



The Newly Reopened Gardiner Hall Jr. History Museum

The Eastern Connecticut Center for History, Art, and Performance (EC-CHAP) nonprofit organization is happy to announce that the Gardiner Hall Jr. History Museum had its Grand Reopening on December 2nd, 2023, after months of planning, renovations, and upgrades. The local museum is housed at The Mill Works facility, formerly the Gardiner Hall Jr. Company thread mill (1860-1954) located at 156 River Road, Willington CT. Back in late February of 2023, EC-CHAP was selected as one of twelve organizations in the state to be awarded the Museum Makeover grant offered by Conservation ConneCTion and supported through a partnership with the Connecticut League of History Organizations with a grant from the CT Cultural Fund by CT Humanities and funding provided by the Connecticut Office of the Arts from the Connecticut State Legislature. The grant provided funds to upgrade the museum space along with expert advice from a team of museum curators.

After an initial visit by traveling curator Stephen Bartkus in March, planning began on a new museum exhibition layout. The “before” images of the museum with the blue flooring show that while there was an array of historical objects on display, the space certainly could benefit from a makeover. The priorities for the project would be focused on providing a more informative and enjoyable experience for guests while also improving the facility in order to optimize the preservation of historical artifacts.



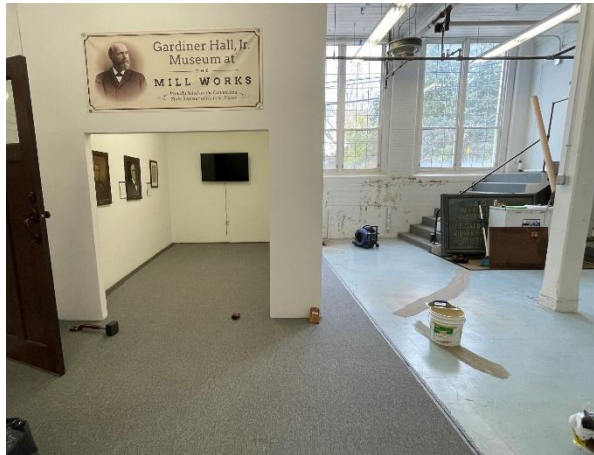
Before & After: A view of one part of the Gardiner Hall Jr. History Museum before the makeover (left) and after the makeover (right).

The first step was to create six larger, professional text panels to tell the story of the mill, employees, the Hall family, and South Willington. Many weeks were spent on historical research followed by creating, editing, and designing the text panels now seen in the museum. In addition to the new text panels, one of our favorite photos of

company employees was chosen to be enlarged into a 10-foot hanging fabric photograph, bringing a still image of 1920 work conditions to life. To enhance the presentation of historical objects, modern display cases were graciously donated to the cause from the Fairfield Museum & History Center and the Seymour Historical Society. The museum space now hosts multiple display cases featuring products of the Gardiner Hall Jr. Company and



After: The enlarged, high-resolution image of Gardiner Hall Jr. Company dressing room employees circa 1920.



Carpet being installed after the museum was cleared out and artifacts placed in storage.



Museum pieces being moved back into the museum after carpeting installation. A final day of planning and layout decisions.

future businesses that occupied the mill, personal items of the Hall family, and relics from employees. More is to come as new pieces are put on display and the museum expands.

One of the most visually pleasing facility upgrades to the Gardiner Hall Jr. History Museum was changing the flooring. Previously, the blue tile floor was showing its age. Every piece of the museum was removed and put into storage so commercial carpeting could be installed. The carpet also extends into a newly created presentation room to be used for historical lectures and demonstrations. Lastly, the large early-20th century mill windows on the West wall of the museum received UV treatment. Upgraded blinds now span both windows and fully block the harmful effects of sunlight to sensitive museum artifacts.



Before: The view from the museum entrance before the makeover. Photo taken in September, 2023 before the former exhibition layout was removed for carpet install.



After: The view from the museum entrance after the makeover. Photo taken during the Grand Reopening on December 2, 2023.

After nine months of progress thanks to the Museum Makeover program, members of EC-CHAP along with traveling curators Stephen Bartkus, Ben Gammell, and Rich Malley completed the installation of the permanent exhibition *Threads in Time* in November, 2023. *Threads in Time* explores Willington's history, the impact of the Gardiner Hall Jr. Thread Company, the contributions of South Willington residents and employees, and the Hall family. EC-CHAP invites everyone to stop by the Gardiner Hall Jr. History Museum to see the renovated space and take in a part of Connecticut's rich local history.

We wish to give our sincere thanks and acknowledgement for the assistance, guidance, and support received from Conservation ConneCTion Director Kathy Craughwell-Varda and assigned Traveling Curators Stephen Barkus, Ben Gammell, and Rich Malley; for donated design services provided by Graphic Designer Leslie Buccino; for printing services by EC-CHAP Sponsor - Anything Printed Copy Center; for flooring materials and installation by EC-CHAP Sponsor - Booth Flooring; for the donation of eight display cases by Heather Brown, President of the Seymour Historical Society; for the donation of one large acrylic display case by Chelsea Garth, Curator of the Fairfield Museum & History Center; for the donation of one clothing mannequin by Conservation ConneCTion Director Kathy Craughwell-Varda; Home Depot for providing \$100.00 Donation; Susan Schur, Treasurer, Willington Historical Society for providing the original photograph of mill workers for scanning; and assistance from Tyler Hall, descendent of Gardiner Hall Jr., for content development.

Ryan Elgin serves as EC-CHAP Assistant Director, Curator of the Gardiner Hall Jr History Museum, and Volunteer Coordinator. He may be contacted directly at ryan@ec-chap.org.

The Gardiner Hall Jr Museum is open to the public Saturdays from 10:00am to 12:00pm. For more information, please call 518-791-9474.