

From Farm to Factory, the Beginning of the Industrial Revolution in New England

Two hundred years ago, during the Industrial Revolution, huge changes took place in the way people lived and worked. Before the Industrial Revolution, people made what they needed on their farms by hand. That changed when people invented machines to make products much faster and easier than they could be made by hand. People working at those machines made money, and bought items like food and clothing instead of making them by hand.

Farm Life – Before the year 1820

Before the Industrial Revolution, most Americans lived on farms. The whole family worked together to make what they needed for daily life. They bartered (traded) for items they could not make themselves. A farmer may trade corn with the blacksmith for horse-shoes or nails.



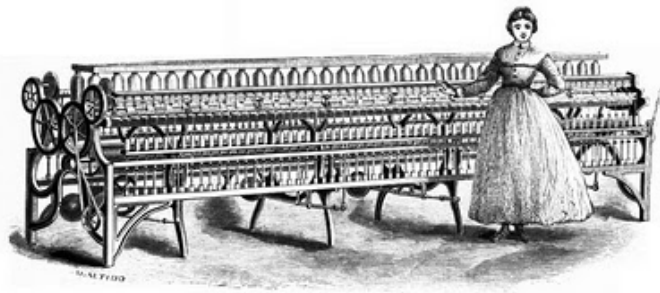
Boys and girls living on farms had specific jobs to do throughout the day and had little time for school or play. The family grew all of their food. They planted seeds in the spring, cared for fields during the summer and harvested crops in the late summer and fall. They stored food for the winter so that they would have something to eat when nothing was growing outside. They preserved fruits and vegetables and stored potatoes, squash and pumpkins in a cool, dry root cellar. Farmers cut and stored hay in the barn. Men cut wood for the fires that kept the house warm and cooked the food. The families cared for animals that provided milk, eggs, and meat. They milked cows morning and night, and gathered eggs every day.

The family also worked together and made all of their cloth and clothing by hand. Making cloth took a lot of time and effort: Farmers sheared (shaved) sheep, younger children cleaned and combed the wool, and the older daughters and mothers spun the wool into yarn, wove it into cloth and made it into clothing. Women and girls spent a lot of time throughout the year making cloth and clothing for the family.

Farm life could be difficult, but there were also opportunities for social activities. Neighbors visited, especially on Sundays. Families got together to make maple sugar, or to help each other gather crops. The sun and the seasons set the day's schedule, making each day different depending on what they needed to do. Growing up on a farm meant that you were surrounded by family and friends, but you often had little more than you needed to survive.

Factory Life – After the year 1820

Cloth was the first things mass-produced during the Industrial Revolution. Cloth made on machines was made faster and easier than cloth made by hand. Huge factories were built and filled with machines producing different kinds of cloth.



FALES & JENES' SPINNING FRAME.

Machines require people to work them and the mills needed a lot of workers. Early mill owners chose mostly young women from New England farms to run the machines. Farm girls flocked to Lowell.

On farms, everyone had many different jobs to do. In a factory a worker did the same job every day. People worked in different rooms in the mills. In the carding rooms, dangerous machines combed the cotton. The cotton was

turned into thread in the spinning rooms. In the weave rooms threads were woven into finished cloth. Everyone in the factory spent 13-14 hours a day in the hot, noisy rooms working at dangerous machines. Cotton dust filled the air, making it hard to breathe.

Lowell also had many opportunities not found elsewhere. Boardinghouses owned by the mills served as “home” for the young workers. They lived with others their own age, and a boardinghouse keeper served them three meals a day. Workers earned money and had a lot of fun and interesting things to do in the city. They sent their money home, or bought themselves new clothes and books or saved it for the future.

By the 1840s, nearly 10,000 women and 2000 men left New England farms to work in Lowell’s mills. Lowell was a city of possibilities and adventure for some; for others, the city meant nothing but long days and hard work.

Farm image courtesy Old Sturbridge Village (www.osv.org)

Factory image courtesy Lowell National Historical Park (www.nps.gov/lowe)