



INTERIOR VIEW OF I. C. PRAY'S STITCHING SHOP,  
NO. 232 DERBY STREET SALEM MASS.

*Interior of I.C. Pray's Stitching Shop,  
No. 232 Derby Street, Salem, c. 1863*

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M.S. Andrieu  
Lithograph

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

"The first widespread technological revolution in the shoe industry came with the invention of the sewing machine. Beginning in the 1850s, the use of the sewing machine in shoe manufacturing allowed local businesses to create women's slippers to compete with French imports then the rage among well-shod consumers. The first sewing machine was installed in a Lynn factory in 1852 and was used to stitch shoe uppers."<sup>1</sup>

When women first entered into factory work in the United States, they hoped for better financial opportunities and some autonomy. In 1857, economic depression in the country placed a great strain on the North Shore shoe industry. Many people lost their jobs, and wages were low. Men earned \$3 for "six 16-hour days a week," and women, only \$1. In 1860, men and women laborers went on strike. At its height, about 20,000 people participated from across the New England shoe industry. Factory owners did not give in, however, and the outbreak of the Civil War overshadowed labor disputes.<sup>2</sup>

### **ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

This lithograph depicts women at work in I.C. Pray's Sticking Shop in Salem. The artist seems to view the operation in a favorable manner. The women are seated in front of large windows that provide light for their careful stitching at sewing machines. In the center, one woman sits at a large table, with shoe parts laid out in an orderly fashion. In fact, the entire scene is orderly, from the coats and bonnets neatly hung on a back wall, to the regular spacing of the women, to the man (their manager) who presides over the scene. His gesture seems gentle yet authoritative, and all wear neat, clean clothing and have full, healthy physiques. All appear industrious and content. The artist also includes an element of factory efficiency and modernization. The women work at machines with gas piping running overhead.

The scene does not hint at the labor unrest that disrupted the shoe industry only three years prior, nor does it suggest the exhausting labor that these women would have performed for low wages. It is also interesting to note that this shop was located on Derby Street in Salem. During the Federal Period, Derby Street would have been a bustling center for maritime industries. By 1820, however, maritime trade was in decline in Salem, and the city turned increasingly toward industry. I.C. Pray's shop would have been ideally located to take advantage of the harbor to ship their goods.

### **SAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- Describe who is working in this scene. What is the difference between the work the women perform, and the work the man performs?
- Can you tell how the people in the scene feel about their work?
- How do you think the artist felt about women working in shoe factories?
- Why do you think the artist made this print? For whom might he have created this?

### **SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

- Consider this image with the Lye-Tapley shoe shop. How do these represent two very different models for shoe production on the North Shore?
- Imagine that you are one of the women in the scene. Draw your own version of your work experience. How is it different from the perspective of this lithograph?

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Bradstreet Richter, "Following the Footprints of the Past: The Shoe Collection of the Essex Institute." *Essex Institute Historical Collections* (April 1991): 123-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Lynn Shoeworks' Strike*, 22 February 1860. Online at: <http://www.massmoments.org> [Viewed 11 November 2006].