

PAINT A PICTURE—PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT

Massachusetts Lawmakers Investigate Working Conditions in Lowell

Massachusetts State Legislature | 1845

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

The first petitioner who testified was Eliza R. Hemmingway. She had worked 2 years and 9 months in the Lowell Factories; 2 years in the Middlesex, and 9 months in the Hamilton Corporations. Her employment is weaving-works by the piece. The Hamilton Mill manufactures cotton fabrics. The Middlesex, woollen fabrics. She is now at work in the Middlesex Mills, and attends one loom. Her wages average from \$16 to \$23 a month exclusive of board. She complained of the hours for labor being too many, and the time for meals too limited. In the summer season, the work [starts] at 5 o'clock, a.m., and [is] continued till 7 o'clock, p.m., with half an hour for breakfast and three quarters of an hour for dinner. During eight months of the year, but half an hour is allowed for dinner. The air in the room she considered not to be [clean]. There were 293 small lamps and 61 large lamps lighted in the room in which she worked, when evening work is required. These lamps are also lighted sometimes in the morning. About 130 females, 11 men, and 12 children (between the ages of 11 and 14) work in the room with her. She thought the children enjoyed about as good health as children generally do. The children work but 9 months out of 12. The other 3 months they must attend school. Thinks that there is no day when there are less than six of the females out of the mill from sickness. Has known as many as thirty. She, herself, is out quite often, on account of sickness. There was more sickness in the Summer than in the Winter months; though in the Summer, lamps are not lighted. She thought there was a general desire among the females to work but ten hours, regardless of pay. Most of the girls are from the country, who work in the Lowell Mills. The average time which they remain there is about three years. She knew one girl who had worked there 14 years. Her health was poor when she left. Miss Hemmingway said her health was better where she now worked, than it was when she worked on the Hamilton Corporation. She knew of one girl who last winter went into the mill at half past 4 o'clock, a.m., and worked till half past 7 o'clock, p.m. She did so to make more money. She earned from \$25 to \$30 per month. There is always a large number of girls at the gate wishing to get in before the bell rings. On the Middlesex Corporation one fourth part of the females go into the mill before they are obliged to. They do this to make more wages. A large number come to Lowell to make money to aid their parents who are poor. She knew of many cases where married women came to Lowell and worked in the mills to assist their husbands to pay for their farms.

The moral character of the [workers] is good. There was only one American female in the room with her who could not write her name.

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

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

Based on your inferences from the photos and the information from the text, what conclusion can you make about how the industrialization of the American economy impacted workers? This should be a 2–3 sentence statement. Please use evidence from the photos and/or the text to support your claim.

Source: Schouler, W. (1845, Mar.). Massachusetts House Document No. 50. Reprinted in John Commons, Ed., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society (1910). Retrieved from: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/massachusetts-lawmakers-investigate-working-conditions-in-lowell/>