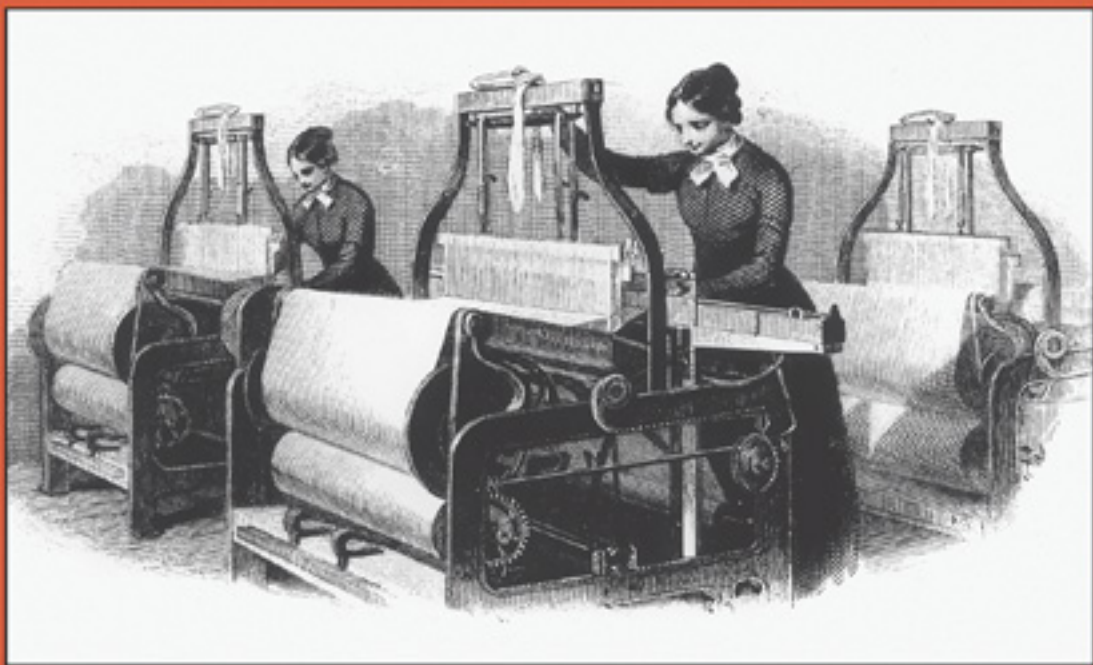


History
UNFOLDING

LOWELL

THE FACTORY COMES TO AMERICA



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Introduction

The Lowell Experiment

The Industrial Revolution began in England and the wealth and power it conferred on that nation soon became apparent to the rest of the world. But so, too, did the less attractive features of industrialism. In England's new factory towns, entire families—men, women and children—worked long hours to support themselves (barely) in cramped, rat-infested slum quarters. It's possible that the rural conditions they had left behind were as bad as, or worse than, what they encountered in their factories and slums. Nevertheless, industrialism clearly meant new forms of abject poverty as well as a general rise in national wealth and comfort.

In America, Lowell's founders hoped to design a city that would avoid the negative features of industrialism. The model industrial community they established was to be based on the labor of eager New Englanders, mainly female, hoping to supplement the incomes of their rural families through stints of one or more years in the mills of Lowell. For a time, the ideal seemed close to the reality. But within two or three decades, the dream faded. Soon, a more typical factory town took its place. Still, for a time, Lowell combined state-of-the-art technology with social planning to become a major center of the early Industrial Revolution in America.

The twelve visual displays in this booklet focus on some of the key aspects of the Lowell experiment. The images are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

Factories and Textiles

The illustrations here focus on the partial mechanization of the American textile industry in the years before Lowell was founded, and they touch on the key role of textiles in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

The Factories of Lowell

Inspired by Francis Cabot Lowell, the Boston Associates established an entire system of mills, canals, waterwheels, turbines, and other machinery to bring all key phases of textile production under one roof. The images here focus on central elements of the technology of this system.

Lowell: The Ideal

Lowell was to be a model community, attending to the minds and souls of its workers, along with their physical well-being. The images for this lesson illustrate the idea of a factory community fully harmonized with a largely rural and politically free republican society.

Lowell: The Changing Reality

The ideal of Lowell did not survive for long. Labor strife appeared as early as the 1830s. By the 1840s, stiff competition pushed mill owners to lower wages and accelerate production. This, in turn, convinced many of the Yankee female workers to leave. French Canadian, Irish, Greek and other immigrant groups took their places as Lowell changed into a more typical 19th century factory town.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will deepen their understanding of the impact of industrial change on America in the 1800s.
 2. Students will better understand conditions in the textile industry in America just before the Lowell factories were built in the 1820s.
-

Factories and Textiles

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. Use the questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

As one historian put it, “Whoever says Industrial Revolution says cotton.” And it is true that by the late 1700s, a fully mechanized British cotton textile industry was a central driving force in the industrial transformation of Great Britain. But the British kept their industrial secrets to themselves, and only slowly did this knowledge slip from their control. In 1789, however, Samuel Slater arrived in America in disguise after memorizing the details needed to construct a spinning frame. By 1793, he had started the first permanent American cotton textile mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. His mill, shown here, was limited to spinning yarn. Weaving was still done mainly in private homes, often by farm families seeking extra income. Textile manufacturers would supply domestic weavers with yarn and later return to pick up finished cloth. As the top illustration suggests, these domestic workers used simple tools and worked without direct supervision by the owner.

Illustration 2

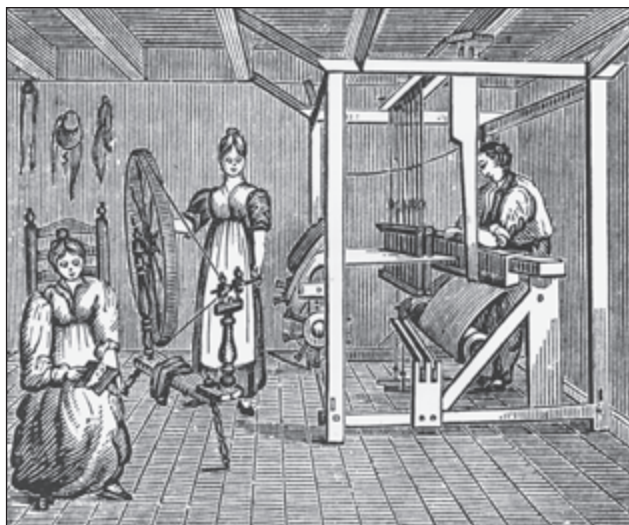
Slater’s mill was one early example of industrial development. This illustration captures the full range of the technological changes that altered America in the early 1800s. Steamboats, trains, and improved roads are all shown. Together, they made it easier to deliver raw materials to factories, such as those in the drawing. This encouraged the use of expensive power-driven machinery by giving businesses access to distant markets that could buy their rapidly increasing output. The factories shown here were located in Wheeling, West Virginia, where the Ohio River connected to rail lines from the East. Cities began to grow rapidly in similar locations.

Illustration 3

In the past, Americans had produced much of their clothing at home. Factory production made huge amounts of textiles available at much lower prices. As a result, a growing number of Americans found it easier and cheaper to buy clothing in stores. By the middle of the 1800s, the nation was linked by roads, rails and canals, and factories such as the Lowell mills could sell their goods all across the country. In this new nationwide market, a business often had to advertise to become known in any given area. Thus, as a middle class with money to spend grew, so too did the economics of fashion and advertising.

Lesson 1—Factories and Textiles

Illustration 1



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

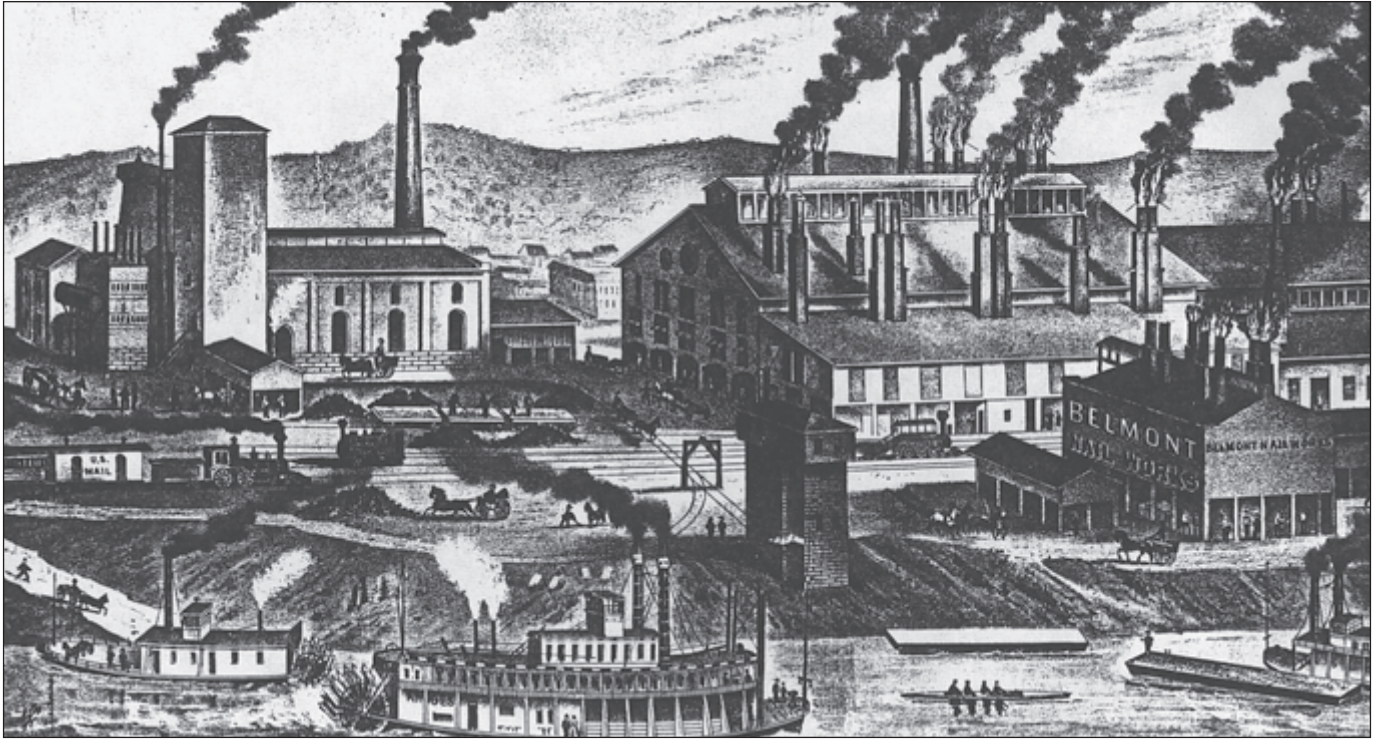
Discussing the Illustrations

1. Until the 1790s, all phases of textile production were done in the home or in very small shops. The top drawing here, for example, shows the processes of carding, spinning, and weaving being done in a single domestic workshop. Can you explain briefly each of these phases of textile manufacture?
2. The lower illustration is a textile mill built in the 1790s. It was the first in America to make use of Samuel Slater's new spinning machinery. Slater had memorized the design for this machinery in another country and then left in disguise. Can you explain what that country was and why Slater had to leave it in disguise?
3. Small, rural mills like Slater's spread rapidly in the first two decades of the 19th century. But the weaving of the yarn still had to be done mainly by workers in their rural homes near the mill. Which type of work—in the mill or in the home—would you have preferred? Why?

Follow-up Activities

1. Read more about the life and times of Samuel Slater. Find out as much as you can about the spinning frame he recreated in America. Create a diagram of your own showing this machine in as much detail as you think you will be able to explain. Prepare a brief talk to the class on Slater. Use your diagram to help explain the impact he had on American history.
2. **Small-group activity:** One member of your group should play the part of the owner who supplies raw materials to domestic workers and later picks up their finished cloth. Have the other group members portray the workers or other family members. Create a play around the theme of the supplier announcing plans to move the entire production of his cloth into a single factory. Imagine what the owner might say to his workers, how they might react to him and what they might say to one another. Act out your brief play in front of the class.

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This drawing shows the “Belmont Nail Works” in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1877. The drawing includes many of the key changes that helped industrialize America. How many of these changes or features of industrialization can you identify in the drawing?
2. The drawing suggests that by 1877, Wheeling was a sizable commercial and industrial center. From what you know about its location, the region and natural resources near it, why do you think Wheeling had developed this way by the mid-1800s?
3. Why do you think the owners of the Belmont Nail Works decided to locate their particular business where you see it?
4. What other types of businesses do you think might have decided to set up factories in Wheeling in the middle decades of the 19th Century? Why?

Follow-up Activities

1. Transportation inventions and improvements were a very important part of the Industrial Revolution in America. Prepare a brief talk to the class explaining why. To prepare for your talk, read more about roads, canals, and railroads in America from around 1810 to 1850. Create a simple map showing Wheeling, West Virginia, and various transportation routes in the surrounding region. Use this map and the above illustration as a part of your talk.
2. **Small-group activity:** Your group is made up of the owners of the “Belmont Nail Works” shown in the above illustration. The year is 1880. You have all met to discuss a proposal to relocate from Wheeling. In your group, discuss why you might want to move to a different city. Suggest other locations for your business and provide reasons for those choices. As a group, make a final decision about relocating. Prepare a brief report on your decision and present this report to your classmates as if they were shareholders in your business.

Lesson 1—Factories and Textiles

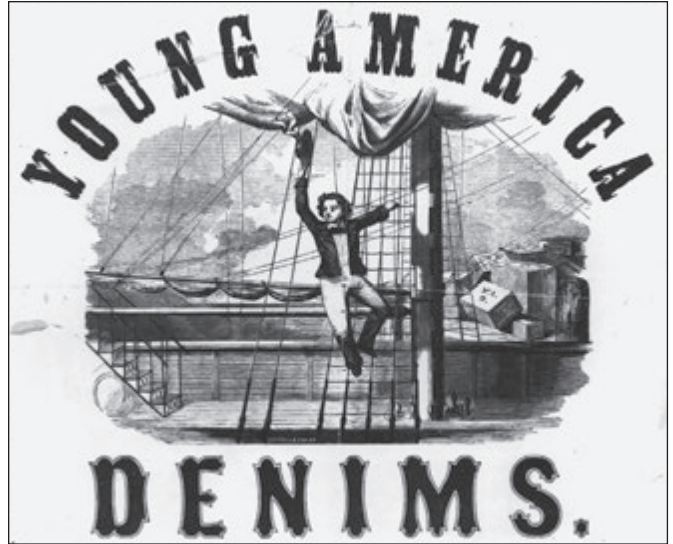
Illustration 3



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The industrialization of America led to many social and economic changes, including the rise to importance of advertising aimed at a mass audience. What is meant by this phrase, “a mass audience”?
2. Early in our history, Americans made much of their own clothing at home. But with factories, canals, and railroads, it became much easier for large textile businesses to make clothing and sell it far and wide. Can you explain why? Why might these changes lead textile businesses to feel a need to advertise more?
3. From the start of the industrial age, as these images suggest, clothing was a key type of item advertised in newspapers and magazines. Why do you think clothing ads have always been so common?
4. With advertising came fashion and style. What style differences from today do these mid-1800s ads suggest? What, if anything, do they suggest about social life, values, the views men and women had of each other, etc.?



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Follow-up Activities

1. The cotton textile industry was perhaps the single-most important industry during the early Industrial Revolution that began in Great Britain in the 1700s and later spread to the U.S. and many other lands. Develop your own definition for the term “Industrial Revolution.” Read more about the textile industry’s role in the Industrial Revolution. Based on what you learn, explain why textiles, in particular, were such a key product in the switch from small-scale craft production to machine and factory production in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Present your views in a brief talk in class.
2. In the 1800s, as a wealthier urban middle class grew, and as factories spread, demand for store-bought clothing rose rapidly. Find clothing ads from the 1800s and choose around ten for a bulletin board display called “Clothes and Consumers in the 1800s.” Select ads that not only show key styles, but also those that show how these styles created consumer images of who they were or what kind of people they were.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand how Lowell was founded and why it was an ideal location for a key industrial center.
 2. Students will better understand the nature of mechanized textile production in the mid-1800s.
-

The Factories of Lowell

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. Use the questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

In 1810, Francis Cabot Lowell, a member of Boston's wealthy merchant class, visited textile mills in England. Like Samuel Slater, he came away with detailed memories of the design of certain machines. In this case, he was able to recreate a working power loom in America. It became the last piece of the technological puzzle and enabled Lowell and his "Boston Associates" to build a fully mechanized cotton textile mill in Waltham, Massachusetts. After Lowell's death, the Boston Associates found a better site at East Chelmsford, in northern Massachusetts, along the Merrimack River. It was there that a vast expansion of the textile industry would take place. This industrial center was later renamed Lowell. Shown here are Francis C. Lowell and one of the mills in the town named for him.

Illustration 2

The 1841 map here shows the Merrimack River circling the northern edge of Lowell, with the Pawtucket Falls on the left and the Concord River flowing into the Merrimack on right. Between the falls and the Concord, the Merrimack drops a full 30 feet. A canal skirting the falls was already in place when the Boston Associates arrived. Both the falls and the canal were key to making this site so valuable because the textile mills were originally powered entirely by falling water. Several additional canals were soon connected to the original, and they carried water to all of Lowell's mills where it was used to power waterwheels and turbines before continuing on its way downstream.

Illustration 3

These drawings illustrate two key phases of textile production in the Lowell mills. In the scene on top, a female worker tends a vast array of bobbins onto which cotton is being spun. One male worker appears to be fixing one of the flywheels connected by belts to overhead shafts. These shafts were in turn connected to a central drive shaft turned by the flowing water on which the mills depended. Spinning was one phase Slater had already brought into his factory in the 1790s. But the other drawing here shows a group of women weaving cotton yarn into cloth using power looms. Earlier U.S. mills did not have these machines. In both scenes, the machinery is operated directly by female workers. Men are seen performing mainly a supervisory role.

Lesson 2—The Factories of Lowell

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the
Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. In the upper right is Francis Cabot Lowell. Like Samuel Slater, Lowell memorized details of a key British textile machine, a power loom. He did this on a trip to England in 1810. It was his ability to build this machine that fully industrialized textile manufacturing in America. Can you explain?
2. Francis C. Lowell died in 1817. The town of Lowell was named after him when his business partners decided to set up their mills there. One such mill is shown here. From this photo, can you guess what some key differences might be between the Lowell mills and earlier spinning mills like Samuel Slater's?
3. Lowell, Massachusetts, was founded in the early 1820s. The mills built there differed from Slater's mill and others in America at the time because all key phases of textile production were performed in the factory using machines instead of hand tools. As a result, far more cloth could be produced at a much lower cost. Why do you think that was so?

Follow-up Activities

1. Francis Cabot Lowell died before the town bearing his name became a great manufacturing center. Why was this town named after him? To answer this, read more about both Lowell and Samuel Slater. Then prepare a timeline on key technical developments in the textile industry in America from 1780 to 1830. Emphasize what Slater and Lowell did, and add any other facts and dates that seem important to you. Display your timeline on a bulletin board and illustrate it with any drawings or photos you can find.
2. **Small-group activity:** A brief history called *Lowell: The Story of an Industrial City* was prepared for the Lowell National Historical Park by the National Park Service. Read and discuss this book in your group. Then have each member pretend to be one of following: a female worker in the 1820s; a mill owner in the 1860s; an immigrant worker in the 1890s; a union organizer in 1912; and a Lowell shopkeeper in 1920. As these people, write essays to appear in the local newspaper along with the above photo of the Lowell mills.

Lesson 2—The Factories of Lowell

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the
Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

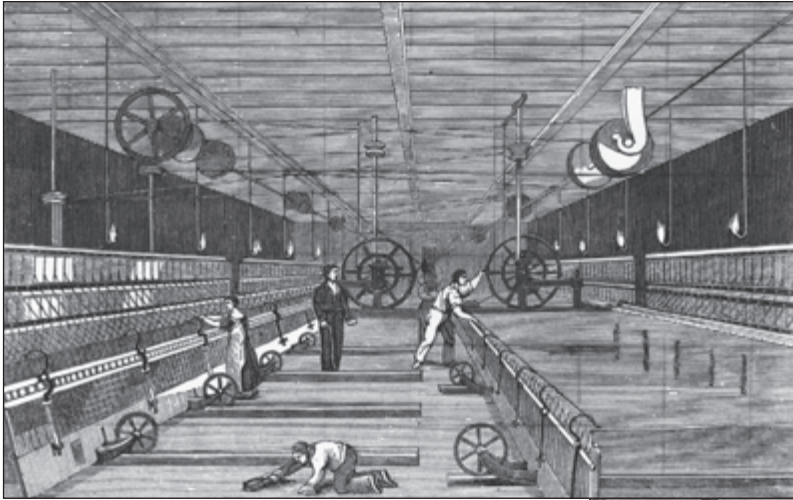
1. This 1841 map shows Lowell with the Merrimack River circling it to the north. To the left of the river are the Pawtucket Falls. The river drops more than 30 feet from these falls to the point where the Concord River joins the Merrimack. From what you know of textile production in the mid-1800s, can you explain why this steep drop made Lowell so appealing to the mill owners who founded the city?
2. The map shows a canal skirting Pawtucket Falls south of Lowell and joining the Concord River where it empties into the Merrimack. This canal was already there when the mill owners arrived and made this site even more appealing to them. From the map and the photo, can you guess why?
3. The Merrimack flows down from New Hampshire. Below Pawtucket Falls it is navigable to the Atlantic Ocean. Another canal already in place by 1820 linked the Merrimack with Boston, Massachusetts. All of these factors also made this site appealing to the mill owners. Why do you suppose that is so?

Follow-up Activities

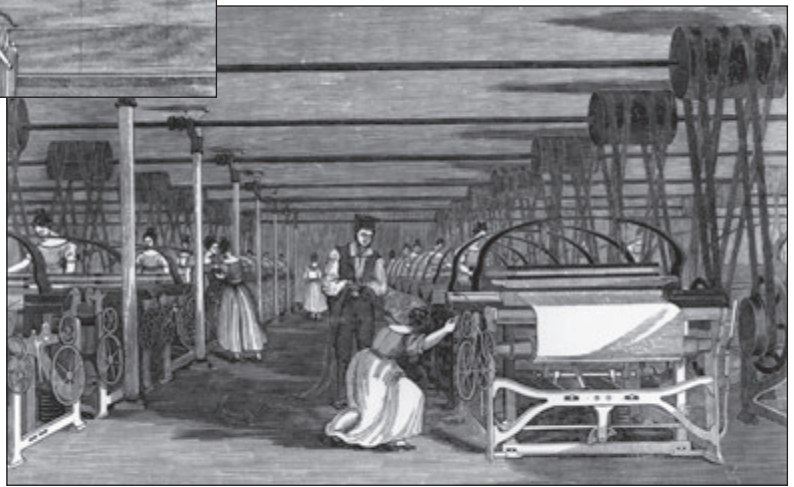
1. **Small-group activity:** This activity is for a small group of artists. Create a mural showing several scenes of the Pawtucket Falls located just above the Lowell mills on the Merrimack River. Learn more about Lowell and its history in order to include the following scenes of the falls in your mural: 1) In the 1600s when the Pennacook Indians lived nearby. 2) Around 1810, after loggers built the first canal. 3) In the 1830s, after the Lowell mills were built. 4) When Lowell was a mature industrial town in the late 1890s or early 1900s. 5) Lowell and the falls today. The Lowell National Historical Park or the American Textile History Museum should be able to help you.
2. Learn more about the wooden waterwheels first used to turn the central shafts in the Lowell textile mills. Also learn about the turbines that later did the same job. Create diagrams of these two techniques for using water power to run mill machinery. Also show the iron bevel gears and belts used to transfer power to mill shafts and textile machines in the mills.

Lesson 2—The Factories of Lowell

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. These scenes show two phases in the production of cotton cloth in a textile mill in the mid-1800s. Five key phases in textile production are: picking, carding, spinning, warping and weaving. Briefly explain as many of these steps as you can.
2. In both of these illustrations, a large number of flywheels are connected by belts to shafts hanging from the ceiling. Can you explain the purpose of all these wheels, shafts, and belts?
3. In the illustrations, fairly large machines appear to be tended in some cases by only a few workers. Why would the mill owners have been pleased about this?
4. From the illustrations, what, if anything, can you conclude about the different roles of male and female workers in the mills? What do you think accounts for this difference in roles?

Follow-up Activities

1. In the 1700s in England, the manufacturing of textiles changed to machine production. This happened as a result of a series of inventions or improvements in tools. At first, new weaving devices led to a demand for better spinning machinery. Then the new spinning machinery encouraged further improvements in weaving. As a group, prepare a report illustrating this pattern of development. Do this by describing the contributions of the following: John Kay, James Hargreaves, Richard Arkwright, Samuel Crompton and Edmund Cartwright.
2. **Small-group activity:** One of last steps in textile manufacturing to be fully mechanized was weaving. Read more about how looms work. Create a clear diagram showing the working parts of a typical hand loom. Then read about the development of power looms. Using your diagram, make a brief presentation to the class on weaving and try to explain why it was so much harder to mechanize than carding and spinning.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand the ideals that motivated the mill owners in planning the Lowell community.
2. Students will debate the question of how realistic these ideal hopes for Lowell were.

Lowell: The Ideal

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. Use the questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Francis Lowell's partners, the "Boston Associates," had a dream, not just a business plan. In founding Lowell, they hoped to avoid the evils of Great Britain's new factory towns. In such towns, entire families of the poor worked long hours in unhealthy factories and lived in squalor in even less healthy slum districts. Crime and disease were rampant. The Boston Associates wanted Lowell to be different. They designed a planned community in which a largely female labor force would live and work in healthy conditions, protected by owners concerned for both their spiritual and physical well-being. In Lowell, they hoped to prove that the new industrial order could be adapted to America's democratic, small town virtues. This illustration captures that idealized vision of Lowell.

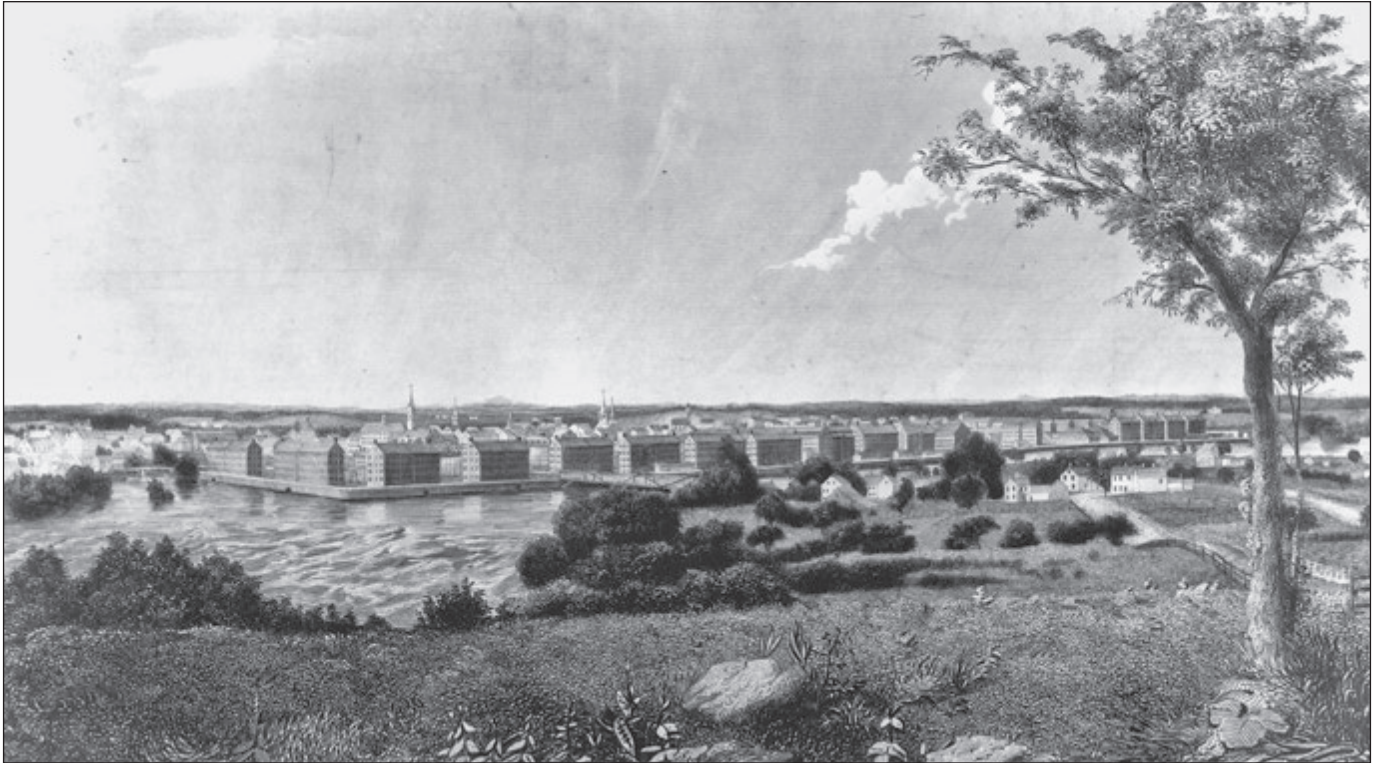
Illustration 2

Lowell's first mills started operating in the 1820s. Into the 1840s, its workforce was largely made up of young women from surrounding New England farms. They came to Lowell to work, usually for a year or so at a time, to add to the family income and get a taste of life outside their small communities. In Lowell, they were supervised in dormitories such as the one shown here. Strict rules protected them and confined them. Even church attendance was sometimes required. The women often worked 14-hour days, but were usually accustomed to long workdays from their farming backgrounds. For the first few decades, these Yankee women flocked to Lowell in search of a better life. The drawing of two weavers does not depict the reality of the mills—hot, humid and noisy. It suggests more graceful and feminine working conditions, capturing the ideal that employees and owners worked toward but never achieved.

Illustration 3

The life of the mind was not neglected at Lowell. The Lowell Offering was a literary magazine that published articles, stories and poems written by factory girls. In addition, evening lectures, plays, and other cultural events were provided. Newspapers, magazines and books were available through lending libraries. Literary circles, Sunday schools and other church activities, as well as Lowell's shops and stores, provided these rural women much wider cultural horizons and a real sense of independence.

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This engraving of Lowell was made around 1850. It shows Lowell's so-called "mile of mills" as seen from across the Merrimack River. Overall, what impression of Lowell do you get from this illustration? Why?
2. Lowell's founders were wealthy Boston businessmen who, along with Francis C. Lowell, had run an earlier cotton mill in Waltham, Massachusetts. They set up the town of Lowell to take advantage of its falls and faster-moving water but also wanted to make Lowell an ideal industrial community, one that could avoid the evils of industrialism in Great Britain. From what you know of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain during this period, what bad conditions do you think these men wanted to avoid?
3. Do you think this painting portrays Lowell in a way that would have pleased these businessmen? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

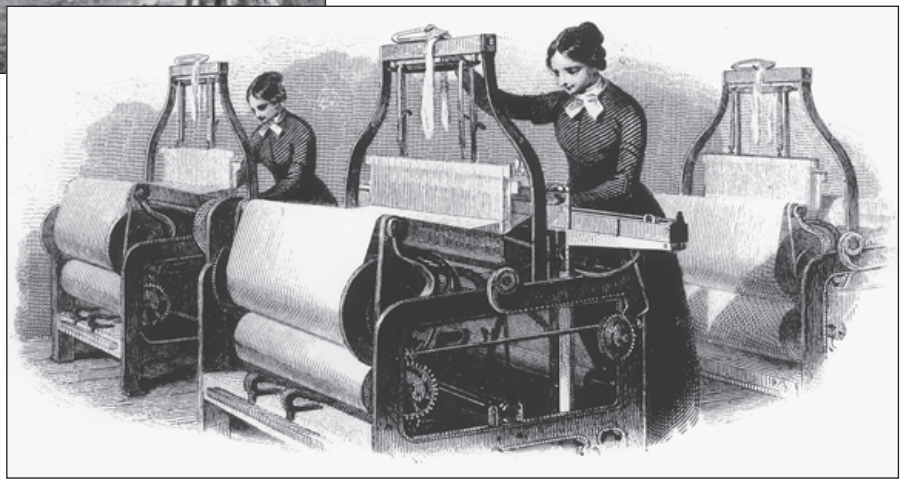
1. Ask your teacher or librarian to help you find books with paintings of industrial towns or factories in the early- and mid-1800s. Make photocopies of several paintings, and use them in a brief class discussion about the way various artists portrayed factory and city life in the early years of the Industrial Revolution. As a class, try to group the drawings or paintings into categories such as "realistic," "romantic," "hostile to industrialization" and "favorable to industrialization."
2. Many people might say that the above painting offers an idealized, or romantic, view of an industrial city in the 1840s. How do Americans view their cities today? Look through recent magazines or books on American life today, and find five views of cities that you think are romantic or idealized and five that are not. Make copies and pass them around for the rest of the class to see. Explain why you grouped them as you did, and give others a chance to explain how they see the illustrations.

Lesson 3—Lowell: The Ideal

Illustration 2



American Textile History Museum,
Lowell, MA



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Discussing the Illustrations

1. At first, the Lowell mill owners hired mainly young, single women from nearby rural areas. Why do you suppose they saw these women as the best workers to recruit for the Lowell mills?
2. The owners built and managed dormitories like the one shown here, hoping to provide a safe and healthy living environment for the young female workers. The dorms had strict rules for the mill girls to live by. Why do you suppose the owners felt it was necessary to manage the lives the mill workers in this way?
3. Right from the start, the mill girls of Lowell worked long, hard days—often laboring for 14 hours from sunup to sundown. Yet for the first few decades, many New England women flocked to the mills eagerly seeking work there. Why do you suppose these female workers were so attracted to Lowell?
4. What view of the life of the average mill girl do you get from these two illustrations? How realistic do you think this view is? Explain your answer.

Follow-up Activities

1. Learn more about the lives of the young women who made up most of the workforce at Lowell in the first phase of the city's industrial history. Based on what you learn, pretend you are a female weaver at Lowell, and write a diary entry for a typical day during your stay. In the entry, comment on the drawing of the two women at their looms as if you had just seen it in a magazine earlier that day.
2. **Small-group activity:** Each group member should pretend to be a youngster growing up on a farm in a rural New England village in the 1830s. Someone has just shown your group these two illustrations and described job openings at the mills in Lowell. That night, you each write a letter to a friend about what you have heard, listing the pros and cons of living and working in Lowell. Use copies of the two illustrations and these letters in a small bulletin board display about Lowell.

Lesson 3—Lowell: The Ideal Illustration 3



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Discussing the Illustration

1. In the evening, lectures, plays, literary groups and other activities were provided for the mill girls. Some of them wrote for locally published magazines, the most famous of which was the *Lowell Offering*, shown here. What kinds of articles, stories or poems would you expect the mill girls to have contributed to the *Lowell Offering*. Why?
2. The illustration on the cover of the *Lowell Offering* presents the ideal of life at Lowell as the mill owners hoped it would be. Study the cover closely. Think about the way the girl is drawn, her dress, her posture, the book she holds, the mill behind her, the church steeple and the rich foliage surrounding the scene. How do each of these elements add to the ideal image of Lowell conveyed by this illustration?
3. The *Lowell Offering* sometimes included articles dealing with the problems of life in the Lowell mills. Does this fact surprise you? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Have your teacher or librarian help you locate a copy of *The Lowell Mill Girls: Life in the Factory*, edited by Joanne Weisman Dietch (Discovery Enterprises, 1998). Two items in this book are “A Letter to Hannah,” by Shirley Gifford (pp. 24–32), and “The Evils of Factory Life” by “Julianna” (pp. 19–21). Create a one-act play in which Shirley Gifford, Julianna, and several other female workers discuss the above magazine cover of the *Lowell Offering* and decide what they think of it. Act your play out and discuss it with the rest of the class.
2. Also included in *The Lowell Mill Girls: Life in the Factory* are articles entitled “The Spirit of Discontent,” by “Almira” (pp. 33–36), and “Extract from Factory Tracts Number 2, by someone identified only as “an operative” (pp. 43–45). Read both articles, and pretend you are the operative and write a letter to Almira. Next, pretend you are Almira, and write a letter replying to your first letter. In class, explain the articles and share your two letters.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand how the workforce and conditions of labor in the Lowell mills changed over time during the 1800s.
2. Students will assess the overall importance of Lowell to the industrial history of the nation.

Lowell:

The Changing Reality

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. Use the questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

By 1850, Lowell produced a fifth of the nation's cotton cloth, and it was the largest industrial center in the United States. In addition, the Lowell Machine Shop sold textile manufacturing equipment, machine tools and locomotives all over the nation. But the dream of Lowell as a model industrial community was fading. As the mills began to face stronger competition, they had to lower their prices and made up for their losses by lowering wages. Many of the New England female workers were driven away and replaced by a diverse group of European immigrants. This drawing shows immigrant laborers on their way to work at Lowell, and as it suggests, instead of single females, entire families often worked and divided up much lower wages.

Illustration 2

This mid-century drawing of a female worker and her supervisor conveys a less idealized view of factory life in America. As wages dropped, labor protests in Lowell increased. In the 1830s and '40s, the largely female workforce mounted spirited protests against long hours and poor working conditions. As efforts to improve working conditions grew, another aspect of Lowell's reality worked against its idealistic concept. Before the 1860s, Lowell depended mainly on cotton produced by southern slave plantations, and one of the mill's key products was "negro cloth," a cheap cloth that slave owners often bought for their slaves. These connections led one senator to speak out against the unsavory relationship between the "lords of the lash and the lords of the loom."

Illustration 3

By 1900, Lowell's factories were filled with Irish, French Canadian, Italian, Greek, Polish and Portuguese immigrant workers. The old dormitories were sold off or turned into crowded tenements, with each immigrant group occupying its own section of the city. At first, the competition for jobs from new immigrants quieted the labor protests of the early New England female workers. But in time, both older and newer workers joined in even stronger protests, including two major strikes in 1903 and 1912. By the 1920s, these labor troubles, along with competition from new mills in the South, were forcing Lowell's mills to close. By the 1930s, Lowell's days as an industrial powerhouse were over.

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This Winslow Homer illustration was done in 1868. It shows people on the way to work at Lowell. In the background you can see Lowell's "mile of mills" along the Merrimack River. What overall impression of Lowell, its mills, and its workers does the illustration convey to you? Why?
2. By the 1840s, Lowell's mills were facing stronger competition from a growing number of mills in other parts of the country. This led the Lowell owners to cut wages, angering the New England mill girls who made up much of the workforce. Why could increased competition lead the Lowell mill owners to lower wages?
3. By the 1850s, fewer New England farm girls were taking jobs at Lowell. From this illustration, and from what you already know about Lowell's history, can you explain what groups were taking their place? Why do you think these groups were willing to accept the lower wages that the New Englanders would not?

Follow-up Activities

1. One of the most famous of Lowell's early female workers was Lucy Larcom. She contributed to the *Lowell Offering* and later went on to become a fairly well-known writer and poet. Ask your teacher or librarian to help you locate a copy of Lucy Larcom's *A New England Girlhood, Outlined from Memory* (Cornerhouse Publishers, 1977). Read the book and prepare a brief report to present to the rest of the class.
2. Read the book mentioned above for Activity 1. In reading it, try to imagine what Lucy Larcom might have thought had she seen the Winslow Homer illustration shown here. Pretend you are Lucy Larcom, imitate her style, and write your own letter to a former Lowell co-worker about the painting. Share your letter with the rest of the class and discuss it. (But be sure to make it clear that you wrote the letter, not Lucy!)

Lesson 4—Lowell: The Changing Reality

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Neither of these illustrations is of the Lowell mills. Yet both images call attention to some harsh truths. In one illustration, a supervisor is scolding a female factory worker. How does this image of factory life differ from the illustrations for Lesson 3 in this booklet?
2. As competition put pressure on the mill owners, the conditions of work for Lowell's female employees became harder. What is meant here by "conditions of work," and why might increased outside competition have led owners to make those conditions harder?
3. In the years before the Civil War, Lowell's cotton mills depended on another region of the country and another kind of labor altogether. Use the second illustration to explain?
4. Do you think the Lowell mills were to blame in any way for the evils of slavery in the South? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. Compare the drawing of the female worker and her supervisor with the illustration of the two women at their looms on page 14 of this booklet and with the cover page from the Lowell Offering on page 15. Each of these three images portrays a very different idea of factory life for the female workers in the 1800s. Write an essay about these images and explain how useful they are in trying to learn the truth about life at Lowell and about the impact of the Industrial Revolution on ordinary factory workers.
2. In years before Civil War, Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner talked of an "unholy alliance . . . between the lords of the lash and lords of the loom." Learn more about Charles Sumner. If you can, find the full quotation of which these comments are a part. Give a brief talk to the class about Sumner, his words as quoted here, and their meaning for the mill workers and owners in Lowell. Use the illustrations above to help you clarify Sumner's point in your presentation.

Lesson 4—Lowell: The Changing Reality

Illustration 3



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Discussing the Illustration

1. This photograph shows an immigrant woman at work in Lowell's mills in 1912 or 1913. By then, life in the mills had changed in a great many ways since the mid-1800s. What do you think the biggest changes would have been by 1912?
2. Compare this photograph to some of the other illustrations on Lowell in this set. Which illustration seems most realistic? Which tells you the most about what life for Lowell's workers was really like? Explain your answers.
3. What, if anything, can you tell from the photo about this woman and her thoughts and feelings about life in the mills? Around 1912, a huge and sometimes violent strike by the Lowell mill workers took place. In what way, if any, does this fact affect your reaction to this photograph?
4. In general, what do you think is most important about the story of Lowell? That is, why do you think it is a valuable story for Americans to learn about?

Follow-up Activities

1. Read more about the big strikes in nearby Lawrence, Massachusetts, and at Lowell in 1912. Pretend you are the above worker at Lowell or a member of her family. As this person, write an account of the Lowell strike in the form of a letter to a friend.
2. What can you learn about Lowell on the Web? A good place to start is with the Lowell National Historical Park website at:

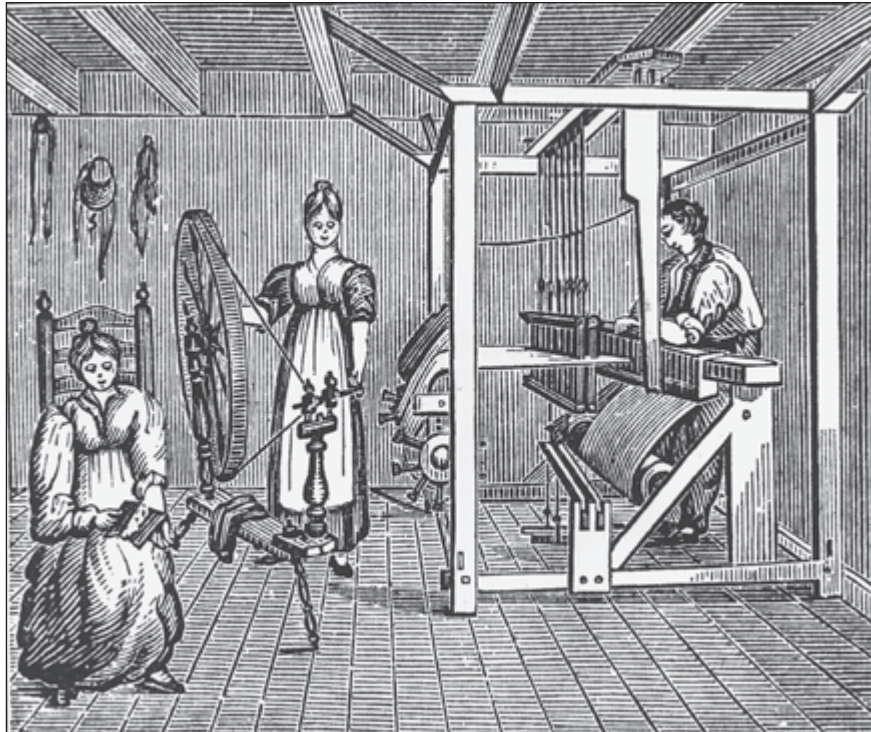
<http://www.nps.gov/lowe/home.htm>

After exploring this website, see what links it contains to other interesting sites. Prepare a brief report to the class describing some of the interesting features of the Lowell National Historical Park site and any others you find. Plan a tour of Web resources on Lowell and conduct this tour with other interested students looking on.

Image Close-ups

Factories and Textiles

Illustration 1



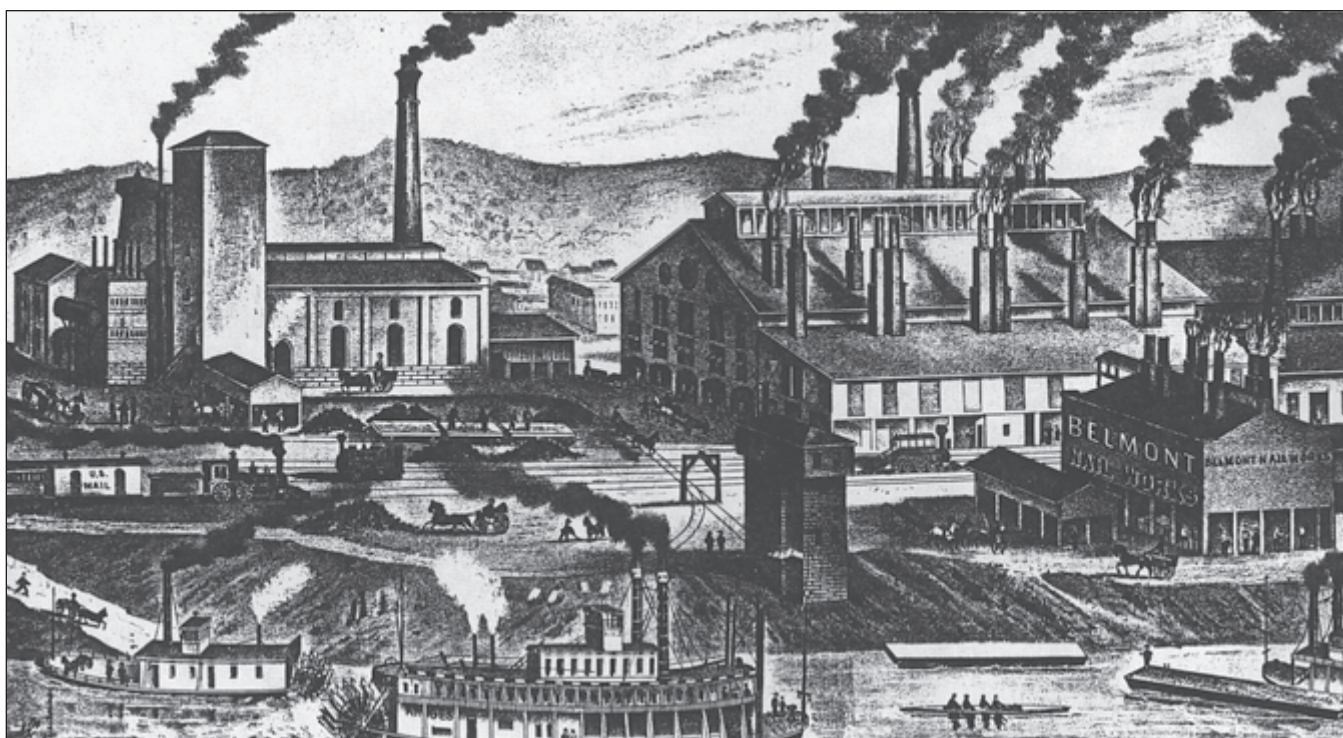
American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Factories and Textiles

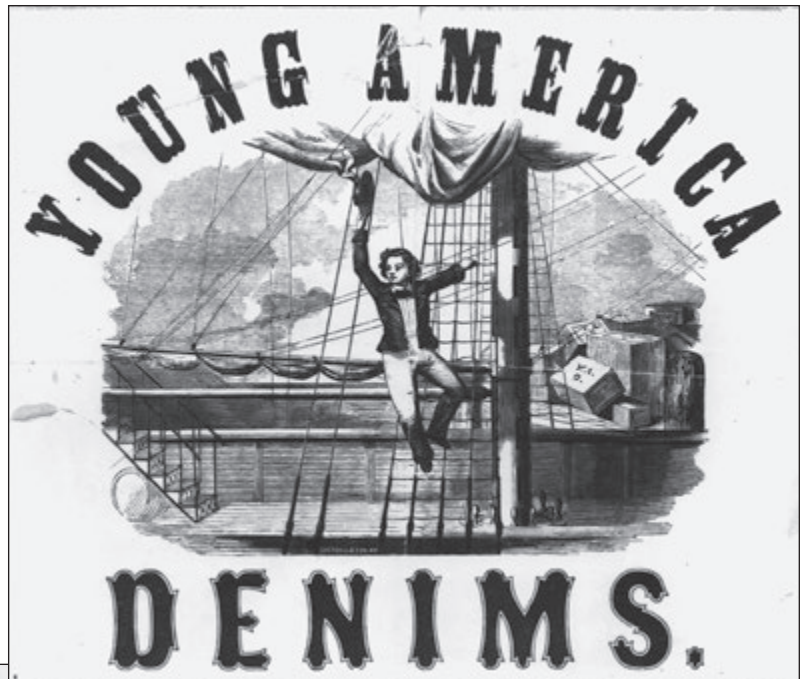
Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Factories and Textiles

Illustration 3



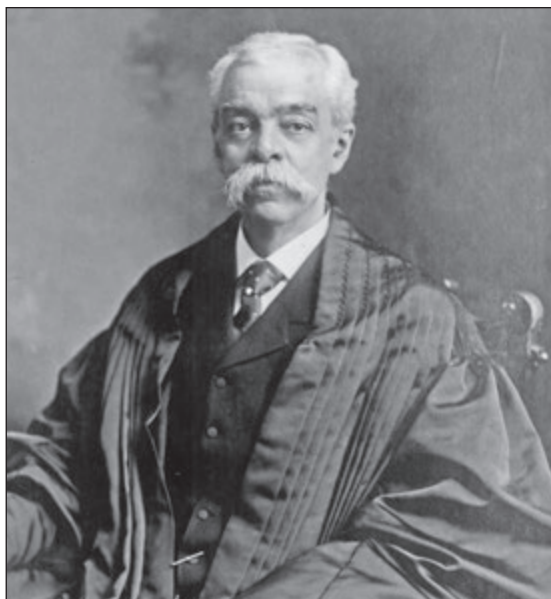
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

The Factories of Lowell

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



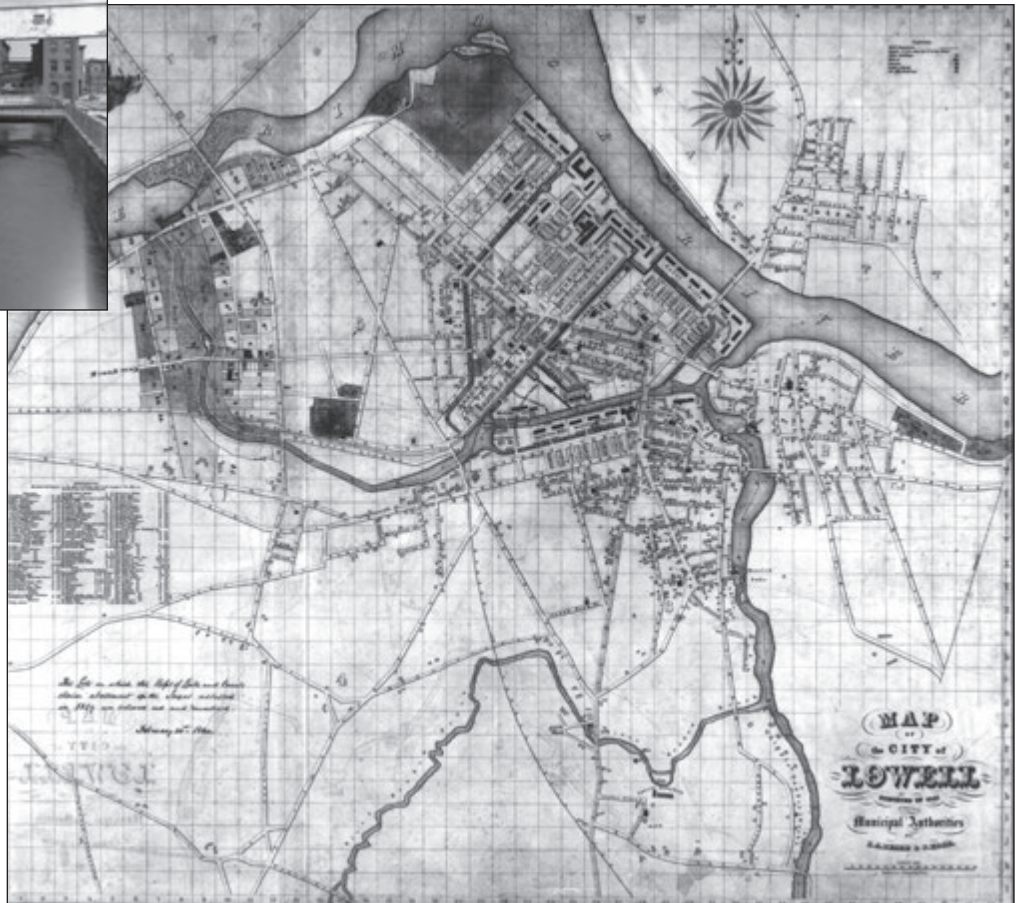
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Factories of Lowell

Illustration 2



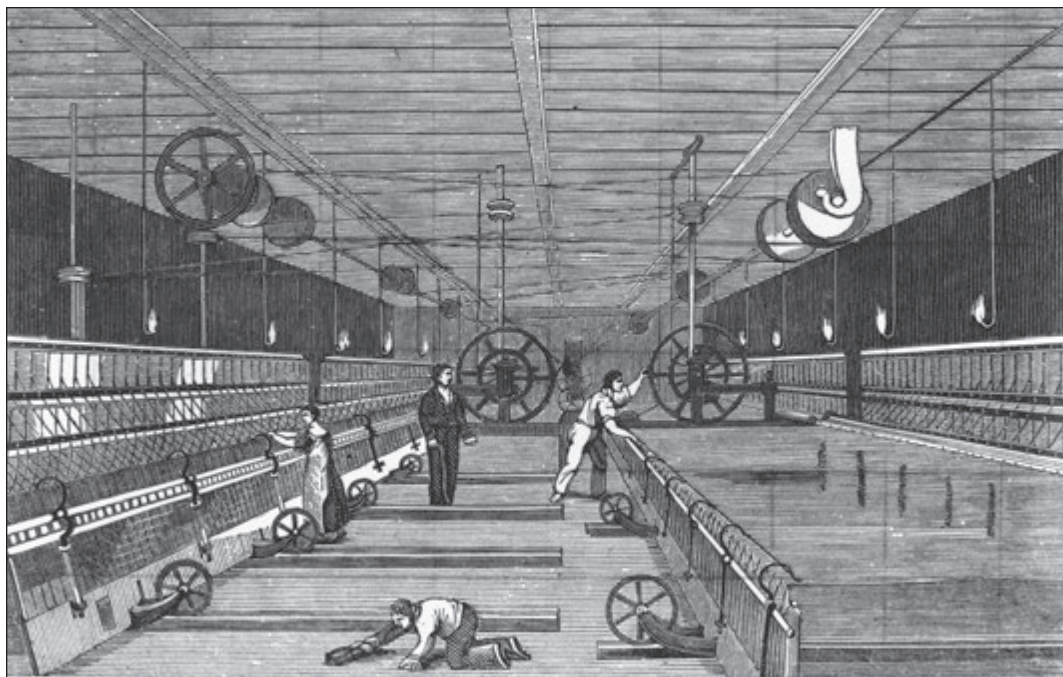
Courtesy of the
Library of Congress



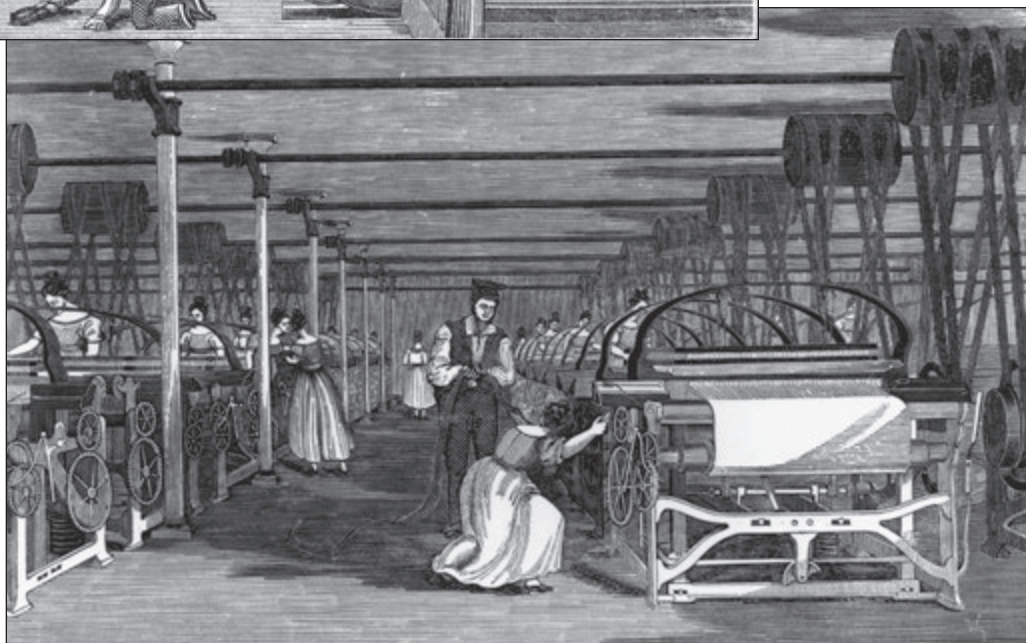
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Factories of Lowell

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the
Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Lowell: The Ideal

Illustration 1

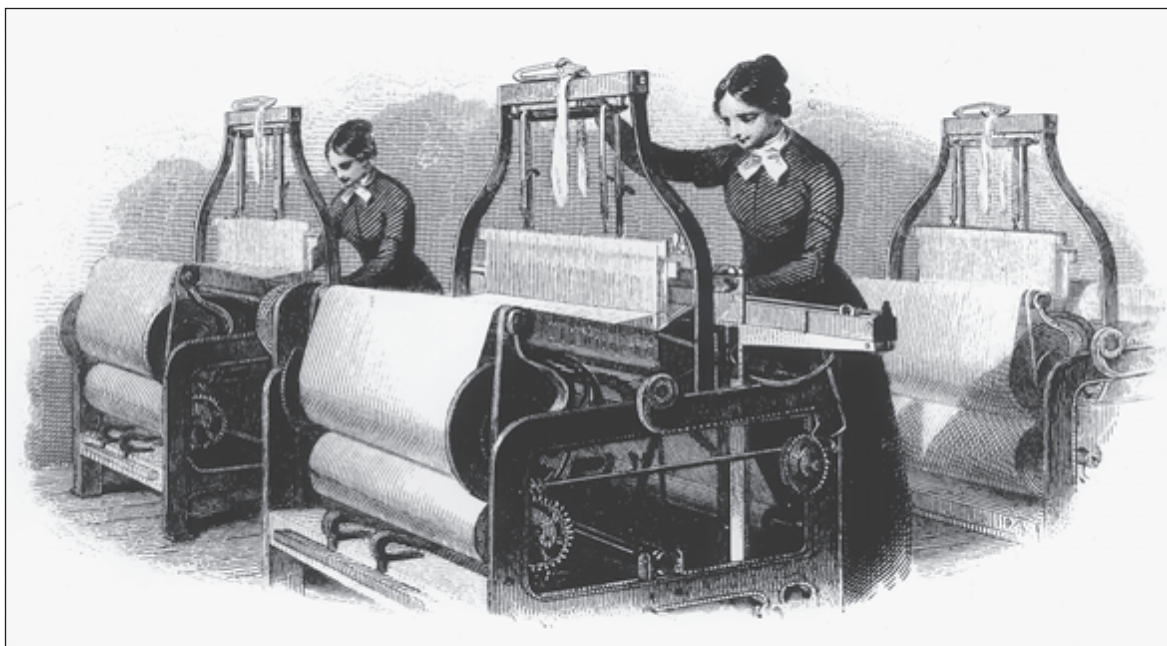


Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Lowell: The Ideal Illustration 2



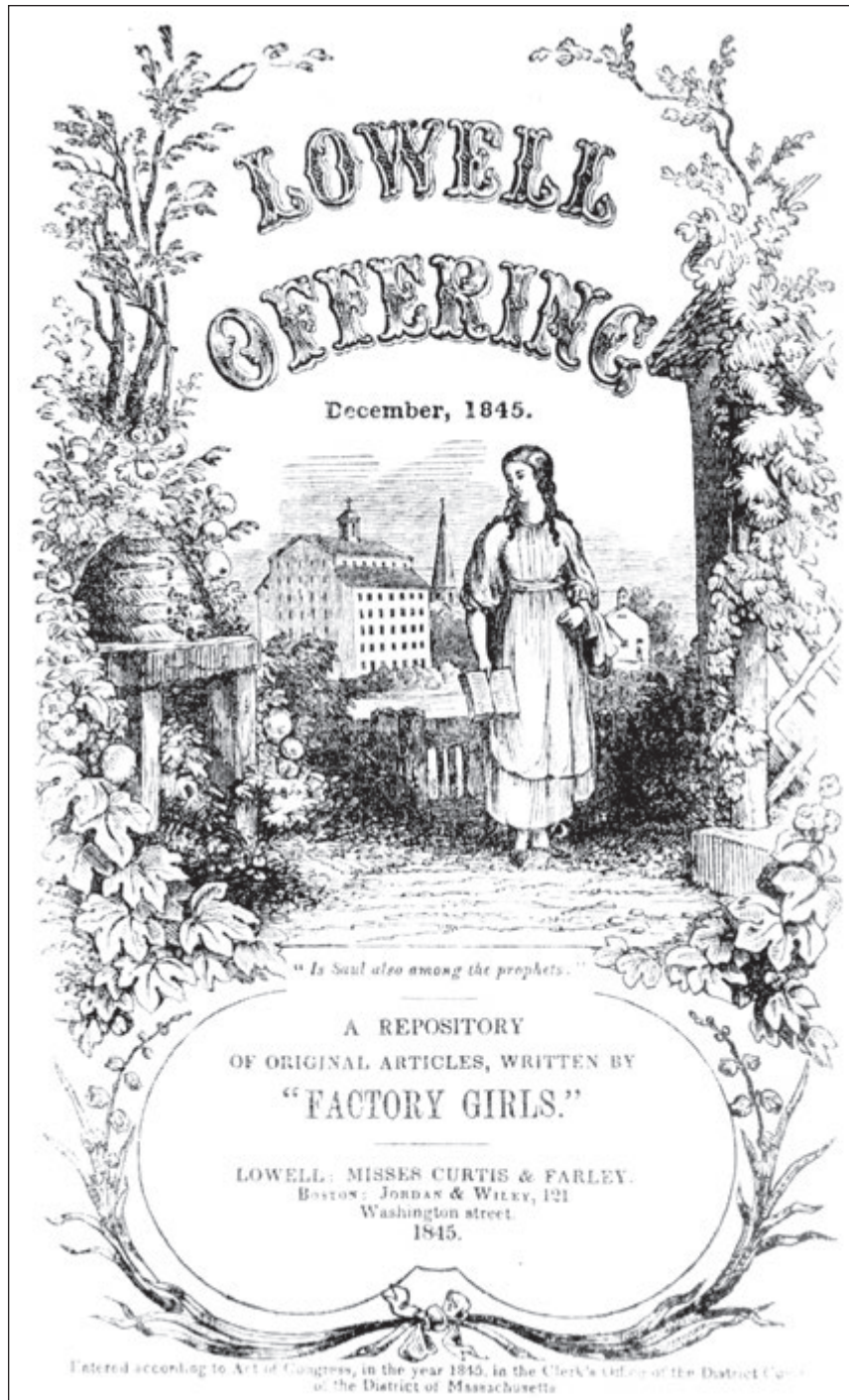
American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Lowell: The Ideal

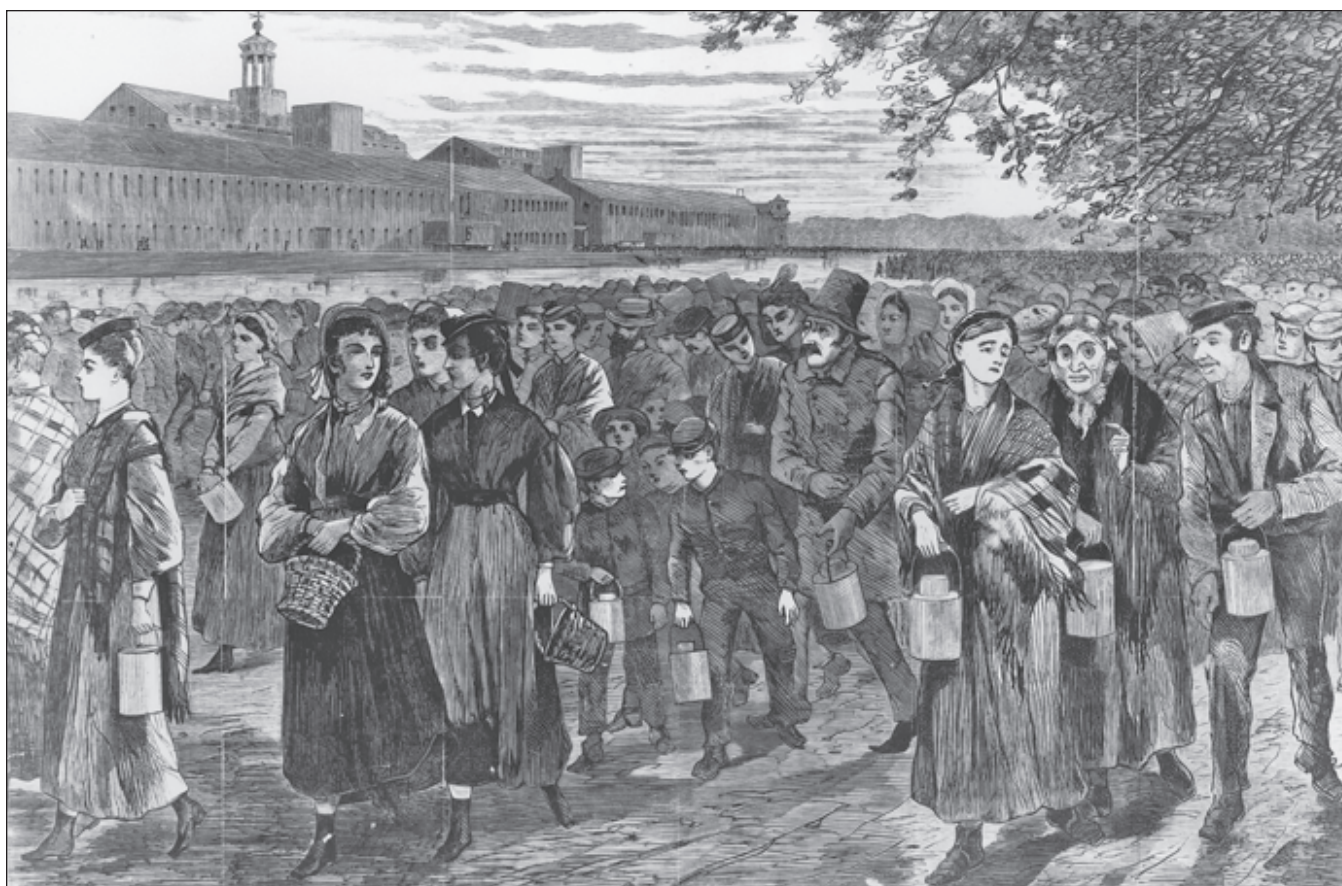
Illustration 3



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Lowell: The Changing Reality

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Lowell: The Changing Reality Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Lowell: The Changing Reality

Illustration 3



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

