

Samuel Slater

1768–1835



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Samuel Slater has been called the “Father of American Industry.” His contributions to the textile industry helped to jumpstart the Industrial Revolution in the United States.



As you read the biography below, think about how Samuel Slater’s knowledge of successful textile mills in Britain helped him energize the American mills.



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Born in England, Samuel Slater eventually became an apprentice at a successful **textile** mill. His math skills and ability to organize helped him in daily calculations and bookkeeping. In addition, Slater also learned the mechanics of cotton manufacturing. He spent seven years in his apprenticeship and witnessed the booming British **textile** industry.

Slater realized that the textile industry in England was already established, but the American industry was still waiting for its big break. Slater saw the opportunity and fled England in disguise. At the time, skilled mechanics like Slater were not allowed to leave England. The British did not want to lose their hold on the market by sharing its talented tradesmen. Nonetheless, Slater, dressed as a laborer, boarded a ship headed for the United States. He was 21.

Slater began working at a small textile mill in New York in 1789. That same year, a man named Moses Brown was looking for a person who understood textile machines. Brown’s mill in Rhode Island was not able to produce cloth as he had hoped. The spinning frames in the mill were hard

VOCABULARY

textile a woven or knit cloth

to use by hand, but were not designed to work by water-powered.

Slater and Brown met in 1790. Slater was not impressed with the quality of Brown's machines. He contracted with Brown to reproduce the machines that had enabled the success of the British textile mills. Amazingly, Slater achieved this task by relying only on his memory of the machines he had used and managed in England.

In 1793 the first mill was replaced with a new one in Pawtucket. In 1798, Slater built another mill under his new partnership, called Samuel Slater and Company. More mills followed and he became very wealthy.

Slater's ideas for organizing a workforce also helped in his success. He employed entire families to work at the mills. Towns formed around the mill sites. The textile industry exploded in the United States. For this reason, Slater is recognized as the "Father of American Industry."

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why did England ban skilled tradesmen like Samuel Slater from leaving the country?

- 2. Expressing and Supporting a Point of View** Do you think it was important for the United States to produce its own textiles? Provide reasons or examples to support your point of view.

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Do research to find more information about mill towns. Create a travel brochure for a town of your choice. Describe the town and write it about what it has to offer potential workers. Use illustrations and quotations.