

Chapter 68h -- We The People In 1820: Making A Living Up North



Dates:
1820

- Sections:**
- Industrialization Fosters A New Workforce
 - Women Enter The Industrial Labor Force

Time: 1820

Industrialization Fosters A New Workforce



Frank Lowell's textile mill is symbolic of how America's industrial economy opens up new ways to make a living, apart from agriculture. By 1820, about 1 in 5 have embraced these other options.

How People Make Their Living

Year	Agriculture	Other Options
1820	79%	21%

Ransom p.260

“Town Workies” is the name many are given, and they have traded off a strictly pastoral life on the farm for the more crowded and complex urban setting. The economic path they choose is also very different from that of Jefferson's entirely self-sufficient farmer.

Three in-Town “Workies”

Their city jobs are wide ranging in content and pay.

At one end of the spectrum are the “unskilled workers,” such as day laborers, longshoremen and draymen, and factory workers, who live off of muscle power and are hired on or laid off at the whim of their employers. They form the lowest rung of the economic ladder, with jobs that are always threatened, especially by immigrants who may be willing to work for lower wages.

Estimated Annual Income – Unskilled Laborers

1790	1800	1805	1810	1815	1820
\$37	\$60	\$62	\$88	\$92	\$67

At the other end are “professionals,” such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers and financiers – who tend to acquire unique skills through higher education, then sell this know-how on a pay for service basis to clients in need of their help. Because of their knowledge, people in these “white collar” jobs retain a high level of independence, often “working for themselves” as entrepreneurs. In turn both their incomes and prestige tend to be higher than all but the elite “owner classes.”

Between the “unskilled” laborers and the professionals are the emerging “urban middle class,” some working independently, others as part of a business. Some work with their hands, as “artisans” who make goods functional or decorative in nature, from clothing to furniture, household items to jewelry, tools to machinery. Others rely more on their minds, running small businesses, writing for newspapers, acting as clerks.

The breadth of jobs available varies by the size and geographic location of any given town or city. But in major cities like New York or Philadelphia, the list of occupations is quite amazing.

Non-Farming Occupations: 1820 America

Raw Materials	Clothing/Appearance	Professionals
Shanties/Lumbermen	Seamstress	Clergymen
Miners/Sappers	Hatter	Educators
Trappers	Leatherdresser	Doctors
Fishermen	Weaver	Attorneys
	Tanner	Politicians
Transportation/Goods	Tailor/Sartor	Magistrates
Coopers/Barrelers	Shoemaker/Cobbler	Judges
Rivermen	Tonsors/Barbers	Surveyor
Sailors		Military
Teamsters	Personal Transport	Undertakers
Draymen	Stablers	
	Blacksmith/Farrior	Journalists
Converters	Saddler	Printers
Textiles	Carriagemaker	Bookbinders
Smelters		
Ironworkers		
Plowrights	Food & Drink	Financiers
Gunsmiths	Bakers	
Clowers/Nailmakers	Butchers	Entrepreneurs
Cutlerymakers	Packers	Ship Owners
Soapmaker	Brewer/Maltster	Factory Owners
Candlemaker	Distillers	Plantation Owners
Ropemakers		Other Capitalists
Watchmaker		
Gold/Silversmith	Merchants	Lower Skill Workers
	Dry Goods	Factory Labor
Housing	Apothecary	Clerks
Houseright	Haberdashers	Servants
Carpenter	Saloonkeeper	Longshoremen
Mason	Innkeeper/Ostler	Rag Pickers
Joiner		Peddlers
Glazier	Middlemen	Tinkers
Cabinetmaker	Warehousers	Chimneysweeps
Locksmith	Factors/Brokers	Waiters

Time: 1814 Forward

Women Enter The Industrial Labor Force



“Lowell Girls”

Lowell’s textile mills also open the door for women to enter the industrial labor force.

Lowell, Massachusetts soon becomes a boom town, with over 30 textile mills being operated by some 8,000 workers. The majority of these are young women, who become known as “the Lowell girls.”

While Charles Dickens found working conditions in the Lowell factories far superior to their counterparts in London, the labor was strenuous. A typical shift for “Lowell girls” ran from 5AM to 7PM on a production line consisting of 80 workers, two male overseers, and the non-stop racket of spinning and weaving machines and air filled with cotton and cloth detritus.

“Lowell girls” worked about 70 hours a week on average and were paid about 6 cents per hour or around \$4 per week – a generous wage at the time.

The girls lived and ate together in company boarding houses, obeyed a 10PM curfew, and were expected to attend church on the Sabbath and exhibit upright behavior at all times. Time off was granted for short vacations, trips to the city, exposure to various cultural events.

Despite the offer of steady work, shelter and pay, the average job tenure for a “Lowell girl” was roughly four years.