

NorthAndoverPatch

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A Saturday Stroll Through Time

The North Andover Historical Society will host Pathways to the Past, walking tours of Machine Shop Village, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. this Saturday.

By [Caroline Louise Cole](#) | [Email the author](#) | 6:00am [Print](#)



For 22 years North Andover native Tom Rockwell worked as a machine erector and then a bookkeeper at the old Davis & Furber Machine Shop which put North Andover on the map as the leading supplier of looms and spinning equipment to the textile industry for 150 years until 1940.

Rockwell, who is a spry 93, will recount his experiences working at Davis & Furber Saturday during the North Andover Historical Society walking tours of the Machine Shop Village, the neighborhood in North Andover's downtown which grew up around the 50-acre mill complex. Rockwell is president of the historical society and Rockwell's niece.

The "Pathways to the Past" walking tours of Machine Shop Village will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. this Saturday, June 18, and will include the Machine Shop complex, now called East Mill, as well as more than a dozen period houses, shops and the Trinitarian Congregational Church on Elm Street.

Rockwell will be joined by David Rand, 80, who grew up in company housing on Pleasant Street and worked at D&F for five years in the job with the North Andover Police Department.

Rand and Carol Majahad, the director of the North Andover Historical Society, will give two guided tours of East Mill at 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. The tours will take visitors home to 27 companies ranging from a law office and yoga studio to a solar energy supplier and art studios, three restaurants, and 31 residences.

Machine Shop Village, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, is roughly bounded on the south by Main Street, between the [Library](#) and Water Street at [Rennie's Florist](#) and Prescott Street at the intersection of High Street on the north.

Participants can also explore the neighborhood on their own time schedule as the tour ticket includes a 20-page brochure of Machine Shop history which has been compiled by Stevens and another Rockwell nephew, Paul Stewart. A third guided tour is scheduled at 2:30 p.m. if demand warrants it, said Stevens, the president of the North Andover Historical Society.

Stevens said the North Andover Historical Society is delighted to be able to highlight a gold mine of North Andover history during its annual tour. Proceeds will help fund the painting of the Society's Parson Barnard House on Osgood Street.

The tour ticket includes a 20-page brochure of Machine Shop Village history which has been compiled by Stevens and another Rockwell nephew, Paul Stewart.

"We are very excited about this brochure because it includes a number of then and now pictures we think people are going to find very interesting," Stevens said.

Stevens is also hoping that others with experiences working either at Davis & Furber or other mills in the region will come Saturday to take part in the tour.

"We've arranged for Phil DeCologero of the North Andover Merchants Association to film our tours because we want to get these first-hand memories before they fade," Stevens said.

While the Rockwell family never owned a controlling interest in Davis & Furber, Samuel Rockwell ran the company for his cousins Dorothy and George, daughters of George G. Davis. Rockwell noted that his father ran the company from 1920 until 1964 when he retired at 84.

Davis & Furber was founded in 1828 as the Gilbert & Richardson Machine Shop in what is now Andover. The company moved to a site in what is now North Andover's downtown in 1832. The company, which went through several name changes early on as partners left and shares were sold, became Davis & Furber, after George L. Davis, who joined the company in 1835, and Charles Furber, who joined in 1848. Davis took over the company on his father's death in 1891.

In the early 1980s Davis & Furber closed down its operation and its substantial brick mill buildings were converted for a series of high tech offices. Over several boom and bust cycles in the office real estate market the RCG Co. acquired it in 2007 and renovated it again achieving federal LEED accreditation.

"Today's uses reflect a new generation of environmental consciousness with work-live spaces as part of the mix," Stevens observed. "It's a green company with full cycle environmental because they used water power in the early 19th Century and solar power today."

Stevens noted the complex remains one of North Andover's major employers.

Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at the 21 High St. lobby of East Mill on Saturday or online in advance at the Historical Society's website at www.NorthAndoverHistoricalSociety.org. Phone orders can be placed by calling the society at 978-686-4035. A third guided tour is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. if demand warrants it, said Kathy Stevens, the president of the North Andover Historical Society.