

**After the Evening Bell:
Working Women and Leisure Time in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1830-1860**

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Honors Thesis Submission

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Map

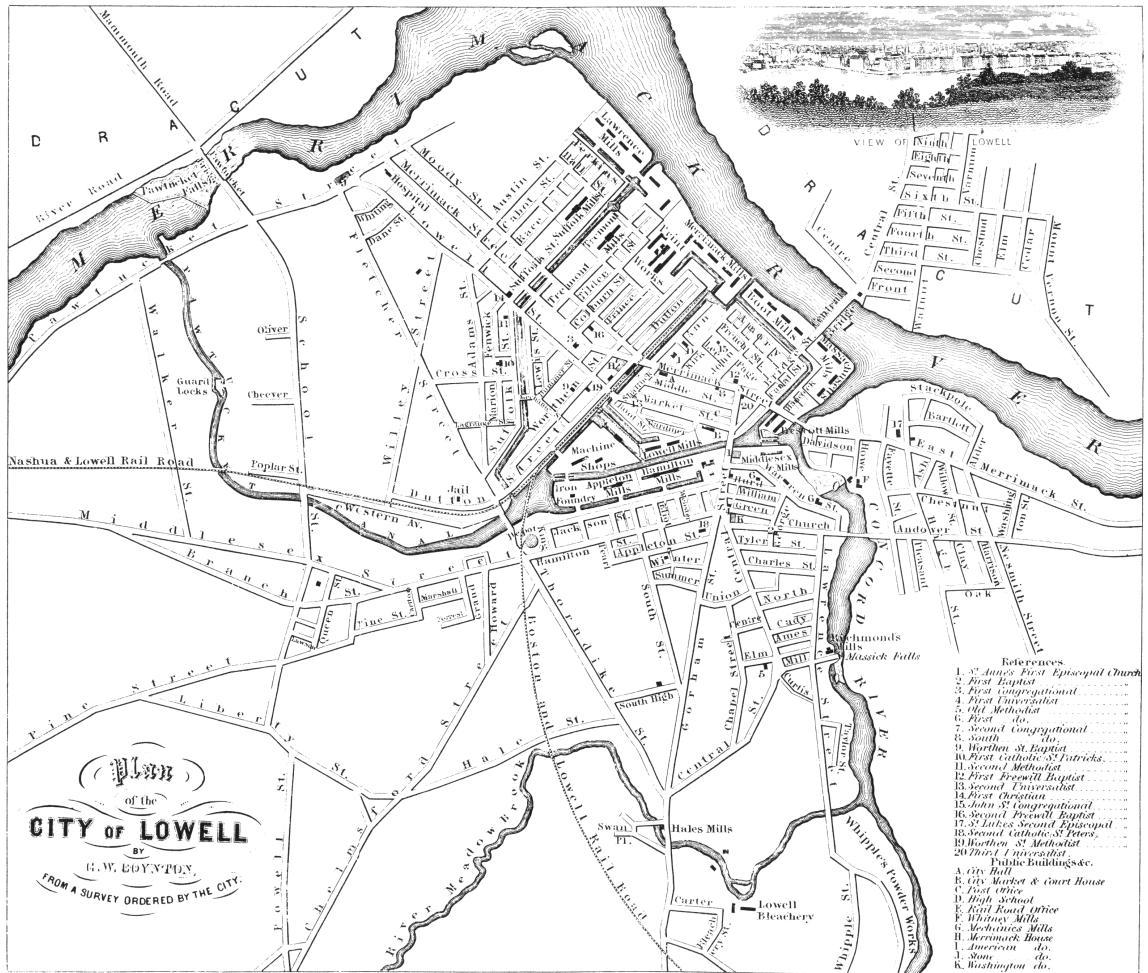


Fig. 1.1:
Lowell, Massachusetts, 1845
 By G.W. Boynton
 Scanned from a Modern Reprint by the Lowell Historical Society

Source: Wikipedia Commons, In Public Domain,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1845_map_of_Lowell,_Massachusetts.png

Introduction

“Alone, I am fancy free and with the sun, moon, stars, sky, the fleecy clouds of sunshine, the dark messengers of storm, the thunder’s peal, and the bright brilliant lightning, I can never be alone.”

Harriot F. Curtis, November 27th, 1836¹

“Fancy free.” Harriot Curtis, a harness dresser in Lowell, Massachusetts, wrote these words to describe her freedom as a single woman who earned her own wage through physical labor. Each day, Curtis drew the warp threads of fabric through a harness and loom reed, later to be woven into fabric. The Lawrence Company paid her by the piece, which encouraged her to work faster and draw more threads per day.² The factory schedule required Curtis to rise before the sun and go to bed long after sunset, having worked a thirteen-hour day. When Curtis returned home, she ached and often wrote of feeling sick, the lint of her unclean work environment affecting both her health and the health of her friends. Why then would Harriot Curtis choose to describe herself as “fancy free” as a working woman in Lowell? What was it she valued?

Lowell set up a new industrial system drawing in women like Harriot Curtis from the New England countryside to provide labor for the textile mills. In the late 1820s-1840s, Westward expansion began to accelerate and many men ventured west in search of better prospects than those offered to them in New England. Their sisters and daughters often remained in the Northeast, yet desired

¹ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 27 November 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith

² Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 64.

both a way to earn their living and an adventure of their own.³ Lowell's looms required human labor at each step of the weaving process. With this high demand for workers to join factories in paid positions, single women came in droves from rural communities throughout the Northeastern United States to Lowell to work. Often following the footsteps of friends or family members, working women would try to gain entry into a boardinghouse recommended by their more experienced peers. The boardinghouse was looked after by a housekeeper, who collected rent, connected women to jobs at factories and kept an eye on working women's activities to ensure they were behaving respectably.

The work and writings of Lowell's working women are the focus of Thomas Dublin's books, *Women at Work* and *Farm to Factory: Women's Letters, 1830-1860*. Dublin argues that women entering factory work were caught between two worlds. They still clung to the values of their rural home communities, but they were also enthralled by the new opportunities that employment offered them. Factory work enabled them to earn their own wage and access new social networks within a factory community. By joining the textile industry, these women continued to execute a domestic task, now using mechanized practices. As different tools and labor were needed to produce materials, the Industrial Revolution created different attitudes, values and expectations for women's work. Dublin states that letters illuminate the industrial

³ Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 61.

history of Lowell's working women, a history that would otherwise be overshadowed by the history of Lowell's paternalistic industrial system.

In her book, *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)*, Benita Eisler also writes about Lowell based on the published perspectives of women in the mills in the *Lowell Offering*, a periodical written entirely by women working in the Lowell mills. She states that women held two important roles in society by working at the mills: they became a prominent consumer category for businesses and important earners for their families. Eisler argues that the *Lowell Offering* allowed women to learn the boundaries set for them by propriety and represented how work intersected with class and gender ideals in the nineteenth century United States. Both of these monumental works bring Lowell's working women out of the shadows of industrial history and shine a light on the individual workers spending day after day standing by carding machines as combs brushed cotton fibers, starching yarn threads before they were woven and dyeing the textile before it was inspected, folded and sold. They discuss the differences of life in a boarding house and life spent on a farm and the power of buying a dress with the money earned through hours of hard physical labor. Both historians focus on women's relationships to work, and consider corporations' relationship to leisure time activities. Yet, in their discussion of leisure time and its effect on the representation of Lowell's working women, Dublin and Eisler fail to address of the ways in which leisure time allowed women to experience independence on an individual level.

Factory labor relied on women rising at dawn so that they would have mostly daylight for their work, which ended at seven in the evening. In his renowned article “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” E.P. Thompson examined changes in the nature of time during the Industrial Revolution. Thompson argued that the transition to factory work created a shift in time measurement and management. In the agricultural hometowns of many Lowell working women, like the “peasant societies” Thompson mentions in his article, time was measured by the sun or tide and revolved around task-orientation where little division existed between work life and social life. In factory life, as Thompson described it, women’s work centered not on the weather, but on the precise measurements of a machine. Thompson explained that rural communities tended to look down on leisure time, because farming families viewed time not working as time lost on “sluggishness.” Lowell acknowledged this disagreement between rural communities and the emerging norms of an industrializing city. Families were concerned about the effect of factory labor and urban life on their daughters’ moral fiber. In an attempt to quell these concerns and promote emerging middle-class values, textile companies set up churches, night schools and literary societies for women to spend their time productively. Thompson concluded that “there is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth or change of a culture”⁴ and that for an industrial community to remain during a time of change, a hybrid lifestyle involving “free time” had to

⁴ E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present*, 1967, 56, Accessed online, March 27, 2016.

emerge, a lifestyle that embraced human occupations not specific to seasons or markets.⁵ The development of leisure time activities represented one shift in Thompson's proposed "hybrid lifestyle" in Lowell.

Time constrained women's freedoms in new mechanized systems of labor. Every boarding house had a grandfather clock that woke women up at 4:30 o'clock in the morning, measured the short period for meal times and sent women back to the factories, all by bell chimes. Women were bound to the time on the clock and risked losing their jobs if they tarried longer than the bell rang. Factories had clocks and bell towers to keep track of time inside the factory complex. The sound of the bell echoed throughout the spaces where women worked and provided a constant reminder of their long workdays. For some working women, labor in factories consumed so much of their lives that they protested for the shortening of working hours in the Ten Hour Movement. Sarah Bagley and the Lowell Labor Reform Association throughout the 1840s in Lowell led the Ten Hour Movement, a movement that emerged among several laboring communities in the United States. The Ten Hour Movement worked to limit working women's hours in Lowell to ten hours with better working conditions.⁶ There were few gains made by women remonstrating against factory conditions in the 1840s, but the attention that protestors placed on time in the factory illustrated the constraints time placed on working women's lives.

⁵ Ibid., 96-97.

⁶ Dublin, *Women at Work*, 125.

Curtis's words represented a different reaction to time than that of the Ten Hour Movement. She described the sun, moon, and the stars as her universal compatriots, all images of the passage of time, in particular, the transition of day into night. After the moment the bell tolled at seven o'clock in the evening, work was done. Curtis was bound to no specific task dictated by the clock; she answered only to her own decisions and the celestial divinations of the heavens. Between seven and ten o'clock at night, Curtis and her co-workers enjoyed entertainment and self-improvement activities including writing, attending the theatre and going to lectures. Pocket watches became popular fashion accessories in workers' pockets, as a way not only to keep track on the time within the factory, but also to own and hold a piece of time. Watch owners had to personally wind up their pocket watches and could choose when they wanted to glance at the time displayed on their watches. In these ways women who wore watches gained the freedom to determine how they controlled and interacted with time.

In Lowell, working women spent their leisure time improving their minds and spirits, investing in entertainment, and purchasing luxury goods with their hard-earned wages. There were still strict rules for women workers about the hours spent outside of the boarding house, who could accompany them to leisure time activities and appropriate behavior during leisure time activities. Yet even with such restrictions, leisure time allowed working women to exercise their freedom to choose the activities in which they would participate. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt argues in his book *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*, that the

concept of “free time” in the United States developed during the American Revolution. This new ideal was expressed in the rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” claimed in the Declaration of Independence.⁷ Although the upper classes did not view factory labor as a source of happiness, Hunnicutt draws attention to the words of a “mill girl” who argued that the prospect of free time after working hours brought her happiness during her workdays.⁸ The excitement of seeing a performance at Welles Hall, attending lectures by popular speakers at the Lowell Lyceum or buying a bolt of fetching silk taffeta inspired women to explore their freedoms while working in a regimented factory system.

This thesis argues that Lowell’s working women gained a greater sense of independence, not only by working and earning a wage, but also through the choices they made about how to spend their time and money, and about how to represent themselves after the evening bell. It explores working women’s experiences through enjoyment and self-improvement activities outside of the factories. Readers may wonder why this project only discusses native-born working women’s experiences while immigrants joined the working population in Lowell in the 1850s and 1860s. Although both groups of workers held jobs in the mills and enjoyed leisure time activities in the decades before 1860, native-born women entered these jobs from a more privileged position in both their economic

⁷ Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

and educational status. Immigrant working women's time in Lowell requires its own study that exceeds the confines of this thesis.

This thesis also strives to explore the methodology of public history and looks at ways argument flow, object choice, visitor engagement, exhibit space and evaluation techniques can influence the effectiveness of the exhibit in sharing history with the public. The presentation of material culture is instrumental in how public histories are told, drawing on historians' academic knowledge and curators' material knowledge of history. Jules Prown argues in his chapter "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" that to tell the history of a culture, one must acknowledge that culture's beliefs and values. Artifacts are physical remnants of these beliefs and values from cultures that no longer exist, or that have evolved to the point where they are unrecognizable to later generations. If curators want to accurately depict the culture and history of a community through objects, they need to understand the way people's use of that object or the beliefs represented in that object were affected by historical events.⁹ Historians can provide this context for curators to explore the object's history from multiple dimensions. Through multi-level analyses of material culture, visitors are able to encounter history in a way that enables them to draw parallels between their culture and cultures of long ago.

⁹ Jules Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?," In *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, W. David Kingery and Steven Lubar, eds., (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000): 3.

In all, this thesis takes up the work of historical analysis and interpretation in three parts. Chapter 1 presents the history of working women's leisure time in Lowell through an analysis of women's writings about their experiences, the writings of observers in Lowell, and public documents from 1830s and 1840s Lowell. The chapter places particular emphasis on the writings of Harriot Curtis, a working woman and editor for the publication, the *Lowell Offering*. Chapter 2 presents in two-dimensional form, an exhibit, entitled *After the Evening Bell: Working Women's Leisure Time in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1830-1850*, prepared as part of this thesis work. This representation of the exhibit shows how it is oriented in the Williston Library at Mount Holyoke College, where it is on display at the time of this writing. Chapter 3 discusses the methods used to engage a college community with working women's history in an exhibit context. The thesis works to discuss the process of developing history for interpretation in an exhibition, using the specific example of an exhibit about the effects of leisure time on working women 180 years ago.

Chapter One:
“To Return to My Adventures”:
A History of Working Women and Leisure Time in Lowell, 1830-1860

After supper the tables were cleared in a trice. Some of the girls came in with their sewing, some went to their own rooms, and some went "out upon the street"—that is, they went to some meeting, or evening school, or they were shopping, or visiting upon some other corporation, all of which is "going upon the street," in factory parlance.

Harriot Farley, May 1844¹⁰

In her fictional article “Letter from Susan” in an 1844 edition of *The Lowell Offering*, Harriot Farley’s fictional working woman, Susan writes, “To return to my adventures-,” at the beginning of a letter, she unlocks a world of leisure time for her readers. She described the various choices women had for how to spend their time outside of the work environment. After “the tables were cleared” from supper, women separated from their boarding house sisters and chose whether to go “out upon the street” or stay inside. Outside the boarding house, Susan observed women gathering in community at church meetings. Other women attended evening school where they could grasp new ideas about their freedom and world. Shopping provided avenues for women to spend their hard earned money. That Susan, and therefore Farley, noted her experiences in Lowell, including her leisure time, as “adventures” indicated that excitement brewed among women as they moved to Lowell.

¹⁰ As quoted in Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 46.

After a fourteen-hour-long day of work, why would women choose to lengthen their “adventures” and time outside of the factory as Farley described? As E.P. Thompson discussed, attitudes around time changed in industrializing cities like Lowell. Women who grew up in rural areas were accustomed to traditional definitions of time, where everyone worked continuously to run a farm. Unlike this rural labor and other types of urban labor, like housekeeping, factory labor ran on a measured allotment of time, which left a few extra hours for leisure activities. Lucy Larcom, a factory operative in the 1830s, reflected on this new leisure time when she wrote,

Country girls were naturally independent, and the feeling that at this new work the few hours they had of every-day leisure were entirely their own was a satisfaction to them. They preferred it to going out as ‘hired help.’ It was like a young man’s pleasure in entering upon business for himself.¹¹

Women took pride in their labor, which was done with their own two hands without any help from anyone else. This was labor that they chose to do. That Larcom went so far as to compare her own and other working women’s experiences at the Lowell mills to men’s independence in business marked a growing consciousness of the power of women’s work, not only inside but also outside the factory.

Not all aspects of factory life provided women with independence. Factory owners built paternalistic institutions that attempted to control women’s lives, including boarding houses, churches, and night schools in Lowell. Although

¹¹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Women’s Sphere in New England, 1780-1835”* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 49.

women were free to choose how they explored these places, some leisure time activities like church required participation. Every boarding house had a housemother who observed the comings and goings of the women in her house. If someone did not adhere to the ten o'clock curfew or kept company with people of questionable propriety, they risked being blacklisted or fired from the factory. Working women thus had to find ways to maneuver these constraints and obligations so as to embrace their newfound inklings of independence.

Working women spent their time and money on both entertainment and self-improvement activities. This chapter analyzes the letters and articles of working women, specifically the letters of working woman, editor and novelist Harriot Curtis, whose ideas display one woman's experience surrounding Lowell's leisure time and the effects they had on her future career as a writer. The chapter also draws on the writings of working women's critics and on material culture left behind by working women to uncover the story of working women's new freedoms through leisure time. These sources aid us in understanding the choices that working women made regarding how they spent their free time, the ways those choices developed their consciousness of their agency over their own lives and the how those choices helped them navigate the moral imperatives created by their community.

Out on the Town: Enjoyment After the Evening Bell

Working women took agency over the entertainment they engaged in during their leisure time. Theatres brought both classic plays, like Shakespeare's, and new tales of adventure to the working class, and captivated the imagination of their audiences. After a stressful workday, or on a rare holiday, working women could spend a small bit of their wage to laugh or cry while being transported to comedic and dramatic fictional worlds, consumed by other people's troubles and not their own. A play at Welles Hall cost fifteen cents for admission, with the doors opening forty-five minutes before the performance. One year's season opening, *You're Wanted or a London Mystery*, boasted "a strong cast, special scenic effects, incidental music," and "No pains spared to make it a Big Success."¹² Another theatre advertisement from Welles Hall heralded a "New Play—New People, A Comedy Company of Rare Ability," and promised audiences "All the Old Favorites in the Laughter producing Farce-Comedy entitled *Hasty Pudding!*"¹³ The first advertisement captured the quality of the productions presented at the Welles Theatre, referencing the strength of the cast's skills and the suitability of the set and music to the show. The advertisement's promise to be a "Big Success" suggested that the play would be the talk of the town. Therefore, if people wanted to stay current to what was popular in Lowell, they surely would have wanted to attend the event. By describing the new

¹² "Welles Hall! Grand Opening of the Dramatic Season, Wednesday and Thursday Evenings, Oct. 1 and 2." Lowell Vertical Files, Box 27, #LF.E5639, Entertainment-Welles Hall File, Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts.

¹³ "Welles Hall, Wednesday Evening, May 21 for the Benefit of Lowell Reform Club," Lowell Vertical Files, Box 27, #LF.E5639, Entertainment-Welles Hall File, Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts.

production of *Hasty Pudding* with “New People,” but “All the Old Favorites in the Laughter producing Farce Comedy,” the second advertisement indicated that the theatergoers of Lowell enjoyed familiarity with plays and may have spent money to see the same play if multiple companies produced it. The advertisement also suggested that Lowell’s population enjoyed comedies, which provided a sense of relief from the workday. The first advertisement for the season opening began on October 1st and 2nd. The second advertisement was for one of the last plays of the season on May 21st. By holding plays during the winter and spring seasons, theaters attracted more audience members as entertainment activities were limited to indoor environments with inclement weather outside.

Theater culture around the United States stirred fear in both the home communities of working women and the owners of corporations. Religious and political figures especially feared that the emergence of women’s free time could result in a greater acceptance of immoral behavior among women. These culturally respected figures felt that it was their responsibility to represent the “wise and good” of their communities, as minister Lyman Beecher claimed about the newly developed Good Moral Society, a society that supported the idea of voluntary moral-control in urban communities.¹⁴ Problems like cursing, alcoholism and neglect of the Sabbath were all activities that occurred among the

¹⁴ Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), 13.

male working class in early industrial hubs outside of the factory.¹⁵ Factory owners in Lowell, acknowledging that women were stepping into more masculine roles, entered into voluntary “warfare” against vice by implementing required observance of Sabbath and curfew hours for leisure time. Other religious men, like Reverend John Todd, thought cities were demoralizing and polluting. He argued in his book, *Moral Influence, Dangers and Duties, Connected with Great Cities* (1841) that it is harder to make a difference in an urban community, where you can easily be forgotten and lose your identity. Todd referenced how character makes up one’s identity. Character is determined by one’s morality, and thus identity was influenced by one’s morality.¹⁶

An emerging middle class culture and its spokespeople viewed theater as encouraging the “virtuous single woman” employed in the factories to participate in sinful activities, which threatened the reputation of factories as moral, safe places. Religious leaders in particular feared a shift in younger generations away from moral order. They shared their opinions in popular periodicals that attracted primarily female audiences, like the New York City-based *Ladies Wreath and Parlor Annual*, which shared poems, stories and music written by women and religious figures. In an 1855 edition of the *Ladies Wreath and Parlor Annual* Reverend S.D. Burchard wrote about the role of theater in the society of youth in an article entitled, “The Theatre.” He argued,

¹⁵ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Workingwomen and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 5.

¹⁶ Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 72.

We have known numbers who have come to this city, youthful, virtuous and happy, the hope of their friends, the pride of their kindred, but unfortunately they have been tempted to the Theatre, and from the Theatre to the gambling-table, and from the gambling-table to the brothel, and we have seen all their once bright and beautiful prospects shrouded by a most fearful moral eclipse.¹⁷

Although Burchard's ideas did not reflect popular sentiment in the 1830s, they built on ideas that produced an ideological emphasis about women's morality. Burchard's rhetoric aimed to frighten women throughout the United States. Although Burchard wrote about audiences in New York City, he spoke of the theatre generally to make a theater in any city seem dangerous for a person's morality. His argument that attendance at the theater led to monetary ruin and prostitution contributed to sentiment for the Moral Reform movement at the time this article was written in 1855. Burchard published his article in the *Ladies' Wreath*, a women's periodical published in New York City, which was a strategic move in maintaining moral order among young workers in cities throughout the Northeastern United States. The readers with the easiest access to his article were those whom he critiqued. By placing his article in a periodical commonly read by working-class women, Burchard had a better chance of reaching his target audience and discouraging women from following the path to prostitution and other vice. Writing from Lowell, Dr. Elisha Bartlett, a professor, a medical doctor and the first mayor of Lowell, argued "It is a very great mistake to suppose that the safeguards of virtue or the temptations to vice are less numerous and

¹⁷ S.D. Burchard, "The Theatre," *The Ladies Wreath and Parlor Annual* (August 1855), 99.

powerful, in the country, generally, than they are here [in Lowell].”¹⁸ Bartlett asked people to evaluate their own communities for vice, not just new industrial communities, as a way of defending Lowell from accusations that linked new urban, industrial settings with vice.

Performances in public venues also entertained women of the working class and provided them with opportunities to respond to the moral rules set out by their community. One example of such an event was the Fourth of July celebrations in Lowell, which Harriot Curtis described watching a hot air balloon launch. She wrote:

When I saw him in mid-air I could have wept to have been beside him. And if he ever makes another ascension from this place while I am a resident-here, be assured, if the weather admits, and influence, and entreaty can avail I shall run the chance of breaking my neck under his escort- to gain a nearer view of the bright ethereal blue.¹⁹

Although hot air balloons appeared an innocent activity, Curtis’s comments illustrate the connections women drew between balloons’ untethered ascents and their own rising courage and freedom. Aware of the audaciousness of her comparison, Curtis assured Hezekiah Wead, to whom she addressed the letter, that she was within reason by stating that the weather must be safe for her ever to fly. She recognized the risks such an experience held. Despite the risks, she wanted the freedom to come closer to “the bright ethereal blue.” Symbols of heaven, like

¹⁸ Elisha Bartlett, *A Vindication of the Character and Condition of the Females Employed in the Lowell Mills, Against the Charges Contained in The Boston Times, and the Boston Quarterly Review* (Lowell: Leonard Huntress, Printer, 1841), 20.

¹⁹ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 29 July 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

the sky and the moon and stars, speak to Curtis's desires to develop a consciousness of her place in the world and balance the moral restraints created by her community. All of these natural images required Curtis to look up in the sky; she was setting aspirations for the future as high as the sky, moon and stars.

Fashion became a representation of working women's changing roles and choices in how to spend their hard earned money. The wages women earned often left them with extra income that many spent on their own interests and desires, if they did not send all of the money they earned back to their families in rural communities. By independently affording fashionable clothing of the period, working women claimed their position in society as respectable and productive women. Businesses took advantage of a large clientele, setting up numerous shops along Central Street and Merrimack Street. Peddlers went from boardinghouse to boardinghouse selling their wares to working women. If neither of these sources provided the goods women needed, they could travel by train to Boston where more services and stores were located.²⁰ Working women took pride in being able to level the social hierarchy of fashion by purchasing items like those women of the upper classes would wear. An article in an 1842 edition of the *Lowell Offering* stated, "I pity the girl who cannot take pleasure in wearing the new and beautiful bonnet which her father has presented her, because, forsooth, she sees that some

²⁰ Linzy Brekke-Aloise, "'Clothes that is fit to wear': Fashion, Wage Work, and Community among Female Textile Workers in New England, 1825-1865," in *The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 2010: Dressing New England: Clothing, Fashion, and Identity*, ed. Peter Benes (Deerfield, Massachusetts: Historic Deerfield, Inc., 2014), 54.

factory girl has with her hard-won earnings, procured one just like it.”²¹ Although the unknown author of this article expressed “pity” for the young girl, her overwhelming tone championed the working women who acquired the newest fashions with their own hard-earned wages, without economic help from anyone else.

What were working women buying with their hard-earned wage? Textiles, sometimes even the ones they were producing, were common purchases. Stylish for the late 1830s and 1840s were capes and shawls, long torso corsets with flattening features, mitts, white collars, ribbons, bonnets, and dresses with bell shaped sleeves, tight bodices and pleated, full skirts. Working women sewed dresses by hand with the textiles they bought, or added on fashionable elements, like fringe or lace, to dresses they already owned.²² Golden watches also came into fashion among the working women of Lowell, corresponding with changing notions about working time versus free time. Make-up, specifically rouge, was “becoming more fashionable every year” according to the *Lowell Offering* series, “Letters from Susan” in 1844.²³ Rouge covered up the pale, bleak qualities in one’s complexion brought on by hard labor in a dark factory room, and made one appear healthier when walking outside in the public eye.

²¹ Benita Eisler, *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), 186.

²² Joan L. Severa, *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995), 8-14.

²³ Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 50.

Working women noted changes in fashions through personal observation and fashion publications, like *Godey's Ladies Book* and *Frank Leslie's Fashions*. Editors published periodicals monthly and delivered issues to subscribers across the nation. Inside these periodicals lay illustrated fashion plates, patterns for embroidered embellishments on dresses, and entertaining songs, poems and stories. The working class purchased periodicals because they were both affordable and offered a window onto the popular trends of Europe and major American cities like New York. For a woman in Lowell, travelling to Boston or New York City required a long, expensive journey; fashion periodicals helped keep working women in factory towns informed about the newest styles.

Critics scolded working women's consumption of fashion for multiple reasons. Sarah Grimké, an activist for working women's rights, wrote the following criticism of working women's dress consumption in a letter to the president of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society:

Many a woman will ply her needle with ceaseless industry, to obtain money to forward a favorite benevolent scheme, while at the same time she will expend on useless articles of dress, more than treble the sum of which she procures by the employment of her needle and which she might throw into the Lord's treasury and leave her leisure to cultivate her mind, and to mingle among the poor and the afflicted more than she can possibly do now.²⁴

²⁴ Sarah M. Grimké, "Letter XI: Dress of Women," *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes: Addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), in Melissa Doak and Melissa Karetny, *How Did Diverse Activists Shape the Dress Reform Movement*, in Kathryn Kish Skylar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements, 1600-2000*, accessed September 28, 2015, through Mount Holyoke College Library, Information and Technology Services at <http://asp6new.alexanderstreet.com/was2/was2.object.details.aspx?dorpid=1000680854>.

Grimké argued that that working women's money would create greater benefit both to them and to their communities if they donated to the "Lord's treasury," in the form of churches and charities in factory communities. These donations would help run Sunday schools where women could "cultivate their minds" and aid those of the lower classes. By donating to charities, working women would aid the moral betterment of their community instead of buying into vanity. Others critiqued the fashions themselves, calling them obtrusive and frivolous. Dr. Elisha Bartlett wrote, "I wish that every girl would consult her health and comfort in providing herself with an umbrella, india rubber over shoes, a warm cloak, woollen stocking and flannel for the winter, instead of sacrificing to her pride in the form of parasols, kid shoes, lace veils and silk stockings."²⁵ Bartlett's concerns were supported by the reality of cold, harsh winters in Lowell and the threats inclement weather brought to women's health. Many luxurious fashion items like "lace veils and silk stockings" held no warmth, serving women only one season out of four in Lowell. Although Bartlett viewed these accessories as unnecessary, working women wore expensive accessories to symbolize their freedom to choose what they wanted to wear. Fashion is a conscious display of one's image. Working women knowingly decided to represent themselves with expensive objects, because they knew those objects would be connected with ideas of financial independence and self-improvement.

²⁵ Bartlett, *A Vindication*, 20.

Self-Improvement

Outside of working hours, women invested in activities that improved their experiences and those of their friends. Some of these activities included investing time, energy and money in personal interests like caring for their sick friends, courting to maintain prospects for marriage and spending time in church to practice their spirituality. Other activities helped women improve their knowledge of world, like attending night schools to continue their learning, participating in literary societies and sharing their opinions and experiences through writing for publications. Leisure time also provided women with an opportunity to assert themselves in political discussions and protests for their rights. Self-improvement activities empowered women to have greater agency in their lives, to think for themselves about the world around them and to gain consciousness about the ways those around them viewed them.

Lowell's working women took agency over their health in a city with high rates of disease and mortality. Crowded living spaces, strenuous work environments and long workday hours contributed to sickness and death in Lowell. Many working women cared for their sick friends or relatives outside of their regular work hours or experienced sickness themselves. Despite efforts to keep blood pure and energy high, women frequently fell ill. Almost every one of Harriot Curtis's letters described a recent sickness of hers, with maladies like

“fainting illness” or a cold that she thought was consumption.²⁶ Consumption and other forms of lung disease were a consequence of working in the mills, because women breathed in the lint that fell off in the production of cotton textiles and oil lamp fumes, both of which would infect their lungs. Amy Galusha, a working woman in Lowell, wrote of having “varioid” or smallpox, a disease that factory owners vaccinated women for in the mills.²⁷

The limitations in care from hospitals and families required many women to depend on themselves and their friends to care for their health on a day-to-day basis. Harriot Curtis writes of death as a constant occurrence in her letter dated May 12, 1838:

Again, sickness and death have disputed empire with my love. Again has the grim tyrant reft me of one fondly loved and cherished. And while bending over the couch of disease and pain while anxiously endeavoring to mitigate the suffering, while watching crisis of life or death, I had no hope, no thought beyond the precincts of the room.²⁸

Death was a consuming process, as Curtis described in her letter. Although hospitals existed in Lowell, they had limited space. Women often took weeks out of work to nurse a sick friend or look out for a dying friend’s interests. Such efforts stole away time and energy that could have been spent earning a wage at the mills or engaging in other activities in their leisure time. Many accounts from Lowell disagreed with Curtis’ tales of constant sickness. Dr. Elisha Bartlett wrote,

²⁶ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 12 May 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

²⁷ Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 28.

²⁸ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 12 May 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

In the year 1830, the population stood, by an actual census, at 6,477, the number of deaths was 114, and of this whole number only seven occurred among the persons employed in the mills!...They show *positively, absolutely, undeniably*, a state of things wholly and irreconcilably inconsistent with the existence of a feeble, deteriorated and unhealthy population.²⁹

There is no way of telling if this was merely propaganda, but Bartlett's descriptions are so idyllic that they lend themselves to suspicion. Labor reformers in the mills called for better working conditions and shorter working hours that they felt contributed to high rates of illness among working women. They claimed one reason for low mortality rates was that many ill working women went home to heal or die.³⁰ Additionally, if a woman fell ill, that does not mean that they died. The health of a working population must be determined by more than just deaths, especially if there were an organized set of hospitals and doctors, as there were in Lowell. Although health facilities existed, they did not prevent women from falling ill due to fatigue and dangerous work environment.

Sickness created constraints and limitations for working women and required women to exercise agency over many of the decisions made regarding their friends' health. Thoughts surrounding mortality aligned with domestic images of women as both the bearers of life and the witnesses of life's final hours. Although Lowell's women worked outside of the home, they were still expected to fulfill a caring role for the people in their lives, be it inside the boarding house or within the factory. In addition to administering medicine, changing sheets and

²⁹ Bartlett, *A Vindication*, 9-10.

³⁰ Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 28.

feeding the sick, caregivers also selected the doctors that treated their friends. When people found doctors that they trusted, they remained loyal to them. Women had an awareness of the multiple diseases that wracked their friends consistently, using their own knowledge of symptoms to analyze doctors' prognoses. Curtis wrote of once hiding in a curtain to listen in on a conversation between two doctors about whether her friend, Abby, truly had brain fever or typhus and whether her friend's doctor, Dr. Howe, intended to aid her in either situation. Curtis forced the dismissal of Dr. Howe, who labeled Abby beyond cure. The choices Curtis made to take agency over what she felt was her friend's best interest led to negative consequences. The repercussions of Curtis's actions resulted in a lawsuit for libel brought on by Dr. Howe after Abby's death. Curtis adamantly claimed that she prolonged her friend's life by dismissing the original doctor and bringing in her personal doctor who diagnosed her with a different illness.³¹

Working women suffered the constraints of bodily discomforts and illness that compromised their ability to do work or participate in leisure time activities. One way women overcame obstacles was by drawing attention to them in their writing. Working woman Harriet Farley's fictional character "Susan" wrote home describing the effect the mills had upon her ears, "it seemed as though cotton-wool was in my ears, but now I do not mind at all. You know that people learn to sleep with the thunder of Niagara in their ears, and a cotton mill is no worse,

³¹ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 12 May 1838, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

though you wonder that we do not have to hold our breath in such a noise.”³² Mill looms ran at a very high decibel level that irrevocably damaged women’s hearing, as they wore no ear protection while working in the factory. The long hours of standing, moving in a repetitive motion, and sleeping for a short number of hours each night also had a toll on women’s health. Curtis proclaimed in her May 12, 1838, letter, “Oh, what would I give for the perfect enjoyment of health. Not to notice bodily infirmities, ‘tis the mental imbecility and sluggishness which I more keenly regret.”³³ Muscle fatigue and mental tiredness from lack of sleep could make workers feel sick or uncomfortable with bodily stress. Local pharmacists took note of these discomforts, and a slew of medicine companies emerged in Lowell by the early 1850s, specifically catering many of their products to women’s maladies. Working women were conscious of the negative image of sickness for women in the mills and chose to spend money on medical compounds that promised to reduce sickness. Pharmacist James Cook Ayer owned one of the most successful of these companies in Lowell. Beginning with the release of Ayer’s Cathartic Pills in 1854 to “stimulate digestion in dyspeptic stomachs,” Ayer’s line profited from the promise of remedies for a variety of ailments. His most popular product, Ayer’s Sarsaparilla, claimed it “purifies the blood, stimulates the vital functions, restores and preserves health, and infuses

³² Harriet Farley, “Letter from Susan,” in *The Voice of the People: Primary Sources on the History of American Labor, Industrial Relations, and Working Class Culture*, Jonathan Z.S. Pollack and Jonathan Rees, eds. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2004), 18.

³³ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 12 May 1838, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

new life and vigor throughout the whole system” when it was introduced in 1859. The large number of laborers and high incidence of sickness enabled entrepreneurial pharmacists in Lowell to grow their businesses faster. Historian Chaim M. Rosenberg argues that the lack of plants and vegetables that were used to heal diseases in the country caused self-made medicines to be scarce in the city.³⁴ Ayer’s products played on the idea of home remedies when they advertised ingredients as “purely vegetable,” similar to homeopathic medicines. Although women chose to invest in new medical treatments like these compounds, they based their decisions on traditional health care techniques.

Although most women came to Lowell unmarried, marriage was a desired goal for the future. “Though the number of men is small in proportion there are many marriages here, and a great deal of courting,” wrote Harriet Farley in her fictional article “Letters to Susan,” as a response to questions about courting.³⁵ Why would women court and willingly enter into a system that diminished the freedom they gained by earning their own living? Women lived and worked as single, independent individuals, yet factory owners and women’s families expected their jobs to be temporary. In a few years’ time, families expected their daughters to get married and take on the responsibilities of motherhood. This expectation applied to the majority of working women in Lowell. While ninety

³⁴ Chaim M. Rosenberg, *Goods for Sale: Products and Advertising in the Massachusetts Industrial Age* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 89-90.

³⁵ Pollack and Rees, *The Voice of the People: Primary Sources on the History of American Labor, Industrial Relations, and Working Class Culture*, 19.

seven percent of women workers in Lowell arrived unmarried, eighty-five percent of Lowell's workers married at some point in their lifetime.³⁶ Many women arrived in factory towns with marriage on their minds, thinking about how money would affect their marriages. The wages earned through factory labor could increase the value of their dowries, which in turn bettered their chances of marrying into a good family.³⁷ Working women's acquired material wealth attracted men in both farming and milling communities. On women's trips to their rural hometowns, men observed that women had "tasteful city dresses and...more money in their pockets than they had ever owned before." Less than half of Lowell's working women's husbands made their living in agriculture, as numerous working women married men who also worked in the factories.³⁸ Perhaps for women married to factory workers, rural life appeared unattractive, as the new availability of entertainment and ideas were in greater abundance in cities. Women's education acquired through night schools and lectures in Lowell also changed the expectations women had for their husbands. A man's economic stability, moral intentions and political leanings all could influence a woman's decision to marry him.

³⁶ Hanson, Holly, "'Mill Girls' and 'Mine Boys': The Cultural Meanings of Migrant Labour," *Social History*, 1996., 160, *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 16, 2015).

³⁷ Inge Dornan and S. Jay Kleinberg, "From Dawn to Dusk: Women's Work in the Antebellum Era," in *The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues*, Eileen Boris, S. Jay Kleinberg and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds. (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 85.

³⁸ Dublin, *Farm to Factory*, 33-34.

Marriage often resulted in the end of a woman's job in the factory and the move into their husbands' homes. The transition from boardinghouse to married life separated many women from their friends and boarding house "sisters," the people who substituted as family while they struggled through factory jobs. Harriot Curtis wrote in a letter dated September 4, 1836 about a friend, Emily Pierce, who married "a Chandler" two years prior. Since that time she had only seen her three or four times, even though she still lived in Lowell.³⁹ Knowing that men would replace them as caretakers for a working woman who was about to marry, fellow working women, boardinghouse keepers and employers observed the courtship of their friends, renters and employees, and looked out for their well being in the courting process.

Working women made decisions about whether to adhere to customs and social pressures to attend church in their leisure time. Churches from multiple denominations existed in Lowell by 1840. Meetings occurred for numerous hours on Sundays or in the evening between the hours of six and ten o'clock. Some churches were funded by



Figure 1.2: "St. Ann's Episcopal Church, Lowell; Drawn and Engraved Expressly for the Lowell Offering." Lowell Offering No. 1-4. Lowell: A. Watson, publisher, 1840-1842.

³⁹ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 4 September 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

factory owners, as in the case of the Boott Cotton Mills, which required all of its employees to attend St. Ann's, the Episcopal Church built by the factory owner, Mr. Kirk Boott. Most factory owners required their employees to attend church services weekly. In 1910, economist Edith Abbott argued that church was an extension of the institutions that controlled working women's hours in factories and boardinghouses. This paternalistic protection bled over into working women's secular life.⁴⁰ By enforcing church attendance among their workers, factory owners attempted to control the activities that women in their factories took part in outside of working hours. The dominance of Christianity in New England communities established common values and expectations for virtuous women. Working women were given much more freedom as to how to spend their time outside of the workplace as labor practices and notions of time changed. Factory owners received criticism for bringing single women into urban environments from virtuous rural communities. By instructing working women on moral behavior during their free time, factory owners tried to prove to their critics that working in Lowell would not morally taint their workers. Sunday schools required women to read religious texts, seek guidance from pastors and stay off the streets on Sunday, the only free day of the week. In early industrial towns, the tradition of Saint Monday threatened poor work ethic and drunken behavior, when workers

⁴⁰ Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry: A Study in American Economic History*, 1910, Reprint (New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), 115.

missed a Monday after indulging in alcohol the day before.⁴¹ Critics, parents and factory workers were concerned about how such influences might affect the working women in Lowell. If women's time was required to be spent in a more respectable way, such as in church, they would have less time to participate in unsavory activities. By implementing such requirements, factory owners secured critics' and parents' confidence about sending native-born young women to urban environments.

Some women embraced church because church membership enabled them to practice the Christian faith that mattered to them. Most women came to Lowell from rural backgrounds that were heavily steeped in the Protestant faith. Small New England towns typically centered around a church on a green, and everyone in the community was expected to attend church on Sundays. It made sense then that women willingly spent many hours of their free time in religious environments; it was part of their culture. Church provided a road to salvation that many women strove to follow for their entire lives.

Yet, women attended church for reasons beyond salvation. Some women went to church to encounter new spiritual ideas, different from those they encountered in their communities at home. The vast number of churches in Lowell allowed women to experiment with different types of spiritual thought. Harriet Farley parodied diversity among Christian churches in her fictitious column, "Letters from Susan," where Susan claimed to attend the Episcopalian,

⁴¹ Mary Renda, "Antebellum Reform," Lecture, History 171, "The American People to 1865," Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, November 16, 2015.

Catholic, Methodist and Congregational meetings, providing herself with a multi-faceted religious education.⁴² Churches also created a social gathering of women from the mills, where stories were swapped and friends met.

Despite the social pressure to attend church, some women decided to not worship at Sunday or nighttime meetings due to constraints on time and money. In 1830, working woman Sarah Hodgdon wrote home about church costs to her mother: “I do not enjoy my mind so well as it is my desire to. I cant [sic] go to any meetings except I hire a seat therefore I have to stay home on that account.”⁴³ Hodgdon wanted to attend church, stating that church improved her mind, but did not have the money to attend. Other women practiced or were drawn to faiths that were not represented by the Christian churches of Lowell. The Shaker faith interested Harriot Curtis, who wrote multiple times about the spiritual community as a possible opportunity for her. She wrote in a January 14, 1838, letter to Hezekiah Wead,

But I am in earnest — I have serious thoughts of joining the Shakers. All that I ask is a ‘lodge in some vast wilderness, some bound up contiguity of shade, where rumour of oppression and deceit, of unsuccessful war might never reach me more. My ear is pained, my soul is sick with every day report of wrong and outrage’ and I know no community so perfectly separate from the world as the one I have alluded to.⁴⁴

Curtis wrote of the Shaker community as an escape from the constant motion of Lowell and from news of the political world outside of Lowell that troubled her.

⁴² Benita Eisler, *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)*, 50.

⁴³ Thomas Dublin, ed., *Farm to Factory: Women’s Letters, 1830-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 42.

⁴⁴ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 14 January 1838, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

She may have been referring to the conflicts that arose on the Canadian-American border between Great Britain, the United States and the Canadian colony in the Canadian Rebellions of 1837, which occurred south of Montreal, about eighty five miles northwest of her hometown in Kelleydale, Vermont, which was renamed Lowell, Vermont.⁴⁵ The Shakers provided an alternative lifestyle that appealed on some level to Curtis. Shaker Eldress Sarah Ann Glover recorded in her register six trips by members of the Harvard Shaker colony to Lowell in the year 1852 alone, marking the visible presence of the community in Lowell.⁴⁶ Although there was no note about why the Shaker community members visited Lowell, their physical presence in the city made others aware of the Shaker faith and its practices.

Women also may have chosen not to attend church out of a desire to protest the paternalistic system. The practice of sending women to Sunday schools for the entirety of Sunday drew many critics. Frances Trollope, a writer and novelist from England who specialized in writing social commentaries, visited Lowell and wrote about it in her book, *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*. She wrote of Sunday school:

How can they [men] gaze upon the blossoms of the spring, and not remember the fairer cheeks of their young daughters, waxing pale, as they sit for long sultry hours, immured with hundreds of fellow victims,

⁴⁵ "Lowell, VT," Map, *Google Maps*, Google, 1 May 1, 2016, Web, 1 May 1, 2016.

⁴⁶ "'Account of the Sisters' [and Brothers'] Rides' Of the Shaker Colony at Harvard, Mass., 1849-1858, kept by Elderess Sarah Ann Glover," Shaker collection, 1822-1879, New York Historical Society, New York, New York, accessed January 12, 2016.

listening to the roaring vanities of a preacher, canonized by a college of old women?⁴⁷

Trollope argued that subjecting young women to attending Sunday schools in their free time would only make women less likely to follow what was preached from the pulpit, because it was boring and dull. Some working women who refused to go to church may also have shared this idea.

Women embraced educational programs that created self-improvement opportunities outside of the workplace. Many women spent money on lectures, night schools and society meetings to contemplate to new ideas, acquire a formal education and discuss their opinions on classic and contemporary novels and articles. Speakers came from across New England to present their ideas and opinions to lecture hall audiences and members at society meetings.

In Lowell, many lectures took place at the Lowell Lyceum and at the Lowell Institute. Working women made up over two-thirds of the Lyceum audience for most lectures.⁴⁸ Professor A. P. Peabody from Harvard described his audience at the Lyceum when he wrote, “When the lecturer entered, almost every girl had a book in her hand and was intent upon it. When he rose, the book was laid aside and paper and pencil taken instead ... I have never seen anywhere so assiduous note-taking. No, not even in a college class, as in that assembly of

⁴⁷ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 1832, Reprint (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 230.

⁴⁸ Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry: A Study of American Economic History* (New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), 117.

young women, laboring for their subsistence.”⁴⁹ The subjects of lectures varied based on the speaker. Speakers for the 1839 Lyceum included Rev. Ralph Waldo Emerson on “Ethical English Literature,” Fr. Catherwood Esq. on “Palestine and Egypt” and Lt. Sheap on “Use of Wine.”⁵⁰ Harriot Curtis mentioned a Dr. Murry of Hanover whom she heard “lecture against the science [of phrenology] last-winter, and came to the grave conclusion that [th—][illegible] and honourable gentleman was a *chince*.”⁵¹ The wide range of topics discussed at lectures presented women with new ideas around which they could craft their own thoughts.

Working women grasped a new consciousness of their freedom in lessons taught in night schools. Classes improved the worldly understanding of women, which then allowed them to help their community. Visitors to night schools were impressed with the persistence of working women to gain access to new ideas. If women did not attend church, lending libraries still enabled literate workers to gain an education after hours. An article entitled “Woman’s Proper Sphere” in the *Lowell Offering* stated, “although we would not see woman engaged in the pursuits of man, we would not have her ignorant and uninterested in regard to them. She may aid, if she may not lead.”⁵² This article’s sentiments aligned with

⁴⁹ Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 32.

⁵⁰ “Lowell Lyceum 1839.” Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts.

⁵¹ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 29 July 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

⁵² “Woman’s Proper Sphere,” *Lowell Offering*, no.1, (October 1840), accessed through Harvard University Library, October 30, 2015.

“republican motherhood,” the idea popular during the American Revolution that stated working women were the future mothers of future male voters in the American republic. By educating women on both a moral and factual level, communities ensured that their next generations would be raised with a strong knowledge of propriety, God and the world around them. Community members supported moral and academic education as it provided an opportunity for women to learn to balance a structured day with labor, prayer and learning. It also enforced ideas of discipline and propriety upon women.⁵³

Organizational life provided another arena in which working women could gather together to analyze literature learned in night schools and to address social issues. The ideas shared in Lowell literary and reform societies influenced the long-term values and work of Lowell’s working women. Some societies fought for labor rights and equality in pay, like the working woman and labor activist Sarah Bagley’s Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. Dialogues held in these societies influenced Harriot Curtis when she described labor rights in her books, including *S.S.S. Philosophy*, where she wrote:

Time is time, labor is labor, and *to live* is an equal necessity with woman as with man; and we never could understand why a man’s time and services were, in fact, more valuable than a woman’s, when the labor was equally as well performed by one as the other.⁵⁴

⁵³ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women’s Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s*, 2nd ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984): 16.

⁵⁴ Harriot F. Curtis, *S.S.S. Philosophy* (Lowell: Merrill and Heywood, 1847): 97, accessed through HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.rsl1b7;view=1up;seq=5>, accessed December 3, 2015.

Curtis wrote in response to assumptions in her community that women were a disadvantaged class, because they were expected to be legally and economically dependent on men. This assumption also was shaped around the idea that women participated in more domestic-based work by nature.⁵⁵ For this reason, working women were paid less than male workers in factories.⁵⁶

In seeking equality, women sometimes identified with other groups that also fought for freedom in American society, like the abolition movement in the United States. By the 1830s, many communities in the Northeastern United States supported abolition. Similar to British abolition, the origins of the American abolition movement arose in religious communities. Working women listened to and read sermons that preached the evils of slavery. Some of what they heard, they related to and used as fodder for their own fight for labor equality. “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,” sang women striking at the Lowell mills in 1836.⁵⁷ The term “white slave” was a term to describe underpaid working class white Americans, although many working women rejected the term, because it diminished the horrors of enslaved African American slavery. Historian David Roediger argues that the idea of white wage slavery was solely a technique used by some workers to gain

⁵⁵ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 160.

⁵⁶ Dublin, *Women at Work*, 66.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

sympathy for fair treatment of factory workers.⁵⁸ Like slaves, they had a “master”, their boss, or more broadly, the capitalist system as a whole, which bound them contractually to their work. Unlike black slaves, they had the choice to leave factory labor whenever they wanted or when they had served the full time of their contract. Working women possessed both economic and racial advantages over slaves, but still chose to publically make a comparison to their experiences in order to gain support for their own struggle against unfair labor treatment.

Literary societies were another venue where working women could discuss articles and books about critical issues that affected their nation. Common readings in literary societies included literature about political, religious and social reform movements, both in fictional and non-fictional form. Societies sometimes published members’ writings in periodicals.⁵⁹ Publication in society journals validated women’s thoughts as equal to those of men, as men published works in many journals too. Some of the articles and poetry written by women in the Improvement Circle were published in the *Lowell Offering*.⁶⁰

Working women’s writing attracted national attention with stories, poems, articles, editorials and letters about Lowell, work, and their hometowns. Women published their writing in the society periodicals discussed previously and in

⁵⁸ David R. Roediger, “White Slaves, Wage Slaves, and Free White Labor in the North,” in *Major Problems in American History Volume 1 to 1877: Documents and Essays*, Blum, et. al., eds. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), 344.

⁵⁹ Carol Lasser and Stacey Robertson, *Antebellum Women: Private, Public, Partisan* (Landham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 36.

⁶⁰ Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 33.

ladies' journals with a larger readership. The intended audience of an article or story determined where a working woman might submit her work. Women's factory journals, like the *Lowell Offering*, enabled working women to share their experiences in Lowell with the greater world. According to the Editor's Note, the *Lowell Offering* strived "to encourage the cultivation of talent; to preserve such articles as are deemed most worthy of preservation; and to correct an erroneous idea which generally prevails in relation to the intelligence of persons employed in the Mills."⁶¹ From its pages, the *Lowell Offering* prided Lowell and its working women for creating a cultured and educated workforce, but also discussed the challenges that came with maintaining morality and health among its workers.

The new mill towns sparked curiosity and readership for publications from Lowell, like the *Lowell Offering* and the *Ladies' Pearl*, both of which discussed the role of working women in society. The *Lowell Offering* reached readers from outside of Massachusetts. The *New York Tribune* wrote of Curtis visiting New York City, to advertise the *Lowell Offering*, which they endorsed. As "the first periodical ever established by Factory Girls," declared the *Tribune's* editors, "we regard it with deep interest apart from its contents, which are usually excellent, intellectually and morally. We hope it will be extensively taken and read."⁶² By

⁶¹ "Editor's Note," *Lowell Offering*, no.1, (October 1840), accessed through Harvard University Library, October 30, 2015.

⁶² "Factories and Labor," *New York Tribune*, February 16, 1844, Image 2. Chronicling America: Historical American Newspapers, National Endowment for the Humanities and Library of Congress, accessed December 4, 2015.

reaching other cities, like New York, the women of Lowell could connect to working women in other parts of the country.

As the *New York Tribune* noted, the *Lowell Offering* was written entirely by working women in Lowell. The funding for publication, however, came from factory owners in Lowell. Investment in the *Lowell Offering* supported the reputation of the Lowell mills, by illustrating to the world with first-hand accounts that Lowell was not a place of hardship, but of sophistication. Certain topics and forms of praise became standard fare in the journal, while negative writings about the mills were scarce. Owners' financial investment prompted the periodical's authors to be cautious about what they published to ensure they would not be fired for what they wrote. Curtis wrote to Hezekiah Wead in 1836 about submitting her first article, anonymously, for publication to an unknown newspaper:

Since you was here I have...to express some of my opinion of "Manufacturing Companies" of their policy, equit, &c and if I am betrayed probably they will dispence with my assistance *instantly*. However I have no fear. The editor was told it was wrote *by a girl* in the employ of the Corporations and in Mondays [sic] paper he stated so saying "Her article would do honor to the heads and nerves of the better writers of the sterner sex. Her arguments are *clever*, and will convince, even the Agents and Directors that there are those, whom they may deem unworthy of notice, capable of defending."⁶³

Here, Curtis stated that writing enabled her to criticize her society, though relied on her anonymity to protect her from losing her job. Later in her career, Curtis authored her articles under pseudonyms, making it difficult for employers to

⁶³ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 13 October 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

target her as a writer. This letter also provided an example of the pride women took in the publication of their writings. Curtis cited the surprise elicited by the paper that a “girl in the employ of the Corporations” could write so eloquently and persuasively. She wrote with uncertainty about the outcome of publication, as she began the paragraph discussing her possible impending dismissal and then follows with “no fear.” For any risk-taker like Curtis, positive thinking became a way to deny the potential consequences of voicing her criticisms of her employer. In the end, it appeared that Curtis did have nothing to fear, as she remained both working in Lowell and writing for the *Lowell Offering* for another decade.

Working women’s writings immortalized their experiences, activities and feelings as single female laborers in a workforce often spoken of as a singular group. Writings from Lowell are especially important in this respect. Many female narratives from the nineteenth century have not survived, because they voiced what were believed to be common, non-remarkable lives for the time. The sources scholars have at their disposal to analyze working women’s experience in Lowell represent both the voices of working women and upper class men of the period. Catharine Hall, a feminist historian, argues that accounts written by women remain important sources for understanding underrepresented experiences, but still need to be written about with the consideration that other writings once existed about the subject. She writes, “If we accede to the death of the subject...it can lead to a loss of any notion of agency [and] a...loss of feeling

in historical writing.”⁶⁴ Hall’s argument rings true in the case of working women in the antebellum United States. If scholars only based their analysis on literature written by others, working women would only be depicted as frail and abused. Women’s letters and diaries provide a necessary set of sources to supplement this literature, as they voice women’s private thoughts about their world. Through their private and public writings, women claimed a measure of agency over prevailing representations of their lives within and outside of the Lowell mills.

Women’s publications and public presence at the meetings of literary reform societies showed the world that women cared about the political workings of the country and not simply about dresses and bows. Many working women held strong opinions on political candidates and decisions, even though they could not vote. In a July 1836 letter to Hezekiah Wead, Harriot Curtis wrote her reaction to a political convention that she had heard about:

I do not see a great variety of Vermont newspapers since my residence in this state, and those I am favoured with are all *Whig*...I still continue a *patriot* instead of a *partisan*. I can not believe that *a man* whom I despise in *private life* is the *best* person to be trusted with the *public* weal.⁶⁵

Curtis’ political leanings made sense within the context of her life. She favored the Whig party, which was known for its nativist leanings. Its support of the Bank and high tariffs supported the domestic economy on which her survival

⁶⁴ As quoted in Joan Sangster, "Gendering Labour History Across Borders." *Labour History Review (Maney Publishing)* 75, no. 2 (August 2010): 143-161. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text, EBSCOhost* (accessed September 28, 2015).

⁶⁵ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 29 July 1836, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

depended.⁶⁶ The appreciation she gave for authenticity in political candidates' behavior reflected her feelings about people in authority elsewhere in her life. Although Curtis could not choose the leaders in her world, they certainly affected her life. Factory managers and local politicians both made decisions that determined the freedoms Curtis gained within and outside of the workplace. Vermont politicians' decisions affected her family that lived in Vermont. Politicians on a national level decided trade agreements that could drive the price of the commodities she produced and consumed up or down.

Politicians also passed legislation that changed domestic traditions, like the adoption of Thanksgiving as a national holiday in 1863. Women's journals, like the *Godey's Lady's Book*, published full-page spreads on the passage of legislation for Thanksgiving by thirty-two states, including those in the Confederacy. New holidays created new fashionable practices that society expected women to perform and advocate. *The Godey's Ladies Book's* editor, Sarah Josepha Hale, championed the Thanksgiving legislation as women's work. She wrote, "God has given to man authority, to woman influence; she inspires and persuades, he convinces and compels."⁶⁷ Hale's argument put in words women's relation to politics, vicariously participating through their husbands, lovers and friends. By attending society meetings, working women could use their "woman[ly] influence" to impact the choices made by the men in their

⁶⁶ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 276.

⁶⁷ Sarah Josepha Hale, ed., *Godey's Ladies Book* (Philadelphia: Louis A. Godey, 1860), 175. Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

communities when they went to vote on Election Day. Some Lowell working women, like Harriet Hanson Robinson and Lucy Larcom, went on to become prominent activists in the suffrage movement, to fight for the opportunity to place their own opinions into the American ballot box. The vote became a potential tool through which women could exercise their ideas about labor rights.

Curtis used her leisure time and position as a working woman to influence the minds of men, like Hezekiah Wead to whom she wrote, and members of the upper class. She wrote on January 14, 1838:

I have an address to deliver tomorrow eve (before a society composed of members who are all individually my superiors) and a single idea of its contents, import or general bearing has not entered my cranium, and I wish they would wait until 'the fit comes over me'.⁶⁸

In the phrase, “until ‘the fit comes over me.’” Curtis may either refer to the writing process or allude to how her superiors viewed her and womankind. Her lectures could have been a form of entertainment to middle-class men or women who may have been in the audience when she spoke. The superiors she spoke of may have included both upper class men and women who were economically her superiors. Upper class women might have been critical of Curtis’ writings and lectures on women’s equality, as their lives did not come in direct contact with wage inequality or sexual aggression in the workplace. With such values in mind, Curtis understandably worried about whether what she said would be taken seriously enough by her “superiors” when advocating for her fellow workers.

⁶⁸ Harriot Curtis to Hezekiah Wead, 14 January 1838, Harriot F. Curtis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

Labor rights played on the minds of many working women as they decided how to spend their leisure time. Why did they need to work such long hours? How could companies get away with paying their female workers so little? These questions surfaced in newspapers, letters and speeches made at the height of native-born working women's time at the mills, between the 1830s and 1850s.⁶⁹

The first labor protest in Lowell occurred in February 1834 in response to a twenty five percent reduction in wages.⁷⁰ Women walked out of the factories and refused to come back to work until they were paid their normal wages. In the streets, women vocalized why they were striking. The *Boston Evening Transcript* wrote, "One of the leaders mounted pump and made a flaming Mary Woolstonecraft [sic] speech on the rights of women."⁷¹ This article illustrated the outspoken public presence working women embraced during the 1834 strike. The strike was unsuccessful in that the companies hired other laborers who accepted working for less and the company kept functioning. The simple act of walking out of work showed male authority figures in the mills that working women still viewed themselves as powerful, even if the average citizen viewed them as subordinate to men. The strike inspired other acts of protest in Lowell and other mill towns, like speeches and even bank runs.⁷² Protest heightened into a larger "turn-out" two years later in October, 1836, also in response to a wage decrease. Historian Thomas Dublin argues that this strike created more change, because it

⁶⁹ Dublin, *Women at Work*, 114-115.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 89-90.

⁷¹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 6-7.

⁷² Dublin, *Women at Work*, 91-96.

included workers from all areas of the factories, occurred during a market boom and had effective leaders.⁷³ It may be added that the first strike attracted attention from local and national media with curiosity about how women could stand up against men. A second strike added fuel to the fire. The 1834 strike and 1836 strike aimed to discourage Lowell textile companies from lowering wages for their working women.⁷⁴

As Dublin claims, women's leadership and dedication of their leisure time to asserting agency over their independence was instrumental towards the success of the 1836 labor strike in Lowell. One of the champions of this strike was Sarah Bagley, a factory worker incensed with inequality in the factory system. She was a proponent of the Ten Hour Movement that reigned in the 1840s, and served as president for the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. In addition, she wrote not only for the *Lowell Offering*, but also for *The Voice of Industry*, a periodical that preached women's rights and labor rights from its pages and came in contention with the *Lowell Offering*.

Sarah Bagley wrote positively about her experience as a working woman in Lowell, despite her participation in numerous protests against factory rules. Much of her praise for working in Lowell reflected time spent outside of the factory. She wrote in her *Lowell Offering* article, "Pleasures of a Factory Life,"

In Lowell, we enjoy abundant means of information, especially in the way of public lectures. The time of lecturing is appointed to suit the convenience of the operatives; and sad indeed would be the picture of our

⁷³Dublin, *Women at Work*, 98.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 103.

Lyceums, Institutes, and scientific Lecture rooms, if all the operatives should absent them...the pleasure of being associated with the institutions of religion, and thereby availing ourselves of the Library, Bible Class, Sabbath School, and all other means of religious instruction. Most of us, when at home, live in the country, and therefore cannot enjoy these privileges to the same extent; and many of us not at all.⁷⁵

Here, Bagley did not wrestle with her misfortune at working in Lowell, as some of her colleagues with the *Lowell Offering* did; in fact, her writing suggested the opposite. She relished her time in activities outside of the factory in Sunday schools and lectures, as well as knowing she was earning a wage and acquiring knowledge. She was conscious of her independence and rights as a woman and a worker. Labor activism allowed women to exercise agency in voicing their concerns with the factory system. Working women spent part of their leisure time applying the new ideas regarding freedom that they heard in public lectures to their own lives. By devoting time to developing these ideas and fighting for changes in the factory system, working women seized the opportunity to use the “privileges” of city life to create a stronger consciousness of themselves as working women.

For other women, standing as one mattered more than the public leadership of one person. In the first Lowell labor strike in 1834, women published a “Constitution of the Lowell Factory Girls Association,” which was structured after the United States Constitution and stated the reasons they “turned out” from work. By voicing their concerns as one group set on a higher goal,

⁷⁵ Sarah Bagley, “Pleasures of Factory Life,” Lowell Historical Society. <http://library.uml.edu/clh/all/lof02.htm>, accessed 5 March 2016.

working women drew on republican ideals rooted in the nation's founding and widely embraced as a point of pride for those living in the young United States. They used terms like "daughters of freemen" and "Republican America" to relate their cause for equal wages to the United States' fight fifty years prior for independence from England's colonial control.⁷⁶ Similar to Bagley, women who supported working women's united protest enjoyed the opportunities Lowell provided, yet still were deeply troubled about the treatment of working women in factories.

"Sis'." "Patriot." "Factory Girl." These are the terms Harriot Curtis used to identify herself and her fellow working women in her fourteen years of letters to Hezekiah Wead from Lowell, describing the numerous roles working women held during their time in Lowell. Women's experiences in the factory environment of Lowell changed popular opinion of women's work both within and outside the United States.

On a national level, working women's experiences in Lowell became a testing ground for future changes in industrial labor. Henry Clay wrote, "Lowell will tell whether the Manufacturing system is compatible with the social virtues."⁷⁷ American leaders, like Clay, questioned the longstanding effects of an

⁷⁶ "Constitution of the Lowell Factory Girls Association," *Mill Girls in Nineteenth-Century Print*, American Antiquarian Society, <http://americanantiquarian.org/millgirls/exhibits/show/reform/reform/resistance>, accessed February 13, 2016.

⁷⁷ Hanson, "'Mill Girls' and 'Mine Boys,'" 176.

industrial revolution and women's participation in production. The freedoms industry offered to women conflicted with social expectations of women. Many people feared that female involvement in the Lowell system would taint the moral character of working women and the children they raised in the future. Workers in other parts of the country looked to Lowell working women's protest movements as inspiration for techniques to make statements about labor rights in their own communities.

On a global level, people heard about the prospects offered in new industrial factories and immigrated to U.S. factory communities, like Lowell, that hired them as cheap labor. The wave of Irish immigrants that joined and replaced native-born women workers in the 1850s and 1860s demonstrated the effect of similar motivations in joining the Lowell workforce. Irish working women devoutly practiced Catholicism and desired an education in hopes of improving their prospects in the United States. Both of these values led to another generation of churchgoers and night school students in Lowell among single working women. The factory systems set in place in Lowell influenced the practices of laborers and manufactory owners elsewhere in the world. Many observers from Europe expressed interest in women's involvement in industry in the United States and the entertainments they partook of in their free time. Writer Charles Dickens spent part of his journey to the United States in Lowell in 1842. Lowell's treatment of working women fascinated Dickens, especially the sophisticated elements of boardinghouses, like pianos, libraries and the publication of working

female voices in the *Lowell Offering*. After returning to England, he asked the British to reconsider how they approached the condition of the working class in his *American Notes*. Dickens urged his fellow Brits to consider how the Lowell structure compared to British labor practices.⁷⁸ International connections to industry practices spanned as far away as Asia, where in the nineteenth century, textile mills in Japan started to cater to farmer's daughters as a group of potential laborers.⁷⁹

Activities that women chose to participate in outside of the workplace for entertainment or personal betterment affected how society treated the female image in other realms of community life. The liberties acquired by working women in the mid-nineteenth century influenced the freedom of women in future phases of political and social movements like the suffrage movement and labor movement. Working women pioneered a new idea of what it meant to be present in all aspects of society. They pushed the boundaries of admittance into different leisure activities, and by writing, imprinted their experiences into the story of United States labor history.

⁷⁸ Charles Dickens, "General Appearance of Mill Workers," *American Notes*. 1842, Primary Sources: Workshops in American History, <www.learner.org/workshops/primarysources/lowell/docs/dickens.html, accessed on December 3, 2015.

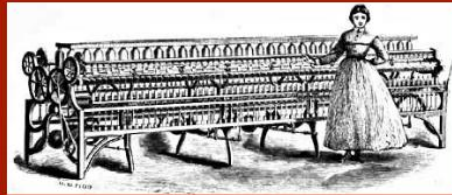
⁷⁹ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labour History*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 282.

Chapter Two:
After the Evening Bell: Working Women and Leisure Time, 1830-1860, the Exhibit

In the mid-nineteenth century, women from rural New England communities traveled to industrial centers to join a growing factory labor force of young single women. Unlike their work back home, these women now answered to the call of the factory bell that marked and divided their long workdays in cities, like Lowell, Massachusetts. At 4:30am, the bell chimed to mark the start of the day, leaving women an hour to prepare before heading to the factories. The noon bell signaled for working women to go back to the boardinghouse for a quick meal. But after the evening bell, women had control over their own lives.

Come explore the different ways women experienced and thought about leisure time through personal stories and artifacts from Mount Holyoke's collections!

After the Evening Bell



WORKING WOMEN'S LEISURE TIME
IN LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS,
1830-1860

A Senior Thesis Project by Phoebe Cos '16

in association with

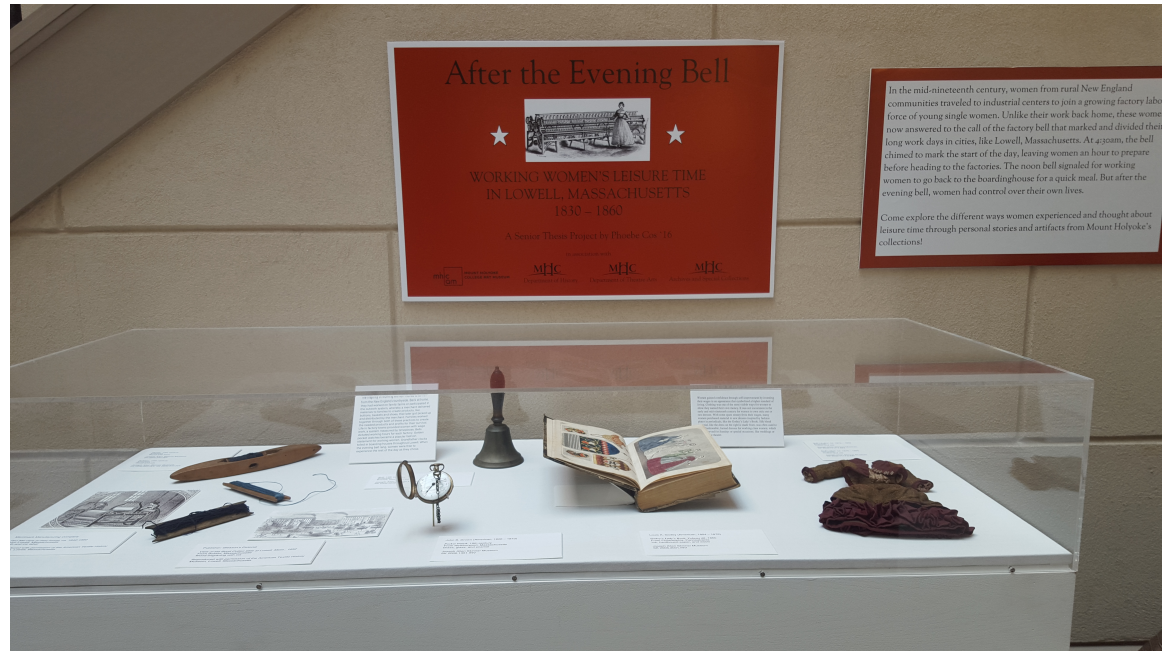


Mount Holyoke College
Department of History


Mount Holyoke College
Department of Theatre Arts


Mount Holyoke College
Archives and Special Collections

CASE ONE



The majority of working women moved to Lowell from the New England countryside. Back at home, they had worked on family farms or participated in the outwork system, whereby a merchant delivered materials to families to create products, like buttons, baskets and shoes, that later got picked up and distributed by the merchant. Families worked together through both of these practices to create the needed products and profits for their survival. Life in factory towns provided women with wage work, a system measured by timepieces. Bells dictated working hours for each factory. Golden pocket watches became a popular fashion statement for working women. Grandfather clocks tolled in boarding houses throughout Lowell. When the evening bell rang, women were free to experience the rest of the day as they chose.

Fig. 2.1: First case of exhibit.

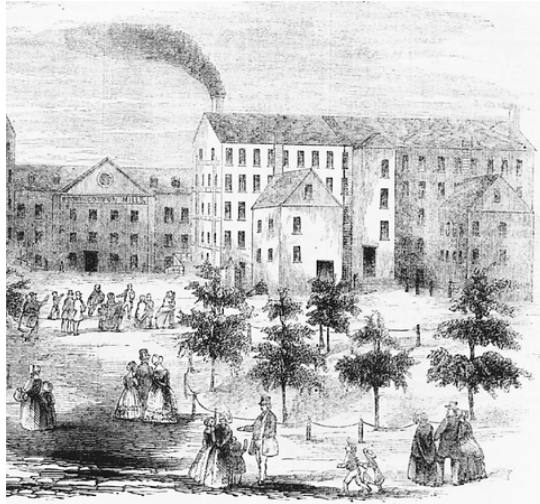


Fig. 2.2:
 Publisher: Gleason's Pictorial

View of the Boott Cotton Mills at Lowell, Mass., 1852

From Boston, Massachusetts
 Wood engraving with ink

Reproduced with permission of the American Textile History Museum

Fig. 2.3:
Shuttle, 19th century (Above)
 American
 Wood with wool

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
 SK 2006.940.INV

Bobbins, 19th century (Below)
 American
 Wood and silk

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
 SK 2006.869.INV, SK 2006.870.INV

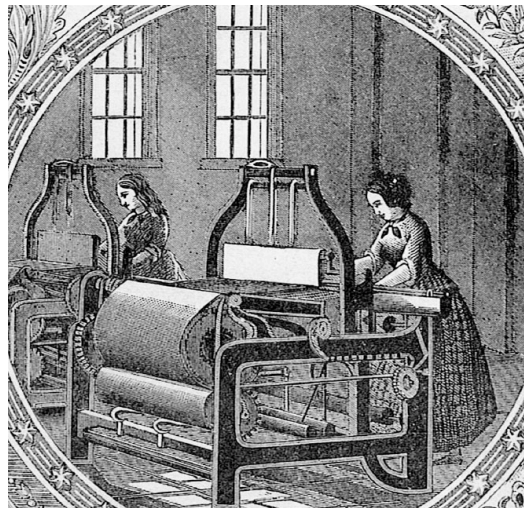
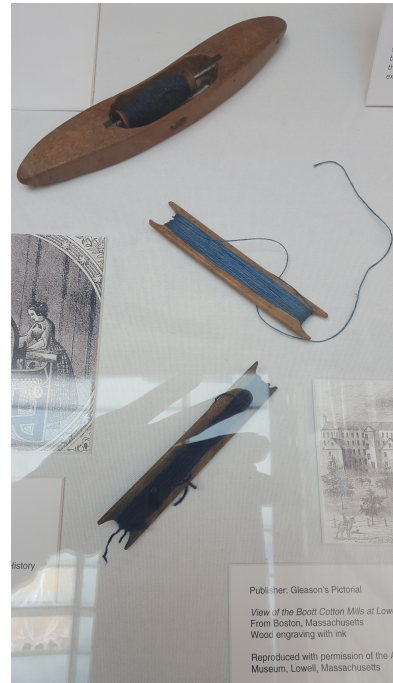


Fig. 2.4:
 Merrimack Manufacturing Company

Two Mill Girls at their looms, ca. 1840-1860

From Lowell, Massachusetts
 Cloth and ink label

Reproduced with permission of the American Textile History Museum



Fig. 2.5:
Bell, 19th century
American
Bronze, iron, and wood

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
SK 2006.2048.INV



Fig. 2.6:
John B. Drown (American, 1826-1873)

Pocket watch, 19th century
From Newburyport, Massachusetts
Brass, glass, and enamel

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
SK 2006.1351.INV

Women gained confidence through self-improvement by investing their wages in an appearance that symbolized a higher standard of living. Clothing was one of the most visible ways for women to show they earned their own money. It was not uncommon in the early and mid-nineteenth century for women to own only one or two dresses. With some spare money from their wages, many women purchased material to sew dresses inspired by fashion plates in periodicals, like the *Godey's Lady's Book*. Silk blend material, like the dress on the right is made from, was often used to make fashionable, formal dresses for working class women, which were reserved for Sundays or special occasions, like weddings or going to the theater.

Fig. 2.7:
Doll's bodice, ca. 1870-1880
American
Cotton and silk

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
SK 2006.1117.1.INV

Doll's skirt, ca. 1870-1880
American
Cotton and silk

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
SK 2006.1117.2





Fig. 2.8:

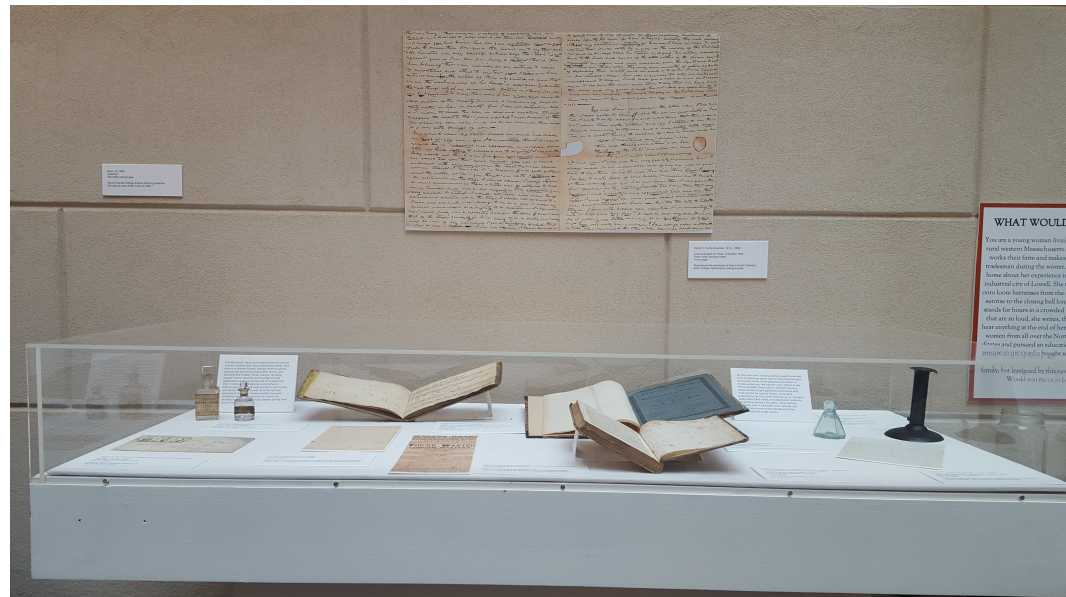
Louis A. Godey (American, 1804-1878)

Godey's Lady's Book, Volume 60, 1860

From Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Ink, hardbound paper, and wood

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
SK 2006.2001.INV

CASE TWO



Entertainment made up a large portion of working women's leisure time. Accompanied by either male suitors or female friends, women went to parties, sang songs around the piano after dinner, and attended the theater. Novel reading, lectures, regular church services, and Sunday schools appealed to working women set on broadening their minds and maintaining moral behavior. Women also spent free time caring for sick friends and family members, as well as suffering from ailments of their own. Factories often had poor ventilation and it was common for women to develop multiple forms of lung disease during their time in the mills.

Fig. 2.10:
Case two of the exhibit.

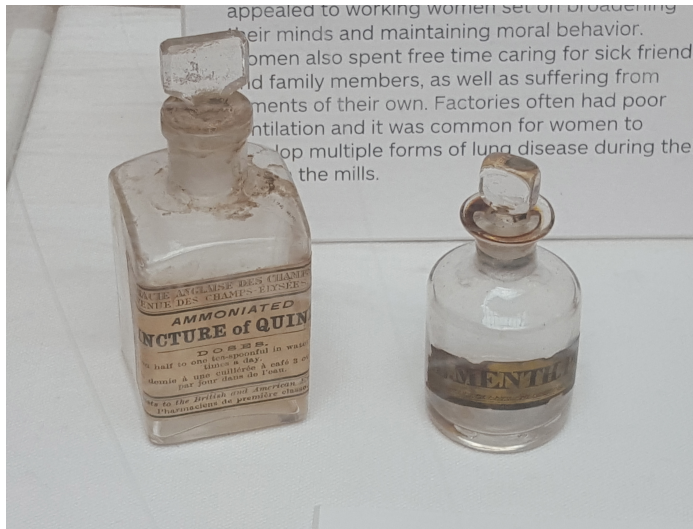


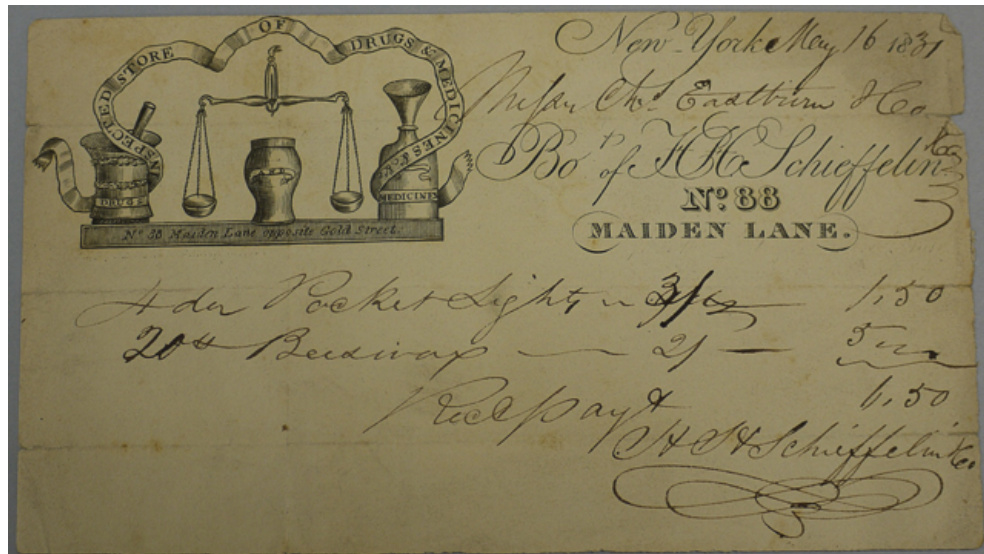
Fig. 2.11:
Medicine bottles, Early to mid-19th century
 From France and England
 Glass and ink on paper

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
 SK 2006.1846.INV

Fig. 2.12:
 Henry H. Schieffelin of Schieffelin & Company (American)

Receipt, May 16, 1831
 From New York, New York
 Ink on paper

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
 SK 2006.2227.INV



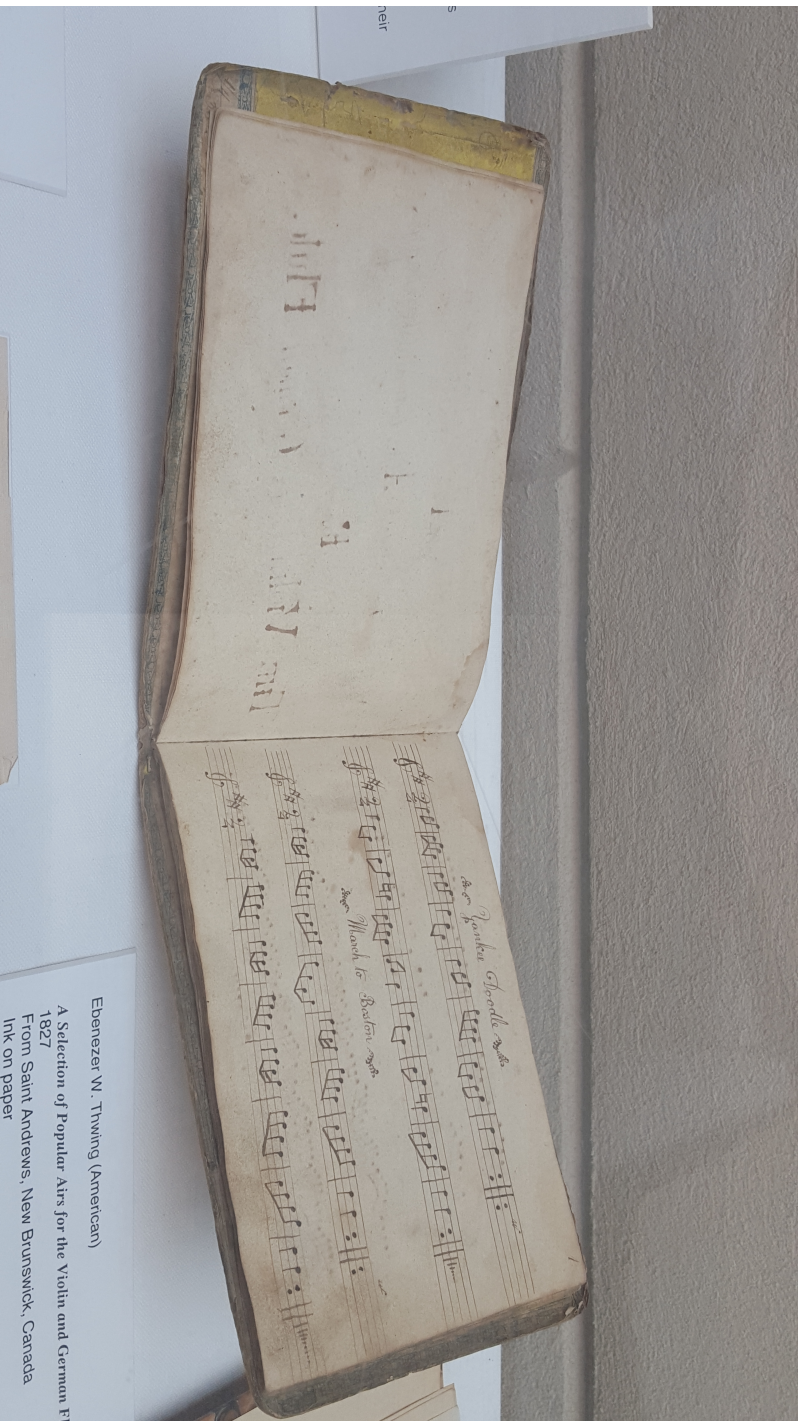


Fig. 2.13:

Ebenezer W. Thwing (American)

A Selection of Popular Airs for the Violin

and German Flute, 1827

From Saint Andrews, New Brunswick,

Canada

Ink on paper

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum

SK 2006.701.INV

Lowell Lyceum 1839

1st lecture by the President,
Hon Dr Elisha Bartlett, Subject
use of Poetry

2 by Hon F. Catherwood Esq
Subject Palestine and Egypt

3 by Hon Dr. Purson, of Salem
Subject, Physician

4 by Rev Leonard Withington of
Newbury, upon neglect of
Agriculture

5 Rev Ralph W Emerson from
Concord, Subject Ethical English
Literature

6 by Hon Eld Sheaf of Lowell
Subject use of Wine

7 Rev Samuel Porter of Lowell

8 and 9 by Hon J. Aiken Esq Lowell
Subject The early History of Vermont

Fig. 2.14:
Lowell Lyceum List, ca. 1839
From Lowell, Massachusetts
Ink on paper

Reproduced with permission of the Center for Lowell History,
University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts

WELLES HALL!

GRAND OPENING OF THE DRAMATIC SEASON.

Wednesday and Thursday Evenings, Oct. 1 and 2.

THE DRAMATIC COMMITTEE OF THE

LOWELL REFORM CLUB

Have determined to make a new departure this season and instead of relying wholly on the dramatic talent of the Club will present New Attractions, New Plays and the Best People that can be obtained—and announce that on the above dates will be produced a New Sensational Play adapted and arranged by T. H. JONES, in Prologue and four Acts, entitled:

YOU'RE WANTED

—OR A—

LONDON MYSTERY.

A STRONG CAST, SPECIAL SCENIC EFFECTS,
INCIDENTAL MUSIC, No pains spared to
make it a Big Success.

PROLOGUE.
BRANDON'S BILL BROKING OFFICE.
CHARACTERS:

DANIEL BRANDON, Broker.....Mr. E. J. BARRETT
 ROLAND BURKE, his Cashier.....Mr. ED. A. SCALES
 CARROTTY BOB, A London Cracksman.....Mr. T. H. JONES
 WILLARD FLEMING, A Bank Expert.....Mr. H. E. WEBSTER
 POLICEMAN X7942.....Mr. PETER SHERLOCK

Forgery—The old story—Wine, women, and cards—A burglary—Caught in the act—
 "Curse you, take that"—A murderous blow—ANOTHER LONDON MYSTERY.

SIX YEARS LATER.
THE PLAY.
CHARACTERS:

BOB BARLOW, A Reformed Cracksman.....Mr. T. H. JONES
 ROBERT MORDAUNT, A Bill-Broker.....Mr. ED. A. SCALES
 MORDIE SOLOMONS, I puts on de screws, my tere.....Mr. H. E. WEBSTER
 INSPECTOR FLEMING, of Scotland Yard.....Mr. E. J. BASSETT
 OLD COBWEBS—Dead to the past.....Mr. FRED. E. BEAN
 FRANK HAWTHORNE, The Broker's Clerk.....Mr. D. J. RING
 MR. BRENT, A Bank Manager.....Mr. WM. MANSUR
 ROUNDSMAN MURPHY.....Mr. DANIEL BURKE
 SHORTY, A Newsboy and "shine," with songs.....Miss ALICE M. PAYNE
 MARY BRANDON, A Shop Girl.....Miss MINNIE EASTMAN
 OLD MOTHER BARLOW, Keeper of the Thieves' Kitchen.....
 POLLY BARLOW, Bob's Better Half.....
 Wharf Rats, Police, etc, by the Company.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES AND INCIDENTS.

ACT 1. After six years, Shadows of the Past, Mordaunt's office—Fraud and its victim.
 A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION.

ACT 2. LONDON TEA GARDENS—An old case—Cobwebs the walking mystery—The inspector and the ex-cracksman—An item from the Police records—The old Jew, "I never forgets mine friends, my tere"—the counterfeit note—another trap. Bob on hand—A BAF-FLIED INSPECTOR.

ACT 3. MOTHER BARLOW'S DEN IN THE SLUMS—The hag and her son. "God 'elp all such as I." Mordie's offer—"a hundred golden pieces my tere mother Barlow, there ish no fisk"—The inspector's night mission—Bob as a human benefactor—A revived recollection—father and daughter—THE JEW ASSASSIN—Bauiked. A clue at last—The inspector plays a double game—Queen's Evidence.

ACT 4. EAST INDIA DOCKS—off for India—The wharf rats—SPORTS ON THE LANDING, introducing songs, clog dancing, acrobatic feats, contortions, etc., by volunteer friends of the club. A policeman's troubles "Crime and brandy maddened." The inspector's triumph—The mystery solved at last—YOU'RE WANTED—DEATH OF ROLAND BURKE.

MUSIC INCIDENTAL TO THE PLAY.

Notwithstanding the expense of production, believing that the public will favor us with as generous patronage as they have in the past, the committee have decided to continue the same price.

ADMISSION, 15 CENTS to All Parts of the House.

Tickets for sale by the Janitor at Welles Hall, and by members of the Club
 Doors open at 7. Curtain rises at 7.45 sharp.

Fig. 2.15:
Welles Hall Grand Opening for the Season Advertisement
 From Lowell, Massachusetts
 Paper and ink

Reproduced with permission of the Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts

On their own time, working women used the written word to challenge public opinion about female labor and leisure. Some wrote personal anecdotes for private audiences, like Harriot Curtis' letters to her friend, Hezekiah Wead, back in Vermont (above). Opportunities to give speeches to societies and write articles for various literary circles and publications like the *Lowell Offering*, an all “mill girls” publication (1840-1845), provided public platforms for working women’s thoughts. These articles created a shift in how both local, national, and international communities felt about factory employment for single women.

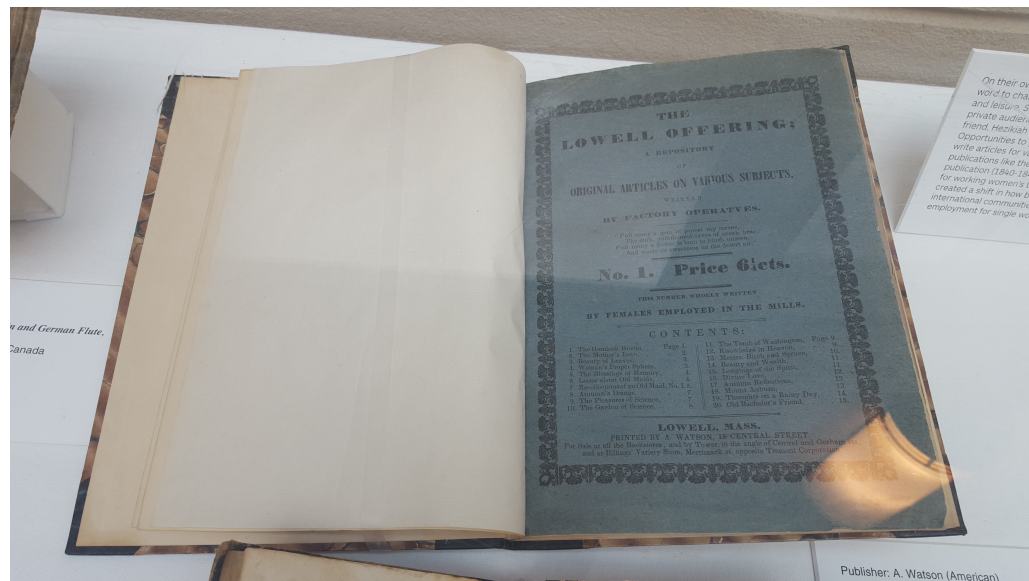


Fig. 2.16:
Publisher: A. Watson (American)

Lowell Offering Periodical no.1-4, 1840-1842
From Lowell, Massachusetts
Ink and paper

Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections



Fig. 2.17:
Umbrella inkwell, mid 19th century
American
Glass

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
SK B.14.H.40.1



Fig. 2.18:
Push-up candlestick, ca. 1800-1820
American
Tin

Joseph Allen Skinner Museum
SK 2006.141.INV

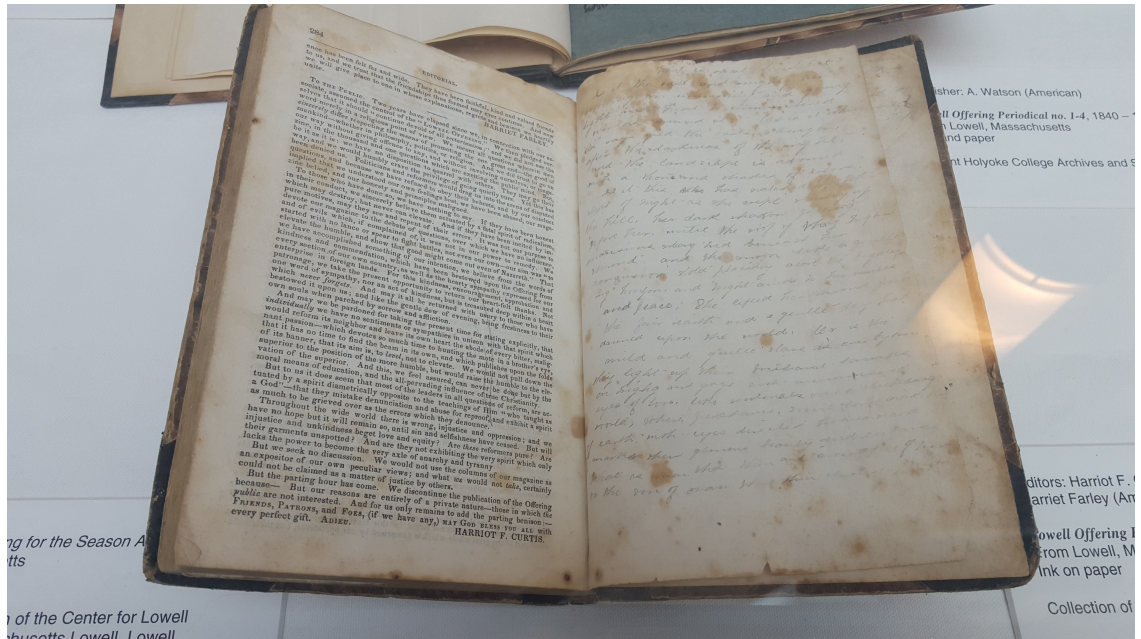


Fig. 2.19:
Editors: Harriot F. Curtis (American, 1813-1889) and Harriet Farley (American, 181?-1907)

Lowell Offering Periodical, 1845
From Lowell, Massachusetts
Ink on paper

Collection of Colleen C. Hurst

Norwich Conn August 27th / 44

My old and dear Friend -

Your kind favor, dated June 30th, reached me in New York some three or four weeks since, but this is the earliest opportunity which I have found for a reply. And this blue ink puts me in pain now, but it is such as they have found me, and I must use it, or delay a reply still longer - but I have a horror of the color - there is nothing blue about me - strangers never suspect that I dab my pretty fingers with that vile fluid, ink. I quotham and an editor whom I met at a hotel and found something of an acquaintance with, was uttering some illiberal remarks of literary women, and I stopped him with the query if he was aware that he was "breaching on my tree" "Dear wife" he rejoined in a tone of that the thing was impossible "Why not?" I continued "Why, I will be, the issue is preposterous - you talk too much, and long from too well" I did not correct him for there than to assure him that I wrote "lots of letters" and let me confess to you that I could not devote the present one to you, were it not that my poor brain is subjected out of all sense and feeling and I can not put two thoughts upon paper. This is but a sorry confession and a poor compliment to you, but my letter will require some apology, unless my pen produces something more brilliant than my brain is capable of -

The reception of your letter was most opportune as the week before I had been in Troy an unearthing your "old letters" and the perusal awakened a thousand sweet memories, and must I say too, some painful ones. Some of your old letters, in spite of their smooth flatteries, engendered this thought he was unjust to me, and did give me credit for the talents which I know I possess - But, no; not talents - but genius, the original sensation, in a confined degree, is mine - I can

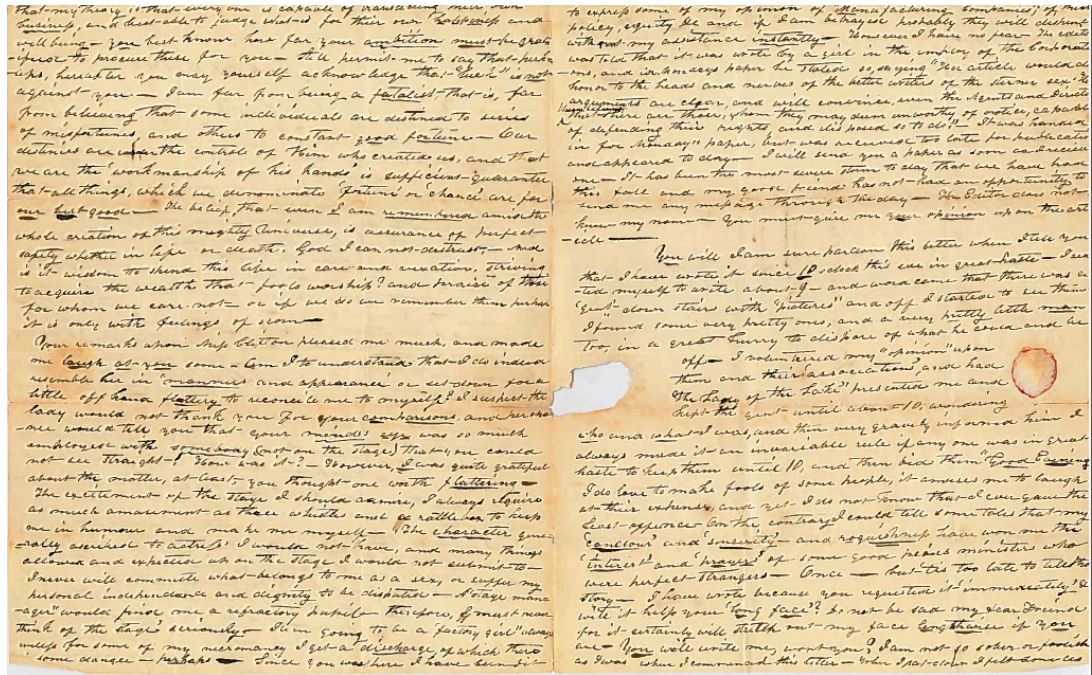
Fig. 2.20:
Publisher: Harriot F. Curtis (American, 1813-1889)

Letter to Hezekiah M. Wead, 27 August 1844
From Norwich, Connecticut
Ink on paper

Reproduced with permission of Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College,
Northampton, Massachusetts

INTERACTIVES

“SHARE YOUR VOICE ... OR SHOULD YOU?”



That only thing, that every one is capable of transcending, and
sincerely, and just able to judge what is for their own best, and
will be - you best know how far your ambition must be great
to press these for you - I'll permit me to say that perhaps
perhaps, however you may yourself acknowledge that "I am not
against you" - I am far from being a fatalist, that is, far
from believing that some individuals are destined to series
of misfortunes, and others to constant good fortune - Our
destiny are in the control of them who create us, and that
we are the workmanship of his hands is sufficient - Guarantee
that all things, which we denominate Fortune or chance are for
our good - He believeth that even I am reasonable amidst the
whole creation of the mighty Omnipotent, is assurance of perfect
safety whether in life or death. God I can not distrust - And
is it wisdom to throw this life in care and creation, trusting
to acquire the wealth that for is worth? and praise of this
for whom we care not - or if we do we remember that riches
is only with feelings of shame

Your remarks upon Miss Weston pleased me much, and made
me look at you come - Com. It is unchristian that old ideas
reminds her in inward and appearance or set down for
little off have flattery to reconcile me to myself? I respect the
lady would not think of me for your companions and friends
- all would tell you that your manners was so much
amplified with somebody (not on the stage) that you could
not be thought of your - However, I was quite grateful
about the matter, at least you thought me with flattery -
The excitement of the stage I should admire, I always rejoice
as much amusement as there whether and be rather to help
me in humor and make me myself - The character gene-
rally ascribed to actors I would not have, and many things
allowance and expense as on the stage I would not submit to
I never will consent what belongs to me as a sex, or suffer my
husband's inhumane and obnoxious to be disturbed - I was once
- again would find me a refractory pupil - Therefore, I must now
think of the stage differently - I'm going to be a factory girl, every
week for some of my melancholy of set a discharge of which there
some change - perhaps - Since you was here I have been in

To express some of my opinion of Manufacturing Companies, of their
policy, equity &c and if I am betrayed probably they will decline
with out my assistance instantly - I'm sure I have no fear - In reality
was that it was with by a girl in the employ of the Company
- one, and in many paper he states so, saying "See article enclosed
sent to the head and names of the better writers of the serious say,"
arguments are clear, and will convince, even the most obstinate
- that there are those, whom they may seem unworthy, of notice, as he
of defending their rights, and ill paid as to do - I'm sure
in your Monthly paper, but was no means a lot for published
and appeared to say - I will send you a paper as soon as received
- one - It has been the most severe town to say that we have
- this fall and my good friend has not - had an opportunity to
- send me any message, through a third party - He better does not
- know my name - You misquote my own opinion up on the art
- all -

You will show some pardon this letter when I see you
- that I have written since I added this one in great haste - I
- was obliged to write about it - and was come that there was a
- great deal of time with "papers" and off - I started to see them
- I found some very pretty ones, and a very pretty little man
- too, in a great hurry to disperse of what he could and he
- off - I volunteered my opinion upon
- them and their associations, and had
- the copy of the letter" presented me and
- kept the rest until about 10, imagining
- who was what was, and then very grave by informing him I
- always made it an unwarlike rule, if any one was in great
- haste to keep them until 10, and then send them "good evening"
- I'd love to make fools of some people, it amuses me to laugh
- at their weakness, and not - I do not know how I can gauge the
- East - opinion on the contrary could tell some tales that my
- "country" and "society" and "respect" have won me the
- "letters" and "praise" of some good people ministers who
- were perfect strangers - Once - but 'tis too late to tell the
- story - I have written because you requested it immediately
- write - I help your "long face"? So not be seen my dear friend
- for it certainly will help out my face long than if you
- are - You will write me, I'm sure, I am not of color, or pink
- as I was when I composed this letter - when I was a child I felt some

This letter (above) was written by Harriot F. Curtis, a woman working in the Lawrence Manufacturing Company in the fall of 1836. She wrote to her friend Hezekiah Wead back home about publishing an article in a local newspaper, the risks she took in printing her beliefs and the fears she had of being discovered.

How would you respond to Harriot Curtis' letter? Would you encourage her to keep writing? If so, what would you encourage her to write about?

Note: Selected visitor letters may be displayed.

Fig. 2.21:

Publisher: Harriot F. Curtis (American, 1813-1889)

Letter to Hezekiah M. Wead, 13 October 1836

From Lowell, Massachusetts

Ink on paper

Reproduced with permission of Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts

Visitor Response #1:

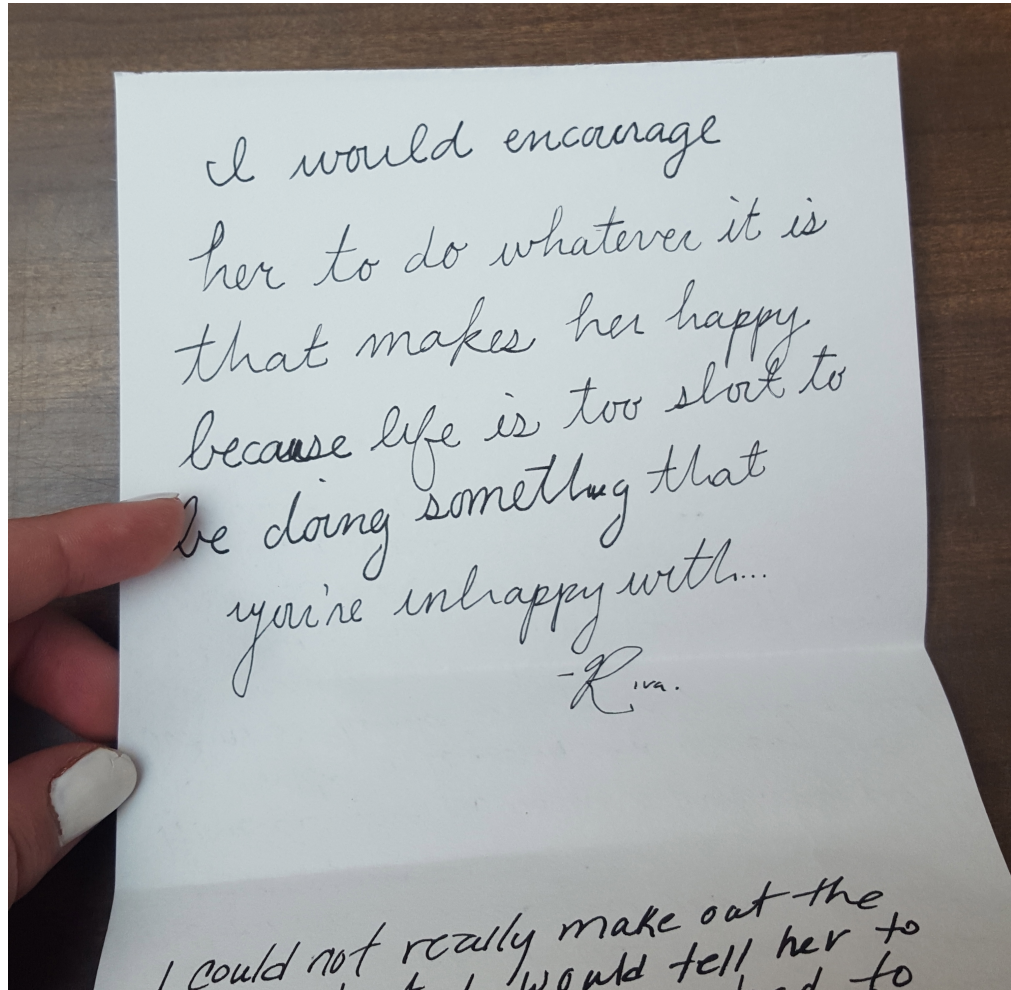


Fig 2.22:
Visitor response from "Share
Your Voice...Or Should You?"

Visitor Response #2:

Dearest Harriet,
I am envious of your spirit
and your fear regarding such an
unsettling situation.
You have inspired many young
women to leave the hard existence
they are familiar with to take on
an equally hard existence they do
not know, which offers them a
spark of hope for a better future
for themselves. You have given them
a great gift of possibility.
I do fear for you well being dear,
you are dancing a dangerous waltz.
One in which I dream of partaking in, yet
can not find the inner strength which
you have.
I am betrothed you know or at
least you must have heard. My father
has made a very good arrangement, as
my future husband owns 6 milking cows,
2 teams of oxen and a well bred bull.
He is quite prosperous and owns 3 large
parcels of land composed of over 1000 acres
many of which are already established
crop fields.
Oh but Harriet I yearn for what
is in your heart and actions though

Fig. 2.23:
A response to
"Share Your
Voice...Or Should
You?"

“WHAT WOULD YOU DO?”

You are a young woman living with your family in rural western Massachusetts in 1834. Your family works their farm and makes buttons for a local tradesman during the winter. Your cousin writes home about her experience in the newly formed industrial city of Lowell. She threads cotton yarn onto loom harnesses from the morning bell before sunrise to the closing bell long after sunset. She stands for hours in a crowded room full of looms that are so loud, she writes, that she can barely hear anything at the end of her shift. She has met women from all over the Northeastern United States and pursued an education through night school. Recently, she bought material to make a fashionable new dress. You are close with your family, but intrigued by this new life in the city. Would you move to Lowell?

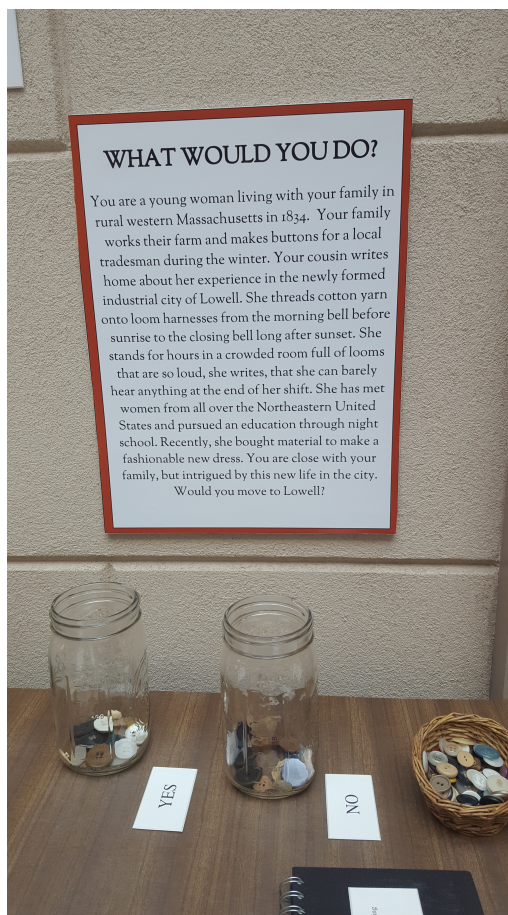


Fig. 2.24:
“What Would You Do?”
interactive.



Fig. 2.25: The final button count
answering ‘Would you go to
Lowell?’: 296 yes and 84 no.

Chapter Three: Methodology and the Exhibition Process



Fig. 3.1: The exhibit *After the Evening Bell: Working Women's Leisure Time in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1830-1860*

History takes a different shape when displayed in a museum setting. When opening an exhibit, the curator is asking the audience to process history with all of their senses, not just their sight. Artifacts in teaching collections which can be handled by the public and special effects which enable audiences to feel, hear, smell and even sometimes taste objects, allow visitors to come in physical contact with the past.

Historians, curators and visitors have different goals in portraying the past. Historians' goals for history vary based on their view of the past. Some historians search to break apart what anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls the "bundle of silences" that are part of every historical narrative, where some

histories are told more than others.⁸⁰ By breaking these silences apart, historians educate their communities about pieces of their past that were misrepresented or left out of previous narratives. For instance, the exhibit *Slavery in New York* at the New York Historical Society, focused on the presence of enslaved Africans in early American history. The exhibit attempted to engage a history not often discussed in relation to colonial New York. Historians who value underrepresented histories need to emphasize people's experiences in these histories. Professor Duncan Faherty argues that curators and historians involved with *Slavery in New York* put too much focus on the presence of enslaved African bodies, and did not engage with the voices of enslaved Africans.⁸¹ Other historians, like those who opposed an exhibit about atomic bomb aircraft *Enola Gay* at the National Museum of American History, feel that their nation's history thrives in discussion with both positive and negative in mind. The *Enola Gay* exhibit is a good example of the disparate ideals between historians and curators, which are represented during the creation of an exhibit. Curators wanted to display the aircraft because of its relation to United States history and due to political pressure from outside stakeholders. The controversy resulted in the cancellation of the exhibit and the display of the *Enola Gay* without labels or

⁸⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 2005), 27.

⁸¹ Duncan Faherty, "'It Happened Here': Slavery on the Hudson," *American Quarterly*, 2006., 455, *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost, accessed November 18, 2015.

explanatory text that explained the effects of the atomic bomb.⁸² By not telling the story of the *Enola Gay* altogether, both historians and curators failed to discuss a controversial topic that had the potential to create a vibrant conversation. In contrast to historians, curators want to tell a story to visitors with objects in an exhibit. Curators enter into conversation with historians to decide how the historical themes suggested by historians can be integrated with the curator's more physical focus on text and material objects. Curators' purpose for the stories of history is to evoke emotion and understanding.⁸³ Visitors enter historical exhibits looking to engage with a story. Humans are attracted to the humanity of stories, to the glories and mistakes made along the human experience of life. Part of this desire for a national story in the United States is a result of poor history education in schools and universities. Many students graduate college without having engaged in a national narrative. On the subject of Americans' lack on knowledge about history, Professor Stephen Bertman argued in a 2001 article, "...the malady is eating away at America's soul, for just as an individual needs memories to maintain a sense of personal identity, so does a nation need them in order to survive."⁸⁴ People throughout the United States are interested in history, as seen through the survival of historic sites throughout the country. They just want to learn about history in a way that appeals to them as humans and engages

⁸² Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 19.

⁸³ David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* (Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982) 160.

⁸⁴ Lawrence R. Samuel, *Remembering America: How We Have Told Our Past* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 145.

their interest. If a historical narrative leaves out memories of minority or disadvantaged communities, those communities will be less likely to be engaged in that story. In order to balance all of these perspectives, an exhibit must be the product of conversations between historians and curators, as well as between curators and visitors.

How does one transform a historical theme into a conversation among historians, curators and visitors? The exhibit created as part of this thesis, entitled *After the Evening Bell: Working Women and Leisure Time, 1830-1860*, strived to present the history of working women in the United States through the display of material culture on a women's college campus in a way that elicited discussion. Its goal was to prompt people to think about working women's labor in a variety of ways. Firstly, the exhibit interpreted the words of Harriot Curtis as a way of connecting visitors to the humanity behind the history presented. By reading directly about Curtis's experiences from her letters, visitors could feel a deeper personal connection to her story and were able to compare her life to theirs. Secondly, the exhibit approached working women's leisure time thematically so that visitors could engage with the material without going through the entire exhibit, as the exhibit space catered to a passerby audience. Lastly, the exhibit made working women's history accessible to a range of audience members. Although the exhibit was located on a college campus, many visitors from varying backgrounds passed through the library atrium.⁸⁵ Basic text and visual

⁸⁵ The library is one of the spots on the Mount Holyoke College admissions tour route.

storytelling enabled the exhibit to reach audiences that do not prefer didactic paragraphs. *After the Evening Bell* relied on a strong organization of argument throughout the exhibit, careful object selection, strategic engagement of visitors, an awareness of exhibit space and a multifaceted evaluation process to portray and promote discussion of history at the intersection of conversations between historians, curators and visitors.

Establishing the Argument

The heart of an exhibit is the argument the curator wants to make. Articulating an argument is the first step in educating visitors regarding a specific idea explored in an exhibit. It is essential for all museum exhibits to make arguments in order to challenge the pre-conceived notions of its visitors regarding the ideas in the exhibit. In early museum literature, arguments presented in museum exhibits were viewed as a way of educating the public. These older views are exemplified by former Director of the Royal Scottish Museum D. A. Allen in his 1949 paper:

Museums *are* education. They exist only to further it: they can be neither provided, maintained, nor utilized without it. Education is the preparation for living, and for living, if possible, the good and complete life; it aims at understanding and appreciation leading to the application of what has been learnt to the art of living.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ David Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

It is true that an exhibition teaches humans how to live and understand how others have lived in the past. Yet, it is more important to create conversations between visitors about how the past relates to their present. These conversations are opportunities to compare the human experience throughout history. For example, on the “Irish Outsiders” tour at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, visitors come in with different ideas about Irish life in tenements: they were targeted by native-born Americans, they were poor, they had a hard time finding work. Museum educators address these preconceptions as they lead tours through an old tenement building, most of the rooms only partly furnished and stripped down to the basic frame of the building. With limited artifacts and architecture, the tour relies on oral stories and visitors’ reactions to the space to challenge previously held ideas of the space. One instance where this occurred was in the sitting room/kitchen of one Irish family’s apartment in the tenement. The educator asked if people thought New York celebrated the Irish presence. The overwhelming response among the audience was no, New York probably did not celebrate the Irish. The educator went on to tell the story of a St. Patrick’s Day parade in the 1860s and the mass turnout throughout the city for the celebrations, which included a speech from the mayor. This story challenged visitors’ opinions of the Irish being solely oppressed victims in New York City. In a physical exhibit the argument that challenges preconceptions and creates these conversations must be presented through the application of a coherent and accessible title and set of

labels, a tone that fits the formality of the topic and a logical flow of objects within the exhibit.

A successful exhibit argument depends heavily on the way it is crafted in the different sections of the exhibit and the accessibility of the argument to a diverse population of visitors.⁸⁷ This can be attained through the proper use of label text and the location of objects throughout the exhibit. The wording and placement of text within an exhibition influences the ability of visitors to understand the argument. Constance Perin, a cultural anthropologist, argues that audiences process new information better if they can internalize it alongside previously acquired knowledge.⁸⁸ If the information within an exhibit does not make sense in relation to visitors' previously held knowledge, the argument of the exhibit cannot impact the greatest possible number of visitors. Labels need to be concise and simple, making them accessible to visitors at different reading levels and with varying amounts of time in the exhibit. This also applies to the tone of the text, which is commonly criticized in exhibition reviews as either too formal or too casual. Curators must find the right tone to describe the exhibit content to their audiences. When an exhibit uses formal language, large words and complex sentences, the messages the exhibit tries to convey may be lost on visitors who have a need for a simpler language. On the other hand, if the language is too

⁸⁷ Tom Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design* (Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2012).

⁸⁸ Steven D. Lavine, "Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, eds. , Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 140.

casual, using slang and jokes, the text can miss the desired tone needed to respectfully and professionally discuss a difficult topic. The curator must carefully choose how they want to use this language, as it affects visitors' interpretation of exhibit content. In her review of the exhibit entitled *Bernard and Rochelle Zell Holocaust Memorial* at the Spertus Museum of Judaica in Chicago, Helen Coxall, a museum specialist, notes that the language of the exhibit on Nazi war crimes is very formal, but it fits the content of the exhibit: the Holocaust.⁸⁹ If the language of this exhibit had been less formal, then the overall tone of the exhibit may have evoked an insensitive, or perhaps more satirical tone for the visitor, similar to the tone of cartoonist Art Spiegelman's graphic novel, *Maus*. Although Spiegelman presents history through his own illustrations and not artifacts, as in an exhibit, he explores alternate media in presenting history to his audience and relies on tone to effectively present his arguments. The satirical tone of Spiegelman's novel works well within the comic book context within which he tells his story, as the tone elicits emotion and irony within its unusual context. A satirical approach to telling history must be used with care, however, as it risks the argument of the exhibit or novel being misunderstood as disrespectful.

The title signals the main argument of the exhibit. The introductory text introduces the argument in greater detail, though still in a concise enough format.⁹⁰ This idea corresponds with National Park Service interpretation expert,

⁸⁹ Helen Coxall, "The Spertus Museum of Judaica, Chicago," in *Objects of Knowledge*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: The Athelone Press, 1990), 213.

⁹⁰ Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, 111.

Freeman Tilden's argument in his 1957 book, *Interpreting our Heritage*, that "The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation."⁹¹ The title and introductory text must provoke visitors to engage with the exhibition content before they are able to educate them on the topic. Chat text, which is the text that describes artifacts and concepts in the exhibit, and interactive text, which introduce the ideas represented in interactive activities, must follow a similar flow, first provoking the visitor to engage and then conveying information to them in a few sentences.

The way a curator presents his or her argument impacts the flow of an exhibit. Flow depends not only on the decision of the curator regarding their chosen path, but also on the shape and placement of the exhibit. An argument develops over the span of an exhibit, just as it does on paper. In order for an argument to make sense, the exhibit needs a beginning and an end. This requires a marking, like a sign or a taped pathway, to designate where the visitor should start their experience and the path they should follow. Sometimes exhibit shape is constrained by the space available to house the exhibit. The challenges space poses to an exhibition will be discussed later in this chapter, but in specific regard to the argument, open spaces work better for certain exhibits than others. In an open space it is difficult to define the path with which one must pass through the exhibit, as people can enter from the left, right and center. Exhibit arguments that are topical or are represented by multiple objects do better in less structured

⁹¹ Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, 155.

exhibitions than do those which are chronological. In these unstructured settings, visitors need to be able to grasp the argument without going through the entire exhibit.⁹²

After the Evening Bell: Working Women and Leisure Time in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1830-1860 argues that working women gained a greater sense of their independence, not only by working and earning a wage but also through the choices on how to spend their time and their money, and how to represent themselves after the evening bell. The exhibit aims to present this argument through both objects and writings left behind by the women of Lowell and their contemporaries.

Due to the limited number of objects in the Mount Holyoke College collection, objects were chosen first and then an argument was crafted around them. A number of questions arose about relationships between the objects and the argument: What themes about life in the mills needed to be discussed? What images highlighted those themes? How would these objects be situated within the exhibit in a way that worked with the rest of the argument? Each object in the exhibit was chosen with these questions in mind. For example, what could represent the changing attitudes toward time during the Industrial Revolution? Pocket watches were popular women's fashion accessories throughout the mid-nineteenth century. They represented a way women were able to hold time in their

⁹² Stephen Bitgood, "Exhibition Design That Provides High Value and Engages Visitor Attention," American Alliance of Museums website, http://name-aam.org/uploads/downloadables/EXH.spr_14/4%20EXH%20SP%2014%20Bitgood_Exhibition%20Design%20that%20provides%20High%20Values.pdf, accessed April 20, 2016.

pockets and have a measure of control over their own leisure time. Time and its effects needed to be expressed to the audience before the exhibit could explore leisure time. Women would not have had leisure time if not for the changes in ideas about time during the Industrial Revolution. Without leisure time, the opportunities would not have been present to participate in various activities that gave working women new consciousness of their freedom. For these reasons, the pocket watch appears at the beginning of the first case, to provide an introduction to the idea of leisure time as a new concept in the early nineteenth century. A flow chart mapped out the direction that the argument needed to advance throughout the exhibit, dividing the argument into sections. These sections were then grouped with small clusters of objects and placed in an order that flowed well with the number of objects in each group. These sections were also incorporated into interactive portions of the exhibit. The first interactive posed a story of a teenage girl choosing whether or not she wanted to move to Lowell. The interactive asked visitors to vote with buttons whether they would move to Lowell. The second interactive presented a letter written by Harriot Curtis and asked visitors to write a letter back to her responding to her experiences.

The title and introductory text aimed to state the main argument clearly and in as few words as possible, because the target visitor was someone that was passing through the atrium and had little time. The chat text, next to each cluster of objects, provided more detail about the argument, adding specific examples to the statements made in the introductory text. These paragraphs were also kept

under one hundred words and all text was written for a fifth grade reading level, in hopes of making the exhibit easily accessible to visitors with varying reading levels. With simple text, it becomes easier for visitors to grasp the argument of the exhibit quickly and move on to the next section. The phrasing and tone of the text underwent multiple transformations during the writing process, beginning as confusing and didactic, and ending with short, powerful sentences. The tone that the exhibit aims to set is one of empowerment and inspiration; it tries to encourage visitors to empathize with working women's hardship and to be inspired by the power of choice in working women's lives, and indirectly in their own lives.

After the Evening Bell's argument is organized topically according to the ways working women spent their free time. This works well in the open space of the library atrium, as people approached the exhibit from different angles. Some began at the start of the exhibit on the left hand sidewall and approaching it directly. Other visitors approached the exhibit from the right and stopped beside the interactive writing desk on their way to or from the reference desk.⁹³ The introductory text is placed on the left wall when facing the exhibit, providing the formal argument at the beginning the exhibit for most people from the center or left hand side. I chose to direct the exhibit this way, as most people turn to the right and follow the right hand wall when moving through a space, possibly due to a dominance of right-handedness or structure of writing in most Western

⁹³ For a floor plan of exhibit location in Williston Library atrium see Appendix V.

languages.⁹⁴ This created a disjunction in the way people from the right processed the argument, as they experienced the interactives and the second case, before the sign. As the exhibit is in an open space in a corner, this is a difficult challenge to work around. One solution was the text for the “What Would You Do?” interactive, which provided basic information about the topic and argument of the exhibit. The interactive’s sign has large text and red border that help attract attention for viewers entering from the right hand side. The interactive addresses the individual experience of one woman and asks audience members to put themselves in her shoes.

Object Selection

Objects act as material examples of the exhibit’s content. When choosing the objects, the curator decides how the visual elements of the exhibition will convey the overall message of the exhibit. The way the curator chooses the objects, groups them, and balances them impacts the presentation of the exhibit.

The relevance of objects to argument and audience interest both merit consideration when choosing what objects are included in the display case. Museums only attract visitors if they can convince them that they have things that are worth looking at. If there are key objects in an exhibition that may heighten the appeal of an exhibit, those should take center stage in the object list. In “Objects as meaning,” Professor Susan Pearce calls the draw of these objects the “power of the real thing” and argues that it is “the greatest strength which a

⁹⁴ Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, 51.

collection-holding institution commands.” Other objects, she argues, supplement these larger, especially powerful objects by telling stories of other individuals connected to the main story. They also create connection to the environment within which the object existed.⁹⁵ All objects need proper identification within the cases, so that visitors can access and understand why the object sits on display and the contextual specifics on what its role was in the society from whence it came.⁹⁶

The visual experience entices visitors to enter into an exhibit space by aesthetically drawing them into the space. A curator seeks to maintain a balance in objects’ weight, direction, color and mass within the display to create uniformity. Exceptions in balance may result from a desire to create an uncomfortable tone within an exhibit, or a wish to highlight a specific trait of one object that dominates a much larger space and disrupts the balance within the exhibit. An object’s positioning also orients the visitor’s point of view, keeping the visitor’s point of reference within the same

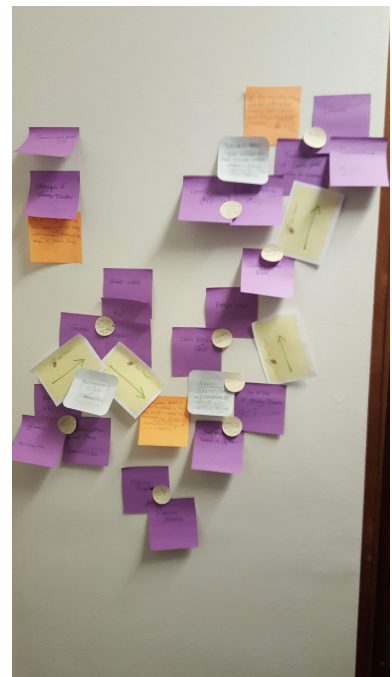


Figure 3.2: Mapping out the argument.

⁹⁵ Susan M. Pearce, “Objects as meaning,” in *Objects of Knowledge*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: The Athelone Press, 1990), 127-143.

⁹⁶ Michael Belcher, *Exhibitions in Museums*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991: 151. Print.

case or away in the direction of the next case.⁹⁷ Balance refers not only to objects' relationships to one another, but also to their relationships to the space within which they are displayed. At the Smithsonian Museum of American History, the exhibit "America on the Move" starts with a large steam engine locomotive at the head of its gallery. Unlike the smaller objects displayed in the adjacent galleries, the locomotive towers above visitors and demands visitors' attention. By beginning the exhibit with an object that attracts attention and is centered in the entrance, the curators are able to frame the locomotive as an entry point into discussions about both the origins of the industrial revolutions and the development of other modes of transportation.

For After the Evening Bell: Working Women and Leisure Time, 1830-1860, the first step in choosing objects lay in determining what objects could tell stories about different aspects of working women's experiences in Lowell. Documents and objects were limited to individual donations and artifacts from the Mount Holyoke Collections. Images and facsimiles of documents also became available with the permission of different institutions, like the American Textile History Museum, the Center for Lowell History, and the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College. Mount Holyoke's collection covers a wide range of time periods and regions, with many objects fitting into the 1830-1860 period in New England. Most of these objects originated in places other than Lowell, but

⁹⁷ Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, 56-58.

represented objects or themes present in Lowell during the early nineteenth century.

The exhibit's objects were grouped into categories that related to the larger topic. I used Post-it notes with the arguments on them and clustered the objects into categories that fit the flow of the argument as seen in Figure 2.1. The topical groupings eased the writing process for chat text, because each grouping of objects required a description about the aspect of leisure time the artifact group conveyed. I kept one eye-catching piece in each grouping to catch visitors' attention. In the section of the exhibit that discusses fashion, the dress from the Mount Holyoke Theater Department Costume Collection attracts attention to fashion and to the exhibit as a whole from every space in the atrium. When visitors move in closer, a set of doll clothes and a copy of *Godey's Lady's Book* draw visitors into a more detailed description of how dress created a new consciousness among women workers in a factory town.

The order that object groups appear determines the way visitors process an argument. For instance, objects relating to women's experiences with time and within the factory appear in a group at the beginning at the exhibit, because they serve as an introduction to the rest of the exhibit. These sections are not the main focus of the exhibit, but are necessary aspects for visitors to understand before they learn about leisure time activities. This section provides information about what women were participating in besides leisure time activities and emphasizes to visitors why working women found leisure time experiences so crucial for their

experiences in Lowell. The group about working women's writing comes at the end of the exhibit, along with writings that reflect on working women's leisure experiences and encourage the exhibit's viewers to reflect on these experiences.

Some of the objects appear in the exhibit as props for a larger argument. Both the inkwell and candlestick are used, because when arranged with a facsimile of Curtis's letter they create a writing scene. By setting a scene when describing a task like writing, the exhibit pulls people into a time and place: a writing desk in the 1830s. Although Mount Holyoke's collections had no objects that belonged to Curtis, using contemporary objects builds context for the visitor and allows visitors to imagine the space a working woman in Lowell would have occupied in a boardinghouse in Lowell.

The aesthetic demand for balance in the exhibit challenged the way the groupings fit within the cases. Most of the textual objects, including books, a receipt and a letter, reside in the right case, while many three-dimensional objects lie in the left case. An image of a letter centered on the back wall attempts to convene all the objects in the case under a textual category, creating a visual balance when looking between the colorful left case and cream-colored paper of the right case. Despite these differences, I tried to place a mix of two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects in each case to create a weighted balance in the exhibit's visual space. Objects that are angled point outwards in the direction of the next case, in the direction of the exhibit's flow.⁹⁸ The red signs, especially the

⁹⁸ Aaron Miller, curator at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, suggested this technique.

title sign, balance well with other signs in the library atrium and the rug within the exhibit. Serendipitously, the full-size, brown dress on display also matches the colors in the rug, creating a pleasing aesthetic.

Working Within a Set Space

Exhibits face challenges and obstacles, one of the largest being space. Space defines how people move through an exhibit. Do these visitors need to move from left to right or can visitors encounter the exhibit cases in any order? Space determines the way people find the exhibit. Can people stumble across it in a well-populated locale or do they need signs to help find it? Space shapes the organization of the exhibit's materials. Will the cases line up alongside the walls or are cases perpendicular to one another?

Space restricts the freedom of movement for visitors to an exhibit. There are numerous paths that an exhibit could take and to form any of those, a museum must construct walls or organize cases to create a certain pathway. For example, at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, one exhibit begins with a forested pathway that takes visitors into the gallery about the early postal service. The exhibit itself could have been within another gallery, and topically it was likely to attract few people. By creating a curious pathway, the exhibit curators drew people deeper into the museum gallery space with signs along the way. Pathways must also direct people to key objects that catch the audience's attention. According to museum specialist George Hein, visitors want to move on to the

next exhibit and tend to move on the most direct path between entrance and exit.⁹⁹

It is a curator's job to entice a visitor to stay at the cases longer by spreading out artifacts that tickle visitors' curiosity.

Different locations appeal to different groups of people, leading many curators to think about their audience when choosing a space to install an exhibit. For most museums, this process occurred within the interior of the museum, though many museums also hold traveling shows and spotlight exhibits that draw attention to the museum at large. Many colleges have spotlight shows as they both provide a way of showcasing artifacts in non-traditional spaces and are a manageable size for student projects. Michael Belcher, a museum specialist and author, argues in favor these significantly smaller exhibits, "They are still of considerable importance" he explains, "in providing the opportunity to examine real objects and specimens in the place of study but stop short of enabling the observers to handle the material as well."¹⁰⁰ Belcher argues that these spaces include opportunities for community members to come into closer contact with museum collections. Instead of going to the museum, the museum travels to them. The more accessible an exhibit is to get to for visitors, the more foot traffic the exhibit will have. If the space available for an exhibit is not out in the lobby or by the entrance, maps and signs are required to help visitors find their way around. Whether an exhibition occurs in a space that charges an admission fee also matters when considering the visitors that might attend the exhibition. Money

⁹⁹ George E. Hein, *Learning in the Museum*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 136.

¹⁰⁰ Belcher, *Exhibitions in Museums*, 56.

creates a division in the economic status of visitor that can attend an exhibition, as it requires a certain economic status to view it. So, if a curator wants to target a group of college students, he or she is more likely to gain visitors if the exhibit appears in a cost-free facility on campus. The space is also accessible, because it is a common point of access to all students, which all students pass through.

The organization of an exhibit depends on the way it can be laid out within a space. If the room is a square with two doors, there is a space left open for people to enter and exit on either side of the gallery where no objects can go. Cases cannot line the wall completely in this situation. If there are fewer objects for exhibition, but more room to display objects, the curator sometimes gives more space to the story of an object or its chat. If there are too many objects within a case, the space can feel cluttered. A curator must rationalize how to categorize and exhibit so that it maintains balance and organization with multiple objects in the case.

After the Evening Bell experienced numerous space challenges. The library became the ideal location for the exhibit to take place, based on its high foot traffic and relevance to the exhibit topic, which focuses on young women gaining a new consciousness of independence through their leisure activities. These experiences were similar to the lives of students on Mount Holyoke's campus today and some students interviewed voiced feeling that this would be a good topic to discuss on a women's college campus. At the beginning of the

exhibit process, I consulted with Library, Information and Technology Services to see if this space was available, and with the curators and archivists at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum and Mount Holyoke Archives and Special Collections to hear about other places to put the exhibit. Suggested locations included the upper levels of the library, the library reading room, and Blanchard Student Center, but the library atrium had the most foot traffic and provided the most security for the objects. The library introduces the exhibit to everyone who passes through the entry doors, reaching a large audience of passersby. The library also attracts a wide range of visitors to campus, creating a large range of visitors for the exhibit with different availabilities to stop and learn from an exhibit in the atrium.

As discussed previously, visitors could approach the exhibit from all angles, spending different amounts of time in front of different cases. The current set-up of the exhibit follows what Belcher describes as the block circulation pattern, where the objects are along the sides of the room and visitors can go through the exhibit in either direction.¹⁰¹ Although the exhibit does have a flow visitors should follow built into its structure, it helps to have the content make sense when moving either direction, especially as the space in the library atrium is so open.

One challenge presented in organizing the exhibit was in the distribution of interactives within the exhibit. If the stairs came a little deeper into the atrium,

¹⁰¹ Belcher, *Exhibitions in Museums*, 114.

placing the “What Would You Do?” interactive on the left against the staircase would have created a greater balance in hands-on engagement opportunities within the exhibit. The limitation of the space forced the interactive aspect of the exhibit to feel too weighted towards the end of the exhibit. At other museums, I noticed that the practice of grouping interactive activities worked well if a museum were targeting a younger audience. In the Lowell National Historical Park, a section of the visitors’ center is carved out for younger visitors to experience the themes of Lowell through numerous interactive experiences. For children, a population with shorter attention spans than adults, interactive experiences stimulate greater learning, because they force young visitors to think about museum topics while they engage in short activities. Lowell National Historical Park’s adult exhibits interspersed interactives within individual exhibits, providing adults with knowledge first before they could apply it first-hand in the interactive. Since *After the Evening Bell* targets a college-aged and adult audience, the system of interactives for adults seemed to be the best set-up for the exhibit, but conflicted with resources and space. In *After the Evening Bell*, the interactives are set up on one desk that faces away from the rest of the exhibit and at which many people stop before they enter the rest of the exhibit. This resulted in large waves of feedback from visitors, but disconnected from the rest of the exhibit. I thought about turning the desk around to face inwards, but felt that the closed off space this change could decrease the amount of foot traffic of people wandering in to glance at objects on their way to other parts of the library.

A more defined space may have made people feel like they needed to commit more time to viewing the exhibit and decide to not view it at all. For these reasons, the desk stayed facing towards the center of the atrium.

Audience Engagement

All exhibits strive to attract an audience. The work of processing an argument, choosing objects and arranging things within a space is for naught if no one visits the exhibit. When a curator wants to engage an audience, he or she needs to think about who the audience is, the reasons visitors would want to come to an exhibit and what experiences would engage a visitor with the exhibit's content. The visitors in a public exhibition are most likely going to be the people



Figure 3.3: A visitor engaging with exhibit material.

who pass through that space on a regular basis or people who read advertisements for the exhibition. A “Grand Opening” or “Limited Time Only” exhibit attempts to draw

audiences who may not visit the museum on a regular basis, but will travel to see an exhibit if there is a threat of it disappearing. It is common for museums to post the dates of an exhibition. For example, the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum which currently has exhibition dates listed on both its website and banner for their

exhibit “Dancers of the Nightway.”¹⁰² Attendance at an exhibit also depends on whether the exhibit is successfully caters to the interest of stable visitor populations. Many museums in urban communities design their programming and exhibits to fit a specific demographic of visitors. The Anacostia Community Museum focuses their programming and exhibits on African Americans who live in the neighborhood of Anacostia in Washington D.C.¹⁰³ The Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City develops programming in congruence with Jewish holidays and festivals. People want to visit exhibits that have relevance or interest in relation to their own lives. It is part of museums’ jobs to create the connections between the individual and an exhibit.

The reason a visitor visits an exhibit depends heavily on what they want to gain from the experience. In his renowned book, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, museum analyst John Falk identifies five different visitor identities based on their motivations to visit a museum. These include the Explorer, who seeks new information and spaces; the Facilitator, who desires experiences that place them in a position of authority; the Experience Seeker, who is attracted to engaging experiences, often for entertainment; the Professional/ Hobbyist, who visits an exhibit to learn more about something they are already passionate about; and the Recharger, who goes to museum exhibits as a spiritual and mental

¹⁰² “Dancers of the ‘Nightway’: Ceremonial Imagery of Navajo Weaving,” Mount Holyoke College Art Museum website, <https://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu/exhibition/dancers-nightway>, (accessed March 19, 2016).

¹⁰³ The Anacostia Community Museum is a member of the Smithsonian Institution.

rejuvenation from their busy world.¹⁰⁴ Falk's visitor identities reflect differences in experience that stimulate different visitors.¹⁰⁵ For example, in the New York Historical Society exhibit "Superheroes of Gotham," a hobbyist who loves Jack Kirby finds excitement reading over the label text and learning new facts about Kirby's career. In the same room, a mother with her two young sons draws pleasure from a photo booth that creates a video of the participants saving the world. Both visitors appear to enjoy the exhibit, but the experiences that feed that enjoyment vary.¹⁰⁶

The field of museum studies has experienced a shift towards analyzing different forms of visitor engagement over the last ten years. Interactive visitor experiences become more popular within museums as digital technology infiltrates daily life. Adults and children respond to tactile and visual stimuli as they do to smartphones and tablets, encouraging museums incorporate these stimuli into visitor interactives. Experiences are becoming more mobile and virtual with programs like online walking tours and augmented reality projects that use the smart phone within a museum context.¹⁰⁷ Museum specialist Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* directly addresses how museums can create

¹⁰⁴ John Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2009), 64.

¹⁰⁵ Falk discusses identity as changing for visitors, depending on the day or environment in which they visit the exhibit.

¹⁰⁶ These visitor behaviors were observed personally at the New York Historical Society, New York, New York in the exhibit, "Superheroes of Gotham" on January 13, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Susana Smith Bautista and Anne Balsamo, "Understanding the Distributed Museum: Mapping the Spaces of Museology in Contemporary Culture," in *Museums and Higher Education Working Together: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Anne Balsamo (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 59.

interactives while also staying true to the mission of the museum and argument of an exhibit, based on visitor responses to digital media sites like Flickr or Facebook. Simon argues that interactives do not need to be high-tech in order to be successful; they just need to be inclusive to all types of participants. She also points out that interactives create an ideal system for acquiring feedback for the museum, while also presenting that feedback to other visitors who might find interest in it.¹⁰⁸

Since Mount Holyoke College attracts students, faculty, staff and visitors from around the world and with different gender identities, *After the Evening Bell* is destined to have a broad audience. In order to gauge the average age of the visitor, ten hour-long observations were performed while the exhibit was displayed in the Williston Library atrium. Most people observed in the space were college-aged students, with the next largest demographic being adults non-affiliated with the college.¹⁰⁹ Most of the students were women, as Mount Holyoke is an all-female institution. The racial and ethnic background of passersby varied with many students of color and international students. The library of a women's college made sense as a place to house an exhibit about women's leisure time. Similarly, many of the women at Mount Holyoke moved out of their parents' house for the first time to go to college. They have traveled from far away to gain an education and the possibility of a successful future. Although the exhibit focuses on white

¹⁰⁸ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, (Santa Cruz, California: Museum 2.0, 2010), 13.

¹⁰⁹ For more information of ages of visitors see Appendix IV.

native-born women, I hoped that this connection between the culture of Mount Holyoke students and the exhibit could drum up enough interest among students for them to explore and participate in the exhibit.

Many faculty and students approach the exhibit on their way to another location, be it the circulation desk or the reading room upstairs. The identity types discussed by Falk define the ways in which they interact with the exhibit. Some visitors stay for longer at the exhibit reading object labels, as they might be history majors, art historians, museum professionals (a museum director stopped by the day after the show opened) or passersby interested in the topic. These visitors are likely hobbyists and explorers, wanting to learn new things about an unknown topic or a topic familiar to them. Some visitors spend long periods of time at the interactives, fulfilling the experience seeker and facilitator roles that want to engage directly with the material and draw others to the material. A person who writes a long letter to Harriot Curtis may be a facilitator as they want others to know what her letter means by their interpretation. An experience seeker may also be drawn to the exhibit through curiosity, thinking as they walk into the library “Huh, why is there a dress in the middle of the atrium?” Rechargers may go to the exhibit as a break from their studies, taking time to focus on something else. Most visitors overlap identities, drawn by the curiosities of both an explorer and an experience seeker. The length of this curiosity does not last long and many visitors stop by the exhibit to look over the artifacts or put a button in a jar, all under the span of two minutes.

With each of these identity types, the visitor must think about historical events and consequences in relation to how they interacted with the exhibit. A feedback book allowed visitors to share their thoughts about the exhibit and document their participation in the exhibit.¹¹⁰ One visitor wrote in the feedback book for *After the Evening Bell*, “I voted No, because lung disease is bad.” Another visitor wrote, “My favorite item is the dress! Do you know if it is handmade by the owner?”¹¹¹ Both of these individuals had to think carefully about the lives of women discussed in the exhibit and created comments and questions based on these observations. The first visitor read the text about women’s health in factories and decided based on the evidence provided that the risks of factory labor outweighed the benefits, influencing where he or she placed his or her button. The second visitor viewed the dress on display and questioned how the dress was created, influencing her questions in the feedback book.

The interactives in the exhibit both include sensory experiences, but differed in the amount of time to complete. The “What Would You Do?” interactive involves a scenario that asks guests to make the choice many middling class women made in rural New England in the 1830s: “Would you go to work in the mills?” Visitors place a button in a “Yes” mason jar or “No” mason jar. The buttons represent women’s outwork labor in their hometowns as discussed in the

¹¹⁰ The idea to have a method of documentation of visits overtime comes from Nina Simon’s discussion about punch cards that register the number of times a visitor comes back to a place in hopes to elicit a response from them. This idea is discussed in Simon’s *The Participatory Museum*, 75.

¹¹¹ For more responses from feedback book, see Appendix I.

chat. The clear jars allow people to anonymously add to a group of data and then check back afterwards to see how the data has changed.¹¹² This interactive was inspired by a voting station at the Minnesota Historical Society, where voters put pins in voting tubes as they exited the museum, and a similar interactive was set up at the Lowell National Historical Park by park ranger and educator, Resi Polixa. The Lowell interactive asked a series of questions, like whether they would take the risk of traveling to a new country for work, and provided poker chips for visitors to vote with. The “Share Your Voice ... Or Should You?” interactive requires visitors to reflect on the words of a real working woman, Harriot Curtis and share their thoughts about her letter. Although the exhibit is both physical and fixed in location, this interactive can be modified based on how the visitor decides to focus their writing and reflection. At the beginning of the exhibit, no transcription accompanied the letter on the wall, but letters submitted into “Harriot Curtis’ mailbox” stated the letter was undecipherable. More letters appeared once a transcription accompanied the letter on the wall.¹¹³ This interactive drew inspiration from both the Lowell National Historical Park and Smithsonian National Postal Museum. Lowell National Historical Park had one exhibit of a room full of running looms, offering visitors an opportunity to hear the deafening noise of the looms. In the room, an interpreter talked about the roles of factory workers in the nineteenth century as compared to her own life as a textile factory worker today. Her presentation personalized the visitor experience

¹¹² Results for the “What Would You Do?” interactive can be found in Appendix III.

¹¹³ Copies of these letters can be found in Appendix II.

and created connections between historic factory practices and factories today. *After the Evening Bell*'s interactive "Share Your Voice ... Or Should You" attempts to personalize visitors' experiences by encouraging them a "conversation" between a factory worker and a visitor. The idea of writing a letter as a tool to conduct this conversation came from observing visitors engage through letter writing at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum. People reacted to holding a pen and writing down their thoughts, something not done as often today as it was in the past.¹¹⁴ Incorporating a writing desk within the space created a space for visitors to write their letters that mimicked the desks on which working women would have written letters. If more space were available, an interactive surrounding fashion would make a good addition to the exhibit. Last fall, students in the Mount Holyoke Archives and Special Collections brought out a reproduction hoopskirt when dismantling a mannequin and everyone in the archives wanted to try the hoopskirt on. The Fashion Museum in Bath, England, currently displays hoopskirts that visitors may try on with corsets and try walking throughout a space. This would make a memorable addition to a future Mount Holyoke exhibition.

Evaluation

The final phase of exhibit development is evaluating the responses to the exhibit material. Museum curators and educators use the summative evaluation

¹¹⁴ For reactions to the pens, see Appendix I.

process to examine how the different components of an exhibit, like text, object choice, interactives and space, influenced the way the audience engaged with the exhibit. There are multiple types of summative evaluations. Curators and educators can observe visitors in the exhibit, interview visitors directly or indirectly about the exhibit or examine something created by the visitor within the exhibit to analyze visitors' experiences.¹¹⁵ When the results of all of these evaluation processes are analyzed together, curators and educators have a clear picture of whether the exhibit achieved its goals.

After the Evening Bell: Working Women in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1830-1860 had observations and summative evaluation during its four week display in the Williston Library atrium, from March 14- April 11, 2016. Ten single observation sessions, each an hour long, were done on the exhibit: two observations were done between 9-12pm, four observations were done between 12-5pm, two observations were done between 5-8pm and two observations were done between 8-10pm. Among the 42 visitors observed in the ten observation periods, the largest population of visitors was traditional aged students and the second largest population was adults that appeared to have no professional affiliation with the college. The "What Would You Do?" and "Share Your Voice ... Or Should You?" interactives and feedback notebook allowed exhibit visitors to share their thoughts on the exhibit topic and objects while I was not present. The "What Would You Do?" interactive drew responses from 296 people; 219

¹¹⁵ George E. Hein, *Learning in the Museum*, 101.

said yes and 84 said no when asked about moving to Lowell. “Share Your Voice ... Or Should You?” engaged 5 visitors to write letters. 42 visitors wrote comments in the feedback notebook. There were some visitors that I had the opportunity to directly interview about their visit to the exhibit, at both a class visit to the exhibit and the exhibit opening. The evaluation process for *After the Evening Bell* focused specifically on visitor response to argument, visitor participation and the number of visitors responsive to advertising.

Visitor participation was visible through both the average length of time spent at the exhibit and the number of people that visibly engaged in interactives. In the ten observation sessions, the average length of time spent at the exhibit was under one minute. There were also significantly more people that participated in the “What Would You Do?” interactive than wrote in the feedback book or wrote letters in “Share Your Voice ... Or Should You?” This may have occurred, because the “What Would You Do?” interactive requires the least time and energy to engage with. This evidence suggests that most visitors were passing through the library atrium and stopped briefly to look at the exhibit. Most of them did not take the time to participate in any interactives. This became evident during the ten observations, when only 8 of the 42 observed visitors participated in one of the interactives. This suggests that the number of people that visited and engaged with the exhibit is likely significantly higher than the 296 people that higher buttons in the “What Would You Do?” interactive. Visitors also participated in the exhibit outside of the interactives and exhibit topic by sending emails or

recording in the feedback journal regarding typos in text, buttons needing to be refilled and the quality of the pens used for the interactives.

Visitor's reactions to the arguments posed in the exhibit were most visible through their responses to interactives and their statements made in interviews. Some of the individuals that participated in the "What Would You Do?" interactive commented on their choices in one of the other interactives. In "Share Your Voice ... Or Should You?" one visitor wrote, "I put a button in the NO jar but I wish I could have put one in the 'Yes' Jar. I would not want to leave my family (I would imagine) but times were very hard then."¹¹⁶ This visitor was processing the difficult decisions that women made leaving their family and acknowledging the differences between present day and the nineteenth century. "What Would You Do?" also displayed visitor responses for others to see, so that visitors could indirectly have a conversation with other visitors about where their preferences would lie in moving to Lowell. When asked about her favorite part of the exhibit, one student said she most liked the "What Would You Do?" interactive, because it gave her an opportunity to frame the rest of her experience at the exhibit through the lens of women's choices. "Share Your Voice ... Or Should You?" encouraged visitors to approach history on a more creative level. In the five letters written back to Curtis, visitors mention concepts discussed in the exhibit including fashion, writing, education and death. They also think beyond the exhibit and make connections to other topics, like marriage. As the audience is

¹¹⁶ For other responses to "Share Your Voice ... Or Should You?" see Appendix II.

primarily women at a liberal arts institution, it is likely that they have some knowledge of women's life experiences in the nineteenth century. The exhibit succeeded in connecting visitors' prior knowledge to new concepts that visitors may not have explored as deeply. At the same time, the exhibit successfully kept text simple enough for those new to nineteenth-century American history to be able to engage with the material.

The number of visitors to *After the Evening Bell* is incalculable, given the impossibility of placing a recording device within the atrium. The interactives suggest that there were at least 300 visitors, with many more people, including many that were observed, looking at the exhibit, but not responding. It is difficult to know when most visitors stopped by the exhibit, though some comments in the feedback book note the date visited. Two specific events happened within the



Fig. 3.4: Visitors at the exhibit opening on March 29, 2016.

exhibit that provided specific counts of people at the exhibit: a class visit and the exhibit opening celebrations. The class visit allowed eight students to interact with both the exhibit and me for an hour, culminating in a stimulating conversation about how they interpreted the exhibit material. The exhibit opening created multiple spaces for smaller conversations and engaged an audience of at least 40 people. The people at both of these events intended to visit the exhibit when they entered the library. Social media and physical advertising played a large role in drawing attention to the exhibit. Advertising for the exhibit opening included both the use of Mount Holyoke History Department emails and a Facebook event that prompted 36 responses. Instagram posts by the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum about the exhibit's progress, posts on Facebook by

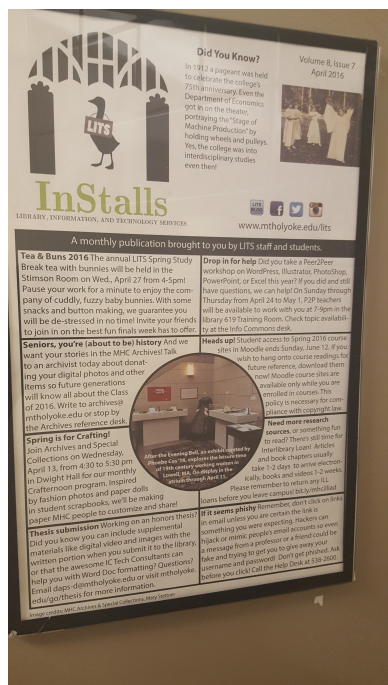


Fig. 3.5: Advertisement in the LITS InStalls.

visitors to the exhibit, a photo in the April edition of the Library, Information and Technology Services' InStalls and frequent mentions on college tours attracted attention to the exhibit outside of scheduled events. Considering the number of people that passed through the atrium in four weeks time, the engagement of 300 individuals marks a successful exhibit. This keeps in mind that many of the passersby are students and faculty that move through the space

on a repeated basis. Only a fifth of the visitors took part in interactives during the observation

period; if this ratio holds true for the entire exhibit there could have been as many as 1,500 visitors overall. The visitor feedback was overwhelmingly positive and many people have commented that the exhibit improved the aesthetic of the atrium space. Although the space of the exhibit was limited and the possibility to direct the exhibit flow was limited, visitors that participated in the interactives, were observed, and were interviewed connected deeply with the exhibit material and made unique reflections on working women's leisure time. One of the exhibit's goals of engaging people with working women's history was therefore achieved. Another goal, to have the exhibit be approachable from any point of the atrium, was also achieved, although people's experiences differed depending on their path through the exhibit. More organization and a different exhibit space would allow the flow of the exhibit to remain more consistent. The exhibit also attracted all ages from a child to senior citizens, from multiple backgrounds, which achieves another exhibit goal.

Conclusion

Lowell created a new space for women to experiment with the freedoms of choosing how to live one's life. Many scholars argue this occurred through the growth of wage work, moving women's lives out of the household and into the commercial workforce where they could earn money. Although this did provide women with new experiences with time and work, the activities that women took part in after working hours allowed them just as many freedoms. Women had to make choices about how they spent the money they earned, how they stood up for themselves and how they represented their roles in Lowell to the world. The experience of working women would not be known to us today if they had not left behind a legacy of thoughtful self-representation through their writings, protests and stories.

An average person rarely digs through an archive to come into contact with history. For history to be tangible, it needs to be presented in an engaging way either through writing or through visible representation. This project attempts to present history in both of these formats, experimenting with historical writing and exhibit curating to discuss a new perspective on the working women's experience in Lowell, Massachusetts, between 1830 and 1860. The result has been connecting students, staff and guests of Mount Holyoke College with the choices of another group of driven women and provoking dialogues about their past.

APPENDICES

I. Feedback and Visitor Comments

Thanks for spending a few minutes of your free time exploring this exhibit! Do you have any comments or suggestions? Any feedback is appreciated!

- “This exhibit is bomb as hell I love it”
- “Extremely interesting!!!”- A guest!
- *Illegible comment
- “Great work, Phoebe!! I can tell you poured your heart and soul into this exhibit. Very interesting and professional-your hard work shows! So proud.”
- “What an interesting perspective on women in the industrial revolution! It’s an angle I haven’t seen before! Great job!”
- “Thanks for bringing the lives of these women-outside the factory-to life for us! What a treasure. <3”
- “Awesome exhibit! Really interesting and I enjoyed the interactive element! You go girl!”
- “Simply marvelous! Well done.”- Elise
- “First, these pens are awesome! Second, this exhibit is awesome and so are you! Love it!”- Kira
- “This exhibit looks great, Phoebe! I thought it was an exhibit put on by the library or archives until I saw your name ☺ So professional...I am *very* impressed! Great work! I hope you feel as I do that your hard work has paid off!”- Elena A.
- “Phoebe, you rock!” –Courtney Kaufman
- “Very wonderful stuff, always a pleasure to look at”- Emily
- “This is all so cool!”
- “Great job! This is such an amazing exhibit!!”
- “This is fabulous, Phoebe! You’ve worked so hard on this all year, and it has paid off! I love the interactivity you have included- it’s a clever way to make people feel connected to the history. Thanks for all you hard work; this exhibit is very interesting and informative!”- Megan Byers
- “I love this exhibit! My favorite item is the dress! Do you know if it is hand made by the owner? I love how you ask us if we would work & move to the mills! Would you? Do you think the women benefited from working there?” – Courtney Rose
- “This was so cool. I would definitely move to Lowell.”- Therese K.
- “Thank you Phoebe. I learned a lot!”- Holly Hanson
- “Thank you for all the work done to do this!”-AB
- “Great work Phoebe!”

- “Terrific job capturing an underappreciated aspect of the Industrial Revolution!”- Elena’s dad
- “Great job Phoebe! I love that it is local...& about women! Congrats!”- Hannah
- “This exhibit is great! I hope I can come again to this place!”-Nipuni
- “Interesting issues to consider. Well curated.”- a visitor
- “The buttons and display are so cute! Would love more ☺”
- “I really loved it and felt transported to a different time. Thanks for the effort!”
- “This is so coool.”
- “What an amazing exhibit! So interesting, and set up beautifully.”- <3 Lydia
- “I really like these pens. Where can I get one?”
- “Phoebe...I’m sad that this event is the only time I’ve seen your work but it is excellent! The artifacts were interesting and brought the era to life, and the dress brought a great aura and presence to the exhibit (Sorry I can’t spell.) I also enjoyed the concise, well written, educational, intriguing text paragraphs, describing the people and objects! I voted No, because lung disease is bad.”-Ted
- “Phoebe, Gorgeous display. You put everything together so beautifully. I know it took a lot of hard work. Congratulations.”- Maeve M-M
- “Phoebe, A wonderful exhibit! Thank you.”-Debbie (in the Archives!)
- “Phoebe-You are a marvelous wonder-weaving together art, history, letters, storytelling in an interactive experience. Even these pens to write with, touching our own hands to history. Thank you! And promise me that you’ll explore the Northampton Association for Education and Industry in Florence, before you fly from the Valley. I’ll go with you! Mazel tov!”- Leslie Fraser
- “This is an incredible exhibit! I know everyone appreciates all the work you put into this! Keep doing great work!” –BTB
- “Dear Phoebe, What a wonderful exhibit! You have such an inherent finesse and depth to it. A profundity on an academic but also an emotional level is so apparent and so thoughtfully laid out. I looove the button idea to personalize the visitors’ engagement with the exhibit. And talking from a visual standpoint (as an Architecture major) you clearly have an aesthetic eye that will take you far! It’s difficult to make history interesting and accessible to people of the modern generation and I think you were highly successful in this. With admiration in many folds.” –Your AJ
- “Phoebe, This really is a spectacular work. Made me think about my own experiences in ways I had not imagined before. Congratulations & wish you the very best!”

- “4/2/16. Fascinating! A great collection of memorabilia, etc.” “Me too”- Annie Schmalz (proud Grannie of Phoebe) and Bopbop ☺
- “This is such a *great* pen! I love your exhibition! Phoebe rocks!”- Gege ☺
- “Fabulous!”
- “Agreed (arrow to comment above) whoever said that must be sexy/smart”
- “Phoebe! This is terrific! I’m learning so much!”- Mimi Farb
- “You did an *incredible* job! I would like to know where you put your button, though ☺”

II. Letter Responses

- LETTER #1:
“Keep writing! Words might be your most powerful tool!”
- LETTER #2:
“My dearest Harriot,
I don’t think I can truly express how marvelous it is to hear from you on this grand adventure. I am thrilled some of my mundane musings brought a smile to your busy days, how I wish I could come visit again.
I haven’t long to write, so I’ll get to my point forthwith; I urge you to voice your opinions as much as you see necessary and, above all, safe. These are quickly changing times, Harriot, and I shudder to read a future letter of yours that bodes of misfortune. As a dear friend, I tell you to take care, but as a man with concern for the well being of this industrial revolution for all workers. I hope you find the best avenue to air those concerns. Whichever choice you make, know that I will vouch for you, and have the utmost belief in your decisions. I must dash, the business day begins, and with it I must hasten.
Fare you well, and take care.
Elise Newcomer”
- LETTER #3:
“Dearest Harriet,
I am envious of your spirit and your fervor regarding such an unsettling situation.
You have inspired many young women to leave the hard existence they are familiar with to take on an equally hard existence they do not know, which offers them a spark of hope for a better future for themselves. You have given them a great gift of possibility.
I do fear for your well being dear. You are dancing a dangerous waltz! One which I dream of partaking in, yet can not find the inner strength which you have.

I am betrothed you know or I assume you must have heard. My father has made a very good arrangement, as my future husband owns 6 milking cows, 2 teams of oxen and a well bred bull. He is quite prosperous and owns 3 large parcels of land comprised of over 1000 acres many of which are already established crop fields.

Oh but Harriot I yearn for what is in heart and actions though I know I marry and raise a family which, though, not as exciting, fills a need in me for stability.

Aside from what I feel my father would be so disappointed in me, something I could not bear. Since mother and my sister were taken by the illness, I and future grandchildren are all my father remains in existence for.

I have regressed. I apologize Harriet. Please write back to me and tell me how you fare. And my good friend please be very careful in who you trust. Hezekiah has, with your permission, shown me some of your letters. I will not share anything I have read with a soul until you might send word it is acceptable to do so.

Do be safe and know that in my heart I am with you. Be careful but never give up Harriet. This is your passion, part of your makeup. You can be no one if not yourself. I hope only for the best outcome and many women will join you.

Your actions have made this one of the sinfully [?] proudest times of my life.

Forever with you, yet apart,
Your nameless piefriend”

- LETTER #4:
“I would encourage her to do whatever it is that makes her happy because life is too short to be doing something that you’re unhappy with...-Riva.”
- LETTER #5:
“I could not really make out the letter but I would tell her to use the intelligence she had to follow the passion which filled her while continuing to be very careful!
What else could she do? For her it seems obvious there were no other choices for such a woman. I wish I had her courage! I put a button in the NO jar but I wish I could have put one in the ‘Yes’ Jar. I would not want to leave my family (I would imagine) but times were very hard then.
Had I not been told about the long hours standing and ad I the wealth allowing me to travel back and forth I would definitely have gone.
However long hours were probably put in working the farm and making the buttons so hands were probably sore & red so perhaps the draw of getting any education and the long hours standing would be more appealing after all!

I wish I would have had her courage but I fear not ☹”

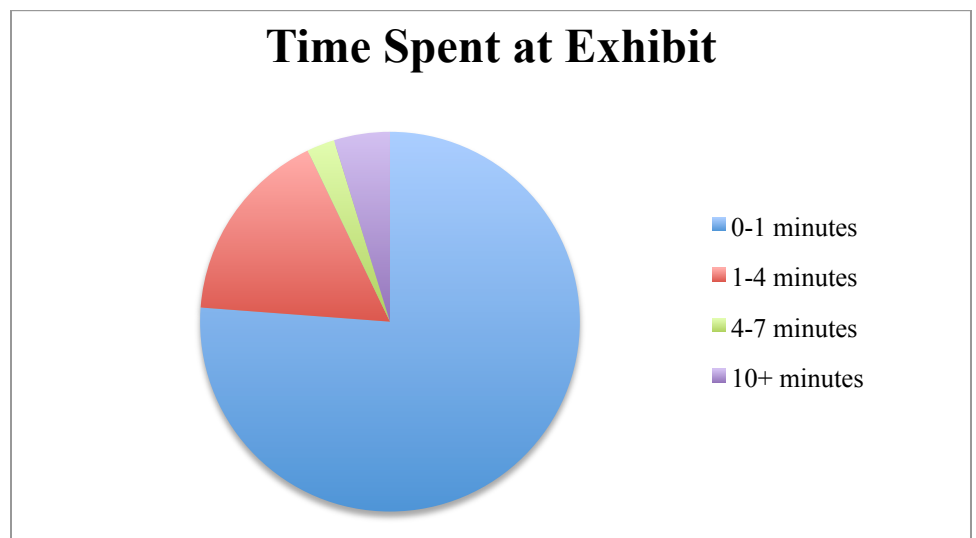
III. Voting Responses

- YES JAR: 212 buttons
- NO JAR: 84 buttons
- TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 296 people

IV. Observation Notes

Observations were taken over ten hour-long periods while *After the Evening Bell: Working Women in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1830-1860* while it was exhibited in the Williston Library atrium.

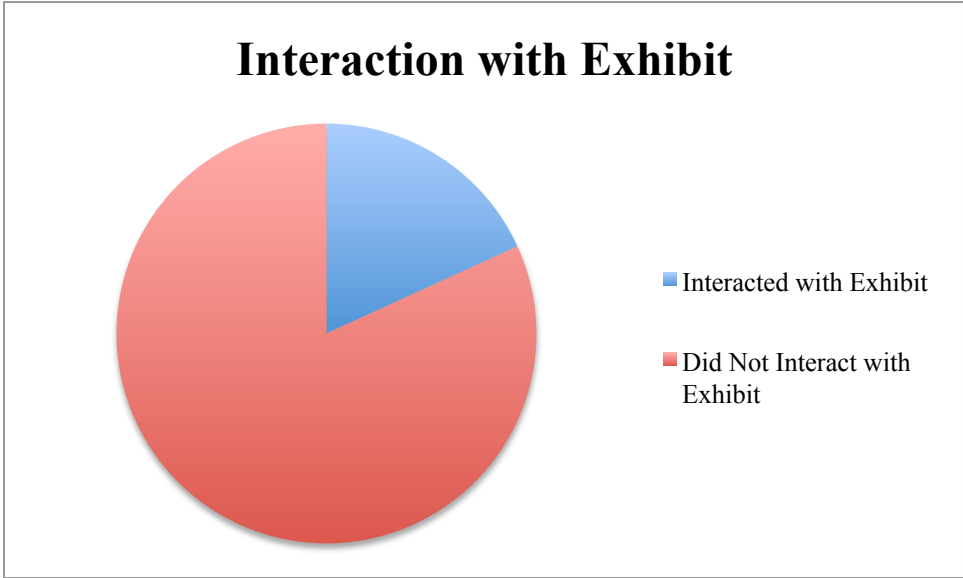
- TIME OF DAY OBSERVED
 - 2 observations were made in the morning (between 8am-12pm)
 - 4 observations were made in the afternoon (between 12-5pm)
 - 4 observations were made at night (between 5-11pm)
 -
- LENGTH PERSON VIEWED AND PARTICIPATED IN EXHIBIT



Of the 42 participants, 76% visited the exhibit for less than a minute. 17% of visitors observed stayed at the exhibit between 1-4 minutes in length. 2% of

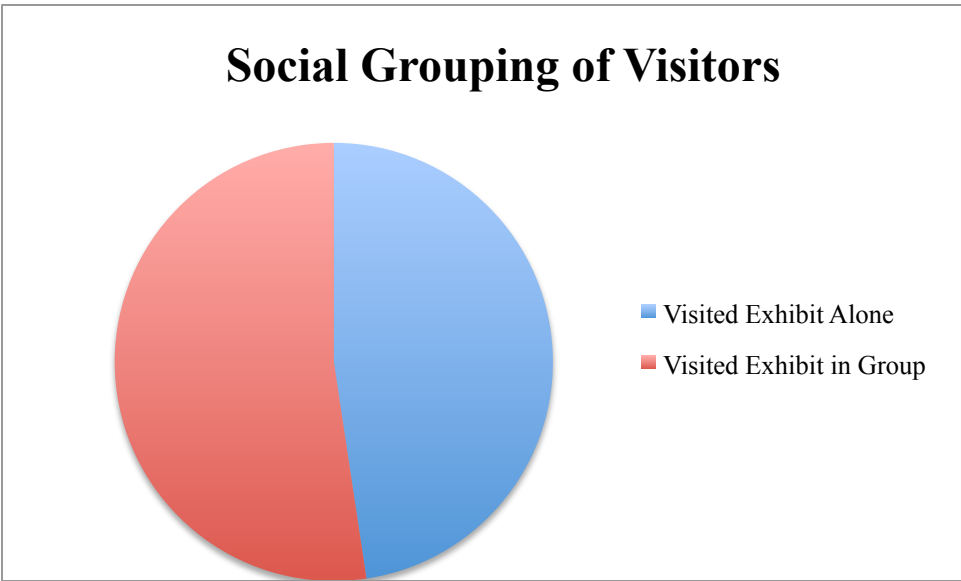
visitors observed engaged with the exhibit for 4-7 minutes. No visitors observed remained at the exhibit for between 4-7 minutes. 5% of visitors observed looked at the exhibit for more than 10 minutes.

- NUMBER OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN INTERACTIVES



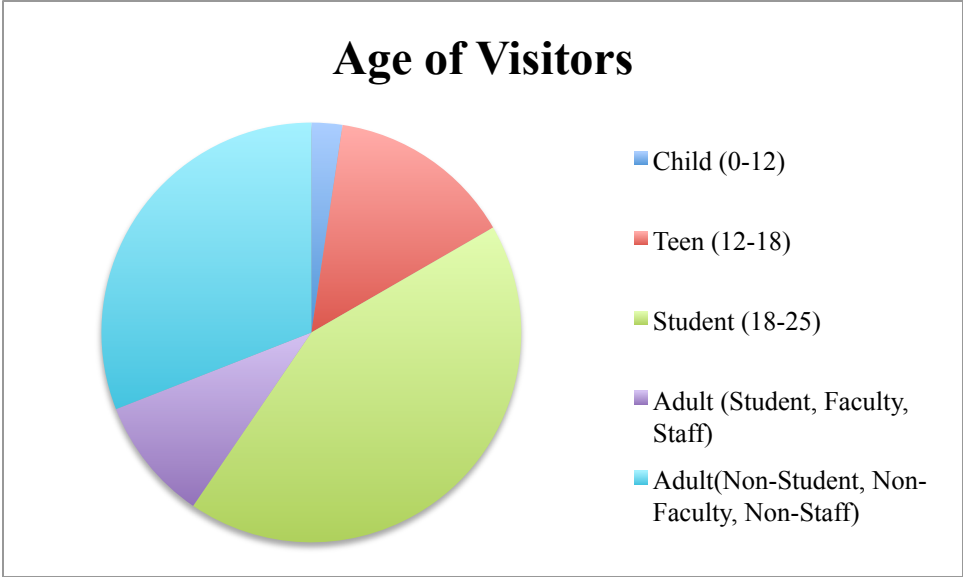
Of the 42 observed visitors, 82% chose not to participate in the interactive activities. 18% did participate in one, two or all of the three interactives in the exhibit: letter writing to Harriot Curtis, feedback book or button voting.

- NUMBER OF PEOPLE VISITING EXHIBITS IN GROUPS



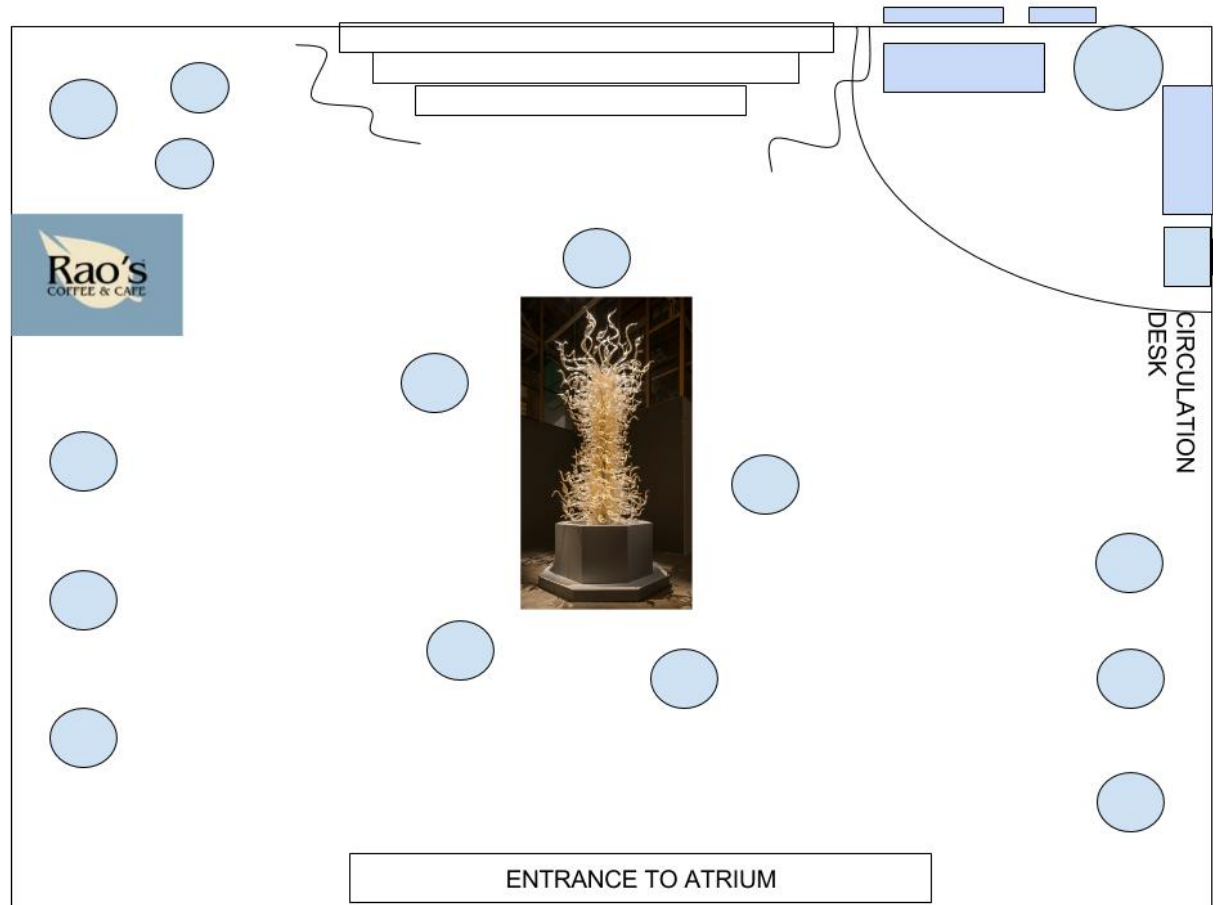
Of observed visitors, 48% visited the exhibit unaccompanied and 52% entered the exhibit with one or more other person

- AGE OF VISITOR



Of the observed visitors, 2% were children, 14% were teenagers, 43% were traditional college age students between the ages of 18-25, 10% were adults identified as faculty, non-traditional aged students and staff, and 31% were adults unidentified with the college.

V. Map of Exhibit Space in Williston Library Atrium



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