

Women and the Industrial Revolution

HST/WMS 286
Spring 2009
Professor Lavender



Lewis Hine, Photograph of a Girl Textile Worker

Women in the 18th Century Economy

- Part of a Family or Household Economy
- Doctrine of Coverture
- Dowries as Source of economic voice (but voice was not guaranteed)
- Deputy Husbands acting on their husbands' authority
- Women have more access to cash (dowry, pre-marital earnings, and egg & butter money) in a cash-strapped barter-based economy

Women in the 19th Century Economy

- Domestic Labor Source in a Market Economy (emergent middle classes)
- Doctrine of Coverture continues, altered
- Dowries replaced largely by pre-marital earnings from market economy labor
- Act on own (or as daughters) as singles, as part of a family wage as marrieds (or as "housewives")
- Men have most of the access to cash in this new cash-based economy.

Transformation of the Economy

- The emphasis in the new republic
 - on development, on the market, on expanding trade
 - put a new emphasis on self-interest,
 - and a new value on success, getting ahead, making money and, even, speculating.
- Need to distinguish between
 - private "republican virtues" developed in the home and family by women
 - Women were supposed to be "disinterested"
 - public "republican virtues" developed in political and economic sphere by men
 - Competition, "It's only business" attitude, self-interest.

"Separate Spheres"

- Male and Female Worlds
- Public life must be segregated from private life
 - the world of home and family
 - the world of work
- The domestic sphere
 - Haven of moral virtues
 - Piety
 - Purity
 - Selflessness/disinterestedness
 - Separate from the public world
 - Competition
 - Aggression
 - self-interest.
- Spheres became gendered -- female and male.

How did this happen?

- Partly cultural (will discuss in coming lectures)
- Partly economic
- Today, the economic origins
 - In the emergence of an industrial market economy
 - In the creation of wage-based values applied to work
 - And the role that gender plays in shaping that world

Remember Martha Ballard's House

- What were the divisions of space?
- To whom did the various spaces belong?
- How was space used by the members of the family?
- Compare the first house to the later house her husband had built (and her son and his family had purloined).



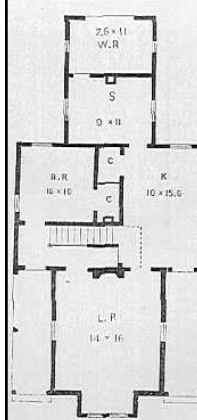
Nineteenth-Century Houses

- It became a cultural "norm" of the middle-class home to have dedicated spaces designed for single uses – kitchen, dining room, parlor, bedchambers – emulated even among the poorest of families
- House-space was gendered and divided
 - The neutral meeting space was the parlor (and sometimes the library, although that tended to be masculine space)
 - Areas of women's toil – kitchens, nurseries – became feminine space
 - And was separated from "family" space
- Inside the house was domestic space, which "belonged" mostly to women (even though owned by men)

A Village Cottage, 1856



FIRST STORY PLAN.



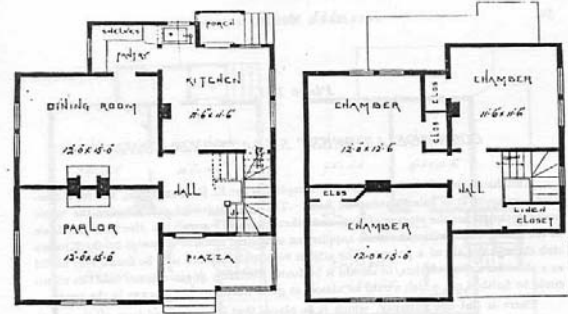
A Village Cottage, 1856

- LR = Living Room
- K = Kitchen
- S = Scullery (secondary kitchen)
- WR = Wood Room
- BR = Bedroom
- Second Story consists of Bedrooms

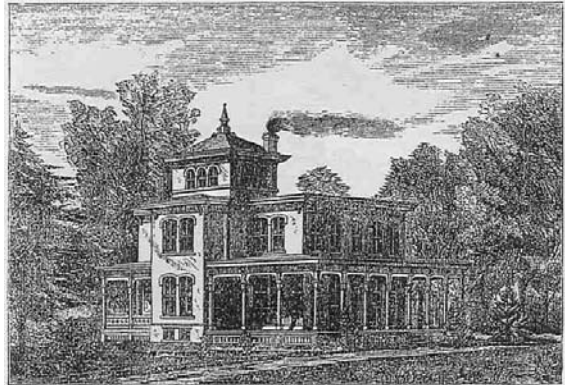
Cottage for a Mill Hand at Chelsea, Massachusetts, 1878



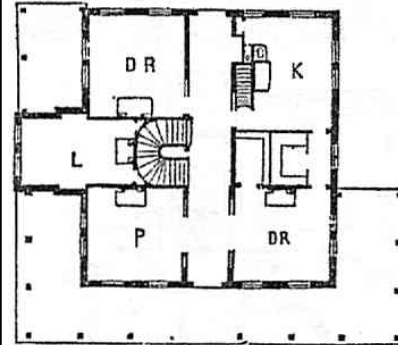
Cottage for a Mill Hand at Chelsea, Massachusetts, 1878



Godey's Lady's Model Residence, 1874



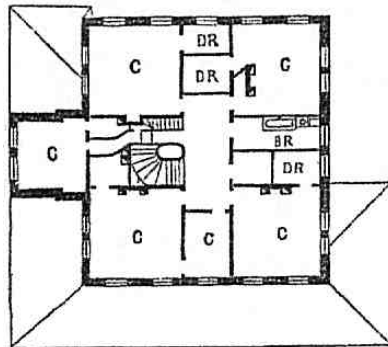
Godey's Lady's Model Residence, 1874



First Story.—
 H hall, 8 feet wide;
 P parlor, 16 by 16 feet;
 DR dining-room, 16 by 16 feet;
 L library, 12 by 20 feet;
 DR drawing-room, 16 by 16 feet;
 K kitchen, 13 feet by 19 feet 9 inches; with a larder, 8 by 10 feet; and a store closet, 5 feet 6 inches by 8 feet 3 inches.

FIRST STORY.

Godey's Lady's Model Residence, 1874



Second Story.—
 C chamber, 16 by 16 feet;
 C chamber, 8 feet 4 inches by 12 feet;
 C chamber, 16 by 16 feet;
 C chamber, 12 feet 6 inches by 12 feet 6 inches;
 BR bath-room, 5 feet 6 inches by 16 feet;
 DR dressing-room, 5 feet by 8 feet 6 inches; C chamber, 15 by 16 feet;
 C chamber, 13 by 16 feet;
 DR dressing-room, 5 by 8 feet;
 DR dressing-room, 5 by 8 feet; with a linen closet, 5 feet 6 inches by 7 feet.

SECOND STORY.

What does change in spaces mean?

- Reflects a change in the ways families work as economic units
 - And as social units
- Separation of productive and reproductive work
- Transition from “family economy” to “wage economy”
 - With attendant loss of status of women’s work because domestic labor is not “waged”

Family Economy

- All members of the family make their own contribution
- Work can be gendered, but this does not immediately devalue “women’s” work
 - Dividing lines of gendered work are less rigid, based on necessity
 - Women’s work often associated with the generation of cash
- The economic contributions of all members of the family are **visible**



Quilting Bee

Women’s work is more public, often cooperative with other work or with the rest of her family, even when the work is directly for the benefit of the woman (dowry)



A family of weavers at work

In the family economy, every member does a small part in supporting the family unit.

Because work is done together, the contribution of each member is visible.

Emergence of Wages

- Within the Artisan System – Apprentices become Journeymen and then Artisans, but earn wages in order to become artisans with own shops.



Gender and Apprentices' Wages

- Male apprentices earned wages with goal of becoming Master artisans
 - Wages must be sufficient to allow them to buy tools, property, and to pay their own future apprentices
- Female apprentices earned wages with goal of earning dowries and learning housewifery
 - Wages must be sufficient to build dowries, but not so great that they may decide to remain single
 - By definition, women's wages must be too low for a woman to live on.

Male and Female Waged Work

- Men's Trades:
 - Apothecary/Medicine
 - Architect
 - Basket Maker
 - Blacksmith
 - Book Binder
 - Boot Maker or Cobbler
 - Brick Maker
 - Cabinet Maker
 - Carpenter
 - Carriage Maker
 - Chandler
 - Cooper
 - Glassblower
 - Goldsmith
 - Gunsmith
 - Hatter
 - Instrument Maker
 - Miller
 - Painter
 - Paper Maker
 - Potter
 - Printer
 - Rugmaker
 - Shoemaker
 - Silversmith
 - Tailor
 - Tanner
 - Tavern
 - Weaver
 - Wheelwright
 - Wigmaker

- Women's Trades (in decreasing order based on pay level):
 - Midwifery
 - Postmistress
 - Teacher/Tutor
 - Weaver
 - Milliner (Clothing and Ladies' Hats)
 - Spinner
 - Handicrafts/Stitchery
 - Confectioner
 - Cook and Baker
 - Housemaid

Impact of the Wage Economy on Women

- But women's waged work is considered temporary; or at the very least taken on in addition to women's responsibilities for domestic work on behalf of their families
- As daughters and as wives, women's waged work took second place to women's domestic responsibilities (which were not waged)
- The lack of a wage = the invisibility of women's productive work

Impact of the Wage Economy on Women

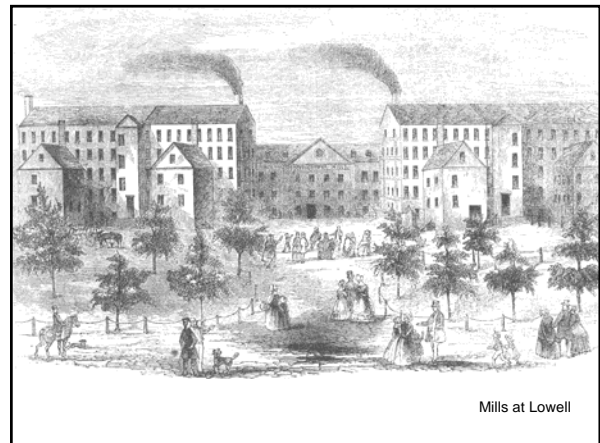
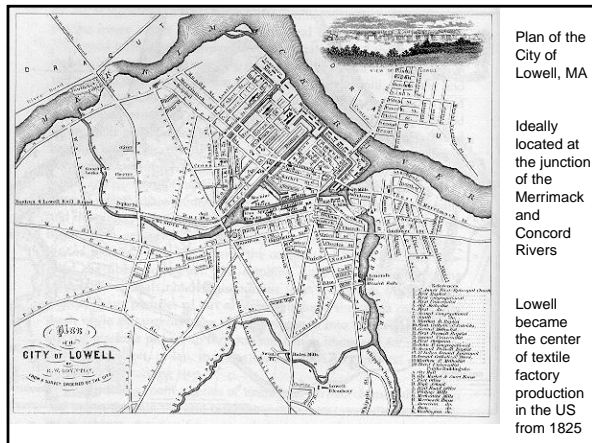
- Ironically, the emergence of a market economy devalued women's economic contributions by making them invisible to their families and to society.
 - Decreasing importance of the dowry
 - Social imperative to keep women's wages below men's wages when available
 - Necessity of keeping women's work temporary and itinerant to prevent male unemployment and allow employers to adjust to economic cycles
 - All result in a decline in women's voice in family economics
 - See Cult of Domesticity as a cultural compensation for this loss of voice (later).

Industrial Revolution

- Follows from the wage economy
- Second irony – starts off with women workers in a women's industry
 - Spinning and Weaving
- Imported from England
 - Application of water power and later steam power to looms allows for a rapid expansion of output
 - Creation of Factories = absolute separation of production from home

Textile Production

- Weaving and Spinning were women's trades, both as apprentices and in the home
 - Martha Ballard's daughters weaving cloth
- When industrialization emerged first in textiles, it was acceptable that the first American industrial workers would be women
 - But this work would require them to be absent from home...
 - So it would be DAUGHTERS rather than wives



Lowell was considered a model

- At the very beginning, it was characterized by
 - a relatively high wage scale,
 - good living and working conditions,
 - and a considerable amount of benevolent paternalism on the part of manufacturers.
- In contrast to English industrial towns like Manchester, which were squalid and violent places to work and live.

Later on in Lowell

- However, by the late 1830s and into the 1840s and 50s, the situation at Lowell seriously deteriorated.
- Lowell became an example of how
 - the profit motive led to the exploitation of workers
 - in terms of both wages
 - and conditions,
 - with little concern on the part of manufacturers for the quality of life of the work force.
 - And also became the birthplace of the American labor movement

The Labor Force

- Labor recruited from among the daughters of farms in surrounding area
 - Daughters saw chance to earn money for dowries
 - Families saw chance to get some cash, which was increasingly important
 - Records from the Hamilton Manufacturing Co. for July 1836:
 - work force was 74% female; 96% native born; 80% aged 15-30; 93% unmarried.
- How to assure the families that their daughters would be safe?

Mill Paternalism

- Workers were housed in company dormitories headed by respectable widows.
- About 75% of the labor force lived in these company-owned boarding houses.
- Life in the boarding houses was very regimented, as was the daily discipline of work in the factory
 - But it was also spent with other girls
 - For many, this is their first taste of female society or sisterhood outside of their own families.

Why did Mill Girls go to the Mills?

- Mill employment was appealing because its wages were higher than those for farm laborers or domestic servants.
- Most mill girls were earning dowries.
 - One worked in mill for two years, then married the brother of another mill operative and settled in Worcester, Massachusetts.
 - Another used her earnings to set up a business as a seamstress before marrying.

Other inducements

- Some mill girls were drawn because of educational opportunities
 - Both in mills themselves and in town
- One, Lucy Ann, wanted to use her wages to attend Oberlin College in 1851 (only college US then that admitted women)
- Letter to her cousin: "I have earned enough to school me awhile, and Have not I a right to do so, or must I go home, like a dutiful girl, place the money in father's hands, and then there goes all my hard earnings.... [that would be] a dead loss... [of my efforts] spent in vain.... Others may find fault with me, and call me selfish, but I think I should spend my earnings as I please."

Life in Lowell

- Most workers stayed 2-4 years.
- Broadening experience akin to going away to the city for school
- Life in Lowell in the 1820s and 30s meant being part of a tight female community.
 - Women lived and worked together 24 hours a day, separated from their families
 - But also extended kinship networks operating in the Lowell mills
 - sisters and cousins brought family and friends from home to work with them.
 - There was little contact with men.

Demographics of The Workroom

- Typical workroom within a factory had 2 male supervisors and 80 female operators; 2 children would assist at various tasks.
- Males in the factories occupied all supervisory positions and when worked as operatives, were in the more skilled jobs.
- The division of labor within the mill was highly sex segregated.



Social Lives of the Workers

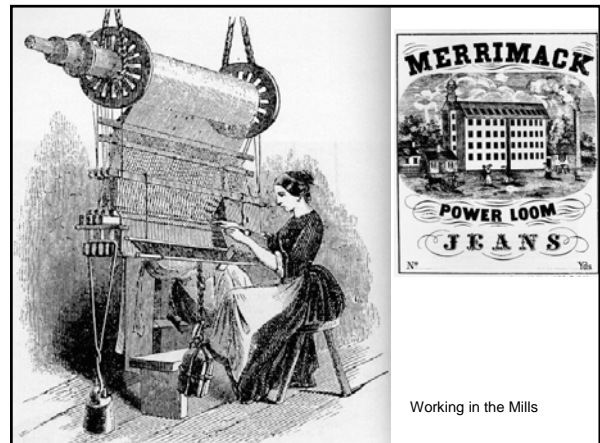
- Women not only worked together, but also lived together.
- Usually were about 25 women per boarding house.
 - They lived 4-6 to a bedroom.
- Boarding Houses
 - Downstairs was a common room and a dining room.
 - Upstairs were bedrooms.
- This was the center of social life for mill workers--where they spent their non-work time.
 - Where they ate, rested, talked, sewed, wrote letters, read books, and made friends to go shopping with, to church with, for walks on Sundays, and to public lectures and events in town.
- The boarding houses did not allow for much privacy, peace, or quiet.
 - And women watched each other for any impropriety that would besmirch them all.

Impropriety and Social Control

- What becomes of the “improper girl”:
- “A girl, suspected of immoralities, or serious improprieties, at once loses caste. Her fellow boarders will at once leave the house, if the keeper does not dismiss the offender. In self-protection, therefore, the patron is obliged to put the offender away. Nor will her former companions walk with her, or work with her; till at length, finding herself everywhere talked about, and pointed at, and shunned she is obliged to relieve her fellow-operatives of a presence which they feel brings disgrace.”

Close-Knit Female Community

- Women saw their social ties to other women workers as primary (more important than ties to factory itself)
- Benefited from this “sisterhood” and solidarity
 - It changed their expectations of and as women
- And this would play a vital role when labor strife erupts at Lowell
 - The source for women’s liberty rhetoric



Working in the Mills (1820s-1830s)

- Long days – 12 hours, but with many breaks for “play” and study.
- The factory actually subsidized women’s education and intellectual and artistic expressions, with several worker’s literary magazines produced.
- Why did factories do this?
 - To reassure the girls’ parents that their daughters would not be “coarsened” by factory work

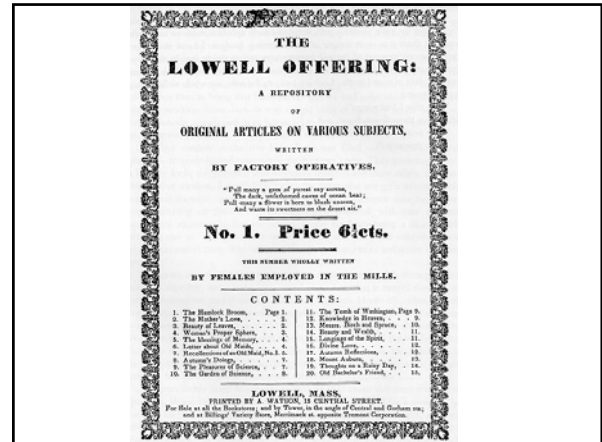
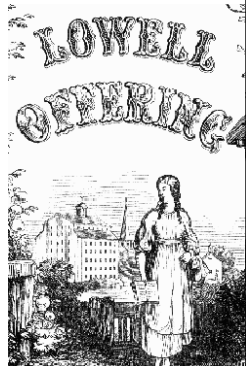
Intellectual Activities of Workers

- Lending Library and Evening Classes for Workers
- Lucy Larcom, for example, took classes in German, ethics, and botany.
- The women set up self-improvement and discussion groups.
 - Much of the discussion centered around the moral dilemma of working on cotton products of slave labor.
- The Lyceum lecture circuit regularly sent moral and scientific speakers to Lowell

The Lowell Offering

- Workers wrote about their lives through poems, stories, descriptive sketches, and editorials
- Circulated in US and abroad.

The
Factory
Girls'
Garland,
Exeter,
NH (Feb.
1845)



The Speed-up

- Beginning in the late 1830s, economic pressure on Lowell mills
 - Competition with English mills which could make good more cheaply
 - Necessity of capital improvements (canals, factory refurbishments) demanded more cash in hand
 - Rising price of cotton cuts into profit
 - As a result, workers get squeezed by speed-up.



The Workers' Speed-Up

- Number of spindles per worker in spinning department increased from 129 to 294 between 1840 and 1859.
- In 1830s, each worker handled one machine; by 1845, that had increased to four.
- 1830s: 60-hour work week; 1840s: 75-hour work week
- Boarding houses were more crowded, classes were cut out, Lowell Offering taken over by mill company when it supports a strike
- Women workers begin to organize, but are fired and replaced by immigrant workers.

TIME TABLE OF THE LOWELL MILLS.

Arranged to make the working time throughout the year average 11 hours per day, TO TAKE EFFECT SEPTEMBER 21st, 1853.

The Standard time being that of the meridian of Lowell, as shown by the Registrar Clerk of MERRIMACK COUNTY, Fast Office Corner, Central Street.

From March 30th to September 19th, inclusive.
 COMMENCE WORK at 5:30 A. M. LEAVE OFF WORK at 5:30 P. M. except on Saturday Evenings
 BREAKFAST at 6:30 A. M. DINNER at 12:30 P. M. Common Work, after dinner, 12:45 P. M.

From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.
 COMMENCE WORK at 6:00 A. M. LEAVE OFF WORK at 7:00 P. M. except on Saturday Evenings
 BREAKFAST at 6:30 A. M. DINNER at 12:30 P. M. Common Work, after dinner, 1:15 P. M.

BELLS.

From March 30th to September 19th, inclusive.

Monday Bells	Tuesday Bells	Wednesday Bells	Thursday Bells	Friday Bells	Saturday Bells
First bell, 4:30 A. M.	First bell, 4:30 A. M.	First bell, 4:30 A. M.	First bell, 4:30 A. M.	First bell, 4:30 A. M.	First bell, 4:30 A. M.
Second, 5:30 A. M.	Second, 5:30 A. M.	Second, 5:30 A. M.	Second, 5:30 A. M.	Second, 5:30 A. M.	Second, 5:30 A. M.
Third, 6:30 A. M.	Third, 6:30 A. M.	Third, 6:30 A. M.	Third, 6:30 A. M.	Third, 6:30 A. M.	Third, 6:30 A. M.
Fourth, 7:30 A. M.	Fourth, 7:30 A. M.	Fourth, 7:30 A. M.	Fourth, 7:30 A. M.	Fourth, 7:30 A. M.	Fourth, 7:30 A. M.
Fifth, 8:30 A. M.	Fifth, 8:30 A. M.	Fifth, 8:30 A. M.	Fifth, 8:30 A. M.	Fifth, 8:30 A. M.	Fifth, 8:30 A. M.
Sixth, 9:30 A. M.	Sixth, 9:30 A. M.	Sixth, 9:30 A. M.	Sixth, 9:30 A. M.	Sixth, 9:30 A. M.	Sixth, 9:30 A. M.
Seventh, 10:30 A. M.	Seventh, 10:30 A. M.	Seventh, 10:30 A. M.	Seventh, 10:30 A. M.	Seventh, 10:30 A. M.	Seventh, 10:30 A. M.
Eighth, 11:30 A. M.	Eighth, 11:30 A. M.	Eighth, 11:30 A. M.	Eighth, 11:30 A. M.	Eighth, 11:30 A. M.	Eighth, 11:30 A. M.
Ninth, 12:30 P. M.	Ninth, 12:30 P. M.	Ninth, 12:30 P. M.	Ninth, 12:30 P. M.	Ninth, 12:30 P. M.	Ninth, 12:30 P. M.
Tenth, 1:30 P. M.	Tenth, 1:30 P. M.	Tenth, 1:30 P. M.	Tenth, 1:30 P. M.	Tenth, 1:30 P. M.	Tenth, 1:30 P. M.
Eleventh, 2:30 P. M.	Eleventh, 2:30 P. M.	Eleventh, 2:30 P. M.	Eleventh, 2:30 P. M.	Eleventh, 2:30 P. M.	Eleventh, 2:30 P. M.
Twelfth, 3:30 P. M.	Twelfth, 3:30 P. M.	Twelfth, 3:30 P. M.	Twelfth, 3:30 P. M.	Twelfth, 3:30 P. M.	Twelfth, 3:30 P. M.
Thirteenth, 4:30 P. M.	Thirteenth, 4:30 P. M.	Thirteenth, 4:30 P. M.	Thirteenth, 4:30 P. M.	Thirteenth, 4:30 P. M.	Thirteenth, 4:30 P. M.
Fourteenth, 5:30 P. M.	Fourteenth, 5:30 P. M.	Fourteenth, 5:30 P. M.	Fourteenth, 5:30 P. M.	Fourteenth, 5:30 P. M.	Fourteenth, 5:30 P. M.

SATURDAY EVENING BELLS.
 The remaining Saturday Evenings in the year, ring out as follows:

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
First Saturday, ring out at 6:00 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out at 6:00 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out at 6:00 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out at 6:00 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out at 6:00 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out at 6:00 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out at 6:00 P. M.
Second, 5:45	Second, 5:45	Second, 5:45	Second, 5:45	Second, 5:45	Second, 5:45	Second, 5:45
Third, 5:30	Third, 5:30	Third, 5:30	Third, 5:30	Third, 5:30	Third, 5:30	Third, 5:30
Fourth, 5:15	Fourth, 5:15	Fourth, 5:15	Fourth, 5:15	Fourth, 5:15	Fourth, 5:15	Fourth, 5:15
Fifth, 5:00	Fifth, 5:00	Fifth, 5:00	Fifth, 5:00	Fifth, 5:00	Fifth, 5:00	Fifth, 5:00
Sixth, 4:45	Sixth, 4:45	Sixth, 4:45	Sixth, 4:45	Sixth, 4:45	Sixth, 4:45	Sixth, 4:45
Seventh, 4:30	Seventh, 4:30	Seventh, 4:30	Seventh, 4:30	Seventh, 4:30	Seventh, 4:30	Seventh, 4:30
Eighth, 4:15	Eighth, 4:15	Eighth, 4:15	Eighth, 4:15	Eighth, 4:15	Eighth, 4:15	Eighth, 4:15
Ninth, 4:00	Ninth, 4:00	Ninth, 4:00	Ninth, 4:00	Ninth, 4:00	Ninth, 4:00	Ninth, 4:00
Tenth, 3:45	Tenth, 3:45	Tenth, 3:45	Tenth, 3:45	Tenth, 3:45	Tenth, 3:45	Tenth, 3:45
Eleventh, 3:30	Eleventh, 3:30	Eleventh, 3:30	Eleventh, 3:30	Eleventh, 3:30	Eleventh, 3:30	Eleventh, 3:30
Twelfth, 3:15	Twelfth, 3:15	Twelfth, 3:15	Twelfth, 3:15	Twelfth, 3:15	Twelfth, 3:15	Twelfth, 3:15
Thirteenth, 3:00	Thirteenth, 3:00	Thirteenth, 3:00	Thirteenth, 3:00	Thirteenth, 3:00	Thirteenth, 3:00	Thirteenth, 3:00
Fourteenth, 2:45	Fourteenth, 2:45	Fourteenth, 2:45	Fourteenth, 2:45	Fourteenth, 2:45	Fourteenth, 2:45	Fourteenth, 2:45
Fifteenth, 2:30	Fifteenth, 2:30	Fifteenth, 2:30	Fifteenth, 2:30	Fifteenth, 2:30	Fifteenth, 2:30	Fifteenth, 2:30
Sixteenth, 2:15	Sixteenth, 2:15	Sixteenth, 2:15	Sixteenth, 2:15	Sixteenth, 2:15	Sixteenth, 2:15	Sixteenth, 2:15
Seventeenth, 2:00	Seventeenth, 2:00	Seventeenth, 2:00	Seventeenth, 2:00	Seventeenth, 2:00	Seventeenth, 2:00	Seventeenth, 2:00
Eighteenth, 1:45	Eighteenth, 1:45	Eighteenth, 1:45	Eighteenth, 1:45	Eighteenth, 1:45	Eighteenth, 1:45	Eighteenth, 1:45
Nineteenth, 1:30	Nineteenth, 1:30	Nineteenth, 1:30	Nineteenth, 1:30	Nineteenth, 1:30	Nineteenth, 1:30	Nineteenth, 1:30
Twentieth, 1:15	Twentieth, 1:15	Twentieth, 1:15	Twentieth, 1:15	Twentieth, 1:15	Twentieth, 1:15	Twentieth, 1:15
Twenty-first, 1:00	Twenty-first, 1:00	Twenty-first, 1:00	Twenty-first, 1:00	Twenty-first, 1:00	Twenty-first, 1:00	Twenty-first, 1:00
Twenty-second, 12:45	Twenty-second, 12:45	Twenty-second, 12:45	Twenty-second, 12:45	Twenty-second, 12:45	Twenty-second, 12:45	Twenty-second, 12:45
Twenty-third, 12:30	Twenty-third, 12:30	Twenty-third, 12:30	Twenty-third, 12:30	Twenty-third, 12:30	Twenty-third, 12:30	Twenty-third, 12:30
Twenty-fourth, 12:15	Twenty-fourth, 12:15	Twenty-fourth, 12:15	Twenty-fourth, 12:15	Twenty-fourth, 12:15	Twenty-fourth, 12:15	Twenty-fourth, 12:15
Twenty-fifth, 12:00	Twenty-fifth, 12:00	Twenty-fifth, 12:00	Twenty-fifth, 12:00	Twenty-fifth, 12:00	Twenty-fifth, 12:00	Twenty-fifth, 12:00
Twenty-sixth, 11:45	Twenty-sixth, 11:45	Twenty-sixth, 11:45	Twenty-sixth, 11:45	Twenty-sixth, 11:45	Twenty-sixth, 11:45	Twenty-sixth, 11:45
Twenty-seventh, 11:30	Twenty-seventh, 11:30	Twenty-seventh, 11:30	Twenty-seventh, 11:30	Twenty-seventh, 11:30	Twenty-seventh, 11:30	Twenty-seventh, 11:30
Twenty-eighth, 11:15	Twenty-eighth, 11:15	Twenty-eighth, 11:15	Twenty-eighth, 11:15	Twenty-eighth, 11:15	Twenty-eighth, 11:15	Twenty-eighth, 11:15
Twenty-ninth, 11:00	Twenty-ninth, 11:00	Twenty-ninth, 11:00	Twenty-ninth, 11:00	Twenty-ninth, 11:00	Twenty-ninth, 11:00	Twenty-ninth, 11:00
Thirtieth, 10:45	Thirtieth, 10:45	Thirtieth, 10:45	Thirtieth, 10:45	Thirtieth, 10:45	Thirtieth, 10:45	Thirtieth, 10:45
Thirty-first, 10:30	Thirty-first, 10:30	Thirty-first, 10:30	Thirty-first, 10:30	Thirty-first, 10:30	Thirty-first, 10:30	Thirty-first, 10:30

YARD GATES will be opened at the first stroke of the bells for entering or leaving the Mills.
 ** SPEED GATES commence striking three minutes before commencing work.

Work in the Mills became increasingly regulated and controlled

The Changing Lowell Workforce

- 1830s Workers
 - 74% female
 - 96% native born
 - 80% aged 15-30
 - 93% unmarried
 - 2.3% children under age of 15
- 1850 Workers
 - 38.6% foreign born
 - 6.5% Children
- 1860 Workers
 - 61.8% foreign born (mostly Irish)
 - @15% Children



Labor Resistance

- From beginning, workers are resistant to control
- Lowell Mills founded in 1825
- In 1826-1827, workers were dismissed for:
 - "misconduct",
 - "captiousness,"
 - "disobedience to orders,"
 - "impudence to overseer,"
 - "dissatisfaction with wages," and
 - "mutiny"



First Strikes

- December 1828 (less than two years after the Dover, New Hampshire, mill was incorporated)
- 300-400 women workers turned out
- First recorded strike of female textile operatives
- They were protesting the imposition of "obnoxious regulations" in the factory

Lowell Strikes (1834 and 1836)

- Wage cuts and rising rents in boarding houses in 1834
- Boston Transcript: "We learn that extraordinary excitement was occasioned at Lowell, last week, by an announcement that the wages paid in some of the departments would be reduced 15 percent on the 1st of March. The reduction principally affected the female operatives, and they held several meetings, or caucuses, at which a young woman presided, who took an active part in persuading her associates to give notice that they should quit the mills, and to induce them to 'make a run' on the Lowell Bank and the Savings Bank, which they did. On Friday morning, the young woman referred to was dismissed, by the Agent...and on leaving the office...waved her calash in the air, as a signal to the others, who were watching from the windows, when they immediately 'struck' and assembled about her, in despite of the overseers. The number soon increased to nearly 800. A procession was formed, and they marched about the town, to the amusement of a mob of idlers and boys, and we are sorry to add, not altogether to the credit of Yankee girls...We are told that one of the leaders mounted a stump and made a flaming Mary Wollstonecraft speech on the rights of women and the iniquities of the 'monied aristocracy,' which produced a powerful effect on her auditors, and they determined to 'have their way if they died for it.'"

1834 Lowell Strike

- The 800 women who turned out in 1834 = 1/6th of the work force.
- Supported by the all-male National Trades Union.
- Strikers use "Liberty Rhetoric" in their strike, calling selves "The daughters of free men":

"Let oppression shrug her shoulders,
And a haughty tyrant frown,
And little upstart Ignorance,
In mockery look down.
Yet I value not the feeble threats
Of Tories in disguise,
While the flag of Independence
O'er our noble nation flies."

Why Liberty Rhetoric?

- Gave women's protests legitimacy
 - Male workers used it all the time
 - Women strikers became, in their own eyes at least, the direct heirs of the revolutionary tradition.
- Wage cuts were thus not questions of purely economic concern; they were interpreted more broadly,
 - as attempts to enslave women workers
 - and to deprive them of independent status and democracy
- But 1834 strike fails
 - A recession has hit the mills
 - It's too easy to hire out-of-work workers to replace the strikers

1836 Lowell Strike

- Use Liberty Rhetoric again:
"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."
- But this time, a boom is on and workers are short
 - And 1500 to 2000 of workers on strike = 1/4th
 - Strikers form "Factory Girl's Association" with 2500 members
 - Strikers win their demands, but 1837 Depression ends labor organizing at Lowell

Legacies of the 1830s Strikes

- News of Lowell success spreads to other mill towns, and other women workers join the Factory Girl's Association
- Factory Girl's Association calls for a ten-hour workday, a call which is picked up by the organizers of male labor as well.
- The Ten-Hour Movement becomes the backbone of the US Labor movement, leading to the formation of later unions like AFL, CIO, & IWW
 - Women play key role in this pre-AFL movement (Female Labor Reform Association), and include among their demands equal pay for equal work



Textile workers strike, NJ, 1912

Significance of the Mill Girls

- Lowell mill girls were among America's most modern women.
 - Seized educational opportunities
 - Experienced a period of independence before marriage
 - Thus may have demanded or expected some continuing independence from their husbands
 - And encouraged children's independence
 - They are the mothers of the generation that will write the Declaration of Sentiments
 - Because they had their own savings before marriage, they controlled their own marital futures – and so they could choose love over necessity (and choose feminist husbands).

Significance of the Mill Girls, cont.

- Working in mills for OWN goals, rather than family's = argument for independence
- And, in mills, created a female subculture and a strong female community
 - prepared the way for a woman's movement.
 - strong sense of group identity is a prerequisite for any social movement.
- Using Liberty Rhetoric
 - Lowell labor reform women first GROUP to assert women's rights
 - to economic independence,
 - political freedom,
 - equality, and
 - individual autonomy