

The Lowell Offering:

Showing the World What Factory Girls Could Do

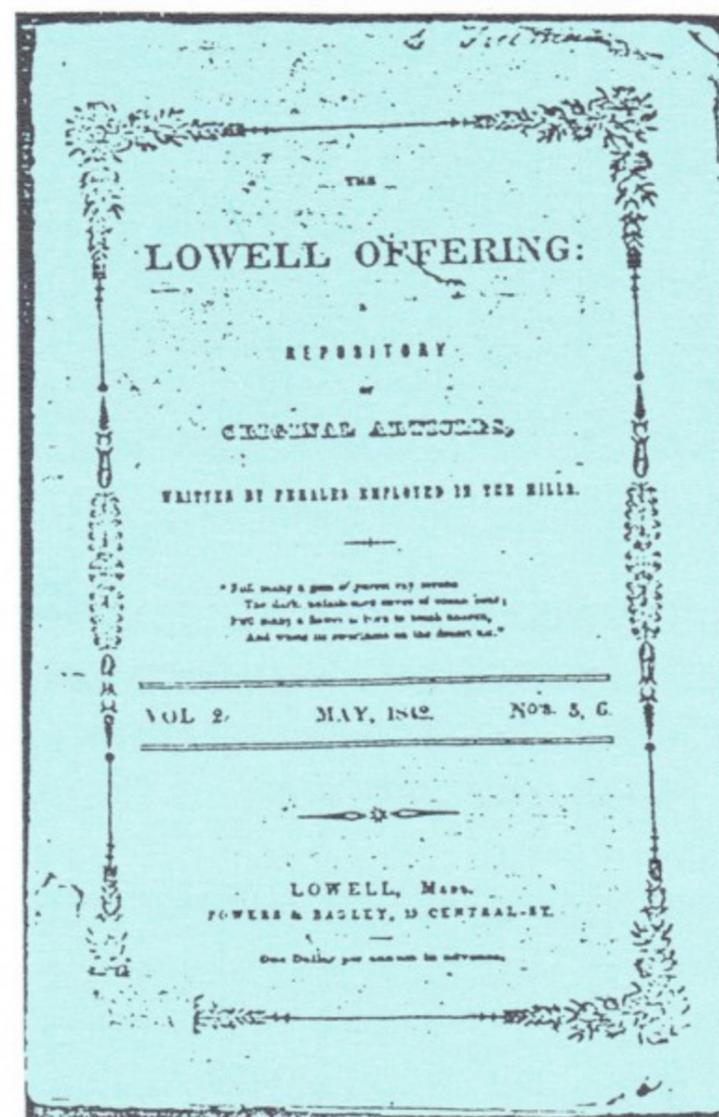
Harriot Fidelia Curtis was another Vermonter who answered the call of “mill fever.” Like Mary Paul, Harriot came from a poor farm family and wanted to better her life. Her **experience** in the mills led her to become **co-editor** of *The Lowell Offering*. This was a magazine **devoted** to the writing of factory girls. More than this, it was the first magazine in the United States written by and for women.

Harriot was born in 1813 in Lowell, Vermont, which was then called Kellyvale. She left one Lowell for another when she moved to Lowell, Massachusetts, in the 1830s. She worked in the cotton mills there for about ten years.

Harriot’s real aim was to become a writer. She joined a church group whose members read aloud stories they had written. Someone had the idea of putting these stories and poems together and printing them. *The Lowell Offering* was born. It carried stories, poems, and letters by factory girls. Many were about working in the mills. Harriot had a friend named Harriet Farley who also liked to write. She, too, was a factory girl. Together they were asked to edit *The Offering*. At first they were afraid to tackle such a task. “We—the Editor!—the idea was very awful.” But they agreed to do their best.

The magazine was a success. It caught the attention of people in the United States and Europe because it was interesting and well-written. At the time, people were discussing whether women should work in the mills. Some argued that it took women away from their homes and families. Others considered working unladylike.

The Lowell Offering challenged these arguments. In its pages were lively stories that showed how factory work was good for women. As for giving up a job because it was unladylike, Harriet Farley noted proudly that, “Yankee girls have too much independence for that.” The two friends printed articles



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that painted a positive picture of the boardinghouses and mills.

Other more militant workers wanted the world to know the bad as well as the good side of mill life—the long hours, poor pay, and crowded housing. If people knew about the hardships, they said, perhaps change would come. They stopped reading the magazine. In 1845, *The Lowell Offering* closed. Still Harriot Curtis and Harriet Farley had shown what factory girls could do.

VOCABULARY

to experience - to learn from life

co-editor - person who shares the job of preparing stories for printing

devoted - especially interested in