**Letters from a Lowell Girl**

The following are all excerpts taken from letters written by Mary Paul to her widowed father Bella Paul, from 1845-1857. Read these selections to learn firsthand about the life of the Lowell mills and the changing roles of women during this period.

Sat. Sept. 13, 1845; Woodstock, VT

I want you to consent to let me go to Lowell if you can. I think it would be much better for me than to stay about here. I could earn more to begin with than I can any where about here. I am in need of clothes which I cannot get if I stay about here and for that reason I want to go to Lowell or some other place.

Nov. 20, 1845; Lowell, MA

I started for this place at the time I talked of which was Thursday. … Did not stop again for any length of time till we arrived at Lowell. … We found a place in a spinning room and the next morning I went to work. I like very well have 50 cts first payment increasing every payment as I get along in work have a first rate overseer and a very good boarding place. I work on the Lawrence Corporation. Mill is No. 2 spinning room.[1] …I think of staying here a year certain, if not more.

Dec. 21, 1845; Lowell, MA

Perhaps you would like something about our regulations about going in and coming out of the mill. At 5 o'clock in the morning the bell rings for the folks to get up and get breakfast. At half past six it rings for the girls to get up and at seven they are called into the mill. At half past 12 we have dinner are called back again at one and stay till half past seven .[2] I get along very well with my work. I can doff as fast as any girl in our room. I think I shall have frames before long. The usual time allowed for learning is six months but I think I shall have frames before I have been in three as long as I get along so fast. I think that the factory is the best place for me and if any girl wants employment I advise them to come to Lowell.

Apr. 12, 1846; Lowell, MA

You wanted to know what I am doing. I am at work in a spinning room and tending four sides of warp which is one girls work. The overseer tells me that he never had a girl get along better than I do and that he will do the best he can by me. I stand it well, though they tell me that I am growing very poor. I was paid nine shillings a week last payment and am to have more this one though we have been out considerable for backwater which will take off a good deal. The Agent promises to pay us nearly as much as we should have made but I do not think that he will. The payment was up last night and we are to be paid this week. I have a very good boarding place have enough to eat and that which is good enough. The girls are all kind and obliging. The girls that I room with are all from Vermont and good girls too. Now I will tell you about our rules at the boarding house. We have none in particular except that we have to go to bed about 10 o'clock. At half past 4 in the morning the bell rings for us to get up and at five for us to go into the mill. At seven we are called out to breakfast are allowed half an hour between bells and the same at noon till the first of May when we have three quarters [of an hour] till the first of September. We have dinner at half past 12 and supper at seven.

Nov. 5, 1848; Lowell, MA

I was unable to get my old place in the cloth room on the Suffolk or on any other corporation. I next tried the dress rooms on the Lawrence Corporation], but did not succeed[e]d in getting a place. I almost concluded to give up and go back to Claremont, but thought I would try once more. So I went to my old overseer on the Tremont Cor. I had no idea that he would want one, but he did, and I went to work last Tuesday—the same work I used to do.

It is very hard indeed and sometimes I think I shall not be able to endure it. I never worked so hard in my life but perhaps I shall get used to it. I shall try hard to do so for there is no other work that I can do unless I spin and that I shall not undertake on any account.

Jul. 1, 1849; Lowell, MA

My health has been pretty good though I have been obliged to be out of the mill four days. I thought then that it would be impossible for me to work through the hot weather. But since I think I shall manage to get through after a fashion. I do not know what wages I am to have as I have not yet been paid but I shall not expect much, as I have not been able to do much, although I have worked very hard.