**The Lowell Mill Girls: Life in the Factory**

**Essential Question**: Was the Market Revolution a positive or negative change?

March 9, 1840

Dear Cousin Hannah,

Please forgive me for not writing to you since I left home six months ago. Never in my fifteen years has the time seemed to pass so swiftly. Whenever I can, I write to my folks since I am the oldest and the first to leave home to work in the mills.

I feel so proud that I now support myself. I am also able to save money toward my dowry and still have some left for an occasional luxury. I now have a sense of being on my own that I never had on the farm, as you will see I have learned many things.

You have written that you may soon follow me here to Lowell to work in the mills—I will do my best to describe life in the big city. First, let me tell you of my journey to Lowell last fall. I felt such sadness as the stagecoach came for me early one September morning. My last memory of home is of my family as they stood at the top of the hill and waved goodbye.

As the stagecoach rolled and bumped along through the beautiful New Hampshire countryside, I realized that I really was leaving the farm. This year I would not be growing fruits and vegetables to put in pies or preserves, nor would I be making butter, candles and soap. My time spent raising and deeding sheep, pigs, and chickens is over for the time being. I am now a mill girl!

…I soon became friends with many of the girls as we shared an eagerness to succeed in our new life. These friendships have made me feel less homesick and have brought me comfort over the past months.

One of the greatest differences between farm-life and factory-life is how our lived are ruled by the bell. I wrote a little poem because it has made such an impression on me. Please do not show it to ANYONE.

The first bell we hear will tell we must,

Toil all day amid the dust.

The second bell says hurry make haste

Eat your meals—there is no time to waste.

We wait so long for the bell to say

Stop your work—you are done for the day.

The last bell signals the curfew hour.

It is time to sleep—goodnight bell tower.

…Our wages vary from week to week. We are paid piecework wages, which means the more cloth I produce the more money I make. On the average we earn about $3.50 a week for 72 hours of labor. Out of our wages we pay $1.37 ½ per week to sleep and eat at the boardinghouse.

Working in the factory means getting used to some unpleasant conditions. The windows in the mill are kept shut so the temperature is extremely warm and the air is filled with lint. In the beginning I actually felt sick due to the lack of fresh air. Many of the girls have habitual coughs.

The noise level is so loud that at first I thought I would surely go deaf. By the end of the day I often have a backache, swollen feet, and sore legs from standing so long. My hand and arm hurt too from constantly pulling the lever that starts and stops the machine.

…Wednesday is the night of the week we can attend Lowell Lyceum, lectures held in a big room at the Lowell City Hall. The price is $.50 to attend. Many professors and intellectuals come here to speak. I am looking forward to a lecture by Oliver Wendell Holmes (the author of the poem, “Old Ironsides”) who is planning to be here later this month.

Last week a professor from Harvard University gave a lecture about Ancient Civilizations. It was so interesting that we all took note in order to remember as much as possible. I feel I am learning a great deal about many things.

One of my favorite ways to spend my free time is to go shopping. What a feeling it is to buy things with money that I have earned myself. I bought a Highland Plaid Shawl for $1.92, a new pair of shoes for $1.12 1/1 and, my prize possession, a bonnet for $1.50. Sometimes Sarah and I stroll along the Merrimac Street arm in arm and window shop. We have such a lovely time figuring how long it will take to save enough for our next purchase.

…Religion is a big part of our lives here as it is on the farm. When we begin working at the mill we are required to sign a “regulation paper” which commits us to regularly attend a church. On the “Sabbath” the streets are full of all girls dressed in their finest as they come and go from their place of worship.

…I must close for now as the hour is approaching 10 PM. That is our curfew hour here at the boardinghouse and also when we retire for the night. It seems I no sooner close my eyes when the bell tolls 4:30 AM—time to rise and shine.

I hope this letter find you happy and healthy. Please write soon.

Your affectionate cousin,

Adeleen Blake

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