



News from the Mill

FALL 2025 / WINTER 2026

A Visit to the Mill's Boilers

In 1924, the Schwambs faced a problem. Their business had rebounded under the management of Clinton and Louis Schwamb, but they needed more power to increase production. Having ceased use of the Mill's water turbine, they had two choices: increase pressures on 50-year-old the boiler that drove their steam engine or install electric motors to power the machinery.

The minutes of the Clinton W. Schwamb Company's annual meeting describe the solution reached:

"During past year investigation was made as to feasibility of installing electric power for some of the machines but the exorbitant rates quoted by Edison Electric Ill. Co. of Boston prevented such action and after study by the Ray Engineering Co. of our power plant their recommendations were carried out boiler pressure increased by permission of the authorities and such changes made as to give us sufficient power for the present. This was done at an expenditure altogether of about \$700."



Bill and Todd Ray in front of the Mill's 1873 boiler.

Thomas Arthur Ray founded Ray Engineering Company in 1921. Ray had served as an agent for valves and other products relevant to steam plants and taught at Wentworth Institute in Boston. The company continues today in Westford, operated by Bill and Todd Ray, great-grandsons of the founder. We reached out to

them and in August they visited the Mill. They examined the boilers in the cellar of the Dry House, as well as the engineer's logs (1937-1948), boiler inspection certificates, coal purchase records, and other items in the Mill's archives.

Here are some of their observations: The two tube boilers were heated by coal with sawdust burning beneath. Fuel was not simply shoveled in; hot coal and ash was pushed beneath the boilers as far as 15 feet to the rear. The hot flue gas would flow beneath the boiler to the back where it would rise and return to the front of the boiler within more than 30 metal tubes running through the water-filled boiler vessel. Water sitting in a bath around these hot tubes would create steam which was sent to the engine in the Barn and to the Mill for heating through underground pipes. The flue gas would exit the tubes at the front of the boiler (with the heavy metal door in down position) and up through the chimney.

Although the Dry House has two boilers, the Hartford Steam Boiler inspection certificates show only one boiler in use from 1910 onward. The certificates describe this



Old Schwamb Mill boilers, ca. 1975, Historic American Engineering Record (Library of Congress)

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A Visit to the Mill's Boilers, continued from page 1

boiler as rebuilt in 1908 by Roberts Iron Works, the same firm that the Schwambs used for repairs. We assume this refers to the right boiler, which has all its tubes. The left boiler has no tubes, and the holes are plugged with scorched wooden stoppers, likely to prevent stray flue gas from blowing out, since the boilers were connected.

Confirming the account in the Clinton W. Schwamb Company annual meeting minutes, the 1924 boiler inspection certificate notes an increase in pressure from 100 to 150 psi. Bill Ray said that before giving the certificate Hartford Steam Boiler inspectors would have needed to see the Ray Engineering recommendation as well as any changes to gauges, valves or plugs needed to operate at the new pressures.

Directly above the boiler is the room where the Schwambs dried countless boards of hardwoods from dealers in Boston and Charlestown. Inspecting that space, the Ray brothers agreed it would have been very hot indeed when the boiler was in use. The top of the boilers and the valve to connect or separate them in operation can be seen on that floor.

The final note in the engineer's log for the Schwamb Mill on May 3, 1948, records the changes required for lowering the boiler's rating to 15 psi. At the Mill, we had interpreted these notes to mean that the town required a reduction in pressure out of concern for the safety of the 75-year-old boilers.

Bill Ray enlightened us. He thinks it is more likely that the Schwambs intentionally converted the mill to electric power in 1948. They would have fully installed electric motors to drive their machinery first. Then they would have modified the boiler for low pressure use only. The note documents the changes made and the town's inspection.

A boiler rated for 150 psi required a licensed engineer to operate it by law. To eliminate the requirement for an engineer, the Schwambs modified the boiler to only operate at 15 psi, all the steam pressure they would need to heat the Mill.

The modifications listed on the last page of the boiler engineer's log make sense in this scenario, especially the change in the fail-safe "fusible plug" that would blow out in an overheated boiler at pressures higher than the specified 15 psi. The dated note records the changes that the town's inspector would have needed to see before the Schwambs could legally discontinue employment of a licensed engineer.

This visit by Bill and Todd Ray is an example of the research and expertise informing our knowledge of the Mill's history. The steam plant — even more than the water wheel and turbine — was central to its operations, making year-round production possible from 1873 to 1948. We are so glad that, after 101 years, Ray Engineering could return to the Mill to shed light on the boiler's operations.

— *Dermot Whittaker*

What Are Schwamb Shares?

Schwamb Shares, like this article about the Mill's boilers, are stories of interest to those who love mills, woodworking, social history, and the Old Schwamb Mill itself. These stories share our research into the Schwamb family, the Mill's workers, the frame-making business, and the machines and equipment preserved at the Mill. Frequently these stories address questions raised by visitors.

The series began during the Covid closures of 2020 when visiting the Mill was not possible. Directors and staff reached out to the Mill's home-bound supporters with pictures and articles explaining different aspects of the Mill. A look at the torn 1918 influenza notice in the glue room was our first subject. More Shares followed: on the woods used in the frame business, on mysterious tools and machines long out of use, on notes and clippings on the walls, on the Schwambs as active residents of Arlington.

Do you have a question about the Mill you would like answered? Email us at info@oldschwambmill.org. But first make sure we haven't already answered it! To read any of the twenty-five Schwamb Shares, visit <https://oldschwambmill.org/schwamb-shares>.

Profile: Dermot Whittaker

“You’ve found a good place here,” a canny visitor once remarked to Dermot Whittaker following one of his fact-filled tours of the Old Schwamb Mill. Dermot sees it that way too. He first toured the Mill in 2007, quickly volunteered, and joined the Board of Directors in 2010, serving as clerk. He has served as president of the Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, Inc., since 2015.

Along the way he designed the Mill’s mailing and donation database, organized the Schwambs’ business archives, and identified and documented over 150 past workers. Like other board members, he has given talks at the Mill and written for the Schwamb Shares series. “The Mill presents challenges, even when we’re not looking for them,” he notes. “Sometimes a water heater asks to be replaced, and sometimes a date and name on a wall asks for an explanation.”

Dermot’s varied experience makes him a good fit for the Mill. He has a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from University of Virginia and a master’s degree in teaching history from Fitchburg State University. He taught history at the middle school level and later as an adjunct lecturer at the college level. He has been a writer and



editor, both freelance and as a marketing manager in software companies. At Tufts University he learned to use databases to capture and deploy information needed for grants, publications, course evaluations, and correspondence. At the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he designed the database that he and the

archives team used to assess over a thousand boxes of historical records from 1779 to 2010, the foundation of the Academy’s ongoing cataloging project.

“I take a collaborative approach to leading the board,” Dermot says, “because every director and volunteer brings insight and talents to this place. I try to listen, ask useful questions, get everyone on the same page, and take my foot off the brake. It is the joy of my life to work alongside these people who value the Old Schwamb Mill as much as I do.”

Schwamb Shares to Date

- The Glue Room’s Influenza Notice
- The Brief History of the Plimouth Grist Mill Site
- The Mill’s Warren Harding Banner
- The Largest Frame the Schwamb Mill Ever Turned
- Where’s the Water Wheel?
- Jacob Schwamb’s Divine Initiative: Co-founding The First Zion German Evangelical Lutheran Church
- The Mill’s Paper Ephemera: Windows Into the Mill’s Work Culture
- Telephone Comes to the Mill
- What We Can Learn from the Mill’s Accident Reports
- Tin Pan Alley on the Mill’s Third Floor
- Edward Schwamb and the Crescent Zouave Fife and Drum Corps
- The Old Man of the Mountain Frames
- Animal Hide Glue: Go-To Adhesive in the Schwambs’ Frame-Making Process
- Boxes in the Mill
- Winter and Christmas at the Mill
- Schwambs in the News, 1872 - 1899
- Engineering, Then and Now: Peter Schwamb and the Construction of the Mount Wilson Telescope
- Frame-making in the Schwamb Mill’s Business Years
- A Mystery Object Identified at the Mill
- I’ll Sue! Mill Owners vs the Town of Arlington
- Call the Engineer! The Mill’s Signal System to the Engine Room
- The Mill’s Gesso Wheel Finds Its Home
- First Snow! Weather Graffiti at the Mill
- A New Hampshire Frame Tells Its Story
- See The Doctor — Local Physicians Who Treated Cases from the Mill
- The Schwambs and the Danger of Fire

IN THE GALLERY

Waterways and Woodcuts

Don Gorvett, Master Printmaker
September 13 – November 15, 2025

Opening Reception
Saturday, September 13 / 2:00-3:30 pm

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

Artist Talk
Saturday, October 25, 2:00 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 reduction woodcuts are complex, colorful tapestries of his surroundings, which are greatly influenced by his passions for history, music, and the activities of working harbor towns.



His printmaking studio overlooks Gloucester Harbor and his Don Gorvett Gallery in downtown Portsmouth, NH, celebrates 19 years of exhibiting his prints and drawings as well as works by other New England artists.

For more information about these programs, visit 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.



The Road Where It Happened: Revolution Comes to Menotomy

December 6, 2025 – March 14, 2026

Re-Opening Reception
Saturday, December 6 / 2:00-3:30 pm

Closing Reception
Saturday, March 14 / 2:00-3:30 pm

The Mill is reinstalling its exhibit on Menotomy’s role during the battles of April 19, 1775 as part of the continuing commemoration of Arlington 250 and national celebrations of the American Revolution.

NOTE: *From September 9 to December 2, the exhibit panels will be shown at Arlington Town Hall in the second-floor ball gallery during business hours.*

panAFRICaproject

Lou Jones, Boston-based photographer
March 28 – May 16, 2026

Opening Reception
Saturday, March 28, 2:00-3:30 pm

Closing Reception
Saturday, May 16, 2:00-3:30 pm

The mission of panAFRICaproject is to create a contemporary visual portrait of modern Africa.



Young boy in Burkina Faso

each of the 54 countries devoid of the preconceived, western notions of distress: conflict, pestilence and poverty, i.e., violence tourism. Jones is an educator, author of several books, and influential figure in Boston’s photography community.

<https://panafricaproject.org/>

Using photography and heretofore unavailable technologies, the intention is to establish a repository of images that represents

SPECIAL EVENTS



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!

The Old Schwamb Mill offers special thanks to our Oktoberfest Sponsors!

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 Senne Residential
 Shattuck Heights Hardware
 Sports Etc.
 Judy Weinberg/Leading Edge Real Estate
 Wonder Yoga

Crafts Fair

Saturday, November 22
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

The Mill is pleased to present its annual crafts fair featuring handcrafted works by 23 local artisans.



Dana Cooperson



Michael Bacon

Exhibitors

- Michael Bacon/beaded jewelry
- Dana Cooperson/pottery
- Teresa Deible/Clayful Expressions/ ceramic bowls and dishes
- Zelda Dennis/cards, paper crafts and etchings
- Kathryn Dodgson/cotton kitchen towels, scarves, tablemats and runners
- Sandy Felder/home goods and decor, jewelry, prints and notecards, scarves and toys
- Jen Flores/textiles, clothing and leather bags
- Janice Schupak Frishkopf/cards and coasters
- Gary Hawley/wood wares
- Beverly Hinckley/Textileations/fabric greeting cards and upcycled mittens
- Launa Johnston/knitted scarves
- Grace Julian-Murthy/notecards and bags
- Abigail McMurray/3D paper art, including map art
- Chikako Mukai/sewn-out handbags, accessories and clothing
- Janet O’Malley/ceramic vases, bowls, oil bottles, mugs and teacups
- Walter Perlman/photography, images on glass cutting boards, puzzles and greeting cards
- Becky Radway/cold-press soaps and bath accessories
- Helen Ray/Pleasant Moments by HER/bath products
- Corinne Rhode/photography
- Janet Smith/photography
- Janet Steele/purses made from tapestry, silk and upholstery
- Angelique Swingle/gemstone jewelry and lithograph prints
- Janice Toth/sterling and gold jewelry

Around and About the Mill

Foot of the Rocks Memorial Park

A Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Foot of the Rocks Memorial Park was held on April 17 as part of Arlington's 250 celebrations. The renovated park commemorates the colonial minutemen, militias and British soldiers who clashed in Menotomy during the battle at the start the Revolutionary War on April 19, 1775.

The planning and hardscaping, based on the design by Ray Dunetz Landscape Architecture, Inc., was installed by the town's contractor, the Belko Group, with monies from Arlington CPA grants supplemented by Arlington250 and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism. When completed the small park, at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Lowell Street in Arlington Heights, will include interpretive signage as well as benches and space for neighborhood gatherings.

The planning effort was led by Allan Tosti and Paul Fennelly with assistance from the Town of Arlington, and the Foot of the Rocks Working Group: Angela Olszewski, Drake Pusey, and historians Michael Ruderman (Arlington Historical Society) and Doreen Stevens (Old Schwamb Mill).



Spajazzy Concert

Founded in 1998 by Sergio Bellotti and Tino D'Agostino, Spajazzy spells Jazz-Fusion Rhythms and Italian/Mediterranean Melodies. Tino and several colleagues performed at the Mill in July.

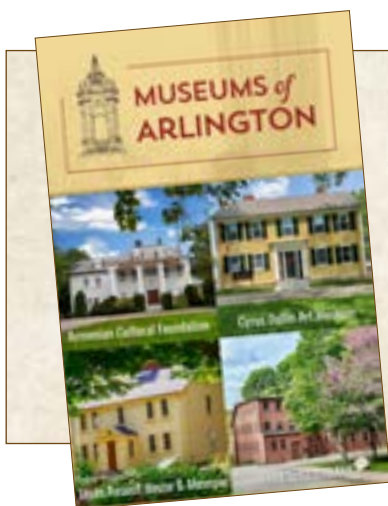


From left: Van Teager on bass, singer Franco D'Agostino, bass guitarist Tino D'Agostino, pianist/singer Steve Heck, and Leo Voet on trumpet.

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 for more information.



Museums of Arlington

A new brochure highlights four nationally significant cultural attractions in Arlington.

The Armenian Cultural Foundation
Armeniancultural.fdn@gmail.com

The Cyrus Dallin Art Museum
info@dallin.org

The Arlington Historical Society
contact@arlingtonhistorical.org

The Old Schwamb Mill
info@oldschwambmill.org

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 or call 781-643-0554.

Recently Produced Mill Frames

The Mill's woodturner David Graf has built this circular 36" black walnut frame made for a customer who lives in Winchester. Arlington Glass on Mill Street later installed a mirror, which will be hung in her living room.

Apprentice woodturner Melissa Carr has finished a 14" x 17" oval frame in Honduran mahogany. The profile was adapted from one



of the frames in the Mill's display room. This wood and many other pieces of cabinet-making-quality mahogany, walnut, cherry and maple were recently donated to the Mill by Martin and Marjorie Cohn, long-time Friends of the Mill. The frame is now in Dundee, Scotland, in the home of a friend of Melissa's.



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 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 1400 art, history and science museums and nonprofit institutions. See the NARM website at 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.

NEW ENGLAND
LIVING

The Mill has once again been selected for a TV feature—this time on New England Living, a lifestyle media show on WBZ Channel 4. You can view the 7-minute video at <https://newenglandliving.tv/old-schwamb-mill/>



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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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