

Industry in New Hampshire

Preparation for a Study Unit on Industry in New Hampshire

Background

By 1820, many of the small towns in the northeast were beginning to see large brick factories on the landscape. New Hampshire especially was endowed with many rivers and waterfalls that were a ready source of power for these mills.

Prior to the building of the mills, production was done by hand in homes or in small buildings on the family farm. Spinning, weaving, woodworking, and shoemaking were among the home industries. All the adult members as well as the children of the family participated in this production. Because the production of manufactured goods was done in addition to regular farming activities, it was scheduled for the off season months. The additional income also supplemented the farm family's income. The products of these home industries were distributed locally or within the immediate region.

By the nineteenth century, the population of the country had grown and with it the demand for goods. New water-powered factories could consolidate workers under one roof creating a more efficient production location. Owners could control the amount and quality of work and the distribution of the end product. Machine-made goods were produced much faster and in greater quantity than the goods produced in smaller home industries. As more goods became available prices became more affordable. Many people could afford to purchase fine fabric, ready-made shoes, and extras like toys for their children. In addition, factory workers who could depend upon a steady income became part of the market for the very goods they were making.

The transition from hand-made to machine-made goods resulted from many inventions and improvements. Standardized or interchangeable parts provided a uniformity of shapes and sizes enabling new products to be produced more efficiently. Abbot-Downing Co. in Concord, N.H., embraced this concept. Their use of standardized parts enabled them to make a wide variety of coaches and wagons. Students can learn more by visiting the Museum of New Hampshire History to see how successful the company was.

Businesses such as Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in Manchester, N.H., also incorporated a variety of skills under one roof. Although internationally known for textiles, they also had their own foundry that produced steam engines along with the machines to run the world's largest textile mill. The same foundries were used to manufacture rifles for use in the Civil War.

Shoe manufacturing was another large industry in nineteenth-century New Hampshire. There is some shoe manufacturing going on today as well. It was common to see ten-foot square buildings known as "ten footers" on farms all over New Hampshire during the late 1700s and early 1800s. Farm families received piece work from the shoe companies in Massachusetts which they then assembled and sent back to the Massachusetts firm. Eventually large brick shoe factories, many of which are still in evidence today, were built along the seacoast. Workers were

under one roof where their work had been reorganized to create efficient production and distribution systems. At the museum, students may see wooden shoe lasts used to give shoes their shape. This type of last has changed little from the 1800s to the present.

In the nineteenth century, New Hampshire was fortunate because it had much of the raw materials needed for manufacturing: cowhides, sheepskins, wool, and wood. What was needed could easily be supplied to the factories by oxcart, rail, or ship. The enormous supply of pine, oak, and birch trees, as well as other hard woods provided raw materials for the mills to produce pails, brooms, shoe lasts, paddles, and crutches. Millions of bricks were made along the banks of the Piscataqua River. Stoddard glass was well known and is highly sought after by collectors today. Textiles, the most important manufactured product of the nineteenth century, is still manufactured today by the Pittsfield Weaving Company and the Globe Manufacturing Company. One weaves labels for many nationally known stores and one produces a high tech cloth used in firemen's protective clothing.

Manufacturing not only resulted in more products, jobs, and a more stable income base, but also brought great changes to the rural landscape and economy. People moved to the cities to work in the mills. Immigrant labor was drawn in to subsidize a small native work force. Families lost the degree to which they were self-sufficient. "Store-bought" items became necessities as they became more available and affordable. Students should consider negative as well as the positive outcomes of industrialization as they explore the impact that it had on New Hampshire.

Objectives for Studying Industry in New Hampshire

- To introduce students to the process of industrial manufacturing: the use of machines for producing items of significance in New Hampshire, the employment and regulation of large numbers of workers, inventions and concepts that made mass production possible.
- To examine and compare hand-made and machine-made objects.
- To discuss the advantages and disadvantages of large industry, its effects on people and the towns in which they lived.
- To prepare for a Museum of New Hampshire History guided museum lesson *Made for Trade: Industry in New Hampshire* or for the traveling museum lesson *New Hampshire Hands at Work*.