

**The Causes and Consequences
of the American Industrial Revolution**

Literature Sourcebook

Tsongas Industrial History Center

Section One: Workers' Voices

PAGE:

- 1 Excerpt from Loom and Spindle (1898), Harriet H. Robinson
- 2-3 Excerpts from Letters from Malenda Edwards to Sabrina Bennett, April 4, 1839, and Aug. 18, 1845--reprinted in Farm to Factory by Thomas Dublin
- 4-5 Letters from Susan, The Lowell Offering (1844), Harriet Farley
- 6 Excerpt from The Voice of Industry (1845), Charles A. Dana
- 7 Excerpt from Factory Tract Number One (1845), Sarah Bagley (?)
- 8 A Letter by Mary Paul (1848)--reprinted in Farm to Factory by Thomas Dublin
- 9 Excerpt from An Idyl of Work (1875), Lucy Larcom
- 10-11 Excerpt from A New England Girlhood (1889), Lucy Larcom
- 12-13 "A New Society" from The Lowell Offering (1841), Tabitha (Betsy Chamberlain)
- 14 Excerpt from a Letter from John Rogers (1850), Mechanic at a Textile Mill Machine Shop, Manchester, New Hampshire

Section Two: The Industrial Revolution in Fiction, Poetry, and the Essay

PAGE:

- 15 Excerpt from Notes on Virginia (1785), Thomas Jefferson
- 16 Excerpts from "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood" (1815), William Cullen Bryant
- 17 Excerpts from Nature (1836), Ralph Waldo Emerson
- 18 Excerpt from The American Notebooks (1844), Nathaniel Hawthorne
- 19 Excerpt from "The Tartarus of Maids," Herman Melville
- 20 Excerpts from Henry David Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849)
- 21 Excerpt from Walden (1854), Henry David Thoreau
- 22-23 Excerpt from American Notes (1894), Charles Dickens
- 24-25 "A Lone Striker, or, *Without Prejudice to Industry*," Robert Frost (from A Further Range, "Taken Doubly")
- 26 "The Egg and the Machine," Robert Frost (from West-Running Brook)

Much has been written and spoken in women's behalf, especially in America; and yet a large class of females are, and have been, destined to a state of servitude as degrading as unceasing toil can make it. I refer to the female operatives of New England—the free states of our union—the boasted land of equal rights for all—the states where no colored slave can breathe the balmy air, and exist as such; --but yet there are those, a host of them, too, who are in fact nothing more nor less than slaves in every sense of the word! Slaves to a system of labor which requires them to toil from five until seven o'clock, with only one hour to attend to the wants of nature, allowed—slaves to the will and requirements of the "powers that be," however they may infringe on the rights or conflict with the feelings of the operative—slaves to ignorance—and how can it be otherwise?

A Letter by Mary Paul, reprinted in From Farm to Factory, by Thomas Dublin (1993)

Lowell Nov 5th 1848

Dear Father

Doubtless you have been looking for a letter from me all the week past. I would have written but wished to find whether I should be able to stand it--to do the work that I am now doing. . . . I went to work last Tuesday--warping--the same work I used to do [in another mill].

It is *very* hard indeed and sometimes I think I shall not be able to endure it. I never worked so hard in my life but perhaps I shall get used to it. I shall try hard to do so for there is no other work that I can do unless I spin and that I shall not undertake on any account. I presume you have heard before this that the wages are to be reduced on the 20th of this month. It is *true* and there seems to be a good deal of excitement on the subject but I can not tell what will be the consequence. The companies pretend they are losing immense sums every *day* and therefore they are obliged to lessen the wages, but this seems perfectly absurd to me for they are constantly making repairs and it seems to me that this would not be if there were really any danger of their being obliged to *stop* the mills.

. . . The Whigs of Lowell had a great time on the night of the 3rd. They had an immense procession of men on foot bearing *torches* and *banners* got up for the occasion. The houses were illuminated (Whigs' houses) and by the way I should think the whole of *Lowell* were Whigs. I went out to see the illuminations and they did truly look splendid. The Merrimack house was illuminated from attic to cellar. Every pane of glass in the house had a half candle to it and there were many others lighted in the same way. One entire block on the Merrimack Cor[poration] with the exception of one tenement which doubtless was occupied by a free soiler who would not illuminate on any account whatever. . . .

Write soon. Yours affectionately
Mary S Paul

From An Idyl of Work (1875)

Lucy Larcom

Some strangers came one day into the mills,--
Among them English travellers,--led on
Through the great labyrinth of dust and noise
By the good Superintendent,--a grave man,
Kindly and manly, and esteemed of all.

They paused awhile among the balsam-flowers
And pinks and marigolds about the gate;
Then peered with curious eyes through every door
Along the winding stair. The carding-room
They gave one glance, with its great groaning wheels,
Its earthquake rumblings, and its mingled smells
Of oily suffocation; and passed on

Into another room's cool spaciousness
Of long clean alleys, where the spinners paced
Silently up and down, and pieced their threads,
The spindles buzzing like ten thousand bees.

Two bright-faced little girls looked up and smiled,
Swinging a bobbin-box between them. These
Were Ann and Alice, who, in April, played
Beside Pawtucket Falls. One stranger said,--

"Now, sir, this should not be! You're copying
Our British faults too closely, when a child
Toils in close air, like this." But carelessly
The children laughed, still turning work to play,
As children will, nor hardship's meaning guessed.

From A New England Girlhood (1889)
Lucy Larcom

From Chapter 7:

"The children will have to leave school and go into the mill."

There were many pros and cons between my mother and sisters before this was positively decided. The mill agent did not want to take us two little girls, but consented on condition we should be sure to attend school the full number of months prescribed each year. I, the younger one, was then between eleven and twelve years old.

I listened to all that was said about it, very much fearing that I should not be permitted to do the coveted work. For the feeling had already frequently come to me, that I was the one too many in the crowded family nest.

I never cared much for machinery. The buzzing and hissing and whizzing of pulleys and rollers and spindles and flyers around me often grew tiresome. I could not see into their complications, or feel interested in them.

It was a great delight to me to study, and at the end of the three months the master told me that I was prepared for the high school.

But alas! I could not go. The little money I could earn—one dollar a week, besides the price of my board—was needed in the family, and I must return to the mill. It was a severe disappointment to me, though I did not say so at home.

From Chapter 8:

We were children still, whether at school or at work, and Nature still held us close to her motherly heart. Nature came very close to the mill-gates too in those days. There was green grass all around them; violets and wild geraniums grew by the canals; and long stretches of open land between the corporation buildings and the street made the town seem country-like.

The slope behind our mills (the "Lawrence" Mills) was a green lawn; and in front of some of them the overseers had gay flower-gardens; we passed in to our work through a splendor of dahlias and hollyhocks.

From Chapter 10:

On writing for the Offering:

We did not receive much criticism; perhaps it would have been better for us if we had. But then we did not set ourselves up to be literary; though we enjoyed the freedom of writing

what we pleased, and seeing how it looked in print. It was good practice for us, and that was all we desired.

"A New Society" from The Lowell Offering (1841) Tabitha (Betsy Chamberlain)

"Dreams are but interludes which fancy makes;
When monarch reason sleeps, this mimic wakes:
Compounds a medley of disjointed things,
A court of cobblers, and a mob of kings.
Light fumes are merry, grosser fumes are sad;
Both are the reasonable soul run mad;--
And many forms and things in sleep we see,
That neither were, nor are –but haply yet may be."

It was Saturday night. The toils of the week were at an end; and, seated at the table with my book, I was feasting upon the treasures of knowledge which it contained. One by one my companions had left me until I was alone. How long I continued to read I know not; but I had closed my book, and sat ruminating upon the many changes and events which are continually taking place in this transitory world of ours. My reverie was disturbed by the opening of the door, and a little boy entered the room, who, handing me a paper, retired without speaking. I unfolded the paper, and the first article which caught my eye was headed, "Annual Meeting of the Society for the promotion of Industry, Virtue and Knowledge." It read as follows: "At the annual meeting of this society, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

"1. *Resolved*, That every father of a family who neglects to give his daughters the same advantages for an education which he gives his sons, shall be expelled from this society, and be considered a heathen."

"2. *Resolved*, That no member of this society shall exact more than eight hours of labor, out of every twenty-four, of any person in his or her employment."

"3. *Resolved*, That the laborer is worthy of his hire, the price for labor shall be sufficient to enable working-people to pay a proper attention to scientific and literary pursuits."

"4. *Resolved*, That the wages of females shall be equal to the wages of males, that they may be enabled to maintain proper independence of character and virtuous deportment."

"5. *Resolved*, That no young gentleman of this society shall be allowed to be of age, or to transact business for himself, until he shall have a good knowledge of the English language, understand bookkeeping, both by single and double entry, and be capable of transacting all town business."

Section Two:

**The Industrial Revolution in Fiction,
Poetry, and the Essay**

From Walden (1854)
Henry David Thoreau

I cannot believe that our factory system is the best mode by which men may get clothing. The condition of the operatives is becoming every day more like that of the English; and it cannot be wondered at, since, as far as I have heard or observed, the principal object is, not that mankind may be well and honestly clad, but, unquestionably, that the corporations may be enriched.

* * * * *

The nation . . . lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the *Nation* have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether *they* do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain. If we do not get out sleepers, and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go to tinkering upon our *lives* to improve *them*, who will build railroads? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to heaven in season? But if we stay at home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. . . .

From Henry David Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849)

It was in fact an old battle and hunting ground through which we had been floating, the ancient dwelling-place of a race of hunters and warriors. Their weirs of stone, their arrowheads and hatchets, their pestles, and the mortars in which they pounded Indian corn before the white man had tasted it, lay concealed in the mud of the river bottom. . . . Pawtucket and Wamesit, where the Indians resorted in the fishing season, are now Lowell, the city of spindles, and Manchester of America, which sends its cotton cloth around the globe.

* * * * *

Since our voyage the railroad on the bank has been extended, and there is now but little boating on the Merrimack. All kinds of produce and stores were formerly conveyed by water, but now nothing is carried up the stream, and almost wood and bricks alone are carried down, and these are also carried on the railroad.

* * * * *

[Thoreau and his brother, in the summer of 1839,] made haste to get past the village [of Manchester, New Hampshire] . . . , and out of hearing of the hammer which was laying the foundation of another Lowell on the banks.

From American Notes (1894)
Charles Dickens

. . . The very river that moves the machinery in the mills (for they are all worked by water power) seems to acquire a new character from the fresh buildings of bright red brick and painted wood among which it takes its course; and to be as light-headed, thoughtless, and brisk as a young river, in its murmurings and tumblings, as one would desire to see. . . .

These girls, as I have said, were well dressed; and that phrase necessarily includes extreme cleanliness. They had serviceable bonnets, good warm cloaks and shawls; and were not above clogs and pattens. Moreover, there were places in the mill in which they could deposit these things without injury; and there were conveniences for washing. They were healthy in appearance, many of them remarkably so, and had the manners and deportment of young women: not of degraded brutes of burden. . . .

They reside in various boarding-houses near at hand. The owners of the mills are particularly careful to allow no persons to enter upon the possession of these houses, whose characters have not undergone the most searching and thorough inquiry. Any complaint that is made against them, they are removed, and their occupation is handed over to some more deserving person. There are a few children employed in these factories, but not many. The laws of the State forbid their working more than nine months in the year, and require that they be educated during the other three. . . .

Of the merits of the Lowell Offering as a literary production, I will only observe, putting entirely out of sight the fact of the articles having been written by these girls after the arduous labours of the day, that it will compare advantageously with a great many English Annuals. It is pleasant to find that many of its tales are of the mills and of the those who work in them; that they inculcate habits of self-denial and contentment, and teach good doctrines of enlarged benevolence. . . .

I returned at night by the same railroad and in the same kind of car. One of the passengers being exceedingly anxious to expound at great length to my companion (not to me, of course) the true principles on which books of travel in America should be written by Englishmen, I feigned to fall asleep. But glancing all the way out at window from the corners of my eyes, I found abundance of entertainment for the rest

of the ride in watching the effects of the wood fire, which had been invisible in the morning, but were now brought out in full relief by the darkness; for we were travelling in a whirlwind of bright sparks, which showered about us like a storm of fiery snow.

(January 1842)

"A Lone Striker,
or, Without Prejudice to Industry"
Robert Frost
(from A Further Range, "Taken Doubly")

The swinging mill bell changed its rate
To tolling like the count of fate,
And though at that the tardy ran,
One failed to make the closing gate.
There was a law of God or man
That on the one who came too late
The gate for half an hour be locked,
His time be lost, his pittance docked.
He stood rebuked and unemployed.
The straining mill began to shake.
The mill, though many-many-eyed,
Had eyes inscrutably opaque;
So that he couldn't look inside
To see if some forlorn machine
Was standing idle for his sake.
(He couldn't hope its heart would break.)

And yet he thought he saw the scene:
The air was full of dust of wool.
A thousand yarns were under pull,
But pull so slow, with such a twist,
All day from spool to lesser spool,
It seldom overtaxed their strength;
They safely grew in slender length.
And if one broke by any chance,
The spinner saw it at a glance.
The spinner still was there to spin.
That's where the human still came in.
Her deft hand showed with finger rings
Among the harplike spread of strings.
She caught the pieces end to end
And, with a touch that never missed,
Not so much tied as made them blend.
Man's ingenuity was good.
He saw it plainly where he stood,
Yet found it easy to resist.

He knew another place, a wood,
And in it, tall as trees, were cliffs;
And if he stood on one of these,
'Twould be among the tops of trees,
Their upper branches round him wreathing,
Their breathing mingled with his breathing.
If--if he stood! Enough of ifs!
He knew a path that wanted walking;
He knew a spring that wanted drinking;
A thought that wanted further thinking;
A love that wanted re-renewing.
Nor was this just a way of talking
To save him the expense of doing.
With him it boded action, deed.

The factory was very fine;
He wished it all the modern speed.
Yet, after all, 'twas not divine,
That is to say, 'twas not a church.
He never would assume that he'd
Be any institution's need.
But he said then and still would say,
If there should ever come a day
When industry seemed like to die
Because he left it in the lurch,
Or even merely seemed to pine
For want of his approval, why,
Come get him--they knew where to search.

Mill Girls' Letters



INTRODUCTION:

Among the most valuable sources of information we have about life and work in early Lowell are letters from "mill girls." The young women who left their rural villages for this new industrial city maintained their ties to family through their letters home, and many of these letters richly detail boardinghouse and mill life as they experienced it.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will

- Explain the advantages or disadvantages of factory work in a persuasive letter, listing several reasons why a person should or should not choose city life and factory work.
- In another letter, compare and contrast rural and urban life, farm and factory work.
- From a mill operative's point of view, argue that the factory system is good or bad for workers.
- Explain how the different purposes and audiences for each letter affect their choices as writers.

TEACHING PLAN:

Explain to students that they will be adopting the persona of a mill girl and writing three (or, if time is tight, one of three) letters based on their knowledge of life in the 1840's. One letter is a persuasive letter to convince a friend to come—or NOT to come—to Lowell to work. The second letter is a comparison-contrast letter to her parents explaining how her new life is different. The last is an editorial stating an opinion of the mill girl's treatment in the factory.

The novel Lyddie is a valuable resource for an activity such as this; also, Thomas Dublin's Farm to Factory. Women's Letters, 1830-1860, provides students with examples of actual mill girl letters. Students can use tinted paper (light blue or off-white) and quill pens (available at the Boott and Visitor Center museum stores) to add a look of authenticity to their letters.

See the following pages for sheets to give students:

Mill Girls' Letters—Students' Sheet



If you lived in the year 1845, you would communicate with others who lived far away by letter writing. We see many examples of letter writing in the book *Lyddie*. For this activity you will be writing three letters based on the knowledge that you have gained from class discussion, the book *Lyddie*, class handouts, and other information.

You will assume the persona of a mill girl who is currently employed in the Concord Manufacturing Corporation. You need to show an understanding of this time period and the problems that these young women faced. Citing specific examples with names will add to the value of our paper. Your grade will be based on the **QUALITY** of the letter and the knowledge that you have gained, not the **QUANTITY** of writing that you do. You must use letter writing format. You need to include the following parts to a letter: a date, a greeting, the body, and a closing.

Letter 1: Your first letter is a persuasive one. You will give a friend three reasons to come or not to come to live and work in Lowell. In the first paragraph you need to state your opinion. The following three paragraphs should each have one reason for this opinion. Be sure to write a convincing closing.

Letter 2: Your second letter is a comparison-contrast letter. This will be sent to your parents. Your first paragraph should state what you plan to discuss. Following this you should write about three ways your life has changed or is the same as it was on the farm. There should be one paragraph for each comparison. Your ending should be some type of summary.

Letter 3: Your third letter is an editorial. It will be sent to a Lowell newspaper. In this letter you must decide whether you feel the factory system is good or bad for the young women who work there. In the first paragraph you should state your opinion. Then in the following three paragraphs give three facts to support this opinion. Your last paragraph should be a summary.

Name: _____



Grading Rubric for Mill Girls' Letters

To earn a Grade of A:

- _____ Your letter must be five paragraphs long and all directions should be followed.
- _____ Your letter must be written in letter format.
- _____ You must have accurate and complete information.
- _____ Your letter should be written in ink.
- _____ Your letter should have no spelling or grammar errors.
- _____ Your letter must show effort and skill.

To earn a Grade of B:

- _____ Your letter must be five paragraphs long and most directions are followed.
- _____ Your letter must be written in letter format.
- _____ You have mostly accurate and complete information.
- _____ Your letter should be written in ink.
- _____ Your letter should have less than 5 spelling or grammar errors.
- _____ Your letter must show effort and skill.

To earn a Grade of C:

- _____ Your letter is four paragraphs long and some directions are followed.
- _____ Your letter has some parts of the letter format.
- _____ You have somewhat accurate information.
- _____ Your letter should be written in ink.
- _____ Your letter should have fewer than 10 spelling or grammar errors.
- _____ Your letter shows some effort and skill.

To earn a Grade of D:

- _____ Your letter is one to three paragraphs long and some directions are followed.
- _____ Your letter has few parts of letter format.
- _____ You have few pieces of accurate information.
- _____ Your letter is not written in ink.
- _____ Your letter has more than 10 spelling or grammar errors.
- _____ Your letter shows little effort and skill.

*** For each day your assignment is late, 10 points will be deducted from your grade.