National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Interior Region 1, North Atlantic—Appalachian

Lowell: The Spindle City

HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY

Lowell National Historical Park

Stephanie Fortado, PhD
Emily E. LB. Twarog, PhD
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Historic Resource Study
Lowell National Historical Park

Stephanie Fortado, PhD and Emily E. LB. Twarog, PhD

Presented to Lowell National Historical Park
Interior Region 1, North Atlantic—Appalachian

In Partnership with
the Organization of American Historians/National Park Service

September 2023

Cover Image:
Merrimack Street looking west, Lowell, Mass., c1908
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September 2023

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Historiography

Developing historical interpretation at Lowell National Historic Park presents the opportunity to engage in multiple historiographies. Many monographs trace the development of Lowell as a city, its role in industrial production in the United States, the lives of Lowell's workers, and immigration in the city. A book that provides insight into the early years of Lowell's development is *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts* (1976), a collection of essays by multiple historians, edited by Arthur L. Eno Jr.. Two books that focus on the industrial capitalists of Lowell include Robert F. Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (1987), and Roger Flather, *The Boss' Son: Remembering the Boott Mills in Lowell, Massachusetts 1937–1954* (2011). Significant works that provide rich detail about industrial production in Lowell include George Sweet Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops: Textile Machinery Building in New England, 1813–1949* (1950), and Laurence F. Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline: The Boott Cotton Mills of Lowell Massachusetts, 1835–1955* (1993). These books are very useful for the information about source material presented in their footnotes. Mark Miller Scott, *The Irony of Victory: World War II and Lowell, Massachusetts* (1988), provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of World War II on Lowell. The late 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of three books that focus on the histories of workers in Lowell. The first of these works is Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts 1826–1860* (1979). Mary Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910–1960* (1982), examines the lives of workers in the textiles mills and includes the oral histories of 30 textile workers, making this a valuable source for looking at Lowell history from the bottom up instead of focusing on the industrial elites. A book that focuses on women workers in the mills is Bernice Selden, *The Mill Girls: Lucy Larcom, Harriet Hanson Robinson, and Sarah G. Bagley* (1983). Two works that provide an analysis of Lowell's role in late 20th-century technological industrial production are David Lampe, ed., *The Massachusetts Miracle* (1988), a collection of speeches and writings by elected officials, bankers, and scholars selected from throughout the years when the Massachusetts tech boom unfolded, and Ross Gittell, *Renewing Cities* (1992), especially chapter 4, "Lowell: Successful Revitalization." While these works were written by economists, and so are not strictly histories, they provide useful analysis of this somewhat understudied era of Lowell's industrial development. Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Post-Industrial City* (2006), analyzes Lowell's turn toward utilizing its industrial and ethnic history as a response to the postindustrial decline, a strategy that many other urban centers have attempted to follow. Two monographs on Lowell's immigrant population include Brian Christopher Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps:*

The Irish of Lowell, 1821–61 (1988), and Shirley Kolack, *A New Beginning: The Jews of Historic Lowell* (1997). The strength of each of these books is the attention paid to generational differences in these immigrant communities. The article by Tuyet-Lan Pho and Anne Mulvey, "Southeast Asian Women in Lowell: Family Relations, Gender Roles and Community Concerns," in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (2003), provides strong gender analysis of Southeast Asian immigrant history in Lowell. In addition, Robert Forrant and Christoph Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell" (2011), a study commissioned by Lowell Historic National Park, is an excellent place to start historic research on Lowell's immigrant populations. Besides these monographs, there are dozens of doctoral dissertations and master's theses that delve into a wide variety of historical topics concerning Lowell—while too many to give a full accounting here, a review of these studies can provide additional insight beyond the body of published monographs.

In addition to these varied histories of Lowell, there is a plethora of other historical monographs that can provide valuable analytical frameworks to contextualizing the events in Lowell into broader national and global historical narratives. What follows are highlights from these bodies of scholarship and should not be considered exhaustive, but rather serve as a good starting point to further investigate these topics. Full citations are provided in the bibliography at the end of this study.

Environmental History

During the 1980s, two of the most influential works of US environmental history focused their analytical lens on the New England region—William Cronon's *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (1983) and Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (1989). These books brought an important racial and gender analysis to environmental history influencing future scholarship in the field. More recent environmental history scholarship focusing on New England includes Theogrode Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (2004); Richard W. Judd, *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England* (2014), which provides a sweeping overview of ecology and human interaction with nature in the New England region from the arrival of first humans in the region to the 21st century; and Erik Reardon, *Managing the River Commons: Environmental History of the Northeast* (2021), which examines the tensions between industrialists and those interested in fishing in the region's waterways. Another book that focuses on the multiple environmental meanings ascribed to river corridors is Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (1995). Although this book is about the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River, its analytical framework that investigates the complex indigenous, working-class, and industrial relationships to nature has been one of the most influential works in the field of environmental history.

One of the important turns in environmental historical scholarship has been an analysis of the environmental justice movement, the postwar social movement that has sought to address how pollution and other issues of environmental injustice have disproportionately impacted poor, working class, and communities of color in the United States—an analytical framework of relevance to Lowell. A foundational text in this scholarship is Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (1990). Other important works in this field include Robert Bullard, *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* (2005); Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stines, eds., *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy* (2002); and Diane Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and Rain, African Americans and Environmental History* (2006).

Industrial Capitalism

Books on capitalism include Christine Desan, *Making Money: Coin, Currency, and the Coming the Coming of Capitalism* (2014), and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (2016). Scholarship that examines capitalism and the textile industry includes Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800–1885* (1983); Duncan Rice, *A New Order of Things: How the Textile Industry Transformed New England* (2002); and Timothy Minchin, *Empty Mills: The Fight against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry* (2012).

In addition to these works, a body of scholarship has expanded the analysis of capital development beyond the familiar narrative of capitalism fixed on the Industrial Revolution framework. Some of these works, such as Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (1989), and Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (1990), seek to explore the nascent development of capitalist production in agrarian economies. In *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth Century America*, Michael Zakim and Gary Kornblith seek to uncover a broader set of cultural and social relationships that are shaped by capitalism. In *Transcending Capitalism* (2015), Howard Brick focuses on alternative visions to capitalism by examining mid-20th-century social theorists who argued for a postcapitalist or postindustrial understanding of society. In *The Conspiracy of Capital: Law, Violence, and American Popular Radicalism in the Age of Monopoly* (2019), Michael Mark Cohen examines dissident challenges to capitalism from the 1880s to 1920s.

Labor History

The field of labor history is broad and deep. Some texts that provide good overviews of work in the United States that help contextualize Lowell's history include Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Factory Girls* (1977), and Patrick Joyce, ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work* (1989). Works on labor activism and unionism in the United States include Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (1977); Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (1995); Nick Salvatore, Richard Schneirov, and Shelton Stromquist, eds., *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s: Essays on Labor and Politics* (1999); Christine Desan, *United Apart: Gender and the Rise of Craft Unionism* (2004); James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing That Divided the Gilded Age* (2006); Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age* (2011); and Erik Loomis, *A History of America in Ten Strikes* (2018).

History of Gender in the United States

Historical monographs that examine how conceptions of womanhood developed in US history from the concept of *coverture* and the domestic sphere to the ways in which women engaged in the public sphere include Katheryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (1976); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800* (1980); Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, eds., *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Women's Sphere* (1988); Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Rights to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (1998); and *Jeanne Boydston, Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (1990). Two books that specifically examine womanhood in New England are Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650–1750* (1980), and Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (1997). Works that focus on women's friendships and LGBTQ history include Lillian Faderman, *Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th Century* (1991), and *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America* (1999), as well as Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (2020). It is particularly fascinating how Manion studies women who passed as men in early American history and were able to live a life beyond *coverture*, albeit with a very dangerous secret.

History of Race in the United States

It is essential to consider the textile industry of Lowell as part of a global textile economy, but much of the early histories of capitalism and industry did not adequately address the essential role that slavery played in the US rise in global economic dominance, nor the reliance of northern industry on southern enslaved labor. The pivotal early work that took up this task was W. E. B. DuBois's *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935), a book that was largely marginalized by the field of history when it was written but has since come to be considered a foundational text for understanding the fundamental importance of slavery to the development of the US political economy. Another book that focuses on Haiti but is an important Marxist analysis of slavery is C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938). Significant works that expand the history of capitalism to more fully discuss slavery include Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1994); Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014); and Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2015), the latter of which given its focus on cotton production is especially useful in contextualizing the history of Lowell into a broader historical narrative. A book that focuses its analysis on the ways that northern industry relied on southern enslaved labor is Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (2006).

In the 1990s, historians also began to seriously consider "whiteness" as a historical social construct. Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993), considers how ideas of whiteness and gender are mutually intertwined. Other influential works in the field that examine immigration, class, and whiteness include David Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (2005); *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (2007); and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998).

History of Ethnicity and Immigration

There is also much historical scholarship on ethnicity and immigration. One specific area of concentration important to Lowell is the Indigenous histories that center on the New England region, which include Christoph Strobel, *Native Americans of New England* (2020); Howard S. Russell, *Indian New England Before the Mayflower* (2014); and William S. Simons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620–1984* (2018).

Specifically focusing on the events of King Philip's War are the edited volume Colin G. Calloway, ed., *After King Philips's War: Presence and Persistence in Indian New England* (2000), and Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philp's War* (2000). The anthology by Siobhan Senier, ed., *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England*, centers on Indigenous voices.

Works on Cambodian immigration to the United States include David W. Haines, ed., *Refugees as Immigrants: Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese in America* (1989), and Sucheng Chan, *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States* (2004). Other significant works on Asian American immigration history include Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996).

Urban History

There is an extensive body of scholarship that examines urban development and reform during the Progressive Era. One of the early foundational monographs on this subject is Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (1955). Some other good overviews include Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (1969); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920*; and Lewis Gould and Courtney Q. Shah, *America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1917* (2021). Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (2008), approaches the Progressive Era with a history from below perspective. William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (1984), provides an overview of the Progressive Era reform movement to beautify cities, and Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (1989), periodizes important eras of urban park development and chapter two of this report, "Reform Park: 1900–1930," provides a good overview of the role of urban parks during the Progressive Era.

Historical scholarship on the impact of federal and local urban renewal policies on the urban working class and communities of color is an important body of scholarship to contextualize the second half of the 20th-century history of Lowell. Lizabeth Cohen, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (2019), considers postwar US urban development. This Bancroft Prize–winning book focuses its analysis through the lens of the career of one man, Ed Logue, a leading figure in urban renewal efforts in New Haven, Boston, and New York. But it also provides a rich overview of both the idealism undergirding efforts of urban renewal and its devastating consequences—a framework that would be useful in approaching this era in Lowell. Mindi Thompson Fullilove, *Rootshock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (2005), is written by a psychiatrist, but its historical review of the impact of urban renewal and conceptual framework of "Root Shock"—the

idea that displacement due to urban renewal has shattering impacts on poor and working-class urban residents—make this book a worthwhile addition to any historical analysis of the legacies of US urban renewal. Other significant books on urban renewal include Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America 1940–1985* (1990), and Francesca Rusello Ammon, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* (2016).

CHAPTER ONE

From the Myth of the "Vanishing Indian" to America's First Industrial City, 1600s to 1823

Multitudes of fish, both in the fresh waters and also on the coast, that the like hath not elsewhere been discovered by any traveler.

—English colonist Thomas Morton, 1630s[1]

Pawtucket and Wamesit, where the Indian resorted in the fishing season, are now Lowell, the city of spindles, and Manchester of America, which sends its cotton cloth round the globe.

—Henry David Thoreau[2]

In Lowell, Massachusetts, today it seems you can walk through history. If you tour the Boott Cotton Mills Museum, you can not only see the textile looms; you can hear the clatter of their operation and, if you breathe deeply enough, almost taste the past. If you leave Boott and walk about five minutes, you can stand before St. Anne's where people have come to worship for nearly two centuries. Another 10-minute walk and you can watch high school students go into class at the same spot where education has taken place for generations. Everywhere in Lowell there are monuments, streets, and parks named after historical figures, and in the downtown area, there are more than 40 buildings marked with historic markers. And that is just the physical landscape of Lowell. The written and archival landscape of the Spindle City includes multiple research archives at Lowell, Boston, and beyond; dozens of scholarly books and articles; dozens of dozens of doctoral and masters' theses; and thousands of pages of digital images stretching back from the 1600s to the present day. The historical record of Lowell can be exhilarating, dizzying, and daunting.

[1] Thomas Morton, *The New English Canaan*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Prince Society, 1883), 232.

[2] Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1873), 98.

In walking through Lowell, visiting the archives, and tracking the digital footprints of this city we have identified six main important historical themes—the history of the environment, industrial capitalism, labor, gender, race, and immigration and ethnicity. In considering these themes, we have been guided by the analytical framework of critical geographer Edward Soja, who has insisted, geography is "stubbornly simultaneous."[3] This concept of simultaneity has informed how we have considered Lowell as a place—meaning if we are to understand the constructions of gender at Lowell, we must simultaneously consider the constructions of capitalism, for they inform each other. Likewise the environmental history of Lowell is intrinsically tied to gendered and racialized constructs that were built in this place. Ethnicity and gender in Lowell were in part defined through labor, and labor in turn rationalized through conceptions of ethnicity and gender. And so on. To use an apt Lowellian metaphor, these themes must be woven together.

What follows is an effort to track these themes through the scholarship and archives of Lowell. At some points we engage with work already done by scholars; at others we amplify selected stories or primary source documents that elucidate one or more of these themes. At other points, we simply mark potential places of fertile ground for future research. This chapter examines the history of the indigenous populations of the region, the commodification of land, the development of environmental understandings of the region through capitalism, settler colonialism, the rise of industrial capitalism, the early growth of Lowell, and the first wave of immigrants.

The Myth of the "Vanishing Indian"[4]

It is critical in any study of the Americas to recognize that colonists and industrialists were not the first to occupy the land. Indigenous peoples lived, worked, worshiped, and built community for thousands of years before, in this case, Francis Cabot Lowell envisioned a mill town that would become a model for industrial cities globally. As University of Massachusetts Lowell historian Christof Strobel rightly points out. William Bradford, the man who would become the first governor of the earliest successful and permanent New English colony at Plymouth, wrote in 1620 about North America and its Indigenous peoples:

> Vast & unpeopled countries of America . . . are fruitful & fitt for habitation, being devoyd of all civill inhabitants, where there are only savage & brutish men, which range up and downe, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same. . . . And also those which should escape or overcome difficulties, should

[3] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 2.

[4] Siobhan Senier, ed., *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 2.

> yet be in continual danger of the savage people who are cruell, barbarous, & most treacherous, being contente only to kill, & take away life, but delight to tormente men in the most bloodie maner that may be; fleaing some alive with the shells of fishes, cutting of the members & joynts of others by peesmeale, and grilling on the coles, eate the collop of their flesh in their sight whilst they livel with other cruelties most horrible to be related.[5]

To reject Bradford's framework of the "vast and unpeopled" landscape and his racist characterization of Indigenous people as "savage and brutish," any telling of the place that became Lowell must begin with a focus on the people who lived in the Merrimack River area prior to colonial settlement. We will not go into great detail, as the National Park Service's excellent study "Ethnicity in Lowell" provides a thorough summary of the peoples of this region.[6] Instead, we will reference primary documents and review the policies and attitudes of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to highlight the history of the Indigenous people as well as the ways in which colonization and industrialization contributed to the almost complete annihilation of Indigenous peoples.[7]

During the early colonial days of the Merrimack Valley, a region that follows the Merrimack River (Molôdomek) from southern New Hampshire and Massachusetts flowing into the Pawtucket Falls in Lowell,[8] the Indigenous people who lived in the Greater Lowell area were Pennacook, a name given to the many different Algonquians with different band names living in the region[9] (Figures 1.1–1.3). "Pennacook is believed to be derived from the Abenaki word 'penakuk,' meaning 'at the bottom of the hill.'" According to several scholars, the term Pawtucket was and is also commonly used to describe the Pennacook Indians who lived on the lower Merrimack River.

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[5] Christoph Strobel, *Native Americans of New England* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2000, Kindle edition), 3.

[6] Robert Forrant and Christoph Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell" (Lowell National History Park, Northeast Region Ethnography Program, Boston, Massachusetts), March 2011.

[7] For a more detailed discussion of precolonial life in New England, see also Richard W. Judd, *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 3–95.

[8] The Merrimack River is called the Molôdomek by the Western Abenaki language, see Senier, *Dawnland Voices,* 275.

[9] See Carl Waldman, *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes* (New York: Checkmark Books, 1999), 185.

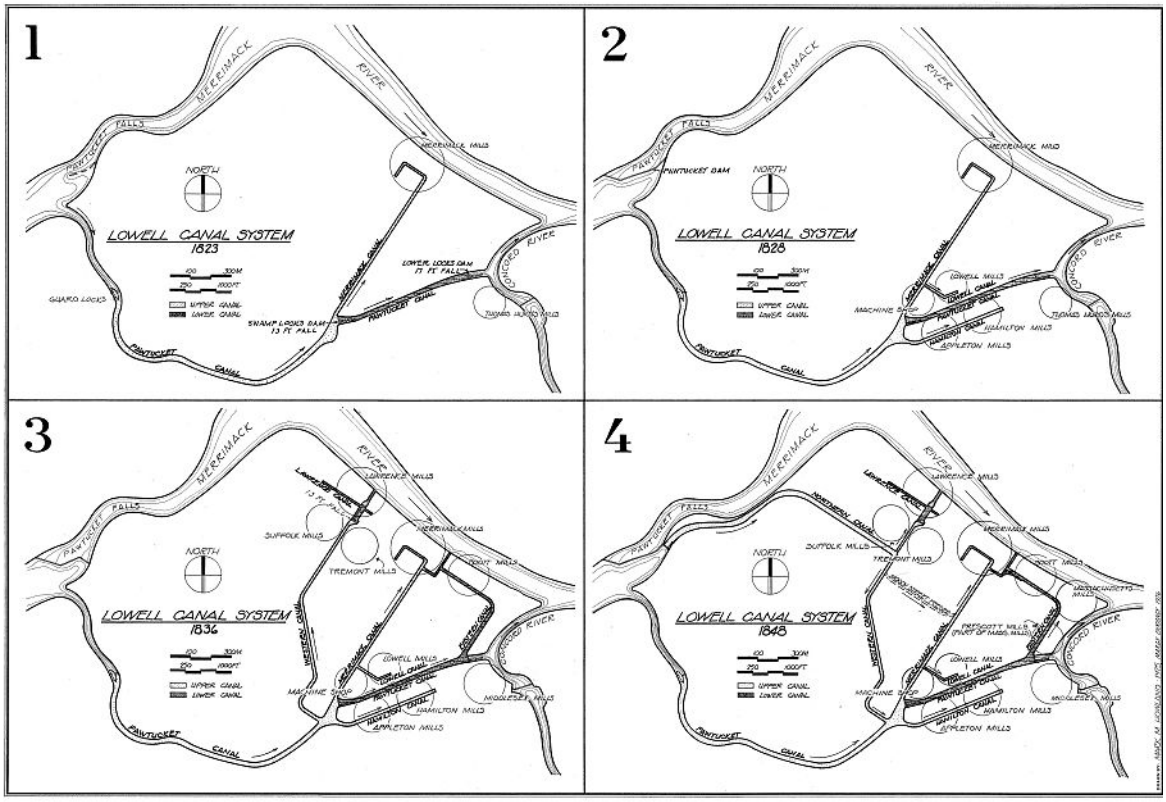

Figure 1.1. HAER MASS, 9-LOW, 8 (sheet 2 of 2), Lowell Canal System, Merrimack & Concord Rivers, Lowell, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

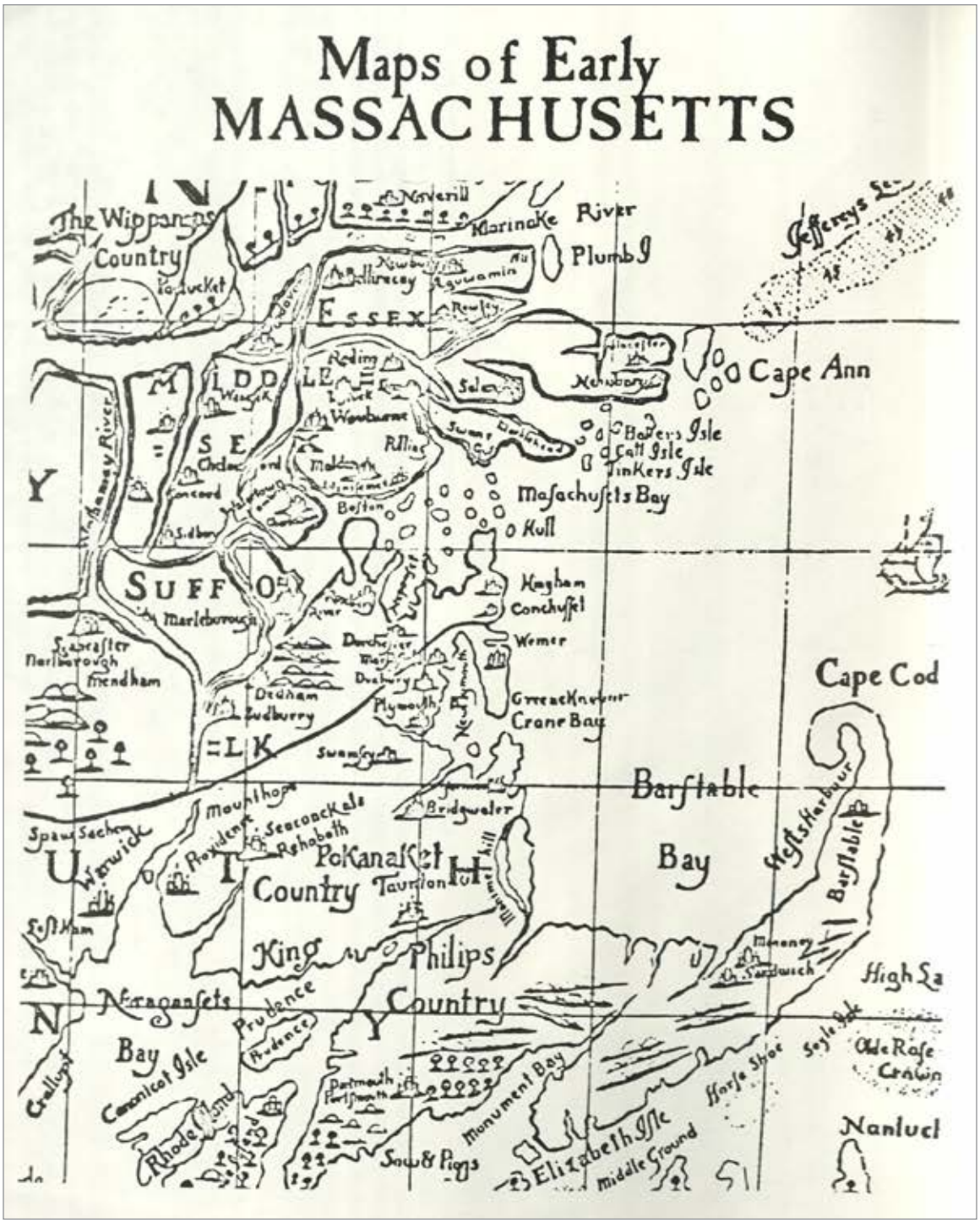

Figure 1.2. Lincoln A. Dexter, *Maps of Early Massachusetts* (Brookfield, MA: LA Dexter, 1984), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois

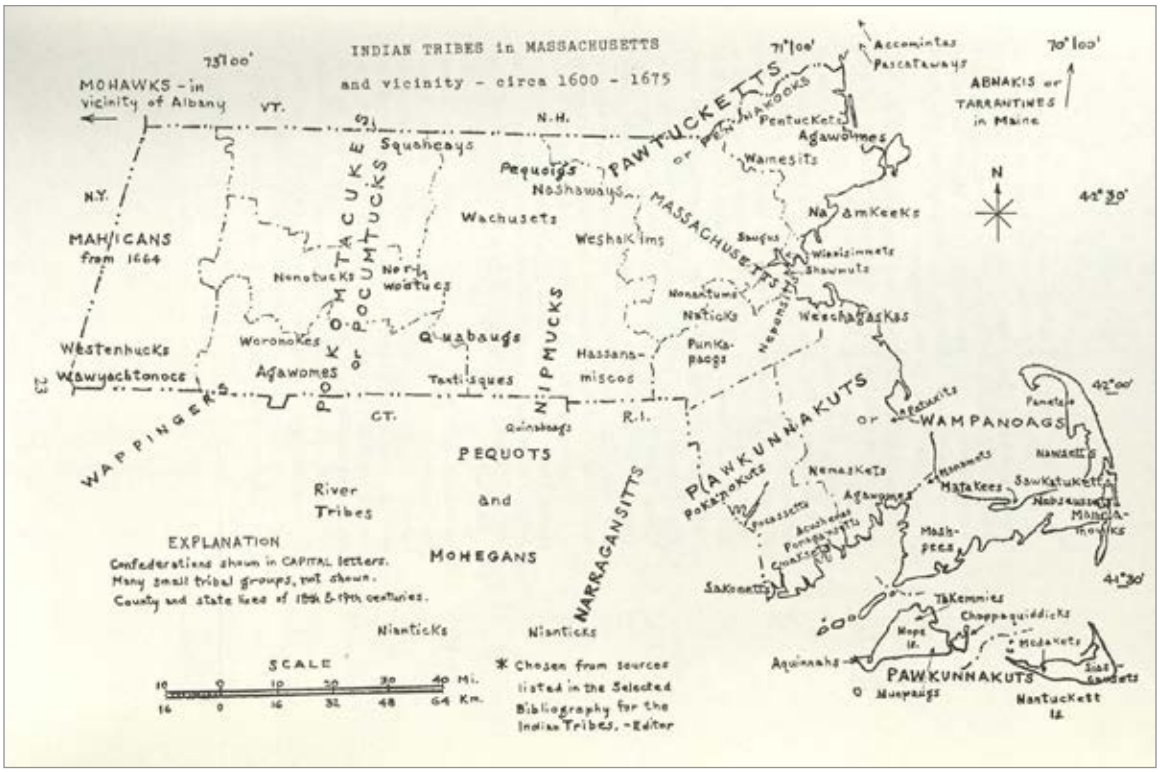

Figure 1.3. Map of Indigenous communities in Massachusetts, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois

This name might have been derived from the town of Pawtucket, which some 17th-century European observers described as the "capitol" of the Native confederacy. Other names for the Pennacook were likely also Nechegansett, Opanango, Owaragee, and after 1680, St. Francois Indians."[10] Like many Indigenous communities throughout New England, the Pennacook relied on the land and the Merrimack River for their livelihood and transportation.[11] As scholar Lisa Brooks notes, the waterways of New England functioned as "old superhighways." The Molôdomek (Merrimack), Kwinitekw (Connecticut River, long river), and Kennebec (Maine) were spaces where Indigenous people moved between communities and sustained themselves through a rich agricultural economy. And, even as settlers and industrial capitalists engaged in actions and policies that displaced and killed many Indigenous people, "many of the ancestors…traveled those same routes. While some remained very close to home, many families took the old superhighways of Kwinitekw, Molôdomek, and Kennebec south in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, returning to old villages or traveling to Massachusetts and Connecticut to seek jobs, holding a persistent sense of northern New England and/or southern Quebec as home."[12]

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[10] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 12.

[11] For details on the day to day lives of the Pennacook, see Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 12–14.

[12] Lisa Brooks, "Introduction," in Siobhan Senier, ed., *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 275–76.

The interaction between the Merrimack Valley's Indigenous communities and French fur traders began in the early 1600s, and then in the 1630s Puritan settlers from England settled along what came to be known as Massachusetts Bay. By the mid-17th century, the European settlers had penetrated the interior of the continent to form a series of small towns that served as trading posts in the Merrimack Valley. According to Charles Carroll, "nowhere on the Massachusetts frontier did groups of Englishmen and Indians live in closer proximity than in the region along the confluence of the Merrimack and Concord rivers." Carroll's essay describes the different motivations that the colonists had for being in the region, including the goal of converting the Indigenous people to Christianity and the desire to trade for furs. Episcopal clergyman John Eliot established several "praying villages" in the region, as part of his efforts to convert the Indigenous people.[13] Gregory Gray Fitzsimons describes the devastating impact of encounters with European people, "possibly as much as ninety-five percent of the population perished in the wake of a plague in 1616–19 and the horrific smallpox pandemic in 1633–34. One result of this massive loss of life was a falling off in the use of the land around Pawtucket Falls by Indigenous people."[14]

In 1653, the Massachusetts General Court seized and allocated a tract of land to 29 men, who named it Chelmsford. This original land did not include what later became Lowell. Instead, "the fields and meadows along the Merrimack and along the western bank of the Concord, an area of about fifteen hundred acres were established as Indian Territory." By 1670, Chelmsford had 260 residents. In the 1670s, tensions between the settlers and the Indigenous people flared, escalating into a 14-month violent conflict between 1675 and 1676. A Wampanoag chief named Metacom, who came to be known by the English as King Philip, led a series of raids on European settlements in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Maine in an effort to expel the colonists. Throughout southeastern New England white militias were raised among the settlements, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony sent soldiers building alliances with some members of the Mohegan and Pequot tribes to the area to quell the rebellion. The war was devasting. Scholar Colin Calloway described the conflict as "a brutal war, one of the bloodiest conflicts in America's history."[15] By some counts, five thousand people died, with three quarters of these being Indigenous. More than a thousand Indigenous people were sold into slavery in the West Indies. "At least thirteen English Frontier villages were partially

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[13] Charles F. Carroll, "The First White Settlement: The Seventeenth Century," in Arthur L. Eno, ed., *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell Massachusetts* (Manchester, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company with the Lowell Historical Society, 1976), 10–25, quotes 11. For more on John Eliot, see Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[14] Gregory Gray Fitzsimons, "Hawk Valley Farm," Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, 2014, 4. https://lowelllandtrust.org/explore-the-properties/conservation-land/hawk-valley-farm.

[15] Collin G. Calloway, "Introduction," in Colin G. Calloway, ed., *After King Philip's War: Presence and Persistence in Indian New England* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2000).

destroyed; Chelmsford and five other towns were partially burned."[16] King Philip was shot, beheaded, and quartered; the war ended in victory for the colonizers. In the 1680s, the residents of Chelmsford purchased the land that was originally granted to the Indigenous people, and began converting it to farming.[17]

The Pennacook did not simply move away or vanish. The mythology of empty lands ready to be settled ignored the brutal violence that occurred to create pathways for a colonial agrarian economy and eventually industrial capitalism. Scholars such as Christoph Strobel, Thomas Doughton, Jean O'Brien, Colin Calloway, Anne Marie Plan, and Gregory Button, to name a few, challenge the narrative of the "vanished Indian."[18] Thomas Doughton, for instance, describes the "forgetting" and the imagined "vanishing" of Native Americans in New England as a "disappearance model." Jean O'Brien, in a detailed study of local New England histories of various towns and cities published in the 19th and early 20th centuries, argues that by "writing Native Americans out of existence in New England," these accounts performed a crucial role in influencing American popular culture and imagination.[19] For example, historians such as Howard Russell note that much of the land settled by the English was already well cultivated by Indigenous communities and, along the Merrimack River, "records show open lands and cleared village sites which the English were glad to acquire, with a certain amount of compensation to their previous occupants. . ." He goes on to write, "It is clear by the time the first white explorers and immigrants appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and undoubtedly long before, areas open and cleared for settlement, cultivation, or other native purposes were common."[20] Russell's interpretation of "open lands" ignores the direct and indirect tactics of physical violence that were used to ensure that "cleared village sites" were available to white colonists.

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[16] Carroll, "The First White Settlement," 11, 24; Vincent Virga, *Massachusetts, Mapping the Bay State through History: Rare and Unusual Maps from the Library of Congress* (Guilford, CN: Globe Pequot Press, 2011).

[17] Collin G. Calloway, "Introduction," *After King Philip's War*; and Carroll, "The First White Settlement," 24–25. For more on King Philip's War and its aftermath, see Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip's War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance and the End of Indian Sovereignty* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), and Lisa Tanya Brooks, *Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip's War* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2018).

[18] Strobel, *Native Americans of New England*, 107.

[19] Strobel, *Native Americans of New England*, 2020, 107. Thomas Doughton, "Unseen Neighbors: Native Americans of Central Massachusetts, a People Who Had 'Vanishe,'" in Colin Calloway, ed., *After King Philip's War: Presence and Persistence in Indian New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 207–30; Jean M O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650–1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[20] Howard S. Russell, *Indian New England before the Mayflower* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1980), 14–15.

The historical narrative requires us to understand both local and national governmental policies and the "complex competition to define the meaning of 'Indian' identity."[21] By the early 19th century, Indigenous communities in Massachusetts were greatly reduced in size. While some communities chose to convert to Christianity and reside in "praying towns," others found ways to retain their identity but were required to find ways to exist on "marginal lands where they wrested their living from an altered and less abundant environment and continued to survive as Indian people even though 'an earlier Indian way of life had become impossible.'" They lived in small clusters and at times engaged in wage labor, sold handmade goods, and in some cases became indentured servants.[22]

On a national scale, President Jackson was aggressively pursuing an agenda of relocation through the Indian Removal Act of 1830 resulting in the forcible removal of southeastern Indigenous tribes to "Indian territory" west of the Mississippi. Critical to the removal policy was a national narrative of "tragic decline." Historian Jean M. O'Brien notes, "Removal proponents used stories of tragic decline to justify dispossessing eastern Indians.... Their vision of Indian decline provided Euro-Americans with ideological justification for forcibly removing Indians from Native homelands to protect them from frontiersmen they refused to restrain who lawlessly encroached on native lands and jeopardized Indian survival."[23] In Massachusetts and elsewhere, stories of the "last full-blooded Indian" reinforced beliefs by the white settlers that Indigenous people were close to extinction. However, Indigenous communities found ways to preserve their traditions and persist. In her handmade diary constructed of copies of the November 1833 *Missionary Herald*, Anne B. Barrett, a local settler, recorded home remedies such as "Indian Cure for Deafness," indicating that people were exchanging ideas and survival strategies locally[24] (Figures 1.4–1.5).

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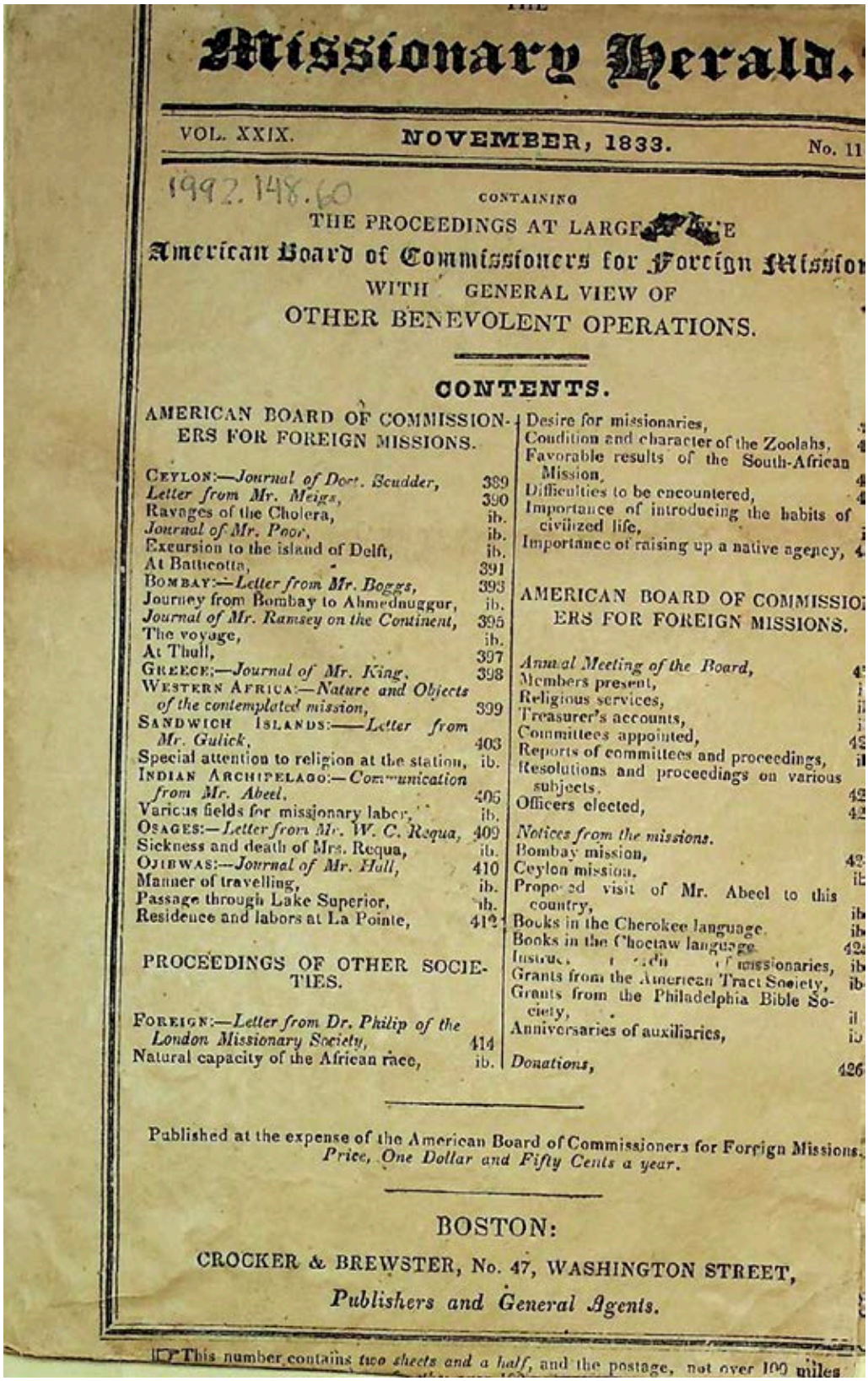
[21] Ann Marie Plane and Gregory Button, "The Massachusetts Indian Enfranchisement Act: Ethnic Contest in Historical Context, 1848–1869," in Calloway, ed., *After King Philip's War*, 178.

[22] O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 7.

[23] O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 3.

[24] Anne B. Barrett, "Diary, September 23, 1838," 7025m, Box 3, Folder 1992.148.60, American Textile History Museum Collection (hereafter ATHM), Kheel Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University (hereafter Kheel Archives).



Missionary Herald.

VOL. XXIX. NOVEMBER, 1833. No. 11

CONTAINING

THE PROCEEDINGS AT LARGE OF THE

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions

WITH GENERAL VIEW OF

OTHER BENEVOLENT OPERATIONS.

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Figure 1.4. Scrapbook, Anne B. Barrett, "Diary, September 23, 1838," 7025m, Box 3, Folder 1992.148.60, ATHM, Kheel Archives

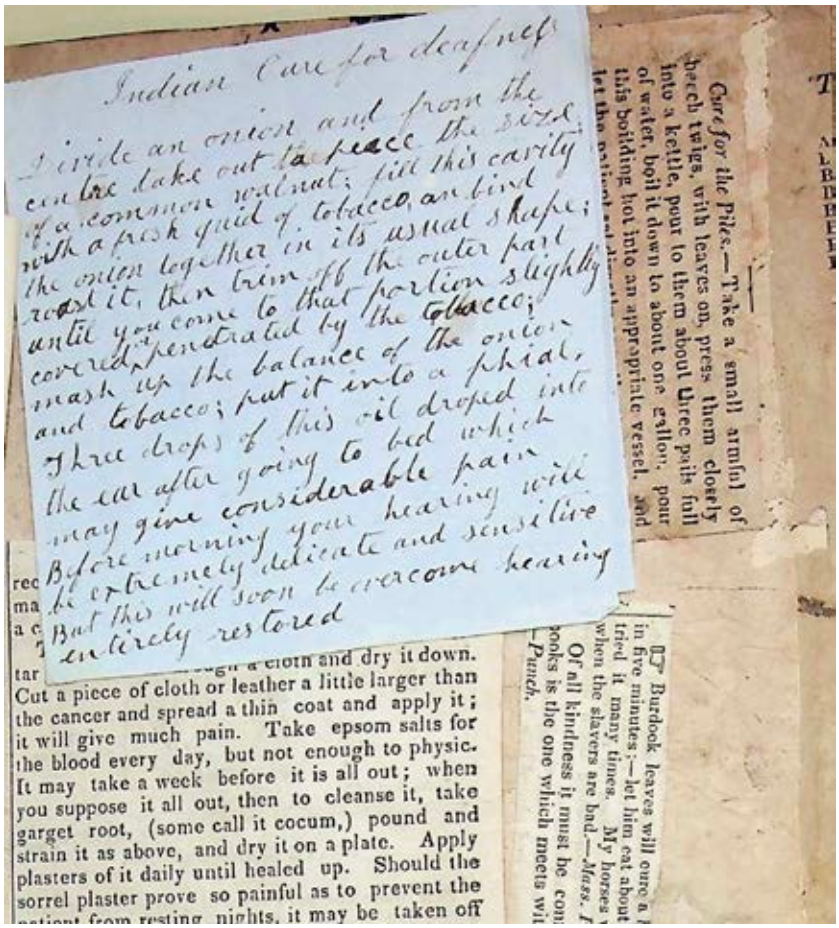

Figure 1.5. Remedy for Deafness, Anne B. Barrett, "Diary, September 23, 1838," 7025m, Box 3, Folder 1992.148.60, ATHM, Kheel Archives

Strobel's research demonstrates:

> Whether on or off the reserve in the 19th century New England Indians participated in and integrated into the mainstream economy to an ever-larger degree. Life sometimes required cash, as Native Americans needed money to pay for clothes, food, household goods, and health care…some Native Americans joined the workforce off the reserves, while others occasionally left their homelands to make some money as peddlers.… Indigenous groups and individuals at times rented their land to whites as farm or timber leases, but some Native Americans ran their own timber businesses and sold their wood on the market.… Participating in the market economy and partial integration into New England society was a complex and difficult process. Indigenous people often had to walk a fine line between participating in the mainstream New English economy and society and trying to maintain their cultures and communities.[25]

[25] Strobel, *Native Americans of New England*, 127–28.

As Strobel clearly demonstrates, the myth of the "vanishing Indian" bore little resemblance to reality in New England, and trading on that myth was essential to the success of westward expansion and industrial capitalism.

"The 'Hardest-Working River' in the World": The Land as a Commodity

In order to understand the founding of Lowell as an industrial city, it is essential to recognize and grapple with the reality that this beacon of early industrialization could only have emerged when it did as a result of almost two centuries of sustained efforts to eliminate, through both violent and non-violent means, the original inhabitants of the land. Indeed the historic evolution of American capitalism and industrialization is dependent on the exploitation and violent control of millions of people within and outside of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. To develop a far-reaching understanding of Lowell and how it changes over time, we must define what we mean by capitalism from the start, tracing its roots from the colonial period to the Industrial Revolution in the United States. In his book *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860*, Christopher Clark defines capitalism as a "set of social relations in which labor is commonly divorced from the ownership of the land, tool, or materials that forms the means of production; as a result of this, labor power is commonly hired for wages by proprietors of land or industrial enterprises, and there exists in society a significant number of people whose principal means of livelihood is the wage work they can obtain."[26] In *Capitalism Takes Command*, Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith push the definition beyond the relationship of labor and wages to production by arguing that the "history of capitalism is not. . .just an account of transaction costs, economies of scale, and diminishing returns, but of social habits, cultural logistics, and the conditions of system building as well."[27] And, given the "traditional prerogative" of the government to regulate the economy, the almost simultaneous expansion of industrial capitalism, Civil War, and the end of slavery forever changed the relationship between the economy and the state. As Zakim and Kornblith argue, "the state thus ceased to be a regulator of industrial development and became, instead, an active partner in that project.. . . An alliance was born between the government's promotion of

[26] Christopher F. Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 14.

[27] Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 2.

general prosperity and industrial capital's unrivaled ability to organize resources, setting the stage for the colossal dimensions of corporate enterprise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."[28]

Lowell stands as an early example in the economic development of the United States of "capital's unrivaled ability to organize resources." The first resource that capital had to harness to establish Lowell as an industrial center was the power of water. In 1821, a group of investors chose Pawtucket Falls on the Merrimack River as the place to organize their vision of an industrial future. The spot was well chosen, as the Merrimack River tumbled more than 30 feet over a natural drop generating enormous power—the kind of power that could fuel an Industrial Revolution.[29] In his book *Nature Incorporated*, Theodore Steinberg argued that while the establishment of the Lowell textile mills is "part of almost every textbook treatment of early American industry. . . [n]ature has tended to be excluded from the history of the industrial transformation."[30] In his book, Steinberg seeks to understand "industrial capitalism from an ecological perspective," tracing how the development of capitalism in the region was predicated upon a commodification of nature.[31] This commodification of nature is integral to the history of Lowell.

As this chapter has discussed, the early industrialists were not the first to organize their constructions of labor and community along the banks of the Merrimack River. According to anthropologist Dean Snow, the Indigenous people of the region fished the river, used it for travel, and organized settlements on its shores.[32] In other words, long before capitalists attempted to harness the power of the river system for industrial output, life was organized around the flow of water in the region. Centering the river in the presentation of Lowell history thus affords the opportunity to examine how different groups of people lived their lives along its shores, and interrogating their interactions with the river can provide a framework for understanding how conceptions of labor and communal life changed in this region over time.

When Europeans encountered Indigenous peoples in what became Massachusetts there began what environmental historian William Cronon has called "changes in the land." The colonists set up a system of property ownership that emphasized fixed agricultural production, and set up a legal system to facilitate the transfer of the rights to specifically bounded pieces of property through deeds resulting in what Cronon has described as "the

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[28] Zakim and Kornblith, *Capitalism Takes Command*, 11.

[29] Patrick M. Malone and Charles A Parrott, "Greenways in the Industrial City: Parks and Promenades along the Lowell Canals," *Journal of the Society for Industrial Archaeology* 24, no. 1 (1998): 19.

[30] Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan), 10.

[31] Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated*, 13.

[32] Dean R Snow, *The Archaeology of New England* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 2–5.

alienation of land as a commodity."[33] This settler commodification of land was predicated on a "criticism of Indian ways of life [that] was a near constant element in early colonial writing."[34] Specifically, colonists leveled racialized criticisms of Indigenous mobility and labor practices, which they characterized as lazy. For the colonists, their efforts to bring the land into agricultural production justified their claims of ownership of the land. Bringing natural resources into productivity, first for agriculture and later for industry, has undergirded economic development in the United States. In Cronon's analysis, the commodification of nature in New England can be traced to the first European contact, long before the advent of industrial capitalism in the region, but the transformation of the region to industrial capitalism accelerated this process of commodification.

This conception that white settlers brought productivity to the region was passed down across generations. For some, the power of the Merrimack River seemed a driving part of a divinely ordered destiny. Environmental historian Carolyn Merchant, in her book *Ecological Revolution: Nature, Gender and Science in New England*, explained, "The rhetoric of manifest destiny encouraged control over natural resources as Europeans swept westward bearing the torch of 'civilization.'"[35] Take for example Lowell poet and author Robert Caverly, whose family lived in the river region for generations. In his text about the genealogy of his family published in Lowell, the river featured prominently in his recounting of his family history. He wrote: "Such as it would seem, were the workings of the creation! And such have been the rolling onward and meanderings of this, our Merrimac, within almost haling distance of which many of us were born and bred. Now, as the mighty river starts in the mountains and meanders to the sea, wave upon wave; thus do the generations of earth, coming and going follow each other down. Everywhere before us there are profitable examples of progress, and of the onward tendency of all things. Wonderful indeed is man's very existence."[36] In this description of the river, Caverly connects the generations who have lived in the region to the flow of the river itself, and deems it all as "profitable examples of progress." Earlier in the book, he describes the river as "renowned, as ever, as the hardest-working river in the world."[37] The words Caverly chooses—hard-working, profitable, progress—paint an image of man and nature together as the "workings of creation." Caverly was echoing a popular mid-19th-century conception of man's relationship that had emerged from the transcendentalist writers, most prominently

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[33] William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 75.

[34] Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 51.

[35] Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 201.

[36] Robert Boodey Caverly, *Genealogy of the Caverly Family: From the Year 1116 to the Year 1880, Made Profitable and Exemplified by Many a Lesson of Life.* (Lowell, MA: G. M. Elliott, 1880), 5.

[37] Caverly, *Genealogy of the Caverly Family*, 3.

Bostonian Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's well-circulated 1836 book *Nature* described the earth as a "commodity" to be used by humans. According to Carolyn Merchant, "Emerson's popularity at mid-century suggested that his commodification of nature was drowning out concerns about its degradation in a flood of exhilaration about progress."[38]

For Caverly, these "workings of creation" on "our Merrimac" were the white man's destiny. He describes the "American Indian" that white men encountered when first coming to New England as "the merest wild hunters, uncivilized, unimproved, unchanged." His poetic lines continue the theme:

> Thus, o'er land and sea, for ages long
> A race of redman vagrant moved along,
> With language, taught from rustic Nature's throne,
> And habit each peculiarly their own.
> On growth spontaneous fed, content with prey,
> That served the purpose of a single day.[39]

Caverly's word choices in describing the Indigenous people, as vagrant, rustic, spontaneous, concerned with only the food they could hunt for "a single day" at a time stand in stark contrast to his earlier depiction of his white ancestors' march to profitable progress. White settlers' conceptualization of their place in nature was thus constructed in opposition to an imagined set of "Indian" characteristics. The commodification of the Merrimack for capital production also produced whiteness for the European settlers in the region.

Yet, while recognizing the transformative power of capital on the Merrimack River corridor, it is also important that we do not imagine capital as an all-powerful actor. As environmental historian Richard White explained in his book on the Columbia River in Washington: "It is important that we get our metaphors right. We have neither killed the river nor raped it, although people claim both are true. What has happened is closer to a failed marriage. Nature still exists on the Colombia. It is not dead, only altered by our labor. It is the steam within Emerson's boiler. It lies hidden in aluminum and pulp mills, in electric lights and washing machines. The organic and mechanical have been merged."[40]

This merging between the organic and mechanical also occurred at Lowell. White's book reminds us that this merging of the organic and the mechanical is never uncontested. Different groups of people—for example, Indigenous people wanting to preserve fishing rights, farmers who need the waterways to irrigate their crops, and industrialists seeking to harness the power of the river—all bring their own visions to river corridors. These visions

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[38] Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 75.

[39] Caverly, *Genealogy of the Caverly Family*, 7.

[40] Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 59.

bump up against one another, often in incompatible ways. It is through these overlapping and contradictory expectations of human interaction with nature that the capitalist development of Lowell took place.

Transitioning from an Agrarian Economy

In the Merrimack and Concord area, the late 1700s economy was driven by natural resources. Three chapters in the book *Cotton Was King*, including Charles F. Carroll's "Church and State in Early Chelmsford" and "Chelmsford and Dracut in the Revolution," and John A. Goodwin's "Villages at Wamesit Neck," describe the development of white settlements at the Merrimack and Concord during the 1700s.[41] What these authors describe is the slow organization of white landholding in the area, and how this organization was shaped by several factors, including local squabbles over property rights, differences of opinion among white settlers about religious practices, and conflicts between England and France over the region. In his essay, Goodwin emphasized how the region was primarily agrarian during this time period: "For more than a century before the first large cotton factories were built along the Merrimack River at Lowell, the inhabitants used the water-power of the Merrimack and Concord rivers in a limited way to cut lumber, grind grains, and to produce cotton and woolen yarn for home weaving. They lived as Thomas Jefferson hoped most people in the United States would live: in a slow-paced, rural, agrarian world, where men's lives were attuned to the seasons and every household was more or less independent of every other."[42]

Post–Revolutionary War American society, culture, and politics were based on rural values and economy. While the main activity in the region was farming in the 18th century, there was some early industrial development. In 1737, a fulling mill for dressing cloth ran at the Wamesit Falls on the east side of Concord River, near to where it joined the Merrimack. A grist mill also operated on that side of the river. In 1790, Moses Hale set up a mill for making cloth on the River Meadow Brook, and then added a sawmill and grist mill. In 1817, he added another mill to make gunpowder. The powdermill was managed by Oliver Whipple, who would go on to become one of the first selectmen of Lowell

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[41] Charles F. Carroll, "Church and State in Early Chelmsford," and "Chelmsford and Dracut in the Revolution," and John A. Goodwin, "Villages at Wamesit Neck," in Arthur L. Eno, ed., *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell Massachusetts* (Manchester, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company with the Lowell Historical Society, 1976).

[42] John A. Goodwin, "Villages at Wamesit Neck," *Cotton Was King*, 58.

after its founding.[43] These early mills foreshadowed the later harnessing of the water power of the Merrimack, which would turn the region into one of the United States' earliest industrial corridors.

The shift away from a farming economy to an industrial economy was not only about the expansion of industrial opportunities; it was also about changing the minds of the general public about access to new forms of transportation, the establishment of a consumer-driven economy, and an overall acceptance to wage labor. The first new form of transportation was canals. The Proprietors of Locks and Canals on the Merrimack River was first chartered in 1792, with the signature of Massachusetts governor John Hancock, who was a principal investor in the Canal, further blurring the lines between business and government interests, making it one of the oldest corporations in the United States. It was founded by a group of merchants and shipowners centered in Newburyport, Massachusetts, who were interested in improving navigation on the Merrimack River, and to that end they constructed the Pawtucket Canal around the rapids at East Chelmsford in 1792–96.[44] Their goal was to bring more commerce to Newburyport. They soon had competition, as the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal, an effort led by Massachusetts States Attorney General James Sullivan, gained its charter in 1793, and began the project of connecting the Merrimack to Boston harbor. This became the Middlesex (County) Canal system, one of two "pioneering canal projects in the United States" at the time.[45] The challenges facing the investors, when they began construction of the locks and dams along the Merrimack River, were borne out of the limits of technology and the natural environment, but also the challenge of convincing the local farming families that using the canal was a more efficient option than land travel. In an 1808 report on the "obstructions of the Merrimack" made to the Middlesex Board of Directors, the report notes: "It will however take some length of time to affect change in the habits of the people in this respect. But it may certainly be accomplished by affording them good accommodations at the two extremities of water carriage."[46]

This short excerpt reveals two important historical shifts. First, the role of the Middlesex Canal Corporation's influence over transportation as farmers navigated how they engaged in commerce between the rural areas and Boston, their primary trading post. And, second, the plan to establish "accommodations" indicated the corporation's interest

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[43] Goodwin, "Villages at Wamesit Neck," 62–64.

[44] Laurence F. Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline: The Boott Cotton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1835–1955* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 5.

[45] Robert F. Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 84. See also John A. Goodwin, "Villages at Wamesit Neck," *Cotton Was King*, 59–61.

[46] Report on the Obstruction of the Merrimack River, October 27, 1808," Middlesex Canal Corporation Records, Box 1, Folder 30, Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts at Lowell Archives, Lowell, Massachusetts (hereafter UML Archives).

in creating a commercial hub that led to additional consumer spending on the part of the rural families. The Middlesex Canal Corporation completed the digging of the first lock in 1789, but they struggled to keep laborers employed due to low pay. Since they drew their labor from nearby farmers the corporation also had to contend with a general suspicion of the project with workers often opting to focus on their farms instead of digging the canal. One report notes: "I have met with difficulty in procuring men at the price that was set for this season and still find it difficult. . .to retain them in the work at this busy time of the years when the farmer comes [and] offers from 12 to 18 dollars per month some have actually left our work & gone into the farmers employ notwithstanding I had engaged all the common hands for this season."[47]

This lack of commitment to working the season by "common hands" is not surprising given the tension between the farmers in the Concord River meadows area. From the early 1600s until the early 1800s, this region was rich in agricultural farmland and fishing along the Merrimack. When the Middlesex Canal Corporation began the process of building locks and dams along the Concord River, the rerouting of the water began to flood farmland. "The Concord River 'flowage' controversy began in 1798 with the construction of the Middlesex Canal dam in Billerica," writes scholar Brian Donahue.[48] The controversy derived from the tension between two economies—agrarian and industrial—and a political system that favored the interests of the industrial capitalists. Old common laws favored the farmers. If a newly built dam encroached on privately owned farmland, the farmer was within their rights to remove the dam. According to historian Gary Kulik, colonial farmers were able to protect their agrarian traditions by "balancing private economic activity with public good."[49] In his book *Managing the River Commons*, historian Erik Reardon argues that river fishing during this period was considered "overwhelmingly. . .a public good." Reardon explains "that New England's farmer-fishermen sought to chart a course that would ensure sustainable river fisheries. They advocated for regulations designed to restrain commercial fishing operations, compelled local millers to open their dams during seasonal fish runs, defeated corporate proposals to erect industrial dams, and asserted a traditional vision of resource rights rooted in the culture of the commons. These efforts underscore an ethos of stewardship and conservation that ran through decades of petitions to state legislatures expressing deep concern for the future of this resource. Amid demographic and economic pressures, many remained convinced that river fisheries were worth

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[47] Loammi Baldwin, "Letter, July 1798," Box 1, Folder 2, Middlesex Canal Corporation Records, UML Archives.

[48] Brian Donahue, "'Damned at Both Ends and Cursed in the Middle': The 'Flowage' of the Concord River Meadows, 1798–1862," *Environmental Review* 13, no. 3–4, 46.

[49] Donahue, "Damned at Both Ends," 48; Gary Gulik, "Dams, Fish, and Farmers: Defense of Public Rights in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island," in Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

saving."[50] The rivers and sustainable fishing fell victim to constant economic pressure. For example, "in the 1750s, coastal and tidewater merchants along the Eastern Seaboard, from Maine to Connecticut, shipped preserved fish, including alewives, to sugar plantations in the West Indies to feed African slaves, and the demand from local family fisherman and commercial fishing reduced availability." Reardon argues that "commitments to sustainable fisheries accompanied observations of resource decline, and for a time, an environmental sensibility, rooted in the values, norms, and traditions of New England's rural economy, served to counteract commercial intrusion into the traditional resource base."[51] Historian Jonathan Prude's work challenges the narrative that "rural industrialization was essentially placid."[52] Prude's essay, "Town-Factory Conflicts in Antebellum Rural Massachusetts," highlights the "rising curve of ill will between the communities and their factories was ultimately rooted in the qualitative gap" between rural and mill town social systems.[53] But with the increasing power of private interests in expanding the textile industry and the relationships flourishing between industrialists and politicians, the balancing act was soon tilting in favor of the mill owners and their partners.

The founding charter of the Proprietors of Locks and Canals allowed them to use eminent domain to take land and it also granted the levying of tolls and fixed the rates. For example, "For passing the locks and canals at Wickasick and Patucket Falls to be received at Patucket, for every thousand feet of pine boards, two shillings; for every thousand feet of two and a half inch pine planks, six shillings. . .for every cord of other wood, one shilling. . . and for all articles no enumerated in proportion to the rates aforesaid for pass the locks, canals and passage-ways at Hunt's, Varnum's, Parker's, and Peter's Falls, to be paid at Peter's Falls, one half of the foregoing rate"[54] (Figures 1.6–1.7).

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[50] Erik Reardon, *Managing the River Commons: Environmental History of the Northeast* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021, Kindle edition), 2–3.

[51] Reardon, *Managing the River Commons*, 5.

[52] See Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideals and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975).

[53] Jonathan Prude, "Town-Factory Conflicts in Antebellum Rural Massachusetts," in Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 74.

[54] Courier-Citizen, *Illustrated History of Lowell and Vicinity* (Lowell, MA: Courier-Citizen Company, 1897), 158.

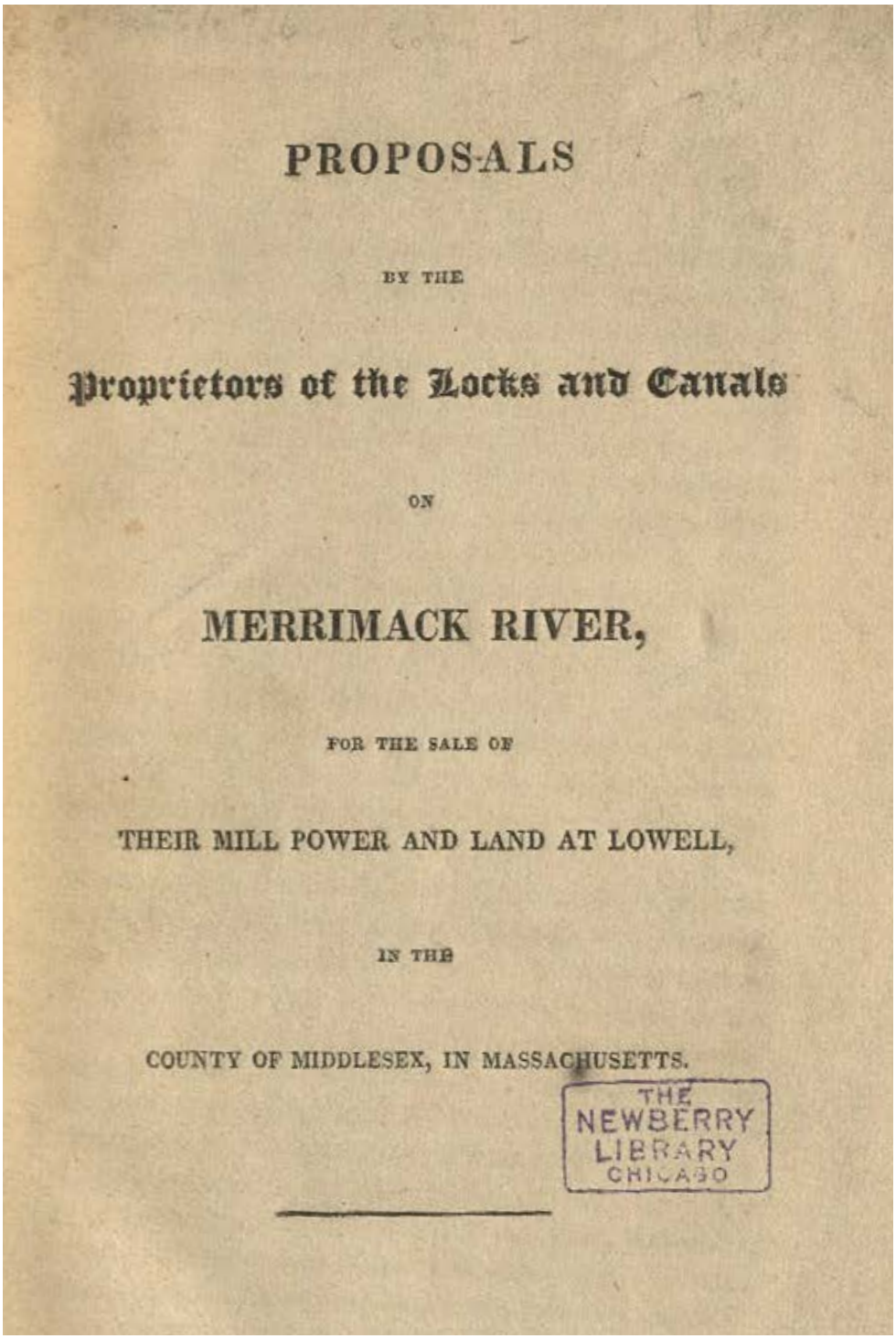
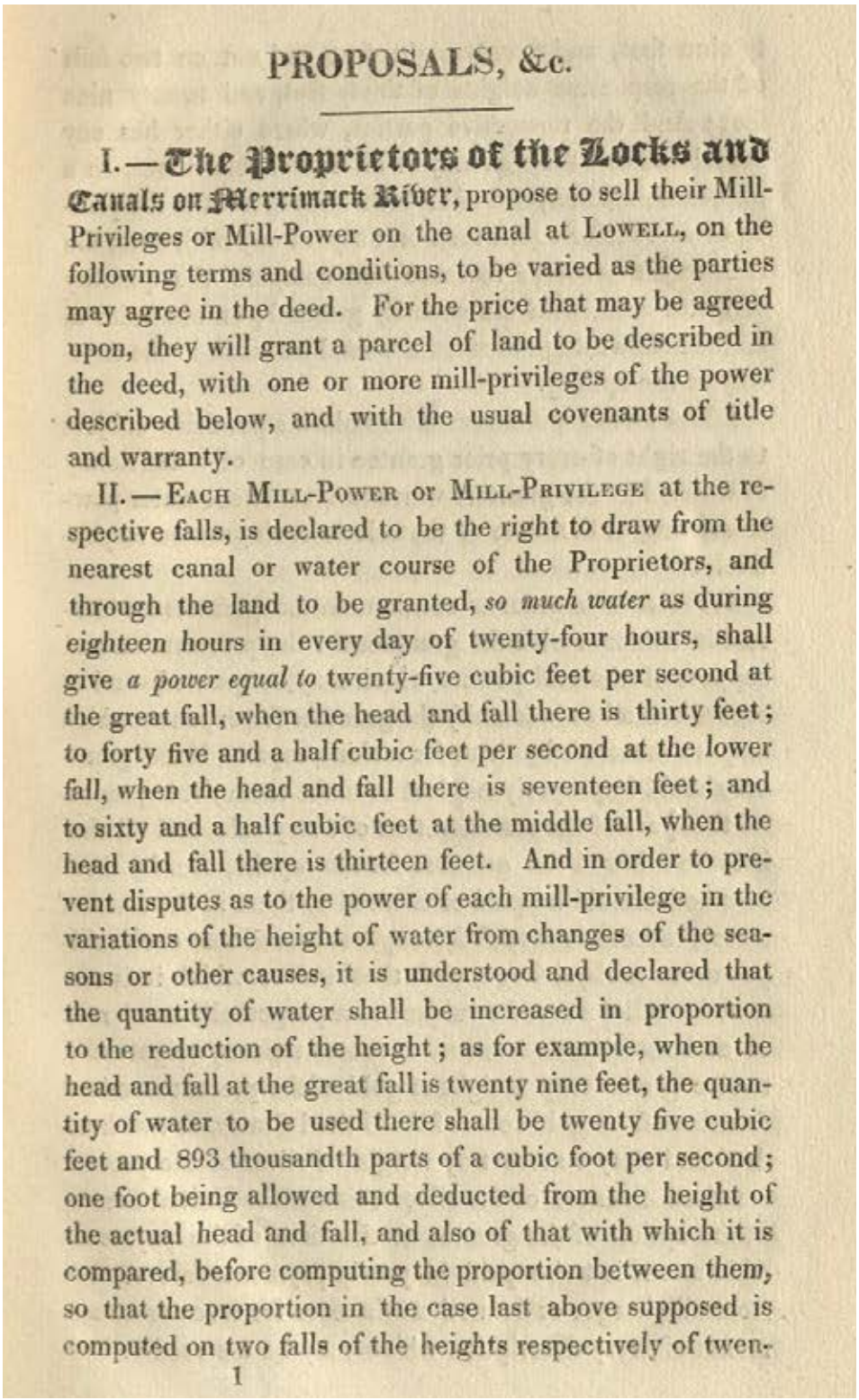


Figure 1.6. Title page, Proprietors of the Locks and Mills on Merrimack River, *Proposals by the Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on Merrimack River, for the Sale of Their Mill Power and Land at Lowell, in the County of Middlesex, in Massachusetts* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1826), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois



PROPOSALS, &c.

I.—The Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on Merrimack River, propose to sell their Mill-Privileges or Mill-Power on the canal at Lowell, on the following terms and conditions, to be varied as the parties may agree in the deed. For the price that may be agreed upon, they will grant a parcel of land to be described in the deed, with one or more mill-privileges of the power described below, and with the usual covenants of title and warranty.

II.—Each Mill-Power or Mill-Privilege at the respective falls, is declared to be the right to draw from the nearest canal or water course of the Proprietors, and through the land to be granted, *so much water* as during *eighteen* hours in every day of twenty-four hours, shall give *a power equal to* twenty-five cubic feet per second at the great fall, when the head and fall there is thirty feet; to forty five and a half cubic feet per second at the lower fall, when the head and fall there is seventeen feet; and to sixty and a half cubic feet at the middle fall, when the head and fall there is thirteen feet. And in order to prevent disputes as to the power of each mill-privilege in the variations of the height of water from changes of the seasons or other causes, it is understood and declared that the quantity of water shall be increased in proportion to the reduction of the height; as for example, when the head and fall at the great fall is twenty nine feet, the quantity of water to be used there shall be twenty five cubic feet and 893 thousandth parts of a cubic foot per second; one foot being allowed and deducted from the height of the actual head and fall, and also of that with which it is compared, before computing the proportion between them, so that the proportion in the case last above supposed is computed on two falls of the heights respectively of twen-

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Figure 1.7. First Page, Proprietors of the Locks and Mills on Merrimack River, *Proposals by the Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on Merrimack River, for the Sale of Their Mill Power and Land at Lowell, in the County of Middlesex, in Massachusetts* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1826), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois

The legislature went on to pass a number of adjustments to the rates and tolls. It took 10 years to build and cost more than $500,000, about $11 million dollars by today's standards. By 1803, however, construction of the Middlesex Canal linking the Merrimack with Boston had diverted shipping to Boston rather than to Newburyport. It ran "via a system of twenty locks, for twenty-eight miles from Boston to a point on the Merrimack River just above the future site of Lowell."[55] Additionally, Boston business leaders calculated that the power of the Pawtucket Falls of the Merrimack River could power 90 mills, an enormous source of potential industrial power. The Merrimack Manufacturing Company took over the Locks and Canals Company in 1821. As historian Laurence Gross notes, the Proprietors of Locks and Canals put up little resistance to acquisition as most parties involved were either "friends or relatives of one another."[56] In fact, Thomas M. Clark, of Newburyport and a member of the Locks and Canals Company, spoke in confidence with the owners of the Boston Manufacturing Company and struck a deal to purchase the stock at a reasonable price.[57] Next, the men began to buy up farm land simultaneously so as not to arouse suspicion. "The three farms of Nathan Tyler, Josiah Fletcher, and Mr. Cheever, comprising about two hundred and fifty acres, were bought for about eighteen thousand dollars. In 1822 thirty acres were purchased of the widow of Joseph Warren, for five thousand dollars; and in 1824 Josiah Fletcher sold one hundred acres additional for ten thousand dollars. The whole farm property, comprising about four hundred acres, was purchased for about one hundred dollars an acre. The proprietorship in the locks and canals, together with the adjoining land. . .was thus secured for about one hundred thousand dollars."[58]

In 1825, the charter of the company was amended to allow it to own real estate, water rights, and mill privileges. Consequently, the Merrimack Company became the prime instrument in the development of Lowell, as the new community was named in 1826. It built new mills, canals, and machinery, and owned the land and water rights which made Lowell a premier textile manufacturing center.

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[55] Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite*, 84.

[56] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 5.

[57] Courier-Citizen, *Illustrated History of Lowell and Vicinity*, 159.

[58] Courier-Citizen, *Illustrated History of Lowell and Vicinity*, 160.

The Birth of Spindle City

While Boston merchant Nathan Appleton was visiting his friend Frances Cabot Lowell in Scotland, they had many conversations about the manufacturing of cotton. During one of those conversations, Appleton recalled, "He [Lowell] had determined before his return to America, to visit Manchester, for the purpose of obtaining all possible information on the subject, with a view to the introduction of the improved manufacture in the United States."[59] Lowell and Appleton were members of an elite group of Boston businessmen often referred to by historians as "the Boston Associates," who for decades had been involved in lucrative shipping ventures and insurance underwriting around the Gulf of Mexico. The organization, a loose network of investors, included men from such illustrious New England families as the Lowells, Lawrences, Cabots, Appletons, Perkinses, and Otises."[60] The name, Boston Associates, was coined by Vera Shlakman in 1935. Shlakman was an economist and research fellow at Smith College when she published *Economic History of a Factory Town: A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts*, an important study of the evolution of mill towns and the roles that working-class people, especially women, played in their success.[61] The Boston Associates were wealthy well before Lowell toured Manchester's cotton mills and returned to the United States with his head full of ideas. Indeed, these men made their fortunes by trading with merchants around the globe, part of a growing system of trade predicated on plantation agricultural products produced by enslaved Africans. Prior to the industrial expansion to Lowell, two of those involved in the project—Israel Thorndike and Nathan Appleton—were explicitly growing wealthy off the backs of enslaved Africans in the southern cotton fields. As historian Lindsay Schakenbach writes, "There is evidence that Thorndike sold Georgia upland cotton in Liverpool, and in 1787, he, the Cabot brothers, and others founded the Beverly Cotton Manufactory, the country's first cotton mill. During the War of 1812, Appleton, a founder of the Waltham Company in 1813, relied on Amelia Island, off the northeastern coast of Florida, as a port for gathering and exporting cotton. These men, and other Associates, would go on to use income generated from trading cotton and other plantation goods to fund the Merrimack Valley industrialization project; thus, they profited from both the trade in and manufacture of cotton."[62] In addition to trade in other areas, the Boston Associates were very wealthy men who would be made even wealthier by Lowell's vision for textile manufacturing in Massachusetts.

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[59] Quoted in Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite*, 5.

[60] Lindsay Schakenbach, "From Discontented Bostonians to Patriotic Industrialists: The Boston Associates and the Transcontinental Treaty, 1790–1825," *New England Quarterly* (September 2011): 378–79.

[61] See Alice Kessler-Harris, "Review" of Vera Shlackman, *Economic History of a Factory Town: A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts*, in *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69 (Spring 2006): 195–200.

[62] Schakenbach, "From Discontented Bostonians to Patriotic Industrialists," 384.

The Boston Associates established strong political and banking ties that ensured that US textile production would be protected from foreign competition. Working with New Hampshire's Daniel Webster while he was a member of the US House of Representatives, the Boston Associates lobbied Webster to change his oppositional stance on tariffs. The introduction of a modest tariff on imported cotton primarily from India and China set the Boston Associates up nicely as they established the Boston Manufacturing Company in Waltham, Massachusetts. Indeed, the entire American system of manufacturing was a political exercise in isolationism and tariffs. According to Henry Clay, the future of the American economy "consisted of modifying our foreign policy, and in adopting a genuine American system." One contemporary summarized Clay's position: "Internal improvement, and protection of American interests, labor, industry and arts, are commonly understood to be the *leading* measures, which constitute the American system."[63] The Boston Associates worked closely with the Whig Party in Massachusetts to secure their place as wealthy businessmen. Understanding early-19th-century politics is critical for two reasons, according to scholars Daniel Carpenter and Benjamin Schneer. "First, it was in this period that the first mass parties connecting large electoral blocs emerged. The suffrage expansions following the War of 1812, flowing as well from the democratic movement in the states, combined with the new systems of patronage to erect organizational and ideological linkages between coalitions of voters and coalitions of legislators. Second, it was in this period that movement toward two major parties continued, not just at the level of district. . .but also at the national level."[64] For the Boston Associates, working with the Whig Party meant economic prosperity. The Whig Party worked hard on behalf of free enterprise ventures and the political payback was beneficial. As Dalzell notes, "According to one study, of the 283 Bostonians identified at the time as possessing fortunes of $100,000 or more, 86.5 percent were Whigs, and the party faired still better among the millionaires in the group. . . . For most of the Associates, involvement in politics meant voting the appropriate ticket, providing financial support for party activities, and working behind the scenes to influence policy."[65] He goes on to point out that "in the early 1820s the Boston Company had earned an average profit of nine cents a yard on cloth it produced; thirty years later, a half-a-cent a yard would have been considered adequate."[66] As the case of the

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[63] Quoted in David A. Houndshell, *From the American System to Mass Production 1800–1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 15.

[64] Daniel Carpenter and Benjamin Schneer, "Party Formation through Petitions: The Whigs and the Bank War of 1832–1834," *Studies in American Political Development* 29 (October 2015): 214.

[65] Danzell, *Enterprising Elite*, 165.

[66] Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite*, 162. See also Harry C. Dinmore, "The Proprietors of Locks and Canals: The Founding of Lowell," in Arthur L. Eno, ed., *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell Massachusetts* (Manchester, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company with the Lowell Historical Society, 1976), 72–73.

Boston Associates demonstrates, the mutually beneficial relationship between political parties and industrial capitalism is not a new one. It has been evolving as long as industrial capitalism has been thriving in the United States.

Expanding on Samuel Slater's mills in Rhode Island, the "Waltham System" was born allowing the Boston Associates to dominate the textile industry by providing affordable cloth to consumers in the United States pushing the textiles imported from China and India aside. It did not take long for the Boston Manufacturing Company to turn Waltham into a thriving company town. But the mills' production quickly topped out the water-power provided by the river, and the Boston Associates began to look further west to the land along the Merrimack and the Pawtucket Falls. The Boston Associates decided that Pawtucket Falls could generate the power that they needed for the scale of textile operations they envisioned. They began to buy up land quietly in the area and tasked the Boston Manufacturing Company to begin to build the spinning frames, spindles, and machinery needed for a large mill. By 1823, their first mill on the Merrimack began operations. In 1826, the Boston Associates incorporated their new industrial town, naming it Lowell in honor of Francis Cabot Lowell, who died in 1817.[67]

Trendsetters in early industrial development, the investors of Lowell sought to build a mill town that both transformed and embraced the local landscape. In "Greenways in an Industrial City," Patrick Malone and Charles Parrot encourage us not only to see the waters of the Merrimack corridor as a power source harnessed by capitalists for profit, but also an integral part of community life. The mill founders, starting with Kirk Boott as an agent of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, were put in charge of landscaping along the Merrimack Canal.[68] According to William Moran, "Boott, contrived a social order to serve a whole new population that, almost overnight, occupied the country's biggest industrial center. Boott built mills, housing for the women, parks, schools, a church, and almost everything else the community needed. He beautified the city with shade trees and emerald-green malls. He built the Merrimack Hotel, which provided visiting mill directors and salesmen with luxury rooms, fine cuisine, and the best of wines. He built a grand home, a Greek Revival mansion, in the middle of town."[69] As Joseph Lipchitz wrote in his essay "The Golden Age" that described the beginning of Lowell, "Lowell was, in contrast to older cities particularly European ones, a completely planned city."[70] That "planned city"

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[67] Albert Barnor and Lynn Elaine Browne, "Francis Cabot Lowell" (Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, July 2003); Schakenbach, "From Discontented Bostonians to Patriotic Industrialists"; Joseph W. Lipchitz, "The Golden Age," *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell Massachusetts* (Manchester, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company with the Lowell Historical Society, 1976), 90–91.

[68] Malone and Parrott, "Greenways in the Industrial City," 19–40.

[69] William Moran, *The Belles of New England* (New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2012, Kindle edition), 15.

[70] Joseph W. Lipchitz, "The Golden Age," *Cotton Was King*, 90.

was controlled by the businessmen who established it. As historian John Ogasapian explained, "For all practical purposes, Lowell and the Merrimack Company were the one and same entity."[71]

Boott even designed the town's Episcopal church, St. Anne's, naming it after his wife. The Merrimack Manufacturing Co. approved nine thousand dollars for the construction, a cost the company recouped by deducting a fee from the workers' wages to cover construction. John Ogasapian wrote an article about the establishment church, in which he described it: "The stone gothic-revival edifice was designed by Boott himself, after the typical English parish church of the time. The nave was seventy feet in length, by fifty-four feet in width, with walls of stone two feet thick. A twenty-foot-square tower rose from the west end."[72] The church was consecrated in 1825. By that year there were twenty-three churches in Lowell, evidencing the speed at which the town developed and the diversity of denominations its residents practiced. The company finally sold St. Anne's to the parishioners for $12,000 in 1842, giving the parish more autonomy from the mill owners and making a profit in the process. With some extension of its original footprint, St. Anne's continues to serve the residents of Lowell as an Episcopal Church today.

Figure 1.8. Postcard of St. Anne's Church, undated, Stephanie Fortado Private Collection

[71] John Ogasapian, "Lowell and Old Saint Anne's: A Study in Nineteenth Century Industrial-Church Relations," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 36, no. 4 (December 1977): 385.

[72] John Ogasapian, "Lowell and Old Saint Anne's," 389.

The Rector of St. Anne's, Theodore Edson, was instrumental in establishing an independent school system in Lowell, separating the city's schools from Chelmsford. The mill operators were not thrilled about the idea, because of the added expense the schools would cost. Boott even stopped attending St. Anne's because of Edson's involvement in advocating for the schools. Edson's involvement in the abolitionist cause also did not endear him to the mill operators including Boott who was vocally proslavery. Despite the objections of the mill owners in 1832, two grade schools were built in Lowell. In 1840, the high school was built between Kirk and Anne Streets, the site where the current high school stands to this day. What the successful effort to establish these schools demonstrated is that while the mill operators wielded considerable power in their new town, their authority was not absolute. The residents were able to affect some agency in their industrial town. The longevity of St. Anne's and the high school also evidenced the endurance of the community institutions that were established at the beginning of Lowell's development as an industrial city.[73]

The Acre: Irish Immigrant Labor in Lowell

As the Boston Associates went about the multiple tasks of setting up a new town, they also knew that significant improvements were needed to maximize the river power and produce the level of energy it would take to fuel the mill complexes they envisioned. Boott hired Irish immigrants and young Yankee men from rural New England to repair "the dilapidated Pawtucket Canal for waterpower use and dug a new one, the Merrmick, to bring water to the Merrimack Manufacturing Company."[74] Kirk Boott hired his brother John W. Boott and Warren Dutton, who would become the first president of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, to transform East Chelmsford into Lowell. The existing Pawtucket canal was in a sorry state. It was an earthen canal that allowed the water to flow unimpeded into area marshes and fields. In order to harness the power of the waterways, the Boston Associates decided to invest in building an extensive, and expensive, network of branch canals that would allow them to utilize the Merrimack River and Pawtucket Falls for both power as well as transportation. After purchasing the surrounding land and the water rights of the Merrimack River, Boott began the long and arduous process of building a mill town that would paint American industrialism as the "pretty sister" of British industrialism.[75]

Early Irish immigrants built much of Lowell's canals and buildings. Hugh Cummisky, an Irish foreman who worked at the Charlestown docks, the eventual end of the Middlesex Canal, urged Boott to hire him. Cummisky and 30 Irish laborers traveled the 27

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[73] Lipchitz, "The Golden Age," 95–96; and John Ogasapian, "Lowell and Old Saint Anne's," 390–91.

[74] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 5.

[75] Brian C. Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps: The Irish of Lowell, 1821–61* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 10–11.

miles from Charlestown to Lowell to begin working. As historian Brian Mitchell tells it, Cummisky became a leader within the new Irish community of Lowell but also a close ally of the Protestant Yankee leaders such as Paul Moody and Kirk Boott. His willingness to take on any task and his commitment to community involvement drew other Irish laborers from Boston and Canada to Lowell seeking work. And, eventually, as Irish immigrants began to leave Ireland and come to North America, Lowell became a destination as there were ample construction jobs in the young mill town. Irish immigrants brought with them loyalty to their native "factions." Before migrating to the United States, most Irish had never traveled more than several miles from their family home. This regional loyalty was replicated to a certain degree in Lowell and other Irish immigrant communities in the US. Mitchell argues "the communities provided order as well as a sense of continuity and stability."[76] In Lowell, two "paddy camps" were established in the marshy areas on the periphery of the downtown—the Acre, developed around Cork (now Marion) and Dublin Street, west of the Western Canal—was the larger of the two and home to immigrants who came from the southwestern sections of Ireland. Half-Acre (or Connaught) settlement was near Lowell and Lewis streets with "West Country" Irish immigrants.[77] In 1831, a visitor described the settlements:

> In the suburbs of Lowell, with a few rods of the canals, is a settlement, called by some, New Dublin, which occupies rather more than an acre of ground. It contains a population of not far from 500 Irish, who dwell in about 100 cabins, from 7 to 10 feet in height, built of slabs and rough boards: a fireplace made of stone, in one end, topped out with two or three flour barrels or lime casks. In a central situation, is the schoolhouse, built in the same style of the dwelling houses, turfed up to the eaves with a window in one end, and small holes in two sides for the admission of air and light.... In this room are collected together perhaps 150 children.[78]

Because Lowell officials interfered very little in the camps, residents established living arrangements that "reflected Irish cultural traditions, including clan associations" and resulted in an area of the city that "looked, smelled, and felt 'Irish.'" Narrow streets and alleyways boasted churches, schools, markets, and taverns.[79]

By 1830, workers had revitalized the Pawtucket Canal, and it now measured 60 feet wide by 8 feet deep. The Lowell, Merrimack, and Hamilton Canals were completed, as well as the buildings making up the Merrimack, Hamilton, Appleton, and Lowell mills. In

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[76] Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps*, 23.

[77] Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps*, 24.

[78] Quoted in Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps*, 26.

[79] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 44.

addition to the mills, the downtown commercial area was also close to completion with public buildings, walkways, and private residences. During this period, the Irish workers were still a minority of the workforce with rural Yankee laborers being the largest contingent.

In 1831, with the help of the Catholic bishop in Boston, Benedict Fenwick, the Irish enclave established a Catholic church for Lowell's growing Irish Catholic community. Boott, who hoped that providing the Irish their own worship space might ease tensions with the other residents of Lowell, donated a lot for the building. Irish labor built the church, and St. Patrick Church was dedicated in 1831, between Adams and Fenwick Street. "St. Patrick was made of wood and measured seventy by forty feet. It was designed in Gothic style, with a gilded globe and cross surmounting a central tower."[80] In 1854 a new church was built at the site, and the church was rebuilt again after a devastating fire in 1904. The establishment of the Catholic Church in Lowell would be a draw, and Irish families would flock to Lowell in the wake of mass migration during the Ireland famine in the decades to come.[81]

In 1834, renowned frontiersman David Crockett visited Lowell on a tour of New England, where he was trying to drum up support for the Whig Party against President Andrew Jackson. He was also personally invested in the success of US cotton manufacturing, such as that in Lowell, given that he was an enslaver and owner of cotton fields in Texas. He penned his observations of Lowell, which included:

> I wanted to see the power of machinery, wielded by the keenest calculations of human skill; I wanted to see how it was that these northerners could buy our cotton, and carry it home, manufacture it back, and sell it for half nothing, and, in the mean time, be well to live, and make money besides.... This place has grown by, and must depend on, its manufactures. Its location renders it important, not only to the owners, but to the nation. Its consumption not only employs thousands of its own population, but many thousands far from them.[82]

During the 19th century the mills at Lowell would continue to consume the labor of its own population, as well the labor of "many thousands far from them," spinning southern cotton into textiles. Many would wonder at the power of Lowell, the industrial city on the banks of the Merrimack.

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[80] Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps*, 37–39.

[81] Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps*, 29. See also "St Patrick Church Parish," http://www.stpatricklowell.org/our-history-2.

[82] David Crocket, "An Account of Col. Crocket's Tour to the North and Down East, 1835." https://libguides.uml.edu/c.php?g=529897&p=3627009.

CHAPTER TWO

The Rise of Industrial Capitalism to the Civil War

And then these farmers so cute,
They gave *all their lands and timber to Boott,*
Ri-oot, ri-oot, etc.[1]

. . .Try again! try again!
Heart and hope should never wane;
Fear ye not the bold aggressor,
Heed ye not the sten oppressor;
Try again! try again. . .

The Voice of Industry, May 8, 1846[2]

This chapter explores how Lowell contributed to the transformation of the industrial landscape and industrial capitalism that in many ways continues to define the American economy. It examines how environmental understandings of Lowell were shaped through the lens of industry, the shift for women from the expectations of the "cult of domesticity" to the reality of wage labor in the textile industry, the waves of Irish immigrants during the antebellum period, the urban expansion of Lowell beyond the factories, the inextricable links between enslaved labor and industrial Lowell, and Lowell's response to the Civil War.

Early industry in New England was, in the words of textile manufacturer Zachariah Allen, "carried on in little hamlets, which often appear to spring up in the bosom of some forest, around the water fall which services to turn the mill wheel." Despite the growing footprint of Lowell, which by 1840 was a city of 20,000, most of the

[1] Quoted in Harriet H. Robinson, *Loom and Spindle* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1898), 9.

[2] Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Factory Girls* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 103.

700 cotton mills operating in New England were in small villages.[3] According to historian Percy W. Bidwell, "It would have been difficult to find 50 out of the 479 townships in Southern New England which did not have at least one manufacturing village clustered around a cotton mill, an iron furnace, a chair factory or a carriage shop."[4] Small mill villages relied on a family labor system resulting in a company town that included the varied architecture of modest family tenements and buildings made of stone, brick, or wood. Industrial production took place in multiple buildings requiring workers to transport goods from one building to another, and the village developed as new production demands evolved. There was little architectural uniformity to the village resulting in a hodgepodge layout that became known as the "Rhode Island System." Company towns like these were not isolated to Rhode Island and grew throughout New England. In fact, as journalist Hardy Green notes in his book, *The Company Town*, the United States embraced the tradition of social experimentation and as such "has a unique experience with company towns. With its vast expanse of virgin land and a government that has generally taken a laissez-faire attitude toward business, the United States has provided a great opportunity for developing such settlements than other countries."[5]

In contrast to the Rhode Island System, the Waltham-Lowell system was a vertically integrated system, which meant that all aspects of production happened within one building, allowing for architectural uniformity in the layout of the town. Vertical integration would become the new standard in manufacturing allowing greater control over the supply chain and less reliance on external companies. And, in contrast to relying on family units to provide labor, Lowell opted to hire single women, which allowed for the building of dormitory-style housing in which multiple women shared bedrooms and lived collectively, ridding the need for privacy required by families.[6]

The uniformity of vertically integrated industrial systems allowed industrialists to preserve green spaces and design a town that set them apart from the "dark satanic mills" of Manchester, England. In 1814, Johann Georg May wrote: "Manchester is famous throughout the world as the centre of cotton manufacture. There are hundreds of factories…which tower up to five and six storeys in height. Huge chimneys at the side of these buildings belch forth black coal vapours, and this tells us that powerful steam engines are used. The clouds of vapour can be viewed afar. The houses are blackened by it." Johann Heinrich Meidinger, a Frankfurt merchant, visited a few years later in 1820. "Manchester is

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[3] Quoted in Gary Kulik, Roger Parks, and Theodore Z. Penn, *The New England Mill Village, 1790–1860* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), xxiii.

[4] Percy W. Bidwell, "The Agricultural Revolution in New England," *American Historical Review* 26 (July 1929): 686.

[5] Hardy Green, *The Company Town: The Industrial Edens and Satanic Mills That Shaped the American Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 5.

[6] John S. Garner, *The Company Town: Architecture and Society in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 112–14.

a sprawling town with few beautiful streets and buildings—mostly nothing else apart from warehouses and factories. Among the workers one sees a large number of pale and poorly-dressed people who live on buttermilk, oatcakes, and potatoes." And, a 22-year-old Frederick Engels concluded that the "350,000 working people of Manchester and its environs live, almost all of them, in wretched, damp, filthy cottages, that the streets which surround them are usually in the most miserable and filthy condition, laid out without the slightest reference to ventilation, with reference solely to the profit secured by the contractor."[7] In short, the founders of industrial Lowell attempted to bring the industrialism of Manchester to New England, without its worst attributes.

"Work Is Here the Patron Saint": Industry and the Environment in Lowell

As the mills developed, the mill owners created a series of parks and greenways along the canal and riverbanks in an effort to draw workers to their town and to "deflect criticism of the American industrialism." In their article about Lowell's greenways, Patrick Malone and Chares Parrott argue that "corporate landscaping efforts in Lowell were not the domination of nature, but instead the planned integration of natural features and deliberate plantings in the rational, highly structured order of a new industrial city." Lowell took pride in its image as the "Venice of America."[8] For the mill owners, this effort to rationalize nature was at its core an effort to maximize profit from the industrial landscape, a nascent recognition that environmental conditions impacted on worker productivity.

Discovering how workers themselves considered their natural environment is more difficult and requires close reading of available sources. For example, millworker Lucy Larcom reflected on her work in the mills and on the local landscape in her poetry. Larcom came to work at Boott Mills at age 11, where she worked her way up to the position of bookkeeper over a decade. She became a regular contributor to the *Lowell Offering*, where she published multiple poems about life and work in the Spindle City. Many of her poems touched on environmental themes, including *Idyl of Work*. The poem glosses over the negative impact of industrial production on the environment and labor to paint a romanticized recollection:

> A river less romantic than the Rhine,
> Yet fringed with its unwritten histories,—
> New England's beautiful blue Merrimack

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[7] "Dark Satanic Mills? The Archaeology of the World's First Industrial City," *Current Archaeology,* May 25, 2010, https://archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/dark-satanic-mills-the-archaeology-of-the-worlds-first-industrial-city.htm. Accessed on January 24, 2022.

[8] Malone and Parrott, "Greenways in the Industrial City," 19–40.

> And they were idle as queens' ladies now,—
> Three girls in their work-aprons, gazing out
> Upon the swirling freshet; for the stream
> Had risen to a flood, and made the factory-wheels
> Drag slow, and slower, till they almost stopped.
> The spindle scarcely turned, the thread ran slack,
> And lazily the shuttle crossed the web.
> Slight watching their work needed; so they stood
> And gave free voice to thoughts and fantasies
> That groaning shaft and ceaseless clattering loom
> Were wont to clamor down.[9]

In these lines, Larcom compares the Merrimack River with one of the most renowned rivers of Europe. The next line, describing how the river was "fringed with unwritten histories," captures the moving power of the river. The Merrimack River is the environmental throughline that runs through the histories—those written and those unwritten—that unfolded on its banks. Industrialism had not completely tamed the river in Larcom's poem. When the water levels rose high, the waterpower that turned the factory wheels slowed and gave the women working in the mill the chance to engage in idyll, to daydream, something that was often hard to do during the "clamor" of a busy workday in a mill.

Yet, despite this effort to characterize Lowell as Venice reborn or to draw parallels between the Merrimack and the Rhine, the Proprietors of Locks and Canals stood as the arbiters of the environment of the canal and the land along its banks—and preserving environmental splendor did not motivate their decisions. Profit was the bottom line for decisions made about the waterways—and the water was most valued for its power to aid the labor of textile production. In 1844, the Quaker abolitionist and poet John Greenleaf Whittier captured the importance of the water power in Lowell while he was there writing for the abolitionist newspaper *Middlesex Standard*. He wrote:

> This then, is Lowell, a city springing up, like the enchanted palaces of the Arabian tales, as it were a single night, stretching far and wide its chaos of brick masonry and painted shingles, filling the angle of the confluence of the Concord and the Merrimac with the sights and sounds of trade and industry. Marvelously here have art and labor wrought their modern miracles. I can scarcely realize the fact that a few years ago these rivers, now tamed and subdued to the purpose of man and charmed into slavish subjection to the wizard of mechanism, rolled unchecked towards the ocean the waters of the Winnipesaukee and the rock-rimmed springs of the White Mountains, and rippled down their fall in the wild freedom of Nature. A stranger, in view of all

[9] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAD5902.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.

> this wonderful change, feels himself, as it were, thrust forward into a new century; he seems treading the outer circle of the millennium of steam engines and cotton mills. Work is here the patron saint.[10]

Whittier describes Lowell as an almost magical place that seemed to spring up "in a single night," poised to usher in a new century. The Concord and Merrimack Rivers run through his prose as waterways "charmed" with by the "wizard" of industrialism. The mills had transformed the landscape, but Whittier declared the transformation "wonderful." Whittier's description glosses over the environmental devastation caused to the waterways by the mills as well as the grinding, dirty labor of textile production. Perhaps this is because as an abolitionist, Whittier was invested in circulating an idealized picture of northern industry as a juxtaposition to the enslaved labor of the south. His conclusion that "work is here the patron saint" summarizes well the driving philosophy of environmental management in the Lowell area during the late 19th century.

In 1846, a Massachusetts law was passed further codifying the power of industry over the region's water "giving the manufacturing corporations of Lowell power to own and improve the waterpower used by them." According to the act, the companies involved included "the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, Hamilton Manufacturing Company, Appleton Company, Suffolk Manufacturing Company, Tremont Mills, Lawrence Manufacturing Company, Boott Cotton Mills, Middlesex Company, Massachusetts Cotton Mills, Prescott Manufacturing Company, and the Lowell Machine Shop, are, and each of them is hereby, empowered to purchase and hold the capital stock of the Proprietors of Locks and Canals on Merrimack River, in such amounts as the said corporations, or each of them, shall think fit."[11]

With so many different competing mill and industrial interests attempting to harness the waterpower of the corridor, the principals involved in the different companies early recognized the necessity for a method to settle disputes about how these firms interacted with their local environment. In 1847, the various major mill companies agreed to send disagreements to the Board of Directors of Proprietors of Locks and Canals. The records of the Lowell Machine Shop describe the scope of their jurisdiction to settle disputes: "Whenever and as often as there shall be any controversy, dispute, or difference of opinion, between any two or more of said corporation, their respective assessors or assigns, concerning the power of any mill privilege…or the quantity of water used, wasted or disposed of by them…or concerning any or either dams, gates, canals flumes, vacuways, or wasteways."[12]

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[10] John Whittier Greenleaf, "The City of a Day," in *The Writings of John Greenleaf in Seven Volumes, Volume V* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.1892), 351.

[11] Courier-Citizen, *Illustrated History of Lowell and Vicinity*, 160.

[12] April 10, 1848, Lowell Machine Shop Records 1845–1905, Lowell Machine Shop, Baker Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (hereafter BL Archives).

The environmental issues that the Proprietors of Locks and Canals were asked to weigh in on varied. One of the most pressing issues was how to deal with the fluctuating water levels in the Merrimack River corridor, and the demands for that water by the various manufacturing concerns that relied on waterpower to turn their profits. By 1845 engineer James B. Francis was named Manager of the Proprietor of Locks and Canals and for 40 years served as a leading voice in trying to regulate the waterpower of the canal system. Francis first learned his craft in England, apprenticing with his father in Wales as a young man before coming to Lowell where he quickly rose through the ranks of Locks and Canals. In 1850, he oversaw the construction of a Great Gate at the Pawtucket Canal. Some detractors derided the project as "Francis's Folly," in an effort to protect the Lowell mills during a time of the flood. Francis's plan had limited efficacy in mitigating serious flood damage downstream, and what relief it did provide came at the sacrifice of houses and farms upstream that became collateral damage to save Lowell industry.[13]

Another threat that could upset the system was contaminants in the water. In the 19th century, the worry over such contaminants was not due to their potential negative environmental impact, but because of the potential economic harm such contamination could cause the industries that drew on the water. In 1851, the Proprietors of Locks and Canals received a letter from Middlesex Company accusing Lowell Gas and Light Co. of putting "some dirty gaseous substance" into the water. "We have been annoyed for some months past by finding our goods when they leave the rinsers covered with black spots and stripes which have caused us much damage and expense." The "expense" was the word that surely caught the attention of the Proprietors of Locks and Canal agent as their priority was to ensure profit on the canal way. They urged the gas company to abate the "the nuisance" at once.[14]

Drought posed another concern. For example, during the 1871 drought, the Boott Cotton Mill asked to "draw some excess" over their typically allowed water usage to keep their spindles going, a request for which Francis indicated approval.[15] While water management was the paramount concern for the Proprietors of Locks and Canals engineers, they also had to accommodate other interests in the waterway. Upon his retirement in 1884, Francis's son, also named James, took over his position as the head engineer. In his correspondence as engineer, he explained how a "channel has been cut through the ledge of sufficient depth to allow the fish a passage to the dam" at the Pawtucket Dam, an

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[13] "Francis's Folly" Historical Marker Database, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=48418.

[14] James M. Francis, Agent, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to M. C. Bryant, Esquire, Agent Lowell Gas Light, Co.

[15] James B. Francis, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to R. D. Rogers, Treasurer Boott Cotton Mills, July 14, 1871, Volume DB 5–8, DB 6, 273, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

accommodation that he described as "quite satisfactory to the fish connoisseurs." Whether it was floods, droughts, or fishermen, the engineers had many issues to solve on the Merrimack River and canal system.

These issues continued into the new century. In his records in 1901, Proprietors of Locks and Canals engineer Hiram Mills described the long-standing practice of mills upstream dumping "any refuse material that it has been convenient to convey away by water," a practice deemed "permissible" as long as the refuse "did not interfere with the operations of the mills on the lower level."[16] But when a carpet company upstream began to dump dark dye refuse into the canal, it became a problem because the tainted water could alter the color of the products being spun further down the canal, including the Middlesex Company. Upstream companies, especially Hamilton Manufacturing Company protested they had long engaged in the practice of dumping refuse into the canal, and that practice gave them the right to continue to do so. Engineer Mills proposed installing pipes to divert the dark dye refuse to the "other side of the canal" with all parties concerned footing some of the cost.[17] Textile companies were not the only ones dumping substances into the water. Lowell Machine Shop also agreed to sign on to the agreement that it "would not claim any right to so pollute said water by prescription or adverse use."[18] What these examples demonstrate is that for decades during the industrial era concern about water pollution had less to do with the short- or long-term impact on the local environment, and more to do with the bottom lines of the various industries along the canal. It also points to the difficulty of changing entrenched industrial practices and the impact of such practices on the environment.

"Daughters Are Now Emphatically a Blessing to the Farmer"[19]

The mill owners had to not only navigate the difficulties of water management; they also had to secure a workforce. They chose young women from rural New England. The employment of young women as mill operatives has multiple historical ramifications.

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[16] Hiram Mills to the Directors of the Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on the Merrimack River, February 21, 1901, Box VC 1–3, Volume 2, 478–82, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, Baker Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, BL Archives.

[17] Hiram Mills, "Memorandum for Use of the Committee," February 28, 1901, Box VC 1–3, Volume 2, 478–82, and Hiram Mills To the Directors of the Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on the Merrimack River, March 29, 1901, Box VC 1–3, Volume 2, 491–95. Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[18] Edward S. [M]oodies, May 2, 1901, Lowell Machine Shop Records 1845–1905, Lowell Machine Shop, BL Archives.

[19] Quote of a mill owner, Bernice Selden, *The Mill Girls: Lucy Larcom, Harriet Hanson Robinson, Sarah G. Bagley* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), 4.

These women were the first large contingent of factory workers in the United States. In some cases, women chose to leave their rural communities on their own initiative, or their families demanded they work in the mills—either option brought much-needed income into the family that previously was not available. When the economic landscape shifted during the 1800s and an industrial economy replaced an agrarian economy, the social expectations for young women in New England were singular: become a wife and mother. The transition from daughter to wife was not only a social construct but also an economic necessity. Agrarian households depended on the work of a heteronormative family unit—husband, wife, and children—to maintain the family economy. However, as historians have noted, the dependence on women's labor in the household did not translate into social and political power or voice for women. Historian Mary Beth Norton notes, "The mere fact that a woman's economic contribution to the household is significant is not sufficient to give her a voice in matters that might otherwise be deemed to fall within the masculine sphere."[20] Indeed, women were subjected to the laws of "*coverture*."

Women in the United States were bound by the division between the public and private spheres. As such, women did not have the right to vote nor was property handed down to them. Further, they were subjected to an elaborate legal system of *coverture* that defined the citizenship of white women, in contrast to enslaved women and other women of color who were not deemed citizens by the law. The laws of coverture were not only relevant to landowners and the elite. The law itself informed the social and cultural construction of gender identity and by extension the roles of white women in society. As historian Linda K. Kerber explains it, "By treating married women as 'covered' by their husbands' civic identity, by placing sharp constraints on the extent to which married women controlled their bodies and their property, the old law of domestic relations ensured that. . .married women's obligations to their husbands and families overrode their obligations to the state." This in turn was supposed to "shield [white] women from the stresses of public life."[21] Yet the segregation of the demands of household management away from public life was unrealistic especially as the economy shifted away from an agrarian model toward an industrial model that ultimately created an increased demand on mass-produced consumer goods. It also established a social norm of what historian Barbara Welter calls "the cult of true womanhood," an ideology that promoted the idea that women's behavior—specifically white women—must reflect virtue and piety, and this

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[20] Mary Beth Norton, "The Myth of the Golden Age," in Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, *Women of America: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 42. See also Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650–1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[21] Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Rights to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), xxiii, 15.

was done by fulfilling their roles and mothers and wives and remaining in the domestic sphere. In *The Bonds of Womanhood*, historian Nancy Cott seeks to understand how "the emphasis placed on and agencies attributed to the family unit were new, and the importance given to women's roles as wives, mother, and mistresses of households were unprecedented. The ministers, educators, and pious and educated women in the northern United States whose published writings principally documented this ethic made women's presence the essence of successful homes and families."[22] Writer and educator Catharine Beecher Stowe wrote in her 1845 treatise, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, that women should feel drawn to the domestic sphere and drafted instructions that outlined the ideal behavior for women.[23] As historian Kathryn Kish Sklar writes of the separate spheres and Beecher's work, "It fostered uniform communities, molded socially homogeneous human beings, and produced a set of predictable habits among contemporary Americans.... Beecher was among the first to engage in the contradictory task of both nationalizing and personalizing the American domestic environment."[24] The cult of domesticity was so deeply entrenched in the social construction of white New Englanders regardless of class, the female mill worker was often equated with the idea of prostitution in that work outside the home was a violation of "true womanhood" and the ideal of sexual purity. In Sarah Savage's fictionalized account *The Factory Girl*, published in 1814, in the early days of industrial textile work, Mary's mother implores, "What your poor father would say, were he alive, to have you get your bread in such a manner.... I don't think he would consent...to your being with people who were not good and serious."[25] Her mother went on to explain that her father believed that if Mary was to work for someone, it would send her "astray" and she would forget the lessons she had learned from the Bible. The equating of wage labor with sinful or wayward behavior was one challenge that the Lowell manufacturers needed to counter when they were recruiting an all-female workforce of unmarried young women. Ultimately, Mary's marriage to a wealthy widower she meets through her industrial labor served as a balm to her mother's worries. However, it took Mary convincing her mother that she would not do anything "for the world to make you uneasy" and the assurances of Mr. and Mrs. Danforth, "who you know are good judges of correct behaviour," to allow her to work in the

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[22] Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 2.

[23] Catharine Beecher Stowe, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School* (Boston: T. H. Webb, 1843).

[24] See Katheryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (Norton Press, 1976); Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, eds., *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Women's Sphere* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[25] Foner, *The Factory Girl*, 4.

factories.[26] This ideology was so pervasive throughout New England that Lowell's founders needed to address it as they sought women to work in their mills—a far cry from the realm of the domestic sphere.

It was in this context that the young women of New England farming communities were encouraged to work in the Lowell mills. Lowell's founders sought to "create a labor force that would be a shining example of. . . Yankee ideals: profit and virtue, doing good and doing well."[27] Nathan Appleton desired a "fund of Labor, well-educated and virtuous." Rather than rely on advertising like in smaller textile villages, the founders hired recruiters to scour the farming communities of Massachusetts and surrounding states offering young unmarried women the opportunity to move to Lowell, work in the textile mills, and live in the boarding houses. Posting broadsides throughout rural communities seeking "Young Women from 15 to 35 Years of Age, Wanted to Work in the Cotton Mills in Lowell," hiring agents set up meetings in hotels and community centers for women to apply for work and commit to one year of work in the mills.[28] This hiring process contrasted with the manufacturing in villages that relied on families for labor. One help wanted advertisement from July 31, 1832, read, "Wanted as the new Cotton Manufactory in Windham [Connecticut], two or three large Families, to whom liberal wages and constant employment will be given (as there is no lack of water) and full employment for men's labour wanted." Some advertisements sought as many as "10 to 15 families," and others specified family size, "a family consisting of six or eight persons. . . to such a Family liberal wages [*sic*] will be paid, either in cash or otherwise as may be agreed upon."[29]

The Lowell strategy was indeed quite clever. It allowed much-needed income for families without necessitating the relocation of the full family unit. And, for the unmarried young women, it offered an opportunity to forestall the inevitable marriage and motherhood of the domestic sphere and the sheltered life in rural New England. For example, Lucy Ann, a mill operative, planned to use her wages to attend Oberlin College. In 1851, she wrote a letter to her cousin: "I have earned enough to school me awhile, & have not I a right to do so, or must I go home, like a dutiful girl, place the money in father's hands, & then there goes all my hard earnings." She went on to write, "I think I should spend my

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[26] Foner, *The Factory Girl*, 7.

[27] Benita Eisler, *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women, 1840–1945* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997, 15.

[28] "75 Young Women 15 to 35 Years of Afe, Wanted to Work in the Cotton Mills!," Broadside circa 1870, Baker Library, Harvard Business School Archives, Vertical File Collection. Also available at https://wams.nyhistory.org/building-a-new-nation/american-woman/mill-girls. Accessed on February 9, 2023.

[29] Quoted in Kulik et al., *The New England Mill Village*, 408–10.

earnings as I please."[30] The financial independence afforded these women was a revelation. In 1833, the Lowell Institution of Savings reported that women factory operatives had deposited $100,000.[31]

Working Life of Mill Women

Upon arriving in Lowell, newly employed women were required to live in the boarding house that provided a shared bed in a room with two to three beds, three meals, candles, curfew, and a housemother, who was called a "keeper," who managed the boarding house and acted as guardian of the female boardinghouse residents. The boardinghouse system benefited the factory owners in two ways. First, by building large boardinghouses that could house up to 30 to 40 women at a time, the layout of the city escaped the hodgepodge of single-family dwellings that was inevitable in mill villages. By intentionally mapping out both the factory and housing footprint in close proximity to one another, the mill owners' vision of relying on a workforce composed of single young women allowed them another opportunity. As scholar Lisa Vogel points out, "The boarding house was an experiment in corporate paternalism. . . [with] boardinghouse keepers to enforce the rules and supervise the women on and off the job. . . . The manufacturers thought to transfer the patriarchal structure of women's country backgrounds in to the factory setting."[32] The boarding house system reinforced a strict code of conduct that allowed for total control over their workforce. And, as the workers were all women, this was viewed by society as socially acceptable. A population of young, unmarried women living away from their families, according to the social norms of the day, meant that the women workers required constant surveillance and companionship by other women. By regulating all aspects of their work and personal lives, Lowell mill women were given little opportunity to breach their prescribed roles. However, many of them did succeed in challenging the status quo, as we will see later in this chapter.

Launched in 1840, the *Lowell Offering* was a monthly publication that was filled with short stories, poems, and reflections written primarily by mill women with a subscription service that reached beyond the streets of Lowell. The use of *Lowell Offering* as a single primary source to recount the history of the experiences of mill workers would be a mistake, as it was not an independent publication. It was published with funding from the mill owners, and their influence played a critical role in the editorial content of the

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[30] Quoted in T. Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826–1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 37–38.

[31] Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 17.

[32] Lisa Vogel, "Their Own Work: Two Documents from the Nineteenth-Century Labor Movement," *Signs* 1, no. 3 (1976): 789.

publication. As historian Benita Eisler notes, "Its cover bore the banner line that would inspire adulation abroad and pride at home: 'A Repository of Original Articles, Written Exclusively by Females Actively Employed in the Mills."[33] The publication benefitted multiple stakeholders. First and foremost, it served as an advertisement for Lowell as a pioneer in industrial capitalism and the future of urban planning among both the families sending their daughters to work in the mills but, equally important, future business partners and investors. For women workers, it provided opportunities to cultivate their literary skills and build relationships. And, among the city's arbiters of morality, it served to preserve the notion that industrial capitalism and wage labor were socially acceptable. By spending time in Lowell, a factory operative would have the opportunity to not only save some much-needed money, but also build friendships and pursue an education through the many cultural events provided by Lowell's leading citizens. And, while there were many events that took place at the Lyceum and churches, the very real fact remained that the purpose of the Lowell mills was to produce and sell textiles at the highest possible profit margin in order to pay out the maximum dividends possible to shareholders who did not reside in the new industrial city of Lowell.

The many nuances of the *Lowell Offering* can make it a tricky primary source; however, if read against the grain, it can uncover some of the voices of working-class women, laboring, and living in Lowell. For example, in "Abby's Year in Lowell," penned by "Lucinda" and published in the first volume of the *Lowell Offering*, the reader is given a glimpse into one interpretation of what life was like for young rural women choosing to leave their family and work in the mills. One of the publication's purposes was to demonstrate the acceptability of wage labor and living away from one's family before marriage, as this excerpt shows us. In this fictionalized narrative, a young woman begs her parents to let her leave the family farm to work in Lowell like her friends, the Slater sisters. Her desire to go to Lowell is initially driven by the desire to consume—to trade her "brown cambric bonnet, and. . .the same calico dress [for] new silk dresses, and Navarino bonnets trimmed with flowers."[34] Her mother is reluctant to allow her daughter the adventure as she believes "she is so very giddy and thoughtless, and the Slater girls are as hair-brained as herself, and will lead her on in all sorts of folly." Yet her father believes that a year in Lowell will challenge her to mature.[35] And, indeed, Abby resolves to "pursue a course entirely different from that which was expected of her. . .they shall see that *I am* a better, milder, and more thoughtful girl."[36] As we see in the story of Abby, her initial desire to work in the mills is

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[33] Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 33–34.

[34] "Abby's Year in Lowell," *Lowell Offering*, Volume 1, 2.

[35] "Abby's Year in Lowell," *Lowell Offering*, Volume 1, 3.

[36] "Abby's Year in Lowell," *Lowell Offering*, Volume 1, 4–5.

borne of curiosity and the lure of shiny baubles and silken dresses. Her parents do not need her to work in the mills, yet the income and gifts she brings home are without a doubt beneficial to her family's financial health and well-being.

As Abby's story continues, when she arrives in Lowell she is tempted by the "illuminated streets" and all the shops have on display; yet she commits to putting her wages into the local savings bank. This is not easy for her as she walks by the milliners and the confectioneries. Her friends shun her at times because she is not wearing a new bonnet and her dress is out of date, but she focused on her "newly-awakened desire for mental improvement and spent her leisure hours in reading useful books." Upon returning a year later to her family, they expect to see a modern woman dressed in the finest gowns of silk. Instead, she returns in a modest new dress and a trunk filled with gifts for her family and a small sum saved in the bank. Her family rejoices at her return and her parents smile proudly at her maturity. And, in the end, they know they can trust her to return to Lowell to be industrious and help the family. Life in Lowell introduced young mill women to a much broader world than their lives in rural New England. When they were not working, they were encouraged to spend time in the town center shopping, socializing, attending readings and performances, and, of course, worshiping on Sundays. In a letter to her sister, Mary Cowles writes, "I have purchased me a seat in the Presbyterian Church and I attend there. I think it is much better to attend on Church steady than to be going from one to another every Sabbath as a great many of the girls do here."[37]

The social and economic elite of Lowell embraced the "cult of self-improvement." As a result, they established a lyceum modeled after the Lowell Institute in Boston and invited speakers to come and educate the workers of Lowell. Founded in 1828 by Daniel Webster and John Lowell Jr., the Lowell Institute invited "everyone from respectable Harvard professors to phrenologists or outright quacks could hire a hall, sell tickets, and hope to clear a profit."[38] The purpose of the lyceum movement was to offer educational opportunities when formal schooling was not the standard for the general population. It was also rooted in a belief that this type of philanthropy through education in the arts and sciences would reap economic benefits.[39] "Mill workers were paid in cash enabling them to take advantage of such amenities as relatively stylish store-bought clothes, evening classes in such subjects as languages, music or sciences, and 'mutual self-improvement' clubs where workers who liked to write could share their latest efforts. The lyceum movement in Lowell sponsored speakers and was second only to Boston's, bringing to town such

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[37] "Mary Cowles, "Letter, December 6, 1847," Box 6, Folder 13, ATHM, Kheel Archives."

[38] Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 49.

[39] Margaret W. Rossiter, "Benjamin Silliman and the Lowell Institute: The Popularization of Science in Nineteenth-Century America," *New England Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1971): 602–26.

luminaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horace Greeley and John Quincy Adams."[40] For some mill women, participation in these activities offered opportunities to access education that they would not otherwise have had access to in their more rural communities. However, the rigor of their working lives which took up six days a week begs the question of how many mill women were indeed attending these events.

The friendships developed between mill women while living and working in Lowell signified a shift in the social order of the 19th century and potential challenges to the expectations of the "cult of domesticity." In boarding houses filled with young women, the opportunity to make friends from other towns, counties, and states was inevitable, and in some cases, these friendships evolved into romantic bonds that deviated from the heteronormative expectations of the time. As letters between Lowell mill workers demonstrate, long-term friendships were developed as women traveled between Lowell and their hometowns. In some cases, "romantic friendships" likely formed. Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's now classic essay "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America" was a foundational text in documenting the reality that "long-lived, intimate, loving friendship between two women" were a reality.[41] Building on Smith-Rosenberg's work, Kathryn A. Cady's research explores how "theories of silence provide a critical reading strategy. . .shed[s] new light on sexualities created in *Offering* stories."[42] Cady focuses on one story specifically, "Ann and Myself," in which two women share "an intense and exclusive bond" that is challenged by the narrator's departure to Lowell. While in Lowell, the narrator finds the women working in the mills to be "beautiful" and "intelligent." And, when Ann marries while she is away in Lowell, the narrator cuts off ties from Ann. The story is ultimately an unusual critique of marriage, which Cady argues is "atypical" for the time. The narrator's belief that Ann's marriage is a "threat" to their friendship and her rejection of marriage altogether allow there to be a "specter of female same-sex desire."[43] More recently scholars such as historian Jen Manion have explored sexuality in the 18th and 19th centuries. In *Female Husbands*, Manion "follows the category of the 'female husband' from its origin in 1746 through its demise just before World War I."[44] And, while there is no mention of Lowell, as it was predominantly a female workforce, there are cases in other New England mill towns where women lived as

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[40] Mary Roberts, "Hell's Bells," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 2022, for more on how the understanding and use of time changed during the rise of industrial capitalism. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/hells-bells-63350240. Accessed February 9, 2022.

[41] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1.

[42] Kathryn A. Cady, "'Ann and Myself': Rhetoric, Sexualities, and Silence at Lowell," *Southern Communications Journal* 77, no. 1 (2012): 26.

[43] Cady, "Ann and Myself," 35–36.

[44] Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 2 (Kindle edition).

men and worked in the mills. This allows us to conclude that, while much of the archives are—as Cady would argue—"silent" on the topic of sexuality in the 19th century, contemporary understanding of sexuality and recent scholarship on other periods allow us to conclude that same-sex relationships certainly existed within the walls of Lowell's mills and boarding houses.[45] For example, in a 1855 letter to Amy Galusha from her friend Lizzie, we bear witness to an intense friendship in a letter that reads as a love letter (Figures 2.1–2.2):

> I fear you have been looking for a letter long before this. . .but you must not look in vain any longer for here is a letter for you, from your far distant friend Lizzie. . . .Thinking of the many changes in life a few months ago we met as strangers to each other. . .many happy hours have we spent in each other society, hours never to be forgotten while memory hold her sway. . .pleasant to reflection are the past hours spend happily with friends though the present finds us far separated; thus is life ever changing, today happy in friends, and all to render life dear; tomorrow perchance, deprived of some dear object, which takes one the desire to live away. . .yours in love, Lizzie (do not show this letter to anyone).[46]

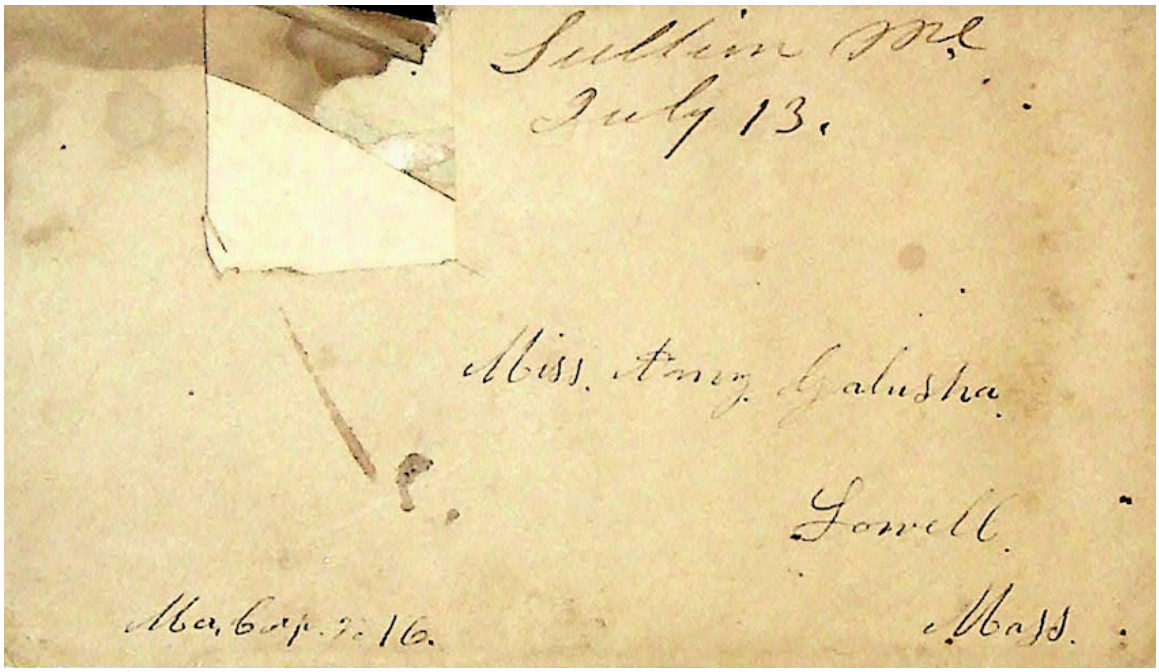

Figure 2.1. Envelope, "Lizzie to Amy Galusha, July 5, 1855,"
Box 1, Folder 75, The Galusha Family Collection, Lowell National Historical Park Archives
(hereafter LNHP Archives)

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[45] For more on the history of sexuality in the United States, see Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Lillian Faderman, *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America—A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

[46] "Lizzie to Amy Galusha, July 5, 1855," Box 1, Folder 75, the Galusha Family Collection, LNHP Archives.

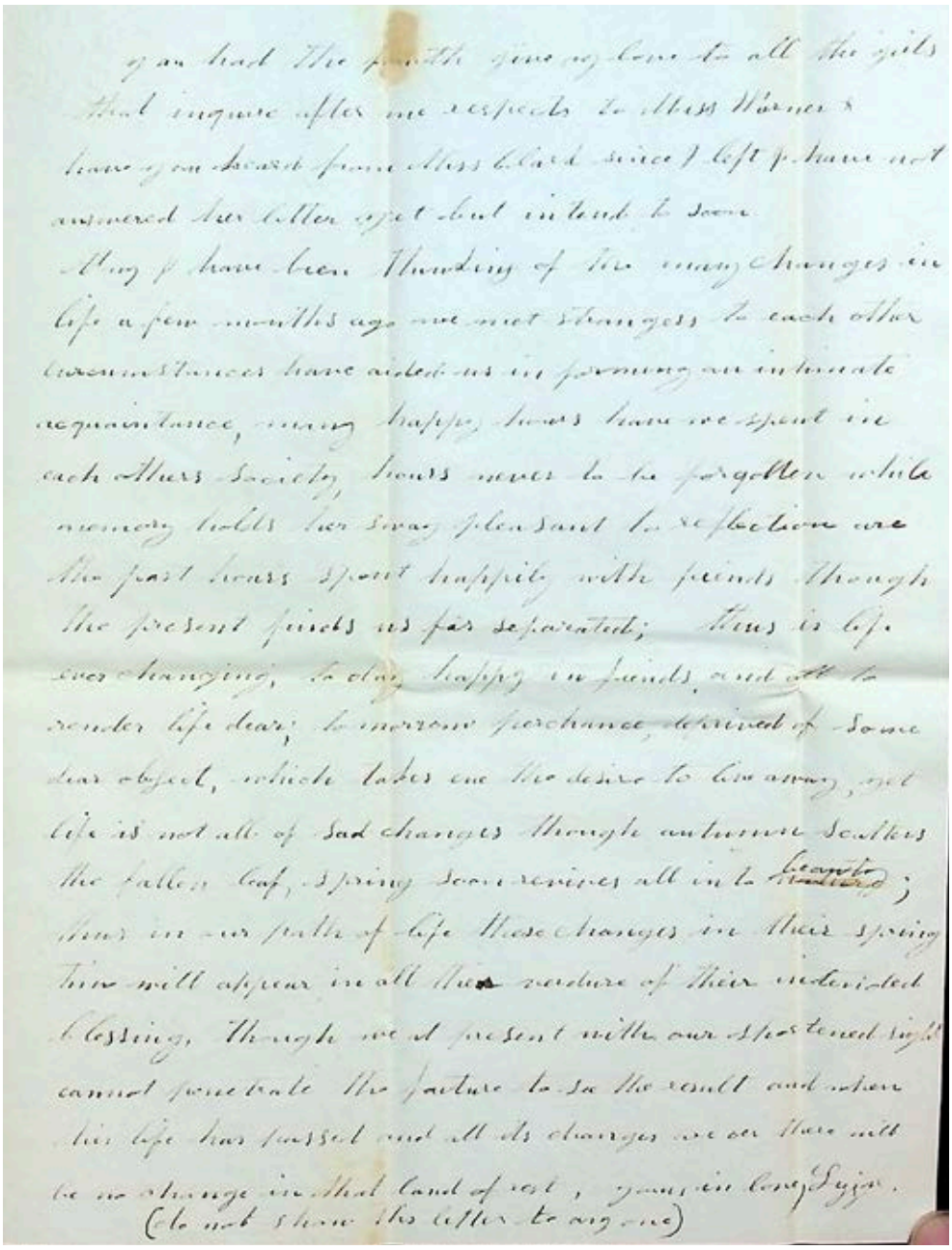
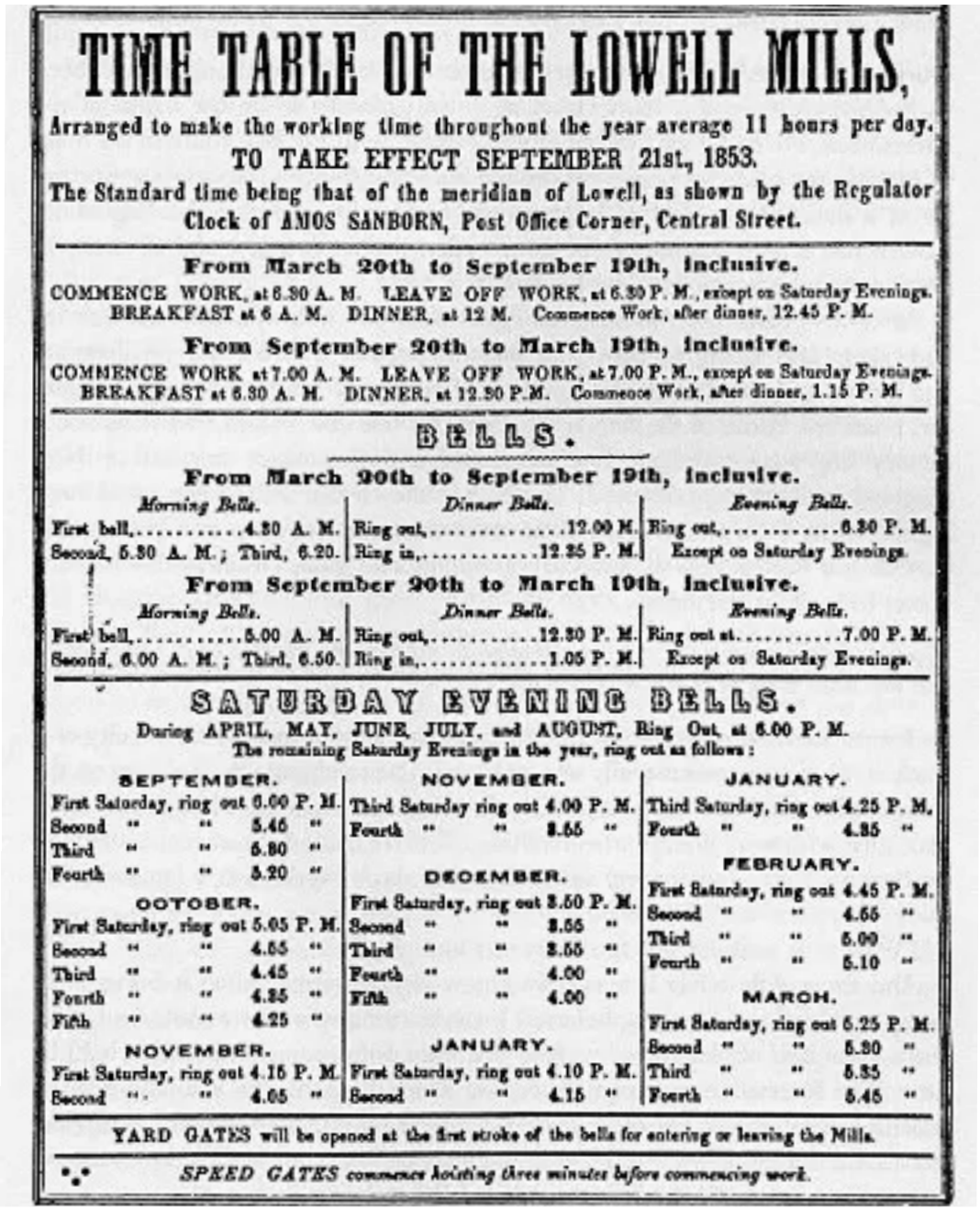


Figure 2.2. Letter, "Lizzie to Amy Galusha, July 5, 1855,"
Box 1, Folder 75, The Galusha Family Collection, LNHP Archives

Lizzie, who returned home from working in the mills and far from her friend Amy, is clearly distraught at their distance. And while much of the wording is typical for the time, Lizzie's despair at her distance from Amy is clear. Her urging at the end requesting that Amy not show the letter to anyone also indicates that the intensity of the letter surpassed that of conventional friendship, indicating that the two of them shared a bond beyond platonic love.

For the young women who came to work at Lowell, the experience afforded them new autonomy from their families and the opportunity to explore new relationships. These newfound freedoms came at a price. The impressive rows of brick buildings that housed the mills along the Merrimack and the cobblestone streets of shops filled with ready-wear clothing and easily accessible consumer goods hid the howling noise of hundreds of machines, "the trembling of the floorboards" and air filled with the lint that women would inhale causing racking coughs that they could not escape, and oppressive heat that caused many to faint daily. Except for meal breaks, the howl of the machinery never stopped during the entire workday of 12, 13, or 14 hours. "You know that people learn to sleep with the thunder of Niagara in their ears," one of the women wrote. "And the cotton mill is no worse, though you wonder that we do not have to hold our breath in such a noise."[47] The work schedule was rigorous, and while the women were used to working hard on their families' farms, their lives were now dictated by a system of bells managed by the mill owners rather than nature's rising and setting of the sun.

[47] William Moran, *The Belles of New England* (St. Martin's Publishing Group, Kindle edition), 21.



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 Regulator Clock of AMOS SANBORN, Post Office Corner, Central Street.

From March 20th to September 19th, inclusive.

COMMENCE WORK, at 6.30 A. M. LEAVE OFF WORK, at 6.30 P. M., except on Saturday Evenings.
BREAKFAST at 6 A. M. DINNER, at 12 M. Commence Work, after dinner, 12.45 P. M.

From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.

COMMENCE WORK at 7.00 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. Commence Work, after dinner, 1.15 P. M.

BELLS.

From March 20th to September 19th, inclusive.

Morning Bells.	*Dinner Bells.*	*Evening Bells.*
First bell,.....4.30 A. M.	Ring out,.....12.00 M.	Ring out,.....6.30 P. M.
Second, 5.30 A. M.; Third, 6.20.	Ring in,.....12.25 P. M.	Except on Saturday Evenings.

From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.

Morning Bells.	*Dinner Bells.*	*Evening Bells.*
First bell,.....5.00 A. M.	Ring out,.....12.30 P. M.	Ring out at.....7.00 P. M.
Second, 6.00 A. M.; Third, 6.50.	Ring in,.....1.05 P. M.	Except on Saturday Evenings.

SATURDAY EVENING BELLS.

During APRIL, MAY, JUNE, JULY, and AUGUST, Ring Out, at 6.00 P. M.
The remaining Saturday Evenings in the year, ring out as follows:

SEPTEMBER.

First Saturday, ring out	6.00	P. M.
Second " "	5.45	"
Third " "	5.30	"
Fourth " "	5.20	"

OCTOBER.

First Saturday, ring out	5.05	P. M.
Second " "	4.55	"
Third " "	4.45	"
Fourth " "	4.35	"
Fifth " "	4.25	"

NOVEMBER.

First Saturday, ring out	4.15	P. M.
Second " "	4.05	"
Third Saturday ring out	4.00	P. M.
Fourth " "	3.55	"

DECEMBER.

First Saturday, ring out	3.50	P. M.
Second " "	3.55	"
Third " "	3.55	"
Fourth " "	4.00	"
Fifth " "	4.00	"

JANUARY.

First Saturday, ring out	4.10	P. M.
Second " "	4.15	"
Third Saturday, ring out	4.25	P. M.
Fourth " "	4.35	"

FEBRUARY.

First Saturday, ring out	4.45	P. M.
Second " "	4.55	"
Third " "	5.00	"
Fourth " "	5.10	"

MARCH.

First Saturday, ring out	5.25	P. M.
Second " "	5.30	"
Third " "	5.35	"
Fourth " "	5.45	"

YARD GATES will be opened at the first stroke of the bells for entering or leaving the Mills.

*** *SPEED GATES commence hoisting three minutes before commencing work.*

Figure 2.3. Time table of the Lowell Mills, National Park Service

As E. P. Thompson, historian of the working-class, highlights, agricultural work was "task oriented" while work under industrial capitalism was all about "time-discipline."[48] "The bells aroused the mill towns from slumber, rang when work started, rang to begin and end mealtimes, and rang to signal the close of the workday." Some bosses tried to squeeze

[48] E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (December 1967), 56–97.

more work out of their employees by sounding the last bell a few minutes later than the official quitting time. "This is unprincipled conduct," a newspaper said in an editorial scolding the cheating managers. Workers raised money to place public clocks in town squares and church steeples to verify the time kept by the mills."[49] As literary scholar and English professor at the University of Massachusetts Lowell Bridget Marshall notes in her article "Fright Factories: Nineteenth-Century Industrial Gothic," in "both England and America, nineteenth-century writers portrayed industrial machines as Gothic monsters that perpetrated brutal bodily violence upon workers, both through long-term damage to their health and terrifying and all-too-common industrial accidents." After visiting a factory town in Massachusetts, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote in his *American Notebooks* in July of 1838:

> a steam engine in a factory to be supposed to [*sic*] possess a malignant spirit. It catches one man's arm, and pulls it off; seizes another by the coat-tails, and almost grapples him bodily; catches a girl by the hair, and scalps her; and finally draws in a man, and crushes him to death.[50]

Marshall's work goes on to explore how the rise of industrialization in the mills created social anxiety. In another example, she cites an excerpt from the *Lowell Offering*, a writer named "Serena" also suggests a Gothic imprisonment—more precisely a burial—when she laments, "I am buried deep within the walls of a factory." "The wide array of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry depicting nineteenth-century labor conditions through the mode of the Gothic," argues Marshall, "supports the idea that industrialization is an essential movement to consider in the emergence and the development of the Gothic, and further suggests that the Gothic played an important role in the development of the industrial novel."[51] Given the desire of mill owners to promote a utopian industrial environment, the physical brutality of industrialization demanded that the literature of the Industrial Revolution function as an avenue to publicly share the horrors of factory life. In a letter to her brother, Amy Galusha, a mill worker, explained that she has not written for so long because she was in the hospital for a week with an illness. She writes, "I have been very sick with the vere.... I do not know was you will know what this is so I will tell you it is the same as the small pox only it does not go quite so hard on account of being evaxionated [vaccinated].... I was sick enough I can tell you my face was swolen so that if you had seen me

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[49] William Moran, *The Belles of New England*, p. 19 (St. Martin's Publishing Group, Kindle edition). See Mary Roberts, "Hell's Bells," *Smithsonian Magazine* (May 2022) for more on how the understanding and use of time changed during the rise of industrial capitalism. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/hells-bells-63350240. Accessed February 9, 2022.

[50] Bridget Marshall, "Fright Factories: Nineteenth-Century Industrial Gothic," in Agnieszka Lowczanin and Katarzyna Malecka, eds., *Gothic Peregrinations: The Unexplored and Re-Explored Territories* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 165.

[51] Marshall, "Fright Factories," 168 and 176.

you would not have know me from Adam."[52] For young women, exposure to disease was a very real risk, as they now lived and worked in close proximity to thousands of other women in spaces that offered minimal fresh air.

The ability to document the physical impact of daily work in the factory is accessible through a variety of archival sources and, as the Industrial Revolution wore on, reports by factory inspectors. But other forms of workplace violence are more difficult to trace, such as sexual violence in the workplace. Given both the taboo nature of the subject and the lack of archival materials, it is challenging to provide specific data or detail about the frequency of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. Historian Mary Bularzik's work takes up this challenge as she examines the tension between the necessity of sexual purity and the inevitable sexual tension and violence that occurs in an industrial setting such as Lowell.

> The nineteenth-century ideal of True Womanhood required women to be the guardians of purity; if a sexual episode occurred, it was the woman's fault, and she was "ruined for life." In practical terms, this meant she might be thrown out of her job and house. "Ladies" were not to know even of the existence of sexual passion. To admit that sexual contact, even conversation, occurred, was to be blamed for it. Thus, the double bind—while women workers were often at the mercy of male supervisors, the repercussions of admitting incidents happened were often as bad as the original event. This conflict between the "lady" or "good girl" who is above sexuality, and the "bad girl" or "whore" who is involved with it, is a major theme in the history of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment "reinforce[d] women's feelings of powerlessness at work."[53] The impact of sexual harassment is not to drive women workers out of the workforce, but rather to control the workforce. As historian Bularzik notes, "if sexual harassment was completely effective at driving women out of the workforce, it would work against the interests of management and capitalists as a whole; for an industrialized economy needs women as a source of cheap labor."[54] While there are limited primary resources that depict sexual harassment in the mills in Lowell, more recent research in similar manufacturing scenarios of the 20th and 21st centuries demonstrate that sexual harassment in the workplace and gender violence more broadly is in fact an epidemic. In *Life and Labor*, a publication of the National Women's Trade Union League, a 1911 editorial recounted the experiences of women working in the clothing trade: "Abusive and insulting language is

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[52] "Letter from Amy Galusha to Her Brother Aaron Leland Galusha, April 3, 1849," The Galusha Family Collection, LNHP Archives, https://libguides.uml.edu/c.php?g=542886&p=3724664.

[53] Bularzik, *Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: Historical Notes*, 121.

[54] Bularzik, *Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: Historical Notes*, 121–22.

frequently used by those in authority in the shops [factories]. This is especially intolerable to the girls, who should have the right to work without surrendering their self-respect. No women [*sic*] should be subjected by fear of loss of her job to unwarranted insults."[55]

Lowell mill women began to organize to improve working conditions and use their voices to contradict the artificially constructed life promoted by the mill owners and the managers. They challenged what scholar Lori Merish describes as "the aestheticization of female factory work that would efface the pains of the female laboring body and euphemistically construe female labor as feminine labor."[56] As Merish explains, "Radical workingwomen such as Sarah Bagley recognized the class power embodied in the domestic ideal. . . factory women recognized the ideological power of femininity and feminine 'delicacy' to privatize the identity of female factory operatives, specifically to mark politicized female speech as deviant and to contain workingwomen's class dissent."[57]

The tricky thing about history is that it does not happen in a vacuum; nor can it be siloed into compartments. The historical narrative of industrial capitalism tells one story, but when viewed with a feminist lens, the shiny story of industrial achievement and innovation is tarnished by the dirty reality of the working conditions of the mill operatives. This contradiction is seen in the experiences of Sarah Bagley, a mill operative and contributor to the *Lowell Offering*. Born in 1806, Bagley was older than many of the mill operatives when she arrived to work at the Hamilton Manufacturing Company. In her 1840 *Lowell Offering* essay "The Pleasures of Factory Work," she wrote that millwork allowed "pleasurable contemplation." She wrote of the "care of overseers who feel under moral obligation to look after our interests."[58] Within a few short years, Bagley has significantly changed her mind about the "pleasures of factory work." She left the *Lowell Offering* and turned her focus and energy on founding the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA). Bagley declared, "With us and us alone, rests the great responsibility of *the standard of female virtue in Lowell*."[59] Bagley was not talking about upholding the ideals of true womanhood as much as she was talking about improving the working conditions for women in the Lowell mills. It was not possible to simultaneously uphold expectations of domesticity and the cult of true womanhood while improving working conditions. The organizing efforts required to change the conditions of labor demanded actions that flew in the face of the socially prescribed roles of propriety for white working- and middle-class women. The

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[55] Quoted in Bularzik, *Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: Historical Notes*, 125.

[56] Lori Merish, *Archives of Labor: Working-Class Women and Literary Culture in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 21.

[57] Merish, *Archives of Labor*, 21.

[58] "Sarah Bagley," https://www.nps.gov/lowe/learn/historyculture/sarah-bagley.htm. Accessed on February 21, 2023.

[59] Sarah Bagley, "The Female Department," *Voice of Industry*, January 9, 1846, quoted in Jocelyn M. Boryczka, *Suspect Citizens: Women, Virtue, and Vice in Backlash Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 95.

factory, as another scholar put it, was a "concentrated metaphor for hopes and fears about the direction and pace of industrial change."[60] Working in tandem with the New England Workingmen's Association, the two organizations began to campaign for a 10-hour day, pushing for legislation that would require all employers to decrease the work hours required by mill operatives. By aligning themselves with the cause of labor rights, women workers were now challenging the status quo making them vulnerable to accusations of vice and immorality. Their allegiance to women's rights in the workplace set them apart from the socially prescribed roles of "true womanhood" and docility. As Jocelyn M. Boryczka notes, "The rebellious Lowell mill girls adapt the rights-based discourse of Jacksonian democracy to address their specific issues as working women and advance quite revolutionary claims about women's rights well before the 1848 Seneca Falls *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions*."[61] The financial and social independence experienced by mill women, who earned their own wages and lived away from their families, placed them in male public life and led some to question women's inequality in private life. "Rebels began extending their rights-based position to the institution of marriage. They argued that women should have input equal to men in all domestic decisions, freedom in friendship and affection, free intercourse, and unrestrained expression of language and address."[62]

A year after becoming president of the LFLRA, Bagley took the editorial helm at *The Voice of Industry*, a newspaper that sought to shed light on the reality of the working conditions in the industrial setting. T*he Voice of Industry* thus differed from *Lowell Offering*, providing an alternative perspective of mill life often more at odds with the idealistic promotion fostered by the mill owners and managers. As scholar Sylvia Jenkins Cook notes, "Although the literariness of these first American factory women was undoubtedly used as a promotional tool by their employers, it was not easily contained and restricted by manufacturers' boosterism. Even as the New England factories became progressively more like the English Manchester they had meant to avoid, the dream of a mindful life of reading, writing, and self-culture did not disappear from the consciousness of workers or their literary record."[63] Bagley challenged Harriet Farley, the editor of the *Lowell Offering*, in which she herself had published essays, and called Farley "a mouthpiece of the corporations."[64] *The Voice of Industry* published essays on a broad array of topics including the political economy, rights of women, religion, "human character," "the life of

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[60] Robert Gray, "The Language of Factory Reform in Britain, 1830–1860," in Patrick Joyce, ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 143.

[61] Jocelyn M. Boryczka, *Suspect Citizens*, 91.

[62] From Martha, "The Rights of Women," *Voice of Industry*, May 8, 1846, quoted in Boryczka, *Suspect Citizens*, 98.

[63] Sylvia Jenkins Cook, *Working Women, Literary Ladies: The Industrial Revolution and Female Aspiration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

[64] https://www.nps.gov/lowe/learn/historyculture/sarah-bagley.htm. Accessed on February 1, 2022.

the mind," the 10-hour movement, and, a particular favorite, "bits and bobs."[65] One example published on November 14, 1845, emphasized the importance of reducing working hours not only for the "health and happiness" of the operatives but also to challenge the "slavish system" that industrial capitalism promoted: "A reduction of the present hours of labor in our manufactories, has become an important question before the working people of this country; and one, we trust, that will not be abandoned, until the entire overthrow of the slavish 'twelve to fifteen hour' system which is making such inroads upon the health and happiness of our 'free, well paid' operatives, is accomplished."[66]

In the context of the early days of industrial capitalism, the effort to differentiate wage labor from "slave" labor was critical. Such comparisons of their work to enslaved labor gave the contributors to *The Voice of Industry* a powerful rhetorical framework to level their critiques of their work experiences. Within such a framework, such writing was not only about reducing hours; it was about the power struggle between the wealthy and the working class who were losing control over the means of production as they shifted from agrarian labor to industrial labor and skilled artisan labor to deskilled task-oriented labor. This was about control and independence over which a revolution had been fought only two generations earlier. Indeed, it is telling that despite the pride that Lowell's business and civic leaders took in the well-educated "mill girls," mill managers ultimately banned reading from the workrooms.[67]

In 1834, less than 10 years after the first textile strike in the United States in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, Lowell mill women walked off the job. Eight hundred women quit their jobs in protest against a 15 percent reduction in their piece rates. The boarding houses also began to squeeze eight women into one room which would typically have slept six women. It was a brief strike but the seeds of resistance had been planted. In a statement, "Union Is Power," they declared: "We circulate this paper wishing to obtain the names of all who imbibe the spirit of our Patriotic Ancestors, who preferred privation to bondage, and parted with all that renders life desirable and even life itself to procure independence for their children." As women entered the mills on the heels of the American Revolution and during the height of slavery throughout the south, the statement's embrace of patriotism as connected to workers' rights and their willingness to endure suffering rather than "bondage" reflects popular sentiments among many in the working class, who sought to distinguish themselves from enslaved Black people and establish their credentials as patriots and

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[65] http://industrialrevolution.org/industrial-revolution--featured-content.html includes examples of writing in all of these topics. Accessed on February 2, 2022.

[66] *The Voice of Industry*, November 14, 1845. http://industrialrevolution.org/10-hours-movement.html. Accessed on February 2, 2022.

[67] Cook, *Working Women, Literary Ladies*, 5.

citizens, despite their work as wage laborers.[68] One Nashua, New Hampshire agent "cautioned against a proposed wage cut by noting: 'for us to think of reducing wages before they do at Lowell would in my opinion be bad policy.'"[69] So, when Lowell cut wages and raised the cost of living in 1834, other New England companies followed their lead. The strike spread to nearby Lawrence where "mill agent William Austin informed his Boston office, 'This afternoon we have paid off several of these Amazons & presume they will leave town on Monday.'"[70] The invocation of the women organizers as "Amazons" illustrated how some elements of society categorized the women mill workers, in this case connecting worker organizing with the vision of primitive aggression in opposition to the traditional expectation of the docile "mill girl." Several years earlier, in New Hampshire, the local newspapers called into question the future of democracy, when women mill workers went on strike in Dover. *The National Gazette* in Philadelphia wrote, "The late strike and grand public march of the female operatives in New Hampshire exhibit the Yankee sex in a new and unexpected light. By-and-by the governor may have to call out the militia to prevent a gynecocracy." While the commentary was imbued with a sense of sarcasm, the threat to "democracy" that was only recently established in the United States likely resonated with the primarily male readership.[71] In a society that was dependent on explicitly placing women under the legal, political, and social control of men, the reality that women workers were not content to remain docile and subservient rocked the equilibrium of industrial Lowell. Women mill workers continued to organize throughout their tenure in the mills on a local and statewide level demanding better working conditions, higher pay, and fewer hours, making them a much less appealing workforce for the mill owners.

Immigrant Lowell

With women mill workers becoming increasingly vocal about their working conditions, the new waves of immigrant workers from Europe and Canada offered a new population of workers who were not engaged in the political and social upheavals taking place in the United States. Increasingly in the antebellum period mill owners turned to immigrant labor to fill low-wage positions. According to Maura Doherty in her doctoral thesis, *Spindle City Blues*, "of 7,000 women operatives in 1836, less than 4 percent were foreign-born. But the

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[68] Quoted in Eric Loomis, *A History of Ten Strikes* (New York: The New Press, 2018), 20. See also Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work*.

[69] Dublin, *Women at Work*, 11.

[70] Quoted in William Moran, *The Belles of New England* (St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2002, Kindle edition), 29.

[71] Quoted in William Moran, *The Belles of New England*, 29.

figure for 1860 climbed to an extraordinary 61.8 percent of the mill workforce."[72] The growing need for labor in the mills coincided with the ravages of the potato famine in Ireland, which lasted from 1845 to 1850, and Lowell increasingly became a destination for Irish workers. According to Brian Mitchell, whose book *Paddy Camp* details the life of Lowell Irish in the first half of the 19th century, Irish immigrants fleeing the ravages of the famine "arrived in Lowell in full force in 1846." Along with *Paddy Camps*, the *Ethnicity in Lowell* study, conducted by Robert Forrant and Christoph Strobel, details the community life of the Lowell Irish during the antebellum period. The rich detail of Irish life in Lowell in these two resources is too lengthy to summarize here in full, but three important points merit summaries.

First, during the 1840s the diversity of opinions on a range of issues increased within the Lowell Irish community. Opinions varied on issues such as temperance and the proper means of educating children. The splintering of St. Patrick's to form a second church, St. Peter's, is indicative of these differences. By 1844 the two parishes baptized 228 children, and by 1846 that number had jumped to 353 baptisms. The arrival of the Irish immigrants fleeing the Irish famine in the 1850s led to further class stratification with the Irish immigrant communities, as a small number of established Irish were able to make financial gains, especially through controlling real estate for the new arrivals.[73]

A second important point is that the Irish, who often toiled in the most dangerous and unhealthy working conditions in Lowell, were disproportionately impacted by disease outbreaks in this era such as tuberculosis, dysentery, and typhus. Many of the newly arrived male Irish workers found work in temporary, low-skilled jobs, conducting the dirty and dangerous work of extending the canal system to feed the textile mill's demand for water power. But few Irish men found skilled work with the Proprietors of Locks and Canals, or in Lowell manufacturing. By the late 1840s the mill operators, hungry for a cheap labor pool to help drive down costs, began to open up to female Irish labor.[74] These new workers faced some of the worst health impacts of living and working in an industrial mill town. In 1847, when a typhus outbreak killed 52 Lowellians, 46 were Irish.[75] By 1850, Irish workers accounted for a third of the workers at the Hamilton Mill. In another example, according to Mitchell, in 1851 the Prescott Corporation began hiring Irish, when the "Yankee operatives" left the mill to return home and visit their friends during the warm season when water levels powering the Lowell mills were lower and work slowed. Since the Irish were

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[72] Maura Doherty, "Spindle City Blues: The Impact of the Maturing Industrial Economy on the City of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1947–1978" (PhD thesis, New York University, 1998), 66.

[73] Mitchell, *Paddy Camps*, 62–77, 100–102.

[74] For a thorough review of the Irish and work during the prebellum period, see Mitchell, "Chapter 5, The Pattern of Employment," in *Paddy Camps*, 78–100.

[75] Mitchell, *Paddy Camps*, 106–7.

immigrants, the mill operators hoped they would have less seasonal social connections to pull them away from the mills during downtimes and fewer options to leave the mills despite the harsh working conditions.[76]

Third, the 1850s marked a period of rising nativist anti-immigrant sentiment. In Lowell, this was manifested by some boarding houses advertising for "Americans Only" and anti-Catholic speeches and demonstrations. These local events were indicative of a national political trend, which led to the ascendency of the Know-Nothing Party, a national political party with nativism as its central platform plank. In Massachusetts in 1854, the party dominated the election results electing the governor, lieutenant governor, 11 congressmen, 40 state senators, and all but three state representatives. Lowell elected a Know-Nothing mayor, who held office until 1858. According to Mitchell, this time of anti-immigrant persecution led many Irish immigrants to Lowell to turn toward Irish Catholic churches and other institutions to forge community and resistance to anti-Irish policies and actions. Mitchell explains, "Paradoxically, the Know-Nothings had strengthened many of the Irish institutions which they wished to see diminished, forging a new Irish Catholic identity in Lowell." The Irish of Lowell became more involved in local politics and formed and strengthened ethnic-based institutions, partly in response to this oppression.[77]

During the antebellum period another neighborhood "Ayer's City" was established, which would later become an immigrant enclave. The "city" was established in 1848 when Daniel Ayer, a Canadian who had moved to Lowell and worked for a while in the Hamilton Mill, began to buy up land along River Meadow Brook. This area south of industrialized Lowell was still largely hay fields, fruit orchards, and vegetable gardens when Ayer began to quietly purchase property there. Ayer hoped the area would become a site of mixed manufacturing, including a tannery and cattle market that he financed. Ayer's vision was largely unrealized, and besides three tanneries that operated there before the Civil War, there was not much expansion of industry, residential homes, or city services in Ayers City until later in the 19th century, when it became a diverse neighborhood that was 50 percent Irish, and also included "New Englanders, French Canadians, Portuguese and Azoreans, and Swedes, along with a number of immigrants from England, Scotland, and Germany."[78]

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[76] Mitchell, *Paddy Camps*, 92.

[77] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," and Mitchell, *Paddy Camps,* 142 quote.

[78] "Ayer's Industrial Park Urban Revitalization and Development Plan," City of Lowell, 2013, 10–12, 12 quote.

A Growing City

The development of the Ayer's City neighborhood was not the only change to come to Lowell in the antebellum period. The 1840s also saw the beginning of the development of a new residential enclave for Lowell's business and professional-class residents, which came to be known as Belvidere Hill. Located east of the city center, this enclave was established on a few large farm properties, one of the largest of which had been named "Belvidere," which translates from Italian as "beautiful to behold," by Judge Edward Livermore, who had purchased the property in 1816. The farms were originally part of Tewksbury, and the city of Lowell began to annex the area starting in the 1830s. In 1831, John and Thomas Nesmith, two wealthy residents of Lowell, purchased the farmland from Livermore and hired a Boston landscape architect to develop a plan for streets, residential lots, and a small park. Soon Washington Park "began to draw the city's most prosperous merchants, industrialists, and businessmen and the location above the industrial city with its picturesque views became a highly desirable address."[79] In 1849, the Proprietors of Locks and Canals built the Lynde's Hill Reservoir in the area to provide water for fire protection for the textile mills, spurring residential development nearby. During the 1850s and 1860s, more of Belvidere Hill was divided into residential lots, and Lowell's professional and business-class residents built grand houses in the neighborhood, early examples of which were "inspired by the architecture of Italian villas." The Belvidere Hill area would continue to be an important upper- and middle-class neighborhood in Lowell for the next century, boasting some of the most significant residential architecture in the city.[80]

By 1840, Lowellians also developed new institutions, enterprises, and infrastructure to serve their growing city. The mill owners opened the Lowell Corporation Hospital, the first industrial hospital in the United States, in the mansion of the late Kirk Boott. Each mill contributed to the endeavor based on how many workers they employed. The workers only had to pay for room and board if they visited the hospital, $1.75 for women and $2.75 for men, when the facility was established. These fees were charged per week, which meant that during hospital stays patients accumulated medical debt while they could not earn wages, possibly resulting in debts they would have to pay off to their employer once they left hospital care. The hospital remained primarily financed by the mill owners until 1930, when the decline in the Lowell textile industry led them to sell it to the Boston Archdiocese for one dollar and it became St. Joseph's Hospital. Janet Greenlees, who has written an article about the hospital, argues that the Lowell Corporation Hospital was more

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[79] "Washington Square Historic District," Lowell's National Register Neighborhoods, Lowell Historical Board, https://archive.org/details/WashingtonSquare_Lowell/mode/2up?view=theater.

[80] "Belvidere Hill Historic District," Lowell's National Register Neighborhoods, Lowell Historical Board, https://archive.org/details/BelvidereHill/mode/2up?view=theater.

comprehensive in its services than similar endeavors in other industries, such as the medical care provided by mining companies, making it "both atypical and much earlier than other healthcare initiatives."[81]

The 1840s also saw the construction of a permanent high school building for the city. Originally established by the Hamilton Manufacturing Company in 1831, Lowell High School was the nation's first coeducational and integrated public school.[82] In 1840, a more permanent building was constructed at Kirk and Anne Avenues. The enrollment in the mid-1800s was approximately 269 students with a robust curriculum including courses in the liberal arts such as history, French, Latin, composition, and English grammar, as well as math and sciences such as algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and chemistry. Some of the subjects were gender specific. "In the male department there were the additional studies of the useful arts, physical geography, Greek, and declamation; and in the female department botany, Milton, and vocal music."[83] Given the subjects and the demographics of the workforce in the 1840s, it is most likely that the students attending Lowell High School were children of local merchants and mill management.

The high school has played a significant role within the community since its founding. In fact, it is one of the longest-standing institutions in Lowell and as such has adapted to the changing industry and demographics of the city. In 1860, the *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* covered the graduation ceremony and noted that the "successive anniversaries [of the high school] have so well illustrated its importance to the educational interests of our community." Particularly noteworthy in this article are the comments made by Lowell's mayor to the young men and women who were graduating. In his comments to the males graduating, he recognized both the male students heading to college, "five of your number who applied for admission to Harvard have all succeeded," and went on to recognize "those who do not design to pursue their academic studies further, I would say, you have here laid a foundation upon which you can safely build the superstructure of practical knowledge," only to continue to remind them to have "regard for the authority of law." His comments to the female students encouraged them to embrace the socially ascribed obligations of the "cult of womanhood" and "her duties. . .to the home circle," interestingly noting that women should not seek to "pass her time amid the noise and din of active life."[84] Ironically this comment was made only blocks from the noisy din of the factories, which still employed a large percentage of women. However, as historian Thomas Dublin's research shows, the daughters of mill workers would very likely not be graduating from

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[81] Janet Greenlees, "'For the Convenience and Comfort of the Persons Employed by Them': The Lowell Corporation Hospital, 1840–1930," *Medical History* 57, no. 1: 45–64, 46, quote.

[82] See "Lowell High's Footprint: A History," March 12, 2017, http://richardhowe.com/2017/03/12/lowell-highs-footprint-a-history.

[83] "City Items," *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, July 21, 1857.

[84] "High School Examination," *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, July 24, 1860.

Lowell High School in the summer of 1860. In 1860, only 5.7 percent of female children between 14 and 17 would be enrolled in only school, while only 10.6 percent would be balancing school and work. The reality is that 82.3 percent of young women were working during this period and the numbers for young men were only marginally better.[85] This data indicates that Lowell High School's Class of 1860 were overwhelmingly middle and upper classes, a trend in education at this time across the United States.[86] This pattern was reflective of the fact that the leading citizens of Lowell, such as Frederick Flather, sent his children to Lowell High School.

In 1892, a large yellow brick building was constructed to replace the smaller building on Kirk and Anne Streets. Coburn Hall, as it became known and is still known today, was designed by Frederick Stickney, who also designed Lowell's public library. The school would continue to expand within the same location. In 1922, an additional building was added increasing the size of the building and also making education more accessible. In 1910, there were more than 200,000 one-room schools in the United States, which accounted for almost all public education throughout the 19th century. Between 1910 and 1950, they declined by half, and by the 1980s, there were practically none left in the United States. Instead, the 20th century saw the expansion of the local and state school districts and the consolidation of schools. The investment in the local school system along with the expansion of the Lowell High School in the early 20th century coincides with the popularity of Ely's "social gospel" mission of finding "balance" between the industrial and the social good.[87] By 1940, 50 percent of young adults had earned their high school diploma. Lowell High School was no longer a college preparatory school as it had been in the 1800s. It was now driven by a common school system that focused on training students for an adult life either straight into the workforce or onto college.

While the hospital and Lowell High School were established by the mill concerns in Lowell, 1840s Lowell also saw diversification in the textile mills into new areas of production. Take, for example, the Lowell Manufacturing Company, which was later known as Bigelow Sanford. John Ewing and Nancy Norton have written a detailed history of the company, including its early years in Lowell. They describe how Erastus Brigham Bigelow engineered the "first successful mechanization of the carpet weaving process." In 1842, the firm began work on a two-story brick building for carpet production, and by the 1850s carpets were established as an important part of textile manufacturing in Lowell.[88]

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[85] Dublin, *Women at Work*, 178–79.

[86] Cynthia Crossen, "In 1860, America Had 40 Public High Schools," *Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 2003.

[87] Benjamin G. Rader, "Richard T. Ely: Lay Spokesman for the Social Gospel," *Journal of American History* 53, no. 1 (June 1966).

[88] John S. Ewing and Nancy P. Norton, *Broadlooms and Businessmen: A History of the Bigelow-Sanford Carpet Company* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), 17–20, quote 20.

Another important development in Lowell during this time period was the expansion of rail service to the city. The idea of train service to Lowell went back to 1830, when the Massachusetts legislature granted the Proprietors of Locks and Canals a charter to build the Boston and Lowell Railroad. The railroad connected inland Lowell to the Boston Harbor. The principal capital invested in developing Lowell manufacturing came from trans-Atlantic trade, and the railroad allowed these industrialists to move between the wharves and the mills more easily. The engine for the first locomotive was purchased from the Stephenson Company in England, and was disassembled and studied to copy for future reproduction. The first trip from Lowell to Boston took place in March of 1835. According to Joseph Lipschitz, the railroad was so successful it "drove out of business accommodating rival, the Middlesex Canal. From the beginning the new line carried just under 4,000 passengers a week." In 1838, the Nashua & Lowell Line began service, and in 1850, the Salem & Lowell Railroad began operation, connecting Lowell with more cities in a growing regional railroad transportation network.[89]

"We Determined to Build Engines for Ourselves": The Lowell Machine Shop

The textile mills were not the only industry that put Lowell on the map of industrial global capitalism. Perhaps no other industry was as important to the young city as the Lowell Machine Shop. The shop created the machines that produced Lowell textiles, including the fabricating machines, the steam engines, and the complex system of gears and pulleys that moved the water power through each mill. It started as the machine arm of the Boston Manufacturing Company in Waltham in 1814, and then was part of the Proprietors of Locks and Canals in 1825. The Lowell Machine Shop incorporated as its own company in 1845, and some of the best mechanical minds in the United States developed the Lowell machines, including Paul Moody, George Washington Whistler, and James B. Francis.[90] George Sweet Gibb has written a thorough account of the Lowell Machine Shop history, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, describing the national significance of the endeavor.

In many ways, the Lowell Machine Shop broke new ground for industrial growth in the United States. Early US industry relied heavily on imported English machinery to run their plants. The Lowell Machine Shop was one of the first US manufacturers in this period that set out to change that by making mechanical knowledge and production local. In 1839,

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[89] Lipschitz, "The Golden Age," 88; See also Charles J. Kennedy, "The Early Business History of Four Massachusetts Railroads," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 25, no. 1 (1951): 52–72.

[90] For a thorough review of the Lowell Machine Shop in its formative years, see George Sweet Gibb, "Chapter II: Operating as a Cotton-Mill Department Waltham 1814–1825," *The Saco-Lowell Shops, Textile Machinery Building in New England, 1813–1949* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967, reissue), 23–62.

while still under the aegis of the Proprietors of Locks and Canals, the machine shop sent George Brownwell to England armed with letters of introduction from Patrick Tracy Jackson, Treasurer of Locks and Canals. Brownwell's task was not only to visit various English manufacturers and procure materials for machine fabrication in Lowell, but also to gain any information he could gather about machine production. His instructions were clear—"ascertain if they have any new tools or improved modes of working which we can adopt to our advantage." Of particular interest was one English machine shop, where the Proprietors of Locks and Canals had previously purchased a large, useful engine they used to grade roads and for other projects. Jackson worried that the English shop would be hesitant to provide insight into their production. "You may find him unwilling to let you into his shop or give you information," Jackson warned Brownwell. But he urged his agent to "state fairly your object."[91] Brownwell's letter of introduction to the English shop clearly explained his aim: "We have a large machine shop at Lowell, and finding it as but few more tools would be required for building than for repairs, we determined to build engines for ourselves and for those in our neighborhood who would purchase of us. We have followed your pattern thinking it the best we have yet seen, either from England or built here."[92]

Yet no sooner had Brownwell been dispatched on his reconnaissance mission to England than diplomatic tensions between the nations over the border between New Brunswick and Maine threatened the enterprise. Worried that war with England could be in the offing, Treasurer Jackson wrote his agent, "Should circumstances occur, which lead you to fear detention, you will of course leave at once, leaving your business unfinished."[93] The possibility of war with England was worrisome for Jackson, not just because it might shorten his agent's trip, but in early industrialism, US manufacturers including at Lowell were still largely reliant on England to supply iron and steel—although the Proprietors of Locks and Canals also purchased iron from Sweden, Russia, and the enslaved southern United States.[94] While tensions mounted, full-scale war did not erupt at the northern US border. Attempting to learn manufacturing secrets and secure needed supplies, while navigating the political waters of international business, the machine shop at Lowell was determined to bring manufacturing back to their "neighborhood."

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[91] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to George Brownwell, February 9, 1839, Volume DA-1, 100, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[92] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to Robert Stevenson, Esq., February 9, 1839, Volume DA-1, 97–98, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[93] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to George Brownwell, March 6, 1839, Volume DA-1, 115, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[94] While Jackson was dispatching Brownwell to England, he was also negotiating a manufacturing deal with an agent in New Orleans—and the timing of the project relied on the delivery of English steel and iron. P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to Dr. A Jones, New Orleans, January 22, 1839, Volume DA-1, 100, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

The mechanical shop at Lowell was not satisfied with building machines to run the textile mills just along the Merrimack River corridor; they had ambitions to expand their sales throughout the United States. This included the US South, where the Lowell Machine Shop aggressively pedaled their products. Interest in producing textiles in the South was not new, and can be traced at least as far back as 1789, when a horse-powered cotton mill spun 84 spindles on James Island off the coast of South Carolina, and the Baltimore Manufacturing Company organized to bring textile production to Maryland.[95] For the next few decades expanding Southern manufacture was a slow process, and for Lowell machine manufacturers, lengthening their reach to Southern markets came with some risk. In 1838, the Treasurer of Proprietors of Locks and Canals, Patrick Tracy Jackson, began a long series of correspondence with a Dr. Alexander Jones of New Orleans who patented an improved cotton gin that he claimed removed the seeds from cotton more efficiently.[96] Dr. Jones hoped that Lowell could help him produce his improved gin, but Treasurer Jackson was cautious. Jackson explained to the Southern inventor, "I have formerly shipped goods to New Orleans for sale and have uniformly lost by bad debts more than my profits." Jackson insisted the deal could only be done with a reputable firm ensuring the financial backing—an often difficult prospect, especially in the South where investment capital was very limited.[97] Difficulties securing needed production materials further made growing the machine shops' market reach difficult. "Our first lot of gins is nearly completed," Jackson wrote his agent in England, "I find it exceedingly difficult to get iron for saw shafts and picket shafts."[98] The difficulty of arriving at even one such deal in a new market is evidenced by the volume of correspondence between Treasurer Jackson and Dr. Jones. Over the course of a few months, Jackson sent more than a dozen separate communications haggling over everything from the number of machines on order, price, timing of delivery, and the security of the financial backing for the deal to bring the improved cotton gins to a southern market.[99] Despite these challenges, by the summer of 1839, the machine shop at Lowell was sending orders to New Orleans, "By ship St. Louis, Capt. King, I send to

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[95] Perry Walton, *The Story of Textiles* (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1925), 188.

[96] "For Improvement of Cotton Gin," Alexander Jones, City of New Orleans, April 25, 1838, *Journal of Franklin Institute* 25, no. 1 (1838): 48.

[97] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to Dr. A Jones, New Orleans, November 15, 1838, Volume DA-1, 55–56, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[98] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to George Brownwell, March 27, 1839, Volume DA-1, 126–27, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[99] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to Dr. A Jones, New Orleans, November 15, 1838; November 24, 1838; November 25, 1838; November 27, 1838; December 10, 1838; December 15, 1838; December 19, 1838; December 28, 1838; December 29, 1838; January 5, 1939; January 22, 1839; January 30, 1939; February 11, 1839; and, February 12, 1939; March 14, 1939; Volume DA-1, 55–56, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

you eight boxes containing cotton gins, pickers."[100] This story is recounted here because it demonstrates the extent to which Lowell and Southern capital were intrinsically intertwined. An idea for improving the cotton gin developed in the South; then that idea was produced in Lowell. In turn, those machines were then sent to the South, where they helped bring cotton to market. The cotton then made its way back to Lowell, where it was converted to textiles, some of which was shipped back South to clothe the enslaved Black labor that made the entire cycle possible. By the 1840s, the "Big Shop" was not only making machines for the mills; they also had a drafting service that planned mill layouts. According to historian George Gibb, they continued this service for some seven decades, and "no other establishment in the country had performed the function of mill designing on a comparable scale over so long a span of years."[101] Lowell Machine Shops had established itself at the forefront of the textile machine production industry in the United States.

From the "Lords of the Lash" to the "Lords of the Loom"

To fully comprehend Lowell's role in the development of consumption and production in early US industrial capitalism, we must extend the scope of analysis beyond the mill town's borders and consider Lowell as part of a global cotton economy. Much of the early history on capitalism, and especially capitalism in the United States, does not address the essential role that slavery played in the US rise in global economic dominance. Those histories were invested in tracing a triumphal American narrative from the yeoman farmer to the free wage earner, largely treating slavery as an exception to the American narrative doomed to inevitable collapse due to its incompatibility with the free labor ideals of the republic. But even most Marxist historians who sought to disrupt such narratives in their critiques of the wage-earning system with their emphasis on industrialization and proletarianization could not fit an analysis of slavery neatly into their frameworks. There were some notable exceptions, including two scholars of slavery in the Caribbean, C. L. R. James and Eric Williams. In particular, Williams's 1944 book *Capitalism and Slavery* remains a touchstone in recent scholarly efforts to reconnect the histories of slavery and the growth of early capitalism in

[100] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to White and Co., New Orleans, July 2, 1839, Volume DA-1, 154–155, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[101] George S. Gibb, *Textile Machine Building in New England, 1813–1819* (New York: Russel and Russel), 474–75.

Europe and the Americas, later characterized as the "Williams' thesis."[102] W. E. B. DuBois's 1935 groundbreaking work *Black Reconstruction* was another work that made the connection between slavery and northern capital. DuBois wrote:

> Slowly but mightily these black workers were integrated into modern industry…all the more so because with increase in American cotton and Negro slaves, came both by chance and ingenuity new miracles for manufacturing, and particularly for the spinning and weaving of cloth. The giant forces of water and steam were harnessed to do the world's work, and the black workers of America bent at the bottom of a growing pyramid of commerce industry; and they not only could not be spared, if this new economic organization was to expand, but rather they became the cause of new political demands and alignments, of new dreams of power and visions of empire.[103]

In other words, DuBois argued that far from being incompatible with a free-labor industrial economy, the wealth generated by enslaved labor "could not be spared," as it generated the raw product that fed the "giant forces of water and steam" of industrialism. Using DuBois's analysis, Lowell and the southern plantations were part of an economic "pyramid" that would propel the United States into its position of industrial empire by the late 19th century. The extension of DuBois' analysis was that the only way to end such a system was through protracted struggle—the Civil War.

By and large, the work of Dubois, James, and Williams was marginalized by historians of their time. Instead, the scholarship on slavery written in the first half of the 20th century followed the lead of southern historian Ulrich Phillips, who saw slavery as a successful means of racial control but ultimately an unprofitable economic system, while at the same time approaching slavery in paternalistic terms that downplayed the systems' oppression and cruelty.[104] The "Phillips School" dominated historical interpretations of slavery until Kenneth Stampp's 1956 work *The Peculiar Institution* took some of Phillip's conclusions to task, especially rejecting the characterization of slavery as a relatively benign institution.[105]

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[102] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 1938. For more on the reception of Williams work, see Colin Palmer, "'Capitalism and the Slavery,' and the Politics of History," *Review* 35, no. 2 (2012): 95–116. A more recent treatise that applies a Marxist framework to slavery in the Americas is Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery* (London: Verso, 2010).

[103] W. E. B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935), 4–5.

[104] For more on Phillips' economic argument on slavery, see Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1918), chapters 18–19.

[105] John David Smith, "The Historiographic Rise, Fall and Resurrection of Ulrich Bonnel Phillips," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 142. For more on the differences between Phillips and DeBois's scholarship on slavery, see John David Smith, "DuBois and Phillips-Symbolic Antagonists of the Progressive Era," *The Centennial Review* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 88–102; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956).

For the next several decades, historians worked to both uncover the ravages of the chattel slave system, and the cultural, religious, and family lives of the enslaved. But even as the histories of slavery threw off their previous racist frameworks, the questions of the relationship between the institution and US capitalism remained at the margins of the field. It has not been until relatively recently that historians have revisited the connections between slavery and the early developments of capitalism and have begun to fully examine how the wealth generated by enslaved labor fueled the northern Industrial Revolution and the development of the capitalist system itself. Lowell, with its textile mills worked by wage laborers processing the raw material produced by chattel slavery, is positioned as an important site to interrogate the connections between slavery and capitalism. Lowell's position in both the development of the early US labor movement and its location in the circuits of New England abolitionism further make the mill town a worthwhile location to consider how workers in the burgeoning free-wage capitalist system considered the issue of slavery in their time.

Perhaps no book lays out the stakes of this effort to reconnect slavery to the history of US capitalism and industrialism, as well as Edward Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. In this ground-breaking book, Baptist argued that in treating slavery as separate and incongruous from the growth of US capitalism, for many historians "slavery was not implicated in US growth, success, power and wealth."[106] The connection between the cotton plantations and the textile mills of Lowell affords an opportunity to make that implication tangible. According to Baptist, from the 1830s annually the mills of Lowell used "5.5 million pounds of cleaned cotton [that] consumed 100,000 days of enslaved people's labor every year."[107]

Lowell mill workers held enslaved labor in their hands as they transformed cotton to cloth. However, it was not only the textile mills that wove the northern and southern economies together. In their book, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery*, Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank trace the many ways that northern industrialists profited from and promoted the continuation of southern chattel slavery. One passage of that book summarizes the many threads connecting North and South in the production of cotton: "Northerners influence and control infused every phase of the trade. Most ships that carried the cotton from plantation to port to market were built in the North, and they were usually owned by Northerners. Their captains and crews were often New Englanders. Northern companies sold the insurance to protect a farmer's crop and all of his property, including his slaves. And hundreds of Northern textile mills clothed

[106] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xix.

[107] Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 317.

those slaves, using what was sometimes referred to as 'negro cloth.'"[108] In his book, Baptist also touches on this reciprocal nature of slaveholders purchasing northern cloth for their enslaved laborers. He explains that clothing the more than one million enslaved people who labored in the sugar cane and cotton fields in 1832 would have required 15 million yards of cloth or "all of Lowell's annual output."[109] Thus the southern chattel slave system not only provided the raw material that formed the basis of Lowell mill production, but it also served as a key market for the mills' finished product. The impact of Baptist's work is that he renders it impossible to adequately tell the history of Lowell without also telling the history of slavery. The two histories are intrinsically connected—and indeed are not really two histories at all—but rather the two ends of one thread that winds through the development of early US capitalism.

In *Empire of Cotton,* Sven Beckert expanded the scope of analysis to consider how the production of cotton by enslaved labor fueled industrialism across the globe. He noted that "by the 1850s, millions of workers streamed into the world's newly built factories to operate the machines that produced cotton thread and cloth," generating "working-class neighborhoods in Barcelona, Chemintz or Lowell."[110] Other scholars have picked up this empirical framework. Walter Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams, Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, examines the connections between industrialism and cotton production in the Mississippi Valley.[111] Political scientist Tatah Mentan argues in her book chapter "The Cotton Empire of Slavery, Racism and Resistance," "Racialized chattel slaves were the capital that made *capitalism*. While most theories of capitalism set slavery apart, as something utterly distinct, because under slavery, workers do not labor for a wage, new historical research reveals that for centuries, a single economic system encompassed both the plantation and the factory."[112] Taken together, these works situate mill towns such as Lowell into broader histories of empire and colonialism.

Approaching the labor of Lowell mill workers as part of a larger global cotton economy that included enslaved plantation labor enables us to more critically think about how the white, gendered labor of these factory workers was made possible by racialized chattel labor. Yet it is not only from the vantage point of historical analysis that the issue of slavery bears on the Lowell story. During the rise of Lowell as an industrial hub,

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[108] Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 14.

[109] Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 319.

[110] Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014).

[111] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

[112] Tatah Mentan, "The Cotton Empire of Slavery, Racism and Resistance," *Africa in the Colonial Ages of Empire: Slavery, Capitalism, Racism, Colonialism, Decolonization, Independence as Recolonization* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2018), 86, emphasis by author.

contemporary debates around enslaved labor took place in the Spindle City. These debates were part of local public discourse and informed the way that Lowell mill workers understood themselves as laborers. In 1834, residents of Lowell established two antislavery societies, one composed of men and the other women, that joined 18 other Massachusetts cities and towns that had formed such societies by that year.[113] It is perhaps unsurprising that labor activists and abolitionists found common cause in New England, and in Massachusetts particularly. Massachusetts and Vermont were the first states to ban slavery in their constitutions.[114]

According to historian Sean Griffin, some of the leaders of the effort to improve the working conditions in the mills were often also "unequivocal in their antislavery stances," perhaps most notable was Sarah Bagley, an editor at *The Voice of Industry* and a leader of the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association.[115] According to scholar Julie Husband, leading abolitionist voices were likewise versed in the issues faced by the Lowell mill workers. In 1843, the *Lowell Offering* published a select list of its "friends," and it included antislavery activists including William Ellery Channing, John Greanleaf Whittier, Eliza Follewn, Maria Weston Chapman, Elizabeth Peabody, Emma Willard, and Harriet Martineau.[116] For some labor activists, the antislavery movement helped provide language to describe their opposition to working conditions in northern factories. For example, the term "wage slave" rhetorically connected the abolitionist and labor causes, a term that resonated in the US labor movement for decades after the end of slavery.[117] Yet Husband explains that some women mill workers were hesitant to compare their own labor exploitation to that of the enslaved chattel system. She writes "because tales of women's economic exploitation quickly transformed into images of sexual exploitation in the public mind, writers for the *Lowell Offering* resisted dramatizations of the most abusive practices of the mills." Instead, the writers in *Lowell Offering* emphasized that "as producers, consumers, and potential wives and mothers, rural women's options were enhanced by factory work."[118] In other words, the Lowell mill workers attempted to preserve the position of their white womanhood and were sensitive to rhetoric that might undermine that position.

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[113] *The Journal of the Times*, Box 27, Folder Slavery, Mayo (Martha) Collection, UML Archives; George; *The Liberator* 5, no. 1, Saturday, January 3, 1835, 3 (http:///fair-use.org/the-liberator).

[114] Kathryn Grover, "The Underground Railroad in Lowell," Case Study, for National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom and Massachusetts Historical Commission, 2004; Chernoh M. Sesay, "The Revolutionary Roots of Slavery's Abolition in Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (March 2014): 99–131.

[115] Sean Griffin, "Antislavery Utopias," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 2, "The Future of Abolition Studies Special Issue" (June 2018): 252.

[116] Julie Husband, "The White Slave of the North: Lowell Mill Women and the Reproduction of 'Free' Labor," *Legacy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 14.

[117] See, for example, the writings of US labor activist Lucy Parsons, *Freedom Equality and Solidarity, Writings and Speeches, 1878–1937* (Chicago: Charles Kerr Press, 2004).

[118] Husband, "The White Slave of the North," 13.

An 1844 story in the *Lowell Offering* illustrates this tension. A three-part serial, "Prejudice against Labour," tells the story of Martha, an orphaned young woman who was born into some degree of privilege. Rather than rely on charity, Martha chooses to go to work in the Lowell mills. Martha's aunt and uncle are planning a birthday fete for their son George. Mrs. K, her aunt, wants to invite her orphaned niece but worries about what her friends will say, "Notwithstanding her aristocratic prejudices, [Mrs. K] would gladly have her niece [Martha] present at the party…were it not for fear of what people might say if Mr. and Mrs. K suffered their children to appear on a level with factory operatives." Mr. K is less concerned and launches into a monologue on the dignity of the "labouring class." "I am determined my niece shall be at the party," Mr. K declares. "However loudly the public opinion may cry out against such a measure, I shall henceforth exert my influence to eradicate the wrong opinions entertained by what is called good society, respecting the degradation of labour; and I will commence by placing my children and niece on a level. The occupations of people have made too much distinction in society. The labouring classes, who are in fact the wealth of a nation, are trampled up.… In my humble opinion, the rich and the poor ought to be equally respected, if virtuous; and equally detested, if vicious." Ultimately, Martha is invited to the party and despite some nastiness, she is able to charm her aunt and uncle's friends with the "clear, musical tones of her voice" as she challenges their beliefs that factory operatives are "ignorant slackers…not worthy of credence."[119] And, in the end, not only does Martha prove the well-heeled citizens of Lowell wrong, she marries one of their sons. This story perfectly illustrates the needs of some Lowell women workers to simultaneously challenge the stereotypes of the working class while embracing the notion of "white womanhood" that would allow for the fictional Martha to transform from orphan factory operative to a married woman of means. It must be noted that this story appeared in the *Lowell Offering*, a paper that was produced with financial support of the mill owners, who would have been invested in portraying mills as a space of potential uplift for its female workers.

An extensive field of historical scholarship has emerged that examines how the privileges afforded by whiteness have shaped American labor and conceptions of gender.[120] Lori Merish argues that to maintain Lowell as a "showcase" mill town, it was necessary to maintain an aesthetic of whiteness. "That aesthetic involved policing factory women's racial identification, stabilizing the precarious whiteness of poor and laboring women…

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[119] Ethelinda, "Prejudice against Labour," in Knight, Charles, 1791–1873, and Cairns Collection of American Women Writers, *Mind Amongst the Spindles: A Selection From the Lowell Offering: A Miscellany Wholly Composed by the Factory Girls of an American City* (London: Charles Knight, 1844), 73–77.

[120] The historical literature on whiteness is extensive, one important early work in the field was Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*: *European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For more on whiteness and constructions of gender in the United States, see Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

part of the function of the aestheticized mill girl was to manage the racial intimacies of the cotton textile trade, the social proximity of female factory workers to the institution of slavery that produced the raw materials of industrial production."[121] In his book *The Wages of Whiteness*, Dave Roediger argues that antebellum white workers were loath to make too common a cause with those laboring under racialized chattel slavery. He cites a Lowell women workers' protest song: "Oh! I cannot be a slave / I will not be a slave / For I'm so fond of liberty / That I cannot be slave." According to Roediger, these lyrics reflect a refusal by mill women to be categorized as being enslaved.[122]

While Lowell labor activists wrestled with how to position their cause in relationship to abolitionism, as a leading industrial city in New England, Lowell continued to be a likely place for visits from some of the days' leading abolitionist voices. But not everyone in Lowell welcomed the antislavery message. During 1834 and 1835, British Reformer George Thompson stopped at Lowell twice to speak, during a more than yearlong speaking tour against slavery in the United States. The year prior to his first visit the British parliament had abolished slavery in most British colonies, and some in Lowell did not appreciate him bringing his cause to their doorstep. While Thompson's first visit to the mill town was uneventful, the second visit where he was scheduled to give three days of speeches stirred controversy. The abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* printed an anonymous threat against Thompson by a "citizen of these United States of America," telling him "to take your departure from this part of the Country." A mob gathered outside of the Lowell City Hall, where Thompson was lecturing. The newspaper account described the scene, "his lecture was interrupted by hideous noises from certain brutes and reptiles, and a shower of missiles, of which came into the window where Mr. T. was speaking and very narrowly missed his head."[123] In the face of such opposition, the abolitionists decided to postpone the next day's lecture, and the protestors took over the hall. Later, during his tour the English abolitionist Thompson faced an even angrier mob in Boston and had to leave the city without giving his speech.[124]

In Lowell, a group of some of the leading businessmen in town formed a committee to explain their opposition to the abolitionist message. They named an inn proprietor, Samuel A Coburn, as their chair and J. N. Sumner, a dentist, as their secretary, and others in

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[121] Merish, *Archives of Labor*, 36.

[122] Dave Roediger*, The Wages of Whiteness; Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, rev. ed. (London: Verso), 2007.

[123] "Cowardice and Ruffianism," *Liberator*, December 6, 1834, Box 27, Folder Slaver, Mayo (Martha) Collection, UML Archives; Yukako Hisada, "George Thompson and Anti-Abolitionism in Lowell, Massachusetts," *Journal of the Faculty of Foreign Studies* 46 (2014): 215–27.

[124] C. Duncan Rice, "The Anti-Slavery Mission of George Thompson to the United States, 1834–1835," *Journal of American Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 1968): 22–23; and Arthur L. Eno Jr., "The Civil War: Patriotism vs. King Cotton," in Arthur L. Eno, ed., *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell Massachusetts* (Manchester, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company with the Lowell Historical Society, 1976), 127–28.

the group included two attorneys and a storekeeper. The group issued a set of resolutions, in which they avowed that while they "deeply deplore the existence of Slavery in the United States," they believed "the agitation of the question of immediate emancipation, in this part of the country, is calculated to create suspicions and disaffection between the north and the south," and further decried using Lowell's town hall to hold abolitionist meetings. The group sent a copy of their resolution to Lowell's selectmen and various local newspapers. While they expressed dislike of slavery on principle, in practice these Lowell businessmen did not want a disruption between the "the north and the south." According to researcher Yukako Hisada, the Center for Lowell History archive at the University of Massachusetts Lowell holds a handwritten note in a file that includes antiabolitionist materials. The note describes the calling for a meeting of citizens opposed to "the rash doings of those who advocate the immediate abolition of slavery," including Kirk Boott among its signers. A meeting of these anti-abolitionists established "William Austin, of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company" as their chair, and other representatives of manufacturing and local businesses on their committee.[125] The make-up of these two different antiabolition committees demonstrates that members of the professional class and mill owners understood the connection between the local mill economy and the southern plantations. Attempts to disturb that connection caused concern among these business leaders.

While local Lowell businessmen called for a slower approach to abolition, speeches on the side of antislavery continued in the city throughout the antebellum period. Historian Arthur Eno described the abolitionist movement in Lowell as a "small nucleus of anti-slavery sentiment."[126] This nucleus included several Black voices, from the city's small Black population, including Walker Lewis, John Levy, and Horatio Foster, all of whom were barbers in the city.[127] In 1837, a crowd estimated at one thousand came to hear Amos Dresser, an Ohio abolitionist who received 20 lashes for bringing antislavery brochures to Nashville, Tennessee. Afterward, many members of the audience made donations to the antislavery cause and 518 signed a petition to Congress against slavery.[128] On May 4, 1843, *The Courier* reported on "Anti-Slavery Meetings" featuring various speakers. On Monday evening, an escaped, formerly enslaved man George Latimer spoke at the Apple Street Church of his escape from a Mr. Gray. The next evening the renowned abolitionist

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[125] Hisada, "George Thompson and Anti-Abolitionism in Lowell," 222–23.

[126] Arthur L. Eno Jr., "The Civil War: Patriotism vs. King Cotton," 128.

[127] "Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict: The Meaning of Slavery in a Northern Textile City, Tsongas Industrial History Center," which includes this citation: "The three best sources on Lowell's African American community in the antebellum period are Loretta Ryan, 'Afro-American in Lowell, Massachusetts (1826–1880),' unpublished paper, Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell; Parker, Black and Antislavery History of Early Lowell, especially chapters 2 and 4; and Martha Mayo, "Profiles in Courage: African Americans in Lowell," brochure for exhibit, 1995, Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

[128] "Great Antislavery Meeting at Lowell, Mass.," *Liberator*, February 4, 1837, Box 27, Folder Slavery, Mayo (Martha) Collection, UML Archives.

Frederick Douglass spoke. *The Courier* reported, "Douglass is not merely a story-teller; he can speak of the working of the slave system from observation, but that is not all—he is a man of strong mind, quick thought and occasionally powerful eloquence."[129] The newspaper went on to recount the visits of Douglass and Latimer: "In Frederick Douglass and George Latimer the people of the north have a specimen of the serfs of the South—the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the chivalry, *par excellence*, of this republic. We fancy people will soon become divested of the idea that slavery is natural and proper position of such men of these; and they will clamor louder and louder for their release from bondage, and the recognition of their rights."[130]

The author of this report was making the argument that by the work of their hands, men like Douglass and Latimer should be eligible for the full rights of manhood and should be included as part of the US "republic." In 1844, John Greenleaf Whittier edited the abolitionist newspaper the *Middlesex Standard* in Lowell, where it was published briefly before moving to nearby Worcester.[131] The sources reviewed here demonstrate that there is ample material to investigate Lowell as a site where enslaved labor and the growth of industrial wage work met, and that at this meeting place there lies the opportunity to interrogate the constructions of labor, race, and gender and the growth of the US republic and the Civil War.

The Civil War and Lowell

Lowell also affords the opportunity to investigate how the Civil War impacted a northern site reliant on the Southern slavery economy. One figure from Lowell that was important to the Union war effort was Benjamin Franklin Butler. Butler was a brigadier-general of the Massachusetts Sixth Regiment and included four companies from Lowell, which joined the Union cause. He was also the majority owner of the Middlesex Company, a Democrat who supported a proslavery candidate for Massachusetts Governor because he wanted to forestall Southern succession. Butler personified the position of many in Lowell—they did not want the war to come and disrupt their place in the cotton economy—but once it did, they joined the side of the Union. During the course of the war, Butler became more persuaded to the cause of abolitionism, and after the war he was elected to Congress where became known as a staunch "Radical Republican." As Congressman Butler served as

[129] *Courier*, May 4, 1843, Box 27, Folder Slavery, Mayo (Martha) Collection, UML Archives.

[130] Folder Slavery, *Courier*, May 4, 1843, Box 27, Folder Slavery, Mayo (Martha) Collection, UML Archives.

[131] Eno, "The Civil War: Patriotism vs. King Cotton," 128–29.

chairman of the House Committee on Reconstruction, he authored the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, which gave the president wider latitude to prosecute Klan members, and was one of the authors of the Civil Rights Act of 1875.[132]

The Sixth Regiment set out for Washington in April 1861. Their train was stopped in Baltimore by a secessionist mob, and four men from Massachusetts were killed—including Luther C. Ladd and Addison O. Whitney, Lowell's first casualties of the war. According to historian Arthur Eno, the death of these two Lowellians "aroused the people of Lowell and spurred the recruiting of new companies of militia, which were equipped with the help of a municipal appropriation." In total, 5,266 Lowell men served on the side of the Union—all volunteers except for those recruited by one draft. The women of Lowell held "Sanitary Fairs" to raise money for the Sanitary Commission, which provided care for men at the front.[133]

At first, the commonly held belief was that war would be a short affair. As men from the textile city joined the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment, Merrimack Manufacturing Company shut the doors to its mills and let its workers go; the other mills in Lowell followed their lead.[134] "The mill stopped last night for a month and most of our boarders have left us," George Fox, a carpenter's apprentice in Lowell, wrote to Mary Brockway, a former mill worker who had returned home to Sutton, Vermont, at the outbreak of the war. In an earlier letter, he complained that only the "old maids" remained at the boarding house.[135]

As the war dragged on, the Lowell businesses scrambled to restart their operations with mixed results. For the duration of the war, "two-thirds of the spindles at Lowell remained idle," although some mills produced woolen cloth uniforms and blankets, and the Lawrence Manufacturing Company produced hosiery during the conflict.[136] As many spindles idled, worries about the war grew amongst local businessmen. For example, in late summer 1861, Lowell resident Edward Tucke, an 1862 Harvard graduate who worked for the Boston firm Hall, Dame, and Bullock, and would go on after the war to serve on various local Lowell business boards and represent Lowell in the Massachusetts legislature, wrote to his children who were abroad in Europe about the impact of the war. In the late summer of 1861, he informed his children, "You will naturally inquire what will our Cotton Manufacturers do, ah! that is where a very dismal laugh comes." A month later, he wrote, "<u>not one Cotton Mill running in Lowell</u>," underscoring each word to emphasize the dire news. Three years later, he informed his children that the "prices of everything has

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[132] Eno, "The Civil War: Patriotism vs. King Cotton," 130–35.

[133] Eno, "The Civil War: Patriotism vs. King Cotton," 133–35.

[134] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 195–96.

[135] George Fox to Mary Brockway, August 4, 1861; George Fox to Mary Brockway, July 17, 1861, Folder 4 and 5, The Fox Brockway Letters 1861-1863, LNHP Archives.

[136] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 196.

advanced fearfully of late," detailing the escalating costs of butter, sugar coffee, veal, beef, potatoes, flour, and coal.[137] By December of 1864, Tucke's frustration with the war and its impact on the economy became more pronounced in his letters to his children, as did his racism. While his earlier letters had boasted of Lowell's contribution providing soldiers for the war, he now vented his dissatisfaction with how "Old Abe" was proceeding with the conflict. The problem in his view was that the president was insisting on "the Doctrine of Emancipation as one of the conditions of peace," and that "nothing so completely united the Southern people as the North attempting to control their local affairs." He went on to explain, "For my part I should be satisfied with the old union and let those whose business it is and those only who are really affected by it take care of the N—."[138] In his view, "Radicalism" was getting in the way of peace and profits. While Tucke's shifting opinions and racism may not reflect those of all Lowell businessmen during the Civil War, they do provide insight into the kinds of anxieties the war generated amongst the managerial and professional class in the city.

Since the mills were the pulsing heart of the Lowell economy, the reduced operations during the war reverberated throughout the city's economy. Other businesses had to adapt to survive. While much of the machinery of the textile mills sat idle, the Lowell Machine Shop saw a sharp decline for orders of mill machinery. In 1860, the machine shop produced 1,049 looms, 274 carding machines, and 358 spinning frames. By 1864, the shop turned out almost as many looms (978), but no carding machines and just 17 spinning frames. However, the Machine Shop was able to successfully diversify its output during wartime. The workforce grew from 500 employees in 1860 to 800 in 1863, during the height of the conflict. According to business historian George Sweet Gibb, the variety of production at the shop in addition to the textile machinery was truly astounding, and included: "Jonval and Swain turbine water wheels, hydraulic presses, boilers, locomotive tanks, railway switches, hydrants, pill-dispensing machines, indigo grinders, sugar mills, sewing machine needles, set screws, factory elevators, fire escapes, iron bridges, force pumps, locomotive and steam cranks, double gang saws, pony steam engines, fire engines, ventilator fans, rotary pumps."[139]

As the war drew to a close, the textile mills assessed the impact of the war on their industry. In his 1865 annual report, the Treasurer of the Merrimack Manufacturing Co. described the volatility brought by the war, writing that the past year had seen "greater changes and fluctuation in value in the manufactures of cotton than probably ever

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[137] Edward Tucke to his Children, June 9, 1861, Edward Tucke to his Children, September 1, 1861, Edward Tucke to His Children, March 26, 1864, Hendee Family Papers 1842–1923, Mss: 45, 1842–1923, Box 2, H495, Folder, Hendee Tuck Family Correspondence, BL Archives.

[138] Edward Tucke to His Children, December 11, 1864, Hendee Family Papers 1842–1923, Mss: 45, 1842–1923, Box 2, H495, Folder Hendee Tuck Family Correspondence, BL Archives. *Racist expletive edited by authors.*

[139] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 196–98.

occurred before in the history of the art: for during that period cotton has fluctuated between 22 cents a pound and 1.90 cents." He went on to describe the "position of the manufacturer [as] one of almost constant anxiety and embarrassment."[140] A year later, the Merrimack's treasurer reported that market fluctuations had eased, but that the potential for the market "to embarrass people in mercantile and manufacturing pursuits" remained high. The treasurer went on to explain that "so uncertain is the future in regard to the growth of cotton in this country," and that rumblings of a possible "European war" remained causes of concern. As part of the global cotton economy, the Lowell textile industry was impacted by both domestic and global conflicts. The treasurer did report the cheerful news that stockholders received 27.5 percent in dividends, and that there were plans to improve Merrimack's machinery.[141] The Lowell Machine Shop reported a record high of more than a million in annual sales in the fiscal year closing in March of 1865. Although a postwar depression temporarily drove down profits, the postbellum period was to be one of "feverish activity" in Lowell.[142]

In 1866, in his annual address on the state of the city, the Mayor of Lowell declared, "The stain of African slavery, which has been a reproach to our government from its foundation, has been totally and constitutionally removed." He reported that Lowell had spent $254,074.87 toward recruitment and bounties to soldiers to fight for the Union. The city also dedicated a memorial to Ladd and Whitney, the first Lowellians to fall in the war, as a lasting reminder of the conflict on the city's landscape.[143]

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[140] "1865–1866," FB Cronwinshield, Treasurer, June 25, 1865, Box V. 72, 74,75, Volume 74, Merrimack Mf. Co., BL Archives.

[141] "1866–1867," FB Cronwinshield, Treasurer, June 20, 1866, Box V. 72, 74, 75, Volume 74, Merrimack Mf. Co., BL Archives.

[142] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 199.

[143] "The Inaugural Address of the Josiah G. Peabody, Mayor of the City of Lowell to the Two Branches of The City Government," in City Documents of the City of Lowell Massachusetts Year 1892–1893, January 1, 1866, 4, 7, Archive.org.

CHAPTER THREE

The System of Lowell: Postbellum to World War II

The principal object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee. The words "maximum prosperity" are used, in their broad sense, to mean not only large dividends for the company or owner, but the development of every branch of the business to its highest state of excellence, so that the prosperity may be permanent.

—Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*[1]

The trade union movement represents the organized economic power of workers. . . . It is in reality the most potent and the most direct social insurance the workers can establish.

—Samuel Gompers, President, American Federation of Labor[2]

From the many contradictions of the post–Civil War economic crises and the effects of two world wars, Lowell—the city and the people—experienced tumultuous challenges. The late 1800s was, in the words of historian Alfred Chandler, "the years of system-building," and in the United States more people were working outside of agriculture than within it.[3] Similar to the railroad systems, the Boston Associates had created, in short, a "megacorp" in Lowell. The mill owners controlled all aspects of production from nature (Locks and Canals), management (treasurer-agent relationships), production (the mills), the market (selling houses), and, finally, profits (shareholders). As historian Philip Scranton puts it, "Thus was the network of investment, production,

[1] Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1915), 9.

[2] Samuel Gompers, "Not Even Compulsory Benevolence Will Do," *The American Federationist*, January 1917: 47.

[3] Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand*: *The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977), 145; Timothy Knight, *Panic, Prosperity, and Progress: Five Centuries of History and the Markets* (Hoboken: Wiley Press, 2014), 98.

realization, and accumulation neatly laced together."[4] The sharp, periodic depressions that shook the US economy, most notably in the early 1870s, 1890s, and the late 1920s, were keenly felt in the textile industry. Two world wars reshaped industrial production throughout the United States, and those wars had lasting impacts on the mills and on community life that forced the Spindle City to grapple with a host of complex economic and social issues. In this chapter, we examine the growing geographic stratification in Lowell by class as the development of streetcar suburbs separated the wealthy and middle-class from the working-class residents; the expansion of vertical integration in the textile industry but also the shifts in US capital production as textile production began to grow in the South; the increase of labor organizing in the city and the ratification of the first union contracts were signed in the mills; the impact of decades of environmental abuse on the land and the people; an influx of new immigrants; and the devastation and contradictions wrought by World Wars I and II.

Postbellum Development of Streetcar Suburbs in Lowell

One important development in postbellum Lowell was the emergence of a growing professional, or middle-class, who established new and expanded residential enclaves removed from the city center and industrial core of Lowell. These areas were serviced by streetcar lines, facilitating travel to and from the city's core to the emerging suburbs. As early as 1864, a horse-drawn line traveled the route along Pawtucket and Merrimack streets to the Belvidere Hill area east of the City, a line which was then electrified and extended in 1890.[5] Often streets in these new middle-class enclaves were named after the businessman who first purchased and subdivided the property for residential development. For example, Charles H. Wilder, "a local landowner, provision dealer and farmer," purchased land in the Highlands area west of the city core in the 1860s. During the 1870s and 1880s, he then divided the property into residential lots, and established and named the most prominent street in the area Wilder after himself.[6]

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[4] Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800–1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15. For more on the organizational structure of Lowell textile mills, see Zehra Baris Gumus-Dawes, *Forsaken Paths: The Organization of the American Textile Industry in the Nineteenth-Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2000).

[5] "Belvidere Hill Historic District," Lowell's National Register Neighborhoods, Lowell Historical Board, https://archive.org/details/BelvidereHill/mode/2up?view=theater.

[6] "Wilder Street Historic District," Lowell's National Register Neighborhoods, Lowell Historical Board, https://archive.org/details/WilderStreet/mode/2up?view=theater.

This move of the middle- and upper classes to the city's outskirts was not unique to Lowell. Across the nation, those with means moved out from the crowded, often dirty industrial areas, leaving working-class and often newly arrived immigrant communities to live with the environmental hardships of industrial urban life. Historian Sam Bass Warner, who wrote about this era in Boston in his book *Streetcar Suburbs*, has described this development as the creation of a "divided metropolis," a geographical mapping of class divisions onto urban landscapes that fundamentally shaped urban development for the next century.[7] Lowell followed this pattern and in the second half of the 19th century became a city increasingly divided along residential class lines.

The 1870s: A Time of Tumult and Change

The development of the streetcar suburbs and its attendant geographical class stratification of Lowell was not the only change to come to the city in the postbellum period. The city was also marked by a diversification of manufacturing. For example, James Cook Ayer became one of the wealthiest patent medicine manufacturers of the postbellum era. He established a factory to produce his medicines in Lowell, and when he died his obituary in the *New York Times* declared, "His name is known through his medicines all over the world."[8] Also of note, in 1876, homeopathic physician and pharmacist Augustin Thompson was living in Lowell when he founded the Moxie Nerve Food Company. He was not alone. Across the country drug store operators and pharmacists began manufacturing carbonated beverages that were initially sold as remedies such a ginger ale and celery tonics. Moxie began as a carbonated beverage advertised as a medicinal drink for women to defend against "softening of the brain, nervousness, and insomnia."[9] But as the temperance movement took hold in the United States, Thompson remarketed the drink to "appeal to temperance advocates. Its advertisement proclaimed that Moxie was 'rapidly crowding liquors out of barrooms.' Quart champagne bottles of Moxie sold for. . .60 cents."[10]

Yet, even as new industries emerged in Lowell, the 1870s were marked nationally by a devastating depression, rising labor activism and militancy, and a growth in working-class politics rooted in white nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment, all of which impacted Lowell. With the Civil War over and the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth

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[7] Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

[8] "Obituary," *New York Times*, July 4, 1878, p. 5.

[9] William Woys Weaver, *Culinary Ephemera: An Illustrated History* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2010), 115.

[10] Andrew F. Smith, *Drinking History: Fifteen Turning Points in the Making of American Beverages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 157.

Amendments, which extended citizenship and voting rights to men regardless of color, Massachusetts established a law in June 1869 stating that Indigenous people were no longer wards of the state. The legislation declared, "Indians and people of color, heretofore know and called Indians. . .citizens of the Commonwealth. . .entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities, and subject to all duties and liabilities [of citizenship]." This piece of legislation effectively shifted the identity of Indigenous peoples from members of a collective through their tribal identity to now citizens of the Commonwealth endowed with status as individuals. Further, it challenged the racial identity of indigeneity as the legislature sought to wipe out "all distinctions of race and caste" in the wake of Reconstruction.[11]

The Panic of 1873 was a global economic shock. Radical Republicans sought to rebuild the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. The 35,000 miles of the transcontinental railroad improved travel through the United States and allowed for the transportation of goods throughout the country, but the cost of building such an enterprise was huge. Despite government bonds, railroad industrialists also relied on investors. And, as industries such as banking, mining, steel, and manufacturing expanded, there was no government oversight. But, when the European stock market crashed in 1873, foreign investors quickly sold off their US investments, resulting in a ripple effect that would devastate the US economy. "A startling 89 of the country's 364 railroads crashed into bankruptcy. A total of 18,000 businesses failed in a mere two years. By 1876, unemployment had risen to a frightening 14 percent."[12] Leaders of Lowell worried about the impact of the national panic on their city's economy. In his 1873–74 annual report, Lowell's mayor wrote of the national depression that city leaders should "earnestly hope that its effects are but transitory, and that the whale of poverty will not long sadden the joyous hum of busy industry."[13] In 1876, the Democratic Party returned to the White House, and with diminished influence in the Senate, the Radical Republicans' vision for rebuilding the South in the wake of the Civil War ended. Twenty years later, the 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* would enshrine racial segregation as the law of the land for the next half-century.

Nationally workers rebelled. In 1877, railroad workers across the US organized a strike in response to the cutting of wages for the third time in the year. Beginning in West Virginia, white and Black workers joined together to stop the movement of freight trains preventing the movement of consumer goods from one state to another. The strike spread across the United States. Confrontations between striking workers and police along with armed "special deputies" took place in New England. In Massachusetts, "a flying squadron of 200 from Fall River, Massachusetts, was turned away from a factory in Dighton,

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[11] Quoted in Plane and Button, "The Massachusetts Indian Enfranchisement Act," 178.

[12] "The Panic of 1873," PBS, https://tinyurl.com/2p96xj86. Accessed on February 1, 2023.

[13] City of Lowell, *City Documents of Lowell, 1873, 1874* (Lowell: Marden & Howell, 1874), 4. https://archive.org/details/lowellma-citydocs٧٤–١٨٧٣-/page/n١٣/mode/٢up. Accessed on February 1, 2023.

Massachusetts, when they found every approach barricaded with sandbags manned by police and seventy-five special deputies armed with shotguns. Other confrontations occurred at Lawrence and Lowell, Massachusetts."[14] These confrontations entrenched industrialists' determination across the nation to thwart labor activism including in Lowell. Although the strike did not result in any monetary victories for the rail workers, it did raise working-class consciousness and helped to raise the profile of the fledging Knights of Labor who were organizing workers in all industries regardless of race, class, and gender, except one group of workers, the Chinese.

One of the sharpest points of labor conflict in Lowell in the 1870s was centered on a small group of newly arrived Chinese immigrants. Shehong Chen has written an article about Chinese immigrants to Lowell, describing how in the mid-1870s a few Chinese men had come to the city and established laundries. Chen noted that these men were part of a larger migration of Chinese men to East Coast cities in the 1870s. With the end of the construction of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and the rise of anti-Chinese violence on the West Coast, some Chinese workers decided to move east looking for work and an end to persecution. They did not find the latter in Lowell. Following the national trend, the late 19th century Lowell saw a rise in anti-Asian nativism. In 1878, Dennis Kearny visited Lowell. He was an Irish Californian labor leader affiliated with the Workingman's Party, a political party whose central platform was advocating for anti-Chinese immigration policy. Thousands of Lowell working men crowded Lowell's Huntington Hall in August of 1878 to hear Kearney deliver a speech railing about what he perceived as the threat of Chinese labor to white workers. His message received a rousing reception, despite the fact that Chinese immigrants only constituted a very small part of Lowell's population and most were concentrated in laundry work in the city. In 1890 only 59 Chinese were counted in the US Census for Lowell.[15] By 1882, the US Congress had passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, effectively stopping Chinese immigration.

The Boott Mill and the Ascendency of the Flathers

The tumultuous year in Lowell continued with the Panic of 1893, which saw 25 percent unemployment nationally, major railroads going under, and the stock market and banking imploding. By the end of the year, 4,000 banks were shuttered and 14,000 different

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[14] Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 174.

[15] Shehon Chen, "Reconstructing the Chinese American Experience in Lowell, Massachusetts 1870–1970s," Institute for Asian American Studies (2003): 4–5. For more about the Chinese Exclusion Act and Chinese immigrant experience in the United States in the late-nineteenth century, see Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), and Mae Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2021).

businesses closed; it was the worst economic depression the young nation had encountered.[16] During these times, it was not surprising that the skilled workers in Lowell sought the security of unionization with the International Association of Machinists and established Lodge No. 138 in 1899. In this, Lowell reflected much of the industrialized and urban north, a time that saw a precipitous rise in organized unions, the establishment of national trade union organizations, and citywide central labor committees led by men in the skilled trades. In 1894, there were more than a thousand strikes, with the most famous strike in Pullman, Illinois. The workers in the town of Pullman, a place where workers worked, lived, and worshiped according to railroad magnate George Pullman's rules, walked out on strike causing the blockage of railroad systems that impacted transportation across the nation, ultimately leading to President Cleveland calling in the National Guard to break the strike.[17] Perhaps it was with this in mind that the Lowell Machine Shop decided to hire Frederick Flather.

Throughout the 1800s, the Lowell Machine Shop played a pivotal role in employing some of Lowell's most skilled workers as well as being a home to innovation in technology and freeing US textile mills from their dependence on English machines and expertise. The Lowell Machine Shop was a full-service company; it "offer[ed] a full textile mill: all necessary machines, engineering specifications for the construction of the plant, and labor to assemble the purchases."[18] In his 1846 history of Lowell, Rev. Henry A. Miles noted that machinists were "highly distinguished" members of the community whose products "have been objects of much admiration." Indeed, skilled male workers were eager to work in the Lowell Machine Shop where skilled work was valued and held in high esteem. In his influential book *The Visible Hand*, business historian Alfred Chandler argues that indeed industrialists took charge of reorganizing their enterprises to maximize profits by simplifying production as the Merrimack Company did by relocating the Lowell Machine Shop inside the plant. Chandler states, "The modern industrial enterprise—the archetype of today's giant corporation—resulted from the integration of the processes of mass production with those of mass distribution within a single business firm.... Almost nonexistent at the end of the 1870s, these integrated enterprises came to dominate many of the nation's most vital industries within less than three decades."[19] Other historians have complicated Chandler's narrative by turning the focus to specialty manufacturing which Philip Scranton argued did not follow Chandler's "visible hand" trajectory. Rather, in specialized production such as jewelry or high-end furniture, the relationship between people such as

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[16] Knight, *Panic, Prosperity, and Progress*, 101.

[17] See Nick Salvatore, Richard Schneirov, and Shelton Stromquist, eds., *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s: Essays on Labor and Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

[18] Matthew Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem: Management, Labor, and Investment at the Lowell Machine Shop," *Labor History* 56, no. 4 (2015): 418.

[19] Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 285.

entrepreneurs and skilled workers matters and the lines sometimes blur.[20] Matthew Lavallee's research on the Lowell Machine Shop challenges Scranton's argument that specialty producers were "firms characterized by the retention of skilled workers, independent ownership, and minimal concern for dividends." Lavallee's research demonstrates that "the growing structure of salaried mid-level managers, given broad decision-making power by ownership residing almost thirty miles away in Boston, actively sought to limit its reliance upon or to dispel its skilled machinists."[21]

The structure of industrial capitalism is, in part, a story of the tension between the local, national, and global interests of industry. The needs and interests of workers, supervisors, and building management from day to day are markedly different from the needs and interests of owners who live far outside of the community where products are made. And those needs and interests, as we will see in this chapter, are often in conflict putting the local community at odds with the distant owners. An apt comparison may be made between the history of the paper mills in Maine and the textile mills in Lowell. As economist Michael Hillard notes,

> Paper mill workers and many of their managers had a cogent and original analysis of the history of Maine's paper capitalism. Interestingly, they did not see globalization as a prime cause of recent industry and labor-management troubles. Instead, they understood what has been clearly true. . .regional owners and long-term mill managers operated their mills fundamentally as community-based enterprises. . . . A virtually feudal—not capitalist—reciprocity bound management in a web of obligations to workers and by extension workers' families and ultimately entire local communities.[22]

This is not to say that capitalism did not drive the bottom line, but the multigenerational relationships that bound management and the local workforce in Maine's paper mill industry were much the same as those in the Lowell textile mills.

A study of Lowell's Boott Mill history and the life and work of Frederick Flather illustrates the escalating tension generated by the growing industrial economy during the turn of the 20th century. The copious amount of primary source material generated by Flather makes a case study of his work life particularly illustrative of this tension. Frederick Flather was a self-educated man born in Nashua, New Hampshire, who married into the Lowell elite. His father's family immigrated from Scotland and moved to Nashua, New Hampshire, just north of Lowell over the Massachusetts border. Joseph Flather was born in England in 1837 and immigrated to New Hampshire, where he spent his career building the

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[20] Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865–1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[21] Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem," 408.

[22] Michael Hillard, *Shredding Paper: The Rise and Fall of Maine's Mighty Paper Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 3–4.

Flather and Company Machine Shop in Nashua tying his family's legacy to the textile industry. Joseph Flather married Caroline Drusilla Drake and they had one son, Frederick Arthur Flather, born in Nashua in 1867. He began his long career apprenticing in his father's machine shop. He went on to work at Pettee Machine Works in Newton, Massachusetts, which made carding machines for the cotton mills. As a young man, he married Mary Southerland Prichard and they had a daughter, Mary Drusilla Flather. Flather's wife died young of tuberculosis. When Drusilla was eight, he married Alice Poor Rogers who gave birth to two sons, John Rogers and Fredrick Jr., who would eventually go on to spend their careers in the Boott Mills. Flather left the small Pettee Machine Works in Newton when he was hired to run the Lowell Machine Shop, a much larger and expansive factory, populated by highly skilled Irish and French-Canadian male machinists. The Lowell Machine Shop had ties to all of Lowell's textile mills and was also a shareholder in the Proprietors of Locks and Canals. This decision defined the remainder of his life (Figure 3.1).

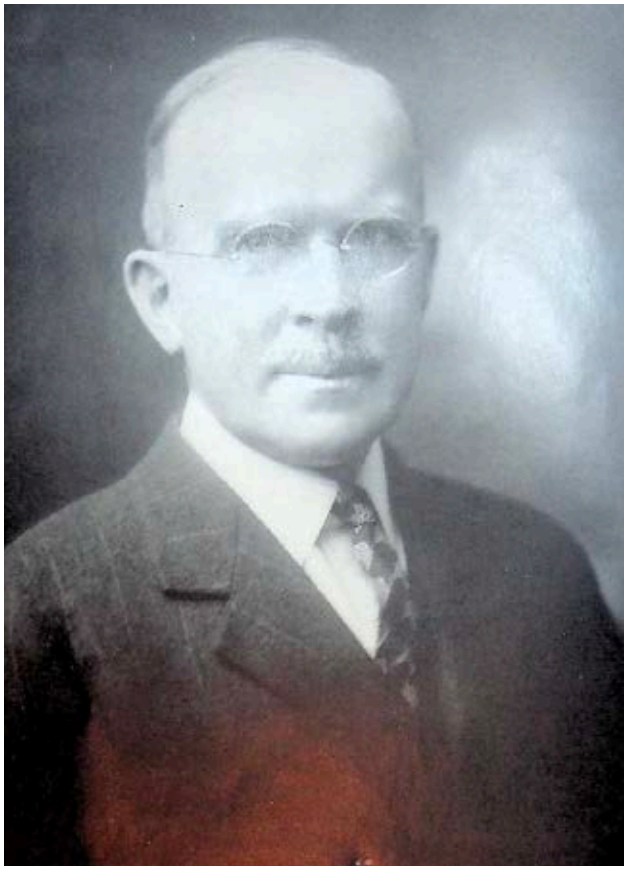

Figure 3.1. Photo, Frederick Flather, Edward P. Conklin, *Middlesex County and Its People* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1927), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois

Frederick Flather was an intense man who was characterized as both "nervous and overworked," as well as someone with "absolute integrity and one of the most forceful, tireless, industrious men."[23] As historian Matthew Lavallee notes, "After managing production at Newton's Pettee Machine Works in the 1880s and early 1890s, Flather developed a keen fascination with applying a more scientific approach to production and management."[24] He took copious notes in small pocket-sized notebooks in which he noted his schedule, the performance of others, and compiled lists of various sorts. Although his notebook does not explicitly state this, his December 12, 1892, meeting with Boott Mill Superintendent Hildreth was either part of a job interview or a post-hire tour of the Lowell Machine Shops as Flather officially began working as Hildreth's assistant in 1893. On December 12, 1892, he writes, "Reached Shop, 8am. M. Hildreth out to breakfast so I had to wait till 9.30.... Mr. Hildreth introduced me to all principal men having any thing to do with card work.... Looked at drawings of card till 12. Talked policy of design with Canning till 12.30. Discussed jigs...till 3.30. All flat work should be consolidated into one department." Flather's notes go on to point out all of his areas of concern.

Cost of work is too high.
There is no organization...
There is no tool kept
Cylinder room is crowded.
Stud work not good enough...
Rooms too dark...
Show Rooms[25]

[23] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 104.

[24] Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem," 408.

[25] Frederick A. Flather, "Diary, December 12, 1892," Box 3, Notebooks, Daily Work 1889-1892, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives. Emphasis in the original.

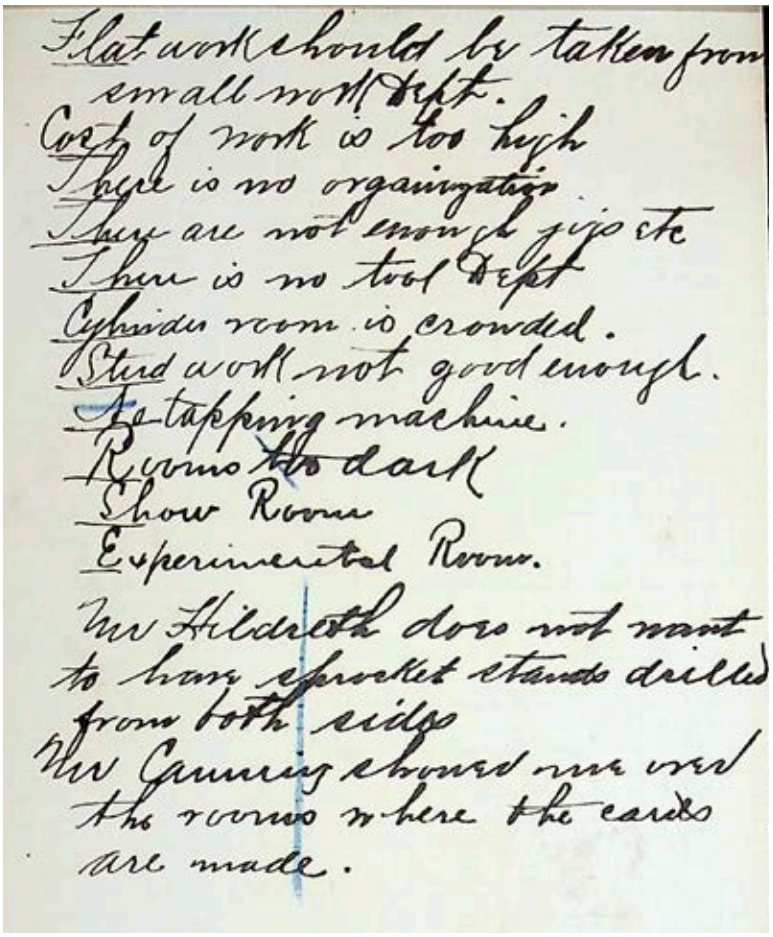
Flat work should be taken from
small work dept.
Cost of work is too high
There is no organization
There are not enough jigs etc
There is no tool dept
Cylinder room is crowded.
Stud work not good enough.
Re tapping machine.
Rooms too dark
Show Room
Experimental Room.
Mr Hildreth does not want
to have sprocket stands drilled
from both sides
Mr Canning showed me over
the rooms where the cards
are made.

Figure 3.2. Box 3, Notebooks, Daily Work 1889-1892, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives (emphasis in the original)

On his second day touring the Lowell Machine Shop, Flather's diary is filled with comments on how the production process is inefficient and poorly organized. In the "experimental room," Flather notes, "Jaws should not be touched after coming from machine. Jig for sprocket stand if made to only drill the diagonal holes [?] should have no supports under.... Sprocket should be covered & held.... Milling cutters do not move fast enough."[26] Flather's personal calculations of how much time he spends completing tasks, along with his meticulous notes on how Lowell Machine Shop runs and the changes he seeks to make, illustrate his desire to implement a system of scientific management at Lowell Machine Works. Flather appeared determined to reorganize the plant into a lean production machine.

[26] Frederick A. Flather, "Diary, December 13, 1892," Box 3, Notebooks, Daily Work 1889-1892, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives. Emphasis in the original.

Lowell Machine Shop was enormous in comparison to his previous factory, Pettee Machine Works. Referred to as "the big shop," by the 1890s, "the Lowell Machine Shop's twenty-one manufacturing buildings stretched across a fourteen-acre yard. Multiple train tracks extended out of the shop, carrying the products. . .across the country. At the confluence of three canals in a spot called the 'swamp locks,' the shop sat close to some of its major customers—Lowell's textile mills—and to City Hall." The "big shop" gained its name from not only its vast geographical footprint but also the products and services it offered. The Lowell Machine Shop produced "all necessary machines, engineering specifications for the construction of the plant, and labor to assemble the purchases."[27] This would eventually prove to be an ineffective model. The management structure of Lowell's mills and the Machine Shop was interesting. The owners were largely absent from Lowell and based in Boston. As a result, they deferred day-to-day management to the mill treasurer and superintendent—two separate positions. "The Lowell mills were from the outset controlled by absentee owners," according to historian Phillip Scranton. "The principal shareholders were centered in Boston, as were the mill treasurers, though the latter visited the mills with regularity. Treasurers function as the chief executive officers. . . . Resident agents (or superintendents) likewise shared information, not only to identify fractious workers through circulated lists but also, through conferences, to establish citywide movements in piece rates."[28] Flather's role at Lowell Machine Shop was assistant to the superintendent, which meant he was essentially third in line with regard to the local running of the Lowell Machine Shop. When hired, his official title was "Company Foreman," but as historian Matthew Lavallee notes, Flather's "salary separated him from the other foreman. Flather's contract called for a $1,500 annual salary while other foreman earned a day rate of $3.25, illustrating the emergent movement of supervisors into the ranks of salaried managers distinct from traditional foreman."[29] Based on assumptions of workload in the late 1800s, this meant that Flather was earning at least a third more than the other foreman. Historian Oliver Zunz, citing Max Weber, notes that "general managers had broad, not always clearly delineated functions and power. Consequently, much depended on their personal priorities and their discretion."[30]

As assistant to Superintendent Hildreth, Flather sought to create efficiencies within the plant and to increase the dividends paid out to shareholders. A year into his tenure at Lowell, Flather went on a national tour to see how other manufacturers created efficiencies and maximized profits. His tour itinerary included visits to the nation's largest companies,

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[27] Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem," 418.

[28] Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism*, 14.

[29] Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem," 410. In 2022 dollars, Flather's salary was equivalent to approximately $46,000.

[30] Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 39.

as well as the most notoriously antiunion, including McCormick Harvester and Pullman in Illinois. Flather's experience at McCormick Harvester Company emboldened him to convince management to adopt machine molding. "There are not more than 5 or 6 regular moulders in all," Flather reported. "The moulding is about entirely done upon machines which draw the pattern, but the ramming of the mould is done by laborers who also operate the mechanism for drawing the patterns. Using these machines they save more than 50% of the cost for doing the work by regular moulders."[31] And, indeed, McCormick did find a labor cost savings, but this was a direct result of a violent strike that took place less than 10 years before Flather's visit.

In 1886, the McCormick Harvester Company (then McCormick Reaper Works) began the process of deskilling their workforce. They replaced almost all of their skilled molders who were members of the Knights of Labor with common laborers who operated pneumatic molding machines. Despite the differences among the workers and the introduction of strikebreakers, the fired workers were able to organize into an even larger union representing almost all of the workers at McCormick. As historian James Green notes, the success of the organizing at McCormick was part of a much larger wave of successful organizing by the Knights of Labor that targeted all the major industries of the late 1800s. For the wage workers of the Industrial Revolution, the question was essentially about worker autonomy. "When a wage earner freely contracted with an employer, did the workers agree to sacrifice his liberty in exchange for compensation?"[32] Industrialists like railroad magnate Jay Gould believed this was precisely the agreement: "The right to hire men for what labor is offered in the market must be upheld against brute force."[33] Ultimately, the result in Chicago was the bombing at a labor rally at the city's Haymarket in May 1886. The bombing led to a militant crackdown on the working class and organized labor such as the Knights of Labor and a trial that was reported around the world. The final verdict found all eight accused guilty with the judge sentencing seven of the eight to hanging.[34]

Even prior to his visit to Chicago, Flather would have been well aware of the impact McCormick's efforts at deskilling labor and industrial reorganization had had on their workers and the ripple effects of those decisions. And, in fact, Flather would leave Lowell in 1901 to work for McCormick for several years before returning to Lowell to work as the treasurer of Boott Mills. This connection to Chicago and McCormick connects Lowell

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[31] Matthew Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem," 410.

[32] James R. Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing That Divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2006), 149.

[33] Quoted in Green, *Death in the Haymarket*, 149.

[34] For more on the Haymarket bombing and its aftermath, see Green, *Death in the Haymarket*; Lucy Parsons, *Life of Albert R. Parsons: With Brief History of the Labor Movement in America* (Chicago: L. E. Parsons, 1889); Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

through Flather to the epicenter of the move toward continued deskilling of factory work, as well as the tumultuous labor relations that characterized the era. His visits and tenure at McCormick are indicative of the exchange of management practices across regions in the industrialized United States.[35] Despite the resultant turmoil from deskilling, Flather believed that this was the best direction for the Lowell Machine Shop. As Flather stressed the cost savings to upper management, he began to plan for the new location of the moulds.[36] "It will probably be better to have the start made in a room adjacent to the regular moulding room of the Foundry. . . out of the view of all journeyman moulders who are likely to try to influence the operatives of the machines."[37] Flather's changes coincided with the Panic of 1893 and a national financial depression. Railroads were going bankrupt, unemployment was on the rise, and the national treasury announced that the value of gold had fallen below the $100 million mark. Workers at the Lowell Machine Shop were greeted with wage reductions on Christmas Eve 1894. "Owing to the depression in our business and absence of orders, it becomes necessary for the Lowell Machine Shop, in order to compete for machinery at the present low prices, and not to do work at a loss, to make a reduction in the cost of labor. It is, therefore, announced that there will be a reduction of the wages now paid our employees from 6 to 12% commencing with January payment."[38] This would not be the last reduction in wages. The "big shop" was on the decline.

Yet an examination of the payroll ledger for those workers who continued at the Lowell Machine Shop complicates the story of wages in the plant. In 1894, the ledger lists that Geo. Jacques made $70.30 working 277 hours in the month of August, while several entries further down Napoleon Jacques earned $67.53 for working 271 hours. Twenty years later they earned $72.90 for 232 hours and $71.93 for 231 hours, respectively. Each had seen their hourly wages increase from approximately 25 cents to 31 cents. This average increase of .83 percent in hourly wages kept slightly ahead of the .76 percent average inflation during these decades. At the same time, the 15–16 percent reduction in total hours worked limited the positive impact of the hourly increase.[39] It was the reduction of hours worked, made possible in part by deskilling of labor, more than a reduction in the hourly wage rate that drove labor costs down.

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[35] This connection could also represent an opportunity for collaboration between Lowell National Historical Park and Pullman National Monument.

[36] Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem," 411.

[37] Frederick Flather, "Comparison of Costs of Labor, Showing Saving to Be Expected," June 1984, 13.5, Box 4, 15, Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[38] Box 2, Folder 12, Channing Whitaker Collection, UML Archives.

[39] Payroll Ledger, July 30–August 25, 1894, Box M-1, M-2, Manuscript 1; Payroll Ledger, August 1–August 27, 1894, Box M-1, M-2, Manuscript 2, Lowell Machine Shop, BL Archives.

By embracing mechanization and the elimination of skilled workers, Flather and the Lowell Machine Shop were following a national trend to deskill labor in exchange for machines, and for a time this was wildly successful. Labor costs went down and dividend payments to shareholders increased substantially. But, in the end, this was not sustainable. The downside of this decision many argue is that what is saved in labor costs is lost in innovation advancements. Historian George Gibb argues that this inflexible management style hastened the "big shop," the end of the machine shop's dominance in the industry.[40] A close examination of the Lowell Machine Shop situates the industrial development of Lowell in a constantly evolving textile industry, confronted with the challenges of the changing industrial landscape. The declensionist narrative of the New England textile industry often begins in the post–World War II era, but as this study demonstrates the textile industry had long been a volatile industry, both during the ante- and postbellum periods. In his book *Empty Mills: The Fight against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry*, Timothy Minchin frames the Lowell narrative as "a pioneer of both industrialization and deindustrialization" using the post–World War II periodization.[41] However, a deeper dive into the archives requires a revised periodization of the textile story in Lowell.

As the 1800s progressed, less and less southern cotton made the journey north for textile production. The Lowell Machine Shop aggressively expanded from sending cotton gins and pickers South, to sending the necessary materials and machines for textile production itself to take place in the South, as well as in the Midwest and other Northeastern cities. As early as July 1839, the shipment of gins and pickers from Lowell to New Orleans also included two wooden frames for the southern Laurel Mill.[42] While the Civil War disrupted the spread of northern-produced textile machinery south, southern cotton producers began courting northern textile companies as soon as the Civil War came to a close (Figures 3.3–3.5).

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[40] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 231.

[41] Timothy Minchin, *Empty Mills: The Fight against Imports and the Decline of the US Textile Industry* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 248.

[42] P. T. Jackson, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals to White and Co., New Orleans, July 2, 1839, Volume DA-1, 154–155, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

Figure 3.3. Delegation of Lowell mill owners on a trip to the US South to tour mill sites, Box 30B, Folder 9B, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives

Figure 3.4. Loray Hill (also known as the Million Dollar Plant) in Gastonia, NC,
Box 30B, Folder 9B, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives

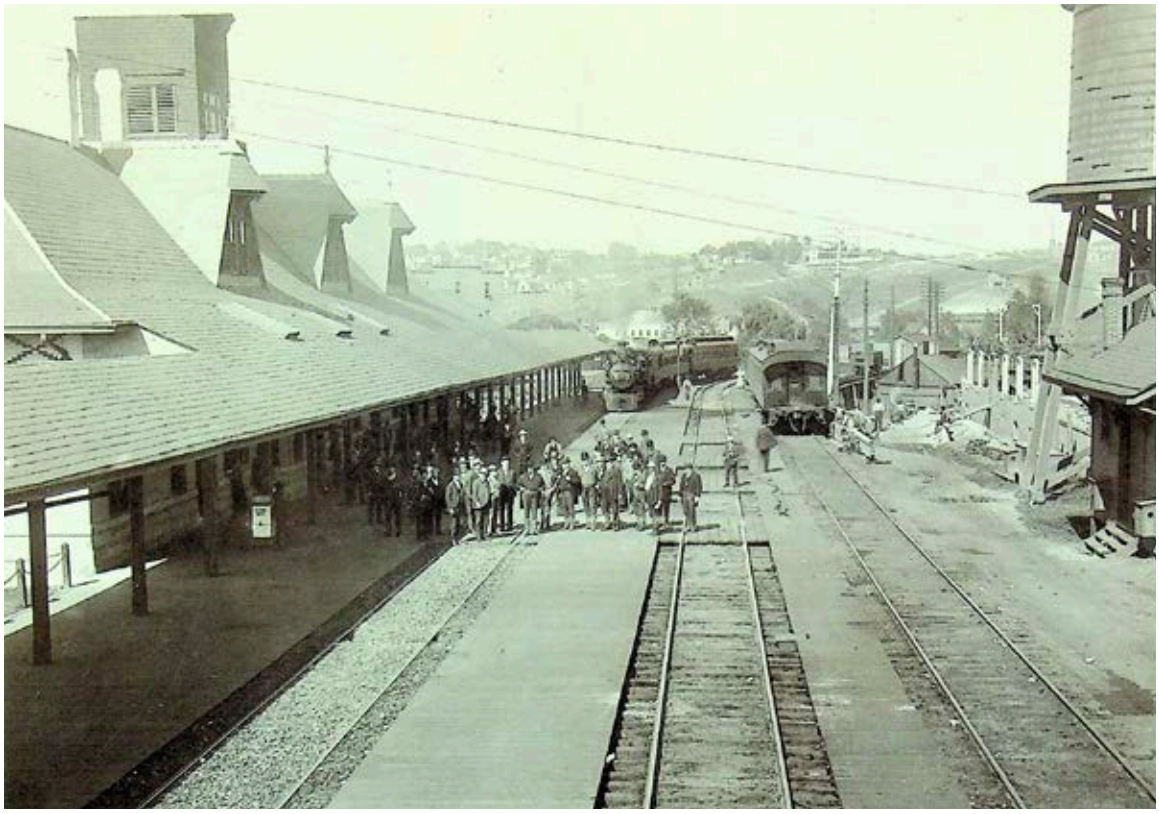

Figure 3.5. Southern Railway train hired to transport the delegation, Danville, Virginia,
Box 30B, Folder 9B, p 126, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives

By the late 1800s, Lowell Machine Shop had established a regular market for their machines throughout the South. According to Gibb, there were several reasons for this expansion, including a saturation of the local market for their product, improved rail transportation for shipping goods South, the establishment of a network of Southern agents to peddle their wares, and the solid reputation of the Lowell products. During this period Lowell Machine Shop narrowed its focus to textile machine production, eschewing the diversity in production that had seen the shop through the Civil War years.[43] Perhaps nothing spurred the expansion of textile production in the South as much as the end of Reconstruction. As the federal government turned its back on the protection of the civil rights of Black southerners, the opportunity for Black labor exploitation in cotton production in the Jim Crow South, coupled with labor agitation across northern industrial cities, led to the expansion of textile production below the Mason–Dixon line. This was the shop's heyday of production. From the period of 1880–84, shareholders in Lowell Machine Shop received 185 percent in dividends.[44] As the "big shop" entered the next decade, the majority of its customers were in New England; however, the South came in a close second with orders being shipped to Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina. Between 1889 and 1891, the Lowell Machine Shop reduced their workforce by a third from 1300 to 898 workers, while dividends paid to shareholders grew by 43 percent.[45]

A national depression in 1896–98, and increased competition by other machine manufacturers, threatened Lowell's position in the southern market. The Lowell Machine Shop employed agents throughout the South to sell their products, and they were not the only northern manufacturer to do so. "It is very annoying to have our competitors cut prices," the Superintendent of Lowell Machine Shop wrote his agent in Atlanta, but warned him, "our best policy is to keep our tempers, and let them take as much of the low price work as they care to undertake."[46] Orders from the South for textile machines continued to arrive in Lowell, and in just the month of January 1899, the shop confirmed orders for two frames with 128 spindles each and other equipment to the Raleigh Mill Co.; one frame with 60 spindles and other equipment to Cherokee Fall Manufacturing Co, in Blacksburg, South Carolina; and other mill machinery to Whitney, South Carolina, and Macon, Georgia.[47] But just as cotton textile mills had slowly moved from the North to the

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[43] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 205–8.

[44] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 234.

[45] Lavallee, "Industrial Requiem," 408.

[46] Hildreth, Superintendent to John Hill, Esq, Atlanta, Georgia, April 17, 1899, 169–170, SC1, Lowell Machine Shop, BL Archives.

[47] Hildreth, Superintendent to Raleigh, Mill Co., January 24, 1899, 117–18; Hildreth, Superintendent to Cherokee Fall Manufacturing Co, Blacksburg, South Carolina, January 25, 1899, 123–25; Hildreth, Superintendent to Whitney Manufacturing Co., Whitney, South Carolina, January 26, 138; Hildreth, Superintendent to Bibb Manufacturing Co, Macon Georgia, January 25, 1899, 130, SC1, Lowell Machine Shop, BL Archives.

South, so too did the production of the machines that ran those mills. By the late 1890s, six separate lines of cotton machinery were being produced by southern shops, cutting into the northern manufacturer's share of the market.[48]

Tempers were not only flaring between various northern machine manufacturers looking to equip the southern textile firms, but tension was also growing between the Lowell textile mills and the southern mills. As more and more of the textile mill production moved South, Lowell's position within the industry slipped. During the first two decades of the 20th century, active cotton spindles increased steadily in the southern states. Meanwhile, in Lowell, the number of active cotton spindles was either static or decreasing. The number of spindles in Massachusetts plunged from 11 million active spindles in 1923 to 1 million active cotton spindles in 1956, in comparison with 17 million in the south.[49] That the Lowell Machine Shop played an early pivotal and enduring role in equipping this move of textile manufacture south is perhaps one of the great ironies of Lowell's place in cotton capital. As the spindles of the textile mills of Lowell screeched to a halt, the mill owners and workers had to look no further for the reason why than down the canal to the Lowell Machine Shop, whose success rested on equipping southern manufacturers, which enabled them to take the market share from their Lowell neighbors.

Labor Unrest in Lowell

With slavery over and the abolitionist movement transformed into a movement for civil rights, the need to control was still alive and well. Many business leaders in Lowell had opposed the abolitionist movement for its ability to agitate the community, labor unrest caused similar concerns. By the late 1800s, Lowell had experienced significant agitation in their own backyard. The female factory operatives had spent much of the antebellum period marching and petitioning the legislature for the 10-hour day, higher wages, and the right to vote. The new workforce of immigrant laborers followed their lead in the continued pursuit of the 10-hour day. In 1882, the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor engaged in a comparative study of three mill towns—Fall River, Lowell, and Lawrence. The study was initiated at the behest of state legislators who were concerned about the "constant turmoil" in Fall River mills, while, in their view, the Lowell and Lawrence mills seemed at peace.[50] But that peace did not mean that there was not a rise in organized labor in Lowell. Skilled male trades workers were the most likely to successfully form workers'

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[48] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 272.

[49] Flather, "Why Did the Lowell Cotton Mills Close?," Box 27, Folder 10, pp. 18–19, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[50] Bedford, *Their Lives and Numbers: The Condition of Working People in Massachusetts, 1870–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 13.

associations or unions during this period, often along ethnic lines. For example, the loom fixers at Boott Mill had a longtime workman's association that was exclusively French Canadian. When the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) came in the 1930s to attempt to organize workers across classifications in Boott, they derided the workman's association as "just a French drinking club," but this criticism misses how such associations were an attempt by workers to maintain their skilled positions within the mills and build solidarity along ethnic lines.[51] In 1889, the labor unions in Lowell combined to form the Lowell Central Labor Union, as an umbrella organization for unions in the city, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor.[52] Lowell factory owners and local business leaders were well-versed in worker agitation and disruption.

By 1900, Lowell was 75 percent first- or second-generation immigrants, and 42 percent were foreign-born. A third of Lowell's 90,000 residents worked in textile production. "Fifty-eight percent of the textile workers labored in cotton mills, 20 percent in knitting operations, 12 percent in woolen and worsted production, and another 10 percent in the construction of textile machinery and parts." A decade later, even more people had immigrated to work in the textile industry in Lowell pushing the percentage of native-born residents born to native-born parents to just 10 percent. The largest percentage of immigrants were French-Canadians followed by Greek, Jewish, Portuguese, Swedish, and Polish immigrants.[53] Many immigrants arriving in Lowell had been pushed out of their homelands because of extreme poverty or religious persecution. For these workers, it meant that they came to the United States with some familiarity on how to organize for change. Throughout the textile industry in the first half of the 20th century, skilled and unskilled workers in Massachusetts were at the forefront of this organizing.

While Lowell textile workers in the 20th century may not have been as outspoken as their foremothers in the mid-1800s or as militant as their counterparts in nearby Lawrence and Fall River, workers rose up to demand improved wages and working conditions from 1900 until after World War II. The first labor action of this era took place in the spring of 1903, when a 12-week strike of 18,000 textile workers left spindles across Lowell inactive.[54] Established in 1901, the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, was an amalgamated union of skilled textile trades. Unlike Fall River, Lowell was one of the weaker cities in terms of union density. In Lowell, "unions

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[51] Marc Scott Miller, *The Irony of Victory: World War II and Lowell, Massachusetts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 29.

[52] "Central Labor Union to Celebrate its 50th Anniversary on Oct. 30," *Lowell Free Press,* September 16, 1939, 1. https://archive.org/details/LowellFreePress/page/n87/mode/2up?view=theater.

[53] Mary H. Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910–1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 5.

[54] Address of Hon. Charles E. Howe, Mayor of Lowell to the Two Branches of the City Government," in City Documents of the City of Lowell Massachusetts Year, 1892–1893, January 1, 1904, 4. https://archive.org/details/lowellma-citydocs-1903-04/page/n11/mode/2up?view=theater.

existed only among the mulespinners, slashers, weavers, loomfixers, machinists, carpenters, and firemen (tending boilers not extinguishing fires)."[55] On February 22, 1903, a year after Lowell's textile workers almost walked out on strike, the Lowell Textile Council, a branch of the UTWA, approached Lowell's mill owner requesting a 10 percent wage increase.[56] Working conditions were not good. "The secretary of the mixed-gender weavers' union, Annie McMullen, said in 1903, 'The life of a mill girl is not an attractive one.... It is hard work week in and week out.'"[57] The mill owners rejected the wage proposal. Union members began to organize along craft and ethnicity lines. Realizing that worker momentum was building, the mill owners opted to lock out the workers before they could strike. This decision galvanized many of the nonunion workers to begin forming unions. As historian Ileen DeVault writes, "Female ring spinners also met and organized a union in the first days of the strike. Twisters and dye-house workers formed unions, too. Through these various occupational and ethnic identities, Lowell textile workers began to evince their recognition of their common interests."[58] By the end of the first week, the Textile Council held a parade that wove throughout the streets of Lowell.

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[55] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 152.

[56] Ileen DeVault, *United Apart: Gender and the Rise of Craft Unionism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 34.

[57] DeVault, *United Apart*, 39.

[58] DeVault, *United Apart*, 44.

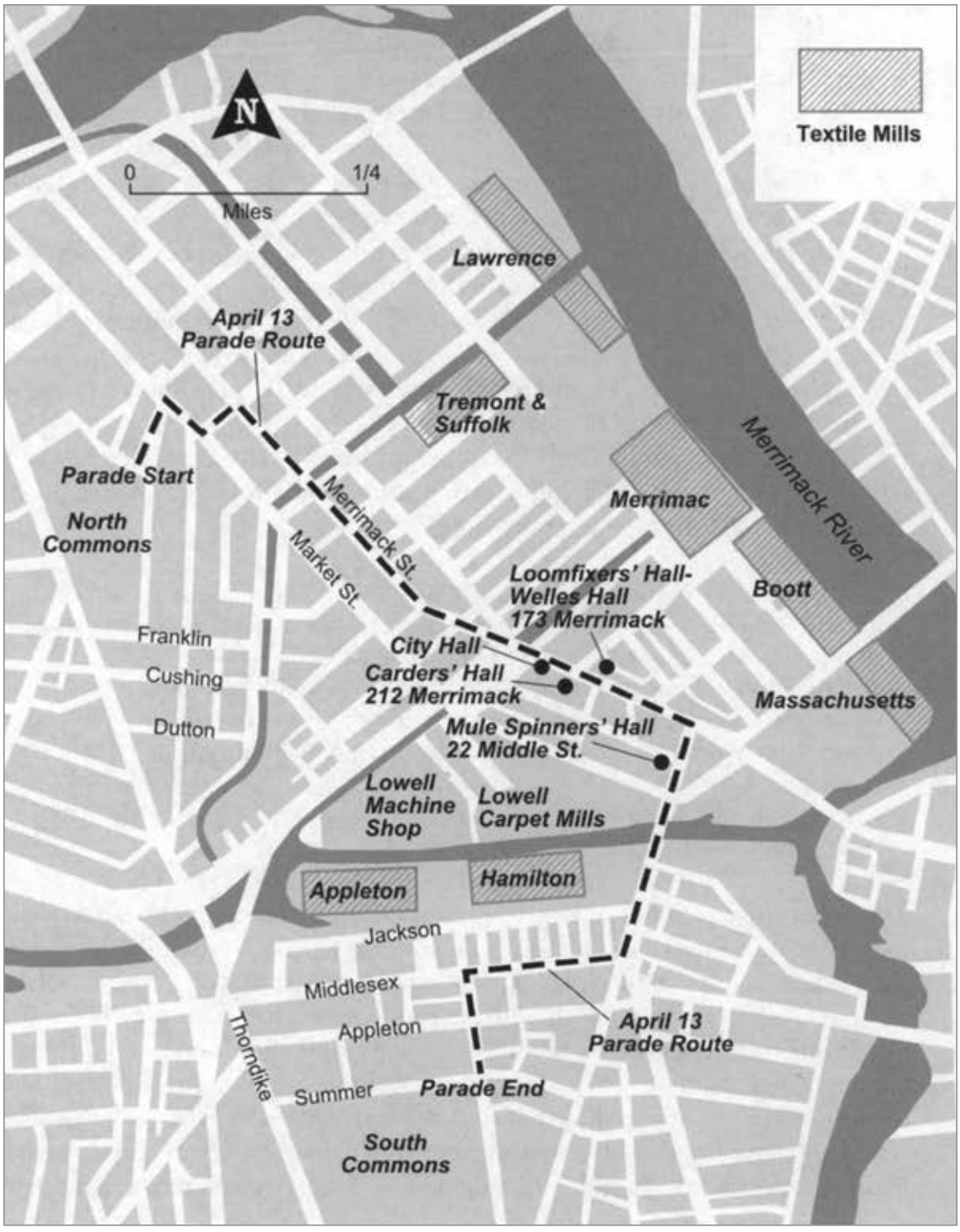

Figure 3.6. 1903 Strike location map in Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (New York: PM Press, 2014)

But momentum was difficult to maintain, and when the Board of Arbitration ruled against the union's claims that they were being underpaid, the mills slowly began to reopen. Historian Maura Doherty's research argues that the mill owners also pitted ethnic

immigrant groups against one another in an effort to break the strike using French-Canadian, Greek, and Portuguese immigrants as strikebreakers.[59] In her essay "The 1903 Strike in the Lowell Cotton Mills," Shirley Zebroski argues that the strike was "an example of the ineffectiveness of craft unionism in a changing industrial system."[60] And 3 months after the 14 unions of skilled workers represented by the Textile Council began protesting, the remaining workers voted to return to work. Over those 3 months, however, thousands of workers left Lowell in search of jobs elsewhere, and those that stayed faced punishment by their employers.[61] Many workers found themselves on employer blacklists.

A decade later, in perhaps one of the most well-known textile strikes in the United States, workers in neighboring Lawrence walked out in what would become known as the "Bread and Roses" strike. The strike began when a group of Polish women and girls walked out on strike at the Everett cotton mill. By the end of the week, more than 20,000 workers were on strike in Lawrence, halting production. The workers reached out to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) for support. Historian Michael Mark Cohen writes, "Inexperienced at strike tactics, the workers reached out to the IWW for help in building an organized movement, and together they showed such solidarity—and 'Solidarity' quickly became the watchword for the strikers—that even across the twenty seven different languages and dialects spoken by the striking workers, the Lawrence strike came to define the possibilities of industrial unionism."[62] The IWW sent organizer Big Bill Haywood to help the workers organize. At a mass rally in Lawrence, he declared: "There is no foreigner here except the capitalists.... Do not let them divide you by sex, color, creed or nationality. Billy Wood [owner of the largest woolen factory] can lick one Pole, in fact he can lick all the Poles, but he cannot lick all the nationalities put together."[63] The strike lasted for three months and only ended after the state, mill owners, and the media deliberately attacked the strikers using violent tactics. One popular tactic was to use press coverage of the strike to paint the strikers as violent and out of control. Given that most of the strikers were immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, this framing fueled existing xenophobic fears in the community and beyond. For example, the press reported that bombs were found in the homes of striking workers and union leaders. "When the strikers use or prepare to use dynamite," editorialized the *New York Times* before anyone knew whose dynamite it was, "they display a fiendish lack of humanity which ought to place them

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[59] Maura Doherty, "Spindle City Blues: The Impact of the Maturing Industrial Economy on the City of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1947–1978," PhD diss., New York University, 1998, 85.

[60] Shirley Zebroski, "The 1903 Strike in the Lowell Cotton Mills," in Mary Blewett, eds., *Surviving Hard Times: The Working People of Lowell* (Lowell, MA: Lowell Museum, 1982), 43.

[61] DeVault, *United Apart*, 49–52.

[62] Michael Mark Cohen, *The Conspiracy of Capital: Law, Violence, and American Popular Radicalism in the Age of Monopoly* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), 155.

[63] Quoted in Cohen, *The Conspiracy of Capital*, 155.

beyond the comfort of religion until they have repented."[64] Despite these efforts to characterize the striking workers as violent, the actual violence of the police in putting down the strike, carried out with the support of the mill owners, backfired as stories and images of attacks on women and children circulated around the country. The picketers held firm, and by the end of March 1912, they declared victory. "'You, the strikers of Lawrence, have won the most signal victory of any organized body of working men in the world,' declared [Big Bill] Haywood at a mass celebration."[65]

Inspired by Lawrence, Lowell's immigrant workforce, led by the Portuguese and Lithuanians, invited the IWW organizers to help with the strike. They wanted the raises they were denied a decade before and that the workers in Lawrence had just secured. According to historian Laurence Gross, "Demands included a 15-percent wage increase, double pay for overtime, the right of weavers to weigh their own cloth, and reinstatement of all striking workers without discrimination."[66] IWW leader Elizabeth Gurley Flynn spoke in a local Greek church, despite the priest's insistence that women were not permitted to speak in the church. In her memoir, Flynn recalls: "The Greeks were slow to join the strike.... A meeting was arranged in the Greek Catholic Church. A translator was ready to convey to them what the IWW had to say. Then we struck a snag. I was the only English-speaking organizer there and therefore the one designated to speak. The priest said: 'A woman cannot speak in the church.' We finally convinced him that I spoke as an organizer, not as a woman."[67]

This was the largest textile strike in the history of Lowell resulting in a 10 percent wage increase. The workers met with little success in winning recognition for the union, despite pickets and parades, including an attempt to march past Flather's family home only to be "misdirected" by the family's chauffeur.[68] This could be in large part due to the divisions that the leadership of the United Textile Workers of America affiliated with the AFL attempted to sow against the workers organizing with the more militant and more representative IWW. The UTWA represented only the skilled workers in the mills—about 25 percent. The majority of the nonunion workers were overwhelmingly new immigrants working in low-skilled mills jobs.[69] Most of Lowell's textile workers would not win union recognition until the 1940s when the mills were under pressure by the federal government to accept unionization if they wanted to secure wartime contracts.

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[64] Quoted in Cohen, *The Conspiracy of Capital*, 154

[65] Quoted in Cohen, *The Conspiracy of Capital*, 160.

[66] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline,* 153.

[67] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1994 edition), 145.

[68] Doherty, "Spindle City Blues," 86; Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 153.

[69] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 153.

Health and the Environment in Turn-of-the-20th-Century Lowell

At the turn of the century, manufacturers in Lowell had a range of issues keeping their attention, as they attempted to bring increased automation to the mills, dealt with the pressure of southern competition, and responded to the unrest of labor. Another issue they had to navigate at this time was the reform movements that were sweeping the country, as some residents of Lowell became increasingly concerned about the health and environment of the Spindle City. The time period between 1890 and 1920 in US history has often been dubbed the Progressive Era, as reformers undertook a series of efforts from establishing parks, beautifying cities, improving urban infrastructure such as providing sewers, clean water, and regular trash collection, addressing the poor living conditions in urban slums, improving health and safety in factories, and trying to eradicate corruption in city governments. Historical scholarship has challenged the label of "progressive" for this era by pointing out the sharp rise in racial oppression, the expansion of federal nativist and isolationist policies, and the resistance of industrialists to the efforts of reform during this time. Other scholarship has encouraged increased attention to the ways class, race, ethnicity, and gender shaped the various reform movements in this era. In the preface of their 2021 reissue of *America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1917*, Lewis Gould and Courtney Shah argue, "Yet for all its contradictions and ambiguities, the Progressive Era was something real in the history of the United States. The ways in which Americans ran their government and ordered their lives were very different in 1917 from how they had been in 1890. Social and technological changes accounted for some of these transformations, but there had also been a significant shift in the attitude toward what government should do and how its affairs should be conducted." As one of the first industrial centers in the United States, Lowell affords an excellent opportunity to examine the "contradictions and ambiguities of this era." What follows are some examples of this era of reform in Lowell—which should not be considered an exhaustive recitation, but rather as an invitation to more investigation on these subjects.[70]

One big worry for Lowell during this era was local water quality. According to historian Jon Peterson, "The principle of water-carriage sewerage gained a permanent foothold in the United States" in the 1870s. Massachusetts industrial towns, including Fall River, Haverhill, Lawrence, Lowell, Pittsfield, Springfield, and Worcester, implemented

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[70] Lewis L. Gould and Courtney Q. Shah, *America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1917* (New York: Routledge, 2021). For more on the Progressive Era, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); Robert H. Weibe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1965); Steven Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

improved filtration sewage systems starting in the 1870s. Essentially the aim of these sewer plans was to use water to carry sewage away from people, and for Lowell that meant connecting the sewage pipes to the Merrimack River to transport the waste downstream.[71] This practice, added to years of industrial pollution, took its toll on the Merrimack River corridor. In 1893, Lowell Mayor John Pickman explained the issue in his inaugural address: "The water supply from the Merrimack River is of impaired quality, and may easily become the means of the transmission of disease and germs; and some portions of the city, notably Little Canada, at certain times of the year are disease breeding localities by reason of insufficient or defective sewage, the poor condition of the streets, overcrowding in tenement houses, and generally the lack of proper sanitary conditions."[72]

Concern about the public infrastructure and health conditions of Little Canada was a common theme in the annual mayor's addresses at the turn of the century. In 1896, the mayor's remarks described the neighborhood: "Here is a small portion of territory, into which are crowded thousands of people, and in this district there is not a street or sidewalk that is decently constructed." He also recommended the city build "a small park or playground" for the children of that district.[73]

No force shaped the environment of Lowell more than the Proprietors of Locks and Canals, who were the ultimate arbiters of many decisions about city infrastructure, and in deciding how the various concerns in the region interacted with the waterway that was the lifeblood of the city. The infrastructure of the city of Lowell was intrinsically intertwined with that of the mills and the waterways that kept the spindles turning; and, keeping the textile industry booming was the driving force behind decisions on how best to marshal the city's natural resources. One example of this was how the Proprietors of Locks and Canals addressed issues of water quality in the city. In the early 1890s, it is estimated an outbreak of typhoid affected as much as one percent of the city's population, resulting in 106 deaths between October 1890 and March 1891. Although this outbreak was alarming, typhoid was by no means a new issue in Lowell. According to an annual report by the Board of Health, "During the fifty-three years of which a record has been kept, there were from sixteen to one hundred and twenty-three deaths from typhoid fever each year, or an average of thirty-eight deaths a year."[74] An investigation of the 1890–91 outbreak found that

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[71] Jon A. Peterson, "The Impact of Sanitary Reform Upon American Urban Planning, 1840–1890," *Journal of Social History* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 88–89, references David W. Cunningham, *Report to the Engineer to the Committee on Sewers and Drains of the City of Lowell, on a General System of Sewerage, 1873* (Lowell, 1874).

[72] "The Inaugural Address of the Hon. John J. Pickman, Mayor of the City of Lowell to the Two Branches of The City Government," in City Documents of the City of Lowell Massachusetts Year 1892–1893, January 2, 1893, 10. https://archive.org/details/lowellma-citydocs-1892–93/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater.

[73] The Inaugural Address of the Hon. William F. Courtney, Mayor of the City of Lowell to the Two Branches of The City Government," in City Documents of the City of Lowell Massachusetts Year 1892–1896, January 4, 1893, 18. https://archive.org/details/lowellma-citydocs-1896-97/page/n11/mode/2up.

[74] City Documents of the City of Lowell, Massachusetts, for the Year 1890–1891, 42. https://archive.org/details/lowellma-citydocs-1890–91.

Lowell Hospital, which treated typhoid patients was dumping sewage into the Northern Canal, and from there the contaminated water circulated throughout the mills for use in washing. Although workers had been told not to drink this water, they often ignored the warning. As a result of the findings, the hospital was instructed to divert its sewage to the public sewer system, and the mills were instructed to place notices above faucets in the mills that the water was not fit for drinking.[75] No systemic improvements of the city and mill water infrastructure were implemented, and a decade later the problem of sewage persisted in the city. In 1900, the city engineer of Lowell issued a public letter to the mayor describing the sewage issue. The city piped their sewage into the Merrimack River, but during "most of the summer and fall" from "Saturday noon until Monday morning," when the mills were not running, raw sewage ended up on the dry riverbed. In his notes to the directors, the Proprietors of Locks and Canals' engineer Hiram Mills noted that this had been ongoing "every year" since the mills had been constructed. Engineer Mills suggested the city extend its sewer pipes further into the river so the low water seasons would not cause such problems. He cited previous efforts that the Proprietors of Locks and Canals had made to reduce the "sewage flats" but clearly determined any future solutions were up to the city to make.[76] Increased concern with city water quality and its relationship to public health persisted, especially with ongoing concerns over the spread of typhoid, reflecting the increasing role of municipalities in addressing issues of public health that took place during the Progressive Era. At the turn of the 20th century in Lowell, the city began to move toward sinking wells to meet the community's water needs, instead of relying on the Merrimack River.[77]

While the engineer of the Proprietors of Locks and Canals decided that fixing the city's sewage issues was the responsibility of the city, that was just one of a myriad of municipal issues considered by the Proprietors of Locks and Canals each year. An examination of a June 1917 report between the head engineer and treasurer of Proprietors of Locks and Canals demonstrates the multiple ways the company interacted with and shaped city life. The report included plans for improvements to local railroad and vehicular traffic bridges and requests from various companies, as well as St. John's Hospital, to lease land held by Proprietors of Locks and Canals. The report also described how "50 to 100 boys" were regularly swimming in the canals and the river "during the opening of swimming" season and that Lowell "had taken no steps" to stop the trespass. In response, the Proprietors of Locks and Canals constructed chain link and picket fences at various

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[75] "Lowell: A Friend of the People the Typhoid Epidemic of 1890–91," and exhibit by Helene Desjarlais, https://libguides.uml.edu/c.php?g=527713&p=3608094.

[76] Hiram F. Mills to the Directors of the Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on the Merrimack River, December 28, 1900, Box VC 1–3, Volume 2, 455–58, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[77] Janet Greenlees, "'Stop Kissing and Steaming!': Tuberculosis and the Occupational Health Movement in Massachusetts and Lancashire, 1870–1918," *Urban History* 32, no. 2: 235.

locations in an effort to stop the swimming. Another issue covered in the report was that the city's inspector of public property had condemned several tenement buildings on Suffolk Street demanding immediate repairs, for properties whose leases were controlled by the Proprietors of Locks and Canals. The Proprietors of Locks and Canals engineer-proposed solutions included possibly "getting rid of the tenements or rebuilding or fencing the backyards and platforms in such a way that there will not be danger to the occupants or children." Still, another issue of concern for city officials and the State Board of Health was that pollution from the canal system was "getting into the city mains." The issue had been raised two years earlier with little progress. Finally, the Parks Commission requested the lease of two parcels of land for a park at Moody Street.[78] Two months later the city gained approval to establish a park at the head of Moody and Pawtucket Streets by agreeing to pay "$5.00 a year, taxes and the cost of fencing the land."[79] From transportation infrastructure to health and safety, from business to recreation needs, the Proprietors of Locks and Canals weighed in on all of it.

During the early 20th century, as more attention was paid to the role of public infrastructure and its relationship to promoting healthy cities, so too did issues of workplace health and safety gain new attention. Historian Janet Greenlees wrote an article about two practices in the Massachusetts cotton mills that caught the attention of Progressive Era health reformers—shuttle kissing and humidification. She explains:

> Shuttle kissing was the practice of loading new cops (bobbins) of thread into weaving shuttles. After weavers placed a fresh cop inside the shuttle, they placed the end of the thread against the shuttle eye, put their lips over the outside of the eye and sharply inhaled, thus drawing the thread through the eye, ready for use. During this procedure, weavers directly inhaled dirt, fine lint. . .and potential poisonous chemicals if the thread was dyed. Weavers repeated this process a minimum of 300 times per day and many years of weaving could cause respiratory illnesses. In addition, shuttles were rarely singular to one weaver. Other weavers or the overseer might also "kiss" weavers' shuttles raising questions about the risk of spreading disease, particularly tuberculosis.[80]

By the late 19th century, the American Medical Association had recognized the connection between breathing dust and the spread of tuberculosis. In the early 1900s, the Draper Company, a textile equipment manufacturer that produced a loom that did not require suck shuttles, joined other voices for eliminating the unhealthy suck shuttles.[81] In

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[78] File #1126 "Report to Treasurer," June 28, 1917, Box Vol. 1–3, Volume 3, 564–72, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[79] File #1126 "Report to Treasurer," August 30, 1917, Box Vol. 1–3, Volume 3, 600, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[80] Greenlees, "Stop Kissing and Steaming!" 223–46.

[81] Charles Levenstein and Gegory F. DeLaurier, *The Cotton Dust Papers: Science, Politics, and Power in the "Discovery" of Byssinonosis in the United States* (Amityville, NY: Baywood), 22–23.

the early 20th century, the Massachusetts Legislature passed legislation that required inspection of textile factories by Board of Health doctors, and based on their reports the legislature banned the suction shuttle in 1912. The next year the Board of Health investigated the humidification techniques used in the mills, and encouraged cotton manufacturers to voluntarily stop the use of spray humidifiers or invest in new equipment that was less likely to spread disease. Some manufacturers complied with this suggestion, although others decided to forgo changing their practices.[82]

Improving water quality and taking steps toward workplace health and safety were just some of the health and environmental efforts in reform-era Lowell. Another key feature of the nationwide Progressive Era reform was efforts to clean up and improve the livability of urban spaces. The banner of "City Beautiful" was first coined in 1899 in an anti-billboard campaign in New York City, and grew to incorporate efforts to beautify cities including tree and flower plantings, alley clean-ups, establishing parks, factory and smoke regulation, and trash removal. By 1906, more than 2,000 local improvement societies worked on such efforts in cities throughout the United States.[83] The City Beautiful Movement complimented the burgeoning urban parks movement, most prominently led by Frederick Law Olmsted's design firm, headquartered not far from Lowell in nearby Brookline. At the turn of the century, cities across the nation began to establish parks departments and commissions, and to put more energy into developing urban parks. Olmsted and his firm became the most influential team of landscape designers in US history, designing subdivisions, estates, parks and boulevards in cities big and small, especially on the East Coast, including most famously Central Park in New York.[84]

The influence of the Olmsted firm came to the Lowell landscape in the Tyler Park area, a growing middle-class suburban enclave connected to the central city by an electric trolley system. In 1893, the Tyler family donated 2.74 acres of land to be set aside as a park. Landscape architect Charles Eliot, part of the Olmsted firm, designed the park—which is believed to be the smallest ever designed by the Olmsted firm.[85] The Olmsted firm also

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[82] Greenlees, "Stop Kissing and Steaming!" 223–46.

[83] Mel Scott, *American City Planning since 1890* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1969), 66. For more on the City Beautiful Movement, see William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Eric Mumford, "Cities in the Americas and the International Influence of the City Beautiful Movement," in *Designing the Modern City: Urbanism Since 1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[84] For more on Frederick Law Olmsted and his landscape architect firm, see Justin Martin, *Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2011); Witold Rybcynski, *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Scribner Book Company, 1999); Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[85] https://www.lowellma.gov/1037/Tyler-Park-Historic-District. Accessed on January 15, 2023.

consulted on a variety of other Lowell landscapes, including Lowell City Hall (1894), Lowell Textile School (1902), improvement on Anne Street (1909–10), and the South Common (1913), among others.[86]

By the turn of the 20th century, in Lowell, city parks were under the jurisdiction of a committee of the City Council, but there was no dedicated branch of local government for park upkeep or development. One organization that played a significant role in this cause was the Middlesex Women's Club. In 1902, the club's "tree committee" hosted a talk by the chairman of the Metropolitan Park Commission, who talked on "the possibilities of the beauty on the canal and riverbanks of the Massachusetts Venice." The minutes of the meeting end with the hope that Lowell would establish a volunteer parks commission and that it could make the "City Beautiful."[87]

The Middlesex Women's Club was determined for their city to join the parks movement. One avenue for participation in the public life of Lowell for upper-class women, and in cities across the country, was to try and convince industrialists and civic leaders that profits and beautification could go hand-in-hand. Across the country, members of the women's club movement urged white middle- and upper-class businessmen and professionals to view efforts to beautify their cities as a means to continue to attract business investment and a way to uplift the lower classes. A newspaper write-up announcing the Middlesex talk explained that the efforts to establish parks would allow the opportunity for the "poor people of the city to spend time in the open air."[88]

The efforts by the women's club soon gained traction with prominent city leaders. The next month, when the club hosted a talk by the Park Commissioner of Boston, they drew a crowd between two hundred and three hundred, including many "prominent men" of Lowell. George Marden, the editor of the *Lowell Courier*, presided at the meeting; he began, "We ought to second the efforts of the ladies in this movement, and do everything possible to forward the object which is so close to their hearts.... What the Women's club proposes will add dollars and cents to our valuation, and infinitely to our pleasure."[89] When the measure to establish a volunteer park commission was put to a public vote, the Lowell Board of Trade urged a yes vote, passing a resolution that asserted, "Other cities which have adopted this plan have found it to work to their advantage. We must be progressive and up to date in our methods if we hope to attract the best residents and new

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[86] Olmsted Associates Records: Job Files, 1863–1971; File 1317, Lowell City Hall, Lowell, Mass., 1894–1911; File 2386, Lowell Textile School, Lowell, Mass., 1902–195; File 3970, Anne Street, Lowell Mass., 1910; File 1376, South Common, Lowell Mass., 1913. 1910; and, File 1370, Board of Park Commissioners, Lowell, Mass. 1904–1913, loc.gov.

[87] "November 12, 1902," Box 2, 163-164, "Records Middlesex Women's Club," UML Archives.

[88] "For Public Parks," *Lowell Daily Courier*, Tuesday, November 4, 1902, Box 2, Middlesex Women's Club 8, 1902-1906, UML Archives.

[89] "Strong Arguments for a Park Commission," Box 2, Middlesex Women's Club 8, 1902-1906, UML Archives.

industries."[90] By February 1903, the Parks Commission, made up of five prominent Lowell men was established.[91] In its first year of operation, the commission had under its jurisdiction 9 parks, totaling 72.6 acres.[92] The parks commission, which had started as an issue championed by the Lowell women's club movement had been realized—but those who served on the commission were entirely upper-class men. For their part, the Middlesex club continued to champion the cause dear to their hearts, and in 1907 hosted the leading national voice of the City Beautiful Movement, J. Horace McFarland, president of the American Civic Association. His "The Crusade against Ugliness" included suggestions for beautifying Lowell such as eradicating billboards, establishing parks along the canal, and buying up lots to create gardens.[93]

The involvement of the Middlesex Women's club in early efforts to establish parks and mitigate environmental blight was a familiar story in cities large and small across the United States during the early 20th century. At the turn of the century, championing such environmental causes was a way for middle- and upper-class women to enter the public sphere (although left them almost wholly unable to hold elected offices in the park commissions they helped to establish). What makes Lowell an important case study for this early movement toward urban environmental policy was the interplay between these early environmental reformers and the power of capital, and the extensive archival record that exists about this interaction.

The Boott Mill

No one site represented the power of capital in Lowell more than the Boott Mills. It was the largest operating mill in the city at the turn of the 20th century, and it became a stark symbol of Lowell's overall decline as an industrial center when the mill closed its doors. In 1905, Boott went through a massive reorganization as they struggled to remain operational. Many of Lowell's mills were struggling due to a reluctance to invest in modernizing their machinery and production process, in addition to increased competition from newer southern mills that had lower labor costs. At Boott, the mill's selling house "had been underwriting the mill by endorsing its notes and even paying salaries and wages." In fact, the selling house, Smith, Hogg, and Company, was essentially making all of the company's major decisions. "They not only advised mills on marketable production, they also

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[90] "Favor Commission," Box 2, Middlesex Women's Club 8, 1902-1906, UML Archives.

[91] "Lowell Park Commission," Box 2, Middlesex Women's Club 8, 1902-1906, UML Archives.

[92] Club Records 3, May 1903–May 1908, March 3, 1907, 249–150, Box 2, Middlesex Women's Club, UML Archives.

[93] Club Records 3, May 1903-May 1908, March 3, 1907, 249-150, Box 2, Middlesex Women's Club, UML Archives.

provided credit as needed, interposing themselves between corporations and their financial centers in Boston and New York. They often owned substantial portions of the operations for which they sold."[94] In short, the complicated and incestuous web that Massachusetts's textile industry leaders had woven during the 1800s was coming crashing down around them, and with southern competitors poised and ready to reap the benefits of this collapse.

Alexander G. Cumnock, Boott Mill's longtime agent, campaigned for improvements and challenged the organization of textile production. But his concerns fell on deaf ears. Ultimately, Cumnock left Boott and took over Lowell's Appleton mill, where he updated the buildings while simultaneously establishing an Appleton mill in South Carolina. Gross argues that Cumnock was not seeking to leave Lowell but "to develop an expanded capacity elsewhere as well, and the South offered a convenient opportunity."[95] With Cumnock's departure and Boott's economic instability, the shareholders sold off many shares of Boott stock to pay down their debt and then reopened with a new set of shareholders. The new owners brought in various consultants who offered up their advice on how to turn around Boott Mills. It was highly recommended that the mill either be rebuilt elsewhere or "all of the buildings with the exception of the storehouses, and the No. 7 Mill should be destroyed and new buildings erected in their places."[96] The shareholders did not do this. Instead, they recommitted to producing as much as they could with the lowest possible labor costs and a new marketing strategy.

Under new shareholder management (including his father-in-law), Frederick A. Flather was brought back from Chicago where he had been working for McCormick Harvester Company and put in place as the Boott Mill Treasurer, the mill's top position. According to *Textile World*, Flather was "ultra-conservative" in his approach to financial affairs.[97] Flather was overseeing a textile mill in the middle of a major consumer shift in demand. With a focus on marketing and responding to consumer demand, Boott was producing a staggeringly diverse array of cloth making the ability to monitor and improve production incredibly challenging in buildings that were not built to accommodate new machinery and changing production.

Working conditions in the mill were not good. In 1911, one consultant reported on the depressing work conditions:

> In almost all of the rooms of the Boott Mills, the common practice was to hang the outer garments on a nail or hook, nearby the machine on which they were engaged. The odors arising from these clothes, especially of a damp morning

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[94] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 93.

[95] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 95.

[96] Letter from Lockwood-Greene to Boott Mill, January 29, 1907, quoted in Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 102.

[97] Quoted in Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 107.

> were considerable, if allowed to hang in the work room unprotected, and it is anything but sanitary. Factors like the above with those of light, heat and washing facilities, all have their influence toward elevating or depressing the attractiveness of employment at the mill, and so the better operative relegates the dingy shops to their distant foreign relations.

Several years later, another consultant reported that "the floors of the several mills and their different levels were oil-soaked, slippery, and 'offer an excellent chance for a fall.'"[98] Injuries and loss of work days were numerous, and in some cases, workers died as a result of their labor. In short, Boott Mills's decision to not modernize was taking its toll on the workers and their ability to hire and keep the best quality workforce. This is not to say that they did not have long-term workers; however, they tended to be among the higher-skilled workforce. One of those workers was Harry Dickenson, a loom fixer, who worked at Boott from 1922 until their closing in 1954. Dickenson came to Boott after experience working in textile mills in Maine and Rhode Island. He distinctly remembers when Flathers's two sons, Frederick Jr. and John Rogers, who were only one year apart and raised as twins, joined their father, and began working at the mill in management.[99] Both sons attended Harvard—Frederick Jr. focused on engineering and John Rogers studied business administration. They both took night classes at the Lowell Textile School to learn more about the textile industry. Unlike their father, who was a self-taught man, Flather's children were all formally educated at top universities. As historian Oliver Zunz notes in his book *Making America Corporate, 1870–1920*, "middle-level corporate managers. . .attached increasing value to formal education and to committing themselves to a profession for life."[100] Drusilla Flather, the oldest sibling and daughter of Flather's first wife, attended Brown University, Bryn Mawr College, and the Sorbonne in France, eventually receiving her PhD in biology and becoming a professor of biology at Mt. Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. While attending college was not so unusual for an upper-class woman, Drusilla is unique in the amount of education she received and her career as a scholar prior to marrying. Unlike her bothers who settled in Lowell and worked at Boott Mill, Drusilla married George C. Riley, a native of Montreal, who she met one summer in Maine. She went on to spend the rest of her life living outside of Montreal and raising her family.[101]

Both of Flather's sons began working in the mills after World War I—one focused on the production side (Frederick Jr.) and the other (John Rogers) on the business offices. As Dickenson recalls it, Frederick Jr. was not an easy man to work for. "Frederick was the worst one. What he did was break down the standards of the foremanship. He'd take a man

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[98] Quoted in Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 134–35.

[99] Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 160.

[100] Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 39.

[101] Conklin, *Middlesex County and Its People*, 1927. For more on Drusilla Flather Riley's fascinating life, see Drusilla Flather Riley family. Interview by Emily E. LB. Twarog. Video Interview. January 22, 2022, via Zoom.

off a junk pile and put him in the mill as a foreman. He really ruined the mill." Whereas John Rogers seemed to be more approachable according to Dickenson, "John. . .you could talk to him; he had more reason."[102] Interestingly, in *The Boss' Son: An Autobiography*, Roger Flather (son of John Rogers) writes that he rarely saw his uncle Frederick Jr. and rarely spoke with him, despite growing up nearby and working at the Boott Mill. There was a "growing animosity and lack of trust between the brothers [that] may have accumulated incrementally over time, building on disagreements, misunderstandings, perhaps even competition at the mill for their father's approval."[103]

In addition to working in the mill, all three Flathers were intimately involved in all aspects of Lowell society. Each of them served on boards including local banks, railroads, utilities, and the chamber of commerce. They held memberships in a variety of national organizations such as the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, the Rotary Club, and the Masons. And, while this service likely was to benefit their business interests, the family was also very involved in charitable work including Flather's wife. One particularly memorable and, in the words of Roger Flather, "embarrassing" ritual occurred every Christmas:

> My grandmother [Alice Rogers Flather] used to drive around Lowell sitting in the back of her chauffeured Cadillac at Christmastime, passing out envelopes of cash to selected police officers on duty at key intersections in the city. The most important of these was "the Square," right in the center where East Merrimack Street crossed Bridge Street. Before a stop light was installed, traffic at this intersection was always controlled by a patrol officer on foot. . .if the officer saw a Flather car back in the pack, he would move the traffic through until the Flather car had passed.[104]

The Flather's commitment to social welfare was not unique. In fact, it was quite standard as many industrial capitalists of the time served society through a lens of Christian-inspired social gospelism. The concept "strove to reform [industrial capitalism] from within by calling for people to shun narrow self-interest and aspire to be of 'service to society.'"[105] One of the most influential members of the social gospel movement was economist Richard T. Ely (1854–1943). He believed that "the industrial world faced a severe social crisis due to the antagonism between labour and capital, 'the most important, the farthest and deepest reaching crisis known to humanity.'"[106] Ely rather optimistically believed:

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[102] Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 161.

[103] Roger Flather, *The Boss' Son: Remembering the Boott Mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1937–1954* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), 159.

[104] Flather, *The Boss' Son*, 71.

[105] Kristian Quistgaard Steensen and Kaspar Villadsen, "From Social Gospel to CSR: Was Corporate Social Responsibility Ever Radical?," *Organization* 27, no. 6 (2020): 926.

[106] Quoted in Steensen and Villadsen, "From Social Gospel to CSR," 932.

"Day by day the phrase, 'All men are brothers', comes to mean more and more, and the time is surely coming when it will ethically mean as much in the world at large as once it did in the village community; and when that time comes no decent man will any longer advocate the legitimacy of the universal sway of sharp practice and hard bargaining. Men will then try to put all business relations upon a brotherly basis."[107]

Flather's Christian faith and generational legacy in Lowell indicate that he was likely quite influenced by Ely's social gospel message. Indeed, the Flather family would continue in the vein of public service, as his descendants would go on to become special education teachers, serve in the Peace Corps, and help found and run charitable organizations.[108]

Immigrant Lowell

These generations of the Flather family saw the population of Lowell grow and change. As an industrial city situated in the global network of textile production, Lowell became a destination for immigrant labor. This included the arrival of Eastern-European Jewish immigrants, starting in the late 1880s, who came to Lowell seeking work in the mills. These new arrivals to Lowell were part of the more than two-and-a-half-million Jewish immigrants who came to the United States, predominantly from eastern Europe. Historian Irving Howe has described how in a little more than three-decade span, "approximately one third of the east European Jews left their homelands" fleeing persecution and pogroms and seeking economic opportunity.[109]

The Jewish immigrants to Lowell were part of this larger diaspora. Shirley Kolack's 1997 book *A New Beginning* traces the history of this immigrant community in Lowell across three generations. She explains that these Jewish immigrants first settled in a neighborhood near the train station, known as Hale-Howard. By the 1890s, this enclave had "kosher meat markets, fruit and vegetable stores, bakeries, synagogues, Hebrew schools, and even a ritual bath (mikvah)." By 1912, the community had grown to support two Jewish newspapers, the *Star of Bethlehem* and *Zion's Banner*, as well as four synagogues.[110] Besides the synagogues, Jewish organizations included the Ladies Hebrew Helping Hand Society; the Gemiluth Chassodim (kind acts) Society, which served Jewish families in need; the Hebrew Free Loan Society, which assisted Jewish residents needing bank loans; the

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[107] R. T. Ely, *The Social Law of Service* (New York: Easton & Mains, 1896), 147.

[108] Barry Scanlon, "Newell Flather Was a Force in Lowell," *Lowell Sun*, September 22, 2021; Flather, *The Boss' Son*, 167–69; Drusilla Flather Riley family. Interview by Emily E. LB. Twarog. Video Interview. January 22, 2022, via Zoom.

[109] Irving Howe, *The World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made, 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

[110] Shirley Kolack, *A New Beginning: The Jews of Historic Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 9.

Arbeiter Ring, or Workmen's Circle, a small group which attracted mostly secular Jews interested in socialist labor reform; and the Benjamin S. Puzzner Lodge of B'nai B'rith, which combined social activities with charitable aid and education.[111] Kolack marks generational differences in the Jewish population of Lowell.

The immigrants that arrived in the 1890s lived primarily in the three-floor tenements and worked predominantly in the mills or as peddlers. In the early 20th century, some Jewish residents sought self-employment, in part to avoid the requirement of Saturday mill work. Peddlers became established store owners, tenements became two-stories, and the more affluent Jewish residents moved to the outskirts of the original enclave into single-family homes. Jewish children of this generation attended Hebrew schools and then Lowell High School. By World War II, a third generation of Jewish young people attended college, and left the city seeking jobs and lives elsewhere.[112]

Jewish immigrants were not the only new arrivals to come to Lowell seeking a better life. Greek immigrants arrived in Lowell, part of a great exodus from Greece in the 1890s where national bankruptcy and the 1897 Thirty Days War with Turkey helped propel approximately one-sixth of the entire Greek population, predominantly males, from their home country. Arriving in Lowell, these Greek immigrant men took some of the lowest-paid jobs in the mills, which were also the hottest and most dangerous. The Greek community took over the Acre, which had been the neighborhood established by the first wave of Irish immigrants when Lowell was first built. Nicholas Georgoulis, who was born in Lowell to Greek immigrants and worked reluctantly in the dye house, recalled growing up in the Acre: "I liked the Acre; it was a community. There wasn't a soul in the entire Acre that a child growing up didn't get to know. If you lived in the Acre, they know them by name. If not by name, by sight. . .the people would walk down the street, and everyone was saying, Hello, and, speaking nicely."

Working in the dye house was not an easy job: "The first experience I had in the mill was when I was applying for work in the dye house. I saw all these fellas with their feet [and legs] wrapped up in cloths. Later I found out that they wrapped their feet in cloths like they did and boots [underneath] so that the dyes and the acids wouldn't burn through to their skin."[113] A few years into working in the dye shop, Georgoulis was burned severely when his machine broke and acid fell on him from his neck to his waist requiring 16 skin grafts. He never worked in the mill again.[114]

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[111] Kolack, *A New Beginning*, 20–22.

[112] Kolack, *A New Beginning*, 9–13.

[113] Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 258–62.

[114] Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 263.

In addition to Greeks, the Polish community grew in Lowell. By 1918, approximately 5,000 Poles lived in Lowell with many more heading to western Massachusetts to work in the mills in Chicopee, Holyoke, and Adams. They formed their own ethnic enclave in parts of Centralville near the Aiken Street and Bridge Street bridges. Joseph Golas's family moved from one mill town to another, eventually landing in Lowell. He spent time working in the Wannalancit Textile mill as a weaver and fixer. In the 1950s, when most mill jobs were gone, he went to work for the corrections department of the state.[115]

Ethnic hierarchies and relationships played a critical role in job allocation. Lancashire English and Irish Americans were the most likely to move into a foreman position and were at the top of the skilled trades in the mills. French-Canadians dominated the loom fixing and would at times move into supervisory roles, with many Greek immigrants working in the dye house. Work in the dye house and carding room was deemed too dangerous for women, and they were assigned to looms.

It was very important for workers to find ways to increase their value through improving their skills. Some lucky workers' fathers would take their sons under their wings, essentially handing them a place in the mill when he left. For some men who did not have sons or children of their own, they would seek out a young man to groom. Taking free night classes at the Lowell Textile School was another avenue to improving their chance to move up the textile career ladder. Founded in 1895, the Lowell Textile School offered courses in scientific management, measurement techniques, designing, dyeing, and other textile skills. Alfred Gaunt, a student from neighboring Methuen, attended classes at the school; his notebooks reveal the rigor of the program (Figures 3.7–3.8).[116]

[115] Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 213; Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 96–98.

[116] Albert Gaunt, "Lecture and Sketch Book, Lowell Textile School, February-June 1899," Box 7, Folder MS 331.2, ATHM, Kheel Archives.

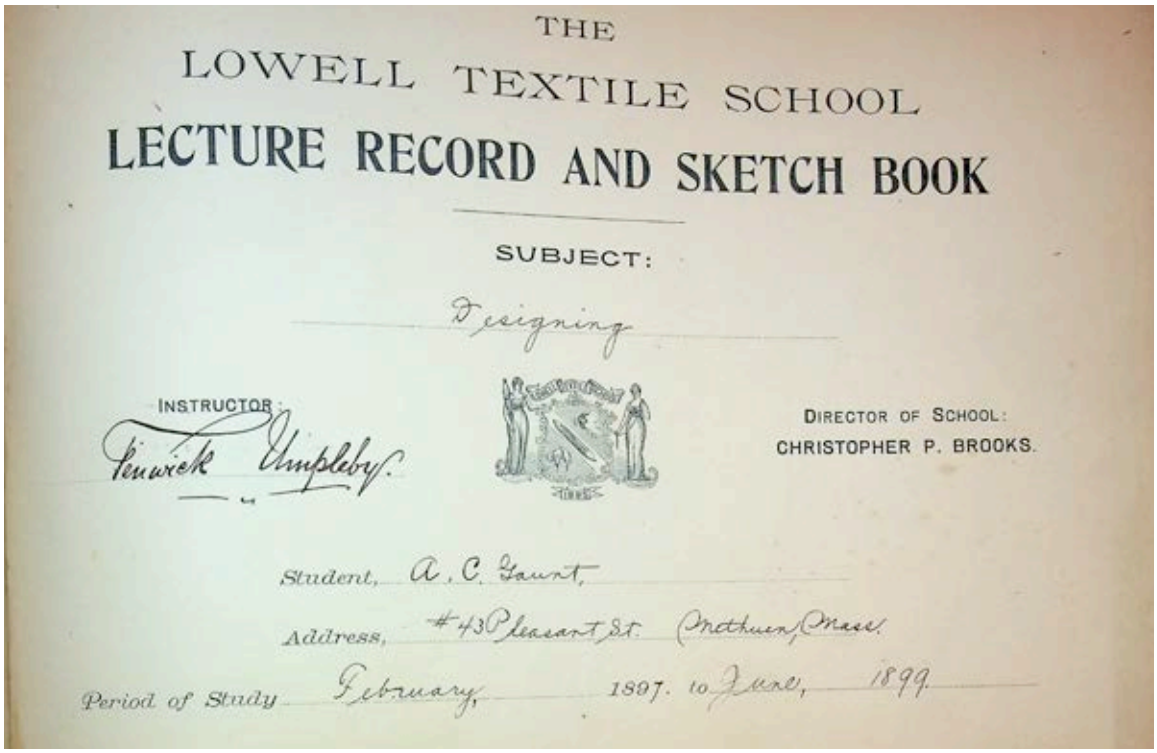
THE
LOWELL TEXTILE SCHOOL
LECTURE RECORD AND SKETCH BOOK
SUBJECT:
Designing
INSTRUCTOR:
Fenwick Umpleby.
DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL:
CHRISTOPHER P. BROOKS.
Student, A. C. Gaunt,
Address, #43 Pleasant St. Methuen, Mass.
Period of Study February, 1897. to June, 1899.

Figure 3.7. Lowell Textile School, designing notebook belonging to A. C. Gaunt, 1897–1899, cover page, Kheel Archives, American Textile History Museum Collection, 7025m, Box 7, MS331.2, ATHM, Kheel Archives

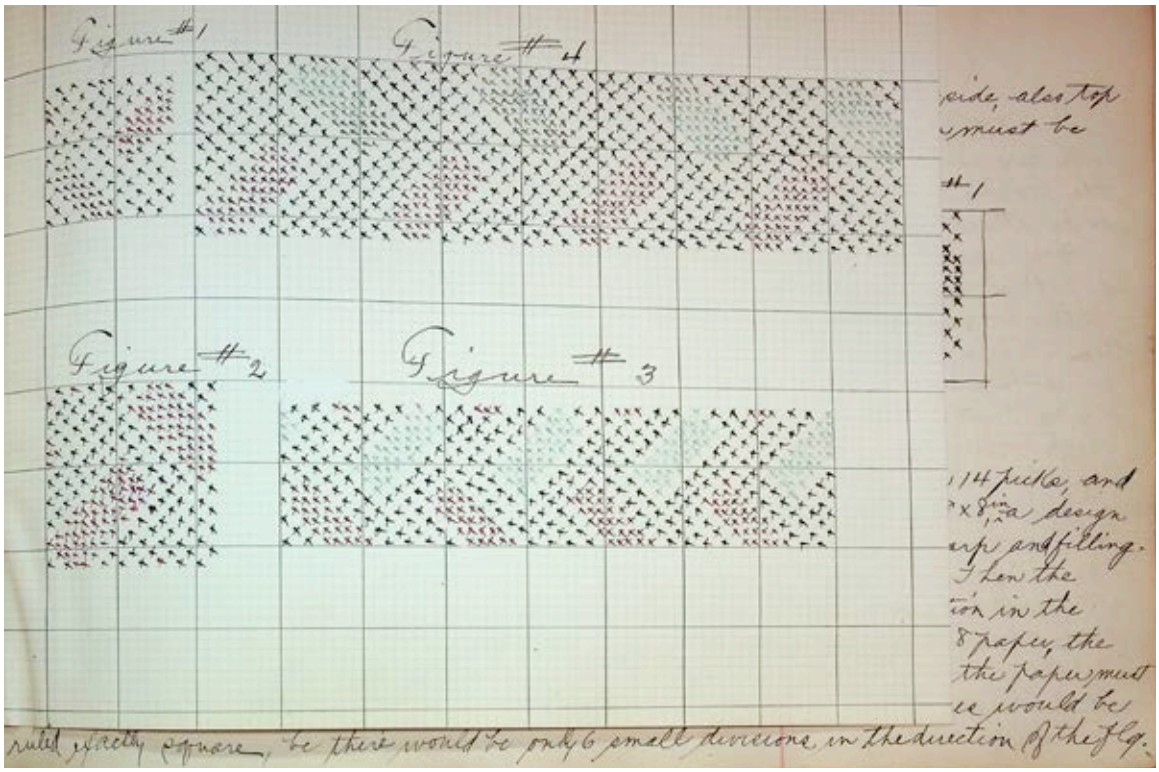

Figure 3.8. Lowell Textile School, designing class notebook, A. C. Gaunt, 1897–1899, notes and sketches, Kheel Archives, American Textile History Museum Collection, 7025m, Box 7, MS331.2, ATHM, Kheel Archives

Functioning as an early technical college, which it would eventually become, the Textile School offered an opportunity for immigrants to raise their standard of living. However, it also assumed students would be fluent in English and highly literate, which likely excluded a large portion of the new immigrant community; who arrived with little to no English-speaking skills.

By the late early 1900s, there were "20,000 native-born residents of native-born parents in Lowell. In addition there were 20,000 French-Canadians, 8,000 Greeks, 25,00 Portuguese, 2,500 Jews, 2,000 Poles, 2,000 Swedes, 500 Germans, 300 Norwegians, 200 Armenians, 200 Belgians, 200 Syrians, and a 'great mixture' of Russians, Lithuanians, and Chinese. A large, foreign, non-English-speaking population has come to Lowell during the last 25 years; those from southern Europe and Asia have come almost entirely during the last fifteen years." In her autobiography, union organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recalls attending a union meeting in 1912 at a Chinese restaurant in Lowell. "I went with some strike organizers to a Chinese restaurant. It was decorated with new flags which we had never seen before, and since in Chinese. It looked like a very special occasion."[117] And indeed it was, on January 1, 1912, that the last imperial dynasty fell and the Republic of China was established, which means the flags were likely the new flags of the Republic of China. By the early 20th century, Lowell had grown into a multiethnic city, drawing immigrant workers from across the globe.

Lowell in World War I

As the 20th century progressed, these immigrant workers found a narrowing of work opportunities in Lowell. In the early 20th century, the Flathers and other mill operatives faced troubling signs of manufacturing decline in the textile city. By 1912, the Lowell Machine Shop, once the proud bastion of Lowell innovation and technology, consolidated with the Saco-Pettee Shop, a longtime competitor based out of Newton. Historian Matthew Lavallee argues that the Lowell Machine Shop had lost its lead in the market because of the company's reluctance to engage in research and development. During his tenure at the "big shop," Flather's focus on controlling the shop floor and increasing shareholder profits blinded management to the opportunities to engage skilled workers in collaborative efforts to retool technology and stay competitive with the growing number of machine shops opening in the Midwest and elsewhere. This lack of "capitalist development" resulted in the merger of the Lowell Machine Shop with Saco-Pettee Shop. Upon the merger, the company shut down the Lowell drafting department, which had designed the plans for

[117] Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 145.

mills across the country and was "one of the most historic and hitherto valuable services offered by the Lowell Shop."[118] Two years after the merger, another important employer in Lowell, the Bigelow-Hartford Carpet Company ceased its operations altogether in the city.

The war in Europe also weighed on the minds of Lowell residents, and the city hosted various events about the conflict. For example, in January of 1915, Lowell was visited by Gen. Nelson Appleton Miles, a veteran of the Union Army during the Civil War and the late 19th century wars against the plains' tribes, and Commanding General of the US Army with the Spanish American War. He came to the city as a guest of the Lowell Board of Trade, and was "escorted to the armory by the four militia companies, the Grand Army posts, Spanish War Veterans and officers of the high school." He was "greeted by a gathering of 1500 citizens, including leading mill officials and prominent business men." In his speech, he predicted the war would "probably go on until the resources of the powers engaged are exhausted."[119]

When the United States entered World War I, there was hope that the demands of war production could help revive the city's flagging manufacturing sector. In some cases, the city's textile infrastructure was repurposed for the war. For example, cartridges for the US government were stored under armed guard at three of the empty buildings that had been vacated by the Bigelow-Hartford Carpet Company when they left Lowell in 1914.[120]

Lowell's public institutions supported the war effort in multiple ways. For example, in 1917 Lowell city government and public institutions contributed financially to the war effort. That year the city budgeted more than $76,000 in soldier benefits, including $41,011 specifically for the "German War." The city also provided $50,000 to "German War to State Aid," while the library gave $100,000 from one of its funds to the "Library War Service Fund."[121]

During World War I, the Middlesex Women's Club featured a series of Monday afternoon speakers on topics related to the war effort. Many of the speakers focused on keeping up the home front during the war. Helen Frazier of the National War Savings Committee in London described the various ways women were supporting the war effort on the home front in England, Loraine Jefferson of the Massachusetts Agricultural College provided tips on how to navigate inflated wartime prices for foodstuffs, and an ongoing series shared ideas for "Wartime Cookery," including talks by Alice Bradley head of the Miss Farmer's School of Cookery, and "southern cook" Portia Smiley. Bradley's talk

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[118] Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops*, 474.

[119] "General Miles Speaks in Lowell Armory," *Pawtucket Times*, January 6, 1915.

[120] Safford, Engineer to Charles F. Young, Treasurer, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, December 12, 1917, Vol. 1–3, Volume 3, 684–85, Proprietors of Locks and Canals, BL Archives.

[121] "City Documents of the City of Lowell Massachusetts, Year 1917–1918," "Audit Report," 29, 42; digitized by the Boston Public Library for the University of Massachusetts Lowell, "Library Trustee Report," 4, https://archive.org/details/lowellma-citydocs-1917–18/page/n105/mode/2up.

included suggestions on how to navigate wartime shortages, such as how to find substitutes for butter and how to make pea and peanut cakes to "take the place of cutlets."[122] Not all of the talks sponsored by the women's group centered on the home front. Isaac Marcosson, one of the nation's leading wartime journalists for the *Saturday Evening Post*, gave a talk on his impressions of the progress of the war. His comments must have pleased the club members who organized the wartime speakers' series as he reinforced the importance of the women's club work on the home front, declaring that "food will win the war." Kate Waller Barrett addressed the club on the subject "Alien Woman," and the possibility of a rise of European immigration after the war's conclusion. A leading national voice on European immigrant women, Barrett explained she did not fear "the hyphenated Americans" and exhorted her audience that "we must get the alien mother imbued with the ideals of American citizenship."[123]

The audience listening to Barrett's speech had firsthand experience with hyphenated Americans. Waves of European immigration had shaped the local workforce, and the churches and other fraternal organizations in these ethnic enclaves were an important part of the city's fabric and culture. As World War I drew to a close, the storm clouds that had gathered on the horizon for Lowell cotton manufacturing before the war were darkening by the early 1920s. This precipitated an expansion into wool textile manufacturing in some of the mills, as well as diversification into shoe and patent medicine production in the city.[124] Despite these ventures into new areas of production, between 1924 and 1932 manufacturing employment in the city fell nearly 50 percent.[125]

The Beginning of the End. . .of Textiles

The impact of the economic hard times had the various mills in Lowell reconsidering the scope of their operations. For example, in 1932, Frederick Flather's report opened with the dire pronouncement, "Operations at Lowell have been reduced considerably, including an almost complete closing of the plant for two weeks." The company was pondering a "concentration of plant," but Flather noted, "It is not feasible to do anything now because there is no money." Flather went on to report that if the Merrimack plant planned to sell off some of their facilities that they should try and do so before tax day rolled around in April, but

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[122] "Women's Part in the War," "Women's Club Hears Inspiring War Address by English Woman," "Wartime Cookery," "Wartime Marketing," Middlesex Women's Club, 9, Scrapbook 1914–1919, UML Archives.

[123] "The Alien Woman Topic of Address," Middlesex Women's Club, 9, Scrapbook 1914–1919, UML Archives. For more on Kate Waller Barrett, see Egal Feldman, "Prostitution, the Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910–1915," *American Quarterly* 19, no. 2.

[124] Miller, *The Irony of Victory*, 5.

[125] Patricia Flynn, "Lowell: A High Tech Success Story," in David Lampe, ed., *The Massachusetts Miracle: High Technology and Economic Revitalization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 277.

warned that the company needed to "avoid selling any that might sometime be needed for central development of water power."[126] Even during hard times, keeping the connection to the water power that fueled the mill industry had to remain top priority. By October, the company had decided to tear down Mills 1, 2, 4, 9, and the "tenement storehouse No. 4." The report from President Flather had identified another piece of the company's holdings that was draining revenue: "The 83 tenements owned by the Company are unprofitable." The report recommended either adding them to the list of facilities to be eliminated before the April tax season, with the typed note "Sorry for the tenants, but it may be necessary" or giving the tenements to "an institution" to manage.[127] For employees of the mills, the slowed economy not only jeopardized their jobs but also their places of residence.

During the 1930s, extreme weather further exacerbated the economic woes for many in the river corridor. Serious floods occurred in 1936. In 1977, *The Lowell Sun* published a retrospective on the devastation of the 1936 flood. By March 13, "Heavy damage was suffered in South Lowell and Pawtucketville. Three feet of water covered Easton Street and water began to enter the first-floor windows of the mills which lined the Merrimack River. City officials hoped for cold weather and prayed." The next day when the ice above the Pawtucket dam broke, "massive ice flows" destroyed trees and covered railroad tracks along the river. After a brief reprieve, on March 18th torrential rain again flooded into the mills and chased those living on Howe and Davidson streets from their homes to be rescued by boats. Thousands were displaced. As the high water displaced residents, exacerbated the already crowded housing in the city and overtaxed the city's inadequate sewage system, the flood brought a health crisis—typhoid.[128]

Two years later a hurricane ravaged New England and the storm buffeted Lowell. The *Lowell Sun* described the storm: "Lowell went under martial law tonight as the city was ripped, torn and laid waste by the worst gale in its history."[129] That October the Middlesex Women's Club invited Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, a Republican representing Massachusetts's Fifth District and Flather's sister-in-law, to speak on the hurricane relief efforts. Rogers explained the regional financial impact including the loss of trees for local apple growers and the timber industry. She described federal efforts to help those industries and the need for better flood control on the Merrimack.[130] During her long tenure in Congress, which spanned 18 terms and 35 years, Representative Rogers was a champion of flood control in the Merrimack River corridor. Battered by weather,

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[126] "Report of the President" Frederick Flather, July 26, 1932, Volume 50, Merrimack Mfg. Co., BL Archives.

[127] "Report of the President," Frederick Flather, October 7, 1932, Volume 50, Merrimack Mfg. Co., BL Archives.

[128] "The Great Flood of 1936," *Lowell Sun*, Sunday Magazine, March 28, 1977, Box 19, Folder 119, Marion Morse Collection, UML Archives.

[129] "The Hurricane: National Guard Controls All Downtown," *Lowell Sun*, September 21, 1938.

[130] "Mrs. Rogers Speaker at Middlesex Women's Club," Scrapbook October 14, 1938, 1938–1939, 1939–1940, 1941 Convention, UML Archives.

their share of the cotton market dwindling, one historian, Marc Scott Miller, has described, "Lowell before the onset of World War II had all the makings of a dying city."[131] John Rodgers Flathers, of Boott Mill, had this assessment: "Then the depression of 1938 came and we never recovered."[132]

As the United States entered World War II, and the industrial engine of the nation revved up to a fever pitch, the question on the minds of the Lowell manufacturers was if the war could help revive the flagging mill economy. Marc Scott Miller's *The Irony of Victory* explores that question, taking a close look at the war's varying impact on Lowell manufacturers and workers. But Miller's analysis of the war's impact expands beyond the factory floor, as he argues "for every class of people, in every occupation, World War II brought a new way of seeing and dealing with economic, political, and social affairs."[133]

One of the most profound new ways of seeing, on a national level, involved women and industrial work. As the US industrial war machine geared up to supply World War II, the War Production Coordinating Committee waged a public relations campaign to convince women to enter industrial work at an unprecedented scale. In Lowell, where much of textile factory work had long been gendered female, at the onset of the war women held nearly one half of the unskilled textile positions, and represented one-third of the work force overall. As the *Lowell Daily Sun* explained, "Working wives have been the rule rather than the exception in Lowell for a long time."[134]

While working women navigated the shifting labor force opportunities of a wartime economy, Lowell club women also focused their attention on the war effort. Much as they had in World War I, the Middlesex Women's Club brought a series of speakers to their Monday afternoon meetings at Liberty Hall to talk on war time topics. Speakers from the Red Cross included John Stuart, the regional Director for the North Atlantic area who spoke on the organization's domestic war efforts, and Carmel "Candy" White, who cheered soldiers in Africa as part of the Red Cross's club efforts. These talks provided an opportunity for the Middlesex Club's war relief committee to sell their wares including jams and handicrafts to help fund their support of the war effort. In 1944, the Club invited the president of the State Federation of Women's Clubs for Massachusetts to speak, and she took the occasion to extoll the virtues of the knitting and sewing projects to support the war effort and lift soldiers' morale with their handiwork. Later that year, the club held a war relief Christmas sale, featuring goods made by the members who had been working on

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[131] Miller, *The Irony of Victory*, 12.

[132] "Management and C.I.O.," June 17, 1944, Box 74-Contract Renewal Meetings, 3, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[133] Miller, *The Irony of Victory*, 192.

[134] Miller, "Working Women and World War II," *New England Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1980), 43; *Lowell Daily Sun*, March 24, 1943, 4.

the items since the summer "with needles flying and scissors clipping busily."[135] The Club also sold war bonds, raising $25,525 in 1944. Featured guests also gave the club women firsthand accounts from Europe and Japan including a talk by a civilian internee who spent more than two years in an internment camp near Paris, and journalist Jim Young, a long-time correspondent to Japan who was imprisoned for two months during the war and gave a jingoistic account of "a vast, war-designed industrial Japan."[136]

World War II provided a brief reprieve in the Lowell mills. Boott Mills secured an early contract with the Navy to produce uniform twill for their uniforms, increasing production significantly. However, the mills struggled to keep staffing levels up as demand increased. For example, at Boott Mill the workforce grew from 1,500 workers to 2,500 workers.[137] Many workers left the textile industry to work in other wartime industries in Lowell. The war brought new work opportunities to Lowell, including the Parachute Division of the Atlantic Rayon Company, Remington Arms, General Electric, and United States Rubber. According to historian Marc Miller, this enabled women to leave behind the poor working conditions of the textile mills, to try their hands at other higher-paying war production work. As women workers chose to make munitions for Remington over textiles for Merrimack, this caused the textile mills to raise their wages to compete for the labor pool, although textile work continued to lag behind the other industrial wage scales.[138] Furthermore, southern mills were also manufacturing textiles for the US military and the navy issued no cost-plus contracts to the textile industry to keep production costs down throughout the duration of the war.[139]

Boott's war contracts required the inclusion of no "cost-plus" provisions. This requirement tied the hands of the textile producers to increase pay in an already historically low-paying industry. As a result, the mills found themselves in a continual cycle of hiring and training workers. In a memo to their selling agent, Parker, Wilder, and Company, written in May 1942, Boott Mills appears to be explaining the limited cash flow of the company despite the enormous contract they were carrying with the Navy for their uniform tweed. The memo states: "It is well-known that seven of the nine companies have left Massachusetts and that the Boott Management has, by devotion to its Lowell job, refused to

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[135] "With needles flying…"; Women Observe War Relief Day, November 12, 1944; see also "Red Cross Talk at Women's Club, War Relief Committee in Charge of Women's Program Monday," November 15, 1943; "Middlesex Woman's Club War Bond Sales Reach $25,525 Mark," January 31, 1944; "War-Time Contribution of Club Women Stressed by Speaker," February 21, "To Observe War Relief Day Monday with Open Meeting at Liberty Hall"; "A Vast War-Designed," Untitled, "November 12, 1945, Middlesex Women's Club," 11, Scrapbook 1945–1946, UML Archives.

[136] Untitled, November 8, 1943: 1944 Middlesex Women's Club, 11, Scrapbook 1943–1945, UML Archives.

[137] Flather, "Why Did the Lowell Cotton Mills Close?," Box 27, Folder 10, p. 16, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[138] Miller, "Working Women and World War II," 44–47.

[139] Philip Wood, *Southern Capitalism: The Political Economy of North Carolina, 1880–1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986).

give up, and has brought the Mill safely through the disastrous New England textile depression, so that it is no able to be of enormous help in supplying the Government with combed yarn uniform cloth, which has been described as the most critical of all textile fabrics."

Another impact of World War II was that Boott Mill for the first time recognized a union for the textile workers, when they signed a contract with the CIO in 1943. While many of the skilled workers in the mills had been members of the craft unions prior to the Great Depression, the passage of the National Labor Relation Act and the CIO's organizing success in New England mills meant more mill workers were unionized than ever before. Often such organizing was highly contentious. Not long after Pearl Harbor, fresh off their success in organizing the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, two CIO organizers Louis Vergados and James Ellis began an organizing drive at Boott, but were drafted into service before their campaign could reach its conclusion, something they both argued was a result of their union activity. Historian Marc Miller has argued that with the absence of these key organizers, Merrimack essentially "co-opted" the union, and the threat of the draft deterred others from taking union leadership roles. During World War II, labor peace remained the driving goal of the federal government. The War Labor Board intervened in a strike by 130 cab drivers in 1943, and strikes by the workers at Merrimack and Hide and Leather in 1944. In all of these cases, the workers' demands were essentially put on hold until after the war.[140] Despite these difficulties, the desire by the federal government for war time labor peace, buttressed by the New Deal labor legislation that cleared a pathway for private sector organizing, opened a window for union organizing across the textile industry. By 1944, the CIO represented 78 textile plants in Massachusetts.[141]

Unionization at Boott Mill was particularly contentious. CIO interest in the plant began in 1937, and the Boott workers went on strike twice in 1940. That conflict was settled by an arbitration decision that was eventually thrown out by the courts two years later. Boott did agree to a card-check union recognition in 1943, a first for a textile workers union contract in the plant. The company agreed at the urging of the US Navy, who relied on the mill for uniform production, and did not want labor strife disrupting work. The union and the plant management then entered into a protracted negotiation under the auspices of the National War Labor Board.[142] Boott Mill management's frustration in having to deal with the CIO was clear during the 1944 contract negotiation records. While wages were to be settled by the War Labor Board, the union was requesting a set schedule to negotiate wages after the conflict; insurance for death, accident, and illness; paid vacation leave; access to the shop floor for the union to investigate grievances; and a closed

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[140] Miller, *Irony of Victory*, 31–32.

[141] "Management and C.I.O.," June 17, 1944, Box 74-Contract Renewal Meetings, 14, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[142] Miller, *Irony of Victory*, 29–32.

union shop, where only card-signed members could work at the mill.[143] During the third meeting of contract negotiations, management repeatedly brought up the lower-wage scale paid in the South as a reason for not meeting the union's demands. The union representative insisted: "So of course you talk about the South, but we must talk about the North because your workers have to live up to Northern standards." John Rogers Flather, speaking on behalf of the company replied, "we are not asking anyone here to live under Southern standards or work for Southern wage; but we feel as long as their wages are so much below ours, the least we can expect is to have the people up here do as efficient a job as the best mill in the South."[144] During the first half of the 20th century, textile work in the south was almost wholly white.[145] The derision of the "Southern standards" of work reflects the long-standing rhetoric of the "productivity" of the Yankee workers along the banks of the Merrimack.

Negotiation records with the union reveal that not only the threat of southern labor posed a challenge to the northern mills, but that government wartime contracts came with their own set of challenges. John Rogers Flather explained: "Our trouble is that the Government is really running this business. They have directed us to change our cloth from bleached Navy uniform to slate gray Navy uniform. It requires different cotton, different machines, and different kind of help.... It doesn't do any good to complain that white is better. My own thoughts are that airplanes will see the battleship before it sees the man on it. They say the white uniforms stand out."[146]

At the end of World War II, Boott Mill workers, like millions across the nation, went out on strike demanding wage increases (Figures 3.9–3.10). The strike lasted eight months. As Roger Flather, Frederick Flather's grandson, remembered it decades later, "In retrospect...the strike was necessary, it solved the problems of each of us, of the mill and the union but it was a mistake and a tragedy for both sides."[147]

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[143] "Management and C.I.O.," January 24, 1944, Box 74-Contract Renewal Meetings, 1-2, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[144] "Management and C.I.O.," January 24, 1944, Box 74-Contract Renewal Meetings, 2, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[145] Timothy J. Minchin, "'Color Means Something': Black Pioneers, White Resistance, and Interracial Unionism in the Southern Textile Industry, 1957–1980," *Labor History* 39, no. 2: 109–33.

[146] "Management and C.I.O.," June 17, 1944, Box 74-Contract Renewal Meetings, 3, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

[147] Roger Flather, "Why Did the Lowell Cotton Mills Close?" Box 74, Box 27, Folder 10, Boott/Flather Collection, UML Archives.

Figure 3.9. Picket line, 1947–1948 strike, Boott Mills, Lowell, Massachusetts,
Kheel Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, Textile Workers Union of America Photo Collection

Figure 3.10. Picket line, 1947–1948 strike, Boott Mills, Lowell, Massachusetts, Kheel Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, Textile Workers Union of America Photo Collection

Despite the boon provided by the wartime contracts, cotton textiles were down in the postwar period. At Boott, wages represented 40 percent of their budget with little wiggle room to bring this down, especially as historian Laurence Gross notes, "Labor's cost-share was increased by the necessity of maintaining the repairment needed to keep the decrepit plant and machinery in operation."[148] With Frederick Flather still at the helm as Treasurer, and his sons Frederick Jr. and John Rogers managing the plant, Boott's approach to industrial relations failed to advance with the time. Frederick Flather experienced the demands of the workers as a personal affront rather than a business approach to improve the balance of power and receive wages and benefits that reflected their labor.[149] In memos to their workers, encouraging them to stay on at the mill as production waned, management used the language of family and paternalism to try and persuade workers to stay. They wrote that the other workplaces would not be "as comfortable or as home like." And with

[148] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 225.

[149] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 225.

the threat of the mill closing, they appealed to workers' fears about finding alternate employment: "Some of you will have to just stop earning any money. Some of you are too old to learn a new trade. Some of you would never be happy anywhere else." And in an effort to show solidarity with their workforces as citizens of their beloved Lowell: "We want to impress you at the outset that we sincerely *want* to keep operating *right here* in Lowell. We are local people—this mill and this city mean something to us and so does the welfare of our fellow workers."[150] All efforts to keep afloat failed in the end. Alabama Mills looked into purchasing Boott but decided against it. By 1955, Boott was sold off for $130 per share and stood silent waiting for its reincarnation. A few mills continued to produce including Joan Fabric's and the Wannalancit Mills, formerly known as the Suffolk Mills.[151]

[150] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 226.

[151] Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 229.

CHAPTER FOUR

From Spindle City to Cultural Tourism

To thank the spirit of the water, to pray for evil spirits to go away, and to honor the Dragon King who dwells in the water. The water festival is a time to be thankful for the rivers, lakes, and ponds that villagers depend upon for their livelihood and economic development.

—On the purpose of the annual Southeast Asian Lowell Water Festival[1]

Integration doesn't mean completely absorbing a city's rules or norms—it means adding yourself to it to help enrich the community with what you bring.

—Joseph Harris, Liberian immigrant and Lowell resident[2]

This chapter examines Lowell during the post–World War II period. It considers nine themes: the process of deindustrialization in the textile mills through the lens of race, class, and gender; student engagement in student engagement in postwar social movements; the contradictions and racism of urban renewal; the promises and disappointments of the Massachusetts Miracle in the 1980s and 1990s; a local and national program to embrace cultural tourism and the role of the Lowell National Historic Park; how a new wave of Latinx and southeast Asian immigrants revitalized the cultural and political landscape; and the fight for environment justice after two centuries of industrialization. While each of these topics is considered thematically in this chapter, it is important to note that many of these themes overlap in chronology and are intrinsically intertwined. For example, the wave of new Asian immigrants that came to Lowell in the second half of the 20th century was drawn to the city in large part because of the job opportunities in new manufacturing, especially in the technology sector. This chapter attempts to point out these connections—while keeping a thematic order to the analysis of postwar Lowell.

[1] Quoted in Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 150. See http://www.lowellwaterfestival.org/ for more on the festival.

[2] See https://www.refugeesintowns.org/all-reports/lowell#_ftn1. Accessed on February 17, 2022.

"Skilled Men. . .Deeply Rooted in the Community": Deindustrialization, Race, Gender, and Work

The closure of so many textile mills meant empty buildings and massive amounts of industrial square footage in need of a new purpose. By 1955, the Lowell Development and Industrial Commission (LDIC) was trying to find tenants for 24 available industrial plants and abandoned buildings in the city. Boott was the largest empty mill at 700,000 square feet, but other large, shuttered mills included Newmarket Manufacturing (175,000 square feet), Abbot Worsted Company Lowell Mill (76,500 square feet), and Merrimack Manufacturing Co. (75,000 square feet). The largest empty space on the LDIC list was the 900,000 square feet former Curran-Morton warehouse complex. Other properties included sites that had formerly produced furniture, shoes, and lumber, as well as a cold storage facility.[3]

The LDIC attempted to market the empty industrial plants as a selling point for industry to come to the city. An advertisement in the *Boston Herald* in 1956 described more than 30 available industrial sites in the greater Lowell area, ranging from 5 to 400 acres, as well as a 110-acre new modern plant. The advertisement described the advantages to locating in Lowell to include "abundant productive labor, a low-cost area for housing, food, gas, hospitalization, etc."[4] A multipage brochure published by the LDIC described one million square feet of available floor space. The environmental advantages of Lowell were featured as another plus for industries looking for a place to locate. Some of the largest lettering on the front of the brochure announced the Hydro-Electric Power of Lowell. Inside the brochure, the environmental advantages of Lowell were described in greater detail. "Lower cost electricity is generated in our own power plants by water power from the Merrimack River, making it possible to offer exceptionally low power rates to our tenants." The brochure also championed the "soft water" of the Merrimack and provided a chart that compared the soft water in Lowell to that available in other industrial cities (Figure 4.1).

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[3] "Industrial Space Available in the Greater Lowell Area," Revised May 1955, Box 7, Folder 1, Lowell Development and Industrial Commission, UML Archives.

[4] *Boston Herald* ad, December 10, 1956, Box 7, Folder 1, Lowell Development and Industrial Commission, UML Archives.

Figure 4.1. *Boston Herald* ad, December 10, 1956, Box 7, Folder 1, Lowell Development and Industrial Commission, UML Archives

The environmental selling points touted by the LDIC went beyond Merrimack to include the people of Lowell as well. The brochure promised, "A variety of highly skilled and common labor is available in Lowell." It continued, "The invigorating climate is conducive to personal activity and high production rates. The winters are less severe, the summers more temperate, and the low humidity less enervating than in many parts of the country." Another 1950s LDIC brochure described Lowell's "country like environment favorable to morale builder for employees." It also described local labor as "a race of artisans–skilled men, proud of their handiwork, loyal workers, deeply rooted in the community." While not specifically alluding to the whiteness of this "race of artisans," the implication of who these "skilled men" were is clear. This language in these brochures attempted to connect Lowell's "invigorating" environment to labor productivity, lauding

the skilled (white) labor of its Yankee workers, and in so doing differentiated Lowell from southern clime's "enervating" effect on its workers. Such advertising echoed descriptions of the Merrimack River corridor as a space of "productivity" penned by the Lowell poet Caverly some seven decades earlier.[5] Both shared a vision of the northern, East Coast region as a place for a productive partnership between the environment and labor—a vision that located this productivity in tropes of white masculinity.

Whiteness became reemphasized as a component of working-class masculinity during deindustrialization in the late 20th century United States.[6] Lois Weis, in her article "Masculinity, Whiteness and the New Economy," points out that in the United States the concept of a family wage that supported a "settled" family life long applied to white men.[7] As jobs disappeared along with the factories that closed their doors across the industrial north, it prompted an uneasy reconsideration of gender roles and work. The LDIC's brochure describing Lowell's workforce of "skilled men," who were "deeply rooted in the community," was not just an effort to entice manufacturers to the area, it was an articulation of the kind of labor force that the leadership of Lowell envisioned for their city. Of course, in Lowell that conception of racialized-gendered work and labor never reflected the realities of the local industrial workforce. The city's labor force, which had long been comprised of wave after wave of recently arrived immigrant workers, did not reflect the advertisement's promise for men with "deep roots" in the community. Also, Lowell's industry had long relied on female wage laborers. As Marion Morse, the secretary of the Lowell Historic Association, described in an essay he wrote in 1975, "There is the new role of women in society—not that Lowell didn't experience that problem in the 1840's when the publication of the 'Lowell Offering' was presented by the women and the young female workers in the mill."[8] Characterizing the women in the mills who published in the *Lowell Offering* as a "problem" demonstrates the uneasy feeling that women workers in industrial settings had long evoked in Lowell.

Despite Morse's observation that Lowell had more than a century of experience with women working in industrial settings, an examination of the technical and trades education in Lowell makes evident that gendered expectations for work existed and persisted in the city. The Greater Lowell Regional Technical School was established in 1967, and serviced Lowell, Dracut, Dunstable, and Tyngsboro with the majority of students hailing from Lowell. In 1975, a time when nationally women were demonstrating in the

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5 Undated Brochures, Box 7, Folder 1, Lowell Development and Industrial Commission, UML Archives.

6 See, for example, Jefferson Cowie, *Staying Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York and London: The New Press, 2010).

7 Lois Weis, "Masculinity, Whiteness and the New Economy," *Men and Masculinities* 8, no. 3: 264–65.

8 Untitled, Marion Morse, January 26, 1975, Box 19, Folder 106, Marion Morse Collection, UML Archives.

streets and lobbying state by state for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, the 129 students making up the graduating class of the Greater Lowell Regional Technical School focused their studies in 13 areas of concentration that were almost entirely gendered[9]:

Male Students	
Automotive	22
Carpentry	23
Drafting	6
Electricity	15
Electronics	6
Food Tech	1
Machine	9
Paint and Paper	12
Upholstery	5
Total	99

Female Students	
Childcare	9
Cosmetology	13
Drafting	1
Home Arts	3
Nurses Aide	4
Total	**30**

The only coeducational course was Drafting because of a sole female student. Furthermore, despite the racial diversity of Lowell, all of the graduating seniors in the class of 1975 appeared to be white. As a result, the enrollment at Lowell Technical Institute was overwhelmingly white and male in the 1970s.

Under the leadership of President Martin J. Lydon, the Lowell Textile Institute was reorganized into the Lowell Technological Institute (LTI) in the early 1950s. New programs in plastics, leather, paper, and electronics were added to the curriculum, reflecting the increasing diversification of industry in the region and the decline of the prominence of textiles. But here too the courses were often gendered. In March 1952, for example, six students attended the first class held in the newly completed Paper and Leather Engineering Building—all of them were male.[10] In 1960, a new Electronics and Plastics Building was added to campus.[11] In 1968, the campus student newspaper reported that Black tech students planned to visit local regional high schools to recruit more Black enrollees for tech training. The story asserted that not a single Black student from Lowell had ever graduated from LTI, that all of the school's current Black students came from other cities in the area, and that only one Black woman was enrolled in the entire school that year.[12]

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[9] "The Gryfon," Greater Lowell Regional Vocational Technical School District, 1967, 1–47, Archive.org.

[10] "First Class in New Building," *The Text*, Thursday, April 24, vol. 31, no. 14, 1, Archive.org.

[11] "New Building to Be Completed," *The Text*, vol. 30, no. 7, October 3, 1958, 1; "LTI Expansion Program in Full Swing," *The Text*, vol. 21, no. 6, December 17, 1959, 1, Archive.org.

[12] Untitled Story, *The Text*, vol. 40, no. 10, May 22, 1968, Archive.org.

As the 1960s progressed, graduates of the LTI would have found it increasingly difficult to find manufacturing employment in Lowell, especially in textile work. For despite city leaders and the LDIC's best efforts, the economic outlook of Lowell continued its decline. The percentage of employment in manufacturing fell from 46.5 percent in 1950 to 43.7 percent in 1960 to 39 percent in 1970. Textile work continued to leave Lowell, and by 1960 less than 5,000 people worked in textiles in the Spindle City, and by 1970 that number had slipped below 3,000. Family median income stood 4 percent below the national average. There was an uptick in industrial work when the Korean and Vietnam Wars brought more manufacturing to the city, demonstrating that the industrial production in Lowell continued to be shaped by global forces, but by 1972 manufacturing jobs in Lowell fell below 15,000 for the first time in a century.[13] In 1961 Lowell was designated by the US Secretary of Commerce as "an area of chronic unemployment," making the city eligible for funding under the Area Redevelopment Act (ARA).[14]

In 1968, Lowell was one of the first cities in the nation selected by the federal government to participate in its Model City program. Part of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society initiatives, the program was approved by Congress under the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 and ran through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Model City targeted urban areas with endemic poverty and significant urban blight and funded urban planning, rehabilitation efforts, and social services that emphasized community involvement.[15] That Lowell was chosen as an early site for this antipoverty program demonstrates that the economic downturn of the city was significant enough to garner federal attention.

Despite the economic hard times in Lowell, the LDIC tried to market Lowell as a vibrant place with an "invigorating climate" and "race of artisans." Yet *The Boston Globe*, the most influential newspaper in New England, characterized the once proud Spindle City in the postwar period quite differently. In 1971, the paper quoted an unnamed newcomer to Lowell who was in the city to help organize around tenants' rights. He said that Lowell "never really recovered from the Depression. And now there is a kind of spiritual depression here.... They're kind of afraid here. They seem difficult to mobilize. It's attitudinal. They don't expect to get it. They don't expect things to change."[16] As Kathy Stanton wrote

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[13] Ross Gittell, *Renewing Cities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 69–70.

[14] "1961 Annual Planning Department," Lowell Redevelopment Authority, 1961, 8 https://archive.org/details/LRA1961/page/n7/mode/1up?view=theater.

[15] While the Model City program celebrated its inclusion of community members in its urban planning model, it fell under sharp criticism from many community activists in cities throughout the country who questioned the efficacy of the program in making material improvements for working class and poor urbanites. For more on Model Cities, see Mandi Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); and John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[16] Kathy Stanton, *Public History in a Post Industrial City*, 105.

in her book on Lowell, deindustrialization was "felt throughout the whole social and cultural fabric of former industrial places." *The Boston Globe* story described that fabric in Lowell. In 1972, *The Boston Globe* ran another such story under the headline, "Real estate, obsolete mills, unused canals, Lowell-a junk shop?" and described "Lowell's government and citizens after many years of suffering from an inferiority complex." "It was a town to be laughed at," wrote *The Boston Globe* reporter David Riley, reflecting on Lowell during the post-war period. According to Riley, it seemed fitting that the most prominent artist to emerge from Lowell in this era was Jack Kerouac, who was "best known for his exploits on the road, having fled Lowell."[17] Riley's portrayal of the restless Kerouac, always on the road, always moving, stood in stark contrast to the workforce "deeply rooted in the community" that the LDIC was trying to pedal in their marketing campaign for Lowell. Riley's emphasis on the restlessness of Kerouac's *On the Road* ignores the author's deep connection to his home town and the five books he penned set in Lowell, most notably the *Town and the City*. But writers like Riley were not interested in the entirety of Kerouac's catalog, but rather in how their depiction of a restless Kerouac could be deployed as a symbol of Lowell's decline.

So was postwar Lowell a city trapped in a depressing malaise or a city bursting with productivity just looking for an outlet? Such is often the case when such tropes are employed to describe a place, neither description quite captured the full story of those living in Lowell. Certainly, the prolonged economic downslide of the city took its toll on the psyche of Lowellians, but they also continued to build meaningful community ties, vibrant associational organizations, continued ethnic cultural traditions, and various groups of community members organized around issues that mattered to them. One example of these efforts was an innovative idea to repurpose portions of Wannalancit Mills on Suffolk Street. In the late 1960s, the mill recruited skilled textile workers from Colombia to come work in their factory. While years later, they converted a portion of the mill into Lowell's second Lowell Museum. The goal was to create a living museum that would be an integral part of the Lowell Heritage State Park (LHSP) in which Lowell history would be on display while Colombian textile workers continued to produce textiles. The result was "one original factory building [where] there was in the basement a still functioning 19th century mill turbine, on the ground floor, the Lowell Museum, and on the upper floors a functioning textile mill."[18] Unfortunately, the mill shut its doors in 1981, along with the Lowell Museum.

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[17] Bill Cardoso, "In Lowell, Recession Gets Worse," *Boston Globe*, April 25, 1971, A1; Anthony J. Yudis, "Real Estate, Obsolete Mills, Unused Canals, Lowell—A Junk Shop?" *Boston Globe*, December 10, 1972, A53; and, David Riley, "The Rebirth of Lowell," *Boston Globe*, July 20, 1980, G8.

[18] Michael Edema Leary-Owhin, *Exploring the Production of Urban Space: Differential Space in Three Post-Industrial Cities* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2016), 121–22.

"Long Hair, Beards and Hippies": The Postwar Social Movements in Lowell

Lowell students, both in the community's higher education institutions and at the high school, must not have received the message that Lowellians didn't "expect things to change." Like students across the country, Lowell young people engaged in the social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s including the Black liberation movement, women's liberation movement, and the antiwar movement, calling for local changes to school and community life and connecting those calls to national and international events. The student newspapers from the Lowell Technology Institute and the Lowell State College provide rich details of the issues (both local and national) that were on the minds of the student body, and the multiple ways that young people in Lowell participated in the student protest movements of the era. The imperialism of the war in Vietnam was one of the major causes for student action on both campuses. The first Lowell casualty in the war was army private first-class Donald Arcand, a graduate of Lowell's St. Joseph High School, who died in Vietnam on September 1, 1965.[19]

In 1968, as the war in Vietnam heated up, students protested the role of the ROTC on campus. The student-run newspaper at LTI, *The Text*, published its May 22nd issue with a large picture of a student wearing a sign that read "Is This a College or a Prison?" The newspaper editors sarcastically changed that issue's masthead to read "Lowell Military Institute," and published more pictures of student protests against the ROTC and an advice column on how to dodge the draft.[20] When the administration tried to intervene in the way the student paper reported such issues, reportedly five of the six-member editorial board of *The Text* resigned in protest.[21] In 1971, the student council hosted William Kunstler, the defense attorney for the Chicago 7, the men who were tried for conspiracy and incitement as leaders of the protest movement at the 1968 Democratic Convention. The dean did not welcome the presence of this leftist folk hero on campus and froze funds to the student council for future activities. He also insisted that eight police officers be present at the event and that the Council pay for them from their budget entirely, when typically the campus picked up half the cost for policing student events. Despite these actions, the talk went on as planned. The dean seemingly did take his final revenge on the event. When the council asked that an auxiliary public address be set up outside the venue for those who could not fit in, the dean vetoed the idea, and reportedly said, "When the Cunnock Hall is filled we'll

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[19] Grant Welker, "50 Years Ago Today, Vietnam War Claimed Lowell's 1st Casualty," *Lowell Sun*, September 1, 2015.

[20] Untitled, front page; Henry J. Lessard, "Biased Advise on the Draft," 3; "Sgt. Lydon's Lonely Heart Band," 7, *The Text*, vol. 40, no. 10, May 22, 1968. Archive.org.

[21] "Tech Staff Resigns," *The Advocate* 3, no. 3, September 26, 1968, 1, Archive.org.

close the doors, and the rest can whistle Dixie."[22] It should be noted that a petition circulated and signed by 500 students asked for a delay of Kunstler's appearance until the student body could be polled about having him on campus. Seemingly not every student at Tech agreed about the social-political issues of the day.[23]

LTI students also protested over the desire for more student control of their experiences on campus. In March 1973, *The Text* reported that 400 students protested over "how the Dean had constantly represented the status quo, refused to trust student maturity, and denied the dormitory judicial board the chance to rule on any issues of importance." To end the rally they burnt an effigy of the dean.[24] *The Text's* editorial staff did not support all demands for more student control of their college experience, however. In 1971, the campus Afro-American Society asked the student council to allow the Society to keep their annual activity fee funds, because they felt the programs those fees went to did not relate to them as Black students and that the money would be better spent supporting tutoring and helping Black students who needed financial assistance. An unattributed editorial dismissed the demand, arguing, "What they fail to realize is that in any school there will be some students or group of students who feel they are being discriminated against, but look again. The 'Blacks,' though that term in itself is discriminatory, seem to forget that there are also white students who feel that they receive nothing from the activity fee."

At nearby Lowell State College, the war in Vietnam was also an important issue mobilizing student activism on campus. The campus's left-leaning student paper *The Advocate* reported on student activism around the war. For example, in 1968 the paper ran a story about the Current Issues and Affairs Committee (CIA) on campus hosting an "informal discussion" in the Student Lounge led by two speakers from the Boston Draft Resistance League.[25] Similar to events at LTI, the *Advocate* reported regularly on Lowell State College student efforts to gain more say with the administration about their college experience.[26] The newspaper connected the events on the Lowell campus to student-led protests at other universities across the nation, regularly covering them in the paper, for example reporting on Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) activity at Columbia

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[22] William Kunstler was in Lowell to give a talk on the Chicago 7 trial, which originally included eight defendants, until the prosecution of Bobby Seale, one of the founders of the Black Panthers, ended in a mistrial. The dean vowing to limit attendance at the talk by invoking "Dixie" a song popular in the confederate South seems at best deeply out of touch with the issues motivating the student organizers of the event, if it was not intentionally racist.

[23] Donald Hasselman, "Lowell Tech Welcomes Kunstler" (quote) and "King Freezes Funds," *The Text*, March 29, 1971, 1, Archive.org.

[24] "Demonstration Against King's Policies," *The Text* 51, no. 9, March 19, 1973, 1, Archive.org.

[25] "Draft Resisters Speak," *The Advocate* 3, no. 4, October 10, 1968, 3, Archive.org.

[26] "Problems Still Not Solved," and Susan Molleur, "Student Faculty Administration Confrontation, What Was Gained," April 2, 1969, *The Advocate*, pages 1 and 4, Archive.org.

University.[27] Both the *Advocate* and *The Text* also tracked a proposal for the merger of the two institutions, a merger that was completed in 1975, becoming University of Massachusetts Lowell.

The Advocate also ran stories about student activism at Lowell High School. It covered a November 8, 1968, protest when "approximately 250 students demonstrated at Lucy Larcom Park next to the Lowell High School." The issue that sparked the demonstration was that Plato Karafelis, senior and honor student was not allowed to give a speech at a school Veterans Day assembly, in which he planned to question school policy on "long hair, beards and hippies." An editorial in *The Advocate* supported the high school students' effort to wear hairstyles of their choosing:

> The unalienable rights of the individual include freedom to express oneself by personal judgment. Yet school systems seem to be continuing ancient Puritan customs as if they have not yet heard of the separation of Church and State. Recently, inroads were made as Boston English High School was forced to relax its rules and allow Blacks to wear African dress and hairdos. Demonstrations are not restricted to colleges. Well organized demonstrations for basic rights of the individual are to be endorsed and supported. The students of Lowell High should not retreat now that they have spoken, for they have the numbers and argument on their side.[28]

The next month, the students at the high school formed a Committee of Concerned Students, who distributed a leaflet with seven demands from the students, ranging from revising the dress code to giving students more say about school curriculum.[29]

"Quite a Traumatic Thing": Urban Renewal in Postwar Lowell

Perhaps no issue animated community activism in the 1960s and 1970s more than urban renewal. The first postwar urban renewal project was a 10-acre project on Church Street. The Lowell Housing Authority surveyed the area and found most of the houses to be "substandard." They acquired the property through eminent domain over the protests of the Polish, Lithuanian, Greek, Canadian, Armenian, Serbian, and Portuguese families that lived there. They then demolished the houses and in 1960 sold the property to the Stop and

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[27] "Columbia Faculty and Students Reach Settlement," *The Advocate* 3, no. 4, October 10, 1968, 3, Archive.org.

[28] Rammond Brassard, "Autocracy Challenged," *The Advocate* 1, no. 2, November 21, 1968, 4, Archive.org.

[29] "Reprint of L.H.S. Leaflet," *The Advocate* 1, no. 5, December 12, 1968, 3, Archive.org.

Shop grocery store chain. Given the complexity of such projects, city leaders decided to form a new organization, the Lowell Redevelopment Association (LRA), to oversee urban renewal efforts.[30]

When the federal government designated Lowell as eligible for Area Redevelopment Act (ARA) funding, a program passed by Congress in 1961 that allocated nearly $400 million in federal development money to stimulate private job creation throughout the country, it ushered in a decade of almost frantic urban renewal in the city. In 1961, the sense of urgency to take advantage of the federal redevelopment dollars can be seen in the annual report of the LRA, which oversaw the city's renewal efforts. "Because of the federal Area Redevelopment Act, it is to the City's advantage to undertake as many renewal programs as a possible," because as the report explained, the federal government would fund 75 percent of approved projects, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would provide half of the local share—meaning the local government only had to find one-eighth of renewal project costs. The 1961 plan had renewal projects in various stages of development for 10.3 percent of the entire land area of Lowell, which accounted for "50% of the deteriorating and blighted housing within the City." The report described one project well underway in its planning—the North Canal project, which targeted the renewal of a mixed-use residential and manufacturing section of the city's Little Canada, which had been home to French Canadians for more than eight decades. Two other areas that the report described as in the planning stages for renewal were The Acre and Hale Street, two other long-standing ethnic neighborhoods in the city.[31]

Little Canada's turn came first. In their study of ethnicity in Lowell, Robert Forrant and Christoph Strobel titled this section of their writing "Good-bye Little Canada," and this aptly describes the impact urban renewal had on this tight-knit ethnic community where many small businesses catered to the local ethnic population. According to Forrant and Strobe, instead of recognizing the potential value to the local community of such mixed use, the planners saw it as a problem that caused traffic congestion and a lack of open space. This philosophy against mixed-use, along with serious health and safety issues present in much of the old housing stock in the area, slated the neighborhood for demolition. While some local community members organized for restoration instead of wholesale removal—demolition won the day. The French-Canadian enclave was razed, and the population scattered throughout the city, to neighboring towns and in some cases, the former residents left the state altogether and moved to New Hampshire.[32]

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[30] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 119–20. This report goes into more detail about each of the urban renewal projects covered in this section. Also see Mehmed Ali, "To Save a City: From Urban Renewal to Historic Preservation in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1920–1978," Dissertation, University of Connecticut, 2006.

[31] "1961 Annual Planning Department," Lowell Redevelopment Authority, 1961, 3–4, https://archive.org/details/LRA1961/page/n7/mode/1up?view=theater.

[32] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 121–23.

The lack of an adequate relocation plan further exacerbated the negative impact of the neighborhood demolition not just on those who were dislocated by the project, but in ripples that were felt throughout Lowell. In their 1964 report, the LRA insisted, "During the early period of relocation it was apparent that sufficient standard facilities were available on the rental market and the people being displaced had little trouble in selecting their own accommodations." But on the very next page of the same report, the LRA noted that "of all persons occupying residential properties whose rents are known, both before relocation and after, the average weekly rent has increased from $7.15 to $13.66."[33] According to Forrant and Strobel, as the demolition continued the impact was even greater, and those relocated saw their rents increase from "$8–$12 per week to $30–$35." Residents of Little Canada not only had to leave behind the neighborhood that had been their homes for generations—they saw their rent double or even triple in the process. Absorbing those displaced by urban renewal drove up rents in the already tight Lowell housing market, a negative financial impact not only for those displaced but for all renters in the city. Combined with steadily rising unemployment, such increases could not have come at a worse time for Lowellians.

Much has been written about the devastating impact that the mid-20th-century federally backed urban renewal projects had on urban communities throughout the United States.[34] Between 1949 and 1970, 2,500 neighborhoods in 993 cities were demolished under the auspices of urban renewal. Most were poor, working class, and/or communities of color. Social psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove has described the result of this displacement as "root shock," a "traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem." She argues that the destruction of neighborhoods severs residents from established friendship networks and local institutions such as churches, clubs, and social spaces. The disruption of social networks also means that people displaced from their neighborhoods are less likely to find quality employment, because so many jobs in the United States are filled by word-of-mouth. The scattering of once-concentrated ethnic or racial enclaves also can disperse the political power of these populations, diminishing their ability to impact local policies. While displaced people will often forge new connections in their new locations, the social fabric of the destroyed neighborhoods is irrevocably lost.[35] Longtime Lowell resident and local historian Arthur Eno reflects

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[33] "Lowell Redevelopment Authority Annual Report," 1964, pages unnumbered, https://archive.org/details/LRA1964/page/n1/mode/2up.

[34] Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America 1940–1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Francesca Russello Ammon, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016); and Lizabeth Cohen, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

[35] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Rootshock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do about It* (New York: One World, 2005), 1, 11, 20, 58, quote on page 11.

Fullilove's analysis in his description of the impact of the North Canal project: "There was also among the older people, I think there was a very strong community feeling about Little Canada. That these people had been there as an embattled minority in a ghetto for generations. And then you uprooted them and that was quite a, uh, quite a traumatic thing."[36] On the heels of urban renewal slum clearance initiatives that uprooted poor and working-class neighborhoods often came gentrification—as new housing stock improved business and public infrastructure often priced out former residents, making it impossible for them to return to their old neighborhoods after displacement.[37]

In 1968, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recognized the trauma that urban renewal had leveled in cities across the country and implemented a new requirement that in order to tap into federal monies, local renewal projects had to do more to involve local community members in the decision-making process and form Project Area Committees. In the 1970s, renewal projects in Lowell were under jurisdiction of the City Development Authority (CDA) and, in 1972, they admitted, "The experience of the past is that very little citizen participation occurred in the renewal projects of the city, and in fact, very few community organizations were in operation in Lowell at that time."[38] A look at the organizations consulted during renewal projects in the 1960s confirms this. In 1962, the list of "civic groups and committees" included in project planning included the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, Greater Lowell Home Builders Association, Greater Lowell Area Planning and Development Committee, Greater Lowell Technical Committee on Training, Lowell Incinerator Committee, Greater Lowell Industrial Development Commission, Lowell Housing Authority, Lowell Redevelopment Authority, Citizens Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal, Route 495 Association, Lowell Advisory Public Parking Commission, Tewksbury League of Women Voters, Babson Business Institute, Peter Reilly School P.T.O, Blatnik Committee on Road Investigation, and the Recreation Commission.[39] The Citizens Advisory Committee on Redevelopment was the main means afforded to local residents for participation in renewal discussions—no existing community-based ethnic or neighborhood group, with the exception of the parents' organization at the Peter Reily School, was formally included in the renewal projects.

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[36] Arthur Eno interview by Jim Beauchesne, September 24, 1997, Center for Lowell History, 97.02, cited in Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 123.

[37] To read more about the impact of gentrification and community organizing in protest against it, see Mike Amezcua, *Making Mexican Chicago: From Postwar Settlement to the Age of Gentrification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), especially chapters 5 and 6; Peter Moskowitz, *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood* (New York: Nation Books, 2018); Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Post War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[38] City Development Authority, "Special Studies, Lowell Community Program: Social Resources" (Lowell, MA: City Development Authority, 1972), 116.

[39] Lowell Redevelopment Authority Annual Report (Lowell Planning Department, 1962), 9.

This recognition that community voices had largely been left out of urban renewal in Lowell in the 1960s, did not much help the residents of the Hale-Howard neighborhood, another neighborhood that was first slated for renewal in the early 1960s. The Hale-Howard area had been the heart of Jewish life in Lowell for seven decades. The proposed project took 10 years to implement, and during that time the original proposal to build 100 new homes on 3.5 acres of the neighborhood was jettisoned in favor of making the area entirely industrial—demonstrating that the needs of capital continued to be the driving force behind restructuring urban geographies under the auspices of urban "renewal." Despite protests by HUD, the plan went forward. The demolition equipment rolled in 1972, and the residents of Hale-Howard, like the residents of Little Canada before them, were dispersed throughout the city and beyond.[40]

Yet city leaders were not able to implement all of their proposed renewal projects over the protests of the local community. In the early 1970s when the CDA proposed to extend the Lowell Connector to Interstate 495 and Route 3 through Lowell's Southend neighborhood, community residents mobilized against the plan. The CDA saw this proposal as vital to bringing new business to Lowell, and indeed the Route 495 Association had held a seat at the urban planning table since the early 1960s. The proposed path of the Connector ran through a Portuguese neighborhood, as well as significant concentrations of Black and Latinx households. These Southend families and businesses organized to stop the Connector. "Connector Objectors Organized" ran the headline in the *Lowell Sun* in June of 1972. The article described the tactics by the objectors, which included printing a community newsletter the "Communicator," to keep local residents apprised of their activities, passing out leaflets in English, Portuguese, and Spanish; testifying at a public hearing about the proposal; and making buttons that read "Stop the Connector."[41] Despite the Lowell Chamber of Commerce and *The Lowell Sun* backing the Connector plan, community members were able to bring the proposal to defeat not once, but twice in votes by the City Council.[42]

In the 1980s, Lowell residents again organized against a proposal to change their local community geography. Some Lowell leaders had made the case that Lowell High School, which was in need of an expansion, should be relocated from Kirk and Anne Streets to move it to the edge of town. Many local residents opposed this plan and organized to keep the school at its long-standing location. The fight over the local high school demonstrated the importance that residents can place on long-standing institutions that contribute to the placemaking of their communities. Generations of Lowell students attended high school in the same location. The more than a century of history of the

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[40] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 125–29.

[41] Carol Giacomo, "Connector Objectors," *Lowell Sun*, June 11, 1972, B1.

[42] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 129–35.

Lowell High School location motivated many local residents to want to keep the high school at its long-standing place on the community landscape. After much community pressure, a decision was made to not move the school, and instead expand with an additional building along with playing fields on the other side of the Middlesex Canal with a covered bridge that would allow students and staff to move between the three buildings seamlessly. This was a major victory for community organizers in Lowell.

"Renaissance in Lowell": New Manufacturing in the 1980s and 1990s

By the early 1970s, the abandoned manufacturing plants in Lowell, were just some of the many that dotted cities across much of the industrialized north, as once robust loci of production were shuttered and factory work moved to the US south and offshore. This change in the geographic organization of industrial production hit Massachusetts particularly hard, and by the early 1970s unemployment stood above 11 percent—one of the highest rates in the country. To many, it seemed like it would take a miracle to turn things around.

For Massachusetts, and for Lowell, that miracle appeared to arrive in the form of a tech industry boom that dramatically revitalized the state's economy starting in the late 1970s. The turnaround was lauded as the "Massachusetts Miracle," and by the mid-1980s, unemployment in the state had dropped below the national average. During the 1980s and 1990s, this economic revitalization in Massachusetts, and in Lowell in particular, where the tech boom was accompanied by a campaign to bring historical tourism dollars to the city, received much attention from economists, urban scholars, and the national media. As early as December 1977, stories by reporter Neal Peirce ran under the headlines: "New life replacing blight in 'spindle city'" in *The Boston Globe*, "New Life in 'Spindle City" in *The Washington Post*, and "Renaissance in Lowell" declared the *Chicago Tribune* in 1979. "Communities in Transition—Lowell sets the pace for change in Massachusetts" and "The Rebirth of Lowell" topped two stories in *The Boston Globe* in 1980. The next year *The Christian Science Monitor* went with a nod to Lowell's textile past—"Lowell, Mass: Reweaving a City's Fabric"—headlined their multipage spread on the Lowell turn around. In 1982, a *New York Times* headline read, "In Technology, Lowell, Mass. Finds New Life."[43]

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[43] Neal Pierce, "New Life Replacing Blight in 'Spindle City," *Boston Globe*, December 26, 1977, 43; "New Life in 'Spindle City," *Washington Post*, December 29, 1977, A19; Mary Daniels, "Renaissance in Lowell," *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1979; "Communities in Transition-Lowell Sets the Pace for Change in Massachusetts," *Boston Globe*, July 7, 1980, 10; David Riley, "The Rebirth of Lowell," *Boston Globe*, July 20, 1980, G8; Hilary Devries, *Lowell Mass.*: Reweaving a City's Fabric," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 21, 1981, B1; Fox Butterfield, "In Technology, Lowell Finds New Life," *New York Times*, August 10, 1982, A1.

Two books are useful in unpacking this Lowell "renaissance." The first is *The Massachusetts Miracle*, edited by David Lampe in 1988 as a collection of speeches and writings by elected officials, bankers, and scholars from throughout the years when the Massachusetts tech boom unfolded, also included in the book is a piece by economist Patricia Flynn, "Lowell: A High Tech Success Story." The second book that featured Lowell prominently in its analysis of late 1970s and 1980s urban revitalization in the Northeast is economist Ross Gittell's 1992 *Renewing Cities*. Gittell provides a comparative analysis of how four cities—Lowell and New Bedford, Massachusetts; Jamestown, New York; and McKeesport, Pennsylvania—attempted to achieve urban revitalization after a precipitous decline in their manufacturing sectors and focuses on how local decisions by public officials, private enterprise, and community members shaped economic recovery efforts in each city. He describes Lowell as achieving the "most dramatic turnaround" of the four cities he analyzed, and his conclusion that the idea to establish a National Historical Park at Lowell was the pivotal decision in the Spindle City's economic turnaround.

Alongside these books, a rich archive of primary sources gives insight into this time of renewal in Lowell. Of particular insight are the Marion Morse and Paul Tsongas collections at the Center for Lowell History at the UMass Lowell Archives and the Wang Laboratories Inc. Records at the Baker Library at Harvard University in Cambridge. Taken collectively, the primary sources and scholarship written about this time describe how Lowell simultaneously became part of the new wave of computer manufacturing, while developing an economic revitalization model that rested on the preservation and commodification of the city's industrial past.

In his analysis of the economic turnaround in Massachusetts, David Lampe described what he deemed several "natural advantages," which positioned Massachusetts well for a center for technology production. These included Massachusetts's "Yankee entrepreneurial tradition, and its extraordinary concentration of universities and research labs, as well as its community of venture capitalists and aggressive commercial banks."[44] The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in particular loomed large in this "miracle" with more than 100 new companies in Massachusetts started in the 1950s and 1960s by people who had spent time researching in MIT's labs.[45]

For the business and civic leaders of Lowell, it was clear that if their city was going to attract a piece of that miracle, the city would have to position itself as an attractive option for new industry. In 1975, they held a two-day Spindle City Industrial Exposition, at the Lowell Memorial Auditorium, highlighting some of the opportunities for new industrial development in the city. The exposition featured sessions on Lowell industrial and economic opportunity, industrial education in Lowell, the role of the UMass Lowell in

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[44] David Lampe, ed., "Introduction: The Making of a Miracle," *The Massachusetts Miracle: High Technology and Economic Revitalization* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 2.

[45] Lampe, "Introduction: The Making of a Miracle," 4.

industrial development, and state and federal support for local industry development.[46] Fourteen area banks established the Lowell Development Finance Corporation (LDFC) and pooled .05 percent of their savings accounts for development projects in the city. Between 1975 and 1986 the LDFC provided $6 million for community projects.[47]

Finally, this local boosterism paid off, and much like during the city's textile heyday, a Harvard graduate decided to bring a new industry to Lowell. An Wang, born in Shanghai, earned his doctoral degree in applied physics at Harvard. In 1951, he founded a computer development company in Cambridge. Wang helped develop magnetic core memory for computing, and his company grew rapidly, established its headquarters in Tewskbury, Massachusetts, and expanded its product line. In 1976, Wang built a new 14-story headquarters in Lowell and brought the "Massachusetts Miracle" to the Spindle City, a move supported by a five-million-dollar Federal Urban Development Action Grant. By 1980, Wang's clients spanned the globe, and Wang's computing equipment could be found in US-based companies like General Electric, Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, Mutual Benefit Life, First National Bank of Chicago, as well as foreign-based companies such as Ontario Hydro, Banco di Italia (Argentina's largest private bank), German carmaker BMW, Finnair (the Finnish air transport company), the British branch of Nestle, the French branch of Schlumberger (an energy company), Broken Hill Proprietary Company (an Australian steel and iron producing and energy company), and Pioneer (an electronics company based in Tokyo).[48] Wang was doing so well that by 1982 the company had added a second 14-story office building and a manufacturing plant built in Lowell. The Wang Training Center brought Wang employees and customers from around the globe to Lowell to learn about the Wang line of products. By 1984, Forbes listed Wang as the fifth richest American.[49]

In Lowell, this all must have had a familiar ring—a Harvard graduate setting up a manufacturing plant based on some of the industry's most cutting-edge innovations growing a market that reached far beyond Massachusetts. Instead of gray cloth or spindles, Lowell became known for word processors. Wang Laboratories opening their headquarters was the leading headline in a broader resurgence for Lowell. Other high-tech firms came to town, some of whom did subcontracting work for Wang and other computing

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[46] "Spindle City Industrial Exposition," May 14-15, 1975, Box 19, Folder 102, Marion Morse Collection, UML Archives.

[47] Ross Gittell and Patricia Flynn, "The Lowell High-Tech Success Story: What Went Wrong?" *New England Economic Review*, March/April 1995.

[48] "Annual Report," Wang Laboratories, 1980, Inc., 6–17, Mss: 6592, 1948–1992, W246, Box144, Folder Annual Reports 1979–1980, BL Archives.

[49] Fox Butterfield, "In Technology, Lowell Finds New Life," *New York Times*, August 10, 1982, A1.

firms in the region. Between 1974 and 1979, jobs in office, computing, and accounting machines had jumped in Lowell from 3,159 to 6,620, and in electrical components and accessories from 1,111 to 1,871.[50]

Prince Macaroni Manufacturing Co. expanded its Lowell plant, making it the largest pasta factory in the United States. If you grew up in New England, the slogan "Wednesday is Prince Spaghetti Day" was as popular as "Taco Tuesday" is today. The Prince Macaroni Manufacturing Company opened in Boston's North End by Italian immigrants in 1912. Within a few decades they outgrew Boston and moved west to Lowell in 1939. Prince moved into the Lowell Bleachery Company building helping to rebuild a neighborhood around the factory. By the mid-20th century, pasta was still seen primarily as an ethnic food. But Joseph Pellegrino, who owned a controlling interest and ran Prince, wanted to make it a staple food item for all American homes. In 1953, he hired an advertising firm that developed the advertising campaign "Wednesday is Prince Spaghetti Day." Pellegrino turned Prince into a vertically integrated company, like the textile companies that preceded Prince, and soon acquired more companies along the mid-Atlantic coast.

The popularity of Prince pasta in New England helped to give Lowell a new identity as "Spaghettiville" and anyone who grew up in New England between the 1960s and 1980s would be able to recall the television and radio commercials reminding families that "Wednesday is Prince Spaghetti Day."[51] According to the National Pasta Association, "Northeasterners are more likely than people in other parts of the country to eat pasta on a weekly basis…one in five residents report serving pasta three or more times a week."[52]

Prince employed upward of seven hundred workers and provided steady employment until their closure in 1987. Pellegrino's management style was one of corporate paternalism, and in a community as tight-knit as Lowell, it functioned well to keep control and productivity of the workforce steady. "Approximately 77 percent of the employees walked to work. On Wednesdays in the Spaghettiville neighborhood workers of the Prince plan were identified because they carried home bags of pasta and sauce from work."[53] Workers belonged to the Prince Macaroni Manufacturing Company Employees Union, which was in fact a company union with no real worker voice. But under Pellegrino's management workers worked a steady five-day-a-week schedule with weekends off, overtime after eight hours, and they received time and a half when they worked on the weekends. When Borden bought out Pellegrino, the corporate paternalism ended and workers

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[50] Table 1, "Recession Resistant, Recession Resilient and Post-Recession Growth, Industries Lowell LMA Annual Average Employment 1974, 1975, 1977, 1979," in Vocational Education Planning and Workforce Information Report, 1981, Prepared by Eugene J. Dood, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Employment Security.

[51] Ryan Owen, "When Lowell was Spaghettiville," *Merrimack Valley Magazine* November/December 2014.

[52] Quoted in Francine Corbin, "Prince Pasta Unravels in Spaghettiville, 1939–1997," MA thesis, University of Massachusetts Lowell (2001), 21.

[53] Corbin, "Prince Pasta Unravels," 56.

found themselves being forced to work 12-hour days with no overtime after 8 hours and increased mandatory weekend work. Workers lost their paid sick time and were given only one option for health insurance—the Borden company plan. In 1993, when the United Electrical Workers union approached workers at Prince, they were surprised at the positive response. Borden management fought hard against the union organizing drive and used the company union to try to sway workers away from the UE. In the end, workers fed up with the lack of overtime pay, fewer vacation days, and an overall lack of respect, voted in the new union with 214 votes in favor of representation with the UE. After several long months of contract negotiations, the workers ratified a union contract on December 10, 1994, that would guarantee "incremental wage increased through March 1999. . .workers would no longer work a 12-hour day unless agreed upon by the individual worker, and a real grievance procedure was implemented."[54] However, by 1997, Borden told the workers they were shuttering the plant. Despite public campaigns to save their jobs, workers packed their last box of pasta on July 11, 1997.

As the manufacturing base in the city changed, US Congressman (and later Senator) Paul E. Tsongas, a former Lowell city councilor who grew up in a working-class Greek family in Lowell, developed the "Lowell Plan" aimed at revitalizing the city with a mix of tech jobs, manufacturing, and most importantly historic tourism. Unemployment in the city, which had reached 14 percent in the early 1970s, one of the highest rates in the region, fell to just over 4 percent by 1984, slightly more than half of the national average.[55] Tsongas's "Lowell Plan" was more than just an ambitious concept. In 1980, Lowell Plan Inc. incorporated as "a neutral ground where public and private sector officials could speak candidly and collaborate on priority issues."[56] Between 1972 and 1989 manufacturing employment in the city rose by 90 percent. Most of these gains were in durable goods manufacturing that saw an increase of 32,000 workers in plants that turned out goods such as industrial machinery, electrical and electronic equipment, and instruments. Nondurable goods continued its decline in Lowell, slipping 40 percent during this time period, even as the overall manufacturing employment soared.[57] The Lowell National Historic Park helped restore part of the decaying mill complex that had blighted the town and brought tourists (and tourist dollars) to Lowell. Millions of dollars in state and federal grants, along with local private investment, further renovated abandoned factories into shops, bars, and

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[54] Corbin, "Prince Pasta Unravels," 54.

[55] Patricia Flynn, "Lowell a High Tech Success Story," September 1984, in David Lampe, ed., *The Massachusetts Miracle: High Technology and Economic Revitalization* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 278; and Melinda Beck and Charles Glass, "Lowell: A Town is Reborn," *Newsweek*, September 28, 1981, 38.

[56] http://www.lowellplan.org/history. Accessed January 28, 2022.

[57] Flynn, "The Lowell High-Tech Success Story."

restaurants. Based on all this activity, Hilton decided to come to Lowell and, with the assistance of a two-million-dollar federal Urban Development Action Grant, built a major hotel in downtown Lowell.

Lowell became a national success story for revitalization after postindustrial decline. Across the Northeast and Midwest, other cities with abandoned industrial corridors wondered if they too could enact the Lowell model. The mix of federal-state-local-business investment at Lowell became a model in Massachusetts, especially. Yet, even as unemployment numbers dropped and grant money flowed into the city, some questioned the true reach of the "Massachusetts Miracle" and its implications for Lowell, especially for the recently arrived Latinx and Southeast Asian immigrants who lived in the Acre, the neighborhood that Irish immigrants had called home more than a century before. In her 1984 piece, Patricia Flynn of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston noted that in Lowell in 1979 while manufacturing jobs in nonelectrical equipment production paid $6.17 an hour, 30 percent higher than textile work at the time, jobs in the electrical equipment industry paid just $3.83 an hour, much lower than the average textile job.[58] The "Massachusetts Miracle" was turning out to be something far short of miraculous for many of the workers who turned to this new sector for employment. Noting that by 1982 the computing industry made up 40 percent of all manufacturing in Lowell, Flynn warned, "Lowell need only look to its past to see the vulnerability of an area when one industry becomes dominant." The next year, two researchers from the Bank of Boston echoed Flynn's warnings, noting that while technology manufacturing might boom in Massachusetts during "early stage development" when innovation was essential as the industry matured firms would seek to move their manufacturing to "low-wage rate" regions—glossing over the fact the new electrical equipment wages in Lowell were already on the low end of industrial production in the region.[59] But the authors did make an important point that the increasingly globalized economy resulted in capital's increased mobility to seek out low-wage labor. Unlike a century before, when textile production was at least temporarily tethered to Lowell by its reliance on the water power afforded by the Merrimack, there was nothing intrinsic in Lowell's infrastructure, environment, or location that guaranteed electrical equipment production as a long-term endeavor in the city. The "Massachusetts Miracle"—even in its limited scope—might not last.

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[58] Flynn, "Lowell a High Tech Success Story," 283, 285.

[59] Linda D. Frankel and James M. Howell, "Economic Revitalization and Job Creation in America's Industrial Region," 1985, in David Lampe, ed., *The Massachusetts Miracle: High Technology and Economic Revitalization* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 305–6.

"Planning an American Venice": Establishing a National Park in Lowell

While city leaders worked to keep the manufacturing renaissance going in Lowell, it was not the most significant factor that drove the turnaround in the 1970s and early 1980s. The most important, long-lasting impact for the Lowell economy was the idea of developing a new national park centered on the old physical plant of the abandoned textile mills. The same year that Wang Laboratories opened its doors in 1976 marked the sesquicentennial of the founding of Lowell. Saint Anne's, Lowell's historic church, whose cornerstones predated the founding of the city by two years, held a special worship service that February to mark the occasion. Six former Mayors of Lowell acted as honorary ushers, passing out worship bulletins and collecting the offering. Congressman Paul Tsongas presented a sermon, entitled, "Have We Lost the Will and Character of Our Founders?"[60]

In the 1970s, the question about what the founders would think about the declining Spindle City was on the minds of many Lowellians. Tsongas believed the key to the future of Lowell could be found in its past—if preserving and sharing the story of the city's industrial heritage could help build the local economy. According to economist Ross Gittell, that idea was an important spark for revitalization in Lowell. The idea began in the 1960s and Superintendent of Schools Patrick Mogan helped lead the idea of an urban national park for Lowell. When Lowell was selected as one of the first cities to take part in the Johnson administration's Great Society new Model Cities program, Mogan and other city leaders saw it as an opportunity to realize the idea of spurring economic revitalization based on the city's heritage. Another key figure in the effort to get a park at Lowell was City Planning Director Frank Keefe. Lowell was able to effectively leverage the support provided by Model Cities to develop a community-driven plan for the city's future that centered on founding a national park that could draw cultural tourists to the Spindle City.[61]

One significant impact of the Model City program in Lowell was the development of the Human Services Program (HSP) for the city, an organization that brought together city leaders and community members to work on issues ranging from urban planning to education to child and elderly care. The HSP grew out of the Acre Model Neighborhood Organization, the citizen participation arm of the Model Cities initiative in Lowell. In 1991, the HSP put on a retrospective exhibit about their work. Aptly, the exhibit was held at the city's Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center. The brochure that was developed to accompany the exhibit explained how a National Park came to Lowell:

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[60] "An Ecumenical Service of the Worship and Praise to Almighty God Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Lowell," February 29, 1976, 11:00 a.m., Box 19, Folder 106, Box 6, Folder 35, Marion Morse Collection, UML Archives.

[61] Ross Gittell, *Renewing Cities*, "Communities in Transition—Lowell Sets the Pace for Change in Massachusetts," *Boston Globe*, July 7, 1980, 10.

> Lowell's extraordinary revival over the past twenty years has been reported worldwide. The fundamental change is that the city has been recast as a historical park whose physical and cultural resources are being preserved as a national treasure. It is important to remember this change for the better is the result of the imagination, passion and persistence of Lowell's people. Working in the schools, downtown, and in the neighborhoods beginning in the 1960s, people who believed that new life could be breathed into the city shaped a plan for a radically different kind of "park" based on Lowell's heritage and way of life. Early on this idea was called the "Urban National Cultural Park.[62]

While helping to found the park was the "fundamental change" the HSP took the most pride in, the exhibit also highlighted how the park effort was only one part of a larger campaign to address the needs of those living in Lowell. In order to engage the community in their urban development efforts, the HSP held a series of community conferences, including, "Charting the Course" (1974), "Keeping on Course" (1976), "Pathways to Human Development" (1979), and "Culture: a Celebration of Lowell" (1986). That idea of celebrating Lowell's diverse culture was an essential element in the early proposals for a national park in Lowell.

Robert Weible served as the National Park Service's historian in Lowell for the first decade after the park's founding and wrote two articles for the *Public Historian* about the original vision for the park and how that vision was realized during the early days of the park's operations. He wrote from the perspective of someone who had a front seat to the events as they unfolded. Weible asserted that in the 1970s, Lowellians who championed the idea of a national park wanted the park to reflect an appreciation of the city's diverse ethnic heritage and to serve as a laboratory for community education. He argued that these motivations were more of a driving force in local organizing for the park than was celebrating the city's contributions to American industrialism. Weible's articles situate the founding of Lowell National Historic Park as part of a historical moment when progressive visions for historic preservation and urban planning were championed by urban community activists across the country as a counter to urban renewal policies that had long prioritized slum clearance and demolition that dislocated working-class residents from their neighborhoods and destroyed cultural institutions. The National Historic Preservation Act and the Model Cities legislation both passed in the 1960s and should be understood as part of the federal government's response to the urban social movements of the decade. For Lowell, which had just come through its own painful experience with the demolition forces of urban renewal, federal support for their city based on preservation rather than demolition was a welcome change. According to Weible, the idea of the park at Lowell sprung from a community-based vision "of a national *cultural* park as part of a theoretical and

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[62] "Roots and Dreams: Twenty Years of the Human Service Corporation," October 29, 1991–January 25, 1992, https://archive.org/details/rootsanddreams/mode/2up.

progressive agenda that even included a plan to reverse the city's economic slide." The repeated insistence by those who helped found the park that the people of Lowell should be the park's focus can be seen again and again in the primary source documents about the park's founding.[63]

According to urban park historian, Galen Cranz, the founding of Lowell National Historic Park, was part of an important move in the late 1970s by local, state, and national agencies to reconceptualize and expand ideas about which urban landscapes deserved to be celebrated and protected. This urban cultural park movement worked from the "assumption that all parts of the city—its workspaces, living quarters, and connecting streets—had equal aesthetic and recreational potential, that the city was in fact a work of art worthy of appreciation and objectification."[64] This urban cultural parks movement incorporated the built environment and engaged the vernacular architecture of urban spaces, especially vernaculars of industrialization, labor, and immigration. Capital had long helped structure, and in turn been structured by, nature in Lowell. Lowell residents experienced their local environment as part of an interconnected network of people, work, and nature. At the end of the 20th century, the understanding of urban parks had been expanded enough to incorporate such a vision into the National Park Service.

Other local institutions supported this emphasis on promoting local culture. In 1977, the Lowell Area Arts Council (now LowellArts) incorporated as a not-for-profit. Their early projects included "beautification, gallery exhibitions of local and regional artists, and theater productions."[65] Later, City Councilman Grady R. Mulligan would continue to champion the arts in Lowell as an engine for downtown revitalization. He led the effort to establish an Arts and Cultural District in Lowell's downtown—a goal realized in 1998. A bronze plaque at the intersection of Palmer and Middle Streets in downtown Lowell commemorates Mulligan's contribution to preserving and promoting the arts in the city.[66]

This philosophy of urban planning—focused on historical preservation, emphasizing the arts, and revitalizing the urban core—spread beyond Lowell to become an influential trend in how planners across the country think about city infrastructure. Implementing an expansive new idea for the potential role of a national park—that focused on how the park could contribute to and be part of preserving local cultural heritage and building economic opportunity for a broader community proved a challenge. From the beginning, some in Washington were critical of the idea. An article in *The Boston Globe* described the

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[63] Robert Weible, "Lowell: Building a New Appreciation for Historical Place," *The Public Historian* 6, no 3 (Summer 1984): 31–32; Robert Weible, "Visions and Reality: Reconsidering the Creation and Development of Lowell's National Park, 1966–1992," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2011): quote, 70.

[64] Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 141.

[65] https://www.lowellartsmi.org/board-staff-our-story. Accessed August 12, 2022.

[66] Christopher Scott, "Plaque to Be Commemorated in Honor of the Late Councilor Mulligan," *Lowell Sun*, July 28, 2005.

pushback to this new conceptualization of a national park that came from some in Congress: "Critics complained that the measure represented a nontraditional use of park money, that there were few safeguards to prevent the funds from being used for urban renewal, that the measure would expand the bureaucracy by creating a new federal-state commission, and that it was too costly."[67]

In developing the park, the HSP and the business and political leadership of Lowell had an ardent champion in their Congressman Paul Tsongas, who served on the 94th Congress's Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands. News of the progress of the national park proposal moving through the federal approval process was sent to his constituents as part of his 1976 and 1977 regular newsletters.[68] Shepherding the idea of the park through Department of the Interior planning and Congressional appropriations was a slow process. In 1977, the *Lowell Sun* reported, "After a decade of thought and two years of detailed planning, the Lowell National Cultural Park is finally going national. The lingering question now is: will the park make it?"[69] Tsongas's hard work paid off, and the next year Congress passed HR11662 establishing the Lowell National Historic Park, and that year President Jimmy Carter signed the Department of the Interior appropriation that included $4.35 million to develop the new park along with another $700,000 for historic preservation in Lowell. This was the initial funding for a planned $40 million project, $18.5 million for the development of the park property itself, and $21.5 million for a broader community historic preservation effort.[70]

Several reasons for founding the park were listed in the enabling legislation, including that "certain sites and structures in Lowell symbolize in physical form the industrial revolution." Another reason was "the cultural heritage of the many ethnic groups that immigrated to the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." A third reason was the existing mill, housing, commercial and transportation structures in Lowell of historical significance along with the "five-and-six-tenths mile power canal system." The final reason was that without federal government action, it was feared this historic infrastructure might not be preserved. The enabling legislation allowed for the purchase of six properties: the Linus Childs House at 63 Kirk Street, the H and H Paper Company (commonly referred to as the Boott Mill Boarding House) at 42nd French Street,

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[67] Rachelle Patterson, "$40m Lowell Park Approved by House," *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1978. For more on the challenges of implementing this kind of park idea, see Robert Weible, "Lowell: Building a New Appreciation for Historical Place," *The Public Historian*, 1984.

[68] "Lowell Park Bill to Congress," Congressman Paul Tsongas Reports, circa 1976, 2; "Lowell 'Urban Park' Plans Move Ahead," Congressman Paul Tsongas Reports, circa 1977, 4, Paul E. Tsongas Congressional Collection, UML Archives, digital collection.

[69] David Sylvester, "What Comes Next for Lowell's National Cultural Park?" *The Lowell Sun*, March 9, 1977, 15.

[70] Paul Tsongas, Member of Congress to William Taupier, City Manager, Lowell, October 19, 1978, Paul E. Tsongas Congressional Collection, UML Archives, digital collection.

Old City Hall at 226 Merrimack Street, the Merrimack Gatehouse at 269 Merrimack Street, the Wannalancit Textile Company at 562 Suffolk Street, and the structures containing the Jade Pagoda and Solomon's Yard Goods at 210 and 200 Merrimack Street.[71]

Along with the founding of the national park, the legislation established the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, a 15-member "federal-state-local" commission charged with helping to support historic preservation throughout Lowell and to extend the impact of the founding of the national park to a wider rejuvenation of the city. Their first newsletter gave information about how Lowell homeowners, businesses, and neighborhoods could tap into historic preservation funding for their properties. But as much as the commission focused on brick-and-mortar, it was also interested in showcasing community life and the histories of the people of Lowell. The newsletter explained: "No matter how impressed visitors to Lowell are by the natural wonders like the Pawtucket Falls or man-made wonders like the mile of mills, people always leave Lowell talking about our people. About the museum guide who showed them the mill he spent 50 years in. About the store owner who took an hour out to talk about business and life in the Acre. And about being able to buy feta cheese on one side of the street and kielbasa on the other side"

Lowell's position as being an early site in this national move toward historic preservation in urban park planning and broader urban revitalization has received considerable attention by the media, scholars, and practitioners in the fields of parks and urban planning. For the national media, the establishment of a national park at Lowell presented an opportunity to renew long familiar tropes in describing the canal town. In 1980, the *Washington Post* travel section described the park in Lowell under the headline "Planning an American Venice." Two years later, the *Christian Science Monitor* published "The 'Venice of America': A Look at the Thriving Town of Lowell." In evoking Venice in connection to Lowell these publications were tapping into a comparison that had first been made more than a century earlier. Yet the author of the *Washington Post* piece cautioned her readers: "The sobriquet (rather misleading if you expect to find the charm of Venice) reflects the six mile, intricate power and transport and canal system that laces the city of Lowell." The Venice comparison, it seemed, could only be stretched so far.[72]

The establishment of the park garnered attention even beyond the United States. In 1978, London's *The Economist* lauded the Lowell revitalization plan, and its effort to renew the existing footprint of the city: "The idea of making an urban industrial setting into a national park did not win ready acceptance. In states like Massachusetts, funds for outdoor recreation flow naturally to quasi-rural parklands on the outer fringes of cities, on the

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[71] Public Law 96-290, 95th Congress, June 15, 1978, H.R.11662, Section 1, Title II, Section 202, a1.

[72] Jane Holtz Kay, "The 'Venice of America': A Look at the Thriving Town of Lowell," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 10, 1982, 15.

theory that public greenspaces are a safeguard against the spread of urban blight. In fact that sort of public investment has just encouraged private housing and industrial developers to flee the cities."[73]

The article goes on to describe how Frank Keefe, the city planner at Lowell during the development of the park would go on to become Director of the Massachusetts Office of State Planning, and then later form his own urban planning consultant company. He would become influential in shaping the Carter administration's approach to urban planning.[74] This concept of urban planning in Lowell has also gained the attention of urban scholars and scholars of public history notably Cathy Stanton's 2006 *The Lowell Experiment* and Michael Edema Leary Owhin's 2016 *Exploring the Production of Urban Space*.[75]

According to Robert Weible, the expansive, progressive community-driven vision for the park was brief due to a resurgent conservatism in mid-1980s Washington that did not embrace such an expansive understanding of the function of urban national parks.[76] The economic downturn that began in the late 1980s further blunted the potential of the new park aiding the city's economic recovery. The Lowell renaissance it seemed was faltering.

"All Is Not Well in Lowell": Late-20th-Century Economic Decline

As the 1980s progressed, the tech "miracle" that had helped fuel Lowell's resurgence was fading. National coverage of Lowell had changed its tone. In 1987, *Newsweek* ran a story, "The Dark Side of a Dream: All Is Not Well in Lowell," that examined those who had been left out by the miracle turnaround. The article paid particular attention to the neighborhood known as the Acre, which had once been home to Irish immigrants working in the mills. The article described: "Many Cambodian immigrants, attracted by the availability of manufacturing and assembly jobs at high-tech firms like Wang Laboratories, have crowded into the same tenements where immigrant millworkers lived more than a century ago. 'It's a "Tale of Two Cities" situation,' says Martin Walsh, who recently completed a study of race relations for Lowell for the U.S. Department of Justice."[77]

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[73] "Living Archeology," *The Economist* 267, no. 7028 (May 13, 1978): 53.

[74] "Living Archeology," 53.

[75] Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Michael Edema Leary-Owhin, Chapter 4, "Lowell: (Re)presenting Urban Space," and Chapter 5, "Lowell: Producing Urban Public Space and City Transformation," in *Exploring the Production of Urban Space: Differential Space in Three Post-Industrial Cities* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2016).

[76] Weible, "Lowell: Building a New Appreciation for Historical Place."

[77] George Hackett and Sue Hutchison, "The Dark Side of a Dream: All Is Not Well in Lowell," *Newsweek*, November 30, 1987, 31–32.

The "Massachusetts Miracle" ended up being short-lived in Lowell. As new competitors in computing technology emerged, Wang found its market share slipping. As had been predicted by multiple economists, the movement of capital in search of lower production costs had made Wang's place in Lowell precarious. By 1992, the company had filed for bankruptcy.[78]

As Patricia Flynn had warned, a local economy whose boom times relied heavily on one industry went bust when that bubble burst. The impact on Lowell was devastating. *The Wall Street Journal* described it as follows:

> Lowell is a painful reminder of how recession in a dominant industry can ripple through a local economy. Wang Laboratories Inc., the computer company that spurred Lowell's Turnaround has jettisoned thousands of workers. Hotel rooms go begging. Some restaurants have lost half their business. So many empty office buildings dot the area that real-estate brokers joke that "Now Leasing" is Lowell's fastest growing company. Housing prices are plummeting. Personal and business bankruptcies are soaring. For the first time in years, the city's unemployment rate at 5.8% exceeds the national average. Many folks think things will get worse before they get better.[79]

Economists, who had lauded the Lowell Renaissance, now conducted a postmortem to understand what had gone wrong. Patricia Flynn teamed up with Ross Gittell to write an article for the *New England Economic Review* on Lowell's rise and fall. They found several reasons for the decline. A national downturn in durable goods manufacturing in the United States impacted Massachusetts particularly hard. The banking crisis of the 1990s saw many Lowell area banks fail or merge, and three were taken over by other banking institutions not headquartered in Lowell. This banking crisis effectively dried up local credit, which had been the lifeblood for local small businesses, and had played an important role in Lowell's resurgence. Wang's failure to adapt to changes in the computing industry, along with Lowell's reliance on that industry for its economic turnaround, further accelerated the rapid economic fall of the city. Perhaps nothing symbolized the end of the golden era in Lowell technology manufacturing so poignantly as when in 1994, Wang sold off its headquarters complex at 1 percent of the cost it took to build, as part of its emergence from bankruptcy.[80]

The miracle at Lowell was over. But for many in Lowell, the miracle had never really gotten started. As the *Newsweek* article described, for many residents in Lowell's neighborhoods like the Acre, the economic renaissance had nearly skipped them altogether. In 1980, when Lowell's economic unemployment rate had fallen below 5 percent, in

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[78] Adam Bryant, "Wang Files for Bankruptcy in Chance to Slim Down," *New York Times*, August 19, 1992, D1.

[79] Lawrence Ingrassia, "Recession Haunts City That Believed It Was Saved By High-Tech," *Wall Street Journal*, January 205, 1990, 1.

[80] Flynn, "The Lowell High-Tech Success Story What Went Wrong."

two of the Acre's census tracts the rate was 14.6 percent and 15.6 percent. The neighborhood that had long been home to immigrant residents still was a community of immigrants. By 1990, many of the Irish and Greeks had left the neighborhood, and the Acre was 70 percent Latinx, 20 percent white, and 10 percent Southeast Asian.[81]

New Immigrants of Lowell

In the 1960s there was an increase in Latinx and Brazilian immigrants in Lowell. According to Forrant and Strobel, many of these were migrant workers who came to the United States for temporary work. This was the case until the hardening of the US border during the 1990s made such migratory work difficult and dangerous, and more decided to make their residence in the United States permanent. It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of these migrant and immigrant residents in Lowell during this time. For example, in 1974 a newspaper article in the *Lowell Sun* estimated that there were 5,000–7,000 Puerto Ricans in the city, although exact numbers were hard to account for because it was "estimated that seven out of 10 households were not counted at all in the most recent census." There was considerable discrimination faced by these immigrants and migrants to Lowell, and that might have also made them less likely to answer the door for census takers. According to the 1974 article, one of the greatest challenges faced by Puerto Ricans in Lowell was housing, because many landlords discriminated against them. This meant that those who would rent to Puerto Ricans could "maintain absolute control over the rents and whether or not to keep the units in good repair."[82]

Puerto Ricans were the largest Latinx migrant group to Lowell in the postwar period, followed by Colombians and then Dominicans. As Forrant and Strobel explain, "While one ought to be careful not to over-generalize the complex and diverse motivations of Latino immigrants, many were lured to the Lowell area by a desire to find jobs and improve their opportunities."[83] Colombians, in particular, came, to Lowell, to work in the textile industry.[84] The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 transformed immigration policy in the United States. Before the acts' passage, immigration from most Asian countries had been nearly halted for eight decades. The passage of the 1965 act, along with the refugee crisis created by the war in Vietnam, especially for those who had cooperated with the United States during the conflict, saw Southeast Asian immigration

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[81] Alan Lupp, "Reviving a Lowell Neighborhood," *Boston Globe*, May 25, 1985.

[82] "Puerto Ricans: Starting at the Bottom of the Ladder, *Lowell Sun*, April 21, 1974.

[83] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell," 163.

[84] Eleanor E. Glaessel-Brown, "A Time of Transition: Colombian Textile Workers in Lowell in the1970s," in *The Continuing Revolution: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts*, ed. Robert Weible (Lowell: Lowell Historical Society, 1991), 343–69.

rise dramatically in the United States.[85] Southeast Asian immigrants first began to arrive in Massachusetts in 1975, and then came to Lowell in significant numbers between 1985 to 1990. This immigration included Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians. Cambodians in particular came to Lowell, fleeing the Khmer Rouge regime, making the city the second largest home to Cambodians in the United States, behind only Long Beach, California.[86] Like immigrants who came before them, the Cambodians came to Lowell looking for work.

Two important pieces of scholarship which provide insight into the Cambodian immigrant experience in Lowell are Tuyat-Lan Pho and Anne Mulvey's "Southeast Asian Women in Lowell: Family Relations, Gender Roles and Community Concerns" and Sucheng Chan's book *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States*. Pho and Mulvey's article examines how Cambodian familial and gender roles were changed by resettlement in Lowell, and how the Cambodian immigrants worked collectively to address issues they experienced. While much has been written about how coming to work in Lowell was transformative for gender and familial relationships of the Lowell mill women of the 19th century, less attention has been paid to how gender was shaped by (and in turn shaped) the experiences of the immigrant populations in Lowell. As Pho and Mulvey write in their article, "the postwar effects of resettlement on women and children in the United States have not been adequately studied or documented."[87] Lisa Lowe, a scholar of race, ethnicity, and migration, also encourages consideration of the disruption of the refugee experience in her book *Immigrant Acts*, "Despite the usual assumption that Asians immigrate from stable, continuous, 'traditional' cultures, most of the post-1965 Asian immigrants came from societies already disrupted by colonialism and distorted by the upheavals of neocolonial capitalism and war."[88] A robust understanding of gender, work, and capitalism in Lowell remains incomplete without including the lived experiences of immigrant women. Fortunately, in addition to the article by Pho and Mulvey, there is a rich collection of digitized archival material in the Center for Lowell History, UMass Lowell Archives Special Collection Southeast Asian archive that can help tell these histories.

In addition, in 1987 the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, in partnership with the American Folklife Center, and with support from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities began a year-long project to document the folklife of the different ethnic groups of Lowell. The resulting collection housed at the Library of Congress includes 196 hours of sound recordings conducted by the project investigators, including

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[85] On Asian Immigration and the United States, see, for example, Lisa Lowel, Chapter 1, "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique," in *Immigrant Acts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang), 2004.

[86] Forrant and Strobel, "Ethnicity in Lowell."

[87] Tuyet-Lan Pho and Anne Mulvey, "Southeast Asian Women in Lowell: Family Relations, Gender Roles and Community Concerns," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2003, vol. 24, no. 1, 101.

[88] Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 16.

oral histories, religious services, community festivals, parades, and musical events. Lowell community members submitted another 23 hours of sound recordings that were also included in the collection. More than 13,000 images, some of them digitized, document the ethnic cultural community life in Lowell. Collection materials are in English, French, Greek, Laotian, Portuguese, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Cambodian, reflecting the continued diversity of Lowell.

According to Sucheng Chan, there were several factors that drew Cambodians to Lowell, including the availability of jobs in the city's booming tech industry. Another factor was Massachusetts's reputation as a friendly state for refugees and the presence of state-funded refugee support agencies. Local agencies also emerged in Lowell, such as the Indochinese Refugee Foundation Inc., which was incorporated in 1977 as a nonprofit to support refugees to Lowell and assist them in their resettlement.[89] Finally, the presence of Sao Khon, a revered Buddhist monk who served at a monastery in North Chelmsford and was one of only "a handful of senior monks trained in Cambodia who managed to survive the Khmer Rouge regime" was a draw to Lowell. As word spread through the Cambodian diaspora in the United States about favorable conditions in Lowell, many more decided to move to Lowell from the places where they had originally migrated. According to Chan, as many as 90 percent of Cambodians came to Lowell as part of this secondary migration pattern during the 1980s.[90]

This wave of new immigration to the United States was not uniformly welcome. By the mid-1980s, surveys revealed that anti-immigration sentiment was on the rise and there was growing support for new restrictions on immigration. In a *New York Times* / CBS News Poll, 49 percent of all adult Americans wanted immigration decreased. This was an almost 10 percent change from 1965, the last time there was major immigration reform. The poll demonstrated that public perception about the lives of immigrants in the United States was split and, at times, contradictory. While 45 percent of respondents believed that new immigrants worked harder than native-born Americans, 49 percent believed that most ended up on public assistance. Overall, there was a concern that new immigrants would take jobs and drive up the cost of housing.[91]

In Lowell, this national debate was playing out much as it was in other towns and cities. One of the earliest challenges Cambodians faced in Lowell was a school system that was not equipped to meet the needs of an influx of children for whom English was not their primary language. By 1985, 628 students were enrolled in the Lowell school system,

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[89] "Article of Organization, Indochinese Refugees Foundation Inc., January 1, 1977. Southeast Asian Digital Archive.

[90] Sucheng Chan, *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 103–4.

[91] Robert Pear, "New Restrictions on Immigration Gain Public Support, Poll Shows," *New York Times*, July 1, 1986.

but there were only eight Cambodian-speaking teachers and the student numbers were continuing to grow. At one point, "Cambodian youngsters were enrolling in the school system at a rate of 10 a week."[92] According to a study conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Education, Lowell High School failed to provide legally mandated bilingual education for Cambodian students resulting in a high rate of failed courses and students not eligible to graduate. "The state found that Lowell High has not had a bilingual program for the past four years, though more than 200 Cambodian students are enrolled."[93] The tensions ran even higher when Lowell held a vote on a nonbinding referendum to make English the "official" language of the city. Boran Reth, then-director of the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, told the *Boston Globe*, "I felt really depressed. For 200 years, people come to this country, and no one says 'English Only.' They didn't push this on the Greek immigrants. They act like we're so lazy, we are not going to learn how to read a stop sign." While the vote did not make the policy official, the results sent a clear anti-immigrant message with 14,575 voting in favor of the English-only referendum and only 5,679 voting against it. In 1989, at the time of the referendum, only 3 percent of Lowell's Southeast Asian residents were registered to vote.[94]

Another significant recent immigration trend to Lowell comes from the continent of Africa. In 2003, the Urban Institute did a profile of the foreign-born in Massachusetts and reported that Lowell had 1,366 African-born population, or 2.8 percent of the residents of Lowell. This was more than double the percent of African-born immigrant population in the United States at the time of the study.[95] In 2021, the Refugees in Towns project at the Feinstein International Center issued a study they completed with Joseph Zorokong, a refugee who came to the United States from Sierra-Leone in the mid-1990s and settled in Lowell with his mother when he was six. Joseph described the challenges he faced adjusting to life in his new home: "Despite living in such a diverse city as Lowell, in my formative years I struggled with a sense of my culture and American identity, often weaving in and out of being 'African' or 'American,' depending on my social context. My mother, deeply connected with the city's Sierra Leonean community, played an integral role in helping my brother and me maintain ties with this community while we attempted to live 'normal' American lives. However, coping with the realities of living in two distinct cultures was never easy."[96]

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[92] Brad Pokorny, "Lowell Seeks Help in Educating Cambodian Immigrants," *Boston Globe*, June 6, 1985, 29.

[93] Muriel Cohen, "Report: Failed Students Lacked Bilingual Teaching," *Boston Globe*, April 23, 1985.

[94] Derrick Jackson, "Lowell Exhumes an Ugly Past," *Boston Globe*, November 12, 1989.

[95] Katherine Lotspeich, Michael Fix, Dan Perez-Lopez, and Jason Ost, "A Profile of the Foreign-Born in Lowell, Massachusetts," The Urban Institute, October, 2003, 5.

[96] Joseph Zorokong, "The Value of Community in Lowell," A Case Study of Refugees in Towns, Lowell, Massachusetts, USA, Feinstein International Center, 2021. https://www.refugeesintowns.org.

The Southeast Asian community now lives in the same areas that were once home to the Irish, Greek, and Portuguese immigrants in Lowell. In 2003, the Urban Institute did a profile of the foreign-born in Massachusetts, and found that Lowell had a 22 percent foreign-born population, twice the national average. They described the neighborhoods where the different communities had settled:

> Although foreign-born persons are dispersed throughout Lowell, there are high concentrations of Asians and Portuguese speakers south of the Merrimack River. In census tracts in the Acre and the Lower Highlands neighborhoods, Asians compose up to 34 percent of the population. Most of the Asian immigrants in these two neighborhoods are from Cambodia. Another significant concentration of Asians is found in the Middlesex Village area; most of these immigrants are from India. Portuguese speakers (Portuguese and Brazilian immigrants) are clustered together in the Lower Belvidere and East Back Central neighborhoods, consisting of 10 to 21 percent of each census tract's population. There are also concentrations of Latin Americans downtown and in the Lower Belvidere and East Back Central neighborhoods. Africans are dispersed in smaller numbers downtown, along the southern border of the Merrimack River, and in the Centralville, Pawtucketville, and Middlesex Village neighborhoods.[97]

Yet, in some cases, it is the descendants of these communities that struggled for access to equal rights in the 1800s and early 1900s that have sought to restrict the rights of this new wave of immigrants. Since 1989, a lot has changed due to the activism of immigrant organizations in Lowell. In 2017, Lowell's Asian-American and Latinx voters filed a groundbreaking voting rights lawsuit "alleging that the current at-large plurality method of electing members of the Lowell City Council and the Lowell School Committee denies Lowell's Asian American and Hispanic/Latino voters an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice" in a violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[98] Prior to 2021, there were virtually no people of color elected to Lowell's City Council and other governing bodies, including the School Board, despite the fact that Lowell is 49 percent communities of color. After the success of the voting rights legal case and the 2021 election, this began to turn around. Paul Ratha Yem had run twice before and lost. In 2021, after the consent decree, he won representing the people in the Acre neighborhood, which is one of the majority-minority districts formed by the consent decree. "In just four years, we have come to a place where over one-third of the elected officials on those two bodies are people of color," said Oren Sellstrom, litigation director for Lawyers for Civil Rights. "That's a dramatic change in the power structure of the city. It would be expected to only grow from here."[99]

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[97] Lotspeich, Fix, Perez-Lopez, Ost, "A Profile of the Foreign-Born in Lowell," Massachusetts, 7.

[98] Consent Decree, Case No. 1:17-cv-10895-DLC, US District Court for the District of Massachusetts.

[99] Stephanie Ebbert, "A Changing of the Guard in Lowell as a Diverse Leadership Takes Place," *Boston Globe*, December 26, 2021.

Lowell remains a community of immigrants. According to the American Community Survey published by the US Census, the city's population is 28.4 percent foreign-born, and 48.7 percent White, 23 percent Asian, 18.1 percent Hispanic or Latino, 8 percent Black, 2.5 two or more races, .8 percent American Indian and Alaskan Native, and .1 Pacific Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.[100]

Environmental Justice in Lowell

Another important area for community organizing for Lowell in the late 20th and early 21st century was environmental activism. The environmental impact of more than 150 years of industrial manufacturing on Lowell was considerable. Environmental pollution often impacted poorer and immigrant neighborhoods, and in the 1980s there was considerable community-level organizing to demand the cleanup of the toxic remains of Lowell's industrial past. One area of great concern was the site of the former Silresim Chemical Corporation site, a five-acre property at 86 Tanner Street, that was bordered by the Boston & Maine Railroad and other industrial and commercial properties, an area known in Lowell as Ayer's City. Silresim collected, hauled, stored, processed, reclaimed, and disposed of solvents at the site from 1971 until they went bankrupt in 1977 in part because of repeated environmental violations. More than one million gallons of hazardous waste were left at the site, including liquid acid wastes, heavy metals, pesticides, and herbicides. Between 1978 and 1981, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) removed the drums and storage containers left on the site, but the public remained concerned about ground water and soil contamination. In 1982 several community groups began to organize around the site cleanup. The Lowell Chapter of Fair Share became "actively involved in discussions about site clean up and publicized their views and concerns about the site using media events, newsletters, and door-to-door canvases." The Greater Lowell Environmental Campaign (GLEC), an umbrella group with chapters in different Lowell neighborhoods, became involved in 1983, with the Ayers City Homeowners chapter leading their efforts around the Siliresim cleanup. Ayers City, a mixed-use industrial and residential neighborhood in the late 20th century became home to many Portuguese, Brazilian, and Southeast Asian families. In February 1983, 40 Lowell residents staged a sit-in at the Boston EPA, demanding federal Superfund money for the site. That September the site was given federal Superfund status, and DEP was charged with site mediation. A joint federal-state-citizen task force was established to help oversee site mediation, and a telephone hotline set up to answer resident concerns. In 1985, a consent agreement for site mediation was reached with Silresim Trust. Three years later, the Ayers

[100] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/lowellcitymassachusetts.

Chapter of the GLEC delivered a petition to the DEP demanding the site be designated a Public Priority Site, and in 1989 the Silresim was given Public Involvement Plan status. This meant the remediation would have benchmarks for community consultation and notification built into the remediation schedule.[101] The community members did not only want the site cleaned up, they wanted to be informed about and involved with the project. In 2013, the city of Lowell issued a plan for the Ayers industrial area that called for continued brownfield clean-up, two new parks and a greenway, and new industrial park development.[102] In 2019, the city of Lowell received a $3 million MassWorks Infrastructure Grant for the project.[103] While new development in the area moves forward, the former Silresim site remains one of 39 designated superfund sites monitored in Massachusetts. In 2019, the Environmental Protection Agency reviewed the site to ensure the remediation there continues to promote public health.[104]

Silrsim was just one of the GLEC campaigns. Another significant campaign they waged in the late 1980s was in support of eight Lowell families who lived in four duplexes in a working-class area along Billerica Street. The families claimed that for decades Colonial Gas Co. had dumped toxic pollutants, including cyanide, on empty land around Lowell. Later homes were built over the dump site, and the GLEC alleged that the families living in these homes were experiencing adverse health impacts. The families hired Jan Schlichtmann, a Boston lawyer, to help them in court. Schlichtmann had made a name for himself working with residents of nearby Woburn, Massachusetts, a case that was later turned into a feature film *A Civil Action*, featuring John Travolta as Schlichtmann. In response to the community organizing campaign, the Billerica Street families were relocated to Tewksbury with state support, making them the first families in Massachusetts to receive state compensation for being impacted by hazardous waste disposal. Schlictmann represented the families in a six-month mediation process, and while not admitting any negative health impact from their dump site, the company settled at an undisclosed amount that was reported to be $2 million to the families and $750,000 to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Engineering.[105] The GLEC would continue to organize around other environmental dump sites and other environmental issues in Lowell, often

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[101] Draft Public Involvement Plan/Community Relations Plan Silresim Disposal Site, https://semspub.epa.gov/work/01/569520.pdf, unnumbered pages.

[102] "Ayer's Industrial Park Urban Revitalization and Development Plan," City of Lowell, 2013.

[103] Aaron Curtis, "Lowell Awarded $3 Million for Ayers Industrial Redevelopment," *Lowell Sun*, November 13, 2019.

[104] Robert Mills, "EPA Complete Reviews at Local Superfund Sites," *Lowell Sun*, December 25, 2019.

[105] Andrew Dabilis, "Residents Beset by Chemicals in Soil: State Fences Off Yards," *Boston Globe*, December 18, 1987, 30; Andrew Dabilis Andrew Dabilis, "More Toxic Sites Found, Say Activists in Lowell," *Boston Globe*, September 12, 1988, 21; "8 Families Settle with Firm Over Toxic Lowell Site," *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1989, 21; Jan Schlichtmann, "The Known and Present Danger: The Colonial Gas Company and Coal Gas Waste in Lowell, Massachusetts," prepared for the Greater Lowell Environmental Campaign (Boston: Bateman & Slate, 1988); *A Civil Action* (Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 1999).

collaborating with other community organizations in their efforts. The organization was one of many working-class, community-based groups that became active throughout the country during the 1980s and 1990s in what has come to be called the Environmental Justice Movement. A great deal of scholarship has been written on this movement for environmental justice focusing on the communities of color and working-class neighborhoods that have been left to deal with the impact of the waste left behind by industrialization. Situating the Billerica Street campaign and other Lowell environmental campaigns into this broader history is important to integrating the environmental and industrial histories of the Spindle City.[106]

Another way that local populations sustain community life is through the preservation of their cultural traditions, including their food culture. The study of food is an excellent way to approach new perspectives in understanding the cultural and social organization of places or a people. The study of food allows to "encounter the tangled interactions of. . .people over time."[107] And, in this, Lowell is no different. Exploring the food culture of Lowell helps us to understand the communities that have come and gone. The food people eat shows us ways in which food can sustain a laboring body as well as the traditions of a community. The manufacture of food commodities tells us a story of industry and innovation. The location of restaurants and the food served reveal what is happening socially and culturally at any given time. As we wrap up this study, we will share a little bit about how food can help us understand the past, present, and future of Lowell.

Despite a decline in manufacturing, one could argue that Lowell is a culinary mecca. Lowell's immigrant heritage has resulted in a diverse collection of restaurants that tell the immigrant story dating back to the late 19th century. At Arthur's Paradise Diner, Boott Mill workers would stop by for a quick breakfast and so the Boott Mill sandwich was born. The "delicious Boott Mill sandwich" is a heart-stopping, belly-filling, toasty breakfast sandwich filled with eggs, meat, and cheese.[108] Within Lowell's historic downtown, restaurants offer delicious Greek, Cambodian, or Laotian foods. A little further up the road, bakeries continue to make Portuguese pastries and breads. Dominican and Puerto Rican restaurants also dot the culinary landscape while restaurants serving up Southeast Asian fare draw diners in from across the state.

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[106] Some works on the environmental justice movement include: Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990); Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stine, eds, *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy* (Tuscon, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2002); David Naguib Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002); *Robert D. Bullard,* ed. *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* (San Francisco, California: Sierra Club Books, 2005. Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll, eds. *To Love the Wind and Rain, African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

[107] Marcie Cohen Ferris, "History, Place, and Power: Studying Southern Food," *Southern Cultures* 21:1 (Spring 2015), 3.

[108] Kathleen Pierce, "Boott Mill Sandwich," *The Sun,* April 23, 2008.

Figure 4.2. New Asian Market, Lowell, Massachusetts, June 17, 2021
(photo by Brian Cicioni, personal collection, Emily E. LB. Twarog)

The assortment of ethnic restaurants reflects a desire for immigrants to become business owners, as well as contribute to sharing their story with the larger community. Lowell has a wonderful culinary story to tell that is integral to the expansion of tourism in the city, as well as a means of community building. As public folklorist Millie Rahn writes, "Public folklore takes the conversations out of the academy and restores them to the community. . . culture is the cement for building a community. I see public folklore as a subtle method of social activism." With this study, we hope that all of what you have learned allows for community building and expanded conversations with the public about the rich history of Lowell, Massachusetts.[109]

[109] Millie Rahn, "Laying a Place at the Table: Creating Public Foodways Models from Scratch," *The Journal of American Folklore* 119: 471 (Winter 2006), 30.

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