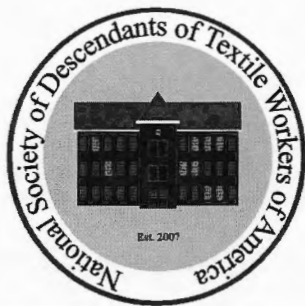




A Thread In Time

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

www.textileworker.com

Volume II

January/February 2016

Issue 6

President's Message

The 2016 annual meeting of the National Society of the Descendants of Textile Workers of America, Inc. will be held March 13, 2016 at 1:30 pm, at the Willimantic Brewing Company, 967 Main Street, Willimantic, CT. The restaurant has excellent food, and is a micro-brewery. Sunday is "Stein Day", so bring your favorite drinking vessel for a deep discount. WillimanticBrewingCompany.com Check them out online. I hope to see you there!

After the meeting, be sure and check out the Windham Textile & History Museum located down the street at 411 Main Street. Information on the museum may be found at www.millmuseum.org

On the agenda will be the election of officers. Three years have flown by since the last election and I have enjoyed serving the society as President and I plan on continuing for another three years until I am term limited out. I expect most, but not all, of the current officers will wish to continue on as well. If you are interested in serving in an official capacity for our society, please contact our nominating chairman Joseph Chauvin at jwchauvin@sbcglobal.net or 860-774-1147.

The 50th annual Connecticut Massing of the Colors was held on Sunday September 20 2015, at St. John's Episcopal Church, Niantic, CT. This is the gathering of lineage, hereditary and patriotic societies that includes a procession of their flags, a short service, and light refreshments. This colorful event is always an interesting time to meet old and new friends from other societies. Our society was well represented with all of our officers present. Our society has agreed to host the event in 2018, the 250th anniversary of Samuel Slater's birth. A committee will be formed at our annual meeting to work on this project. Please contact me if you are interested in serving.

Our society also made a presentation at the Groton Ct Public Library Sixth Annual Local History Fair where we were able to discuss the working conditions our ancestors faced. This month's article is from an autobiography of one of the "Lowell girls", women who made the textile industry in America.

One of our goals for 2015 was to increase our membership. We have gone from 53 members to 65 members in less than a year. That is a 22 percent increase, on top of the 20 percent increase we had in 2014. Our members reside in 22 separate states, truly a national society. Thank you to all who made it possible.



Mary Brown, Beverly and Bill Warner, representing NSDTWA at the Groton Public Library Sixth Annual Local History Fair

Because of our growth, we are also investigating the possibility of the presence of the society on Facebook, in addition to our website. This will give our members a chance to share their heritage and to share information on our ancestors. Please contact me if you are interested in managing the Facebook site.

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

Best Regards, Bill Warner

New Members

We welcome our newest members to the society.

- #58 - Mr. Andrew Banks - Edgewood, MD
- #59 - Mr. Glenn David Reasoner - Burbank, CA
- #60 - LTC Lawrence K. Casey Jr. - Beaumont, TX
- #61 - Mrs. Ann Scott Garner - Parrott, GA
- #62 - Mr. Charles A Hilton - Graniteville, SC
- #63 - Dr. Matthew Bowdish - Colorado Springs, CO
- #64 - Ms. Ora Jane Johnson - Richardson, TX
- #65 - Mrs. Toni Turk - Greenwood, LA

Modern History Sourcebook:

Harriet Robinson: Lowell Mill Girls

In her autobiography, Harriet Hanson Robinson, the wife of a newspaper editor, provided an account of her earlier life as female factory worker (from the age of ten in 1834 to 1848) in the textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. Her account explains some of the family dynamics involved, and lets us see the women as active participants in their own lives - for instance in their strike of 1836.

In what follows, I shall confine myself to a description of factory life in Lowell, Massachusetts, from 1832 to 1848, since, with that phase of Early Factory Labor in New England, I am the most familiar-because I was a part of it.

In 1832, Lowell was little more than a factory village. Five "corporations" were started, and the cotton mills belonging to them were building. Help was in great demand and stories were told all over the country of the new factory place, and the high wages that were offered to all classes of work-people; stories that reached the ears of mechanics' and farmers' sons and gave new life to lonely and dependent women in distant towns and farmhouses Troops of young girls came from different parts of New England, and from Canada, and men were employed to collect them at so much a head, and deliver them at the factories.

At the time the Lowell cotton mills were started the caste of the factory girl was the lowest among the employments of women. In England and in France, particularly, great injustice had been done to her real character. She was represented as subjected to influences that must destroy her purity and self respect. In the eyes of her overseer she was but a brute, a slave, to be beat-

The early millgirls were of different ages. Some were not over ten years old; a few were in middle life, but the majority were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. The very young girls were called "doffers." They "doffed," or took off, the full bobbins from the spinning frames, and replaced them with empty ones. These mites worked about fifteen minutes every hour and the rest of the time was their own. When the overseer was kind they were allowed to read, knit, or go outside the millyard to play. They were paid two dollars a week. The working hours of all the girls extended from five o'clock in the morning until seven in the evening, with one half-hour each, for breakfast and dinner. Even the doffers were forced to be on duty nearly fourteen hours a day. This was the greatest hardship in the lives of these children. Several years later a ten hour law was passed, but not until long after some of these little doffers were old enough to appear before the legislative committee on the subject, and plead, by their presence, for a reduction of the hours of labor.

Those of the mill-girls who had homes generally worked from eight to ten months in the year; the rest of the time was spent with parents or friends. A few taught school during the summer months. Their life in the factory was made pleasant to them. In those days there was no need of advocating the doctrine of the proper relation between employer and employed. *Help was too valuable to be illtreated.*

The most prevailing incentive to labor was to secure the means of education for some *male* member of the family. To make a *gentleman* of a brother or a son, to give him a college education, was the dominant thought in the minds of a great many of the better class of mill-girls. I have known more than one to give every cent of her wages, month after month, to her brother, that he might get the education necessary to enter some profession. I have known a mother to work years in this way for her boy. I have known women to educate young men by their earnings, who were not sons or relatives. There are many men now living who were helped to an education by the wages of the early mill-girls.

It is well to digress here a little, and speak of the influence the possession of money had on the characters of some of these women. We can hardly realize what a change the cotton factory made in the status of the working women. Hitherto woman had always been a money *saving* rather than a money *earning*, member of the community. Her labor could command but small return. If she worked out as servant, or "help," her wages were from 50 cents to \$1.00 a week; or, if she went from house to house by the day to spin and weave, or do tailoress work, she could get but 75 cents a week and her meals. As teacher, her services were not in demand, and the arts, the professions, and even the trades and industries, were nearly all closed to her.

As late as 1840 there were only seven vocations outside the home into which the women of New England had entered. At this time woman had no property rights. A widow could be left without her share of her husband's (or the family) property, an "encumbrance" to his estate. A father could make his will without reference to his daughter's share of the inheritance. He usually left her a home on the farm as long as she remained single. A woman was not supposed to be capable of spending her own, or of using other people's money. In Massachusetts, before 1840, a woman could not, legally, be treasurer of her own sewing society, unless some man were responsible for her. The law took no cognizance of woman as a money spender. She was a ward, an appendage, a relic. Thus it happened that if a woman did not choose to marry, or, when left a widow, to re-marry, she had no choice but to enter one of the few employments open to her, or to become a burden on the charity of some relative.

One of the first strikes that ever took place in this country was in Lowell in 1836. When it was announced that the wages were to be cut down, great indignation was felt, and it was decided to strike or "turn out" en masse. This was done. The mills were shut down, and the girls went from their several corporations in procession to the grove on Chapel Hill, and listened to incendiary speeches from some early labor reformers.

One of the girls stood on a pump and gave vent to the feelings of her companions in a neat speech, declaring that it was their duty to resist all attempts at cutting down the wages. This was the first time a woman had spoken in public in Lowell, and the event caused surprise and consternation among her audience.

It is hardly necessary to say that, so far as practical results are concerned, this strike did no good. The corporation would not come to terms. The girls were soon tired of holding out, and they went back to their work at the reduced rate of wages. The ill success of this early attempt at resistance on the part of the wage element seems to have made a precedent for the issue of many succeeding strikes.

Harriet H. Robinson, "Early Factory Labor in New England," in Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Fourteenth Annual Report* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1883), pp. 380-82, 387-88, 391-92.

This text is part of the Internet Modern History Sourcebook. The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts for introductory level classes in modern European and World history.



Harriet Hanson Robinson (1825-1911), in 1843

By Unknown, commons.wikimedia.org

Annual Meeting

The 2016 annual meeting of the National Society of the Descendants of Textile Workers of America, Inc. will be held March 13, 2016 at 1:30 pm, at the Willimantic Brewing Company, 967 Main Street, Willimantic CT 06226. Phone number 860-423-6777.

Please contact Ida Ransom at iransom@snet.net to RSVP.

Website

Once again, I invite you to visit our outstanding website at www.textileworker.com. Our newsletters are available on the website in full color. You will also notice that some of the honor roll members have special attachments with anecdotes about their life. You are welcome to submit material about your ancestor. Please contact Bill Warner at wwarner13@gmail.com or Mary Brown at mbrown06239@gmail.com for submission of this material.

Treasurers Report

Checking Account	\$1,152.44
Scholarship Fund	\$2,586.15
Life Member Endowment Fund	\$2,180.97
Total as of December 31, 2015	\$5,919.56

Scholarship

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

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

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



Insignia

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

Officers

President	William A. Warner wwarner13@gmail.com
Vice President	Melody L. Guilmotte melodylee14@hotmail.com
Secretary	Ida J. Ransom iransom@snet.net
Treasurer	Nancy A. Merwin Nancyamerwin284@gmail.com
Genealogist	Mary F. Brown mbrown06239@gmail.com
Chaplin	Sandra A. Bullock sndeeo@yahoo.com