Chapter 11 Lesson 1

Industrial Growth

In colonial times, most Americans lived in the same place that they worked, which was usually a farm. They made the items that they needed or wanted, using their hands and simple tools, people made their own furniture, farm equipment, household items, and clothing.

In the mid 1700’s people began producing goods through new methods. In Great Britain, inventors built machines that did some of the work involved in cloth making, such as spinning thread. These new machines ran on the power of water. British cloth makers built factories, called mills, along rivers. To tend the machines, mill owners paid people wages, regular payment of money in return for work. People began to leave their farms and homes to work in the mills and collect wages. This change in culture in known as the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution in the United States

The Industrial Revolution reached the US around 1800. Changes began in New England because of its geography. New England’s poor soil made it difficult for farming. People willingly gave up farm work to earn wages elsewhere. New England’s many rivers made it ideal for the waterpower needed to run the factory machinery. The area also had numerous ports for ease of use in shipping in raw materials, such as cotton, and the shipping out of finished goods, such as cloth.

New Inventions

At the heart of the industrial revolution was technology. New machines changed the way people made cloth. Inventions such as the water frame and spinning jenny spun thread, and the power loom wove the thread into cloth. Compared to making thread or cloth by hand, the machines saved time and money.

Other inventions followed. IN 1793 Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin (gin is short for engine). It quickly removed the seeds from picked cotton and allowed a huge increase in cotton production.

Whitney later accepted the task of making 10,000 muskets in two years for the government. At that time, skilled workers made each musket by hand one at a time. Whitney made muskets in large numbers. Each part was identical to others of its type. Even unskilled workers could assemble a musket quickly. Plus, if a musket broke, a soldier could quickly replace the bad part with another that fit. Whitney’s idea of interchangeable parts changed manufacturing forever.

The Rise of Factories

In 1790 Congress passed a patent law to protect the rights of inventors. A patent gives an inventor the sole legal right to make money from an invention over a period of time.

The British also tried to protect their inventions. One law prohibited textile workers from sharing technology or leaving the country. Still, a few British workers brought these secrets to the US. One such worker was Samuel Slater. He memorized the design of the machines used in the British factory in which he worked.

In the 1790’s, Slater built copies in the US of British machines that made cotton thread. Slater’s mill marked an important step in the Industrial Revolution in the US.

Francis Cabot Lowell improved on Slater’s mill in 1814. Lowell’s Massachusetts textile, or cloth, factory not only made thread, it also wove the thread into cloth. Lowell began the factory system, in which all manufacturing steps are combined in one place.

Free Enterprise

The capitalist economic system of the US helped spur industrial growth. In capitalism, individuals and, businesses own property and decide how to use it. These people – not the government – control capital, which includes the buildings, land, machines, money, and other items used to create wealth.

We also use the term free enterprise to describe the American economic system. People are free to work wherever they wish and to buy, sell, and produce whatever they want. The major elements of free enterprise are economic freedom, profit, private property, and competition. Business owners produce products they think will sell the best and make the most profit. Businesses compete for customers with low prices and high quality. This competition helps push businesses to improve.

Agriculture Grows

While many New Englanders went to work in factories in the early 1800’s, most Americans still lived and worked on farms. In the Northeast, farms were small, so a family could do all the necessary work. Farmers in the Northeast usually sold their products locally.

Agriculture moved west along with American settlers. Western farmers in the region north of the Ohio River found land that could support a thriving agriculture. Many of these farmers concentrated on raising pork and cash crops such as corn and wheat.

In the South, cotton production rose sharply. The demand for cotton grew steadily as textile factories appeared. In addition, the cotton gin allowed planters to grow cotton over a much wider area. Southern farmers seeking new land moved west to plant the valuable crop. Between 1790 and 1820, cotton production soared from 3,000 to 300,000 bales per year in the South.

The success and spread of cotton created a huge demand for enslaved workers. Trade in enslaved Africans expanded. Between 1790 and 1810, the number of enslaved Africans in the US rose from about 700,000 to 1.2 million.

Economic Independence

Small investors – such as shopkeepers, merchants, and farmers – provided the money necessary to build most new businesses. They invest money in the hopes of earning profits if the business was successful. Low taxes, minimum government regulations, and competition encouraged people to invest in new industries.

Growth of Corporations

In the 1830’s, changes in the law paved the way for the growth of corporations. A corporation is a type of business that can have many owners. Because of their legal status, corporations can grow to a large size. They sell stock – shares of ownership in a company – to raise the money to build factories and expand their business. Large corporations began to appear in this era, and their great size helped drive industrialization.

Cities Grow Up

The growth of factories and trade led to the growth of towns and cities. Many cities developed along rivers because factories could take advantage of the waterpower and easily ship goods to markets. Older cities such as New York, Boston, and Baltimore also grew as centers of commerce and trade.

Along New York City’s South Street, shipping piers extended for 3 miles. One traveler wrote of the busy waterfront:

“Every thought, word, look, and action of the multitude seemed to be absorbed by commerce.”

-from The Growing Years by Margaret L. Coit

To the west, towns such as Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville were located on major rivers. As farmers in the West shipped more products by water, these towns grew rapidly.

Cities and towns looked different from modern urban areas. They featured wood and brick buildings and unpaved streets. Barnyard animals often roamed freely. There were no sewers to carry away waste, so diseases such as cholera and yellow fever were a threat. Fire was also a danger since few cities had organized fire companies. Yet cities offered many opportunities, such as a variety of jobs and steady wages. As cities grew, residents built libraries, museums, and shops for people to enjoy during their leisure time. For many, the jobs and attractions of city life outweighed the dangers.