate Jean Flanagan, the programs will include poems in the forth-

coming collection, *The Silver Note: Poets of Arlington, Massachusetts*, published by Ibbetson Street Press in Somerville. For more information about these and other Arlington poets, see <https://artsarlington.org/beehive-anthology/>

Saturday, April 5 / 2:00 pm

**Poets:** Steven Ratiner, Steven Rapp, and Teresa Cader

Saturday, April 26 / 2:00 pm

**Poets:** Thomas DeFreitas, Faith Blake, and Jean Flanagan



## IN THE GALLERY

### Anna Thai Embroidery

June 7 – August 23

*Opening Reception*

Saturday, June 7 / 2:00-3:30 pm

*Closing Reception*

Saturday, August 23 / 2:00-3:30 pm

Anna Thai, a Malden-based artist, learned to embroider from French Catholic nuns when she was eight years old, always encouraged by her mother. Thai's work is intricate, detailed, and exquisitely crafted. She has exhibited her work at the Mill and many other sites in the Boston area. See her Artist Profile in the Fall 2024-Winter 2025 issue of *News from the Mill*.



### Waterways and Woodcuts: Enduring New England Legacies

September 6 – November 15

*Opening Reception*

Saturday, September 6 / 2:00-3:30 pm

*Closing Reception*

Saturday, November 15 / 2:00-3:30 pm

Don Gorvett has been practicing the art of the reduction woodcut for over five decades. His chosen subject, New England's working waterfronts, has kept his artistic life close to the shoreline. His woodcuts are complex, colorful tapestries of his surroundings, influenced by his passions for history, music, and the activities of harbor towns. His printmaking studio overlooks Gloucester Harbor and his Don Gorvett Gallery is in Portsmouth, NH.



Bow Street, Riverside

## SPECIAL EVENTS

### Old Schwamb Mill Open House

Saturday, June 21 / 10 am-4 pm

Join us for tours of the Mill, learn how a frame is made, enjoy refreshments, and much more! All ages are welcome. We will also be hosting musicians that afternoon as part of Porchfest, a free, town-wide celebration organized by the Arlington Center for the Arts.

### Summer Concert with Spajazzy

Thursday, July 17 / 6:30 pm

Enjoy the jazz stylings of this popular group, led by Tino D'Agostino, Director of Instrumental Music at Arlington High School.

For more information about these programs, visit [www.oldschwambmill.org](http://www.oldschwambmill.org) or call 781-643-0554.

Additional events will be announced in the Mill's monthly email notices and on the website.

The Mill Gallery is open during regular Mill hours, Tuesdays and Saturdays from 10 am to 4 pm.

Tours are offered on the hour between 10 am and 3 pm. Admission is free, with a suggested donation of \$5.00.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

## ARLINGTON TOWN DAY

**Saturday, September 20 / 10:30 am – 4:30 pm**

Visit the Old Schwamb Mill's booth to learn about ongoing tours and exhibits in the Mill Gallery, as well as upcoming programs. Town Day takes place along Massachusetts Avenue between Pleasant Street and Jason Street.



**Saturday, October 4 / 12 Noon to 4:00 pm**

Save the date for this annual celebration of the Schwamb family's German heritage, with music, craft beer, German-style food and delicacies, Mill tours, arts activities for children and families, and much more!

### Call for Mill Volunteers

You are invited to join other supporters of the Old Schwamb Mill as a volunteer! Opportunities include serving as a guide for tours of our historic museum, welcoming attendees at our gallery talks, lectures and music offerings, and staffing our visitor center on Tuesdays or Saturdays. Please contact Lynette Aznavourian, Museum Director, at [info@oldschwambmill.org](mailto:info@oldschwambmill.org) for more information.

### Friends of the Mill

We greatly appreciate and indeed depend on the support of our individual and business donors. To make a contribution and join our Friends group, please visit the Old Schwamb Mill website [oldschwambmill.org/donate](https://oldschwambmill.org/donate) or send a check payable to the Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, Inc., 17 Mill Lane, Arlington, MA 02476.

Individual contributions as a Friend are \$30; Family Friend contributions are \$40. Friends who make a donation of \$100 or more are eligible to receive full benefits of the North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association, a network of more than 1300 art, history and science museums and nonprofit institutions. See the NARM website for more information at [narmassociation.org](https://narmassociation.org). Thank you.

*The Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable educational institution. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

### A Special Birthday Party Rooted in Mill History



Denise Herlihy came to the Mill last fall to ask if she could hold her daughter's birthday party there. Having the party at the Mill had special meaning to Denise because she had fond memories of visiting

her grandmother, Patricia Fitzmaurice, the woman who saved the Mill as a living history museum in 1969! Ellen Cohen, the Mill's children's program coordinator, was delighted to accommodate this special request.

Besides the traditional birthday decorations, cake and snacks, Denise requested a craft activity using wood frame scraps. "I remember as a child I would draw on pieces of scrap wood I found around the Mill and I cherished them," Denise said. So, along with the usual party fixings, Patricia's great-granddaughter Mika and a few friends had a child-friendly tour of the Mill and then decorated keepsake wood creations, just as Denise had done years before. A life-size photograph of Patricia, made for a previous Mill exhibition, watched over the party, and the children used her old tea set. Denise shared pictures of the party with her aunts, who said "her grandmother would be thrilled with joy to see it!" Thanks to Patricia for saving the Mill for generations to come.



# Profile: Melissa Carr, Art Conservator

One often wonders how a person chooses a career path. In the case of Melissa Carr, she sums it up as serendipity.

Melissa's business, Masterwork Conservation, is located in the Old Schwamb Mill. A tenant since 2001, she offers condition surveys, object assessments, and treatment services with a specialization in Asian lacquer, fine furniture, structural repairs, finish recovery, and more. Melissa trained as a chemist and cabinetmaker before completing her graduate work in the Furniture Conservation Training Program at the Smithsonian Institution's Conservation Analytical Laboratory. She also studied at the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties in Tokyo. As a specialist in the conservation of wooden objects and Asian lacquer from the 13th to 20th centuries, she provides services to major museums, institutions, and private collectors.

Having earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry at Middlebury College, Melissa considered herself bound for medical school. Changing course, she developed an interest in architecture and completed graduate course work in history, design, and engineering at the University of Washington College of Architecture and Urban Planning. Changing course again, she moved across town to earn an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in cabinetmaking and millwork at Seattle Central Community College. She went to work as a cabinetmaker, producing custom work for residential and commercial installations at The Cabinet Works in Seattle. At the same time, she was an instructor in furniture design, building



Melissa Carr in her basement studio at the Mill.

construction and woodworking at Bellevue Community College in Washington.

A new, serendipitous opportunity arose when Melissa learned that the Smithsonian was offering a graduate program for people with a background in both woodworking and chemistry. She was one of a small number of applicants who had both, and was admitted with six other students. After graduating, she joined Robert Mussey Associates in Boston as a conservator, performing analysis, treatments, and non-intrusive upholstery techniques and gilding conservation for museums, historic houses and private clients. One of the firm's major projects was conserving many of the 100 U.S. Senate desks, among the most iconic and recognizable symbols of the Senate Chamber.

Among Melissa's clients are the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Harvard Business School, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Rhode Island School of Design, the Boston Public Library, Nichols House Museum, Gore Place and other historic houses and private collectors. "This work suits my personality perfectly," says Melissa.

"It gives me great satisfaction to remove what doesn't belong there and protect what does. And I prefer to work alone so there's that."

Melissa emphasized that having her studio at the Old Schwamb Mill brings together an appreciation of history, preservation, and heritage. She is currently working as the apprentice to the Mill's master woodturner David Graf, learning to make unique oval frames. She also serves on the Advisory Council for the Mill.

Melissa Carr may be reached via her website, [www.masterworkconservation.net](http://www.masterworkconservation.net), or email at [hiattcarr@gmail.com](mailto:hiattcarr@gmail.com).



19th century temple figure, courtesy of The Collection of Hathaithip Intarawut.



Melissa Carr and David Graf start working on a large frame for the Gibson House Museum in Boston.

## Custom-made Frames



Our woodturner David W. Graf creating a frame.

The Old Schwamb Mill is historically significant as a picture frame factory that survives intact from the Civil War era. When Charles Schwamb started making frames at the Mill in 1864, much of his business was drawn from customers who wanted oval and circular frames for photographic portraits.

Today, our customers enjoy custom-made, fine-crafted frames to hold a mirror or display family portraits, photos, or artwork. The hand-turned frames are constructed from solid hardwoods such as black walnut, maple, cherry, mahogany and zebrawood. You are invited to visit our showroom, located on the Mill's second floor, to see a variety of oval and circular frames of different wood types and sizes with modern and traditional profiles. We look forward to working with you to create your unique wooden frame.

For additional information about ordering a frame, email [frames@oldschwambmill.org](mailto:frames@oldschwambmill.org) or call 781-643-0554.

## New Mill Frames for Historic Family Portraits

Each year the Mill receives some unusual frame requests, and a recent order harkened back to a previous project. In 2019 a customer from Salem, Mass., requested matching oval frames for a pair of portraits of his ancestors, Captain William Graves, Jr. and his wife Mary Pike Graves of Newburyport. The portraits were painted in 1848 at the time of the couple's wedding, shortly after the captain's return from his last voyage to China. Graves, who became a wealthy shipowner in Newburyport, served as mayor of the town in 1866 and for many years was the president of the Newburyport Marine Society.

About 1925, the couple's daughter Annie separated the two heirlooms in their original frames, leaving her father's portrait to one of her sons and her mother's portrait to one of her daughters. Over subsequent decades the paintings were inherited through two more generations and had become widely disbursed, with one going to Ohio and the other to Nantucket.

William's portrait, which had been badly damaged in a basement flood, was recently restored by paintings conservator Theresa Carmichael of Bedford, Mass. Both current owners wanted to reunite the two portraits in new matching frames, so they returned to the Mill with their request.

Woodturner David Graf crafted the two 36 x 30-inch frames using poplar wood and a traditional Schwamb Mill profile. The frames were then gilded and painted by conservator Wenda Kochanowski of Chelsea, Mass. Poplar or basswood are typically used for frames that will be painted or gilded because the wood is softer and less expensive than finely grained hardwoods such as black walnut, mahogany or cherry.

The cousins plan to donate their newly refurbished portraits to the Newburyport Custom House Maritime Museum, where they will go on display this summer.



Captain William Graves, Jr. and his wife Mary Pike Graves.





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## Mission Statement

**The Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, Inc.**, exists for the preservation, maintenance, and enhancement of the Old Schwamb Mill in Arlington, Massachusetts. Begun in 1864 as a picture frame manufactory, the Mill is located on the site of many previous mills built on Mill Brook. It is a rare survivor of the small, family-owned mills that helped define New England, and is the oldest continuously operating mill site in the United States. The Mill's unique 19th century elliptical faceplate lathes, its original belt-driven shaft-and-pulley machinery, and the traditional hand-turning processes are used to this day to create custom-made oval and circular frames. The Trust preserves and protects the Mill's site, buildings, tools, archives, machinery and manufacturing techniques as unique cultural and educational resources.



Woodcut created by Marjorie Cohn.

## Old Schwamb Mill Board of Directors

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