



**Stephen A. Mrozowski, Grace H. Ziesing, Mary C. Beaudry.** *Living on the Boott: Historical Archaeology at the Boott Mills Boardinghouses, Lowell, Massachusetts.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996. xv + 93 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-55849-034-5.



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**Published on** H-PCAACA (January, 1997)

This case study in historical archaeology is designed to provide an introduction to the field by documenting domestic life in the company owned boardinghouses of the Boott Cotton Mills Corporation in Lowell. The work is based, in the main, upon the first volume of a three volume site report, *Interdisciplinary Investigations of the Boott Mills, Lowell, Massachusetts: Vol. 1: Life at the Boardinghouses: A Preliminary Report* (Boston: National Park Service [NPS], North Atlantic Region, Cultural Resource Management Series 18, 1987), coauthored by co-principal investigators Mary Beaudry and Ricardo Elias, and by Stephen Mrozowski. The former authors are affiliated with the Center for Archaeological Studies at Boston University (CAS-BU), the latter was supervisory archaeologist for the NPS at Boott Mills. Beaudry has also prepared a valuable, informative synthesis entitled *The Lowell Boott Mills Complex and Its Housing: Material Expressions of Corporate Ideology* (Historical Archaeology 23:19-32, 1989).

The mill village of Lowell, originally the farming community of East Chelmsford, was founded in 1825 by the Boston Associates and is situated

between the confluence of the Merrimack and Concord Rivers in northern Massachusetts near the border with New Hampshire. It was the first planned industrial city in New England and was named after John A. Lowell, one of the incorporators who served as corporate treasurer from 1827-1844.

Boott Cotton Mills, named for Kirk Boott an agent for the Boston entrepreneurs who capitalized the company, was incorporated on March 27, 1835, for the manufacture of cotton and woolen cloth. Occupying an area of 5.7 acres, *The Boott* comprised both a workplace and eight-block residential area. Supervisory and skilled laborers lived in 32 *tenements* (in reality, apartment-like complexes), while unmarried and unskilled workers--segregated by sex and nationality--were accommodated (sometimes eight to a room) in 32 boardinghouses constructed between 1835 and 1839. Company agents lived elsewhere in more elaborate and spacious rowhomes. The majority of the textile mill's employees were women, with New England farmgirls being replaced after 1840 by immigrant laborers, particularly the Irish.

Beaudry's article (1989) provides salient data on sex ratios--the case study, unfortunately, does not: 1842 (950 females, 120 males), 1868 (1,020 females, 310 males), and 1878 (1,300 females, 500 males). The term *living on the Boott* was a phrase employed by the workers to indicate their place of residence.

Limited excavations were undertaken in 1986 by NPS and CAS-BU at the request of the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission and concentrated upon tenement #48 and boardinghouse #45, located on James Street. Historic documents indicate that the tenement housed a series of families between 1850 and 1900, while the boardinghouse accommodated 25-30 women from 1850-1880 and French-Canadian men from 1900-1910. Both structures became storage facilities from 1918-1934, at which time they were torn down and the area reused as a coalyard and parking lot.

In the 1996 publication, the authors state a specific objective--"we wanted to understand how the people who ran the industrial machinery structured their lives and shaped their world" (p. 36). The initial three chapters provide the historic background to the site and archaeological work (12 pp.), introduce basic concepts of historical archaeology (25 pp.), and consider the urban landscape (11 pp.). Four chapters describe the excavations and artifacts, and infer living conditions and lifeways--sanitation, hygiene, and health (10 pp.), culinary activities (7 pp.), leisure activities (9 pp.), and clothing and personal adornment (6 pp.). From the material remains, documents, oral history, memoirs, and photographs we are informed about dwelling configurations, 25 x 25 ft. backyards, privies and water wells, food stuffs and meal preparation, smoking and drinking habits, jewelry, the advent of plastic haircombs and ornaments (after 1870), and buttons and studs. The leisure activities included the smoking of cigars and cutties (short clay pipes), and drinking hard liquor, wine, and beer. The consumption of alco-

hol was supposedly forbidden by company policy, so that an ideal versus real culture paradox existed. For interested readers, a recent volume by historian Laurence F. Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline: The Boott Cotton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1835-1955* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), documents the changing industrial scene. Brian C. Mitchell's book entitled *The Paddy Camps: The Irish of Lowell, 1821-61* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), provides additional background on the sociocultural effects of immigration and the famine emigrants of 1845-55.

*Living on the Boot* contains 34 illustrations, 105 pages of text (large font and one and one-half line spacing format), plus an annotated list of 68 sources and suggestions for further reading, and a two and one-half page index. This slim treatise provides a fleeting glimpse into the everyday lives of textile workers and occasionally presents the reader with comparative data from the tenements and agents' houses. It has potential applicability in urban, economic, labor, and women's history. The authors note correctly that it is important for us to understand the lifeways of the working class as well as the wealthy and influential, but their effort falls short of the mark. Certainly much more could be written and additional material incorporated from the original site reports and sources cited by Gross and Mitchell. Nonetheless, this is one of the few attempts specialists have made to interpret archaeological data derived from Cultural Resource Management research, and to popularize historical, industrial, and household archaeology, and I applaud this effort. However, professionals will prefer Beaudry's article in *Historical Archaeology*. Lowell was not a single company town, so that it would be useful to know how Boott Mills, one of a number of factories, related to the other local industries such as the Chelmsford Glass Works, Middlesex Canal Co., and the remaining manufacturing companies (Hamilton, Lowell, Merrimack, and Middlesex). Gross covers some of these relationships in his

work. Mrozowski, Ziesing, and Beaudry's brief synthesis is useful in whetting the appetites of members of the public interested in the topics considered, serves as an interpretive guide to the site, and can be a meaningful (but expensive) supplementary textbook for several humanities or social science disciplines.

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**Citation:** Charles C. Kolb. Review of Mrozowski, Stephen A.; Ziesing, Grace H.; Beaudry, Mary C. *Living on the Boott: Historical Archaeology at the Boott Mills Boardinghouses, Lowell, Massachusetts*. H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. January, 1997.

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