

Life in a Textile Mill: Lowell Massachusetts **Journal of Mary Jane Washington**

My name is Mary Jane Washington. I am a thirteen-year old textile mill worker. I was born on March 10, 1824. I am one of eight children. There are five girls and three boys in my family. I came to work in the Lowell textile factory because my family was large and we are needy.

Before I became a textile mill worker, I was an ordinary kid. I liked to help my mother with housework.

Thursday, April 16, 1835: Lowell, Massachusetts *(Starting location.)*

Today at the factory, my friend Rachel Lincoln passed out from all the humidity in the air.

Rachel had been coughing all week and we told her to tell the company owners that she was getting sick from the poor working conditions. When the company found out what had happened to her, they told us to stay at our looms and not to help. Then they told her to go and lay down for an hour and then come back and tend to her loom. Rachel did as they said and came back in an hour. When she was at her loom, she turned to cough and her machine hit her in her head! The company owners fired her and told her she would never work at another mill because she was too careless. This astonished the other women and made them more furious about this job. Now they were about sick of it.

Friday, May 1, 1835: Lowell Massachusetts *(Next location or stop on your journey.)*

Today they lowered our wages and raised our hours. Now we work for 16 hours a day and the company doesn't make an effort to try to fix the atrocious working conditions. They thought we would stand for this but most of the women do not. They turned out to protest. I admired them for this but I could not protest with them. My family would suffer a great amount if I got fired.

So I stayed for my family's sake. The women held a rally outside the factory and protested against this new rule. The company owners tried to hush them because they didn't want other people to hear. After a day of protesting, they realized that the company owners weren't listening to their demands so they decided to leave. Some of the girls depended on this job to support their families. Now what were they going to do?

Friday, May 25, 1835: Lowell, Massachusetts *(Next location or stop on your journey.)*
All of the girls are gone now and there is a new batch already here. They are happy with their job so far because they haven't seen as much of it as I have. There haven't been any changes except we are trying to convince them to open the windows during business hours. When we asked about this they told us, "No!" Because they needed moisture in the factory so the threads wouldn't break. I don't have anything else to say for right now. I only wrote because I had a free moment.

Monday, June 15, 1835: Lowell Massachusetts *(Next location or stop on your journey.)*
I still work daily and they aren't even making an effort to fix the poor conditions. Today I was late and the overseer promised not to tell this time out. Next time I wouldn't get off so easily. Either the company owner saw me when I was late or someone told. I didn't get into trouble but the overseer got his paycheck docked \$.10. I felt badly about this but if I had said something I probably would've gotten fired. Today I also hurt my finger on the loom. A lady patched it up and I went back to work. Since I last wrote, nothing happened.

Bye-Bye. Talk later.

Friday, July 24, 1835: Lowell Massachusetts (*Next location or stop on your journey.*)

When I got home today, my mother told me she was expecting another young'un. Now it was going to be harder than ever and I couldn't quit my job or my family would be homeless. My little sister, which is nine years of age, started to work at the textile mill. When my sister saw what a day was like at the mill she was horrified to work there. I talked to her and told her the only reason I stayed there was so we wouldn't be homeless. The talked worked and she stayed. Nothing else happened except last week one of the ladies who works at the factory got the flu. The company didn't want to give her time off so she quit early on Wednesday, July 20. She died that night.

Got to go. Talk later.

Wednesday, September 23, 1835: Lowell Massachusetts (*End or last stop on your journey.*)

I passed out today in the factory because it was really nice outside and I had on a long sleeve shirt and a long skirt. The windows were shut like always. Then I fainted. The company owners asked if I was okay. I told them I was but I asked for the rest of the day off. They said to get back to my loom. I told them NO!!! I would not. I got fired. I didn't care because I had realized there were more jobs out there. This is going to be the last entry at this job.

THANK GOODNESS!