

Life at Lowell Mills

Factory Rules from the Handbook to Lowell, 1848

REGULATIONS TO BE OBSERVED by all persons employed in the factories of the Hamilton Manufacturing Company. The overseers are to be always in their rooms at the starting of the mill, and not absent unnecessarily during working hours. They are to see that all those employed in their rooms, are in their places in due season, and keep a correct account of their time and work. They may grant leave of absence to those employed under them, when they have spare hands to supply their places, and not otherwise, except in cases of absolute necessity.

All persons in the employ of the Hamilton Manufacturing Company, are to observe the regulations of the room where they are employed. They are not to be absent from their work without the consent of the over-seer, except in cases of sickness, and then they are to send him word of the cause of their absence. They are to board in one of the houses of the company and give information at the counting room, where they board, when they begin, or, whenever they change their boarding place; and are to observe the regulations of their boarding-house.

Those intending to leave the employment of the company, are to give at least two weeks' notice thereof to their overseer.

All persons entering into the employment of the company, are considered as engaged for twelve months, and those who leave sooner, or do not comply with all these regulations, will not be entitled to a regular discharge.

The company will not employ any one who is habitually absent from public worship on the Sabbath, or known to be guilty of immorality.

A physician will attend once in every month at the counting-room, to vaccinate all who may need it, free of expense.

Any one who shall take from the mills or the yard, any yarn, cloth or other article belonging to the company, will be considered guilty of stealing and be liable to prosecution.

Payment will be made monthly, including board and wages. The accounts will be made up to the last Saturday but one in every month, and paid in the course of the following week.

These regulations are considered part of the contract, with which all persons entering into the employment of the Hamilton Manufacturing Company, engage to comply.

JOHN AVERY, Agent.

Massachusetts Investigation into Labor Conditions

Excerpted from Massachusetts House Document, no. 50, March of 1845.

The Special Committee to which was referred sundry petitions relating to the hours of labor, have considered the same and submit the following Report:

... On the 13th of February, the Committee held a session to hear the petitioners from the city of Lowell. Six of the female and three of the male petitioners were present, and gave in their testimony.

... Miss Sarah G. Bagely said she had worked in the Lowell Mills eight years and a half, six years and a half on the Hamilton Corporation, and two years on the Middlesex. She is a weaver, and works by the piece. She worked in the mills three years before her health began to fail. She is a native of New Hampshire, and went home six weeks during the summer. Last year she was out of the mill a third of the time. She thinks the health of the operatives is not so good as the health of females who do house-work or millinery business. The chief evil, so far as health is concerned, is the shortness of time allowed for meals. The next evil is the length of time employed -not giving them time to cultivate their minds. She spoke of the high moral and intellectual character of the girls. That many were engaged as teachers in the Sunday schools. That many attended the lectures of the Lowell Institute; and she thought, if more time was allowed, that more lectures would be given and more girls attend. She thought that the girls generally were favorable to the ten hour system. She had presented a petition, same as the one before the Committee, to 132 girls, most of whom said that they would prefer to work but ten hours. In a pecuniary point of view, it would be better, as their health would be improved. They would have more time for sewing. Their intellectual, moral and religious habits would also be benefited by the change. Miss Bagely said, in addition to her labor in the mills, she had kept evening school during the winter months, for four years, and thought that this extra labor must have injured her health.

... From Mr. Clark, the agent of the Merrimack Corporation, we obtained the following table of the time which the mills run during the year.

Begin work.

From 1st May to 31st August, at 5 o'clock.

From 1st September to 30th April, as soon as they can see.

Breakfast.

From 1st November to 28th February, before going to work.

From 1st March to 31st of March, at 7 ¼ o'clock.

From 1st April to 19th September, at seven o'clock.

From 20th September to 31st October, at 7 1/2 o'clock. Return in half an hour.

Dinner.

Through the year at 12 ½ o'clock.

From 1st May to 31st August, return in 45 minutes.

From October, at 7 ½ o'clock.

Return in half an hour.

Dinner.

Through the year at 12 ½ o'clock.

From 1st May to 31st August, return in 45 minutes.

From 1st September to 30th April, return in 30 minutes.

Quit work.

From 1st May to 31st August, at 7 o'clock.

From 1st September to 19th September, at dark.

From 20th September to 19th March, at 7 ½ o'clock.

From 20th March to 30th April, at dark.

Lamps are never lighted on Saturday evenings. The above is the time which is kept in all the mills in Lowell, with a slight difference in the machine shop; and it makes the average daily time throughout the year, of running the mills, to be twelve hours and ten minutes.

There are four days in the year which are observed as holidays, and on which the mills are never put in motion. These are Fast Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. These make one day more than is usually devoted to pastime in any other place in New England. The following table shows the average hours of work per day, throughout the year, in the Lowell Mills:

	Hours	Minutes		Hours	Minutes
January	11	24	July	12	45
February	12		August	12	45
March	11	52	September	12	23
April	13	31	October	12	10
May	12	45	November	11	56
June	12	45	December	11	24

A Description of Factory Life by an Associationist in 1846

...We have lately visited the cities of Lowell and Manchester, and have had an opportunity of examining the factory system more closely than before. We had distrusted the accounts, which we had heard from persons engaged in the Labor Reform, now beginning to agitate New England; we could scarcely credit the statements made in relation to the exhausting nature of the labor in the mills, and to the manner in which the young women, the operatives, lived in their boarding-houses, six sleeping in a room, poorly ventilated.

We went through many of the mills, talked particularly to a large number of the operatives, and ate at their boarding-houses, on purpose to ascertain by personal inspection the facts of the case. We assure our readers that very little information is possessed, and no correct judgments formed, by the public at large, of our factory system, which is the first germ of the Industrial or Commercial Feudalism, that is to spread over our land.

In Lowell live between seven and eight thousand young women, who are generally daughters of farmers of the different States of New England; Some of them are members of families that were rich the generation before.

The operatives work thirteen hours a day in the summer time, and from daylight to dark in the winter. At half past four in the morning the factory bell rings, and at five the girls must be in the mills. A clerk, placed as a watch, observes those who are a few minutes behind the time, and effectual means are taken to stimulate to punctuality. This is the morning commencement of the industrial discipline- (should we not rather say industrial tyranny?) which is established in these Associations of this moral and Christian community. At seven the girls are allowed thirty minutes for breakfast, and at noon thirty minutes more for dinner, except during the first quarter of the year, when the time is extended to forty-five minutes. But within this time they must hurry to their boarding-houses and return to the factory, and that through the hot sun, or the rain and cold. A meal eaten under such circumstances must be quite unfavorable to digestion and health, as any medical man will inform us. At seven o'clock in the evening the factory bell sounds the close of the days work.

Thus thirteen hours per day of close attention and monotonous labor are exacted from the young women in these manufactories. . . So fatigued-we should say, exhausted and worn out but we wish to speak of the system in the simplest language-are numbers of the girls, that they go to bed soon after their evening meal? and endeavor by a comparatively long sleep to resuscitate their weakened frames for the toils of the coming day. When Capital has got thirteen hours of labor daily out of a being, it can get nothing more. It could be a poor speculation in an industrial point of view to own the operative; for the trouble and expense of providing for times of sickness and old age could more than counterbalance the difference between the price of wages and the expense of board and clothing. The far greater number of fortunes, accumulated by the North in comparison with the South, shows that hiring labor is more profitable for Capital than slave labor.

Now let us examine the nature of the labor itself, and the conditions under which it is performed. Enter with us into the large rooms, when the looms are at work. The largest that we saw is in the Amoskeag Mills at Manchester. It is four hundred feet long, and about seventy broad; there are five hundred looms, and twenty-one thousand spindles in it. The din and clatter of these five hundred looms under full operation, struck us on first entering as something frightful and infernal, for it seemed such a n atrocious violation of one of the faculties of the human soul, the sense of hearing. After a while we became somewhat inured to it, and by speaking quite close to the ear of an operative and quite loud, we could hold a conversation, and make the inquiries we wished. The girls attend upon an average three looms; many attend four, but this requires a very active person, and the most unremitting care. However, a great many do it. Attention to two is as much as should be demanded of an operative. This gives us some id ea of the application required during the thirteen hours of daily laborer. The atmosphere of such a room cannot of course be pure; on the contrary it is charged with cotton filaments and dust, which, we were told, are very injurious to the lungs. On entering the room, although the day was warm, we remarked that the windows were down; we asked the reason, and a young woman answered very naively, and without seeming to be in the least aware that this privation of fresh air was anything else than perfectly natural, that "when the wind blew, the threads did not work so well." After we had been in the room for fifteen or twenty minutes, we found ourselves, as did the persons who accompanied us, in quite a perspiration, produced by a certain moisture which we observed in the air, as well as by the heat.

The young women sleep upon an average six in room; three beds to a room. There is no privacy, no retirement here; it is almost impossible to read or write alone, as the parlor is full and so many sleep in the same chamber. A young woman remarked to us , that if she had a letter to write, she did it on the head of a band-box, sitting on a trunk, as there was not space for a table. So live and toil the young women of our country in the boarding-houses and manufactories, which the rich and influential of our land have built for them.

The Editor of the Courier and Enquirer has often accused the Associationists of wishing to reduce men "to herd together like beasts of the field." We would ask him whether he does not find as much of what may be called "herding together in these modern industrial Associations, established by men of his own kidney as he thinks would exist in one of the Industrial Phalanxes, which we propose.

Boarding House Rules from the Handbook to Lowell, 1848

REGULATIONS FOR THE BOARDING-HOUSES of the Hamilton Manufacturing Company. The tenants of the boarding-houses are not to board, or permit any part of their houses to be occupied by any person, except those in the employ of the company, without special per mission.

They will be considered answerable for any improper conduct in their houses, and are not to permit their boarders to have company at unseasonable hours.

The doors must be closed at ten o'clock in the evening, and no person admitted after that time, without some reasonable excuse.

The keepers of the boarding-houses must give an account of the number, names and employment of their boarders, when required, and report the names of such as are guilty of any improper conduct, or are not in the as are guilty of any improper conduct, or are not in the regular habit of attending public worship.

The buildings, and yards about them, must be kept clean and in good order; and if they are injured, other-wise than from ordinary use, all necessary repairs will be made, and charged to the occupant.

The sidewalks, also, in front of the houses, must be kept clean, and free from snow, which must be removed from them immediately after it has ceased falling; if neglected, it will be removed by the company at the expense of the tenant.

It is desirable that the families of those who live in the houses, as well as the boarders, who have not had the kine pox, should be vaccinated, which will be done at the expense of the company, for such as wish it.

Some suitable chamber in the house must be reserved, and appropriated for the use of the sick, so that others may not be under the necessity of sleeping in the same room.

JOHN AVERY, Agent.