

SAMUEL SLATER STEALS AN IDEA

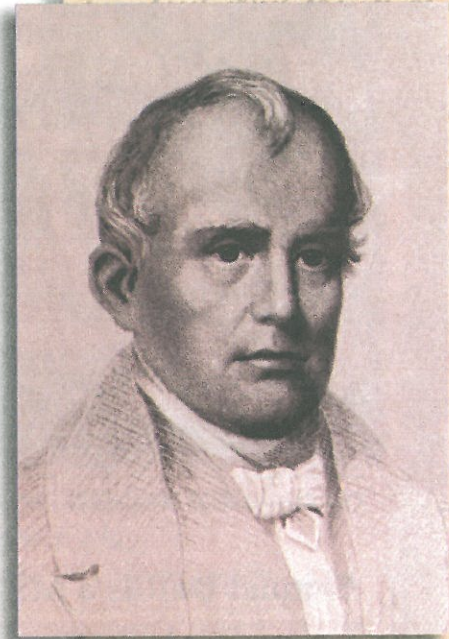
English machines made it cheaper for England than for other countries to make textiles, or cloth. England wanted to keep it that way. So, laws were passed that neither machines nor the men who ran them could leave the country. In that way, England hoped to protect the money its citizens were making from the textile industry.

Samuel Slater Comes to America

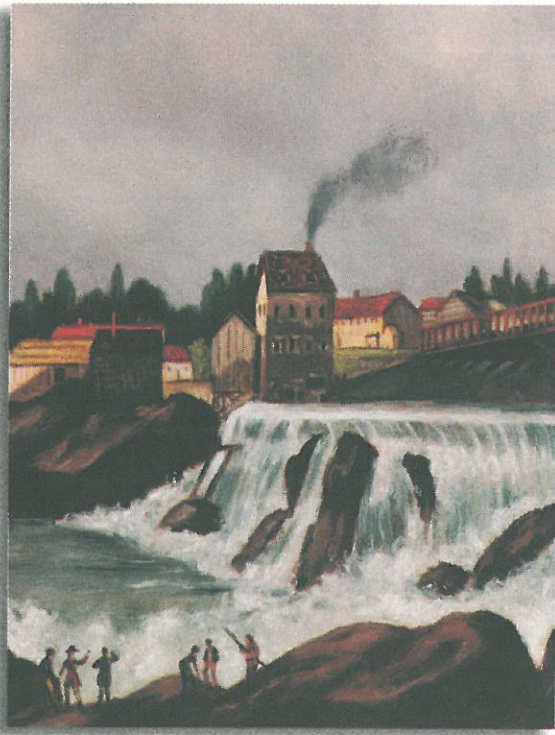
Samuel Slater was an Englishman. When he was young, his family apprenticed him to one of the biggest textile manufacturers in the country. An apprentice is someone who learns a trade. During his apprenticeship, Samuel learned more than how to make cloth. He also memorized how the English spinning machines were built and how they worked.

Samuel heard that American companies were offering prizes to people who brought English technology to the United States. He decided he wanted to go to America.

Samuel knew that he was forbidden by law to leave England. So, he disguised himself by dressing in farmer's clothes. That way no one would suspect he worked in the mills. Then, with the machine plans safely stored in his head, Samuel boarded a ship bound for the United States. Just before the ship left, he wrote his family and told them he was going to America.



Born in England, Samuel Slater came to the United States and built a cotton-spinning mill.



This illustration shows a mechanical cotton mill by a river.

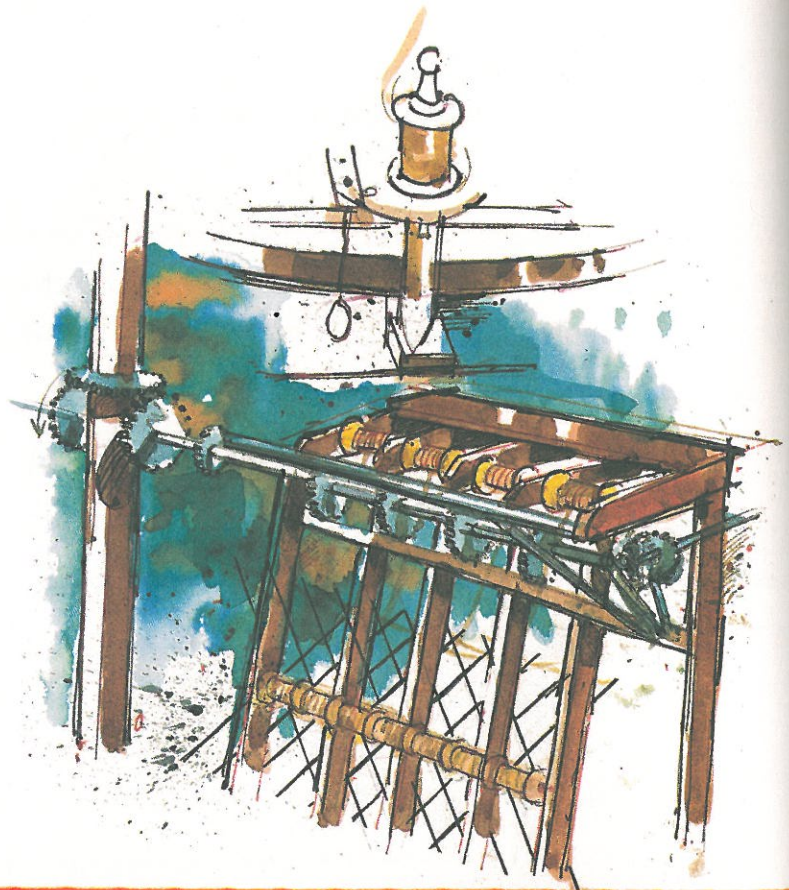
Samuel Builds a Mill

In 1789, a Rhode Island businessman agreed to pay for Samuel to build his spinning machine. By late 1790, Samuel's cotton-spinning mill opened for business. The mill used Samuel's machines to spin cotton into yarn. Then, the yarn was given to home weavers to be woven into cloth.

Samuel built his mill on the Blackstone River in Pawtuxet, Rhode Island. At first, the mill's water wheel didn't work. It froze in place almost every night. Samuel often had to work for two or three hours in the morning to free the wheel from the ice's nightly grip.

Samuel and the Blacksmith's Daughter

Samuel's mill almost didn't get built at all. That is because Samuel fell in love. The girl's name was Hannah, and she was a blacksmith's daughter. She also belonged to a religious group called the Quakers. Her parents wanted Hannah to marry a Quaker, and Samuel wasn't one. So, to break up the romance between Hannah and Samuel, Hannah's parents decided to send her away to school. Samuel threatened to go after her. "You may send her where you please, but I will follow her to the ends of the earth!" he said. Hannah's





Samuel Slater used child labor in his mill. This picture, taken at a later date, shows a young girl working at a cotton mill.

parents gave in. They allowed Samuel and Hannah to marry. Then, Samuel went back to work on his mill.

Children Work in Samuel's Mills

Samuel brought another idea from Great Britain, too. Like the British, he used child labor. The eight boys and girls he hired for his first mill were between 7 and 12 years old. These children were not apprentices. They were workers. And, they worked for very little money—much less money than grownups made. In fact, the wages were so low that only the poorest families sent their children to work in the mills.

In America, it wasn't unusual for young children to work. After all, this was a farming nation. On the farms, children often began to work soon after they began to walk. In addition, Samuel treated his child workers well. Later factory owners also used child labor. However, many were not as kind as Samuel to the children who worked for them.

This poem was written about children at work in a mill:

*The golf course is so near the mill
That almost every day
The little children can look out
And see the men at play.*

— by Sarah Cleghorn

Show What You Know

You have already seen a picture of the kind of machine whose workings Samuel Slater memorized. Choose one of the machines in your own home. For example, you might choose a vacuum cleaner, a VCR, a television, or a toaster. Study the machine for a few minutes. Then, turn away from the machine, and try to draw it from memory. When you have finished, turn back, and compare your drawing to the actual machine. How did you do?