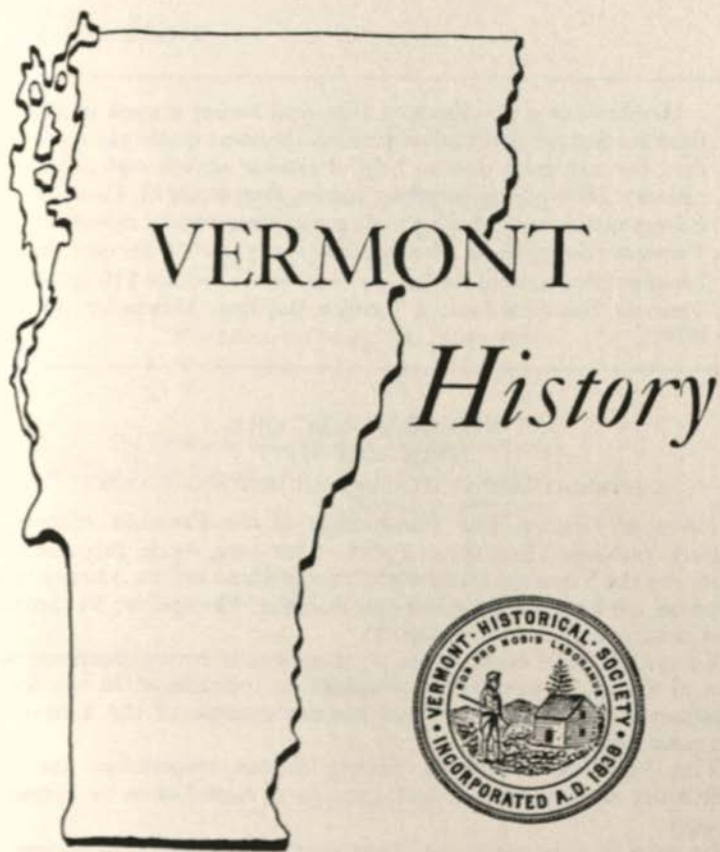
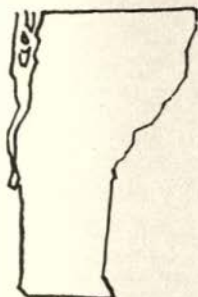


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“... the decline of New England's family farms may actually have opened the door to opportunity for its young women.”

The Letters of Mary Paul, 1845-1849

Edited by THOMAS DUBLIN

In the first half of the nineteenth century the steady expansion which had characterized rural Vermont in previous decades slowed markedly. Numerous towns reached population peaks in 1810 and 1820, only to suffer sustained and sometimes irreversible declines thereafter. The settlement of more fertile lands in western New York and in the midwest and the growth of factory towns along New England's flowing rivers drew away a substantial share of the younger generation. While the work of Lewis Stilwell, Stewart Holbrook and Lois Mathews has traced the westward migration in these years, the similar movement into New England's textile towns has received less treatment from historians.¹

Precise comparisons are difficult, but there is little doubt that urban migration rivalled the more studied westward tide. Some 1200 women from Vermont resided in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1845, working in the textile factories.² Adding to this figure the numbers living in half a dozen other similar mill towns and taking into account the rapid turnover among mill operatives in these years, an estimate of Vermonters in this urban migration would number in the tens of thousands.

One such migrant in these years was Mary Paul of Barnard, Vermont, who worked in the textile mills of Lowell between 1845 and 1849. Mary's correspondence to her father, Bela Paul, provides one of the more complete sets of letters from an early mill worker to her family. Comprising in all twenty-five letters written over a span of seventeen years, this correspondence offers a remarkable view into the private life of one young Vermonter who left home to support herself in the years before the Civil War.³

Mary Paul's first eight letters reprinted below trace her moves to Bridgewater and Woodstock and finally to Lowell.⁴ The letters offer particularly rich insights into one young woman's motivations for entering



Lowell, Massachusetts, ca. 1845, Merrimack Prints, courtesy of Merrimack Valley Textile Museum

the mills and her relationship with her family while working away from home. While living with an aunt and uncle in Woodstock, she wrote home to her father: "I think it would be much better for me [in Lowell] than to stay about here and for that reason I want to go to Lowell or some other place."⁵ The economic lure of Lowell is evident, but a second factor is also at work. While the details remain vague, apparently Mary Paul had difficulty with her earlier employer, the Angell family of Bridgewater. The choice of mill employment at the same time represents a rejection of domestic service, then the major alternative for rural women.

While broad economic motives stood paramount in her decision, Mary Paul had individual economic gain in mind. Though she sought her father's approval, her decision was not a family decision to send a daughter into the mills to help contribute to the family economy. She expected to do better for herself in Lowell than she could in Woodstock or Barnard. Much of the contemporary writing about mill operatives in this period, particularly stories in the *Lowell Offering*, suggested that women entered the mills to help send a brother to college or to contribute to mortgage payments on the family homestead.⁶ While published writings emphasized self-sacrifice on the part of women workers, personal goals like those of Mary Paul seem more convincing.

Mary Paul expressed in later letters, not reproduced here, the wish to contribute to her father's support. "I hope sometime," she wrote to her father in 1853, "to be able to do something for you and sometimes feel ashamed that I have not before this." But she encountered obstacles, for

she noted that she was "not of the smart kind and never had a passion for laying up money, probably never shall have, can find enough ways to spend it though (but I do not wish to be extravagant). Putting all these things together, I think explains the reason that I do not 'lay up' anything."⁷ She obviously felt some guilt but not enough to lead her to return home. In the end she always fell back on the argument which had sent her to Lowell in the first place: "[I] must work where I can get more pay."⁸

Even though individual economic motives lured Mary Paul into the mills, her relationship with her family remained warm and close. She punctuated her letters with questions about family members and expressions of concern for them. When Mary first went to Lowell, she wrote of her disappointment that her father and brothers had not come to see her off. She suggested that her family move to Lowell, indicating that her brothers could find employment in the mills. There was evidently a lively family correspondence, particularly with William, Mary's brother, who lived in Tennessee. Other relatives figure in the letters, Aunt and Uncle Miller in Woodstock and Uncle Jerry in Claremont, New Hampshire, in particular. Although Mary Paul left home to work in Lowell, the move by no means estranged her or created emotional distance from her family.

Bridgewater [Vt] July 25th 1845⁹

Dear Father

Mr. Angell received your letter on the 22nd And I supposed would do something about my staying, but he has not. And so I thought I would write to you & have you come over yourself. I did not leave uncle Millers until Sunday morning. Aunt Sarah was quite sick [and I] have not heard from her since. Mrs. A. did not speak to me after I got home till after supper but she has done remarkably well since your letter came. I suppose Mr. A. wants I should stay but I do not want to. I did not see as anything was going to be done and for that reason I write. I suppose Aunt Nancy expects me every day but she will not see me till you come.

I want you to start as soon as you receive this.

Yours, Mary

[Woodstock, Vt] Saturday Sept. 13th 1845¹⁰

Dear Father

I received your letter this afternoon by Wm Griffith. You wished me to write if I had seen Mr. Angell. I have neither written to him nor seen him nor has he written to me. I began to write but I could not write what I wanted to. I think if I could see him I could convince him of his error if he would let me talk. I am very glad you sent my shoes. They fit very well indeed they [are] large enough.

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 anywhere 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. We all think if I could go with some steady girl that I might do well. I want you to think of it and make up your mind. Mercy Jane Griffith is going to start in four or five weeks. Aunt Miller and Aunt Sarah think it would be a good chance for me to go if you would consent — which I want you to do if possible. I want to see you and talk with you about it.

Aunt Sarah gains slowly.

Mary

Woodstock Nov. 8 1845

Dear Father

As you wanted me to let you know when I am going to start for Lowell, I improve this opportunity to write you. Next Thursday the 13th of this month is the day set or the Thursday afternoon. I should like to have you come down. If you come bring Henry if you can for I should like to see him before I go. Julius has got the money for me.¹¹

Yours Mary

Lowell Nov 20th 1845

Dear Father

An opportunity now presents itself which I improve in writing to you. I started for this place at the time I talked of which was Thursday. I left Whitneys at nine o'clock stopped at Windsor at 12 and staid till 3 and started again. Did not stop again for any length of time till we arrived at Lowell. Went to a boarding house and staid until Monday night. On Saturday after I got here Luthera Griffith went around with me to find a place but we were unsuccessful. On Monday we started again and were more successful. We found a place in a spinning room and the next morning I went to work. I like very well have 50cts 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.¹² I was sorry that you did not come to see me start. I wanted to see you and Henry but I suppose that you were otherways engaged. I hope to see Julius but did not much expect to for I supposed he was engaged in other matters. He got six dollars for me which I was very glad of. It cost me \$3.25 to come. Stage fare was \$3.00 and lodging at Windsor, 25 cts. Had to pay only 25 cts for board for 9 days after I got here before I went into the mill. Had 2.50 left with which I got a bonnet and some other small articles. Tell Harriet Burbank to send me paper. Tell her I shall send her one as soon as possible. You must write as soon as you receive this. Tell Henry I should like to hear from him. If you hear anything from William write for I want to know what he is doing.¹³ I shall write to Uncle Millers folks the first opportunity. Aunt Nancy presented me with a new alpacca dress before I came away from there which I was very glad of. I think of staying here a year certain, if not more. I wish that you and Henry would come down here. I think that you might do well. I guess that Henry could get into the mill and I think that Julius might get in too. Tell all friends that I should like to hear from them.

excuse bad writing and mistakes

This from your own daughter

Mary

P.S. Be sure and direct to No. 15 Lawrence Corporation.

Lowell Dec. 21st 1845

Dear Father

I received your letter on Thursday the 14th with much pleasure. I am well which is one comfort. My life and health are spared while others are cut off. Last Thursday one girl fell down and broke her neck which caused instant death. She was going in or coming out of the mill and slipped down it being very icy. The same day a man was killed by the cars [railroad train]. Another had nearly all of his ribs broken. Another was nearly killed by falling down and having a bale of cotton fall on him. Last Tuesday we were paid. In all I had six dollars and sixty cents paid \$4.68 for board. With the rest I got me a pair of rubbers and a pair of 50 cts shoes. Next payment I am to have a dollar a week beside my board.* We have not had much snow the deepest being not more 4 inches. It has been very warm for winter. 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 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.** 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 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. Tell Harriet that though she does not hear from me she is not forgotten. I have [so] little time to devote to writing that I cannot write all I want to. There are half a dozen letters which I ought to write to day but I have not time. Tell Harriet I send my love to her and all of the girls. Give my love to Mrs. Clement. Tell Henry this will answer for him and you too for this time.

This from
Mary S Paul

Lowell April 12th 1846

Dear Father

I received your letter with much pleasure but was sorry to hear that you had been lame. I had waited for a long time to hear from you but no letter came so last Sunday I thought I would write again which I did and

*In fact, Mary earned only \$2.04 per week during the payroll period which ended January 10, 1846, making a figure of \$0.79 above room and board. She was employed as a doffer who removed full bobbins of yarn from the spinning frames and replaced them with empty ones. The work called for speed and dexterity, but it was intermittent, requiring only about fifteen minutes of activity out of each hour. Doffers were almost always children, usually sons or daughters of boarding house keepers or skilled workers. Mary evidently did not expect to remain a doffer as she expected to have her own frames "before long."

**In her summary of the hours of labor, Mary outlined the winter schedule in the Lowell mills, when operatives took breakfast before beginning work. In the summer months, as the next letter indicates, work began at 5:00 AM and operatives had short breaks for breakfast and dinner during the working day. Over the entire year, work averaged twelve hours, twenty minutes per day, being somewhat longer in the summer than in winter months.¹⁴

was going to send it to the [post] office Monday but at noon I received a letter from William and so I did not send it at all. Last Friday I received a letter from you. 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.¹⁵ 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. If Julius should go to Boston tell him to come this way and see me. He must come to the Lawrence Counting room and call for me. He can ask some one to show him where the Lawrence is, I hope he will not fail to go. I forgot to tell you that I have not seen a particle of snow for six weeks and it is settled going we have had a very mild winter and but little snow. I saw Ann Hersey last Sunday. I did not know her till she told me who she was. I see the Griffith girls often. I received a letter from a girl in Bridgewater in which she told me that Mrs. Angell had heard some way that I could not get work and that she was much pleased and said that I was so bad that no one would have me. I believe I have written all so I will close for I have a letter to write to William this afternoon.

Yours affectionately

Mary S. Paul

Mr. Bela Paul

P.S. Give my love to all that enquire for me and tell them to write me a long long letter. Tell Harriet I shall send her a paper.

*Mary tended four sides of warp spinning frames, each with 128 spindles, the normal complement for spinners in these years. She quoted her wages in English currency, a practice which was common, even in company payroll volumes. She was undoubtedly paid in American currency, however, nine shillings being equivalent to a wage of \$1.50. As in the earlier cases, Mary is referring to her wages exclusive of room and board charges. "Backwater," mentioned here, was a common problem in the spring, when heavy runoff due to rains and melting snow led to high water levels and caused water to back up and block the proper rotation of the water wheel. Mills often had to cease operations for several days at a time. The April payroll at Lawrence indicates that Mary managed to work only fifteen of the normal twenty-four days in the payroll period. Agents often agreed to pay the cost of room and board when the mills could not operate, but for a spinner or weaver this would have amounted to less than half of the normal wage.

Lowell Nov. 5th 1848¹⁶

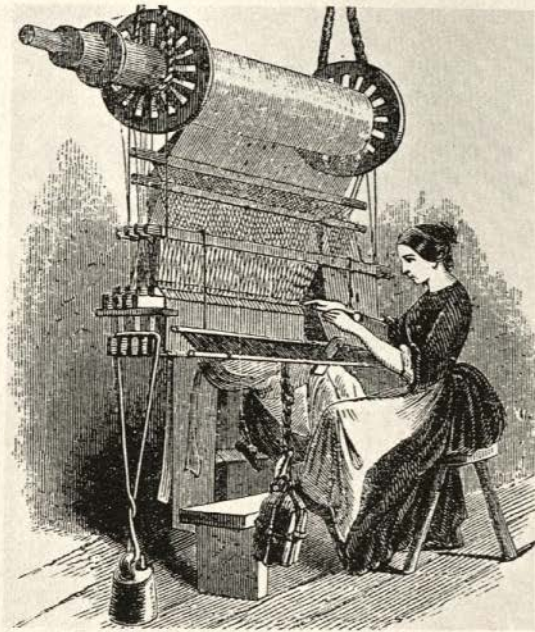
Dear Father

Doubtless you have been looking for a letter from me all the week past. I would have written but wished to find whether I should be able to stand it—to do the work that I am now doing. I was unable to get my old place in the cloth room on the Suffolk or on any other corporation. I next tried the dressrooms on the Lawrence Cor[poration], but did not succe[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 warping — 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. I presume you have heard before this that the wages are to be reduced on the 20th of this month. It is *true* and there seems to be a good deal of excitement on the subject but I can not tell what will be the consequence.¹⁷ The companies pretend they are losing immense sums every *day* and therefore they are obliged to lessen the wages, but this seems perfectly absurd to me for they are constantly making *repairs* and it seems to me that this would not be if there were really any danger of their being obliged to *stop* the mills.

It is very difficult for any one to get into the mill on any corporation. All seem to be very full of help. I expect to be paid about two dollars a week but it will be dearly earned.¹⁸ I cannot tell how it is but never since I have worked in the mill have I been so very tired as I have for the last week but it may be owing to the long rest I have had for the last six months. I have not told you that I do not board on the Lawrence. The reason of this is because I wish to be nearer the mill and I do not wish to pay the extra \$.12-1/2 per week (should not be obliged to do it if I boarded at 15) and I know that they are not able to give it me. Beside this I am so near I can go and see them as often as I wish. So considering all things I think I have done the best I could. I do not like here very well and am very sure I never shall as well as at Mother Guilds. I now realize how very kind the whole family have ever been to me. It seems like going *home* when I go there which is every day.¹⁹ But now I see I have not told you yet where I do board. It is at No. 5 Tremont Corporation. Please enlighten all who wish for information. There is one thing which I forgot to bring with me and which I want very much. That is my *rubbers*. They hang in the back room at uncle Jerrys.²⁰ If Olive comes down here I presume you can send

*The "dressrooms" mentioned here would be the dressing rooms in the mill where warp yarn was prepared for the weaving process. There the yarn was first wound off individual spools onto yard-wide wooden beams, a process called warping. Next it was run through a starch paste on a dressing frame, which strengthened the yarn and enabled it to resist breakage. Finally the warped and dressed yarns were drawn by hand through the reed and harnesses and made ready for the power looms. Generally speaking, more experienced women worked in the dressing room, wages and conditions of work being considerably better there than in the carding and spinning rooms. These advantages probably account for Mary's comment in the next paragraph that she would not return to spinning "on any account."



Woman drawing in warp ends in preparation for weaving, courtesy of Merrimack Valley Textile Museum

them by her, but do not trouble yourself about them. There is another thing I wish to mention — about my fare down here. If you paid it all the way as I understand you did there is something wrong about it. When we stopped at Concord to take the cars, I went to the ticket office to get a ticket which I knew I should be obliged to have. When I called for it I told the man that my fare to Lowell was paid all the way and I wanted a ticket to Lowell. He told me if this was the case the Stagedriver would get the ticket for me and I supposed of course he would. But he did *not*, and when the ticket master called for my ticket in the cars, I was obliged to give him a dollar. Sometimes I have thought that the fare might *not* have been paid beside farther than Concord. If this is the case all is right. But if it is not, then I have paid a dollar too much and gained the character of trying to cheat the company out of my fare, for the man thought I was lying to him. I suppose I want to know how it is and wish it could be settled for I do not like that *any* one should think *me* capable of such a thing, even though that person be an utter stranger. But enough of this. The Whigs of Lowell had a great time on the night of the 3rd. They had an immense procession of men on foot bearing *torches* and *banners* got up for the occasion. The houses were illuminated (Whigs houses) and by the way I should think the whole of *Lowell* were Whigs. I went out to see the illuminations and they did truly look splendid. The Merrimack house was illuminated from attic to cellar.²¹ Every pane of glass in the house had a half candle to it and there were many others

lighted in the same way. One entire block on the Merrimack Corporation with the exception of one tenement which doubtless was occupied by a free soiler who would not illuminate on any account whatever.

(Monday Eve) I have been to work today and think I shall manage to get along with the work. I am not so tired as I was last week. I have not yet found out what wages I shall get but presume they will be about \$2.00 per week exclusive of board. I think of nothing further to write excepting I wish you to prevail on *Henry* to write to me, also tell *Olive* to write and *Eveline* when she comes.

Give my love to uncle Jerry and aunt Betsey and tell little Lois that "Cousin Carra" thanks her very much for the *apple* she sent her. Her health is about the same that it was when she was at Claremont. No one has much hope of her ever being any better.

Write soon. Yours affectionately
Mary S. Paul

Mr. Bela Paul

P.S. Do not forget to direct to No. 5 Tremont Cor and tell all others to do the same.

Lowell July 1st 1849

Dear Father

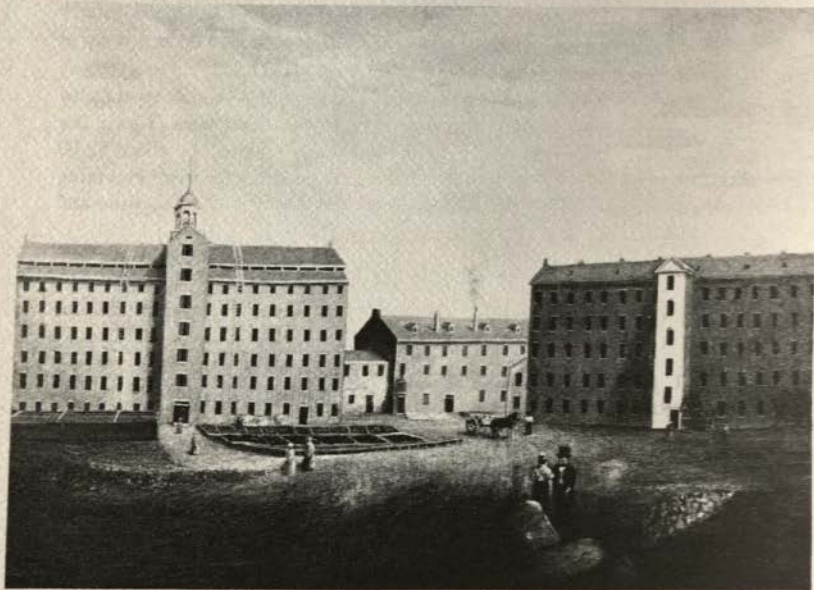
I received your letter dated the 25. of June on Wednesday the 27. and would have answered immediately but had not time. I was very glad to get the letters from William. I had almost given up the hope of hearing from him and had commenced a letter to him when yours came in which *his* [was] enclosed. I will give you his words in regard to his health &c: "As for my own health, it has been generally very good. Though for the last few days I have been quite unwell and was confined to my *bed* for a day or two. I feel quite unsure at this time." And of the Cholera he says, "It has broken out fearfully within a few days on the 10th inst (June) there were 10 deaths from it, on the 11[th] 25, and I have not heard the report for yesterday (the 12th)."²²

He is often in the Prison and will probably remain there until a better situation offers. He says "tell Henry I will write to him without fail before long."

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.²³ I shall send a letter with this to *Eveline* so that you can give it to her when you see her. Give my love to Henry and tell him I will write him as soon as I can and tell him to write me and not *wait* for me.

Yours affectionately
Mary S. Paul

These letters present Mary Paul's experiences for a brief four-year interval. Exactly when Mary Paul left Lowell after her letter of July 1, 1849, is unclear, but in mid-1850 the census of Claremont, New Hampshire, recorded her living with her father.²⁴ By 1852 she was on her own again



Middlesex Company woolen mill, Lowell, Massachusetts, courtesy of Merrimack Valley Textile Museum

living in Brattleboro, Vermont, and working as a seamstress. Ever restless, she soon moved to Redbank, New Jersey, where, with former Lowell friends, she joined a utopian cooperative community, the North American Phalanx.²⁵ Two aspects of life there particularly appealed to her: that members did only work they chose and that women earned wages equal to those of men, a marked departure from her days in the textile mills. A fire contributed to the demise of the phalanx, however, and Mary Paul soon returned to New Hampshire. In October, 1857, she married Isaac Guild, son of her former boarding house keeper in Lowell and assumed the role of a wife and housekeeper in Lynn, Massachusetts. The final letters of the collection provide details of her new settled life. At the end of the correspondence the Guilds had one son and a second child on the way.²⁶

Mary Paul's letters reveal in a striking way the gap between the actual experiences of women and the contemporary ideals concerning "woman's sphere." The mid-nineteenth century saw the rise of what one historian has termed the "Cult of True Womanhood," that attitude, expressed in prescriptive literature, which defined women in terms of their roles as wives and mothers.²⁷ Proponents of the cult viewed women as particularly suited for domestic pursuits, their influence to be exercised primarily within the familial circle. Their position in society was characterized by dependence, first as daughters in their fathers' homes and later as wives under their

husbands' care. In contrast to this ideal, Mary Paul lived away from family fully twelve years before her marriage, and she was undoubtedly not alone.²⁸ Increasing numbers of women found employment in the expanding mill towns and in other urban occupations in this period. These women evidently enjoyed considerable economic and social independence precisely at the time that middle-class public opinion defined women in terms of their dependence.

In fact, the decline of New England's family farms may actually have opened the door to opportunity for its young women. No longer would they necessarily follow the paths their mothers trod. Some did, of course, and those who moved West undoubtedly shared much in common with their parents. For a sizable minority, however, the urban centers of the East beckoned, and this important chapter of New England's economic and social history deserves increased attention. The letters of Mary Paul, one young Vermont migrant in this larger stream, offer suggestive hints as to a number of directions this new research might take.

NOTES

¹Lewis Stilwell, *Migration from Vermont* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1948); Stewart Holbrook, *Yankee Exodus, An Account of Migration from New England* (New York: Macmillan, 1950); and Lois Kimball Mathews, *The Expansion of New England* (New York: 1909, rpt. Russell & Russell, 1962). Two views of the urban migration from northern New England in this period can be found in Harold Fisher Wilson, *The Hill Country of Northern New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), Chs. 1-4, and Nicholas Ward, "Pianos, Parasols and Poppa: The Migration of Vermont Farm Girls to Massachusetts Mill Towns," M.A. Thesis, Brown University, 1974.

²Henry Miles, *Lowell As It Was and As It Is* (Lowell: Powers and Bagley, 1845), p. 193.

³Mary Paul MSS, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vermont. An effort has been made to preserve the character of the original letters as fully as possible. Punctuation has been added between sentences and the first word of each sentence is capitalized. Other additions, such as the spelling out of words abbreviated in the original manuscript, have been placed in square brackets. Otherwise the letters appear as in the originals.

⁴*Ibid.*, Mary Paul to Bela Paul, September 13, 1845.

⁵On the motivation of women operatives see the *Lowell Offering*, I, 161-171 and 263-266 and II, 145-155 and 246-250.

⁶*Ibid.*, Mary Paul to Bela Paul, November 27, 1853.

⁷*Ibid.*, Mary Paul to Bela Paul, December 18, 1853.

⁸This letter, like the next five, is addressed to Bela Paul in Barnard, Vermont. Mary is fifteen years old at this date. See Paul genealogical notes, MSC-12, Vermont Historical Society. She is living in Bridgewater at this time, about fourteen miles from Barnard.

⁹The postmark of this letter and its contents indicate that Mary has left the Angells and come to Woodstock about eight miles from Barnard, where she is staying with an aunt and uncle, the Millers. Later letters, particularly that of July 11, 1855, not included here, indicate that the Pauls had earlier lived in Woodstock.

¹⁰These references are to two of Mary's brothers, Henry and Julius, both apparently living with their father at this time. Henry was thirteen at this date and Julius twenty-seven. For ages of brothers see their listing in the 1870 federal manuscript census for Windsor, Vermont, family #37, microfilm edition M593, roll 1629.

¹¹The payrolls of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company reveal that Mary Paul earned \$0.30 per day in her first month in the mill, making overall \$1.80 per week, or \$0.55 above the cost of room and board in the company boarding house. Lawrence Manufacturing Company Records, Vol. GB-8, Spinning Room No. 2, Nov. 20, 1845, Manuscript Division, Baker Library, Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration.

¹²There are repeated references to William, a third brother, who lived and married in Tennessee during the years covered by these letters. MSC-12, Vermont Historical Society.

¹⁴See James Montgomery, *A Practical Detail of the Cotton Manufacture of the United States of America* (Glasgow: John Niven, 1840), p. 174.

¹⁵It was standard practice to post on a blackboard in each room of the mills the production and the earnings of each worker several days before the monthly pay day to enable operatives to see what they would be paid and to complain if the posted production figures did not agree with their own records of the work.

¹⁶Mary Paul has left and returned to Lowell since her previous letter. She remained at the Lawrence Company until the end of October, 1846. Over a period of just under a year, she worked in all 262 days and earned \$128. Lawrence Company payrolls, Vol. GB-8. References within this letter indicate that she had at least two other stretches in the mills, one in the cloth room of the Suffolk Company and the other at the Tremont Company. This letter is addressed to Claremont, New Hampshire, where her father has moved since her last communication.

¹⁷Wages were reduced in all of the Lowell mills in November, 1848. Earlier correspondence including instructions from a company treasurer to the agents of two of the firms are extant. See Henry Hall to John Aiken, September 4, 1848, Vol. FB-3, Tremont-Suffolk Mills Records. A careful examination of Lowell newspapers found no visible protest to this reduction.

¹⁸This wage figure, \$2.00 per week, again refers to earnings exclusive of charges for room and board. The overall figure of \$3.25 weekly was still extremely low for warpers, usually among the best-paid female operatives in the mills. On comparative wages see Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), ch. 4.

¹⁹"Mother Guild" refers to Mrs. Betsey Guild who, with her husband, kept a boarding house at 15 Lawrence Company at least between 1847 and 1853. Mary Paul did get to know and like the whole family, as she indicates, for in 1857 she married a son, Isaac, and settled in Lynn. *Lowell Directory, 1847-1853*; for marriage see Massachusetts Bureau of Vital Records, vol. 109:147.

²⁰Jerry probably refers to Jeremiah Paul, who lived with his wife, Betsey, and two young children in Claremont, New Hampshire. See Federal Manuscript Census for Claremont, M432, roll 441, dwelling #407.

²¹The Merrimack House was the leading hotel in Lowell and usually housed distinguished visitors and mill owners when they came to town. The date of the illumination, November 3, suggests it was part of election day festivities. For more on the Merrimack House including an early lithograph see John Coolidge, *Mill and Mansion: A Study of Architecture and Society in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1820-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 55-56 and Fig. 48.

²²A cholera epidemic swept through American cities in the first half of 1849. Exactly where William is living is unclear, but his work in a prison evidently gave him a close view of the epidemic. Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

²³The fact that Mary Paul does not know what her wages will be suggests that she completed her work at the Tremont Company and has now returned to the mills after a period of absence. Since earnings were based on piece wage rates, it always took a new worker a period of time to determine exactly how much she could expect to earn.

²⁴Bela Paul, 60, and Mary Paul, 21, are recorded living in dwelling #533 in Claremont, New Hampshire. Microfilm edition of federal manuscript census for 1850, M432, roll 441.

²⁵Founded by Associationists, American followers of Charles Fourier, in 1843, the North American Phalanx was the largest and most successful of their phalanxes, with more than a hundred members when Mary Paul joined in 1855. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, backed the phalanx and lent crucial support to the movement in the pages of his newspaper.

²⁶For children's births see Massachusetts Bureau of Vital Records: Irving Tracy Guild, December 30, 1860, vol. 132, 268; Sidney Pratt Guild, August 31, 1862, vol. 150, 230.

²⁷Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966), 151-174.

²⁸As part of a larger study of the social origins of women textile workers in this period I have drawn a sample of 175 women who came from three New Hampshire towns and worked in the Lowell mills between 1830 and 1850. For those with adequate data, the mean length of time between beginning mill employment and marriage was almost eight years.