

More than a ‘Curious Cultural Sideshow’: Samuel Slater's Sunday School and the Role of Literacy Sponsorship in Disciplining Labor

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Abstract

This article investigates the concept of literacy sponsorship through the introduction of textile factories and mill villages in New England during the American Industrial Revolution. Specifically, the article focuses on Samuel Slater's mill villages and his disciplining and socialization of workers via the ‘family’ approach to factory production, and, in particular, his support of the Sunday school. As an institution key to managerial control and new to rural New England, the Sunday school captures the complicated networks of moral and literacy sponsorship in the transition to factory production.

Keywords

Industrial revolution, textile mills, literacy sponsorship, Sunday school, Samuel Slater

Describing the bucolic New England manufacturing scene of the early nineteenth century, Zachariah Allen (1982 p. 6) writes, ‘[A]long the glens and meadows of solitary watercourses, the sons and daughters of respectable farmers, who live in neighborhood of the works, find for a time a profitable employment.’ A textile manufacturer and pro-industry voice in America, Allen sought to distinguish the ‘little hamlets’ of New England from the factory cities of England in the early nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, one of those ‘small communities’ to which Allen refers is Samuel Slater's mill village in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Unlike the factory system of England, or the factory city of Lowell, Massachusetts, to the north, Slater's village approach cultivated a ‘new work order’ relying on families, specifically children, and villages, located along pastoral landscapes, such as the Blackstone River Valley in northern Rhode Island.

In such settings, the responsibility of workers’ (especially children's) moral and literacy education fell squarely on the shoulders of industrialists, such as Slater. Paternal mill owners sought ways to discipline, assimilate, and educate workers as they transitioned to an industrial order tied to the factory time clock rather than the setting sun. In turn, mill owners, such as Slater, played a pivotal role as entrepreneurs, industrialists, and sponsors of worker education. According to literacy scholar Deborah Brandt (1998 p. 166), sponsors ‘are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way.’ In Brandt's use of the concept, sponsors hold the power, as they ‘set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful

incentives for compliance and loyalty' (Brandt 1998 pp. 166-7). However, as witnessed in Slater's early approach to manufacturing villages, this 'compliance and loyalty' was a carefully mediated balancing act as mill owners sought ways to sponsor workers both in literacy and morality, maintain the agrarian culture and social order familiar to workers, and introduce factory production. Therefore, within Slater's factory village existed another nascent institution of the early nineteenth century—the Sunday school.

This Sunday school, a product of the 'father of the industrial revolution,' captures (however briefly) a transition in America's industrial revolution. Illustrated in what follows, Slater's Sunday school served as both a locus for social control and worker education by sponsoring working families, in particular children. Children learned the basics of reading while also learning the moral code of the factory system—a system that required not only a new 'method of order' but also a new system of discipline that reinforced the Protestant work ethic of rural Rhode Islanders (Kulik 1987). In turn, Slater's school was more important for its non-cognitive functions than for its literacy skills, highlighting the crucial role discipline, rather than education, played in the transition to a new labor structure (for more on religion and labor, see McCarlin 2009). After all, young workers attending Slater's school did not require literacy skills for their mill work:

'In factories 'tis grinding work...Nor have we time to learn to read./Many of us can't write nor spell;/A Fact'ry is a Gothic hell./E'en a head clerk can't read the news' (Buhle, Molloy & Sansbury 1983).

Specifically, by providing a place within mill villages for moral and literacy education, Slater facilitated a subtle shift towards the discipline necessary for economic change (see Kulik 1987). In such an institution, some historians might see the early symptoms of a 'market revolution,' whereby a local agrarian economic system yields to a growing industrial economy revolving around distant markets (see Sellers 1991; Stokes and Conway 1996). In describing such a transition to capitalism in rural New England, historian Christopher Clark (1996 p. 230) posits that mill villages 'provided the basis for the emergence of commercial networks and infrastructure and helped provide a wage labor for new manufacturers.' Such an emergence, however, relied on 'disciplining' institutions that bridged the past and the future, easing labor into new relationships under the guise of literacy and moral education. As David Harvey (1990 pp. 123-4) asserts:

The socialization of the worker to conditions of capitalist production entails the social control of physical and mental powers on a very broad basis. Education, training, persuasion, the mobilization of certain social sentiments (the work ethic, company loyalty, national or local pride) and psychological propensities (the search for identity through work, individual initiative, or social solidarity) all play a role and are plainly mixed in with the formation of dominant ideologies cultivated by the mass media, religious and educational institutions, the various arms of the state apparatus, and asserted by simple articulation of their experience on the part of those who do the work.

In this essay, I focus on the 'religious and educational institutions' noted by Harvey (1990), specifically one that merged moral and literacy education in an effort to socialize workers to a

new order of labor. I rely on Samuel Slater's Sunday school as an example of how discipline and literacy sponsorship evolved and, ultimately, helped transition labor and laborers into the Industrial Revolution. Slater's 'novel' and 'genius' approach to managing workers and families, referred to as the 'Rhode Island' or 'family' approach, would ensure his 'imperishable fame' (*Pawtucket Record* 1888) even after his Sunday School disappeared and the factory, as both concept and institution, spread. I push at Kara Poe Alexander's (2017 p. 22) depiction of literacy sponsorship witnessed in scholarship that 'forwards a view of literacy sponsorship as a one-way, top-down endeavor, where the 'sponsored' and 'sponsor' retain fairly fixed roles.' Rather, Alexander (2017 p. 22) calls for work that offers 'a notion of reciprocal literacy sponsorship where the roles of sponsor and sponsored are fluid, interchangeable, or nuanced.' As opposed to a one-way, top-down, hierarchical flow of power, the new factory discipline, at least as it existed in Slater's mills in Rhode Island, extended the family metaphor to all involved, leading to a seemingly more complicated network of sponsorship. Slater needed these families, especially the children, not just as workers but also as citizens of the early mill villages.

Samuel Slater: The Father of American Manufactures

In 1890, the town of Pawtucket, Rhode Island held the Cotton Centenary, a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the first cotton spinning by power machinery in America. Parades, complete with military personnel and schoolchildren, were held honoring Samuel Slater, 'the hero of the day' (Leavitt 1997). Each day during this week-long celebration had a theme—for instance, Monday was Sunday school day. This legacy proves quite surprising since Samuel Slater entered the United States, on the heels of the Revolutionary War, a young British man with few possessions and 'no far-back ancestry' (Hunt 1858 p. 451).

The details of Slater's life merge fact and myth and they prove worth sharing as context for understanding his approach to management. For example, Freeman Hunt (1858 p. 455), in his entry on Slater in the *Lives of American Merchants*, calls Slater's life 'more like fancy than reality.' Few attempts have been made at a serious scholarly biography and most newspaper stories memorialize Slater, as a 'man of rare talents, of indomitable energy, of sterling worth, and...imperishable fame' (*Pawtucket Record* 1888). Nonetheless, George S. White's (1836) *Memoir of Samuel Slater* is largely cited as the central source for insight into Slater's life despite White's clear admiration for the subject (see also Cameron 1960; Lewton; Tucker 1984). Born in Belper, Derbyshire, in 1768, Slater found himself singled out by his father for an apprenticeship with Jedediah Strutt at the age of 14. Slater acquired a 'common business education' and was strong in arithmetic and 'learned to write a good hand,' owing much to his education with Master Thomas Jackson—'a very approved teacher in Belper' (White 1836 p. 40; Cameron 1960 p. 12). Slater apprenticed under Strutt and Strutt's partner, Richard Arkwright, for six and half years during which he learned the 'Art of Cotton Spinning' (Kulik 1981). As opposed to a specific apprenticeship, Slater learned all aspects of spinning and management. In learning the Arkwright system, Slater, perhaps most importantly, was exposed to understanding the management of workers, earning him, over time, the nickname, the 'Arkwright of America' (see also Fitton & Wadsworth 1968).

At the end of his apprenticeship, Slater, for reasons not known, secretly emigrated to America, never to return to his homeland. White (1836 p. 39) indicates that Slater felt 'cotton spinning

would be overdone in England, and listened to overtures held out from the United States.’ Britain had established restrictions on the emigration of craftsmen, so Slater traveled, disguised as a ‘farmer’s boy,’ with no plans, blueprints, or drawings of the textile machinery. According to White (1836 p. 37), Slater told him, ‘he had nothing about him but his indenture, which he kept concealed, and this was his only introduction and recommendation in the new world.’ Slater quickly engaged in work with the New York Manufacturing Company, but soon found himself frustrated. Through an encounter with a ship captain from Providence, Rhode Island, Slater learned of Moses Brown’s attempts at manufacturing cotton by machinery. Slater wrote to Brown, ‘I flatter myself that I can give the greatest satisfaction, in making machinery, making good yarn, either for stockings or twist, as any that is made in England’ (White 1836 p. 72). This inquiry excited Brown, as up to that point his attempts with spinning were ‘too imperfect to afford much encouragement’ (White 1836 p. 73). He offered Slater ‘all of the profits,’ if Slater could perfect and conduct the water-frame spinning successfully. This correspondence led to Slater agreeing to terms and traveling to Pawtucket, Rhode Island, to establish a co-partnership between William Almy, Smith Brown, and himself. Slater, an ‘owner and proprietor,’ was required to ‘devote his whole time and service, and to exert his skill according to the best of his abilities, and have the same effected in a workmanlike manner, similar to those used in England’ (White 1836 p. 74). Eventually, Slater completed a spinning frame based on Arkwright’s model, illustrating, in White’s biography, Slater’s ‘excellent memory’ as well as his ‘mathematical and mechanical genius’ (White 1836 p. 78; see also Davis & Robinson 1985 for a less mythic take on Slater’s ‘genius’). In 1793, Slater opened operations in the first water-powered textile mill, now referred to as Slater Mill, along the Blackstone River in Pawtucket. Along with Slater, ‘seven boys and two girls, seven to twelve years of age, tended the machines six days a week’ (Bonham 1979 p. 56).

While the partnership between Almy, Brown, and Slater eventually dissolved, the spinning mill thrived, leading Alexander Hamilton, as Secretary of Treasury in 1791, to report, ‘The manufactory at Providence has the merit of being the first in introducing into the United States the celebrated cotton mill (meaning Arkwright’s patent) which, not only furnishes materials for that manufactory itself, but for the supply of private families, for household manufacture’ (White 1836 p. 85). Besides Slater finding himself in favor with Hamilton, Andrew Jackson donned him the ‘Father of American Manufacturing,’ and Rhode Island found itself claiming the ‘honor of being one of the earliest seats of the mechanic arts and of manufactures, on this side of the Atlantic’ (White 1836 p. 92). In 1832, Slater was asked to report on the state of manufacturing in Rhode Island for a census of manufacturers; he noted in his report to the Secretary of Treasury that Rhode Island employed 24,000 workers in the mills (Slater 1833).

The Rise of Mills and Mill Villages

Despite the posthumous legends memorializing Slater for his memory, his bravery, and his ingenuity in bringing water-powered cotton spinning to America, Slater’s ‘greatest’ contribution to the industrial turn in the States lies in his management of workers and their families. The factories and their surrounding towns in England had found themselves the subject of scorn by industrial critics on both sides of the ocean. Further, American leaders debated the role of factories and industrialization in America, hoping to avoid replicating ‘the fetid slums and blighted landscapes of the already notorious factory cities of the English midlands’ (Kulik, Parks

& Penn 1982 p. xxii; see also Folsom & Lubar 1982). This debate over the role of manufacturing in the United States led to two approaches being developed in America. One approach, witnessed in towns such as Lowell, Massachusetts, involved creating factory cities. These cities and factories favored farmers' daughters for employment, witnessed in the 'Lowell girls'. These girls moved to the city, worked in the factory, and lived in dormitories created for workers—illustrated in the rows of brick boarding houses characteristic of New England factory cities (see Ware 1966). These cities and corporations were financed by Boston merchants, such as Francis Cabot Lowell, with individual factories operated by local agents.

The alternate approach towards housing and recruiting workers, labeled by many the Rhode Island, or 'family,' system, was identified by its 'personal and local nature' (see Hadcock 1946 p. 7; Prude 1987). Generally, this approach was financed by Providence merchants and involved a mill village set in a rural area near a water source. Zachariah Allen's (1982 p. 6) description of such villages captures their supposedly pastoral nature: 'The manufacturing operations of the United States are carried on in little villages or hamlets, which often appear to spring up as if by magic in the bosom of some forest, around the water-fall which serves to turn the mill wheel.' These villages housed multiple families, most of whom worked for the mills, and were most prevalent in American manufacturing from 1790-1860 (Kulik, Parks & Penn 1982). Moreover, these families were native born, many living on rural farms throughout the countryside of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and surrounding areas. Over time, immigrant workers replaced native workers, and, as Kulik, Parks, and Penn note, 'The years from 1845 to 1860 witnessed the transformation of the New England textile mill work force, as immigrant workers came to replace the native born in virtually every production task' (xxix; see Leavitt 'The Hollingsworth Letters' for more on immigrants' impact on the textile mills).

Slater's managing of mill villages is noted as a reason for the 'superior relative condition of the manufacturing villages of Rhode Island...in moral and social respects' compared with other locations, including England (Bagnall 1890 pp. 68-9). Further, White (1836 p. 117), in his homage to Slater, contends, '[T]he founder of the cotton manufacture in America, abundantly demonstrated, that under right management, [workers] had no immoral tendency.' Slater was keenly aware of the rural social hierarchy, ensuring the 'conditions of labor...represented a compromise between the demands of householders and the requirements of the new production system' (Tucker 1984 p. 160). As evidence, the 'traditional status of the male and female householder as provider and protector of the family was preserved' (Tucker 1984). According to Paul Rivard (2002 p. 41), mill owners, such as Slater, 'wanted to believe they were providing an environment beneficial to the families in the mill village.' As Tamara Hareven (1982 p. 55) has documented:

The most persistent feature of nineteenth-century paternalism was its concentration on the family unit as the linchpin of the industrial order. Although industrial development would shift the focus of production from family to factory, the family was still the primary unit of production at the beginning of the industrial revolution in the United States. It was also considered the base of morality and stability and the socializer of the young.

But the industrious nature and mutual beneficence of these 'hamlets' required a balancing act

between the needs of the family/workforce and the mill owner.

A New Factory Discipline

The 1790s saw Slater develop what has been described above as the Rhode Island (family) system: small mill villages enlisting entire families as labor units, but providing them with housing, merchandise, education, and religion. In order to offset their cash shortage, Almy, Brown, and Slater established a company store where workers could gain credit. It is worth repeating that every member of the family over seven years of age worked in/for the mill. Further, newspaper ads sought out families with five or six children, enticing them to relocate to mill villages, such as Pawtucket, and away from their rural family farms (regarding child labor, see Feldman 1989; Spilka 1983; Hadcock; Gilbane 1969; Buhle, Molloy, and Sansbury 1983). This form of organization, Hadassah Davis and Natalie Robinson (1985) maintain, helped keep labor costs down. But more than costs, such organization allowed for the integration of a new factory discipline into the lives of families working within Rhode Island mill villages. As outlined below, a key institution responsible for implementing and supporting this new approach to discipline was the Sunday school, both as a concept and physical place. Capturing the complicated role of paternalism, discipline, and education in mill villages, the school, however, did not introduce such traditional themes to American life; according to Tucker (1984 p. 23), ‘lessons in piety, obedience, reverence, and deference, as well as lessons in reading and writing, formed the basis of education and discipline.’ As early as the seventeenth century, fathers felt responsible for their children's development into ‘responsible, moral citizens’ (Tucker 1984 p. 23). Slater’s ‘genius’ lied in his ability to seamlessly shift these traditional themes into a new model of work and discipline.

To counter criticism aimed at mills and factories, Slater depicted rural Rhode Island as a landscape of ‘universal bankruptcy and poverty; the utter extinction of the arts of civilized life; in fine, a retrograde movement of the whole community to ignorance, weakness, and barbarism’ (Prude 1987 p. 114). In turn, the mill villages were designed to reform such rural landscapes and populations; however, the industrial order did not ‘challenge customary prerogatives’ rather it ‘bolstered patriarchy among the lower classes’ (Tucker 1984 p. 26). After all, it supported the ‘householder’s position as provider, guide, and teacher of wife and children’ (Tucker 1984 p. 26). Slater encouraged villagers to ‘hold on to the past’—the hierarchy of the family and importance of religion—while also moving to the future—to work not based in the field or home. In this way, Slater simultaneously fostered an ‘old’ work order—centered on family and the village—while pushing into a new economic structure. Christopher Clark (1996 p. 233) maintains that ‘for much of the first half of the century at least, farming and industrial labor were...intertwined’ (see also Martin 2010 for more recent example of overlap in labor). But this intertwining relied on the successful management of workers—a management feat new to America.

Slater borrowed much of his management style and order from his former mentor, Richard Arkwright. Andrew Ure (1835 p. 15), an enthusiast for the Industrial Revolution’s new systems of manufacturing, posits, ‘To devise and administer a successful code of factory discipline, was the Herculean enterprise, the noble achievement of Arkwright.’ As Gary Kulik (1987 p. 165), a labor historian and former curator of Slater Mill Museum, notes, others before Arkwright had

attempted to ‘refashion the hard clay of eighteenth-century humanity into a disciplined workforce’ (see also Pollard 1963). However, Arkwright introduced continuously moving machines, relying on all workers to maintain the flow of production. This accomplishment was financed by his partner, Jedediah Strutt (in much the same way Brown financed Slater). Kulik (1987 p. 165) asserts that the uniqueness of factory work laid in its regimen of ‘stress, fatigue, and monotony rarely known before and only dimly perceived by contemporaries.’ Workers needed to be trained for such work, such discipline. Individual mill owners developed their own responses to such a need, as there was no collection of management literature.

There were two general approaches to factory discipline in English and American manufacturing operations. The first approach involved the formation of mill or factory villages. This approach allowed mill owners to enact their power ‘through the institutions of village life’ (Kulik 1987 p. 165; Pollard 1963). Much of this approach relied on the ‘moral machinery’ of the villages such as church, chapel, or Sunday school (Kulik 1987 p. 165). According to Kulik (1987 p. 166), ‘The inculcation of such virtues, would, they were sure, promote a contented and better disciplined workforce.’ The second approach emanated from inside the factory through rules on attendance, punctuality, and piece rates. The factory bell, indicating the working schedule and controlled by the mill owner, represented the only timepiece in the mills (see Kulik, Parks & Penn 1982 pp. 165-266). Though the rules and times might differ between mills, a strong sense of order was key to maintaining a mill’s continuous production.

We know that Slater employed both approaches to discipline within his enterprises. Regarding the latter, his correspondence and ledgers highlight a concern for attendance and punctuality (echoed in mill owners’ posted rules). In the next section, I focus specifically on the former approach to discipline through the rise of the Sunday school, in general, and Slater’s version, in particular. This institution, despite a lack of records and notes on its existence and daily happenings, remains one of Slater’s lasting socialization of workers via organizational and institutional measures, and also captures an early attempt at control of workers removed from outright indoctrination and pecuniary discipline. Slater’s village approach to discipline, devoid of the boarding houses to the north, proved amenable to families as the weekly basic education sponsored young workers’ moral and literacy development, assimilating and educating simultaneously.

The Rise of the Sunday School

‘The story of the Sunday school,’ writes Anne Boylan (1988 p. 5), ‘is the story of an American institution.’ And the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of many institutions; most of which, Boylan (1988 p. 4) contends, ‘assumed the social tasks of maintaining order, cohesion, and control.’ Clearly, one can see how the Rhode Island (family) system proved fertile ground for the growth of at least one such institution—the Sunday school. As noted above, opponents of industrialization pointed to the factory towns of England and their masses of workers and families as examples of the ills of manufacturing. Daniel Webster, in his ‘Debate on the Repeal of the Embargo,’ cautioned against reproducing manufacturing in America, claiming, ‘Habits favorable to good morals and free governments, are not usually most successfully cultivated in populous manufacturing cities’ (Folsom & Lubar p. 196). Webster saw manufacturing districts as recruiting sites for England’s armies, for those living in such districts ‘have the least hold on

society' (Folsom & Lubar p. 197). Even Mr. Thomas Jackson, in his correspondence with his former student, confirms for Slater that 'the morals of a particular set are not at all improved since you left them' (White 1836 p. 40).

Slater witnessed firsthand the ways in which a Sunday school might alleviate the concerns of mill owners and opponents. R.S. Fitton and A.P. Wadsworth (1958 p. 102), in their extensive study of the Strutts and Arkwrights, position the 'wave of enthusiasm' for Sunday schools in England as 'the discovery of a cheap solvent of the twin problems of vice and ignorance.' Much of this enthusiasm is owed to Robert Raikes; the man most often cited as the 'founder of Sunday schools' (Lacquer 1976 p. 21). In many public accounts of Slater's introduction of the Sunday school to Pawtucket, Raikes is cited, not Strutt, as the source of the school movement. While working with prisoners, Raikes empathized with them, seeing their 'ignorance as stepping stone to their crimes' (Power 1863 p. 33). Raikes quickly established a Sunday school for the youth, relying on four female teachers, noting how the early sessions 'produced a wonderful change in the manners of those little savages' (Power p. 45). Beginning in Gloucester, Raikes's model proved unique in its quest to educate mill children in basic reading and writing; moral improvement was integrated into the lessons but the schools were 'organized by individuals or by an association of individuals, and were independent of church control' (Trumbull 1888 p. 190). They may have been independent of church control but Raikes's model placed the Bible at the center of instruction alongside *The Sunday Scholar's Companion*. For basic literacy education, Raikes' relied on *A Copious School Book* and *A Comprehensive Sentimental Book*—the latter containing the alphabet, spelling, moral, and religious lessons and stories and prayers adapted to 'the growing powers of children' (Rice 1917 p. 18). Despite their local practice, the schools spread to the nation—within England, the schools 'were the beginning of popular education' (Trumbull p. 117). Nonetheless, Sunday schools also had their critics, many of whom feared such schools represented 'harbingers of a potentially dangerous reading public' (Soltow & Stevens 1981 p. 14). Some in England even saw the institutions as 'dangerous, demoralizing, bad institutions, and agents of the devil' (Rice 1917 p. 20).

While an apprentice under Strutt and Arkwright, Slater witnessed Strutt implement Sunday schools in both his Milford and Belper mill villages. These schools operated on Sundays, avoiding any interference with the six-day work week, and included broad pedagogical goals, such as reading and writing. Additionally, Slater witnessed these Sunday schools' promulgation of factory rules, including the virtue of hard work, temperance, punctuality, and self-discipline. As Jonathan Prude (1983 p. 38) observes, such schools 'permitted Strutt to link workplace discipline with Protestant notions of moral amelioration.' According to Pollard (1963 pp. 194-5), 'All the hands at Strutt's and Arkwright's under 20 had to attend school for four hours on Saturday afternoons and on Sundays to 'keep them out of mischief.' Further, Pollard (1963 p. 197) limits the mission of such Sunday schools to 'raising the level of respectability and morality among the working classes'—a means of 'building up a new factory discipline.' In turn, the schools were more successful as 'instruments of instruction than of conversion' (Lacquer 1976 p. 119).

According to Thomas Lacquer (1976 p. 4), in his *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture*, three motivations aided the founding of Sunday schools in England: 'For some, the new institution was an instrument for the moral rescue of poor children from their

corrupt parents...Others saw in the schools primarily a means of spreading the Word of God...Thirdly, a new, soft, kind, more optimistic and sentimental view of children and childhood induced benevolent men and women to direct their attention to the young.' Michael Sanderson (1972 pp. 81-2) argues the Sunday school proved more than a 'curious cultural sideshow,' contending they 'may be an innovation fundamentally important for an understanding of the eighteenth century as the steam engine and mule.' Regardless of motivation, the schools prospered in England with nearly 2.1 million working class children attending in 1851 (Lacquer 1976 p. i).

Although the specific details are debatable, we know that Samuel Slater established a Sunday school (adapted from Strutt via Raikes) in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, shortly after the opening of Slater Mill, with the backing of his partners (see Bagnall 1890; Conrad 1973). The genesis of Slater's Sunday school involves an oft-repeated tale included here in its entirety, as it captures the mythic status of Slater:

Among the boys who came to work in his mill was one that was to make this place his home for nearly three-score years and ten...He came here a boy eleven years of age, and found an irreverence toward the Sabbath which shocked his sensibilities. Not knowing what to do on that day, he was subjected to peculiar temptations. It so happened that some of the lads who worked with him in the mill were conferring together, one Sunday morning, as to where they should go. Says one of them, 'Let's go up to Smithfield, and rob Mr. Arnold's orchard; that will be fine sport.' But the youth first named demurred. 'I don't believe it is right to go off Sundays to rob people's orchards,' said he. Mr. Slater happened to be passing at that moment, and caught a part of the reply. He stops and asks, 'Boys, what are you talking about?' He is told of what had been proposed, and one of them adds, 'Nat. doesn't think it is right to go off so on Sunday.' 'No, nor I neither,' responded Mr. Slater; and he doubtless feels, if he had never realized the matter before, that he owes a duty to those youth whom God had placed for a time under his charge. He resolves to remove from them one form of temptation; and promptly says, 'Boys, go into my house, and I will give you as many apples as you want; and I will keep a Sunday school.' (Goodrich 1876 p. 123)

Included in Massena Goodrich's (1876) *Historical Sketch of Pawtucket*, this story bolsters Slater's paternal role in the mill village and to his young workers. Further, the tale captures the widespread concern over the moral depravity of mill children, as opposed to their literacy education.

Much has been made about the potential uniqueness of Slater's Sunday school in America—with many proclaiming Slater's the first Sunday school in the States. The actual inception date of Slater's Sunday school is placed somewhere between 1795-1797. We know that other Sunday schools were opening in the States, but Slater's is likely the first New England version of these institutions, especially one modeled on Raikes's schools (see Gilbane 1969 p. 308). Recounted in an article from the *Pawtucket Record* in 1888, the school likely began in Slater's house in the 'south east room on the first floor' and included seven boys (presumably the boys from the orchard): 'Nathaniel G. B. Dexter, Isaac and Samuel Tabor, Reuben and ___ Alexander, Thomas Blye and Clifford Thomas' (*Pawtucket Record* 1888). Slater's introduction of the Sunday school

to his mill villages further differentiated the Rhode Island family system from the Waltham boarding house system. Recall that Boston merchants, such as Lowell, were ‘determined to avoid making a permanent mill village of poor families whose children worked in the mill and who were entirely dependent on factory labor’ (Ware 1966 pp. 64-5). Slater’s Sunday schools were a direct response, and necessary component of, the family-style approach to manufacturing favored by Slater, where entire families did relocate to the mill village.

Again, separating myth from reality proves difficult with Slater, and this is no less true with the Sunday school. Clearly, it was a celebrated institution, owning a day at the 1890 Cotton Centennial Celebration. Moreover, the Slater Mill museum holds various items related to the Sunday school, including a brick from the chimney of the first school as well as memorial glasses from the 1890 celebration. But specific details of the actual institution are scattered, especially due to its brief history as a secular school, resulting in hyperbolic stories such as the tale of the school’s genesis. Barbara Tucker (1984 p. 75) speculates that since the school was patterned after Strutt’s, it probably ‘emphasized the teaching of certain moral values, including obedience, honesty, temperance, punctuality, and deference.’ Initially, Slater taught the children himself but eventually employed students from nearby Rhode Island College, now Brown University, with Slater’s ledger noting on November 5, 1797: ‘Cash paid Benjamin Allen, for teaching a school first days, £2, 14s’ (Goodrich p. 129). And, unfortunately, Slater himself, in his copious ledgers and correspondence, fails to mention the school (Kulik 2007).

Nonetheless, we have some circumstantial details from sources familiar with the institution. Capt. N.G.B. Dexter, who worked under Almy, Brown, and Slater for thirty years recalls that reading, writing, and arithmetic were central to the school: ‘Our lesson-books were five Webster’s spelling-books, and our library consisted of three new Testaments’ (*Pawtucket Past and Present* 1917 p. 12). Other sources note the schools ‘common school-education’ (Benedict 1860 p. 310). Unlike Raikes’s model, the Bible did not seem to be the center of instruction and the school remained free, initially, of church control (see Brown 1996 p. 106 for more on Bible as indication of religious teaching). Yet, teachings clearly emphasized a moral code of conduct conducive to manufacturing. A popular hymn sung by children in the Sunday schools of Slatersville and Webster began:

Why should I deprive my neighbor
Of his goods against his will?
Hands were made for honest labour,
Not to plunder or to steal. (Tucker 1984 p. 168)

By 1815, the schools came under control of the churches due to the introduction of ‘Bible reading and a moderate share of religious instruction’ (Benedict 1860 p. 310). Parents and the adult community supported the school, following a belief in the related nature of ‘idleness, sinfulness, and ignorance’ (Conrad 1973 p. 124). Moreover, as Tucker (1984 pp 171-2) notes, ‘The tenets of the church were reinforced by lessons learned in the home...[for] the home became another training ground for a generation of factory hands.’ One factory agent, writing in 1816, warned parents:

O, anxious parents! Train your rising youth,

In all the faithful elegance of Truth;
Lest, where paternal care has failed to gain,
A dread futurity the wretch restrain.
Obedience teach; the base whereon thy skill
May raise 'high towers' and mighty schemes fulfill;
But mark the means that to the end conduce,
And frame them fit, at least—for mortal use. (Tucker pp. 171-2)

The state of Rhode Island proved a unique site for such a school and may have contributed to its success and legendary status (despite the school's discontinuous operation). As Caroline Ware (1966 p. 286) comments in her study of New England cotton manufacture, 'Rhode Island was very backward in all provisions for public education, including that of children in manufacturing establishments.' And despite doubts as to the contributions such schools made to the rise in American literacy within the nineteenth century, within Rhode Island especially, 'Sunday schools ought to be included in any assessment of educational resources' (Boylan 1988 p. 29). After all, Rhode Island was alone in colonial America in its lacking laws on compulsory education (see Soltow & Stevens 1981). Connecting this tardiness to the 'heterogeneousness in the population,' Goodrich (1876 p. 123), in his history of Pawtucket, positions Rhode Island as the last 'New England State to establish common schools.' Brendan Gilbane (1969 p. 297) similarly points out that the State 'left the matter to individuals and private societies until 1828.'

As historian Nancy Beadie (2010 p. 13) illustrates in *Education and the Creation of Capital in the Early American Republic*, 'the place of education in the social and economic transformations of the countryside remains largely unexplored.' One such 'place' is the Sunday school, where education coexisted with a transition to capitalism, including the 'development of outwork manufacturers, the accumulation of capital by local merchants and entrepreneurs, and the establishment of factory production' (Beadie p. 13). The 'place' of the Sunday school offered an institution in which the traditional aspects of rural New England could not only continue but intertwine with the industrial order: good workers and good citizens. Slater showed a profound attention to the local history and social relations within which he operated his mill. Slater recognized that colonial New Englanders' identity relied largely on the family, the church, and the community. Tucker (1984 p. 27) reminds us that even under the new factory system, 'Religion remained a potent force in the lives of New Englanders.' And as Clark (1996 p. 236) outlines, the 'role of the American countryside was less to create agrarian capitalism, as such, than to contribute conditions in which commercial and industrial capitalism would flourish.' Slater proved adept at nurturing and utilizing those conditions, as well as those 'potent forces,' in introducing and building his manufacturing system in Rhode Island—pointing to his true 'genius'. In contrast to fighting irreligion, as its evangelical successors would attempt, Slater's Sunday school stressed to families of rural New England that the shift from the farm and marketplace to the market was not to be feared.

Undoubtedly, there was a 'benevolent paternalism' that occupied mill owners such as Slater as they convinced rural villagers to join his workforce (Hadcock 1946 p. 37). Bagnall (1890 p. 68) notes that Slater showed a 'kindly and paternal interest' in his employees, an interest which included 'their personal, domestic, and social relations.' Yet, Slater's sponsorship as an approach to discipline was not fulfilled solely in a top-down hierarchy. It also reflected the precarious

position manufacturers utilizing the village approach occupied, as living near the workers (as opposed to merchants financing Lowell, for example). The mill families did not ‘hold Slater in awe, nor did they defer to Almy & Brown’ (Kulik 1987 p. 173). Tales tell of him breaking the waterwheel free from ice, in order to begin mill operations on cold mornings. Further, Kulik (1987 p. 167) describes Slater’s attention to punctuality and attendance but an aversion towards pecuniary punishment. Rarely was a fine recorded in his ledger. More interestingly, Slater repeatedly plied Almy and Brown for money and supplies for employees, as he was not permitted to purchase supplies himself. One request reads, ‘The mill is now destitute of the following articles cotton to pick, corn, rye, coffee, tea, molasses and flour therefore if you have a part or all or can produce the above said articles, you will please send them as soon as [convenient]’ (Almy, Brown & Slater Papers 1801). Another request demands, ‘Brushes much wanted!! none to sweep the mill with’ (Almy, Brown & Slater Papers 1801). Moreover, they asserted themselves in resisting and contesting issues related to factory discipline. Rhode Islanders’ strong sense of independence ensured they would not assume the role of second-class citizens. Ultimately, the employee had one strategy for subverting the industrial order that may have encouraged leniency on the part of mill owners such as Slater: the ability to leave. Transiency was a common problem for mill owners, including Slater; so as Jonathan Prude (1987 p. 116) explains in his history of rural New England, mill owners had to ‘rely on their good reputation to attract sufficient employees.’ Education, both literacy and moral, offered one means for Slater to institutionalize a code of conduct and reciprocity outside of the mill, yet within the village.

While there was demographically no shortage of labor, especially child labor, Slater encountered an unwillingness of many local farmers and artisans to send their children for employment in his mills. Many factors played into this, including an anti-manufacturing sentiment, a general British hostility, and a concern for water rights on the Blackstone River (see Kulik 1985 on battles over water rights). Almy, Brown, and Slater's search for a sufficient workforce led them to seeking out families ‘not in affluent circumstances, with children aged seven to twelve’ (Almy, Brown & Slater Papers 1800). Despite the Sunday school’s role as the ‘first institution in the village which buttressed the values of the factory system,’ attendance was not mandatory at Slater’s Sunday school, as opposed to its English model (Kulik 1987 p. 170). As Kulik (1987 p. 171) writes, there is ‘no economic argument [to] adequately explain that...choice.’ But we must remain cognizant that mill owners were more than simply economic sponsors. In *Ten Hours Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England*, Teresa Murphy (1992 pp. 21-2) contends, millowners ‘assumed the permanent moral dependence of their work force.’ Jonathan Prude (1987 p. 92) depicts the relationship and its importance as such: ‘early textile employers and employees taught themselves...how to respond to one another. They deciphered—or, more accurately, they created—the rules of the game for being industrial employers and employees. And by doing so they implemented a pivotal lesson in the social meaning of industrial capitalism.’

Exposing children to the ‘three Rs’ and a moral code of conduct represented a version of sponsorship, or what we might now term managerial control, amenable to most rural villagers. At the same time, such sponsorship proved invaluable to the success of the village approach in Rhode Island and elsewhere. Both the Sunday school (albeit in a more evangelical form) and mills proliferated throughout New England and the rest of the country. And while the education

of factory children filled a gap in the literacy needs of rural families, basic literacy instruction would not in itself prove revolutionary. In looking at Slater's village approach and the role it played in shifting the work order of New England, we see managerial sponsorship as 'event, as action, as ideological, as local, as gendered, as complying with the structures of society, and as resisting those structures' (Daniell 2003 p. 3). Indeed, the non-cognitive functions of such schooling proved more lasting for both employers and employees: Through activities such as the Sunday school, Slater and others may have strengthened the paternalism—and Protestant work ethic—of the village but they also allowed working people to construct 'moral autonomy,' providing a 'critical component in the challenges working people made to New England paternalism' (Murphy 1992 p. 22). Others, including Tucker (1984 p. 30), position both groups as 'forging' a system that 'met their respective requirements.' Jonathan Prude (1987 p. 117) even goes so far as to position mill operatives as successful in 'limiting the hegemony of their employers,' while Andrew Ure (1835 p. 329) calls the factory system 'the labouring population[s] grand palladium.' Pointing to the role of early Protestant Sunday schools in England as sponsors of reading for working-class families, Deborah Brandt (1998 p. 168) acknowledges the 'reciprocal relationship' sponsors engage in with those they 'underwrite'.

But she also points to the 'ideological freight' such relationships, even, and perhaps especially, Slater's manufacturing villages, inevitably carried. In an October, 1961, issue of *The Spinner*, the Bulletin of the Old Slater Mill Museum, an advertisement reads: 'Slater's school represents the beginnings of personnel programs in American industry insofar as personnel operations go beyond mere recruitment and training in the immediate duties of the particular job. Slater understood that the well-being of employees and the community could contribute much to business success. Owens-Corning Fiberglass Corp. management understands that, too.' As a sponsor of textile workers' literacy and moral education in the American Industrial Revolution, Samuel Slater introduced an approach to managing labor that foreshadowed corporations of the twentieth century, including Owens-Corning Fiberglass Corporation and Ford Motor Company, where managerial control, paternal capitalism, and worker education became harder to distinguish from each other (see Hull 1997; Pennell on labor and literacy transitions; Burgy on Americanization classes in New Bedford mills). For example, in looking at undocumented migrant workers in poultry processing plants, Miranda Cady Hallett (2017 p. 27) describes 'disciplinary measures that...extend far beyond...a shop floor or assembly line.' She looks to Henry Ford and his welfare programs designed 'to avoid the 'social ills' of industrial urbanization,' claiming, 'The interest in crafting worker morality and sociality under Fordist practices has only become more intense in the post-Fordist era' (Hallett 2017 p. 28). Literacy sponsorship in workplaces such as today's poultry processing plants may be far removed from the sponsorship of New England's textile mills; yet, the usefulness in investigating such sponsorship, by seemingly benevolent corporate leaders, especially during economic transition, remains important. As a harbinger of institutions to come, Slater's mill village, as well as the Sunday school, provides an early 'canary in the mines' with which to skeptically reflect on current worker socialization movements, operating under the guise of training, education, and development.

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