

Industries **Silk – Child Labor**

Emma Boutchyard was the daughter of John Wesley and Alberta Manning Boutchyard. She grew up on a farm near the present Falmouth Elementary School. Alberta was John Wesley's third wife and the mother of six of his fifteen children. He died when Emma, the youngest, was just five years old. When Emma was ten only three of her mother's six children were living at home. Mrs. Boutchyard decided that the son Alfred, would stay at home and take care of the farm while Emma and her twelve year old sister, Bessie, went to work in the newly opened silk factory across the river in Fredericksburg.

The factory was located on Princess Anne Street on the site of what is now The Colonial Inn. Going to work meant dropping out of school and walking approximately five and a half miles to work each day. The two girls were told to be at their work stations by eight in the morning. This meant leaving home before sun-up for the walk to work from November to March. The day ended at 5 p.m. and in the winter dark was approaching as the trek ended.

Emma was so small when she began working that her floor manager had to supply a wooden box for her to stand on in order to reach her machine. Her tiny hands were cut by the fast moving thread as she guided it onto the spool and consequently her mother received a letter from the factory foreman. It stated that blood from Emma's hand was spoiling some of the silk thread and she would be dismissed unless she reported to work wearing gloves.

Emma said her mother traced the pattern of her hands on an old cotton petticoat, cut out the patterns and stitched together the gloves that allowed Emma to continue working. She stayed at the silk factory for the next five years. She wasn't sure, but she thinks she was paid five dollars a week. At age fifteen she left the silk factory to work in the new pants factory which was offering a beginning salary of eight dollars a week.

By Marion Brooks Robinson



Picture of the Silk Factory today as a Bed and Breakfast Inn.