

# Francis Cabot Lowell

1775–1817

Francis Cabot Lowell was a Massachusetts businessman and a pioneer American cotton manufacturer. He was member of the wealthy Lowell family of Boston, who had settled in Cape Ann, Massachusetts, in 1639.

Francis Cabot Lowell was born on April 7, 1775, in Newburyport, Massachusetts, to John Lowell and Susana Cabot. The Lowell family included, his father John Lowell, who was a statesman; former Harvard President Abbott Lawrence Lowell; Civil War general, Charles Russell Lowell; astronomer Percival Lowell; and poets Robert Lowell and Amy Lowell.

Lowell attended school in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and went to Harvard College. Lowell graduated from Harvard in 1793. In 1798, he married Hannah Jackson, the daughter of the Massachusetts delegate to the Continental Congress, Jonathan Jackson. They had four children.

Lowell studied the textile industry when he visited the British Isles. He was impressed with the machinery he saw while he was in the factories. He even tried to remember what he saw, so he could draw the machinery for his own records.

In 1813, along with his brother-in-law, Patrick Tracy Jackson, and Nathan Appleton, Lowell started the Boston Manufacturing Company in Waltham, Massachusetts. This company was the first of its kind where the process of converting raw cotton to cloth was all done in one building. American inventor Paul Moody added to the company by coming up with new advanced spinning equipment and a power loom, all based on what he saw in textile mills in the British Isles.

Lowell and his partners were also responsible for developing shareholding. He and his partners sold \$1,000 worth of shares of stock to the community.

In 1814, Lowell built a new mill along the Charles River in Waltham. It was built the same way as the original mill. Lowell was also the first to hire women to work in his textile mills. Most of the women were between the ages of 15 to 35, and from New England farming families. Lowell was able to save money, by paying the women less than what he paid the men. Lowell came from a wealthy family, so one would expect him to not care about his workers, but he was not like that. Lowell tried to refrain from becoming an exploiter of the labor of lower class girls. He did offer a variety of benefits for his workers and their families, including safe housing, religious freedom, and educational opportunities. Some accounts, however, do claim that the mill's working conditions declined over time. According to a former "mill girl," Harriet Hanson Robinson, she noticed that Lowell was moving away from

his original practices of hiring New England farm girls. Instead, he started to hire poor young girls, which contributed to the decline in working conditions.

Lowell died on April 10, 1817 at the age of 42. The company was still going strong, earning its shareholders a substantial profit. In 1822, his business partners named their mill town, Lowell, in honor of the pioneer. His son, Francis Cabot Lowell Jr., followed in his father's footsteps and ran the mill.