



News from the Mill

FALL 2026 / WINTER 2027

Exploring the Mill's Archives

The archives of the Old Schwamb Mill were established in the 1970s, shortly after the founding of the Mill as a nonprofit museum. Patricia Fitzmaurice had acquired the business records of the Clinton W. Schwamb Co., Inc., from the last owner, Elmer Schwamb. These records from 1904 to 1969 include financial ledgers, inventories, records of operations, correspondence, accident reports, customer lists, and thousands of frame and moulding orders. The collection includes records of Elmer's side business, Elwane, which sold finished frames to customers across the United States and Canada.

Also housed in the archives are recordings of deeds from the 1800s, period photographs, insurance drawings of the

property, blueprints of the Mill's 1888 water turbine, and personal items such as Clinton Schwamb's diary of a trip to Chicago and Colorado in 1901.

For 40 years the collection was stored in archival boxes with accurate but minimal description. In 2010, the Mill obtained a Research in Inventory grant from Mass Humanities to fully describe and rehouse the collected records from 1904 to the 1920s. Documents were organized by their business function, then sorted chronologically and alphabetically as needed. Most importantly, archival folders were added so documents could be handled more precisely and safely.

Learning from the Collection

The archives continue to inform our understanding of the Mill in countless ways.

- Information about the different woods used from 1905 to 1965 was featured in our 2021 exhibit "Into the Woods: From Trees to Frames."
- Schwamb workers' names, ages, marital status, addresses and tasks were pulled from frame orders, accident reports, weekly time books and engineers' logs.
- Ledgers, order books, and customer files have yielded a complete list of Schwamb customers over a 70-year period, ranging from high-end New York and Boston frame shops to the Federal Art Project of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration.
- Repairs and replacement of machines in the Mill are documented in service records and purchase receipts. Payments to workers for cleaning the turbine's "wheel pit" suggest how long that nineteenth-century power source was in use.

Continued on page 2



Elmer Schwamb returned to the Mill to deliver historical family documents to Patricia Fitzmaurice. Photograph is from *The Arlington Advocate*, December 1, 1977.

Exploring the Mill's Archives, *continued from page 1*

These and many other aspects of the Mill's operations have been researched and documented in Schwamb Shares, a series of more than 25 web-based articles that help tell the story of the Mill and its frame-making legacy. See <https://oldschwambmill.org/schwamb-shares/>

Volunteer Contributions

The Mill is grateful for the many volunteers who have worked to make information from the archives more accessible. Peggy Clarke and Dermot Whittaker carried out the Mass Humanities grant-funded organization and rehousing of selected records in 2010. Vivian Kalber created searchable lists of customers and vendors from decades of ledger headings. Margie Hilton has transcribed many informative documents such as the Clinton W. Schwamb Company's board minutes as well as indexing and summarizing correspondence.

Recently Sally Richter has consolidated, organized and labeled both processed and unprocessed records in the archives with a consistent referencing system. She created a spread sheet of all the legal documents describing the property of the Mill under the Schwambs and earlier owners. And Janice McInnes, who also gives tours of the Mill, is using the Schwambs' moulding profile card files to determine the purpose of the wood samples that are displayed in the old office on the first floor. All of these volunteers have lent a hand to organizing folders for countless frame and moulding orders and other records that will facilitate future research projects and reports.



Janice McInnes with the wood samples.

Future Projects and Needs

While the Mill does not have a climate-controlled space for its documents, it does store them safely in a locked second floor room on the building's north side. Metal shelving holds the labeled acid-free boxes. As processing of records continues, more acid-free storage capacity will be needed, as well as more volunteers to help with the documentation process. If you are interested in this kind of work, please contact the Mill.

Dermot Whittaker supervises the archives projects and is president of the Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, Inc.



Frame and moulding files in an archival box.

Become a Mill Volunteer

You are invited to join other fans of the Old Schwamb Mill as a volunteer! Opportunities range from offering tours to visitors and school groups to welcoming attendees at regular gallery talks, lectures and musical programs, helping to organize our archives, and staffing our visitor center on Tuesdays or Saturdays. The Mill's annual Oktoberfest always needs an extra cadre of volunteers to help make that day a special one for all of Arlington. Please contact Museum Manager Kayla Graffam for more information info@oldschwambmill.org. Thank you.

Volunteer Profiles

Sally Richter



Since the fall of 2025 Sally has been working with Dermot Whittaker to assemble more compact shelving and to fully label and arrange processed archives in acid-free boxes. She has also prepared archival folders for the Mill's collection of photographs

taken by Len Gittleman in 1969-70 soon after the Mill closed as a business. Sally recently began a large project to folder and alphabetize customers by year of their frame order receipts from the 1930s to the 1960s. These orders contain a wealth of information that helps us understand the extensive network of commercial and individual customers, the types of frames that were popular over time, the types of wood being used, and the amount of revenue the Mill received.

Sally has also transcribed deeds of the Mill site and organized maps, insurance documents and other materials that authenticate the history of the property back to 1835. She has created an archives folder on the Mill's Google Drive in which she has indexed these records, as well as information about mill machinery, millstones and other descriptions.

A long-ago visit to the Old Schwamb Mill with her school-aged daughter and a more recent visit for Oktoberfest led to Sally's renewed interest in getting involved as a volunteer. Her background in studying German and journalism at the University of Maine Orono, her career at MIT Libraries as an Electronic Resources Associate, and her home within walking distance combine to make the Mill part of her new life in retirement. Her own German ancestry and her daughter's study of German with Janet O'Riordan, a Mill Board member and former German teacher and tutor, make all these connections even more meaningful.

"Any time I'm working at the Mill it gets me thinking about my ancestors and what life was like for German immigrants in the 1860s," Sally remarked. "There are so many great stories here, past and current. It is a charming, historical place and also a very lively place with a group of people who are so welcoming."

Ryan Robinson



For UMass Boston history student Ryan Robinson, volunteering at the Old Schwamb Mill has been an opportunity to do more than just learn about local history. It has given him valuable experience that he hopes to carry into his future career as a high school social studies teacher in the Boston

Public Schools. He was drawn to volunteering at the Mill because of his interest in local history and the opportunity to gain experience working in a historic site.

Much of his time at the Mill has been spent learning its history, with guidance from board members Ellen Cohen, Reed Snyder, Dermot Whittaker and Bob Tanner. He helps with day-to-day operations and events and has contributed to the construction of the Mill's new accessibility ramp. He is also preparing demonstration pieces for the Mill's upcoming exhibit on the history of woodworking tools. One of his favorite aspects of volunteering has been learning from the people involved in this historic site. He has become particularly interested in the Mill's changing sources of power and the way its manufacturing process evolved over time.

For Ryan, the experience has reinforced the importance of studying history outside the traditional classroom. "It is incredibly important for students to learn about their local history," he explains, noting that historic sites can help preserve lesser-known stories while building a sense of community and connection to the past. And his advice to others considering volunteering at the Mill is simple: "Do it!"

IN THE GALLERY

ReFrame

September 26 – November 14, 2026

Opening Reception

Saturday, September 26 / 2:00-3:30 pm

Closing Reception

Saturday, November 14 / 2:00-3:30 pm

Panel Discussion

Saturday, October 24, 2:00-3:00 pm

Five Arlington-connected sculptors — Adria Arch, Olivia Baldwin, Tory Fair, Anna Kristina Goransson, Kate Holcomb Hale — are reimagining the Old Schwamb Mill as they work with the building's rustic architecture and industrial heritage to create site-sensitive installations. The exhibition takes its title literally and conceptually: just as frames both contain and transform what they surround, these artists use the Mill's distinctive spaces to transform their own practices. The building becomes both subject and collaborator: its weathered textures, structural bones, and historic legacy as a maker's place offer new ways to think about how we frame art, history, and the act of looking itself. In a space built to showcase others' work, the *ReFrame* artists ask: What happens when the frame becomes the art?



Radiating Wheel, Adria Arch

Shaping Wood, Shaping History: Tools of the Woodworking Trade

December 5, 2026 – March 6, 2027

Opening Reception

Saturday, December 5, 2:00-3:30 pm

Closing Reception

Saturday, March 6, 2:00-3:00 pm



Plane, from *A Museum of Early American Tools*, Eric Sloane, 1964

This year's Mill history exhibit explores the tools and technologies that have allowed woodworkers to transform trees into useful and beautiful objects. From ancient Egyptian saws and Roman planes to water-powered machinery and precision tools, the exhibit follows the evolution of woodworking across thousands of years and cultures. Visitors will discover how innovations in saws, planes, jointers, and lathes transformed the shaping of wood. But this is not simply a story of machines replacing hand tools. Successful woodworking depends on the knowledge and judgment of skilled craftspeople who understand the natural characteristics of wood, select the right tools, and know how to use increasingly complex machinery. The exhibit connects this broader history to the Old Schwamb Mill, where woodworkers have produced iconic oval and circular picture frames using tools and machinery that have evolved over many generations.

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.

IN THE GALLERY

Present with Past and Future



Contain Multitudes,
Joanna Hayes

March 13 – May 22, 2027

Opening Reception

Saturday, March 13, 2:00-3:30 pm

Closing Reception

Saturday May 22, 2:00-3:30 pm

Artists' Talk

Saturday, April 24, 2:00-3:30 pm

Four artists — Joanne Hayes, Suzanne McLeod, Bonnie Rotenberg (with Sue Cross) and Luba Shapiro Grenader — explore through drawing, painting, mixed-media collage and sculpture how personal identity, roles and perspectives evolve in their lives over time. Exhibit themes include the representation of challenges and possibilities that emerge in using creative processes to acknowledge personal history, loss and transformation. The artists celebrate the “through-lines” of imagery and meaning that persist despite changing ages, life stages, abilities and interests.

SPECIAL EVENTS



Saturday, September 19 / 10:30 am – 4:30 pm

Visit the Old Schwamb Mill's booth to learn about tours of this historic frame-making factory 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 3 / 12 Noon to 4:00 pm

Save the date for this annual fundraiser and celebration of the Schwamb family's German heritage, with music by the Grävmeiners Brass Band and Sure, Why Not, craft beer from Arlington Brewing Company, 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 generous Oktoberfest Sponsors!

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Grävmeiners Brass Band at Oktoberfest 2025

SPECIAL EVENTS

Red Hawk Singers and Dancers

Saturday, October 10 / 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Masonic Temple, 19 Academy Street

In recognition of Indigenous Peoples Day, five Arlington cosponsors are presenting the Red Hawk Singers and Dancers, one of the country's leading Native American performance groups. These members of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe have traveled the world to promote their message of Indigenous values and to make connections with many different cultures, communities and organizations. Each presentation is an educational program that includes song, dance and teachings about the virtues of humility, respect and identity. The cosponsors are the Cyrus Dallin Art Museum, Old Schwamb Mill, Arlington Historical Society, First Parish Unitarian Universalist and Robbins Library. The event is funded in part by a grant from the Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture.

Crafts Fair

Saturday, November 21 | 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

The Mill is pleased to present its annual crafts fair featuring handcrafted works by 24 local artisans.



Wooden items, cheese boards and bowls by Tim Rix



Ceramic bowls and dishes by Teresa Deible/Clayful Expressions

Exhibitors

- Michael Bacon - beaded jewelry
- Robin Bergman - textiles
- Dana Cooperson - pottery
- Teresa Deible/Clayful Expressions - ceramic bowls and dishes
- Zelda Dennis - cards, paper crafts and etchings
- Merrill Frank - pottery
- Nancy French - wood items, tree houses, wool mittens and salvage items
- Janice Schupak Frishkopf - cards and coasters
- Linda Genovese - photography
- Carol Gordenstein - jewelry
- Beverly Hinckley/Textileations - fabric greeting cards and upcycled mittens
- Nidhi Jha - paintings
- Grace Julian-Murthy - notecards and bags
- Preeti Mehdi - textiles, scarves, shawls and sari silk necklaces
- Becky Radway - cold-press soaps and bath accessories
- Helen Ray/Pleasant Moments by HFR - bath products
- Ginny Remedi-Brown - jewelry
- Corinne Rhode - photography
- Tim Rix - wood items, cheese boards and bowls
- Janet Smith - photography
- Janet Steele - purses made of tapestry, silk and upholstery
- Angelique Swingle - gemstone jewelry and lithograph prints
- The Gallery@57 - home goods and decor, jewelry, prints, scarves and toys
- Janice Toth - sterling and gold jewelry

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.

New Frames in the Showroom

Melissa Carr has been involved with the Old Schwamb Mill for more than 25 years. Working alongside David Graf, she has recently dedicated herself to learning the woodturner's trade while also running her furniture conservation business in the Mill's basement. The two frames shown here were fully crafted by Melissa and are now hanging among other frames on display and for sale in the Mill's showroom on the second floor.

Melissa was profiled in the Spring-Summer 2025 issue of News from the Mill www.oldschwambmill.org/newsletters. She may be reached via her website, www.masterworkconservation.net, or by email at hiattcarr@gmail.com.



Cherry frame (19.5 x 15.25 inches)



Birch frame (16 x 13.5 inches)

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/become-involved or send a check payable to the Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, Inc., 17 Mill Lane, Arlington, MA 02476.

Individual contributions as a Friend are \$35; Family Friend contributions are \$45. 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.



Saturday, October 3
12 Noon to 4:00 pm

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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 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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