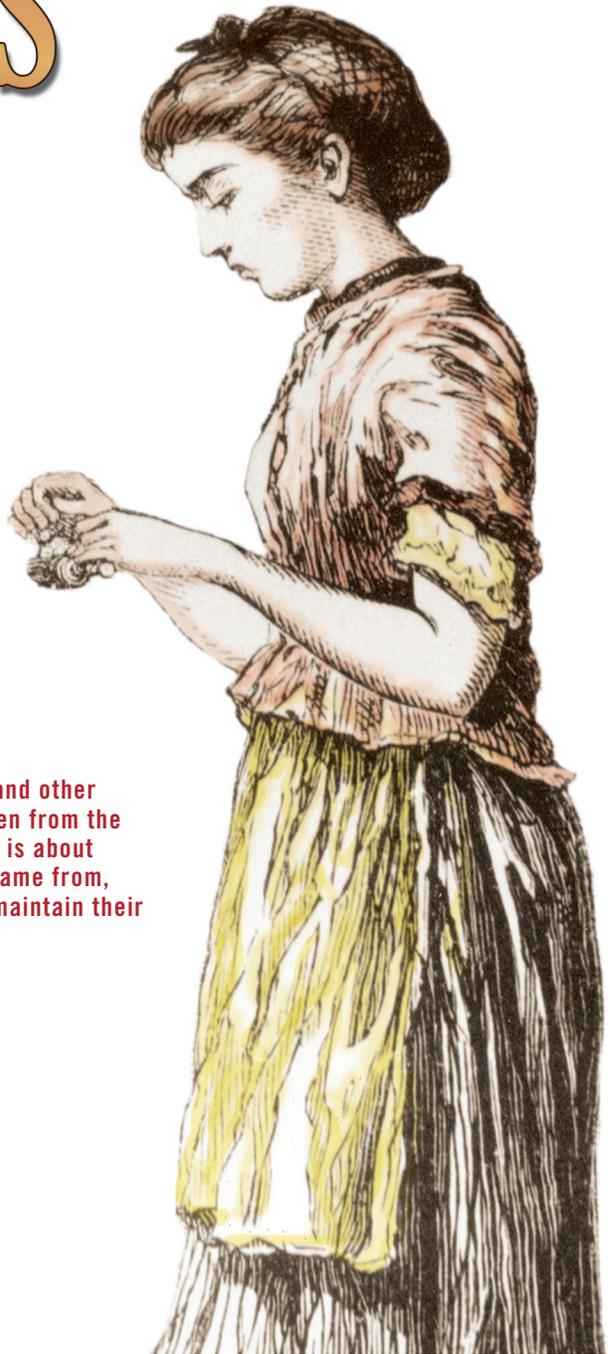


DAUGHTERS of Free Men

**Viewer's Guide
to the 30-minute documentary
by the American Social History Project**

When textile companies built factories in Lowell, Massachusetts, and other New England towns in the 1820s and 1830s, they hired young women from the countryside to operate the new machinery. *Daughters of Free Men* is about the women who worked in America's first factories—where they came from, their lives and labor in the mill towns, and how they struggled to maintain their independence in a new world of opportunity and exploitation.



Visit the ASHP website for more information: www.ashp.cuny.edu

WHO WAS LUCY HALL?

When Lucy Hall was 15 years old, she left her farm and family and traveled to a place she had never seen before. There, settling among strangers, she did something that her mother had never done, that her grandmother had never done—indeed, she did something that few Americans before her had even thought of doing: she went to work in a factory. Lucy Hall is a composite character based on the writings of several Lowell mill workers.

When the first factories were built in America in the 1820s and 1830s, in places like Lowell, Massachusetts, many of the workers were young women like Lucy Hall. *Daughters of Free Men* is about the women who worked in America's first factories—where they came from, how they came to work in the textile mills, and how they struggled to maintain their independence in a new world of opportunity and exploitation.



Lowell mill girls at the loom.

Photographs of working people from the years before the Civil War are rare. Most of the images in this program are drawings printed in books and magazines of the 1830s and 1840s. In *Daughters of Free Men* we've tinted and sometimes retouched them. (See "Seeing is Believing" for more about pictures.)

American Textile History Museum



New Hampshire textile-mill workers, c. 1854 (detail).

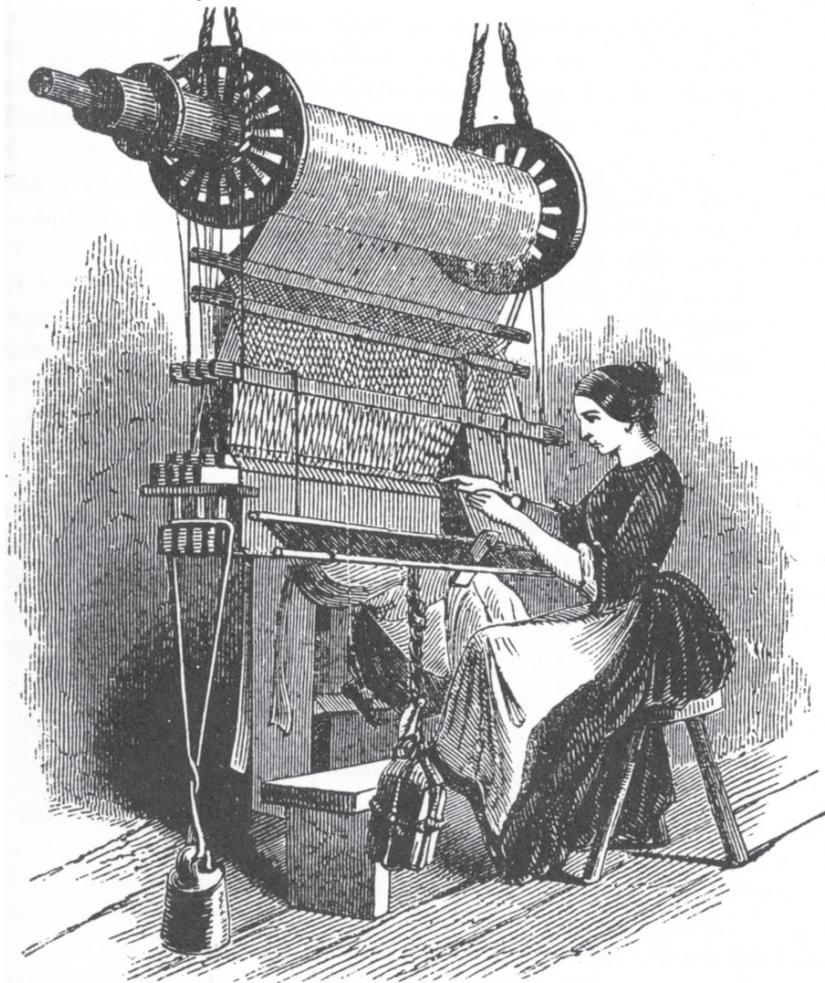
Framed portraits of workers of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Manchester Historic Association

WHO MAKES HISTORY?

When most people say “History,” they think of the deeds of important men, like presidents and generals, and the dates of big battles. But history is also the story of “ordinary” men and women like Lowell mill workers—the way they lived and worked, and how they helped shape American society.

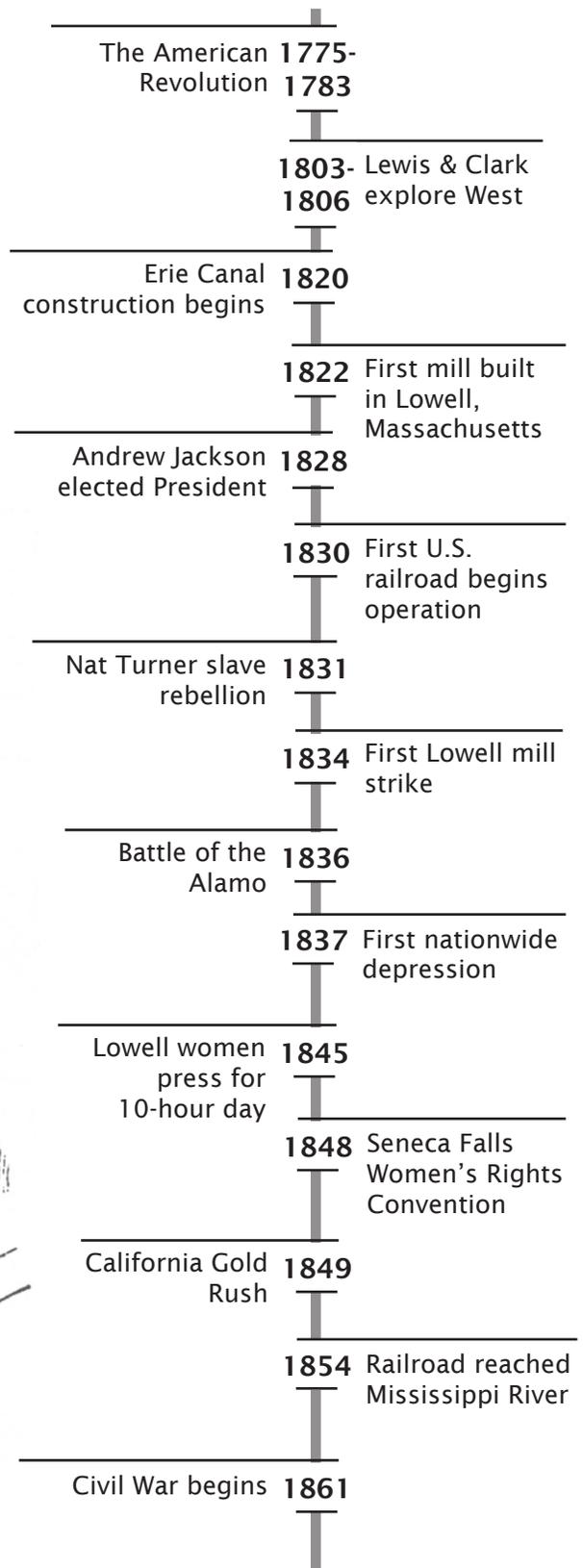
The story of Lucy Hall can help us understand what American life was like in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War when westward expansion and the transportation revolution were changing the face of the new nation. The growing vitality of American commerce in this era was symbolized by the new textile mills of Lowell, considered by many to be an “Industrial Miracle.” Through the lives of women who worked at Lowell, we can see one way Americans experienced and responded to a changing world. And how, in doing so, they affected the course of American history.



Lowell mill 'operative' drawing in warp threads.

Wages for the young unmarried women who came to Lowell mills were lower than for male laborers, but better than wages otherwise available to women.

American Textile History Museum



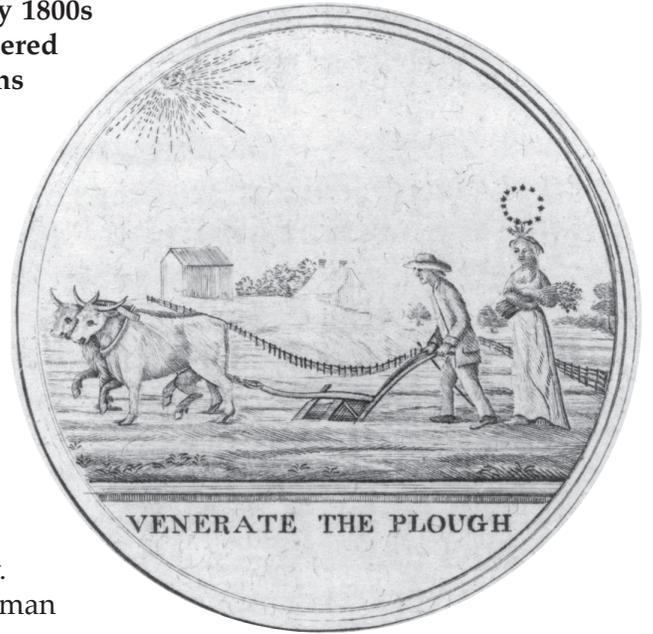
THE WORLD THEY LEFT BEHIND

Lucy Hall and most other women who worked in the early textile mills grew up on New England farms. In the early 1800s America was a nation of farmers. A few cities were scattered along the Atlantic coast, but more than 90% of all Americans lived in rural areas.

In the Northern states most farm families were economically independent. Today most Americans depend on wages earned by working for some other person or corporation. But in the early 1800s Yankee farm families worked only for themselves. They grew their own food and produced most of their own clothing and household goods. What they could not make themselves, they usually got by trading with neighbors in their small, closely-knit communities.

It was a hard life with few luxuries, but Yankee families were proud people. In their own eyes, they were living examples of the “republican” ideas of the American Revolution—*independence, community, equality and democracy.*

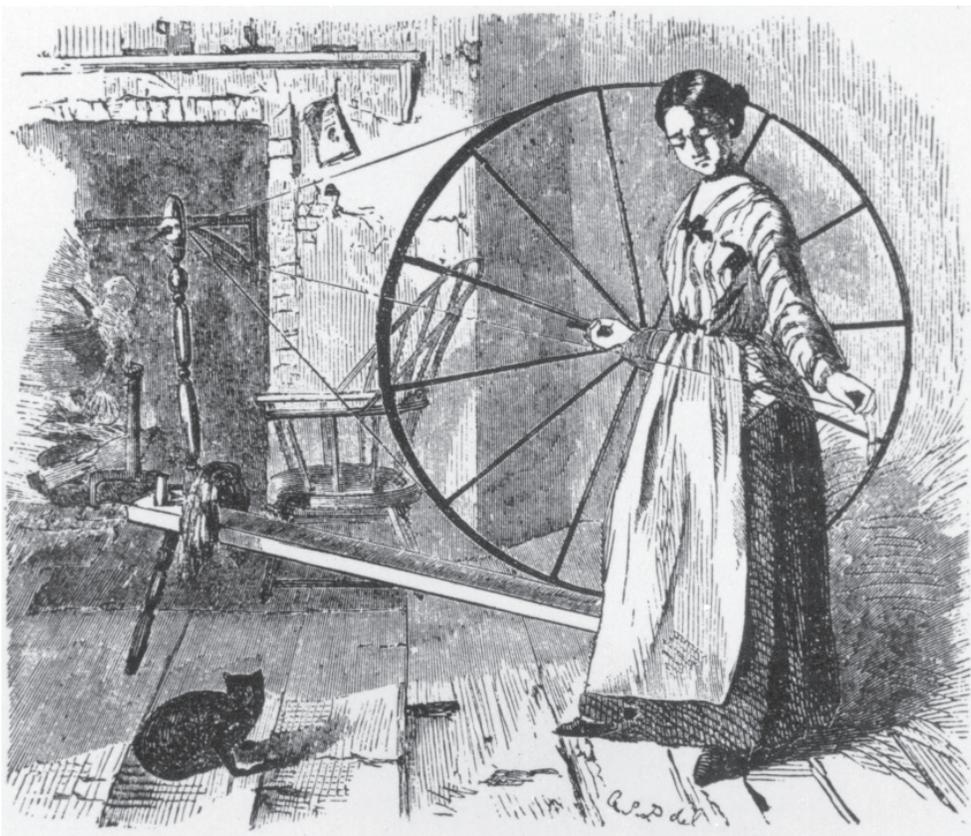
When we think of farmers, we usually think about the man behind the plow. But women like Lucy were crucial to the success of the self-sufficient farm. Besides helping with crops, women made household items like candles and soap and processed all the family’s food—churning the butter, making the cheese, baking the bread, drying the fruits and meats. Spinning yarn and making clothes were among the most important aspects of women’s work.



“Venerate the Plough.”

The independent farmer plowed the path to prosperity for the Republic on this seal of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture.

“The Plan of a Farm Yard,” *Columbian Magazine*, October 1786—American Philosophical Society Library



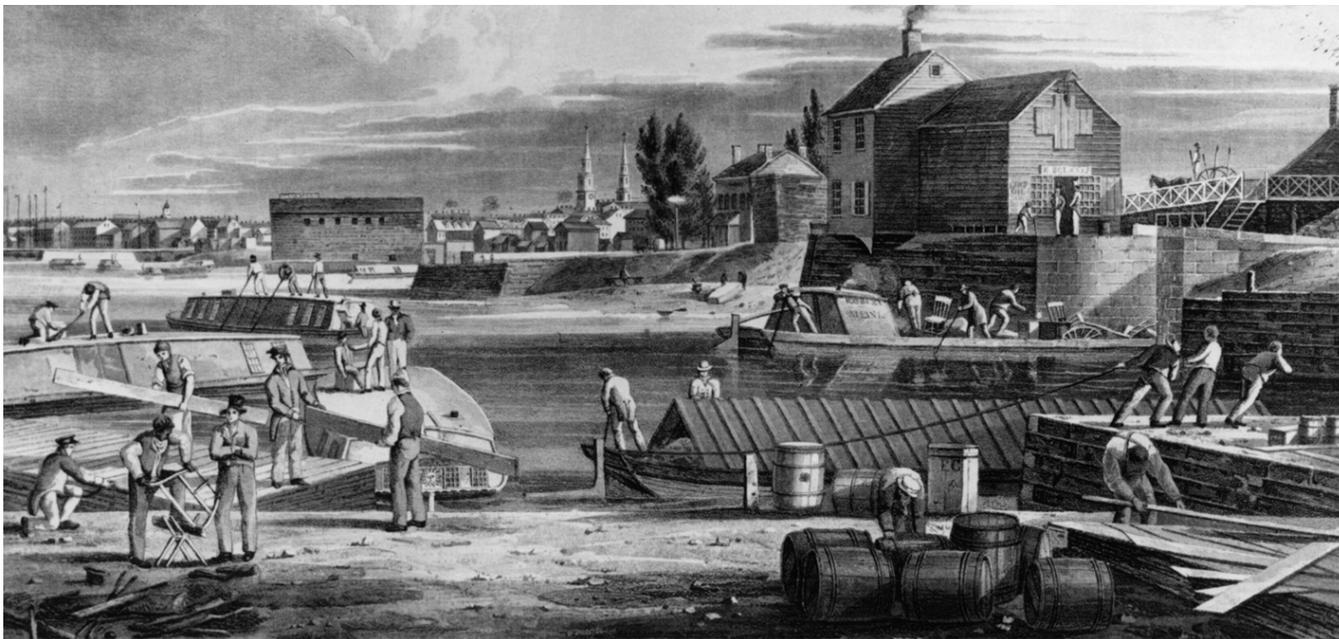
*“Every Man is a free,
independent landlord,
thinks himself as good
as his neighbor, and
asks none but his Maker
leave to live and thrive.”*

—THE NEW ENGLAND FARMER

Farm girl spinning.

Library of Congress

A WORLD IN TRANSITION



Erie Canal.

Built at public expense between 1817 and 1825, the Erie Canal linked the Great Lakes region to New York City.

New-York Historical Society

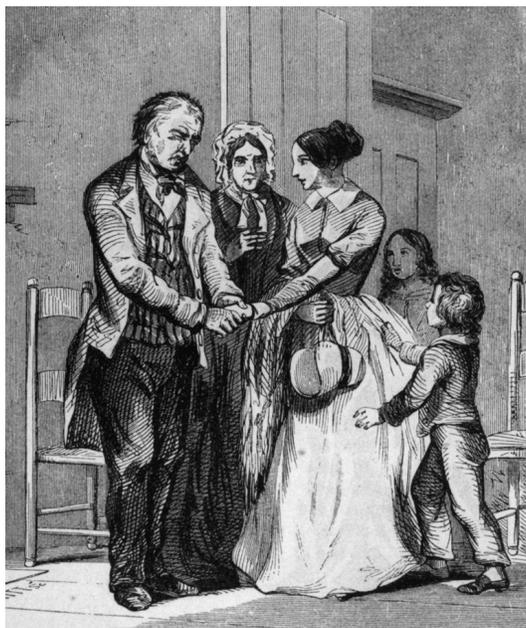
By the 1830s, the world of the New England farm was rapidly changing. After the War of 1812, better roads and new canals were built. Soon came the railroad. Farmers could now cheaply transport crops to city markets. And household goods previously made at home became available through stores and peddlers. A new “cash economy” spread.

The cash economy, while it created new opportunities, also undermined the independence of Yankee farm families. Competition for markets created a “grow or die” situation. Farmers grew more dependent on bank loans and more vulnerable to ups and downs in the market. Population growth and worn-out soil added to their problems. “Thousands of illustrious families are compelled to take the situation of tenants,” noted one New England writer in 1834, “or are scattered into factories, and into the kitchens of the rich—or, more happily for them, driven into exile to the remoter West.”

Since colonial times, despite their contributions to the family farm, women had fewer rights than men. Women could not vote and rarely owned property, and their lives were controlled by their fathers and husbands. They had few alternatives; life outside the family was almost impossible for women in these years.

The spread of the market economy changed the problems faced by young farm women. The new store-bought goods reduced the total amount of women’s work needed to sustain the family. Now, when hard

times hit, a young woman like Lucy Hall might be considered an extra mouth to feed. Some young women began looking for new ways to support themselves before they married. Often their search led them away from the farm and into challenging new worlds.



“Starting for Lowell.”

An illustration from T. S. Arthur’s reform tract *Illustrated Temperance Tales* (1850) showing a young woman leaving her farm family to work in a cotton mill. This picture is accurate in showing that New England farm families often had to rely on income from factory labor. But reformers blamed economic hardship on personal weaknesses—in the case of Arthur’s story, the father’s alcoholism.

American Social History Project

THE BIRTH OF INDUSTRY



Shoemakers in a "ten-footer" shop. A master cordwainer and his journeyman make shoes in a workshop attached to the master's home. By the time this engraving was published in David N. Johnson's *Sketches of Lynn* in 1880, the shoemaker's "ten-footer" was only a memory.

Our Country

The world outside the farm was also changing. The rise of the new cash economy affected many aspects of American life. Better transportation and growing demand spurred commercial manufacture of goods such as shoes, tools, oil lamps, and clothing. The first stage of the Industrial Revolution began to take shape.

At first, most manufactured goods were still made in the old ways, by master craftsmen who owned small workshops. They were assisted by journeymen, paid workers who expected to own a shop one day. But soon workshops began to grow in size, and masters took on the role of bosses. Many journeymen had to accept permanent wage-earning status and give up the hope of future independence.

Some goods, especially textiles, were made in the first primitive factories. In 1792, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, America's first mechanized spinning factory began producing cotton yarn. Small factories powered by water wheels were soon built in a number of New England towns. Children of local families tended the spinning frames, while women worked at home, weaving the yarn into cloth.

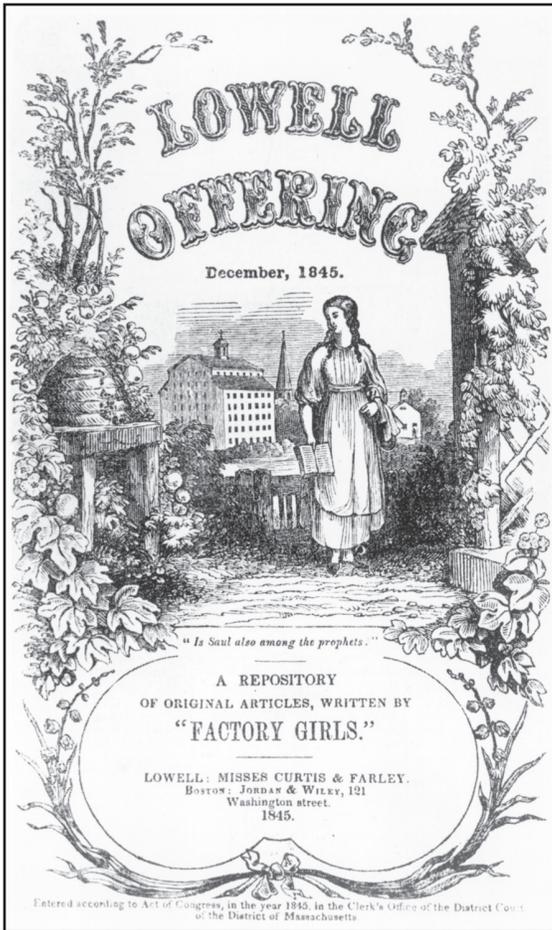
These developments did not just occur by happenstance. New England merchants, who had built fortunes shipping slaves, rum, tea, and other goods, provided the capital needed to construct new mills, buy raw cotton from the South, and hire workers. The profits made by early mill owners attracted increased investment, and the number of factories grew slowly but steadily.



An early Rhode Island mill.

New York Public Library

LOWELL—"THE FACTORY IN THE GARDEN"



The Lowell Offering.

During the 1840s the *Lowell Offering* published writing by women working in the Lowell mills. Contributions to the publication, which was supported by the city's textile companies, promoted the morality and industry of mill women, carped occasionally about working conditions, but avoided any harsh criticism of employers. On the *Offering* cover, a pure textile maiden, book in hand, stands adjacent to a beehive (representing industriousness).

American Textile History Museum

The most famous early American mills were located in Lowell, Massachusetts. The first Lowell mill was built (by Irish laborers) in 1822. By 1836 there were twenty major mills employing 7,000 workers—most of them young, single Yankee farm women. Many of them, like Lucy Hall, were only teenagers.

The Lowell mills were the largest and most advanced of their time. With the invention of new weaving machines, all production could be assembled under one roof. To poet John Greenleaf Whittier, the impressive factories at Lowell seemed to foretell a coming “millenium of steam engines and cotton mills.”

The fame of the Lowell mills rested not only on size, but also on claims that they were a new kind of factory, free of the misery of England’s industrial cities. English workers entered the mills as children and lived their whole lives as factory workers—a horrifying idea to “republican” Yankees, who feared that such life-long dependence would cause individual and social decay.

In contrast, the owners of the Lowell mills suggested that young women could work in the mills for a few years and then move on to better lives, thus maintaining their independence (and preventing the creation of “dangerous classes”). To attract workers, the owners built boarding houses, organized educational programs and painted a rosy picture of life in Lowell.



View of Lowell, Massachusetts.

This illustration, which was printed by Merrimack Company for promotional purposes, shows the Lowell mills nestled peacefully in the countryside.

American Textile History Museum

LABOR IN LOWELL



Mill girl at work.

The average work day was 13 hours. The average pay for a six day week was \$3.50.

Winslow Homer, illustration for William Cullen Bryant, "Song of the Sower"

Lowell women worked as spinners, warpers, weavers, drawers and dressers. (Men worked as overseers and mechanics.) The work was hard, and most workers had difficulty keeping up at first. But, with the help of more experienced women, they learned to run spinning throstles, looms and other complicated machinery.

Farm women were accustomed to hard work, but laboring in the large, noisy mills was different. On the farm, women had controlled their own work schedule. And they did many different farm tasks, working at each until it was completed. In the mill, women did one task over and over again. The pace and the hours of work were now determined by the factory owners. In this new context, work was less satisfying and even time itself took on a different meaning.

The Factory Bell

*Loud the morning bell is ringing,
Up, up sleepers haste away;
Yonder sits the redbreast singing,
But to list we must not stay...*

*Sisters, haste, the bell is tolling,
Soon will close the dreadful gate;
Then, alas! we must go strolling,
Through the counting room, too late...*

*Mid-day sun in heaven is shining,
Merrily now the clear bell rings;
And the grateful hour of dining,
To us weary sisters brings.*

*Now we give a welcome greeting,
To these viands cooked so well;
Horrors! oh! not half done eating—
Rattle, rattle goes the bell.*

*Sol behind the hills descended,
Upward throws his weary light;
Ding, dong, ding—our toil is ended.
Joyous bell, good night, good night.*

Factory Girl's Garland

Exeter, New Hampshire, May 1844

THE CHANGING WORLD OF AMERICAN WOMEN

REGULATIONS

TO BE OBSERVED BY ALL PERSONS EMPLOYED IN THE FACTORIES OF THE

MIDDLESEX COMPANY

The overseers are to be punctually in their rooms at the starting of the mill, and not to be absent unnecessarily during working hours. They are to see that all those employed in their rooms are in their places in due season. They may grant leave of absence to those employed under them, when there are spare hands in the room to supply their places; otherwise they are not to grant leave of absence, except in cases of absolute necessity. Every overseer must be the last to leave the room at night, and must see that the lights are all properly extinguished, and that there is no fire in the room. No overseer should leave his room in the evening while the mill is running, except in case of absolute necessity.

All persons in the employ of the Middlesex Company are required to observe the regulations of the overseer of the room where they are employed. They are not to be absent from their work, without his consent, except in case of sickness, and then they are to send him word of the cause of their absence.

They are to board in one of the boarding-houses belonging to the Company, unless otherwise permitted by the agent or superintendent, and conform to the regulations of the house where they board. They are to give information at the counting-room of the place where they board when they begin;

Lowell, July 1, 1846.

and also give notice whenever they change their boarding place.

The Company will not employ any one who is habitually absent from public worship on the Sabbath, or whose habits are not regular and correct.

All persons entering into the employment of the Company are considered as engaged for twelve months; and those who leave sooner will not receive a regular discharge.

All persons intending to leave the employment of the Company are to give two weeks' notice of their intention to their overseer; and their engagement is not considered as fulfilled unless they comply with this regulation.

Smoking within the factory yards will in no case be permitted.

The pay-roll will be made up to the end of every month, and the payment made in the course of the following week.

These regulations are considered a part of the contract with persons entering into the employment of the MIDDLESEX COMPANY.

Samuel Lawrence, Agent.

Joel Taylor, Printer, Courier Office.

"I am most 19 years old. I must of course have something of my own before many more years have passed. And where is that something coming from if I go home and earn nothing?... You may think me unkind, but how can you blame me for wanting to stay here? I have but one life to live and I want to enjoy myself..."

—LETTER FROM MILL GIRL, SALLY RICE TO HER PARENTS, 1839

Lowell boarding house regulations, 1846.

The company-owned boarding houses, where most Lowell women lived, were strictly regulated. The women accepted these rules and even helped enforce them.

University of Lowell

The 1830s saw important changes for women across America. As trade grew and the importance of home-produced goods declined, gender roles evolved in new directions. In the new, non-agricultural middle-class, the idea of "separate spheres" became common. According to this ideal, men should work in the harsh world of commerce, while women should be confined to the gentler world of home and family.

The young women of Lowell adopted some but not all of these new ideals. Lucy and other mill girls worked in the "unladylike" world of manufacturing. Yet most of them also planned to later marry and raise families. Some used their wages to purchase pretty, store-bought clothes, while others sent money to their parents. Some saved for dowries and a few saved for education. Nearly all viewed mill work as a temporary stage in life, a way to escape the limits imposed by the farm—a step towards greater independence.



"Tableaux of Life."

Cover from *Godey's Lady's Book*, an early women's fashion magazine that encouraged American women to be "pure, pious, domestic, and submissive." Lowell women read *Godey's* enthusiastically.

WOMEN MARCH IN LOWELL



Massachusetts shoemakers' strike, 1860.
There are no pictures of the Lowell strike.
This engraving from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* is the first known picture of an American strike, (showing women shoeworkers demonstrating in the streets of Lynn, Massachusetts, on March 7, 1860).

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 17, 1860
Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

The prospect of expanded economic and social opportunities that attracted Yankee women to Lowell eventually brought them into conflict with the mill owners. When owners cut wages and tried to increase production in the mid-1830s, the young women went on strike, much to the amazement of observers and mill owners.

The first Lowell "turn-out", or strike, took place in 1834, when owners announced a 15% wage cut. Lowell women were angered not only by the loss of income, but also by the threat to their vision of increased independence. 800 women walked out in protest, and held a march through the center of Lowell. However, the owners quickly recruited replacements from the surrounding countryside, and the strike was defeated.

Two years later, in 1836, when the owner tried to force the women to pay higher prices for room and board, the women turned out again. This time because they were more experienced, the women were better organized and more successful. Strike leaders realized that by shutting down key floors of the factory, they could bring an entire mill to a halt. After several weeks, most owners conceded defeat and re-adjusted the boarding rates.

The strong bonds of friendship and community created in the mills and boarding houses united the women and made the strikes possible.

THE LOVE OF LIBERTY



“A New Touch on the Times by a Daughter of Liberty” (detail).

During the American Revolution, women joined the struggle in a variety of ways and adopted the rhetoric of freedom from tyranny.

New-York Historical Society

Oh! Isn't it a pity,
such a pretty girl as I
Should be sent to the factory
to pine away and die?
Oh! I cannot be a slave,
I will not be a slave,
For I'm so fond of liberty
That I cannot be a slave.

—SONG BY LOWELL
WOMEN STRIKERS

Harriet Harson Robinson, *Loom and Spindle or Life Among the Early Mill Girls* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1898), 83-86.

The Lowell women used the values and ideals they had learned in their Yankee farm communities to explain and defend their “unladylike” actions. The women charged that the mill owners’ actions would “enslave” them to lives of factory work, and deny them the independence due to “the daughters of free men.” These young women gave new meaning to the “republican” heritage of equality and independence that had emerged from the American Revolution.

Though strikes were illegal in most states, working Americans took part in many strikes and protests in the 1830s. Like the Lowell women, many journeymen artisans felt the changes taking place in the economy threatened the republican vision of American society. They created the first trade unions and Workingmen’s Parties to fight for the ideals of the American Revolution, and to protect their own independence.

While the young women of Lowell shared many concerns with the early trade unionists, they weren’t members of any union. (In fact, most unions of this era excluded women.) Nor were the Lowell women part of a larger women’s rights movement. Later, in the 1850s, the first feminist movement emerged to challenge the restrictions on women’s lives, but it generally overlooked the problems of poor and working women.

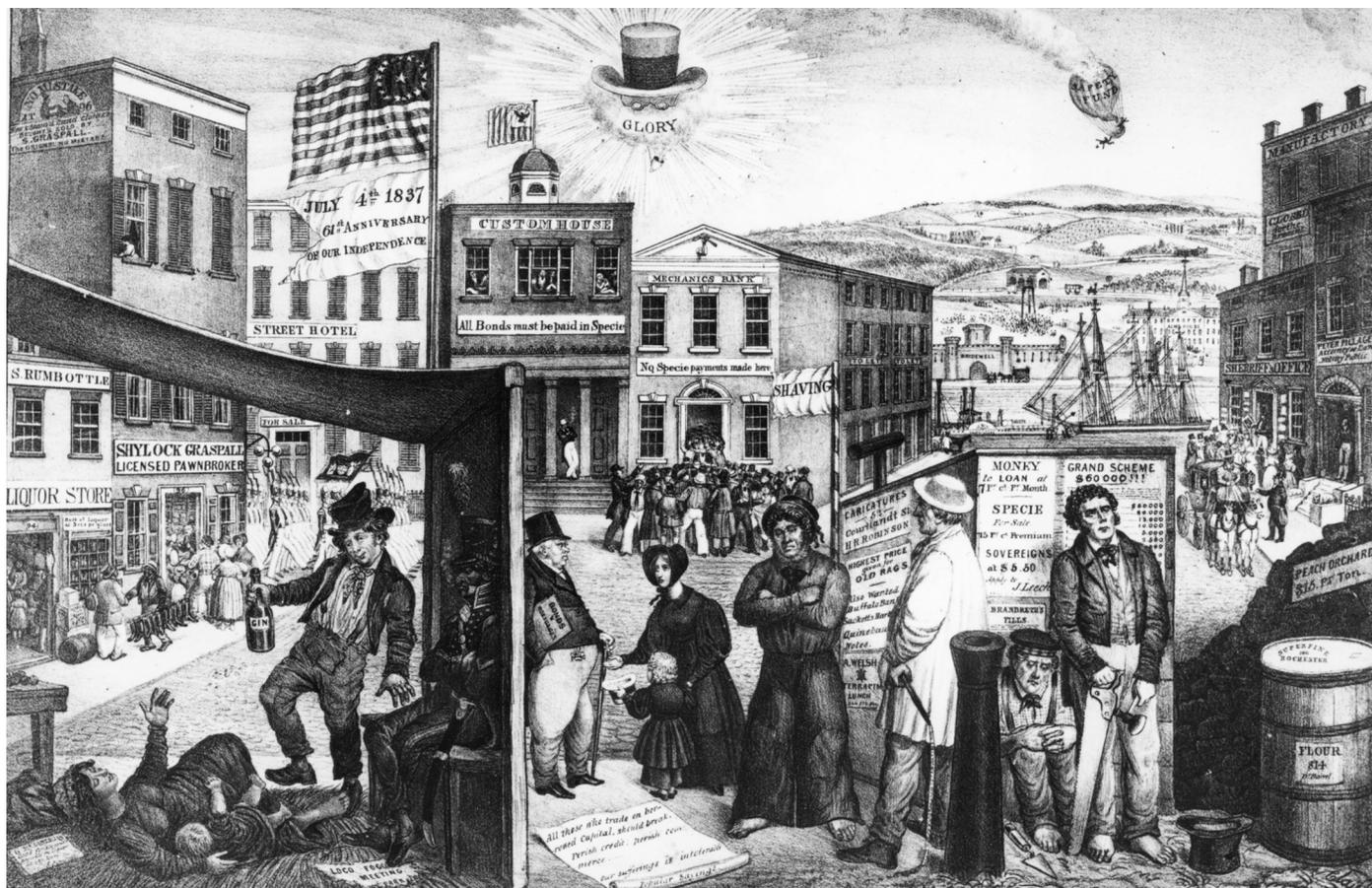


“By Hammer and Hand All Arts Do Stand.”

The artisan’s symbol adorns an announcement in New York’s General Trades’ Union newspaper, *The Union*, calling for a demonstration to support union tailors convicted of conspiracy in 1836.

The Union. New York Public Library

THE END OF AN ERA



"The Times."

The ravages of the depression were catalogued in this 1837 lithograph. The foreground depicts a family descended into alcoholism, a mother and child begging for charity, and unemployed workers standing about. In the background, citizens line up outside of a pawn broker's shop, while others make a run on a bank. Signs all around announce the devaluation of currency and lack of credit.

J. Clarence Davies Collection, Museum of the City of New York

After the depression of 1837 (the worst depression in American history up to that time), conditions in the Lowell mills grew much worse. The textile industry became more competitive, and mill owners pushed the women to work harder and faster, for less money. In the mid-1840s, some Lowell women responded to this situation with an enormous petition campaign for a ten hour workday. Other women left the mill and found better work elsewhere.



Lowell today.

You can visit the Lowell mills some of which are open to the public as a National Historical Park. By the end of World War I textile mills in Lowell began to fail or leave the area. The textile industry moved first to the U.S. South and then off-shore to developing countries.

Lowell National Historical Park

Meanwhile, mill owners began replacing the Yankee women with destitute Irish-born men, women, and children. By the 1860s, immigrants made up nearly 60% of the workforce in a typical Lowell mill. The owners discarded the boardinghouse system, and work in the mills grew even more demanding. Lowell's fame as an ideal factory community soon faded away.

The Irish, fleeing the desperate poverty and famine of Ireland, had fewer choices about where and how they would work, and fewer resources for resisting the mill owners' decisions. Ethnic hostilities divided the work force, and the Lowell labor movement declined in the 1850s. By the end of the Civil War, however, the Irish workers were in a better position to take action. They organized a union and launched a "Ten Hour" movement that finally triumphed in 1875. New labor traditions were now being made; and the world of the "daughters of free men" was gone.

SEEING IS BELIEVING?



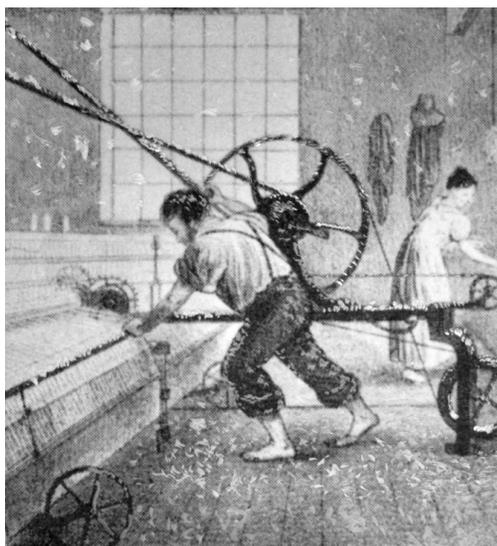
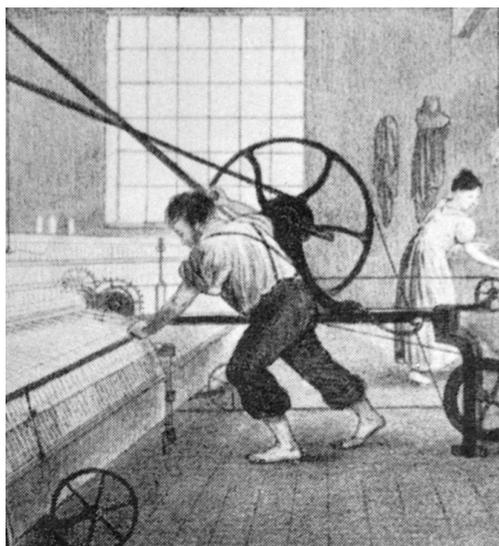
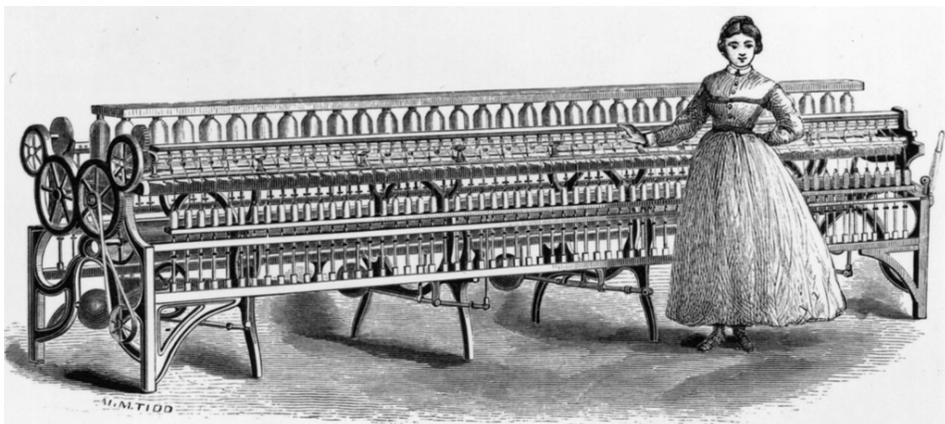
What did Lowell really look like in the 1830s? Were people really as stilted and stiff as they look in pictures like this? How do we form our image of the past?

American Textile History Museum

The pictorial record of life in Lowell is erratic. In the 1830s, printing technology was still very primitive, and cameras hadn't been invented. When we try to visualize this era we have to think carefully about where our images come from, who made them, what they wanted to show, and what they did not want to show.

The engravings in this pamphlet and the ASHP program *Daughters of Free Men* come from books, magazines, and advertisements published between 1830 and 1855. Some of the photographs come from a slightly later period. Many of the images are scenes from other New England factory towns, and a few were originally from Great Britain.

For the most part, the visual record provides a sentimentalized view of life in Lowell. The controversial parts—the injuries, the harsh conditions of work, the strikes—are usually left out. To try to account for this (and to add color to a largely black and white record), our artists have tinted and occasionally retouched the historic images.



"Progress of Cotton" Lithograph (detail).

We retouched this picture, adding the cotton dust common in mills. Why wasn't there any dust in the original? Does the cotton dust change what you think about the scene?

Mabel Brady Cargav Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, retouched version—American Social History Project

Many of these pictures were originally created to help promote Lowell, or to promote specific machines. This picture comes from an advertisement for a spinning frame. What do you think the artist wanted to convey?

Advertisement, Fale and Jenicks
Spinning Frame, ca. 1845

LEARN MORE ABOUT *DAUGHTERS*

Scholarly Works

American Social History Project, *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's History*, Vol. 1 (2008).

U.S. history survey with a focus on the lives of ordinary people in shaping the nation's history.

Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (1979).

Classic work on the importance of women in America's Industrial Revolution that focuses on the experiences of women in the Lowell mills.

Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (1994).

A broad study of women workers and women's work in the transition to industrial labor throughout the nineteenth century.

Alice Kessler-Harris, *A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (20th Anniversary Edition 2002).

A pioneering work that traces the transformation of "women's work" into wage labor in the United States and identifies the social, economic, and cultural forces that shaped expectations of women's labor.

Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (1995).

A broad and concise overview of the causes and development of industrialization in the United States during the nineteenth century.

First Person Accounts

Thomas Dublin, ed., *Farm to Factory: Women's Letters, 1830-1860* (1981).

This collection of early 19th century letters to or from New England mill girls details their economic concerns, motivation, the work itself, their friends and social lives.

Benita Eisler, ed., *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)* (1997).

A selection of letters, stories, articles, and essays from the magazine written by mill workers and published by the mill owners.

Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood: Outlined from Memory* (1889).

At age 11 after her father's death, Lucy moved to Lowell and went to work in the mills. Her mother ran a boarding house and Lucy wrote regularly for the *Lowell Offering*.

Online at: <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=2293>

Harriet Robinson, *Loom and Spindle; or, Life among the Early Mill Girls* (1898).

Harriet Robinson worked in the Lowell Mills intermittently from age 10 until 23 when she left them to marry. She went on to become an advocate of woman's suffrage.

Online at: <http://www.oberlin.edu/history/GJK/H258S2000/LoomSpindle.html>

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THE *WHO BUILT AMERICA?* MATERIALS

Daughters of Free Men and nine other documentaries are a part of the *Who Built America?* series, which explores the central role working women and men played in key events and developments of American History. See also the two-volume *Who Built America?* textbook, *Freedom's Unfinished Revolution*, a high school text on the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the *WBA?* interactive CD-ROM.

Complete list of *WBA?* documentaries:

History: The Big H— This film-noir detective story introduces the history of working people and the challenge of understanding the past.



Tea Party Etiquette— Boston shoemaker George Robert Twelves Hewes narrates his experience of the Boston Tea Party, Boston Massacre, and the American Revolution.

Daughters of Free Men— Lucy Hall leaves her New England farm to work in the Lowell textile mills of the 1830s and confronts a new world of opportunity and exploitation.

Five Points— The story of 1850s New York City and its notorious immigrant slum district, the Five Points, is seen through the conflicting perspectives of a native born Protestant reformer and an Irish-Catholic family.

Doing As They Can— A fugitive woman slave describes her life, work, and day-to-day resistance on a North Carolina cotton plantation during the 1840s and 1850s.

Dr. Toer's Amazing Magic Lantern Show— The struggle to realize the promise of freedom following the Civil War is told by ex-slave J.W. Toer and his traveling picture show.

1877: The Grand Army of Starvation— In the summer of 1877 eighty thousand railroad workers went on strike and hundreds of thousands soon followed. The Great Uprising began a new era of conflict about equality in the industrial age.

Savage Acts: Wars, Fairs and Empire— The story of the Philippine War (1899-1902) and turn-of-the-century world's fairs reveal the links between everyday life in the U.S. and the creation of a new expansionist foreign policy.

Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl— Framed by the 1909 New York shirtwaist strike, this program presents a panoramic portrait of immigrant working women in the turn-of-the-century city.

Up South: African-American Migration in the Era of the Great War— Narrated by a Mississippi barber and a sharecropper woman, *Up South* tells the dramatic story of African-American migration to industrial cities during World War I.