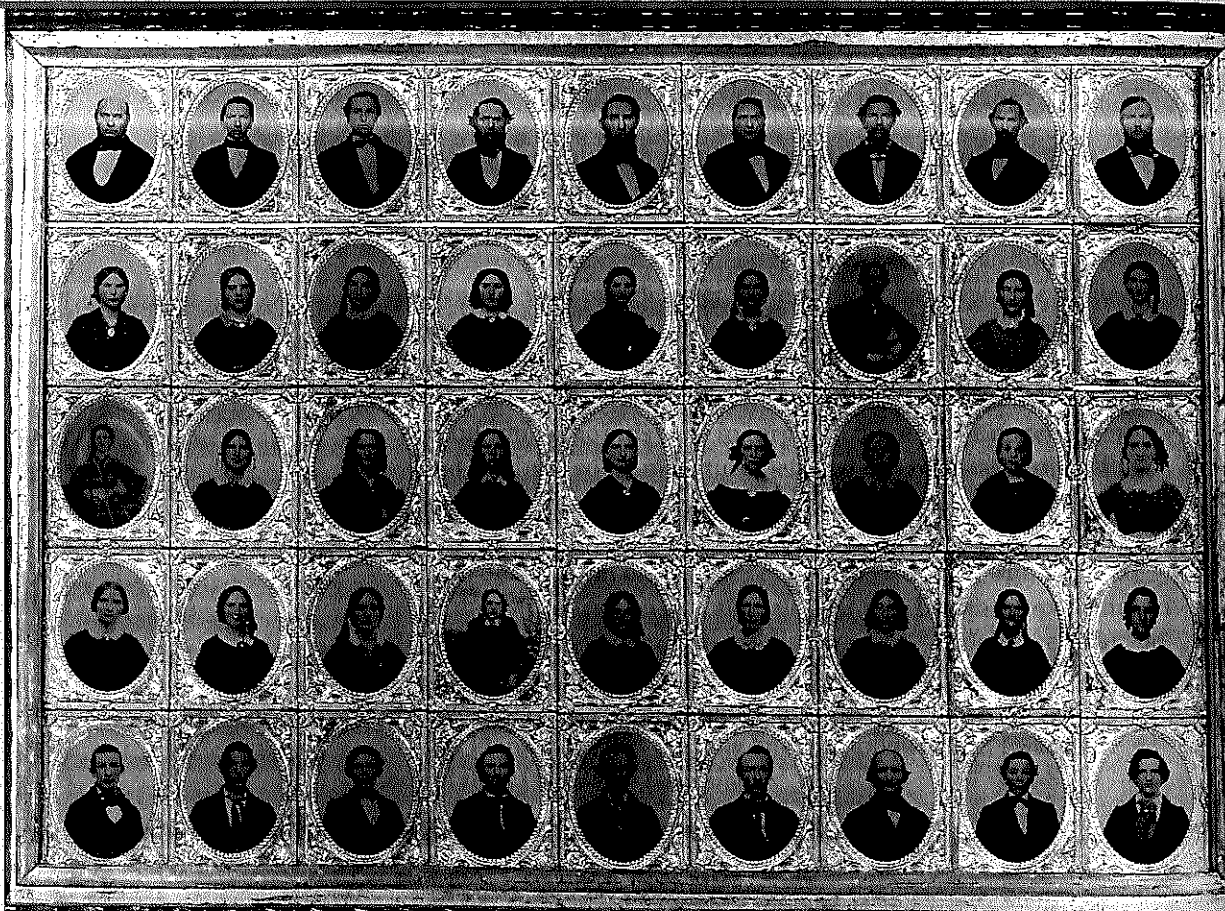


7

Northern Society and the Growth of Wage Labor

1790-1837



The Early-Nineteenth-Century North

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LIKE ONE IN THREE Massachusetts women of her generation, Abigail McIntire was pregnant when she married in 1788. Her husband, Mayo Greenleaf Patch, owned no property, so the couple lived in a small house built by Abigail's father, earning money by shoemaking. A decade and six children later, the Patches were struggling to make a living from rented farms and shoemakers' shops in various places and getting deeper into debt. In 1807, they moved to Pawtucket, Rhode Island, where spinning mills turned slave-grown cotton from the South into yarn for making cloth. Abigail and the children worked at home, cleaning cotton and weaving cloth for the mills. Mayo took to drink, stole Abigail's and the children's wages, and in 1812 walked out on them. Six years later, after he had been imprisoned for counterfeiting, Abigail divorced him. She and her children continued to support themselves by working for wages in Pawtucket. One of the sons, Sam, later obtained notoriety as a daredevil jumper. Poverty and wage labor, the growth of manufacturing and the factory system, women's labor in early factories and domestic outwork, the connections between northern industry and the slave economy of the South—all these facets of Abigail's life also had broad significance for the transformation of the North in the early nineteenth century.

New Hampshire Textile Mill Workers

Framed portraits of workers of
the Amoskeag Manufacturing
Company in Manchester, New
Hampshire, c. 1854. Manchester
Historic Association.

The Early-Nineteenth-Century North

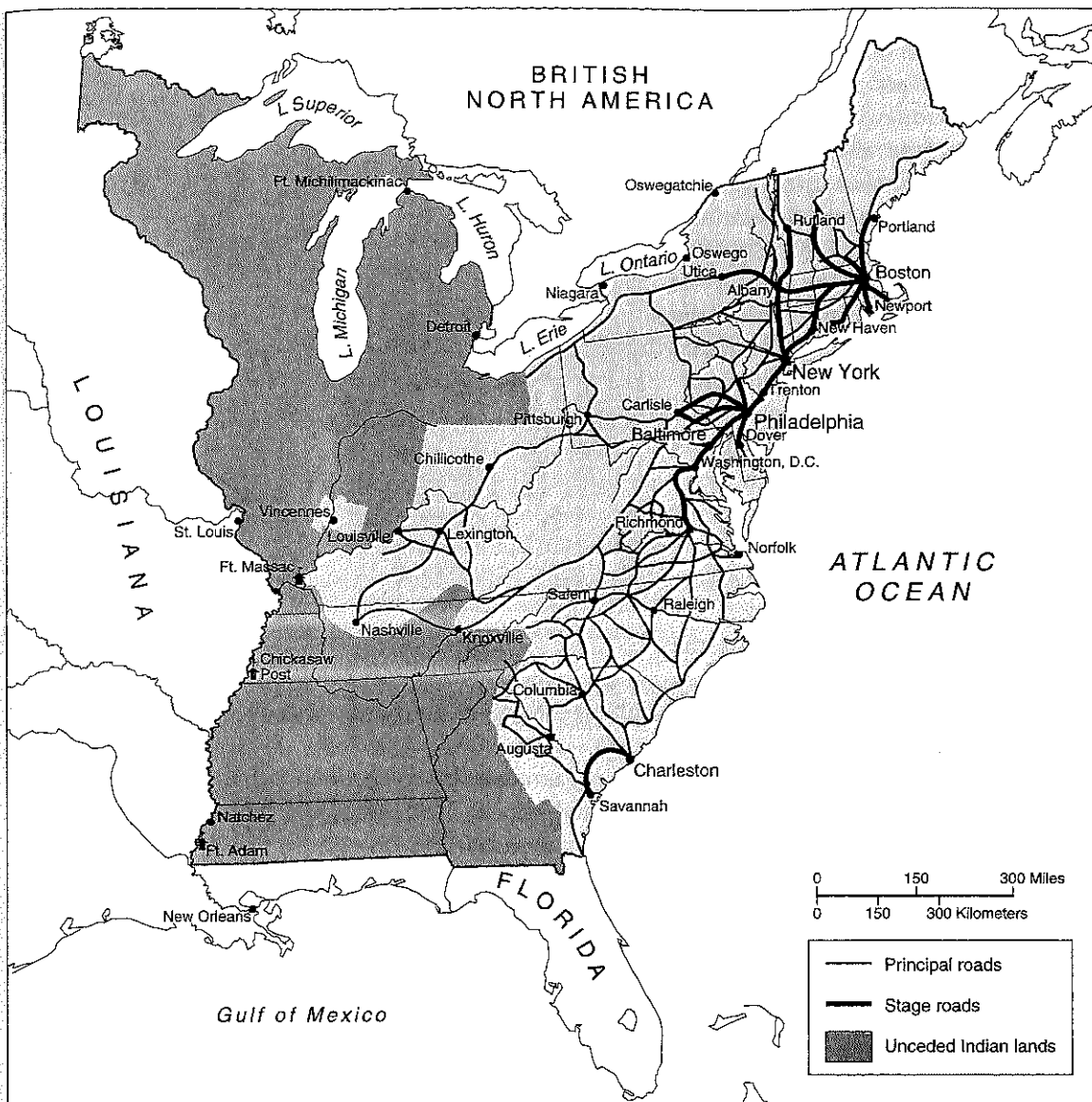
The Patches' story illustrates the struggle of thousands of northern families to sustain their economic independence in the years after the American Revolution. Many faced scarce resources in settled rural regions such as eastern

Massachusetts and were obliged to move or change their occupations. Many would leave for the newly opening West, hoping to establish successful farms on frontier land. Others went to sea or to the growing port cities. The Patches were among the first to become wageworkers in the North's new manufacturing industries. Men and women who remained in the countryside also became increasingly involved in producing goods for sale or in working for wages (Map 7.1).

Many Northerners hoped that economic prosperity would guarantee their material independence. Whereas in the plantation South, the expansion of slavery created a growing propertyless and dependent workforce, it seemed possible that the North, where slavery was disappearing, would become a society of independent proprietors. Instead, northern towns, industries, and farms came to rely increasingly on the labor of wageworkers. In 1800, about 12 percent of the U.S. labor force worked for wages. By 1860, the proportion was around 40 percent, and the majority of wage employees were concentrated in the North. This change signaled a growing divergence between northern and southern societies and called into question the republican vision of property-owning independence for most Americans. It also gave rise to a working people's movement. By the 1830s, wage earners were defending their economic position and asserting their right to equal respect with their more prosperous fellow citizens.

Republican Ideology One legacy of the American Revolution was the belief that the republic would best be preserved if voters were politically “independent,” not subject to coercion by others. At first, this seemed best assured if voters were economically “independent,” too. They should own property, which would give them a stake in society and free them from the influence of people with some hold over them. Those without property—women, children, the poor, servants, and slaves—were regarded as “dependent” on others and so to be excluded from voting, officeholding, or public political debate. Women were assigned the role of “republican mothers,” expected to raise their children to be virtuous citizens but not themselves to obtain the full benefits of citizenship.

These “republican” assumptions were widely shared, North and South. An overwhelming majority of Americans were engaged in agriculture, many on small freehold farms, and a significant proportion of men owned land. Indeed, most people expected the United States to have an agrarian future, and this expectation was to some extent borne out. Rural society expanded rapidly. By 1840, over 80 percent of people in the North still lived in rural areas; in the South, the proportion was over 90 percent. Most continued to work in agriculture, and agricultural goods such as cotton, grain, and lumber were among the United States' most important products.



MAP 7.1 The United States at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

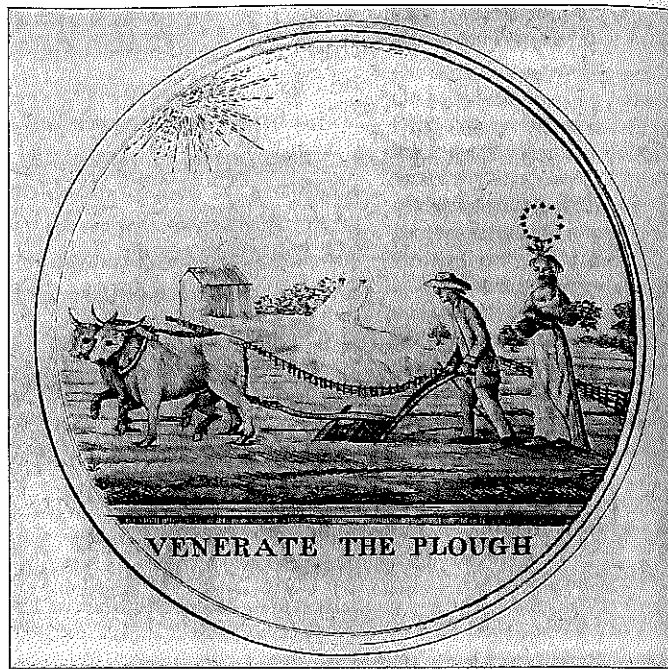
While migration to the frontier pushed the settled areas of the United States westward and southward, the northeastern states were already emerging as a region of denser population, larger urban centers, and better roads than in the rest of the nation. D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, vol. 2, *Continental America, 1800–1867* (1993).

Belief in the virtues of rural life was deeply ingrained. Suspicious of cities with their crowds and potential disorder, Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1785 that farmers were “the chosen people of God” and implied that urban growth would threaten the republic’s future. When he arranged the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, doubling the territory of the United States, Jefferson hailed the acquisition of a vast reserve of land that could ensure the future of a property-owning republic; the United States would grow crops to feed its population and export abroad, exchanging them for manufactures produced in more socially unequal countries such as Britain. As late as 1810, Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin claimed that “the superior attractions of agricultural pursuits, the abundance of land compared with the population, the high price of labor, and the want of sufficient capital” would inhibit the growth of American manufacturing.

Other circumstances also appeared to favor an agrarian future. The cotton gin boosted cotton exports from the South, and wars in Europe following the French Revolution of 1789 fostered American trade with markets in Western Europe and the Mediterranean. Northern merchants established new trade links with Asia. All expanded the overseas commerce that could supply America’s need for manufactures.

Jefferson and others who extolled rural America’s republican virtues did not suggest that all rural people were fit to exercise political leadership. Beneath the partisan strife of the 1790s and 1800s between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans lay shared expectations about who should rule. Federalists were explicitly elitist. “The best men,” whose birth, education, or wealth guaranteed their virtue and independence, should govern; lesser property owners should defer to these leaders and accept their authority. Democratic-Republicans attacked the most hierarchical of these assumptions, but leaders such as Jefferson also assumed that power would be exercised by a “natural aristocracy” whose talents best suited them for government.

Yet the success of the Revolution, the opening of the continent, and the establishment of new state and federal governments sowed the seeds of economic change and new political traditions. During the early nineteenth cen-



“Venerate the Plough”

The independent farmer plowed the path to prosperity for the Republic on this seal of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture. “The Plan of a Farm Yard,” *Columbian Magazine*, October 1786 — American Philosophical Society Library.

tury, political culture was transformed, turning republicanism in a more democratic direction, although restricting participation to white males only. It also became clear that the United States would not remain simply an agrarian society. Particularly in the North, economic development altered the republican vision. By 1840, an industrial revolution was under way in the Northeast. Cities were growing rapidly in size and influence. Population growth and commercial expansion were creating new divisions, both between North and South and within northern society itself.

Rural Society in the North Though North and South were both mainly rural in 1800, they differed greatly. Southern planters used a large enslaved workforce to produce exportable commodities. Most northern whites, in contrast, lived in small-farm regions that consumed much of what they produced. Family farming, supported by cooperation between neighbors, sustained a republican notion of economic independence that contemporaries often referred to as a “modest competence.”

Typical northern farms were modestly sized, between 40 and 120 acres, and worked by the families that owned them. Employment as a laborer or tenant was often a stepping-stone to acquiring one’s own farm. Even so,

“There Is No Want of Meat and Drink Here”: An Immigrant Writes Home

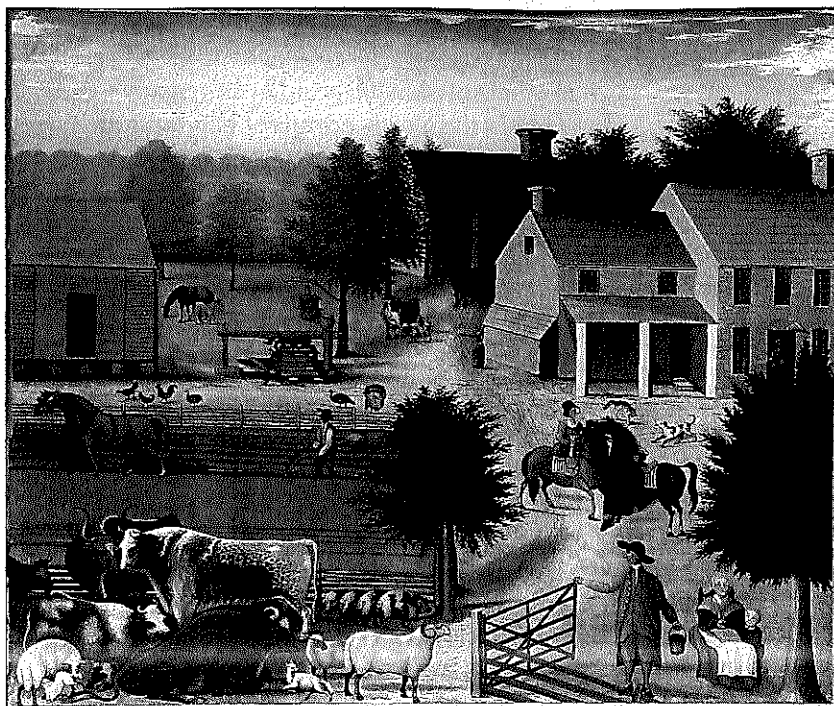
In the following letter, written in August 1818 from Germantown, Pennsylvania, Alice Barlow describes in detail the bounty of available food and drink. Letters such as this helped to lure other Northern Europeans to migrate to America in the decades that followed.

Dear Mother:

I write to say we are all in good health, and hope this will find you so. . . . Tell my brother John I think he would do very well here; my husband can go out and catch a bucket of fish in a few minutes; and John brings as many apples as he can carry, when he comes from school; also cherries, grapes, and peaches, we get as much bread as we can all eat in a day for seven pence; altho’ it is now called dear [expensive]. Dear mother, I wish you were all as well off as we now are: there is no want of meat and drink here. We have a gallon of spirits every week; and I have a bottle of porter per day myself, in short I have everything I could wish. . . . Tell little Adam, if he was here, he would get puddings and pies every day. Tell my old friends I shall be looking for them next spring; and also tell my brother John and sister Ann, if they were here, they would know nothing of poverty. I live like an Indian Queen. . . .

Your affectionate daughter,
Alice Barlow

Edith Abbott, ed., *Historical Aspects of the Immigration Problem* (1926).



The Residence of David Twining, 1787

Edward Hicks, a Quaker painter of coaches and signs, completed this painting in the late 1840s. Hicks's idealized representation of a "well-ordered" eighteenth-century farm was based on memories of his childhood with the Twining family in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Edward Hicks, 1845–1848 — Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg, Virginia.

inequality was widespread. Tenancy blighted parts of New York and other states, and some farmers still held slaves who were not yet freed under gradual emancipation laws. Landless farm laborers could be found everywhere, and a majority of free blacks in the rural North owned little or no land. Still, the ideal of land ownership remained within reach for many. Journeying through New York and New England, the Reverend Timothy Dwight was convinced that "[n]o man here begins life with the expectation of being a mere laborer. All intend to possess, and almost all actually possess, a comfortable degree of prosperity and independence." For white farmers at least, landownership conferred the right to be treated by others as an equal.

Economic independence required the labor of all family members. Husbands and sons, by and large, worked the fields. Most other tasks, including manufacturing household goods, fell to wives and daughters. One farm journal reported that women's work amounted to half of all farm labor:

Women . . . picked their own wool, . . . spun their own yarn, drove their own looms, made and mended their own chairs, braided their own baskets, wove their own carpets, quilts, and coverlets, . . . milked their own cows, [and] fed their own calves.

On their Maine farm in the 1790s, Martha Ballard and her daughters produced cloth, raised garden produce, preserved vegetables, and did

household chores, and Ballard served as a midwife in her neighborhood. Women raised children, nursed the sick, and cared for the elderly. Men celebrated an economic independence that rested heavily on the skills and exertions of their sisters, wives, and daughters.

Farm families were often linked by ties of kinship, religion, and ethnicity. Most settlements included a church, a general store, and a few artisans, such as carpenters and blacksmiths, who might ply their trades only part-time. Proper schoolhouses, doctors, and lawyers were scarce. Families exchanged work and goods, sharing tools or lending a hand when harvesting or barn raising required extra help.

Beyond these local ties, rural independence also rested on links to outside markets, most significant in grain-exporting regions such as Pennsylvania but essential everywhere for the assurance of even minimal comfort. Salt, sugar, molasses, coffee, tea, tobacco, gunpowder, guns, knives, and axes could not be produced at home, and farm families exchanged crops or home manufactures to pay for them. Yet as late as 1820, only one-fifth of the North's farm output found its way beyond local communities into urban markets. Farm families also purchased modestly. About two-thirds of the clothing rural Americans wore between 1810 and 1820 was homemade, mostly by women. Poor transportation hindered inland trade, protecting those producing for local markets from distant competitors. With few rivers and poor roads connecting coast and hinterland, a ton of goods cost as much to ship 30 miles overland as to be brought by sea from Europe.

Towns and Commerce In 1800, the northern merchant elite conducted business largely in the cities and smaller port towns of the coast. Unlike southern planters, they were not generally directly concerned with production but obtained their wealth from trade. Urban markets were small; fewer than one in twelve Americans lived in places with populations of 2,500 or more. The biggest mercantile profits went to traders in oceangoing commerce between the Americas and Europe. American neutrality in the European wars of the 1790s and early 1800s gave merchants from the Northeast dominance of trade routes that were largely closed to other nations. Trade with China, first established in the mid-1780s by merchants in Philadelphia and Salem, Massachusetts, offered substantial profits from the sale of the tea, silks, porcelain, lacquerware, and other exotic goods brought back to the United States.

Mercantile success brought great wealth to some Americans and provided employment to many others, especially smaller merchants and the sailmakers, ropemakers, carpenters, caulkers, and barrel makers whose crafts were connected with shipping. But the benefits were not equally shared. After farmers, the nation's largest group of workers were seamen, who labored for modest wages in dangerous conditions, often on long

voyages. Large numbers of women in the port towns struggled for livelihoods while their husbands were absent: Lydia Almy of Salem wove cloth, tanned leather, made cider, looked after livestock, worked in the fields, carted wood, and cooked for boarders at her house. Boston mariners' wives worked for the city's ropemakers and other employers. Many were poor. In every port lived widows and families of men who never returned from the sea.

Maritime trade did not substantially improve the North's position in world production. "The brilliant prospects held out by commerce," wrote Adam Seybert, a Philadelphia congressman, "caused our citizens to neglect the mechanical and manufacturing branches of industry." Between 1795 and 1815, the United States ran up a large trade deficit, spending \$350 million more for foreign goods than it received for exports. Indeed, nearly half of U.S. exports were really re-exports—goods produced abroad, purchased by American merchants, and resold to other countries. Although this kind of trade amassed profits, it did not directly stimulate the growth of domestic commercial agriculture or industry.

A Transformation Begins

Pressure for change came from several directions. Immigration from Europe, especially to the Middle Atlantic region, increased the supply of urban labor. European warfare in the early nineteenth century encouraged many merchants to redirect their attention from overseas to domestic investment. Transportation improvements, linking coastal areas to the interior, fostered the emergence of regional and national markets for goods. Faced with population growth and inequalities, farm families in rural areas migrated or sought fresh sources of income. All these developments contributed to the expansion of manufacturing in many parts of the North and to the emergence of new patterns of labor and social division.

Population Pressure and Westward Movements This pressure for change arose partly within rural society. For some farmers, maintaining independence required accumulating wealth, but for most, it meant achieving a "competency": cultivating enough land to feed a family, to acquire necessities that could not be made at home, and to obtain land on which grown sons could establish their own farms. Population growth and land scarcity in older regions made these things difficult to achieve. Many southern New England farms were too small to support all the offspring of large families and ran short of essentials, such as wood for fuel. One son might be given a farm of his own on coming of age, but dividing a homestead among several sons would create small, unprofitable holdings. According to their means, farmers took various steps to avoid this. They turned to the market-

Harriet Noble's Life on the Michigan Frontier

Harriet Noble and her family took the northernmost of the major migration routes west, crossing upstate New York and Lake Erie to reach Detroit. While helping her husband to complete their cabin on their isolated farm, Harriet, like many women on the frontier, lamented the absence of neighbors and social institutions.

There was one house here, Judge Dexter's; he was building a sawmill, and had a number of men at work at the time; besides these there was not a white family west of Ann Arbor in Michigan territory. . . . I helped to raise the rafters and put on the roof [of their log house], but it was the last of November before our roof was completed. We were obliged to wait for the mill to run in order to get boards for making it. The doorway I had no means of closing except by hanging up a blanket, and frequently when I would raise it to step out, there would be two or three of our dusky neighbors peeping in to see what was there. It would always give me such a start, I could not suppress a scream, to which they would reply with "Ugh!" and a hearty laugh. They knew I was afraid, and liked to torment me. Sometimes they would throng the house and stay two or three hours. If I was alone they would help themselves to what they liked. . . . At last we got a door. The next thing wanted was a chimney; winter was close at hand and the stone was not drawn. I said to my husband, "I think I can drive the oxen and draw the stones, while you dig them from the ground and load them." He thought I could not, but consented to let me try. . . . My husband and myself were four days building [our chimney]. I suppose most of my lady friends would think a woman quite out of "her legitimate sphere" in turning mason, but I was not at all particular what kind of labor I performed, so we were only comfortable and provided with the necessities of life. . . . The roads had been so bad all the fall that . . . I think it was December when my husband went to Detroit for supplies. Fifteen days were consumed in going and coming. We had been without flour for three weeks or more, and it was hard to manage with young children thus. After being without bread three or four days, my little boy, two years old, looked me in the face and said, "Ma, why don't you make bread; don't you like it? I do." His innocent complaint brought forth the first tears I had shed in Michigan on account of any privations I had to suffer, and they were about the last. I am not of a desponding disposition, nor often low-spirited, and having left New York to make Michigan my home, I had no idea of going back, or being very unhappy. Yet the want of society, of church privileges, and in fact almost every thing that makes life desirable, would often make me sad in spite of all effort to the contrary. . . .

Elizabeth F. Ellet, *Pioneer Women of the West* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1852), 388–395.

place to raise the cash (at least \$600 in the 1830s) to buy new farms for their sons. They tried new crops and raised more livestock for sale. In some regions, farm women increased their output of dairy produce.

In search of more land, many people migrated westward. Starting in the 1780s but in increasing numbers after 1815, families moved from older farming districts in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania to “new” land in western New York, the Ohio Valley, and the Great Lakes region. Expansion led to the destruction of Native American groups such as the Shawnees and the Wyandots, the seizure of their lands, and the removal of their populations. By 1800, the white population of Ohio had reached 45,000; twenty years later, it was 581,000. Though many new settlers found renewed prosperity by moving west and encouraged others to follow them, some advised caution. John Stillman Wright sold his New York farm in 1818 and went to Ohio but later published *Letters from the West*, warning of “the cruel disappointment and vain regret, which so many thousands are now enduring.”

Instead of migrating, some sons (as well as daughters) without land or other means stayed in the East but moved to the towns, tried new occupations, or became laborers. With new immigrants from Europe, they swelled urban populations, turning small market centers into bustling towns and large ports such as New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore into metropolises. Both in the countryside and in towns, more people engaged in manufacturing and formed America’s first industrial workforce.

Improvements in Transportation and Communication Wealthy merchants reinforced these changes as they turned their attention from international trade to the American continent. Some speculated in urban property or western land; a handful invested directly in manufacturing. But most early-nineteenth-century investors concentrated on improving internal commerce and transportation, financing the construction of roads, bridges, and canals and later of steamboats and railroads. State and local governments encouraged such investments. By 1812, Massachusetts had authorized the building of 105 turnpike roads, and New York had authorized more than 50. Labor for local road building was recruited from farm families, but larger projects required greater numbers of workers. Some states poured public funds directly into transport improvements. Others rewarded investors with tax exemptions, banking and lottery franchises, and corporate charters conferring lucrative monopoly privileges.

Expenditures increased steadily, producing great improvements in travel. New York State’s Erie Canal had the most remarkable effects. Built at public expense between 1817 and 1825 by thousands of laborers, both local recruits and immigrants, the canal stretched 364 miles from Albany to Buffalo, linking the Great Lakes region with New York City and transatlantic trade. Freight rates fell sharply as a result. In 1817, it cost 19 cents a mile to



Correct Likenesses, c. 1820

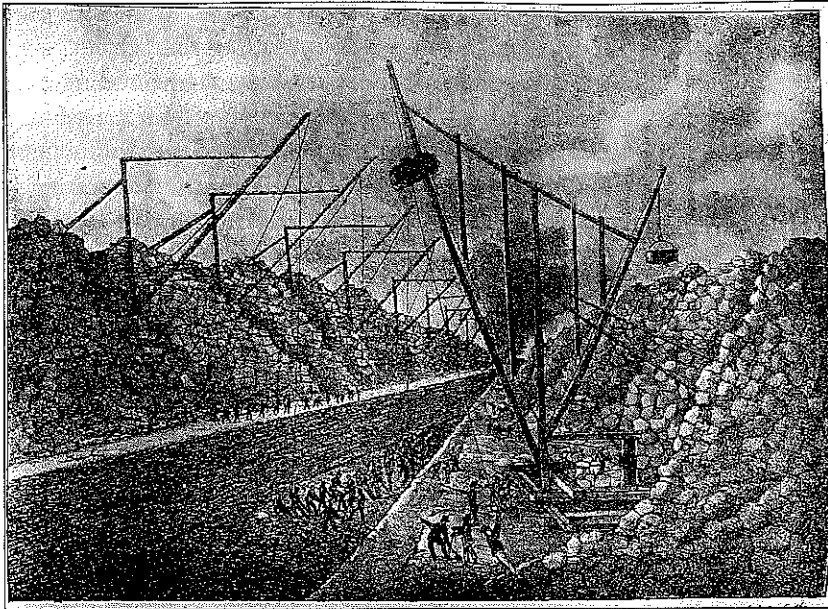
Itinerant portrait artists offered rural people reasonably priced portraits, using simplified techniques to render enough of a “correct likeness” to satisfy a client. Portraitists and other traveling tradesmen served as scouts for capital, introducing attractive goods and services to the countryside. American Anti-quarian Society.

move a ton of goods from New York to Buffalo; by the 1830s, it cost less than one-tenth of that. Other states sought to emulate the Erie’s success by building their own canals. Railroad developments soon followed. Baltimore promoters started a railroad line to the Ohio River in 1828, although it took a quarter-century to complete. By 1840, shorter railroads connected Boston and other cities with manufacturing and commercial centers in the hinterlands.

Speedier travel was only one dimension of a broader improvement in the circulation of information. Literacy rates were high in the North, and the printing and distribution of published materials flourished. Aided by improvements in printing, such as the development of the steam press, books, periodicals, and inexpensive newspapers multiplied and flowed from a growing number of local and regional centers. By 1836, nearly one in four New York City residents purchased newspapers daily. “These papers,” noted one observer, “are to be found in every street, lane, alley, in every hotel, tavern, and counting house. . . . Almost every porter and drayman, while not engaging in his occupation, may be seen with a paper in his hands.” Women’s magazines, the labor press, African American papers, and antislavery journals were all initiated during the 1820s and early 1830s.

Better communications helped to knit together regional and national markets and steadily reduced household manufacture for home use. Upstate New York farm households made an average of more than ten yards of cloth per person in 1825, but this output dropped to less than half a yard thirty years later as people switched to buying factory-made cloth. Falling freight costs made internal trade more profitable for merchants and made store-bought items of decent quality available to rural families at declining prices. Between 1809 and 1836, the prices of soap and candles fell by about one-third, and glassware, cotton mattresses, buttons, pins, and many other goods also became cheaper. “Formerly,” noted a Pennsylvanian in 1836, “no man thought of going to a tailor for a sheet. Now everybody goes to one even for a handkerchief.”

Needing cash to buy these goods, farm families devoted more of their time to raising crops and other produce for market. Instead of providing much of their own food, they purchased foodstuffs from others. Some farmers flourished as commercial producers, adding to their property, hiring less-fortunate neighbors as laborers and servants, and supporting



Building the Erie Canal

A contemporary lithograph by Anthony Imbert shows the excavation at Lockport, New York. Excavating the canal took heavy physical labor involving more than 3,000 workers. Accidents and disease took their toll on the canal workmen; during the summer of 1819, hundreds of laborers digging in the marshes adjacent to Syracuse, New York, came down with fevers, leading to many fatalities. Cadwallader Colden, *Memoir on the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals* (1825) — Metropolitan Museum of Art.

measures to increase commerce. “Our sons,” said the *New England Farmer* in 1835, “from the very cradle, breathe the air of independence—and we teach them to owe no man. It is to gratify this love of independence that they rake the ocean and the earth for money.”

But farmers who lost out in the new competition often found their independence threatened by debt or poverty. Caught between rising costs and dwindling incomes, farm families faced ruin if they could no longer produce much of their own food and clothing. They mortgaged property to stay afloat, but unless they used the loans to increase output, the debt became just another burden. By 1832, one farmer claimed, “[t]his business of mortgage has already dispossessed a large portion of the best farmers in New England, and it constantly increases.” He feared that “the independent yeomanry of our country” would soon “give place to wretched tenantry” and that “a very few rich men . . . will own the whole soil.” Another voiced the fears of many: “We are willing to work, our wives are willing to work—but spare us . . . the humiliation of performing the servile offices and living in the kitchens of our more fortunate neighbors.”

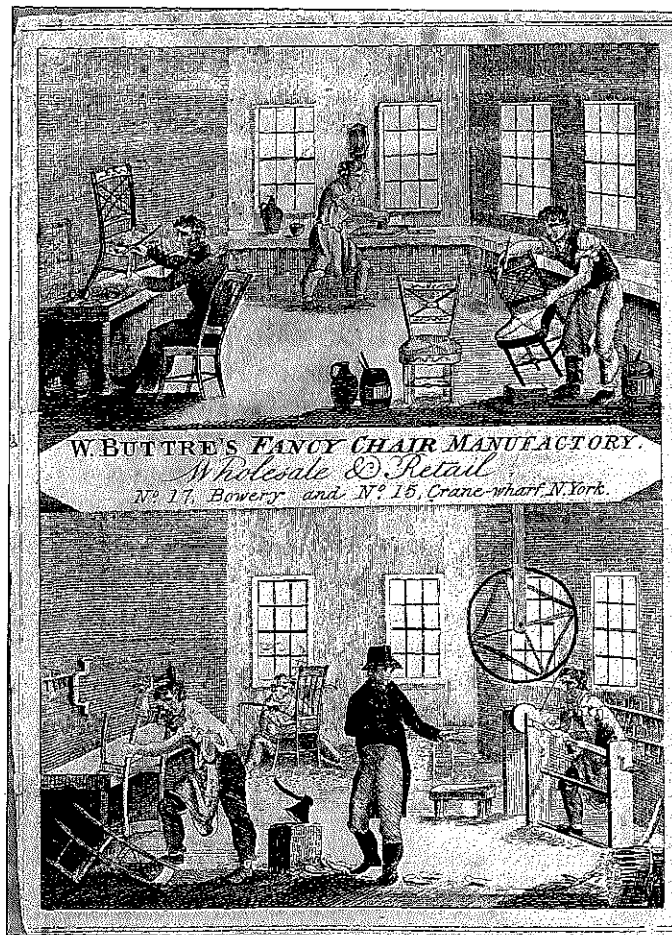
Competition from the West also challenged eastern farmers. With improved transport, produce from newly cultivated lands competed in the market with crops grown on rocky, nearly exhausted New England soils. Commerce through the Erie Canal reduced wheat production in the East and put pressure on hog and cattle raising, too. Even so, western expansion also fostered eastern commerce and manufacturing. Although little merchandise had moved westward from the seaports in 1810, by 1835, the annual

value of goods westbound on the Erie Canal alone approached \$10 million. Located on newly bustling trade routes, cities such as Buffalo, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati boomed. By the 1830s, Cincinnati was the leading center of pork packing, and the foundations were being laid for industries that would later dominate the Midwest: grain milling, meatpacking, distilling and brewing, lumbering, iron smelting, and the production of farm equipment and consumer goods.

The Start of an Industrial Revolution Manufacturing first began to develop in the East, however. Before 1850, three-quarters of America's industrial employment was concentrated in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. Many Easterners sought new occupations to supplement or replace their reliance on the land. Growing urban populations and immigrants from Europe provided the workforce that was needed to sustain an industrial revolution.

Dividing Labor

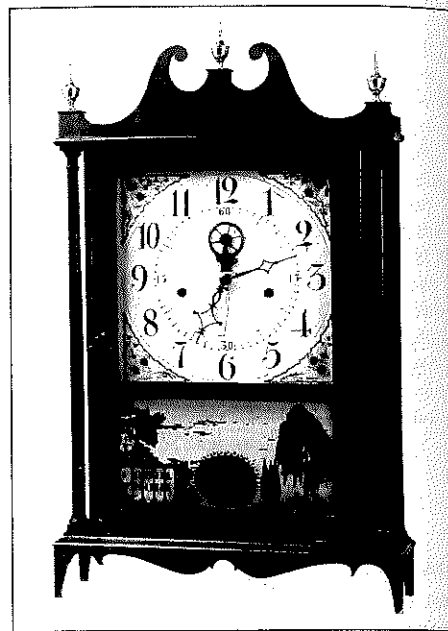
Well before mechanization, the division of labor within the workshop made possible the production of more products at cheaper prices. This trade card for William Buttre's Fancy Chair Manufactory shows the way in which production was subdivided; in the lower panel, for example, one man turns chair legs on a lathe while in the background, a younger man "seats" a chair. After 1800, fancy chairs could be found in the homes of all classes of Americans because of their attractive "classical" style and inexpensive price. Trade Card, William Buttre's Fancy Chair Manufactory, c. 1813, New York City — Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Advocates of an agrarian America opposed large-scale industry, urging that the expansion of manufactures take place at the household level: “Domestic manufacture,” wrote one, “is the object contemplated[,] instead of establishments under the sole control of capitalists.” Apart from shipbuilding and ironworking, most early manufacturing was performed in households. From the late eighteenth century onward, rural artisans and farmers complemented their work on the land with seasonal manufacturing, making tools, wagons, barrels, and other items for sale. Families supplemented meager farm earnings by making goods at home; women worked on shoes, wove straw hats, and sewed shirts for merchants who paid them by the piece. Urban artisans ran shops at their homes, assisted by live-in apprentices. Those who expanded their businesses to meet demand often did so by putting work out to other local households.

Soon, however, growing demand and investment were moving some manufactures from households into larger workshops and factories. In skilled crafts such as clothing and hat making, shoemaking, leatherworking, furniture making, printing, and bookmaking, masters took on extra apprentices or journeymen and so increased the numbers of urban waged workers. They also divided skilled tasks into separate stages, for which they could employ cheaper labor. In Connecticut, master clockmakers such as Eli Terry and Seth Thomas organized farmers and artisans to make different parts of the wooden clock movements and cases that were then assembled in their workshops.

Most yarn, cloth, and thread production also moved from homes into factories. Merchants began investing profits from overseas trade in textile operations that employed machinery that had been developed in eighteenth-century Europe. “The time spent in a factory,” explained a Massachusetts observer, “will produce at least ten times as much as it will in household manufactures.” In 1790, Samuel Slater, an immigrant with experience of the English textile industry, set up the first water-powered spinning machines in the United States in an old clothier’s shop at Pawtucket Falls, Rhode Island. Slater’s capital came from the Brown family, wealthy Providence merchants, and his success encouraged the firm of Almy, Brown, and Slater to erect the country’s first substantial textile factory in 1793. This modest, two-and-a-half-story spinning mill depended largely on children to run its machines. Adults, often the parents of child employees, were paid to weave the yarn into cloth in their own homes. It was for Slater’s mills that Abigail Patch and her children worked from 1807 onward. By 1815, southern New England boasted several yarn-spinning factories based on the Rhode Island model, and by 1840, they were common across Rhode Island, south-



A New Form of Clock

Eli Terry’s invention of a new box or shelf clock (only twenty inches tall) around 1816 transformed the clock industry and the very notion of a clock. The small and affordable shelf clock became the standard nineteenth-century timepiece, sold throughout the United States by a network of peddlers. Before Terry’s innovation, clocks were large and expensive objects made of imported brass. The box clock used less expensive wooden parts that were interchangeable — and it even came in its own case! Eli Terry, Box Clock, c. 1814–1816 — National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

"No. 5 & 7 Looms Stopped — No Weavers": A Mill Manager's Diary

Finding and disciplining an adequate supply of competent weavers plagued early textile mill managers such as N. B. Gordon, who managed a small woolen mill in rural Massachusetts. The daily entries in his 1829 diary reveal recurring problems of absenteeism, unpredictable natural conditions, and poor production standards.

January

5: One weaver sick, four looms stopped. Water wheel froze up this morning. Took until 8 o'clock to start it.

6: One weaver still sick. Four looms stopped. Water failed some about 4 o'clock.

8: Last night and yesterday warm, which gave plenty of water this day for all hands. One weaver sick. Four looms stopped.

13: 6 weavers—2 looms stopped. One weaver sick. Sally and Mary Ann Leonard out 3/4 of the day by permission.

14: Looms all in operation.

16: Fine warm day. Almira Lowell absent this day and also to be tomorrow, to bury her grandmother. P.M. went to Mr. Carver's to get harness made.

March

23: No. 4 weaver absent 1/2 day. No 5 and 6—1/4 day each. Extreme cold. Lovell's children did not get in until 1/2 past 7 a.m. on account of water on the road.

24: Mr. Thayer's party last night broke up 3 o'clock. Morning hands in consequence come in late, and one, No. 6 weaver, not until noon. H. Kingman commenced repairing the old looms.

April

18: No. 6 loom stopped, no weaver. No. 5 weaver quit.

19: Went to Norton after weavers.

21: No. 5 & 7 looms stopped—no weavers. New spinning badly tended.

Gary Kulik, Roger Parks, and Theodore Z. Penn, eds., *The New England Mill Village, 1790–1860* (1982). Reprinted with permission of MIT Press.

ern Massachusetts, and eastern Connecticut. Baltimore and Philadelphia merchants also invested in mills, and the latter city and nearby river valleys emerged as another important industrial region.

During the War of 1812, Boston merchants established another textile factory system in eastern Massachusetts, first with a mill at Waltham and during the 1820s with additional mills at a site on the Merrimack River that became the town of Lowell. The Waltham system differed from the Rhode Island system, involving a greater financial investment and operating on a



View of Lowell, Massachusetts

In this illustration, which was printed in a Merrimack Company folder containing fabric samples, the Lowell mills nestled peacefully in the countryside. American Textile History Museum.

larger scale. The first Waltham factory cost \$400,000, over ten times as much as the average Rhode Island mill. Incorporating powered weaving as well as spinning, the system mechanized each stage of cloth production. While many smaller mills were run by their owners, the Waltham and Lowell mills were managed by agents hired by the merchant proprietors. To obtain the labor they needed, they had to recruit a different kind of workforce. Most workers were young, single women from rural New England, who were attracted to the mills as household textile production declined and were called “operatives” because they worked powered machinery. Because factory work drew them away from their families’ homes, the companies constructed special boarding houses for workers, calculating that good wages and strict discipline would make them a reliable labor force.

All these developments marked a shift away from household-based production. By 1830, a decreasing number of workers lived in their employers’ households. Factory workers inhabited their own rented accommodation or—as in Waltham or Lowell—lived with fellow operatives in company boarding houses. Even when the scale of production remained small, residential separation of workers and bosses became common. Most New York City artisans had workshops attached to their homes in 1790, but by 1840, two-thirds of them lived and worked in separate places. In Rochester, New York, by 1827, fewer than one journeyman in four lived in an employer’s household. This residential separation was just part of a trend toward greater social division.

Industrialization and Social Stratification Many people born around 1800 found greater prosperity than their parents had. For some, the growth

of manufacturing brought economic success. Chauncey Jerome, son of a Connecticut blacksmith and nailmaker who died when Chauncey was eleven, started work making clock dials for Eli Terry but then built his own business. By 1840, he owned one of America's largest clock-manufacturing firms. Another Connecticut-born artisan, Thomas Rogers, began as a house carpenter, moved to Paterson, New Jersey, and was a loom builder and machinist before helping to establish, in 1831, what would become one of the nation's largest locomotive builders. Successful manufacturers such as Jerome and Rogers viewed themselves as beneficiaries of the republican ideal of a property-owning citizenry, and Rogers named his factory the Jefferson Works to commemorate this ideal's political hero. For them, industrialization brought opportunities for independence.

But amid prosperity, there was also poverty and insecurity. Trade and manufacture were increasingly competitive, there was greater reliance on wageworkers, and disparities between rich and poor grew. Periodic economic slumps created hardship and uncertainty. The first severe downturn, in 1819, ended the import boom that followed the War of 1812, putting many people into debt and out of work. Other slumps would follow, particularly in the late 1830s. Industrial growth created larger numbers of people whose labor was essential but whose access to property and wealth was limited or precarious.

Urban growth widened the disparities between rich and poor. By 1840, 38 percent of the Massachusetts population lived in settlements of over 2,500 inhabitants. Although much manufacturing took place in small towns, large industrial centers also developed, of which Philadelphia and New York City were the biggest. New York's population, over 312,000 in 1840, had almost tripled in two decades, and its manufacturing workforce—already over 25,000 strong—would more than triple in the next ten years. Migration from the countryside and from Europe provided much of this growth. Poorer workers arriving in the cities were often obliged to take low-paid unskilled or casual labor for incomes that were only a fraction of those of urban elites.

Conditions for the urban poor were often bleak. Thousands of women labored in the clothing and millinery trades for extremely low wages. An 1830 report noted needlewomen earning as little as \$55 a year and having to pay \$26 for rent alone. A missionary described visiting many homes whose "entire furnishings" were "one bed, one chair, . . . one table, one candlestick, one cup, an old pot, and a piece of a frying pan." Some middle-class reformers protested these conditions. Fearing that poverty would cause prostitution, crime, or disorder, they urged folk to stay in the countryside and called on employers to be kinder. But they had no practical solutions to propose. Poorer workers sought better pay or working conditions, but circumstances were often against them.

Wage Labor and Resistance

The early expansion of industry involved different types of labor and economic organization, as well as people of different social and national backgrounds. The changing organization of work and growing numbers of wage earners challenged the ideal of a republic of property owners. During the 1820s and 1830s, working people began to act together to defend the principles of equality in a divided society. They resisted changes in the work process, organized labor unions to secure better pay or working hours, or campaigned for legal measures that might secure their rights in a harsh economy.

Artisans and Outworkers Two important wage-earning groups were artisans (skilled craftsmen and occasionally women) and outworkers, people who were paid by the piece to perform manufacturing tasks in their homes. Traditional craft production centered on master artisans, their journeymen, and apprentice helpers, who worked together in small shops. Apprentices were boys who were contracted to work during their youth in return for instruction in the master's trade. Journeymen were trained workers who earned wages by the day. Although their relationship with the master was not an equal one, most apprentices and journeymen could hope to become masters in their own right once they had acquired skill and capital.

Commercial growth and transportation improvements increased competition between artisans and undermined their independence. Enlarged markets encouraged larger-scale output of ready-made goods, instead of custom-made production of a few items. Boston, New York, Newark, and Philadelphia shoemakers, for example, competed not only with one another, but also with Lynn, Massachusetts, the nation's rising center of shoe production. By 1820, especially in trades that supplied goods to southern and other nonlocal markets—where quantity and price, rather than quality, counted—workshops had grown in size, and tasks were subdivided into less skilled segments of work. Some New York shoe manufacturers each employed from twenty to thirty-five men and women.

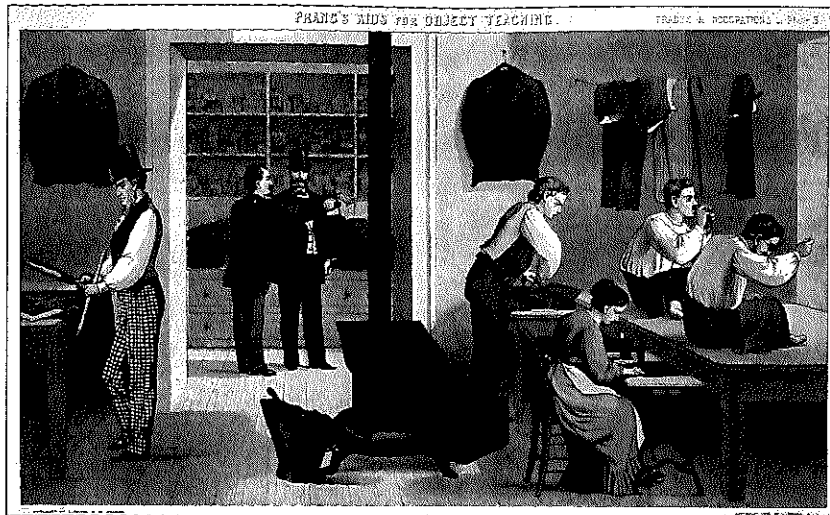
Many artisans prospered in these new conditions, but more were obliged to migrate to more promising areas or face debt and eventual dispossession of their shops and perhaps even their tools. Deprived of independent means, they became employees, working up materials supplied by merchants or working in a master's shop for wages. Many urban shoemakers, tailors, hatters, and others were reduced to living on low pay in cramped, squalid conditions.

Working patterns in many trades were irregular. On one hand, this relieved the monotony of the job. New Jersey ironworkers left work to take in the harvest, go hunting, get drunk, or go to the beach. When one iron-

Urban Crafts Under Siege

Tailoring was one of the crafts most affected by changes in the organization of production. As late as 1874, when Boston lithographer Louis Prang published a series of views of the occupations for use in public schools, the nonmechanized urban workshop remained small in scale, but a rigid hierarchy among workers had long been established. In this print, the skilled cutter works in his shirtsleeves but is otherwise well dressed, while across the room, younger and less skilled male workers sew by the window, and a woman operates a sewing machine. Through the door, a master tailor or clothier measures a customer in the separate retail establishment.

"Prang's Aids for Object Teaching: Trades and Occupations — Tailor," lithograph, 1874 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



master threatened fines for bringing liquor to work, he was told that a worker had “got drunk on cheese.” On the other hand, many workers faced periods of idleness. A skilled workman might in theory make \$600 a year but could have difficulty earning half this amount because there were days or seasons when there was no work to do.

Master craftsmen faced a dilemma. Some remained loyal to tradition and to their journeymen and apprentices, resisting pressure for change. In 1830, a New York master refused to divide the work in his shop according to skill because this would violate republican principles: “this Sir is a free country[;] we want no one person over another which would be the case if you

Job Visited by a Master Tailor from Broadway

An illustration from the 1841 novel *The Career of Puffer Hopkins* caricatured the growing distinction between masters and journeymen. The master tailor’s prosperous outfit, stance, and fancy business address (New York’s Broadway) sharply contrasted with the journeyman’s wretched appearance and workshop-home.

Cornelius Mathews, *The Career of Puffer Hopkins* (1841) — American Social History Project.



“No One Ever Hurried During ‘Cake-time’”: Traditional Patterns of Work

Here, a ship carpenter recalls the frequent breaks for food and drink that punctuated a typical day in an early-nineteenth-century New York shipyard. In the early nineteenth century, traditional work patterns still limited the pace and intensity of labor in many industries. Employers increasingly came to regard such practices as intolerable obstacles to efficiency and profit.

In our yard, at half-past eight a.m., Aunt Arlie McVane, a clever kind-hearted woman but awfully uncouth . . . would make her welcome appearance in the yard with her two great baskets, stowed and checked off with crullers, doughnuts, ginger-bread, turnovers, pies, and a variety of sweet cookies and cakes; and from the time Aunt Arlie’s baskets came in sight until every man and boy, bosses and all, in the yard, had been supplied, always at one cent a piece for any article on the cargo, the pie, cake, and cookie trade was a brisk one. Aunt Arlie would usually make the rounds of the yard and supply all the hands in about an hour, bringing the forenoon up to half-past nine, and giving us from ten to fifteen minutes’ “breathing spell” during lunch; no one ever hurried during “cake-time.”

After this was over we would fall to [work] again, until interrupted by Johnnie Gogean, the English candyman, who came in always at half-past ten, with his great board, the size of a medium extension dining table, slung before him, covered with all sorts of “stick,” and several of sticky candy, in one-cent lots. Bosses, boys, and men—all hands, everybody—invested one to three cents in Johnnie’s sweet wares, and another ten to fifteen minutes is spent in consuming it. Johnnie usually sailed out with a bare board until eleven o’clock, at which time there was a general sailing out of the yard and into convenient grog-ships after whiskey. . . .

In the afternoon, about half-past three, we had a cake-lunch, supplied by Uncle Jack Gridder, an old, crippled, superannuated ship carpenter. No one else was ever allowed to come in competition with our caterers. Let a foreign candyboard or cake basket make their appearance inside the gates of the yard, and they would get shipped out of that directly.

At about five o’clock p.m., always Johnnie used to put in his second appearance; and then, having expended money in another stick or two of candy, and ten minutes in its consumption, we were ready to drive away again until sundown; then home to supper.

Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (1976), 34-35.

divided the labour.” But this stance usually led to economic ruin. Other masters pressed their employees to produce more. As their shops grew in size, some hired agents or foremen to supervise and discipline workers. When Thomas Babcock became foreman of a New Haven, Connecticut, printing office in 1825, he was expected to set working hours, oversee production, “keep . . . [workmen] . . . still, sober and peaceable, and attentive to their business,” and hire and fire workers as needed. “Capitalists,” objected the *New York State Mechanic* in 1842, “have taken to bossing all the mechanical trades, while the practical mechanic has become a journeyman, subject to be discharged at every pretended ‘miff’ of his purse-proud employer.”

Workers resisted what they saw as encroachments on their rights. When the owners of a Catskill, New York, machine works installed a bell in 1836 to signal the beginning and end of the workday, their twenty-eight employees threatened to strike. There was a compromise: workers retained the right to determine their working hours but promised in return to work steadily and cease drinking and storytelling on the job. Such agreements, though, did not stem the tide of changes sweeping over many craft industries.

Changes in shoe production in Lynn, Massachusetts, illustrate a general pattern. In the eighteenth century, most shoemakers worked in their own homes or small workshops (called ten-footers), cutting and sewing leather pieces and joining soles and uppers. There was minimal division of labor. Masters had a journeyman or two and a couple of apprentices and trained them in all the tasks of production. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, however, demand for cheap shoes for the expanding southern slave population altered the way in which shoemaking was conducted. Shops multiplied, the division of labor increased, and some masters established large central shops, where they concentrated on cutting the leather, leaving other tasks to journeymen. In time, the job of cutting was delegated to workers, and masters became bosses (supervising others’ labor) or merchants (selling finished shoes). Journeymen resented masters’ changing attitudes toward them. “They seem to think it is a disgrace to labor,” complained one, “that the laborer is not as good as other people. These little stuck-up, self-conceited individuals. . . . You must do as they wish . . . or you are off their books; they have no more employment for you.”

As the new system took root, tasks were further subdivided, making it possible to replace skilled journeymen with less fully trained workers, including women and children. Journeymen’s wives and daughters often took on the work of binding—stitching together shoe uppers and linings—leaving journeymen only the tasks of lasting (fitting the uppers over a shaped wooden last) and bottoming (attaching uppers to the soles). Dividing tasks and reducing skill worsened most journeymen’s prospects. Few now became masters. Apprenticeship declined. Journeymen protested the

"The Natural Tie Between Master and Apprentice Has Been Rent Asunder"

The American Revolution, with its rampant egalitarianism, dissolved much of the paternalistic control that had once been wielded by fathers, masters, and other authority figures, as the anonymous author "An Old Apprentice" made clear in this 1826 letter to the New York Observer. In addition, employers began dividing up manufacturing tasks, and semiskilled and unskilled women and children performed this labor rather than apprentices or other workingmen of the traditional artisanal system. A loss of reciprocity and responsibility occurred on both sides.

... It is generally admitted, that intemperance among mechanics, and among the boys employed by them, has alarmingly increased of late; and it is, I conceive, a natural consequence of the present loose system of taking boys. In the course of my inquiries I saw four or five boys, from ten to fourteen years of age, romping at their work; and upon asking, "Are not these boys apprenticed?" was answered, "Oh no! they are little journeymen; they are received upon the same footing, are paid their wages regularly, and know and feel that they are freemen; and of course soon discover it by their conduct. If one of them should dislike a word of reproof, he will call for his wages and quit me instantly; and there are employers enough who will receive them, and care nothing for their moral character, or their steadiness, or constancy at their work." There are too large a portion of mechanics who prefer the present system, as they look not beyond their own immediate wants. . . . These men prefer that the boys should not be bound as in that case there is nothing binding upon them. If the boy is taken sick or is guilty of misconduct, he can be turned adrift upon the public or his friends, and no responsibility attached to the employer.

There is one important view of the subject, which this class of men seem entirely to have overlooked, viz. that they are contributing, by their practice, to form and to perpetuate the insubordinate characters of which they complain. Masters will tell you that their journeymen repeatedly leave them, with no word of explanation, for several days together; and it is proverbial that during the Spring races, troops of them invariably drop the paint brush or the saw, for the race-course; and the whole family is thus left in confusion till the races are past and the workmen are sobered. . . .

Now, I ask, what is the cause of all these complaints? . . . Is it not because the natural tie between master and apprentice, has been rent asunder? As there is now no community of interest, so there is no community of feeling between them. The master no longer lives among his apprentices, watches over their moral as well as mechanical improvement, accompanies them on Sunday to a place of public worship, counsels them when in trouble, keeps them and comforts them in sickness, and when he is able, gives them, with their good name, some assistance to begin the world for themselves. . . .

New York Observer (New York, New York), October 7, 14, and 28, 1826.

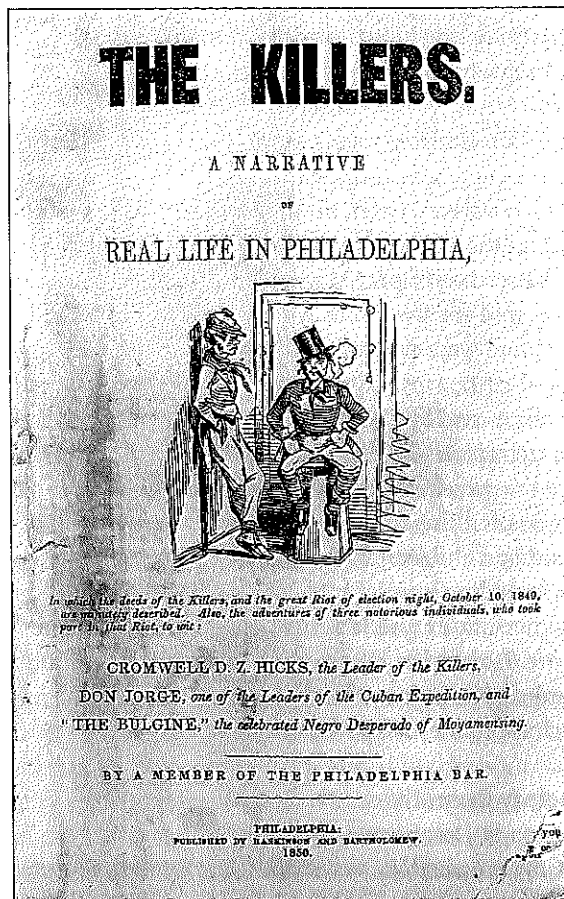
“anti-republican” distinctions that were emerging between them and masters, which they likened to “those existing between the aristocracy and the laboring classes in Europe.”

Shoe bosses scoured New England for new workers. Part-time rural craft workers competed for journeymen’s work, enabling employers to hold down wages and lengthen working hours. Yet families facing hard times came forward eagerly. Thousands of farmers and fishermen supplemented their incomes by lasting and bottoming shoes at home, and increasing numbers of women took up shoe binding as outwork, at one-third to one-half the wages paid to male shoemakers in the central shops.

From the 1820s on, more and more manufacturing tasks were “put out” to rural families or the urban poor, who worked for merchants for piece-rate wages. Counting outworkers, almost half of all manufacturing workers,

Killers

As master artisans’ supervision of their journeymen and apprentices dwindled, their former charges were freer to choose how to spend time away from the workshop. Some, like these two “Killers,” joined proliferating urban gangs. This is the cover of an 1850 novel that was based on the violent activities of a notorious Philadelphia gang of journeymen, laborers, and apprentices. George Lippard, *The Killers. A Narrative of Real Life in Philadelphia . . .* (1850) — Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



and about two-thirds of those in New England, were women. Eighteen thousand Massachusetts women braided straw hats at home in the 1830s; others made buttons, socks, mittens, suspenders, and palm-leaf hats. Rural outwork was initially a strategy for household independence adopted by families with daughters who would previously have undertaken home textile production. As wage rates fell, however, outwork was taken up by poorer families—often by women with young children who did it in gaps left by other tasks. Homeworking also became a staple for the urban poor. In 1831, Mathew Carey estimated that in America's four largest cities, 12,000 or 13,000 women worked at home making paper boxes, shirts, collars, artificial flowers, and similar goods.

Urban trades underwent changes similar to those in shoemaking. Until the early 1800s, the New York clothing trade was dominated by male tailors who catered to upper-class demand for custom-made garments and by female dressmakers and seamstresses who worked on dresses, children's clothing, shirts, and mending. But under the federal protective tariff of 1816, the U.S. clothing trades expanded. City merchants, using cheap cloth from the new textile mills, captured from England the market in clothing for southern slaves. Later, these merchants added clothing for plantation owners, and the opening of the Erie Canal gave them new western markets. New York merchants' profits were handsome. In the early 1830s, ready-made clothing sold for five times what it cost to produce. By the middle of the decade, there were several clothing firms with over 300 employees each.

Profits rested on low wages and low overhead costs. The outwork system allowed manufacturers to replace skilled tailors with less-skilled women homeworkers. Some were the wives and daughters of laborers, but most women clothing workers headed their own households. Many had been widowed or abandoned and had children to support. Swelling numbers of poor women and families, including immigrants, increased competition for work, further depressing piece rates and lengthening the hours of work required to earn an income. Isolated at home, outworkers had difficulty banding together to defend common interests. Frequently, they could not afford for themselves the clothing they made for others.

Manual Laborers and Factory Operatives Demand for manual laborers also grew. The building of roads, canals, and railroads and construction in burgeoning towns and cities furnished employment to thousands of men. Commerce required the labor of carters, warehousemen, dockworkers, and



**Scenes and Occupations
Characteristic of New
England Life**

This engraving in a popular 1850s magazine heralded the centrality of rural women in antebellum work. While a variety of men such as a farmer, a drover, and a lumberman are shown at work, the illustration features three working women: a "factory girl," a woman picking hops, and—in the center—a palm-leaf hat braider. Thousands of rural women made palm-leaf hats in their homes, adding valuable cash to their family's income, all part of a vast rural outwork system organized by rural merchants. *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-room Companion*, June 16, 1855 — General Research Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Starting for Lowell

An illustration from T. S. Arthur's reform tract *Illustrated Temperance Tales* presented a young woman leaving her farm family to work in a cotton mill. This picture was accurate in showing that New England farm families often had to rely on income from factory labor. But reformers blamed economic hardship on personal weaknesses — in the case of Arthur's story, the father's alcoholism. Timothy Shay Arthur, "The Factory Girl," *Illustrated Temperance Tales* (1850) — American Social History Project.



sailors, who loaded, transported, unloaded, and stored the commodities that created rising mercantile fortunes. Within a year of its opening, for example, some 8,000 men were employed in moving the goods that traveled along the Erie Canal.

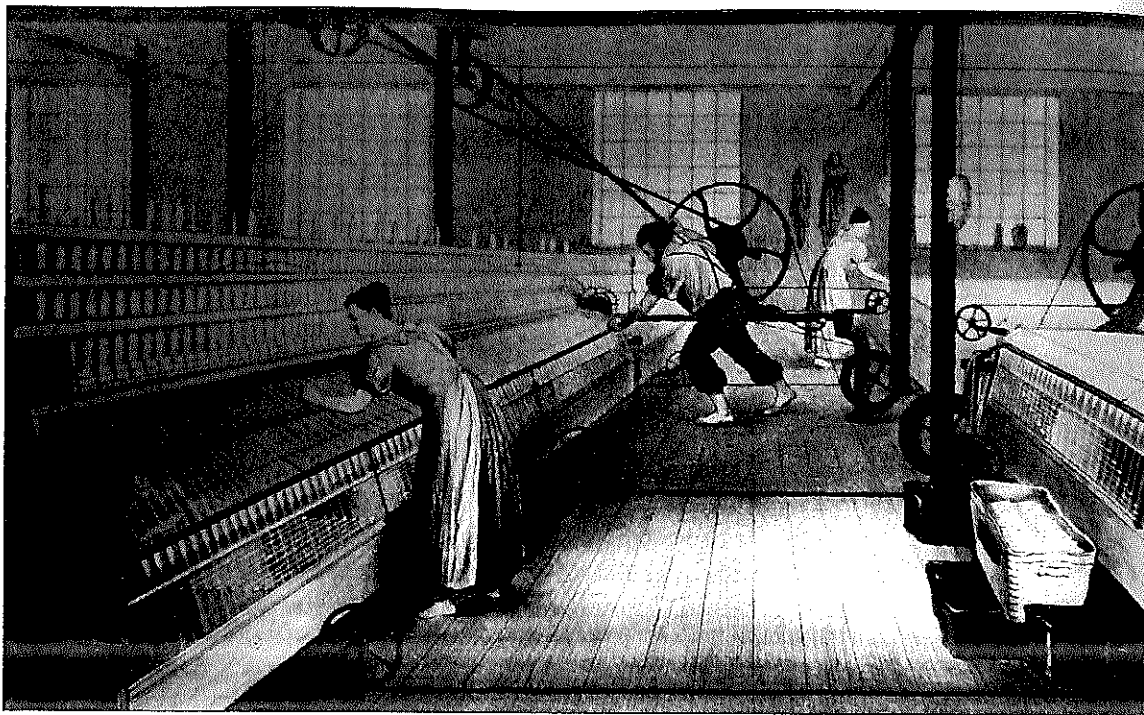
All these tasks were considered unskilled; in an age before power-driven machinery they involved heavy exertion, often under harsh conditions. Canal construction, for instance, entailed winter work in water and ice and summers of digging through leech- and mosquito-infested swamps. Living conditions were wretched. Workers shared tents or rough shanties — “more like dog-kennels than the habitations of men,” one observer wrote — poorly built, scantily furnished, and offering little protection from harsh weather.

After 1820, manual laborers' wage rates rose about 12 percent each decade in real terms, but for many reasons, this rise often failed to produce incomes much above bare subsistence. Migrants from the countryside and from Europe fed the pool of available workers. Wage payments were often irregular or were made in the form of credit at an overpriced company store. Many jobs were intermittent or seasonal; the average day laborer

found work only two hundred days a year. Large construction projects were handled by contractors who bid for jobs “as low as labor and capital can afford” and hired workers for as little as they could. Not infrequently, contractors went bankrupt and fled without paying workers the wages they had earned.

Laborers' low earnings placed a premium on enhancing family incomes. Wives and children worked to help fulfill everyday needs. Many women took in outwork or boarders. Children worked in factories or in casual jobs. Daughters hired out as live-in servants for money wages averaging a dollar a week or less besides room and board.

Factories grew in number and size, becoming a major source of wage work. Large mills, such as those of the Waltham-Lowell system, recruited workers in sizable numbers. Many of Lowell's first women workers were the daughters of farmers. Rural economic change both pushed them out of their parents' homes and attracted them to factory work, typically for periods from a few months to a few years; sisters often followed one another to



work in the mills. By the 1830s, most were from northern New England, where farm households were hardest pressed. The Fowler family owned a small farm in Boscawen, New Hampshire; four of their five daughters worked in a Lowell mill at different times between 1831 and 1842.

Women hoped that factory work would give them cultural opportunities and the chance to earn a dowry, which impoverished farm life denied them. Although early wages for the young, unmarried Yankee women who came to Lowell's mills and boardinghouses were lower than those for male laborers, they were better than the wages that were otherwise available to women. Mary Paul of Barnard, Vermont, worked in her early teens as a domestic servant before seeking her father's permission to work in Lowell. "I think it would be better for me than to stay out here," she wrote him. "I am in need of clothes which I cannot get about here and for that reason I want to go to Lowell or some other place." Some young women saw factory work as a chance for some independence. Sally Rice found being a farm worker isolating and exhausting. Telling her parents that she wanted to find work in a textile mill, she wrote, "I am most 19 years old. I must of course have something of my own before many more years have passed over my head. And where is that something coming from if I go home and earn nothing?"

Spinning

This picture depicts the spinning of yarn, part of the process of cotton production chronicled in a series of twelve prints published from 1835 to 1840, called *The Progress of Cotton*. The woman on the left is repairing broken threads while a child crouching below the threads (a "scavenger") cleans the machine. J. R. Barfoot, lithograph, c. 1840 — Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery.



“Throughout this vast republic,” declared the *Albany Advocate*, “the farmers, mechanics, and workingmen are assembling . . . to impart to its laws and administration those principles of liberty and equality unfolded in the Declaration of our Independence.” Thomas Skidmore, a self-educated New York City machinist, wrote a radical prescription for a workingmen’s policy. In *The Rights of Man to Property* (1829), he argued that the poor should win control of government and redistribute property equally among all adults, including women and slaves, and abolish inheritance to maintain equality over generations. Society would have “no lenders, no borrowers; no landlords, no tenants; no masters, no journeymen; no Wealth, no Want,” and independent self-employment would become general.

Actual workingmen’s parties adopted more modest proposals, including the abolition of paper money, a homestead law to provide free land in the West, and some of the earliest calls for publicly funded schooling. By the early 1830s, their candidates also pledged to enable mechanics to enforce payment for their work, to abolish compulsory militia duty and imprisonment for debt, and to curb the power of banks and corporations. Their electoral success, though modest, was sufficient to jolt the major parties into adopting many of their policies. Unable to withstand this competition, most of the workingmen’s parties dissolved during the 1830s, many of their leaders affiliating with the Democrats and a few with the Whig Party. But the end of their electoral challenge did not erase the issues that had given rise to it.

Strikes and Protests In 1838, journeymen carriage makers from small Massachusetts workshops protested a proposal to incorporate a large carriage-building firm, arguing that this would block their aspirations to

A Militia Drill Thirty Years Ago

Congress authorized universal military duty for all males, but inequalities in the system led to calls for reform. The Workingmen’s Party in Pennsylvania and New York attacked privately organized elite units whose members’ costly uniforms and elaborate ceremonies displayed their wealth and connections. The aristocratic pretensions of “private” units contrasted with the ragtag appearance of “public,” neighborhood militias (remembered here in an 1862 lithograph). Public militia service was a financial burden: members lost wages to attend drills and risked fines if they were absent or violated dress codes. David Claypool Johnston, 1862, lithograph 10 7/8 × 16 inches — American Antiquarian Society.

“This Monopoly Should Be Broken Up”: Workingmen Protest Inequality

Like the Philadelphia Workingmen’s Committee that published this report in 1830, many workingmen’s political parties condemned the inequality between the education available to those who could afford it, and the lack of provision for the poor. They advocated the adoption of free public schooling in their states, as a means of promoting “general and equal education” and “equal knowledge” as a step toward achieving “equal liberty.”

The original element of despotism is a monopoly of talent, which consigns the multitude to comparative ignorance, and secures the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich and the rulers. If then the healthy existence of a free government be, as the committee believe, rooted in the will of the American people, it follows as a necessary consequence, of a government based upon that will, that this monopoly should be broken up, and that the means of equal knowledge (the only security for equal liberty) should be rendered, by legal provision, the common property of all classes. . . .

It appears, therefore, to the committee that there can be no real liberty without a wide diffusion of real intelligence; that the members of a republic should all be alike instructed in the nature and character of their equal rights and duties, as human beings and as citizens; and that education, instead of being limited, as in our public poor schools, to a simple acquaintance with words and cyphers, should tend, as far as possible, to the production of a just disposition, virtuous habits, and a rational self-governing character.

When the committee contemplate their own condition, and that of the great mass of their fellow laborers, when they look around on the glaring inequality of society, they are constrained to believe that until the means of equal instruction shall be equally secured to all, liberty is but an unmeaning word, and equality an empty shadow, whose substance to be realized must first be planted by an equal education and proper training in the minds, in the habits, in the manners, and in the feelings of the community.

Working Men’s Advocate, March 6, 1830.

become proprietors in their own right. Although they currently worked for others, “We . . . do look forward with anticipation to a time when we shall be able to conduct the business upon our own responsibility and receive the profits of our labor, which we now relinquish to others.” Large incorporated businesses, they argued, would destroy the republican ideal: “we believe that incorporated bodies tend to crush all feeble enterprise and compel us to work out our days in the Service of others.”

As a growing number of waged workers had little chance of achieving propertied independence, the benefits of republican citizenship came to depend on reasonable wages and working conditions. Philadelphia journeymen house carpenters noted that “in this favored nation we enjoy the

inestimable blessing of 'universal suffrage,' and constituting, as we everywhere do, a very great majority, we have the power to choose our own legislators." However, "this blessing . . . can be of no further benefit to us" unless "we possess sufficient knowledge to make proper use of it." To acquire knowledge, workers needed more time to read, think, and discuss and less time chained to the workbench. In 1827, they struck in support of a demand that their working day be shortened from twelve hours to ten. Antagonism between masters and journeymen and between employers and employees continued to deepen during the 1830s, causing an unprecedented mobilization of trade unions and labor protest.

The issue of working hours sparked heated conflict. In 1824, Pawtucket mill owners tried to extend the workday and lowered piece rates. Led by women weavers and supported by townfolk, workers went on strike to resist the changes. When, in 1828 and 1829, it was rumored that New York employers were about to extend the workday from ten hours to eleven, mass meetings of journeymen and their supporters denounced the proposal as a selfish assault on republican citizens' rights. Several thousand workers threatened to strike against any boss who insisted on more than ten hours, and the employers backed down.

Wages were a more frequent source of friction and often a basis on which labor unions could organize. Despite their relative isolation in the outwork system, 1,600 women joined the New York Tailoresses' Society, founded in 1831, to fight a series of wage cuts by merchants. In 1833, journeymen carpenters in the city struck for higher wages, winning a month-long campaign. The New York carpenters obtained the support of organizations in fifteen other trades, and the printers' union president John Finch noted the "necessity of combined efforts for the purpose of self-protection." Finch's union issued a call for all organized trades to unite in a citywide federation of craft unions. Representatives of nine trades attended the first convention of New York's General Trades Union (GTU). In 1834, a GTU parade stretched for a mile and a half. The GTU aided strikes over wages or

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.		
<i>Morning Bells.</i>	<i>Dinner Bells.</i>	<i>Evening Bells.</i>
First bell, 4.30 A. M. Ring out, 12.00 M. Ring out, 6.30 P. M.		
Second, 5.30 A. M.; Third, 6.30. Ring in, 12.35 P. M. Except on Saturday Evenings.		
From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.		
<i>Morning Bells.</i>	<i>Dinner Bells.</i>	<i>Evening Bells.</i>
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.	NOVEMBER.	JANUARY.
First Saturday, ring out 6.00 P. M.	Third Saturday ring out 4.00 P. M.	Third Saturday, ring out 4.25 P. M.
Second " " 5.45 "	Fourth " " 3.55 "	Fourth " " 4.35 "
Third " " 5.30 "		
Fourth " " 5.20 "		
OCTOBER.	DECEMBER.	FEBRUARY.
First Saturday, ring out 5.05 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 3.50 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 4.45 P. M.
Second " " 4.55 "	Second " " 3.45 "	Second " " 4.55 "
Third " " 4.45 "	Third " " 3.35 "	Third " " 5.00 "
Fourth " " 4.35 "	Fourth " " 4.00 "	Fourth " " 5.10 "
Fifth " " 4.25 "	Fifth " " 4.00 "	
NOVEMBER.	JANUARY.	MARCH.
First Saturday, ring out 4.15 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 4.10 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 5.25 P. M.
Second " " 4.05 "	Second " " 4.15 "	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.		
Penhallow, Printer, Wyman's Exchange, 28 Merrimack St.		

Bells, Bells, Bells

The mill workers' day in 1853, as dictated by the managers of the Lowell Mills. American Textile History Museum.

conditions among bakers, hatters, ropemakers, sailmakers, weavers, and leatherworkers in New York, Newark, Poughkeepsie, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Radical printer and former Workingmen's Party leader George Henry Evans urged that such mutual support should become general, so that "[t]he rights of each individual would then be sustained by every workingman in the country, whose aggregate wealth and power would be able to resist the most formidable oppression." An August 1834 convention formed the National Trades Union (NTU), with delegates representing over 25,000 workers. A labor upsurge in the next few years spawned at least sixty new unions and called more than a hundred strikes.

Organizing across trades and regions was accomplished mostly by skilled craftsmen, but other groups, including women, could be equally militant. When Lowell mill owners cut wages in 1834, women operatives struck, in a "turn-out" that involved one-sixth of the Lowell workforce. Their action failed. Companies recruited other women to tend machines, and within a week, most mills were operating near capacity. But two years later, the Lowell employers raised rents in their boardinghouses, provoking a more widespread and better-organized response from women operatives, who stayed out on strike until the rent increases were canceled or reduced.

Almost two decades before the birth of a formal women's rights movement, female strikers asserted the right of women to defend their interests in a society that denied them political participation or a public voice. New York Tailoresses' leader Sarah Monroe asked, "if it is unfashionable for the men to bear oppression in silence, why should it not also become unfashionable with the women?" In 1833, women shoebinders from Lynn and neighboring towns formed their own protective organization. They drew on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to proclaim that "Women as well as men have certain inalienable rights, among which is the right at all times of 'peaceably assembling to consult upon the common good.'" Lowell strikers warned that the mill owners' "oppressive hand of avarice would enslave us" and, rebuffing the employers' suggestion that those in need could turn to charity, proclaimed, "We prefer to have the disposing of our charities in our own hands; and as we are free, we would remain in possession of what kind Providence has bestowed upon us; and remain daughters of freemen still."

Some male unions supported campaigns by women workers, but the labor movement was generally hostile to women. According to the NTU's committee on female labor, "the physical organization, the natural responsibilities, and the moral sensibility of women prove conclusively that their labors should be only of a domestic nature." Most men regarded women's employment as an attack on their own independence or dignity as providers, as taking women away from their proper domestic roles, and as threatening to undercut their own wage rates.

"I Cannot Be a Slave": Remembering the 1836 Lowell Mill Strike

Harriet Hanson Robinson began work in Lowell at the age of ten, later becoming an author and advocate of women's suffrage. In 1898, she published a memoir of her Lowell experiences. In the following excerpt, she recounts the strike of 1836.

One of the girls stood on a pump, and gave vent to the feelings of her companions in a neat speech, declaring that it was their duty to resist all attempts at cutting down the wages. This was the first time a woman had spoken in public in Lowell, and the event caused surprise and consternation among her audience.

Cutting down the wages was not their only grievance, nor the only cause of this strike. Hitherto the corporations had paid twenty-five cents a week towards the board of each operative, and now it was their purpose to have the girls pay the sum; and this, in addition to the cut in the wages, would make a difference of at least one dollar a week. It was estimated that as many as twelve or fifteen hundred girls turned out, and walked in procession through the streets. They had neither flags nor music, but sang songs, a favorite (but rather inappropriate) one being a parody on "I won't be a nun."

"Oh! isn't it a pity, such a pretty girl as I
Should be sent to the factory to pine away and die?
Oh! I cannot be a slave,
I will not be a slave,
For I'm so fond of liberty
That I cannot be a slave."

My own recollection of this first strike (or "turn out" as it was called) is very vivid. I worked in a lower room, where I had heard the proposed strike fully, if not vehemently, discussed; I had been an ardent listener to what was said against this attempt at "oppression" on the part of the corporation, and naturally I took sides with the strikers. When the day came on which the girls were to turn out, those in the upper rooms started first, and so many of them left that our mill was at once shut down. Then, when the girls in my room stood irresolute, uncertain what to do, asking each other, "Would you?" or "Shall we turn out?" and not one of them having the courage to lead off, I, who began to think they would not go out, after all their talk, became impatient, and started on ahead, saying, with childish bravado, "I don't care what you do, I am going to turn out, whether any one else does or not"; and I marched out, and was followed by the others.

As I looked back at the long line that followed me, I was more proud than I have ever been since.

Harriet Hanson Robinson, *Loom and Spindle or Life Among the Early Mill Girls* (New York, T. Y. Crowell, 1898), 83-86.

Like women, unskilled workmen were initially disdained by the skilled craft unions but organized on their own behalf. Dockers and maritime workers in New York stopped work in 1828 and again in 1834 to protest layoffs and wage cuts. Canal laborers struck on at least four occasions in the 1820s and another fourteen times in the 1830s. On the Chesapeake & Ohio and other canals, Irish laborers formed secret societies to protect wages and conditions, fighting off men who refused to join or who were hired by the companies to break the societies' influence. One pitched battle on the C & O Canal in January 1834 was suppressed by federal troops. But four years later, when the company failed to pay wages and laborers destroyed the work they had not been paid for, militiamen who were called out to quell them refused to march, declaring their sympathy with the workers.

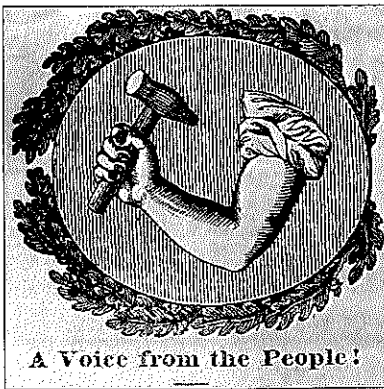
By the mid-1830s, some urban labor activists were pursuing collaboration between the skilled and the unskilled and even talked of a general strike of all organized workers to improve conditions. Philadelphia coalheavers accomplished the first such strike in American history when they walked off the docks in 1835 to demand shorter hours and were joined by shoemakers and other craftsmen. The strike spread to other trades, including textile workers and outworkers, before employers conceded shorter hours and a wage increase, and a city ordinance made ten hours the legal working day on public projects. Cooperation between skilled and unskilled workers continued, and in 1836, the Philadelphia General Trades Union voted to allow laborers into its ranks—the first time skilled workers reached across the gap that had separated them from the unskilled.

“By Hammer and Hand All Arts Do Stand”

The artisan's symbol adorned an announcement in New York's General Trades' Union newspaper, *The Union*, calling for a demonstration to support union tailors convicted of conspiracy in 1836. *The Union*, June 14, 1836 — Rare Books and Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Two Outlooks: Morality or the Market? In a republic, the NTU insisted, a citizen's conduct and the “value of all social institutions” should be guided by standards of “moral justice” rather than those of profitability; the private pursuit of profit jeopardized “the social, civil, and intellectual condition of the laboring classes” and resulted in “the most unequal and unjustifiable distribution of the wealth of society in the hands of a few individuals.” Labor organizations and their activities defended working people against “a humiliating, servile dependency, incompatible with . . . natural equality” and “subversive of the rights of man.”

Many merchants and employers, outraged by strikes, held an alternative view that identified republican order with the free play of the market—a market in which labor was a commodity like any other. “The true regulator of prices,” held the *New York Journal of Commerce*, “whether of labor, goods, real estate, or anything else, is demand.” Certainly, the editor agreed, “we wish to see all men, mechanics as well as others, receive an adequate compensation for their labor.” But collective action was “at war with the order of things which the Creator has established for the general good.” In trade unions and strikes, he advised, the best workingmen—“whose



wages would go up . . . if they would but go on their own merits” —suffered needlessly because they aided in “lifting up the unworthy, [even] though they sink themselves.”

These outlooks—one demanding that economic life conform to republican principles, the other insisting that life in the republic be regulated by the marketplace—clashed in New York in 1836. For two years previously, rapid price inflation had driven shoemakers, carpenters, cabinetmakers, weavers, and others to strike for higher wages. Now New York employers sought to make an example of the journeymen tailors’ association, one of the city’s strongest unions. Early in the year, masters and merchant tailors repudiated a negotiated pay scale and agreed with each other not to hire union members. Journeymen picketed the masters’ shops to discourage other journeymen from taking their places. A grand jury, however, labeled this conduct “conspiracy” —a criminal offense under a state law of 1829 prohibiting collective action “to commit any act injurious to public morals or to trade and commerce.”

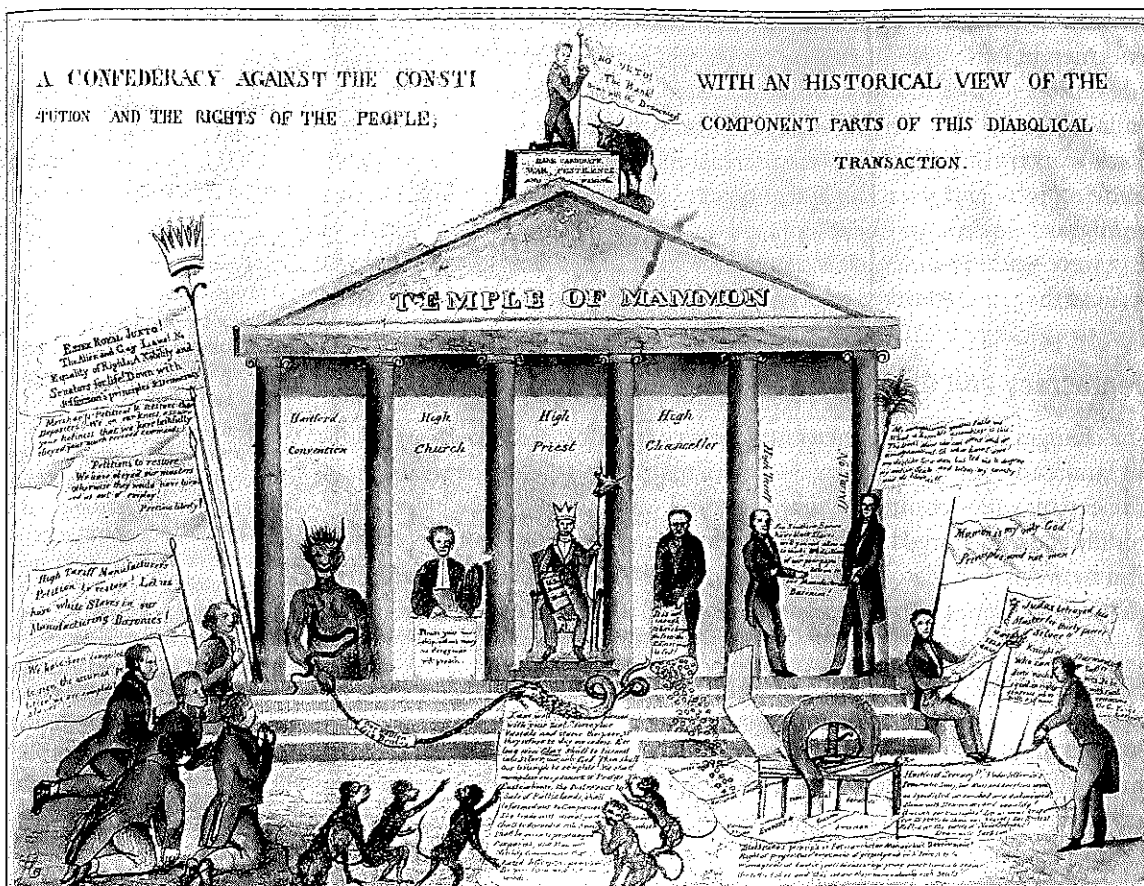
At trial in May, twenty tailors were found guilty, fined heavily, and lectured by Judge Ogden Edwards on the error of their ways. Echoing the city’s employers and antilabor newspapers, Edwards told them that in this “favored land of law and liberty, the road to advancement is open to all, and the journeymen may by their skill and industry and moral worth soon become flourishing master mechanics.” Unions, he claimed, were alien to

“The Rich Against the Poor!”: A Strikers’ Handbill

Shortly after New York’s striking tailors were convicted in 1836, a placard appeared in various parts of the city. Its text was printed within the outline of a coffin, signifying the “coffin of equality.” Following are excerpts from that text. The Common Council promptly offered a reward for the apprehension of the anonymous author of this “Coffin Handbill.”

The rich against the Poor! Judge Edwards, the tool of the Aristocracy, against the People! Mechanics and Workingmen! A deadly blow has been struck at your Liberty! The prize for which your fathers fought has been robbed from you! The Freemen of the North are now on a level with the Slaves of the South! with no other privileges than laboring that drones may fatten on your lifeblood! Twenty of your brethren have been found guilty for presuming to resist a reduction of their wages! and Judge Edwards has charged an American jury, and agreeably to that charge, they have established the precedent, that workingmen have no right to regulate the price of labor! or, in other words, the Rich are the only judges of the wants of the Poor Man!

New York Courier and Enquirer, June 8, 1836.



A Confederacy Against the Constitution and the Rights of the People

A typically busy 1830s cartoon denounced monopoly and privilege. On the right side of the “Temple of Mammon” (named after the New Testament false god of wealth and avarice), a northern manufacturer conspired with a southern planter: “You Southern Barons have black Slaves; will you not allow us to make white Slaves of our poor population in our Manufacturing Baronies?” Anonymous, 1833, lithograph — The Library Company of Philadelphia.

American society “and . . . mainly upheld by foreigners.” The trial verdict and Edwards’s attack on the right to organize and strike provoked massive protest. Twenty-seven thousand people — over a tenth of New York City’s population — attended a rally that burned Judge Edwards in effigy and branded the trial “a concerted plan of the aristocracy to take from them that Liberty which was bequeathed to them as a sacred inheritance by their revolutionary sires.” While Edwards claimed that workers in a republic were free to advance themselves, workers argued that only their freedom to organize could restore republican rights that had been undermined by class division and social inequality.

This conception of labor’s rights, however, was increasingly confined to white men. There was a small, prosperous black middle class in the Northeast, but most African Americans faced segregation and job discrimination that kept them in relative poverty. By the 1820s, they were excluded from many occupations, even those with long traditions of black participation. In Philadelphia, the number of black artisans fell by more than one-quarter

between 1832 and 1837 alone. An observer claimed that there were no black workmen in many New York City trades and that Boston had only a handful. Whites hostile to black workers rioted in Providence in 1831 and in Philadelphia in 1834, driving many African Americans out of their homes. Black workers of both sexes were increasingly confined to service or heavy laboring jobs, but even domestic servants were displaced by European immigrant women. In Philadelphia, over half of black women workers by 1837 were washerwomen. Few black workmen joined labor organizations because they rarely worked in organized trades and often met with hostility.

Democracy and Class in Jacksonian Society

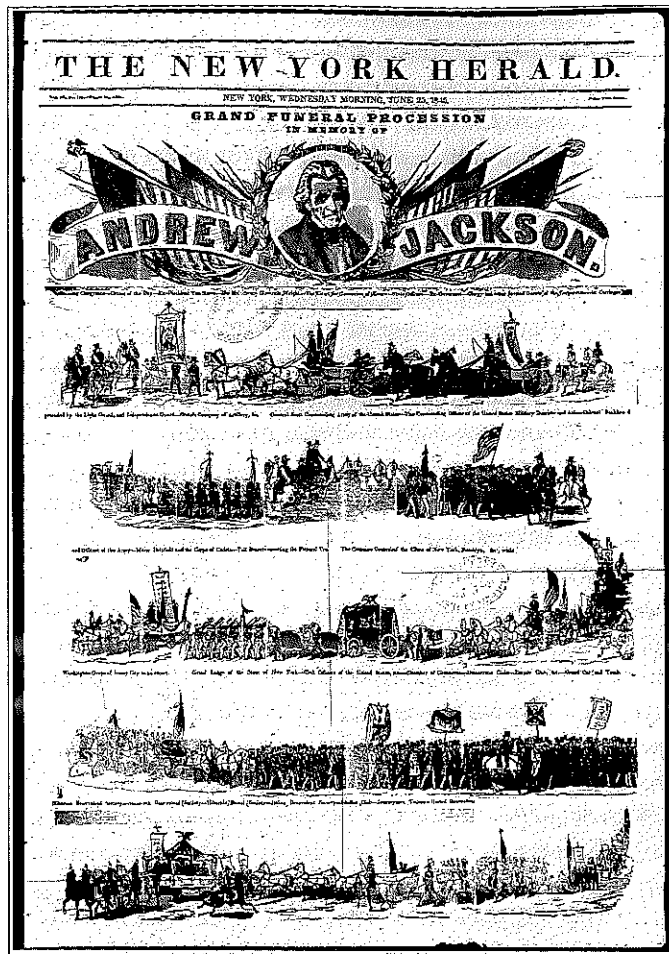
The changes of the early nineteenth century transformed America's political landscape, introducing greater participation—at least for white men. The expansion of commerce, industry, and wage labor fostered a growing middle class, anchored by women's work at home, and new patterns of division between proprietors and workers. While social division did call forth political and religious movements that aimed to bridge growing class distinctions, it also prompted political rivalries and pressures for reform and would be deepened by economic crises at the end of the 1830s.

Politics and the Second Party System Under pressure, the conception that republican citizenship should be based on possession of property gave way to reform. State after state modified its electoral rules to reduce or abolish property qualifications for voting. In the North, by the 1820s, all states but Rhode Island had granted the vote effectively to all adult white males. However, no state permitted women to vote, and many barred African American men from voting on grounds of race. Only white men could share in the privileges of political “independence.”

Increased participation promoted new, more democratic political styles. Astute politicians grasped that genteel methods appropriate to government by “natural aristocracy” were inadequate to channel the votes of an expanding electorate. In New York State in the 1820s, the Democratic Party led by Martin Van Buren pioneered local organizing and campaigning tactics—making skillful use of newspapers—that emphasized popular inclusiveness, tactics that would spread across the nation. Committees drummed up local support, and elections were dominated by public meetings, picnics, and parades that became part of the fabric of social life. A new breed of professional politicians, such as Van Buren, built their careers on appeals to voters and the ability to dispense state or federal government patronage. Government jobs became rewards for favors and political support from outside the elite. Campaign speeches, banners, and handbills effused loyalty

Penny Pictures

Expanded political participation was aided by and contributed to the rise of new, inexpensive newspapers that trafficked in scandal and sensation. The *New York Herald*, more than any other of the so-called penny newspapers, published topical pictures. Most of the time, the pictures were simple maps or crude portraits of people in the news. Occasionally, special events received greater pictorial coverage. But when the *Herald* published five detailed pictures on its cover showing New York's 1845 funeral procession honoring Andrew Jackson — the first full-page cover devoted to pictures ever to appear in a daily newspaper — rival newspapers charged that the same engravings had been used to illustrate Queen Victoria's coronation, William Henry Harrison's funeral, and the celebration of the opening of the Croton reservoir. The *Herald* discontinued illustrating the news after 1850, leaving that task to the weekly illustrated press. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



to “the working man” and “the producing classes.” In practice, working people were divided in their political allegiances.

For a brief period after the War of 1812, commentators had celebrated an “era of good feelings” in which it appeared that party differences had dissolved. Advocates of federal involvement in the economy had secured broad support in 1816 for the chartering of a Second Bank of the United States to help stabilize the financial system. Henry Clay of Kentucky, a politician with followers both North and South, became the leading advocate of a program of federal sponsorship of transportation improvements and other measures aimed at fostering both national expansion and economic development. But the upheavals of the panic of 1819 and the growth of white men’s political participation helped to obstruct Clay’s ambitions and sow the seeds of new party divisions.

Epitomizing the new political culture was the figure of Andrew Jackson, who, having lost the 1824 presidential election in controversial circumstances, won the presidency four years later as a symbol of popular democracy. The first president not to come from the Virginia gentry or from New England, Jackson attacked "privilege" and the apparent threat of "aristocracy" arising from government power. "The first principle of our system," he told Congress, "[is] that the majority is to govern." His Democratic Party aimed to minimize government's ability to grant "special privileges and monopolies" that the wealthy could exploit to their own advantage. In the early 1830s, Jackson vetoed the rechartering of the Second Bank of the United States and condemned "the undue aggregation of capital in the hands of a . . . few" that threatened to rob the people of "the enjoyment of the fruits of their labor." Democrats believed that corporations concentrated "large masses of property" and impeded "the natural tendency of capital to an equal distribution among the people." They resisted bankruptcy statutes, which they suspected of sheltering the rich from their poorer creditors. Above all, they attacked federal expenditure for internal improvements such as roads and canals and attempted to break what they saw as "aristocratic" monopolies allegedly sought by a national elite.

Jackson's Democrats drew support from rural planters and proprietors, particularly in the South and Southwest, and from the urban poor, some craftsmen, and some businessmen in the North. By the mid-1830s, opponents of Jackson, comprising some Southerners but mostly northern commercial farmers, financiers, and industrial craftsmen and proprietors, joined to create the new Whig Party. Using campaigning and organizing methods similar to those of the Democrats, the Whigs' emergence signaled the creation of what historians have called the "second American party system." Both parties sought a broad appeal among the mainly white electorate and, above all, sought to avoid making slavery, with its potential for dividing the nation on sectional lines, into a contentious issue. Their different positions on "privilege" and federal power divided their appeal to workingmen.

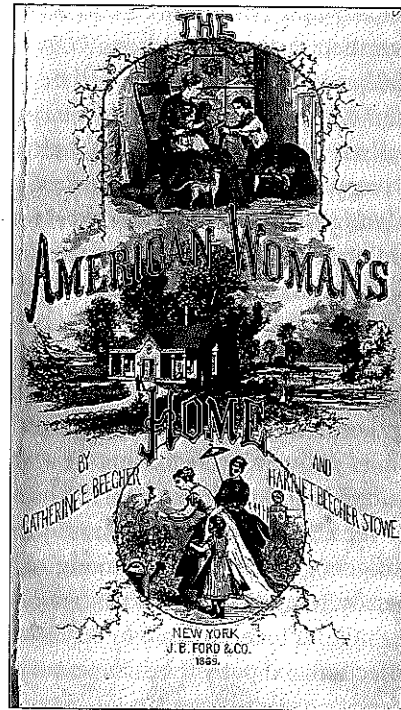
The Democrats acted in the name of equality. Yet avoiding the use of government to create privilege did not always benefit working people. Since 1816, the federal government had enacted protective import tariffs to encourage manufacturing. By the 1830s, under pressure from southern members of the party, many Democrats were criticizing tariffs and working for their reduction, despite northern workers' support for them. Democrats' preference for leaving the economy unregulated also made it hard for workers to obtain laws that could protect them from long hours and poor working conditions. Meanwhile, the Whigs became strongly associated with a middle-class ideal rooted in the interests of urban and rural property holders that also proved appealing to some wageworkers and craft workers.

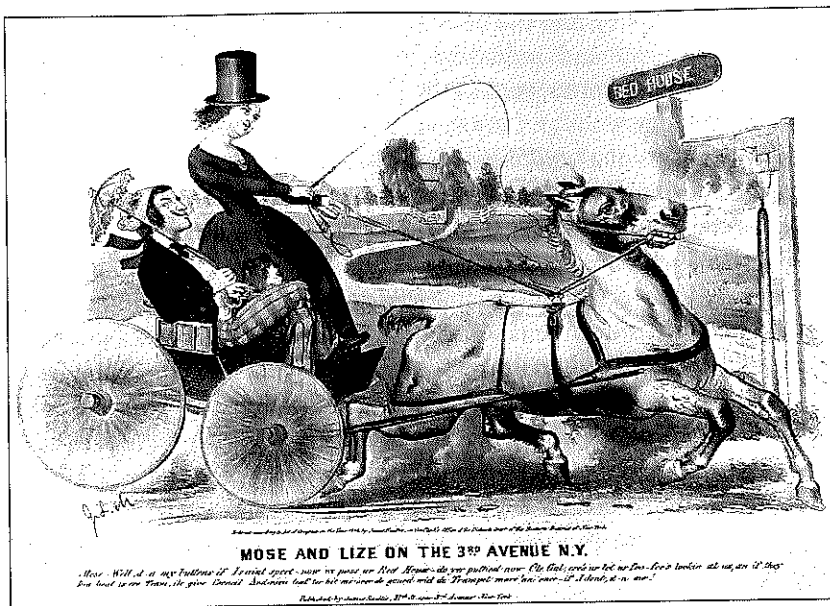
Gender, Domesticity, and the Emergence of a “Middling Class” Commercial prosperity and industrial development swelled the ranks of property-owning farmers, merchants, professionals, and master manufacturers. During the 1820s and 1830s, many such people came to view themselves as members of a “middling class” whose interests, as Boston publisher Joseph T. Buckingham wrote, were distinct from those of the “unprofitable poor and the unproductive rich.”

The decline of household manufacturing, the separation of home and business, and the increased availability of consumer goods altered the lives of these people. Around them, writers and moralists constructed a new ideal of family life, centered on a home that was sheltered from the anxieties of work and business, in which age and gender roles were subtly altered from the patriarchal and hierarchical assumptions of an earlier period. In such families, fathers increasingly conducted business in offices, shops, and factories separate from their homes. Their wives remained at home, now excluded from most income-earning activities. In the workshops of master craftsmen, the labor of employees replaced that of family members. In shoemaking, for example, the responsibility for stitching shoe uppers shifted from the master’s wife to the daughters of poorer families, employed as outworkers.

The American Woman’s Home

These were the frontispiece and title page of a popular 1869 guide to the “formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes.” Intended to instruct young women on their proper role in the middle-class home, this book was continually expanded and reprinted after its first publication in 1841. Its lessons about “domestic science” ranged from the correct way to raise children to the appropriate type of picture to hang in the parlor. Catherine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman’s Home or, Principles of Domestic Science . . .* (1869) — American Social History Project.





Mose and Lize on the Third Avenue, New York

This 1848 print showed the exuberant style of dress and behavior favored by many young working-class women. Although Lize (like her boyfriend, Mose) was a fictional character, her popularity in the press and theater suggested that the principles of domestic science did not represent the ideal for all young women. James Baillie, 1848, lithograph — New-York Historical Society.

Middle-class women contributed to the family economy by performing household work and shrewdly planning purchases. The availability of stoves and, in some cities, a public water supply began to ease some burdens of housework. Women who could afford to hire domestic servants, whose numbers since 1800 had grown twice as fast as the number of white families and whose ranks in northeastern cities by the 1830s were becoming dominated by immigrant women, particularly from Ireland. Servants, typically working for sixteen to eighteen hours a day, relieved middle-class women of strenuous or unpleasant household tasks. In 1841, the writer Lydia Maria Child claimed that genteel women no longer washed or dressed their children, made clothing, laid fires, scrubbed floors, or emptied slops.

Writers idealized home life as a refuge from the economic pressures and personal frictions of a man's working life. Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, one of the 1830s' most popular magazines, told her middle-class female readers, "Our men are sufficiently money-making; let us keep our women and children free from the contagion as long as possible." Women's role, in this view, was to make the home a domestic haven and to instill in their children the standards of behavior deemed essential to republican government and prosperity: hard work, perseverance, and diligence; frugality and saving; self-discipline, emotional restraint, and steady, temperate habits.

Child rearing came to rely less on physical punishment and more on affection and patient instruction. Children were now expected not simply to bend to authority but to understand and internalize their parents' values.

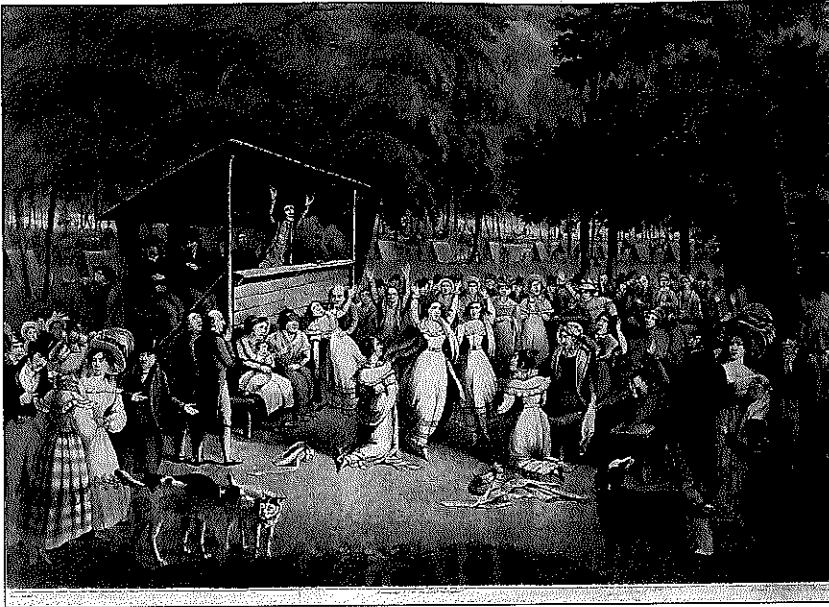
Machinist Morton Poole encouraged his sister to cultivate in her son “the liberties which are essential to the formation of a free and independent spirit,” relying on “superior understanding” instead of fear. “A child that is afraid of its parents,” he wrote, “can never feel that confidence which is necessary to the receiving of information in conversations with its parents.”

But this new concept of women’s role as homemaker and teacher of values did not challenge husbands’ power over their wives and households or bring women into political life. They performed their domestic roles at their husbands’ pleasure. An 1840 book addressed to “the American mechanic” explained that the proper wife would be “patient, resolute, [and] love . . . her home,” and her place would be “eminently at the fireside.” Wives, Sarah Josepha Hale advised, should be “pure, pious, domestic, and submissive.”

Shielded from the public sphere, the mother-supervised home became equated with proper Christian values. Indeed, middle-class women now assumed greater responsibility for overseeing the morals not only of their own households, but also, by extension, of society as a whole, by becoming active in their churches and setting examples for others. While men saw to the nation’s material needs, women would see to its spiritual ones. Yet this very formula proved a means by which some women would gain a new degree of influence in the public sphere.

The Second Great Awakening Middle-class, domestic ideals were shaped by, and helped to reinforce, a strong resurgence of evangelical Protestantism across early-nineteenth-century America. Beginning in the South with events such as the great “camp meeting” at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, this “Second Great Awakening” swept northward during the 1820s and 1830s to take root in new farming regions such as upstate New York and among the middle classes of the cities and smaller commercial towns. Evangelical revivals drew strength from many sources—from democratic thought and economic development, as well as from changes in family life. As the enthusiasm spread, more Americans than ever before entered active religious life.

The emotional scenes that marked southern revival meetings were repeated across the North. Western New York was dubbed the “Burned-Over District” because of the repeated fiery revivals there. The movement embraced many, often opposing, doctrines but affirmed that anyone who experienced a religious conversion and lived an upright Christian life could avoid eternal damnation. Like Charles Grandison Finney, who became the most famous and influential of revivalist preachers, most believed that this salvation was an act of free will, not—as Calvinists had maintained—predestined by God. Individuals had the power to choose for themselves the path to eternal life. Self-discipline and self-control could save them after death as well as gaining them material comfort and prosperity on Earth. The confidence that, with self-discipline and effort, people could influence



Revivalist Meeting

A camp meeting in the woods painted by Pennsylvania artist Jeremiah Paul. Jeremiah Paul, c. 1815, oil on board, 18¾ × 28 inches — Billy Graham Center Museum, Wheaton College.

their afterlives complemented their belief in personal initiative, hard work, and individual advancement.

The evangelical movement sought to bridge widening social divisions, and it embraced people from every social class. Though merchants, masters, and journeymen now lived and worked separately, they might still worship together. Everywhere, women formed a majority of church members and congregations, and in one sense, evangelicalism endorsed women's separation from business and their moral authority as teachers and exemplars. However, their importance in the churches gave them a new semipublic role and enabled many evangelical women to develop wider social influence.

Evangelicals believed in changing society by reforming ("perfecting") the individuals who composed it. "To the universal reformation of the world [we] stand committed," wrote Finney. Through personal example and by spreading the word of Christ, evangelicals would reform society. Most saw the causes of social ills in "the ungoverned appetites, bad habits, and vices" of individuals, not in the workings of society itself. Their activism generated an impressive network of voluntary organizations pledged to fight alcohol and prostitution, enforce a strict Sabbath, and encourage public and religious education. Men usually headed these organizations, but women composed much of the membership and were prominent as organizers and activists.

The revivals were an important spur to the antislavery movement, which grew rapidly in many northern towns and agricultural districts in the 1830s and would sharpen the distinctions and antagonism between North

and South in the decades that followed. The American Anti-Slavery Society—founded by Arthur Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison, and others in 1833—employed techniques that were already being used by revivalist organizations: itinerant lecturers, emotional oratory, and printed periodicals and tracts that condemned slavery as a sin and spurred the campaign for emancipation.

Although evangelicals sought social inclusiveness, they by no means gained universal support. Even many Christians rejected their efforts to become “their brothers’ keepers.” Class distinctions, especially, shaped evangelical activism. Families of successful master craftsmen, merchants, and farmers who had adapted to the new, competitive economy were among the strongest supporters of reformist revivalism, which also became closely associated with the Whig Party in politics. Although commercial and industrial change brought them prosperity, businessmen worried about the threats to order that change produced. Reform often meant converting the poor to evangelical ideas about proper family life and personal behavior. Drinking alcoholic beverages, the Presbyterian minister Albert Barnes argued, “produces idleness and loss of property. . . . [T]he man who will not work . . . is the enemy of his country.” Other Whig evangelicals warned against “the ascendancy of the rabble, . . . the filth and offscouring of all things,” and advocated the influence of “the mass of intelligence and property of the country.”

Evangelicalism offered reformers a means to convert others—including their own employees—to their values. Hoping to secure docile workers, employers such as Samuel Slater and the owners of the Waltham-Lowell mills encouraged church attendance by their operatives to foster regularity and discipline. Mill owners were also among the sponsors of evangelical churches built in the Rockdale district of Pennsylvania in the 1830s.

But workers’ religious attachments were not just imposed on them by employers. Itinerant preachers—working men and women themselves—evangelized in factory villages, and young workers found spiritual and social companionship in church activities. Nor did piety necessarily make them more docile. Camp meetings and prolonged revivals sometimes disrupted work, causing frustrated manufacturers to combat local churches or evangelists. In one Massachusetts textile district, revivals were followed by increased labor turnover in the mills.

Radically minded working people also identified with evangelicalism because it stressed spiritual equality and sincere belief over elitism and formality. They sought a religion that would help workers to defend and extend their rights. They endorsed the emphasis on self-discipline, viewing alcohol, gambling, and prostitution as snares set by a corrupt society to trap people or distract them from exercising their liberties. Although evangelicalism fostered acceptance of the wage system, it also promoted self-assurance and

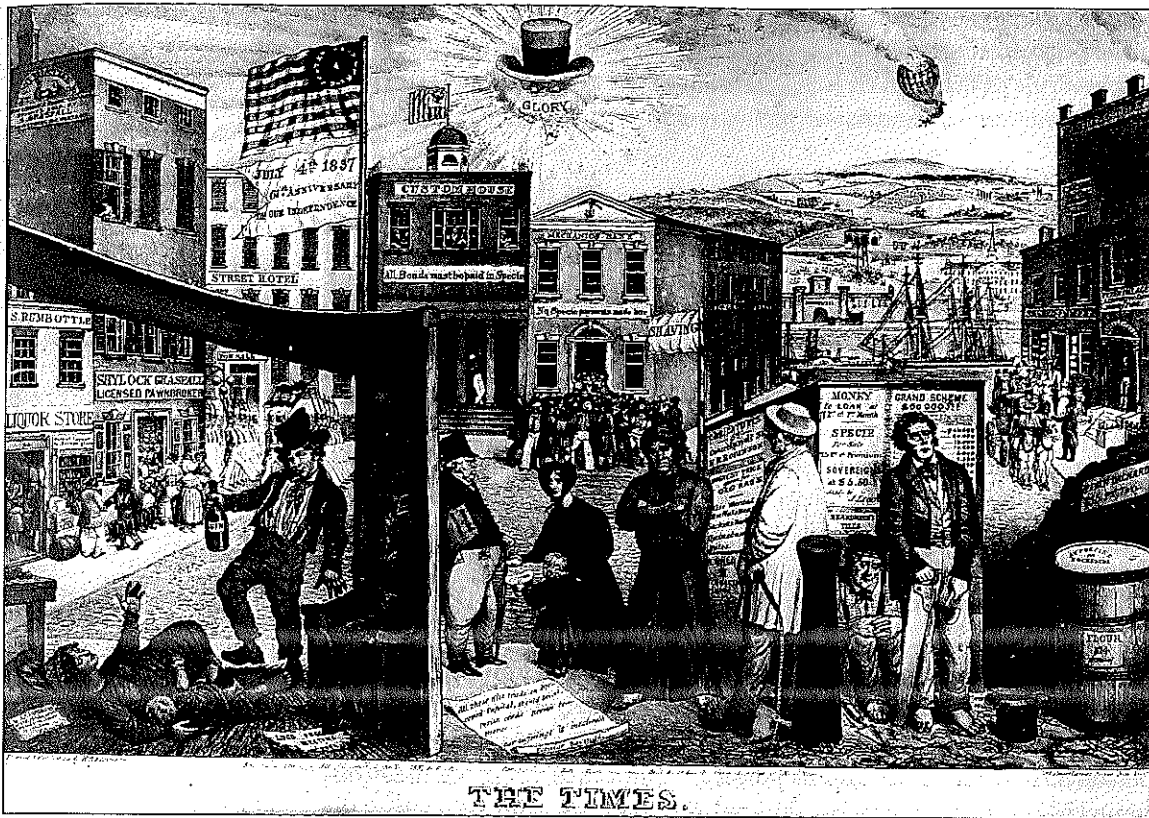
a strong sense of equal rights. As it grew in importance during the 1830s, evangelicalism helped to fuel, as much as diminish, the determination of labor leaders and activists to secure justice for working people.

Depression and Crisis in Northern Society However, a serious economic depression, starting with a financial crisis in 1837, wiped out much of the organized labor movement and marked a deep crisis in the North's emerging wage labor economy. A fall in the price of cotton in Europe, driven by rising output from the slave South, bankrupted some brokerage firms. The Bank of England called in American loans, sparking a panic in New York and other eastern cities. Banks collapsed, and thousands of businesses and individuals were ruined. Whigs blamed the Jackson and Van Buren administrations' policy of removing federal funds from the Bank of the United States to favored state-chartered "pet banks" for exacerbating the crisis.

Recovery proved difficult. Commerce and transportation declined, most construction ceased, and goods went unsold. Countless businesses folded, including many manufacturing operations, large and small, scattered across the rural and urban Northeast. Most of New York City's large clothing firms and many of its metal foundries were wiped out. Even firms whose products were in high demand, such as the printing press manufacturer R. Hoe and Company, were caught out by the financial disruption, failed, and laid off their employees. In all the main centers of industry and commerce, many workers found themselves without work or income.

In Lynn, Massachusetts, thousands of shoemakers were jobless, and the wages of those still employed were cut in half. The poor in Philadelphia were reported to be "dying of want." A committee of Boston citizens sought to drive unemployed people out of the city. In New York City, more than one-third of the total labor force was thrown out of work, and a similar proportion were reduced to working part-time or at drastically cut wages. When a notice appeared offering rural employment for 20 laborers at one-quarter of the usual wage, 500 men applied. Growing numbers of the poor were forced to live in cramped buildings, as one report put it, "crowded beneath mouldering, water-rotted roofs, or burrowed among rats in clammy cellars." More than 7,000 people were living in New York City cellars by 1842, and their numbers were rising.

The labor movement plunged into crisis. In contrast to their resistance in 1834 and 1836, Lowell factory women organized no protests against wage cuts between 1837 and 1843. With so many jobs lost and people desperate for work at any pay, strike threats lost their effect, and most unions dissolved. For employers, this was the depression's silver lining. A hat manufacturer boasted that his workers were now free of "the moral gangrene of Trades Union principles" and "the inconveniences" of "regular combina-



THE TIMES.

The Times

The ravages of the depression were catalogued and blamed on the Jackson administration in this 1837 lithograph by a Whig printmaker. In the foreground, a family descended into alcoholism, a mother and child begged for charity, and unemployed workers stood about. In the background, citizens lined up outside of a pawnbroker's establishment while others made a run on a bank. Signs all around announced the devaluation of currency and lack of credit. Above the dismal scene shone Andrew Jackson's well-known beaver hat, spectacles, and clay pipe. Henry R. Robinson (after a drawing by Edward W. Clay), 1837, lithograph, 19 x 12 inches — J. Clarence Davies Collection, Museum of the City of New York.

tions and periodical strikes.” The editor of the *Journal of Commerce* urged proprietors to “employ no men who do not forever abjure the unions.” The opportunity had now arrived to eradicate labor organizations, and “it should be done thoroughly.”

But hardship also fanned the flames of antibusiness sentiment. In 1837, a flour riot in New York reflected popular conceptions of justice handed down from the Revolutionary period. A meeting of 4,000 to 5,000 hungry people heard speakers denounce landlords and high rents, along with merchants holding back food from starving neighbors. One speaker announced that the firm of Hart and Co. had thousands of barrels of flour at their store and suggested that the crowd “go and offer . . . eight dollars a barrel for it” — a figure below the market rate, but deemed just by the public. As crowds had done in the eighteenth century, the New Yorkers went to extract economic justice from an individual who was more powerful than they.

Rioters were met at the store by police and by the mayor with an appeal to disperse, but they chased the authorities away, broke into the store, and seized the flour. After the police returned with state militia and made arrests, the crowd regrouped to rescue the prisoners. They were eventually

broken up, but rioters had made their point: a depression might undermine labor organizations, but it would not reconcile working people to the absolute rule of the marketplace. Alternative conceptions of popular rights and community justice retained their strength.

Conclusion: A Divided Republic

“Whoever looks at the world as it is now,” Thomas Skidmore had written in 1829, “will see it divided into two distinct classes: proprietors, and non-proprietors; those who own the world, and those who own no part of it.” Growth in commerce, productivity, and total output seemed only to deepen the chasm between rich and poor and further erode values of mutual assistance and community rights. Depression and the hardship to which it led further undermined working peoples’ ability to share in the products of their own labor. “No one can observe the signs of the times with much care,” wrote Bostonian Orestes Brownson, “without perceiving that a crisis as to the relation of wealth and labor is approaching.”

The social conflict Brownson anticipated was attributable to the “system of labor at wages.” If America were truly to become a society grounded in equality, he argued, “there must be no class of our fellow men doomed to toil through life as mere workmen at wages.” The North in the 1820s and 1830s had witnessed a crucial modification of the republican conception of personal “independence” and its political significance. Laboring men continued to claim the respect due independent citizens, but had rejected the old idea that political participation should be restricted to those with property. As supporters of workingmen’s parties or the mainstream parties, they asserted the dignity of labor and condemned the notion that power should belong to an “aristocracy” of wealthy or professional men. Some laboring women in the 1830s claimed the same rights to respect and independence that laboring men did. As union members and as strikers, they asserted their right as poor laborers to live in dignity. Criticism of “aristocracy” led some working people to become suspicious of slave society in the South, where a planter class lived off the labor of unfree men and women. Yet white males continued to assert the priority of manhood and race over women and people of color, whom they sought to exclude.

The Years in Review

1793

- The first U.S. textile factory, modest in size and equipped only to spin yarn, is built in Pawtucket Falls, Rhode Island, by the firm of Almy, Brown, and Slater.

1801

- A “camp meeting” in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, helps to begin the Second Great Awakening, an evangelical movement emphasizing the need to perfect the individual that sweeps the nation and involves people from every social class.

1812

- Congress declares war against the British on June 14.

1814

- Boston Associates build a textile mill in Waltham, Massachusetts, that is much larger than “Rhode Island system” mills and mechanizes all stages of cloth production.

1815

- The Treaty of Ghent ends the war with the British.

1816

- Congress charters the Second Bank of the United States in an attempt to standardize state and local banking practices.

1817–1825

- Construction of the 364-mile Erie Canal links the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley to the Hudson River, New York City, and transatlantic trade.

1818

- The president’s residence reopens after being burned out by the British in 1814; it is now called “White House” because of a new coat of white paint.

1819

- Second Bank of the United States tightens the availability of credit, sparking similar restrictions by state and local banks and resulting in the nation’s first financial panic; economic growth slows, and unemployment increases.

1821

- Troy Female Seminary begins higher education for women in the United States.

1823

- President Monroe says that the United States will not tolerate European interference in the internal affairs of the Western Hemisphere—what comes to be called the “Monroe Doctrine.”

1824

- Pawtucket weavers strike to resist a reduction of piece rates and an extension of their workday.

- Robert Owen creates a cooperative community in New Harmony, Indiana, which influences the many communitarian experiments of the period.
- John Quincy Adams is elected president by the House of Representatives after neither he nor his opponent, Andrew Jackson, receives a majority of votes in the election (although Jackson earns the largest number of popular and electoral votes).

1827

- A movement to create workingmen's parties spreads from Philadelphia to other major cities as well as small towns and rural districts.
- Philadelphia journeymen house carpenters strike in support of a demand that their workday be shortened from twelve hours to ten.

1828

- Construction of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad begins.
- Democrat Andrew Jackson is elected president.

1829

- The inauguration of Andrew Jackson as president includes thousands of his supporters tramping through the White House—an action that is symbolic of the era of the “common man.”
- Sam Patch (the Evel Knievel of his day) dies in an attempt to leap over Genesee Falls. He had previously made many successful jumps over cliffs, gorges, and bridges.

1830

- The steam press is invented, eventually leading to a drastic reduction in the cost of printing.
- Robert Dale Owen publishes the first American book on birth control.
- *Godey's Lady's Book* is the first U.S. magazine directed at women.

1831

- The New York Tailoresses' Society is founded.

1832

- Believing that the federal bank's power threatens democratic government, President Jackson vetoes rechartering of the Second Bank of the United States and removes federal deposits from the bank.

1833

- New York journeymen carpenters strike for higher wages and gain the support of fifteen other trade organizations.
- The American Anti-Slavery Society is founded.

1834

- Lowell, Massachusetts, workers strike to protest worsening working conditions; they strike again in 1836.
- The National Trades Union representing 25,000 workers is founded.
- A strike by Chesapeake & Ohio Canal workers is suppressed by federal troops.
- The U.S. Senate censures President Jackson for removing deposits from the Bank of the United States—the only censure of a president in U.S. history.

1836

- Democrat Martin Van Buren is elected president over candidates of the new Whig Party.
- Twenty journeymen tailors on strike are convicted of conspiracy by a New York state judge, who denies them the legal right to organize and strike; 27,000 New Yorkers attend a rally to protest the verdict.
- The Philadelphia General Trades Union votes to allow laborers into its ranks.

1837

- A nationwide financial crisis spurs widespread and severe economic depression and unemployment.
- Angry New Yorkers protest high rents and food prices by storming a local firm and offering what they considered a fair price for the barrels of flour there; police and state militia break up this “flour riot.”

1838

- Oberlin becomes the first coeducational college in the nation.
- Chesapeake & Ohio Canal workers protest nonpayment of wages; militiamen called to suppress the protest refuse to do so out of sympathy with the workers.

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