



# A Thread In Time

Newsletter of the National Society of Descendants of  
Textile Workers of America, Inc.

[www.textileworker.com](http://www.textileworker.com)

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## *President's Message*

The annual meeting of the National Society of the Descendants of Textile Workers of America, Inc. was held March 22, 2015 at 1:30 pm, at the Willimantic Brewing Company in Willimantic, CT. A vote was taken and approved that the first 50 members are to be "Charter Members".

Since there are now more than fifty (50) voting members, Mary Brown will ask the National Gavel Society to recognize the NSDTWA; it was noted that only a member of the Gavel Society can request this designation. Our Society has already been included in the National Hereditary web site and our insignia is also displayed there; <http://www.hereditary.us/>

Tracey Crocker can no longer serve as the web master for the Society. President Warner will serve as the Interim web master, we thank Tracey for his many years of service.

Sandra Bullock was appointed Chaplain, we thank her for her willingness to serve.

I would like to welcome the new members since the last newsletter. Please contact me if you have suggestions to improve our society. Also, if you have information to share on your ancestors, please submit it to our webmaster for inclusion on our website.

**#54 Mr. Harold Douglas Ford – Stone Mountain, GA**

**#55 Ms. Sonya Witt – West Palm Beach, FL**

**#56 Mrs. Mary Linda Hison – Brunswick, GA**

**#57 Mr. Christopher Moberg – Rochester, MN**

The plan was to do an article in each newsletter spotlighting a mill where our ancestors had worked. While writing the article in the last issue, I came across a lot of information on the "Lowell Girls". These were young women that were the backbone of the textile industry in America, toiling away in the factories for

low wages in harsh conditions. These individuals and their coworkers through the years, are the ones our society pays homage to.

We have added a mini insignia medal and a mini charm to be worn on a society bar. All proceeds from the sale of insignia are placed in the scholarship fund and are an excellent way to show your pride in your ancestor. See page 3 for ordering information.

*Regards, Bill Warner*



"2 Young Women" by Unknown - Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell Libraries  
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

## Textiles in Early America “Mill Girls”

**Francis Cabot Lowell** (April 7, 1775 – August 10, 1817), an American businessman, enlisted the support of his brothers-in-law, Charles, James and Patrick Tracy Jackson, and obtained the financial backing to establish the Boston Manufacturing Company at Waltham, Massachusetts, using the power of the Charles River. The BMC was the first "integrated" textile mill in America in which all operations for converting raw cotton into finished cloth could be performed in one mill building. Lowell hired the gifted machinist Paul Moody to assist him in designing efficient cotton spinning and weaving machines, based on the British models, but with many technological improvements suited to the conditions of New England.

In 1814, the Boston Manufacturing Company built its first mill beside the Charles River in Waltham, housing an integrated set of technologies that converted raw cotton all the way to finished cloth. Patrick Tracy Jackson was the first manager of the BMC with Paul Moody in charge of the machinery. The Waltham mill, where raw cotton was processed into finished cloth, was the forerunner of the 19th century American factory. Lowell also pioneered the employment of women, from the age of 15-35 from New England farming families, as textile workers, in what became known as the Lowell system. He paid these "mill girls" (also known as Lowell girls) lower wages than men, but offered attractive benefits including well-run company boardinghouses with chaperones, cash wages, and benevolent religious and educational activities.

The success of the BMC at Waltham exhausted the water power of the Charles River. In 1821, Francis C. Lowell's business associates, looking to expand the Waltham textile operations, purchased land around the Pawtucket Falls on the Merrimack River in East Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Incorporated as the Town of Lowell in 1826, by 1840, the textile mills employed almost 8,000 workers — mostly women between the ages of 16 and 35.

The Lowell System combined large-scale mechanization with an attempt to improve the stature of its female workforce and workers. A few girls who came with their mothers or older sisters were as young as ten years old, some were middle-aged, but the average age was about 24. Usually hired for contracts of one year (the average stay was about four years), new employees were given assorted tasks as spare hands and paid a fixed daily wage while more experienced loom operators would be paid by the piece. They were paired with more experienced women, who trained them in the ways of the factory.

Conditions in the Lowell mills were severe by modern American standards. Employees worked from 5:00 am until 7:00 pm, for an average 73 hours per week. Each room usually had 80 women working at machines, with two male overseers managing the operation. The noise of the machines was described by one worker as "something frightful and infernal," and although the rooms were hot, windows were often kept closed during the summer so that conditions for thread work remained optimal. The air, meanwhile, was filled with particles of thread and cloth.

The English novelist Charles Dickens, who visited in 1842, remarked favorably on the conditions: "I cannot recall or separate one young face that gave me a painful impression; not one young girl whom, assuming it to be matter of necessity that she should gain her daily bread by the labor of her hands, I would have removed from those works if I had had the power" However, there was concern among many workers that foreign visitors were being presented with a sanitized view of the mills, by textile corporations who were trading on the image of the 'literary operative' to mask the grim realities of factory life. "Very pretty picture," wrote an operative in the *Voice of Industry*, responding to a rosy account of life and learning in the mills, "but we who work in the factory know the sober reality to be quite another thing altogether." The "sober reality" was twelve to fourteen hours of dreary, exhausting work, which many workers experienced as hostile to intellectual development.

The investors or factory owners built hundreds of boarding houses near the mills, where textile workers lived year-round. A curfew of 10:00 pm was common, and men were generally not allowed inside. About 25 women lived in each boarding house, with up to six sharing a bedroom. One worker

described her quarters as "a small, comfortless, half-ventilated apartment containing some half a dozen occupants". Trips away from the boarding house were uncommon; the Lowell girls worked and ate together. However, half-days and short paid vacations were possible due to the nature of the piece-work; one girl would work the machines of another in addition to her own such that no wages would be lost but they would be lost if they stopped working.

These close quarters fostered community as well as resentment. Newcomers were mentored by older women in areas such as dress, speech, behavior, and the general ways of the community. Workers often recruited their friends or relatives to the factories, creating a familial atmosphere among many of the rank and file. The Lowell girls were expected to attend church and demonstrate morals befitting proper society. The 1848 *Handbook to Lowell* proclaimed that "The company will not employ anyone who is habitually absent from public worship on the Sabbath, or known to be guilty of immorality."

**Website**

Once again, I invite you to visit our outstanding website at [www.textileworker.com](http://www.textileworker.com). Our newsletters are available on the website in full color. You will also notice that some of the honor roll members have special attachments with anecdotes about their life. You are welcome to submit material about your ancestor. Please contact Bill Warner at [bill.warner@juno.com](mailto:bill.warner@juno.com) or Mary Brown at [mbrown@ct.metrocast.net](mailto:mbrown@ct.metrocast.net) for submission of this material.

**Officers**

- President William A. Warner  
[bill.warner@juno.com](mailto:bill.warner@juno.com)
- Vice President Melody L. Guillmette  
[melodylee14@hotmail.com](mailto:melodylee14@hotmail.com)
- Secretary Ida J. Ransom  
[iransom@snet.net](mailto:iransom@snet.net)
- Treasurer Nancy A. Merwin  
[Nancyamerwin284@gmail.com](mailto:Nancyamerwin284@gmail.com)
- Genealogist Mary F. Brown  
[mbrown@ct.metrocast.net](mailto:mbrown@ct.metrocast.net)
- Chaplin Sandra A. Bullock  
[sndeeo@yahoo.com](mailto:sndeeo@yahoo.com)

**Scholarship**

A goal of our Society is to provide scholarships to Vocational School students. The scholarship does not have to be used for college. It can be for licensing fees, tools, etc. The student must meet the following criteria:

1. Exemplary work ethic
2. Respect for self, family, peers, and persons in authority
3. Strong background and interest in American History
4. Good academic performance
5. Attendance record indicates no suspensions or unexcused absences

This year's scholarship went to Allyssa Sudduth of Windham Tech.



**Insignia**

You may order our insignia pin for \$40, our mini insignia for \$30, our charm for \$30 or the life membership pin for \$10 (available to Life Members only). Send a check, including \$5 for shipping and handling, made out to NSDTWA to Ms. Nancy Merwin, 284 Chesterfield Road, Oakdale, CT 06370. All proceeds from the sale of insignia are placed in the scholarship fund.

**Treasurers Report**

Checking Account	\$1,731.93
Scholarship Fund	\$1,479.03
Life Member Endowment Fund	\$1,056.45
Total as of December 31, 2014	\$4,267.41