

# A CALL FOR FACTORY REFORM

---

*Conditions in early factories began to attract the attention of reformers by the 1830s. The factories that grew in Lowell, Massachusetts, drew particular attention because the textile mills there generally relied on young women to operate the machinery. This report (condensed here) describes the working conditions.*

We have lately visited the cities of Lowell and Manchester, and have had an opportunity of examining the factory system more closely than before.

In Lowell live between seven and eight thousand young women, who are generally daughters of farmers of the different States of New England. The operatives [workers] 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.

At seven the girls are allowed thirty minutes for breakfast, and at noon thirty 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. 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 day's work.

Thus thirteen hours per day of close attention and monotonous labor are exacted from the young women in these manufactories. So fatigued are numbers of the girls that they go to bed soon after their evening meal.

Enter with us into the large rooms, when the looms are at work. The largest that we

saw is four hundred feet long, and about seventy broad. There are five hundred looms. The din [noise] and clatter struck us as something frightful and infernal.

The girls attend upon an average of three looms; many attend four, but this requires a very active person, and the most unremitting care. Attention to two is as much as should be demanded of an operative.

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. Although the day was warm, the windows were down. We asked the reason, and a young woman answered, 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 in quite a perspiration, caused by a certain moisture in the air, as well as by the heat.

The young women sleep upon an average six in a room; three beds to a room. There is no privacy; it is almost impossible to read or write alone, as the parlor is so full. So live and work the young women of our country in the boarding-houses and manufactories, which the rich and influential of our land have built for them.

**Group Discussion:** *What were conditions like for workers in early textile factories in Massachusetts? How do you think the factory owners might have responded to this report?*

