

University at Buffalo

A Penny for Your Rags: Rag Pickers and the Paper Industry in the Later 19th Century

Corrine Cardinale

History Department Honors Thesis

Dr. Thornton

Spring 2018

The fate of the country...does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot-box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning.

--Henry David Thoreau, 1854

## INTRODUCTION

In 1879, the *New York Herald* published an article by a reporter, who with the help of a local detective that supervised “over the Italians in the precinct,” entered into a rag shop located in the Five Points of New York City. “In the front cellar, by the flickering light of an ordinary stable lantern, he was found surrounded by four or five women and several boys almost buried to the neck in rags and waste paper. All hands were busy sorting out into different heaps the stuff collected during the day.”<sup>1</sup> Men, women and children of all ages contributed to the rag picking and processing industry in which whole families sometimes devoted themselves to in order to earn a living. For example, one female German rag picker was interviewed by the *New York Times* in 1853 and asked questions about her life. She was a rag picker in order to support the grandfather and children of the one room house that cost four dollars a month because her husband was forced out of work due to a broken leg. She sometimes thought she would, “never get through.” On average she made two coins, but with the help of her children she could earn three coins, still not a salary that showcased their hard work.<sup>2</sup> The rag-to-paper industry provided rag pickers with up to ten dollars a day in some cases, and in other less fortunate cases, not more than one dollar.<sup>3</sup> In the nineteenth century, thousands of rag pickers combed the streets for rags to sell, trade and process in order to survive. What they scavenged was a critical input to the growing paper industry.

This paper focuses on the economic structure and labor history of the paper industry from the mid-1800s to the end of the century as it pertains to a key input—rags. It examines the

---

<sup>1</sup> “Rag Pickers: Their Haunts, Habits, Profits and Peculiarities,” *The New York Herald*, September 30, 1879, 4.

<sup>2</sup> “Walks Among New-York Poor,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> “Rag Pickers: Their Haunts, Habits, Profits and Peculiarities.”

transformation of rags into paper and the turnover of rags from a rag picker to the manufacturer, a process that could take a number of forms and involve a variety of workers and rag collectors and middlemen. In addition to these economic factors, this paper also focuses on the social history, specifically the work and lives of rag pickers. This paper analyzes the relationships between rags, paper and rag pickers. My main sources are newspapers and magazines, paper trade journals, books on the manufacturing of paper, and contemporary images. Like the bottle collectors of the twenty-first century, rag pickers were casual laborers that the paper industry relied upon. Based on my research, I argue that rag pickers, living in poverty and working under terrible conditions just to survive, made significant economic contributions to the nineteenth century paper industry.

## **HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Historians have previously examined rag pickers and the paper industry separately, but never within the same context. Rag pickers have never been examined in significant detail before which has allowed parts of their lives to be mysterious. In books and articles rag pickers have been mentioned in passing, but no one has ever compiled the available information about them to give them a fuller identity. Rag pickers were a silenced group because of their socioeconomic status, so there are no journals or diaries to refer to for their personal experiences or daily routines. Outside of Jacob Riis, no one cared enough to interview or talk to rag pickers. This voiceless section of society is hard to speak for, but different aspects of who they were can be pieced together through newspaper articles, contemporary images, and magazines. David Nasaw, Carl Zimring, Seth Rockman, and Judith McGraw have each contributed to the knowledge on rag pickers, junkers, poverty, and the paper industry. While their research helps provide a solid

background on the paper industry and the contributions of rag pickers, this paper attempts to actually connect the two.

Author David Nasaw argues that early twentieth-century American cities played a crucial role in the socialization, growth, and development of children in his book *Children of the City: At Work and at Play*. Nasaw's work describes the conditions and competition of urban poverty and urban work that children and adult rag pickers faced. Immigrant and working class children used their urban environment as a place to learn, work, and play. The streets of American cities gave children autonomy and purchasing power in a consumer driven society. While Nasaw's work focuses on the early twentieth century, it can be assumed that similar practices were taking place in the late nineteenth century. Nasaw's research is based on primary sources including autobiographies, oral histories, autobiographical novels, photographs, newspapers, and illustrations generated by settlement house-workers, educators, juvenile court officials, social workers, sociologists, law enforcement officials, and reformers who documented their observations.<sup>4</sup> Nasaw also examined biographies to provide background information into some of his sources. Through these sources, Nasaw explores adult and child rag pickers and junkers, or people who collected scrap metal, and their work within a city. As adults became caught up in changes caused by industrialization, requiring them to work long hours in terrible conditions, children adapted to their circumstances by working in the streets. According to Nasaw, these children of the city learned how to labor on the streets, earn rewards like money and food, and socialize with members of their direct community and neighboring communities. Nasaw recounts the personal stories of children who worked the streets collecting metal and rags, scavenging for

---

<sup>4</sup> David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985), xii.

old appliances and food that could be reused or sold, and stealing from people and various locations, like junk yards. Both boys and girls would participate in these activities every day in order to earn autonomy and help provide for their household.<sup>5</sup> These activities were intertwined with playing in the streets, and became as common as children playing a game of baseball. Junking, scavenging, and theft were competitive and complex neighborhood businesses. Children created specific language to classify different terms like junk and private property. They also developed strategic plans with one another in order to avoid getting caught and to make the most profit possible.<sup>6</sup> At a young age, these children were able to recognize that if they were not competitive and resourceful, someone else would be, and that meant defying the logic of the streets.<sup>7</sup> Nasaw's research identifies the role and labor of children rag pickers and junkers in urban America during the early twentieth century.

In *Cash For Your Trash: Scrap Recycling in America*, Carl Zimring described a complex system of scrap metal junkers, who sometimes doubled as rag pickers, by categorizing their roles and responsibilities from the colonial times to the present. Zimring created his system of organization specifically for scrap metal junkers of the nineteenth century, but it can be helpful in labeling the different roles of rag pickers who worked for and within the paper industry. (See Table 1) Scrap metal junkers were combinations of collectors, peddlers, dealers, and processors. In some cases, a rag picker could serve in all of these roles. At other times, a rag picker served in just one role. Zimring's classifications help lay out a system of collection that can be used to help organize the structure of rag picking as it pertains to the paper industry. According to his classifications, collectors were, "...individuals who gathered small amounts of light materials by

---

<sup>5</sup> Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play*, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play*, 93-95.

<sup>7</sup> Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play*, 100.

scavenging.” Peddlers “...had some equipment and were typically adult males, as were the individuals at the rest of the levels of the industry. Peddlers bought and sold small amounts of materials, working with sacks, pushcarts, and sometimes horses and buggies.”<sup>8</sup> Dealers typically “...operated from a fixed location, usually a yard or shops where they stored their materials.” Finally, processors “...were dealers who also processed materials and invested in the technology to facilitate processing.”<sup>9</sup> These working definitions can be carried over into the rag picking industry and used to show the true complexity of a rag picker’s work in a competitive, urban environment, but they are too broad to be directly translated to rag picking.

Seth Rockman in *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* examines “low-end” laborers<sup>10</sup>, such as slaves, free blacks, European immigrants, and the native-born and their struggle to earn a wage as seamstresses, stevedores, harbor dredgers, and street cleaners in the antebellum era. Rockman’s work identifies economic struggles within Baltimore in order to give insight on the difficulties of earning a living wage and the exploitation of lower class workers because of their vulnerabilities. Rockman states that the dirty work of manual laborers in Baltimore produced such a low wage that it was impossible to get by on, which is shocking considering the jobs that were being done were critical to public health and proper sanitation.<sup>11</sup> Like rag pickers, the marginalized working population in Baltimore knew their strung together days of work would not lift them out of poverty, but would help them meet their basic needs. Like rag pickers, the groups of people Rockman is discussing are voiceless and have

---

<sup>8</sup> Carl A. Zimring, *Cash for Your Trash: Scrap Recycling in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 52-53.

<sup>9</sup> Zimring, *Cash for Your Trash*, 53.

<sup>10</sup> Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*, 1.

left no paper trail to describe how they felt about their personal situations and working conditions. Still, the examples Rockman presents solidify the idea that many underpaid laborers served as a crucial part of the American economy and helped shape the future of cities by providing entrepreneurs and businesses access to a diverse, exploited labor pool.

*Most Wonderful Machine: Mechanization and Social Change in Berkshire Paper Making, 1801-1885* by Judith McGraw analyzes the gradual technological changes that took place in more rural paper factories, specifically in the Berkshire Massachusetts paper mill, that enhanced mechanization including increased rag processing and paper finishing. The Berkshire Mill was one of the longest standing hand mills that operated without any machinery. In the 1830s, American paper manufacturers installed cylinder and Fourdrinier paper making machines. Thirty years after the debut of mechanized paper making, in 1845, only two hand mills remained, one of which was the Berkshire Mill.<sup>12</sup> Increasing development and commercialization of cities, like New York, increased demand for paper of all different kinds. The heightened demand for paper created a need for faster, more efficient production. Paper manufacturers began seeking out mechanization in order to increase profits and maximize performance in order to meet demand and produce higher quality products.

Between 1807 and 1855, inventors worked tirelessly to increase the size of paper machines to increase the machine's output.<sup>13</sup> Despite being able to mechanize many aspects of the paper making process, there was still a large need for human labor in the mill and an increased need for workers in order to efficiently keep up with the production of the machine.

---

<sup>12</sup> Judith McGraw, *Most Wonderful Machine: Mechanization and Social Change in Berkshire Paper Making, 1801-1885* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 102.

<sup>13</sup> McGraw, *Most Wonderful Machine*, 100.



Machines replaced some human workers by imitating the movement of the workers<sup>14</sup>, but workers were still needed for jobs that required human labor in the rag room, beater room and finishing room. Jobs within the factory that required the most human skill, like measuring and hand ruling, were some of the first jobs to be replaced by machines.<sup>15</sup> As mechanization increased, more pressure was added onto workers in the rag rooms because they needed to process materials more quickly to keep up with the machine production. The reasoning behind the term uneven mechanization was that while machines were consistently improving, there was no way to create machines to do the simpler work, like sorting, that women were regularly trained in.<sup>16</sup>

The work of these historians has laid the foundation for understanding child labor, competition in unskilled work, roles and jobs within the scrap industry, exploitation of impoverished labor pools, and the role technology played in increasing the production process of paper from the middle to late nineteenth century. But what these sources have not examined is the work of rag pickers that provided a steady, consistent flow of resources that kept the ever-growing paper industry afloat. Questions remain, such as who were rag pickers, where did they live and why did they work through such terrible conditions?

## **PAPERMAKING TECHNOLOGY IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

A cotton or linen rag, which was the principal source of papermaking material, was usually a piece of old cloth that was tarnished or destroyed and discarded onto the street rags were scavenged by rag pickers or saved within the home to sell to peddlers, or those who went

---

<sup>14</sup> McGraw, *Most Wonderful Machine*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> McGraw, *Most Wonderful Machine*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> McGraw, *Most Wonderful Machine*, 108.

door to door buying, trading other items like pots and pans, or collecting rags. Cotton rags were in constant demand because of their ability to produce different grades of paper found on the market.<sup>17</sup> Paper mills depended on peddlers because of their efficient collection of rags. The peddler was infamous in their neighborhood because children loved the peddler because they always were willing to trade different articles in exchange for rags. Thrifty housewives loved sorting their rags and keeping their rags in safe keeping for the local peddler.<sup>18</sup> On occasion, rag pickers prepared their rags by cutting them and removing buttons and seams before selling, trading or bargaining them off to a peddler or another type of middleman. Finally, the rag arrived at its final destination: the paper mill. Once at the paper mill, the rag found itself in the hands of a different sort of rag picker, the women in the rag room. The rag room was a special part of the factory where female rag pickers prepare the rag to be treated by chemicals and machines in order to become paper. Rag pickers tirelessly worked the streets as collectors, processors, middlemen, and dealers. Without their work, or even on top of the rags they produced, paper manufacturers had to import rags to keep up with the increasing demand.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the production of paper became more advanced and more efficient. In 1804, the first working Fourdrinier machine was invented by Bryan Donkin and allowed paper to be made at faster speeds and larger quantities because it had a conveyor belt that had a paper web. Five years later, John Dickenson invented the cylinder papermaking machine.<sup>19</sup> Both the Fourdrinier and the cylinder papermaking machine were incorporated into almost all American paper mills by the 1830s.<sup>20</sup> By 1818, the first continuous

---

<sup>17</sup> “The Use of Old Rags,” *Scientific American*, May 25, 1872.

<sup>18</sup> Eva March Tappan, *Makers of Many Things*, (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1916), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 343.

<sup>20</sup> McGraw, *Most Wonderful Machine*, 102.

paper machine was built in America. Not long after, in 1830, bleaching processes were created in order to create white paper from colored rags. It was until the later 1860s that American manufacturers began to use wood pulp to create paper. By 1872 the United States surpassed both Britain and Germany to hold the title of the largest paper producer in the world.<sup>21</sup> The nineteenth century saw significant advancements in papermaking that can be attributed to the increase in communication through the telegram, the creation and expansion of transportation methods, like the railroad, the increasing demand for newspapers and the newspapers' demand for a cheaper and faster product, and the creation of papermaking machinery.<sup>22</sup> The process of papermaking grew exponentially because of these industrial changes. In 1820 the U.S. census noted a mere 169 paper mills compared to 669 paper mills fifty years later.<sup>23</sup>

Once the rags reached the factory, women in the rag room huddled over tables and began sorting the rags based on material. For example, cotton would be placed in one bin, linen in one, and silk in another. (Fig. 1) In some factories, rag girls were required to sort the collection not only by material, but also into different types of grades. Sorting the rags by grade was basically sorting the rags into the types of paper they would eventually create. This was also an important process because sometimes the rags from peddlers, or other local collectors, were not sorted properly because of at home sorting errors.<sup>24</sup>

Cotton rags collected by rag pickers were taken to the cutting room where they were properly cut up into perfect sizes and shredded once seams had been opened and all buttons had been removed.<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 2) Most of the dust fell off of the rags when being sorted and cut up

---

<sup>21</sup> Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History*, 343-344.

<sup>22</sup> Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History*, 247-248.

<sup>23</sup> Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History*, 253.

<sup>24</sup> "What Janet Found," *New York Evangelist*, 57, December 2, 1886.

<sup>25</sup> "Preparing Old Woolen Rags for Shoddy Clothing," *Scientific American*, July 18, 1896.

through a wire rack that covered the table. In order to remove the rest of the dust the rags were inserted into a wire drum that rotated. Sometimes after the rags were removed from the wire drum they would weigh much less than before because the dust was removed.<sup>26</sup> Any dust left was sure to be eliminated in the next room: the washing room.

After being properly cut up, the rag was sent to a washing room where it was boiled in limewater for about a day in order to remove dirt, dust, and color from the rag.<sup>27</sup> Once soaked in limewater, the rag's color was closer to grey, but it still needed to be bleached in order for it to turn a creamy white.<sup>28</sup> Different manufacturers used different bleaching methods. For example, larger paper manufacturers may have exclusively used limewater as a substitute for manganese because it was cheaper in cost, whereas other manufacturers may have used manganese. The bleach removed the color, but left an intolerable smell. In order to remove the smell and make the paper more durable after bleaching, the paper underwent a second washing process.<sup>29</sup>

Once the rag was properly treated, it was dried and then shredded up by a machine with several knives to the point that the rag was turned into a pulpy like substance. In this stage, the manufacturer could add color to the mixture if they wished to produce paper in a color other than white.<sup>30</sup> The pulpy substance was added into a machine that mixed in water, drained water, and then dried the leftover substance until it looked like paper.<sup>31</sup> The substance was run through screens that let out any liquid and fine fibers through while holding back any lumps. The

---

<sup>26</sup> Tappan, *Makers of Many Things*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Alice Cousin, "Adventures of a Rag," *Messenger*, September 1876.

<sup>28</sup> Tappan, *Makers of Many Things*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> "The Manufacture of Paper—Paper Made From Rags," *Scientific American*, September 18, 1869.

<sup>30</sup> Tappan, *Makers of Many Things*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Cousin, "Adventures of a Rag."

screens shaking helped the fibers interlace and strengthen the paper.<sup>32</sup> The dried substance was then run through multiple hot, heavy rollers that removed any remaining water and produced smooth and dry paper.<sup>33</sup> From these hot, heavy rollers the paper was run over steam-heated cylinders to be dried and then between cold iron rollers to make the paper smooth. From there the paper was rounded onto a reel which then trimmed and sized the paper to the desired requirements.<sup>34</sup> (Fig. 3)

Rag pickers were major contributors of rags to paper factories; however, the demand was still so great that the importation of rags was required. Linen rags could be imported tax free in the United States. In 1869, 83,795,717 pounds of rags were imported and valued at \$3,454,577. It is important to note that the U.S. imported linen rags because the U.S. provided little to no linen because cotton was a larger commodity in the U.S. Linen was scarcely mixed in with cotton rags once sorted at the factories so it was not profitable. Imported rags came from many different places such as European countries, like Italy and Germany, and cities, like Alexandria in Egypt, shipped large quantities of linen rags. In these supplier countries, the manufacturers and processors of rag shipments depended on poor and poorly paid workers. For example, in Alexandria, rags were collected and sorted into two grades. The first grade was collected from, “the better class of inhabitants, and washed and bleached clean for packing.” The second grade, “comes from the backs of the peasantry and is of home spun texture; dingy-colored by bad washing and long use.” Alexandria was a major supplier of second grade rags because the Egyptian rag gathers collected and accumulations of rags along the Indian Ocean coast. Linen rags were being used to create the finest types of paper, whereas cotton was necessary to produce

---

<sup>32</sup> Tappan, *Makers of Many Things*, 27-28.

<sup>33</sup> Cousin, “Adventures of a Rag.”

<sup>34</sup> Tappan, *Makers of Many Things*, 28.

paper at a lower cost and more efficiently.<sup>35</sup> Rags from the Mediterranean were usually high quality and were being imported more and more each year in the later nineteenth century. While some were hesitant to import these rags because of rumors that they spread epidemic diseases, a company in Boston claimed that they never experienced any illnesses over the course of fifteen years of importation. In New England, rags could be imported for about one to three cents per pound because housewives would process the rags, which saved the mills time and labor.<sup>36</sup>

The middle of the nineteenth century saw the importation of rags skyrocket. By 1850, rags made up half of the cost of papermaking. From 1845 to 1859, foreign rag imports to New York increased by three and a half times, mostly from Italy. This increase was the cause of a few factors. The importation of wool rags was increasing due to the fact it could replace linen and cotton in the manufacturing of clothing. In 1825, America spent \$79,639 on the importation of rags compared to \$707,011 in 1832, only seven years later. The increasing price of importing rags is because of the rising cost of rags and the scarcity of rags.<sup>37</sup>

Other than linen rags, wool rags were commonly imported into America. The importation of wool rags and half wool rags were imported to create shoddy clothing, not paper. Shoddy clothing was a rough textured material that was easily identified by touch because it felt “rough as a horse-card.” Manufactures used wool rags to keep their prices down. For example, in 1854, the cost of importing all wool rags was seven cents per pound and importing half wool and half cotton rags was three to four cents per pound.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> “The Rag Trade,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 1871.

<sup>36</sup> “Fortunes in Scraps,” *Scientific American*, February 18, 1871, 117.

<sup>37</sup> Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History*, 247.

<sup>38</sup> “Frauds in Woolen Cloth,” *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review*, January 1, 1854, 135.

The importation of rags was common, but it was usually for different materials, like linen, to produce finer paper, and wool, to produce shoddy clothing. The importation of rags was not a large competitor of the work of American rag pickers, but there were times of increased importation. In 1862, the importation of rags increased because of a scarcity of rags coming from the American south at the time. The increased importation meant that the price of newspapers and magazines had to increase in order to make up for the cost.<sup>39</sup> The work of American rag pickers was still necessary to sustain the production of regular grade paper. The U.S. paper manufacturing economy depended on the existence of a huge labor pool of poor and poorly paid workers both at home and abroad to both collect, process, and treat rags.

As the nineteenth century progressed, technology was continually being introduced into the paper manufacturing industry in order to increase efficiency and produce more paper than ever before. The invention of the telegraph allowed merchants to order paper within a few hours and have it on the next steamer almost immediately, which contributed to increasing demands of paper. By the mid-nineteenth century, rags could be turned into paper and sold within twenty-four hours of delivery to the warehouse.<sup>40</sup> For example, Storm's Improved Rag Picker was invented by Joseph Storm with the purpose of being able to cut up rags more safely and faster. The machine had multiple knives within a drum that would be able to shred any and all rags that were inserted into the drum.<sup>41</sup> (Fig. 4) Donkin's Rag Boiler was a spherical machine that spun rags while also emitting pressure steam. While the boiler was revolving, the rags could fall out on their own after the strainers within the boiler removed dirt. This boiler was about eight feet in

---

<sup>39</sup> "Paper, Newspapers and Magazines," *The Knickerbocker*, December 1862, 571.

<sup>40</sup> "Improvements in Paper Making," *The Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, September 1, 1848, 342.

<sup>41</sup> "Improved Rag-Picker," *Scientific American*, March 17, 1860.

diameter and capable of boiling about 2,240 to 2,800 pounds of rags.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 5) Machines like Bertams' Rag Engine and Bentley and Jackson's Rag Engine were used to circulate rags in water while simultaneously being cut up by knives. Once the material was cut up into the correct proportions, the engines were emptied and the rags were drained.<sup>43</sup> (Fig. 6) These machines made the manufacturing process much easier and less time consuming. The detailed process of turning rags into paper experienced change over time due to industrialization and technological advancements, but still required manual, human labor in order to produce the perfect product.

Mechanical rag cutters could not open seams or remove buttons, hooks, and soiled pieces because this required visual and manual skills. They were useful for cutting rags into perfect dimensions because they had one or more moving knives to precisely cut up the rag in one direction and then another. While the mechanical cutters did their job well, it was found as late as 1885 that women in the rag room produced more uniform squares and that manufacturers preferred women to do the job instead of machines.<sup>44</sup> Mechanical rag cutters could not eliminate the importance of human labor within the rag room.

## **RAG WORK**

Picking and sorting rags was not an easy job. Rag picking was an extremely strenuous, difficult, dirty, and tedious job. In 1857, one journal writer remarked, "Everybody...sees the men, women, and children of this wandering class, hook in hand, basket on the arm, and sack over their shoulder, moving through the gutters and searching in the ash-barrels and boxes, and

---

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Watt, *The Art of Paper-Making*, (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1890), 31.

<sup>43</sup> Watt, *The Art of Paper-Making*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> McGraw, *Most Wonderful Machine*, 113.



overhauling garbage vessels to find rags.”<sup>45</sup> Sketches of rag pickers include worn out faces of people hauling large sacks and pulling loaded carts with bent backs, weakened steps, sorrow faces, and indifferent to the rest of the world around them. (Fig. 7) These rag pickers worked tirelessly while the middle and upper class slept in order to clean the streets of any salvageable fiber that they could find.<sup>46</sup>

Rag pickers had to be competitive in order to see a return for their work. If a rag picker did not go out and find rags, someone else would and that would be a violation of the street. There were many rag pickers and families that were willing to put in the work others were not willing to do, and in that case, the others would fall behind. Rags did not yield a large profit, but a few pennies could go a long way.<sup>47</sup>

The work done by rag pickers was also extremely dirty. Burlap bags were dragged into the narrow streets between tenements and families, both adults and children, would pick through the rags right in the middle of the alley. One newspaper wrote, “You’ve seen, no doubt, a miserable wretched girl picking up dirty rags out of the gutter, putting them into a horrid looking bag she has, and carrying them off.”<sup>48</sup> Without proper sanitation laws, the streets were filled with dead animals, trash, and feces from animals.<sup>49</sup> In order to collect rags, rag pickers would have to work through these conditions.

The underpaid work of the rag picker was heavily exploited by capitalist America because rag pickers were in such desperate need of money and to capitalists, the conditions rag pickers worked through were not relevant. The job of rag picking was not a well sought out job.

---

<sup>45</sup> “Rag-Pickers of New York,” *American Psychological Journal*, October 1857.

<sup>46</sup> “Rag-Pickers of New York.”

<sup>47</sup> Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play*, 100.

<sup>48</sup> Cousin, “Adventures of a Rag.”

<sup>49</sup> “Rag and Bone Pickers’ Paradise.” *Friends’ Intelligencer*, July 18, 1857.

As business owners and entrepreneurs, like those at the top of the paper industry, made more money from increased profits and manufacturing processes, the lower class became stuck in a cyclic process of poverty because although they earned enough to scrape by, they never earned enough to get ahead.<sup>50</sup> Immigrants, women and children, who made up the majority of rag pickers, were especially at a disadvantage because their wages were the lowest.<sup>51</sup> Many of the places rag pickers were operating in were known to be run down buildings, neighborhoods and shops where the middle class would not even set foot in.

Conditions in paper factories were as bad as those in the streets because there was a lack of labor laws. Factory conditions for female rag pickers were extremely dangerous due to the lack of a regulation and employee rights in the late nineteenth century. Inside of large paper factories and rag warehouses were machines and both paper and rags, easily flammable items. Female rag pickers and sorters were stuffed in small rooms on top floors of factory buildings and warehouses. These buildings were not designed for workers within to escape if something should happen.

Several stories in the *New York Times* document fires in the rag rooms of major paper factories and the devastating losses suffered, including human life. At a rag warehouse in New York City in 1888, two women were killed and many others were injured when a fire on the fourth floor broke out spontaneously from old, oily rags. In the room where the fire originated and on the floor above, ten women were sorting rags and soon became trapped. On the floor above seven women escaped and three women became trapped after their stairwell filled with

---

<sup>50</sup> “The Poverty Reform Movement,” American Social Reform Movements Reference Library, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/poverty-reform-movement>.

<sup>51</sup> “The Poverty Reform Movement,” American Social Reform Movements Reference Library.

smoke. Out of the three women who tried to use the stairwell, two women made it to a tenement roof next door by going through a window and the third woman was unable to escape through the window due to her clothes being on fire and had to be rescued by firemen. The third woman was terribly burned and passed away at the hospital. Another woman from the floor where the fire originated tried to slide down a rope, but she fell and broke both of her legs and suffered internal damage that eventually was the cause of her death once she was at the hospital.<sup>52</sup> In April of 1888, a fire broke out at Charles Harley's rag picking and sorting establishment that killed one older woman and injured about a dozen men and women. About fifty people, two-thirds of whom were women, were sorting, picking, and packing rags when a fire quickly started and spread throughout the five-story building. Those on the first floor who did not need to use the stairs were able to run into the streets while many on the upper floors huddled onto fire escapes and waited for firemen. Many men and women had no choice but to jump if they did not have a fire escape. One man and one woman jumped out of the window into a net held by firefighters, but the net was not strong enough to fully catch them. Both of them hit the ground and suffered major injuries that required hospitalization.<sup>53</sup> A paper factory and rag sorting building in 1900 was completely destroyed after a fire started in a paper bin. All of the rag pickers and sorters were able to escape unharmed, but the building was a complete loss for the Darmstadt & Scott company; which meant that the employees of the warehouse lost their jobs.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> "Two Women Killed.: A Fatal Fire in a Spring-Street Rag Warehouse," *The New York Times*, May 25, 1888.

<sup>53</sup> "One Killed and Many Hurt.: A Fatal Fire in a Rag-Sorting Establishment," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1888.

<sup>54</sup> "Fire Destroys Warehouse.: Girl Employees Frightened by Flames—Firemen Overcome and an Engine Damaged—Loss, \$25,000," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1900.

Paper factories were unsafe work environments for rag workers. Rags, paper and machinery posed a large fire hazard for workers within the buildings. Paper factories and rag sorting warehouses posed a threat to the safety of men and women rag pickers and sorters. The amount of dust in the buildings also created a safety hazard. One reporter wrote that the women working in the rag room were covered in dust and looked like “dirtheaps” themselves.<sup>55</sup>

## **RAG PICKERS**

Reformers viewed rag pickers from a negative lens that did not consider rag picking as a vital part of the economy, but as dirty and for the poor. Riis, a reformer and popular muckraker, known for his photography and journalism on cities and their populations, documented the lives of rag pickers in New York City through photographs and interviews. After spending time in the tenements that rag picker’s lived in, he wrote, “I found boys who ought to have been at school, picking bones and sorting rags. They said that they slept there, and as the men did, why should they not? It was their home. They were children of the dump, literally.”<sup>56</sup> Riis, being an immigrant himself, had a more sympathetic view of rag pickers than other reformers and politicians of the nineteenth century.

Reformers had various movements within the 1800s, one of them being the poverty reform movement in which reformers wanted to eliminate the social ills of poverty that were increasing in cities.<sup>57</sup> As poverty within cities increased, many politicians and reformers took a hard stance that the poor were being punished for their sinfulness and that government aid would

---

<sup>55</sup> Cousin, “Adventures of a Rag.”

<sup>56</sup> “Jacob Riis: Revealing How the “Other Half Lives,”” Library of Congress Exhibitions, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/riis-and-reform.html>.

<sup>57</sup> “The Poverty Reform Movement,” American Social Reform Movements Reference Library.

only strip them of a sense of pride and independence.<sup>58</sup> Reformers saw rag pickers as sad, dirty, poor, and uneducated. Cultural historians have looked at rag pickers as an impoverished, lower class population, but never as a working class with crucial contributions to different sectors of the economy. The socioeconomic status of rag pickers has always trumped their manual labor, work ethic, and substantial contributions to an entire industry.

Rag pickers were a diverse group of people made up of men, women, and children of different ethnicities. Gender and age did not serve as limitations to rag picking. Women, men and children, of all ages, did the backbreaking work. Some members of a family were all in the rag picking business, and in other cases only a one or a few members worked. The more people within the family that helped collect rags, the more income the family received to pay for rent and the little food and clothing they had.<sup>59</sup>

To reformers, the idea of children searching the dirty streets for rags was wrong. The reality though, was that many children needed to work as rag pickers in order to keep their families afloat. Nasaw's documentation of children rag pickers represents the importance of children helping their families. In 1881, the Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children created a bill that would charge any person responsible for a child working as a rag picker with a misdemeanor.<sup>60</sup> Through Nasaw's research though, we see that laws and regulations did not stop children from rag picking throughout the end of the nineteenth century because their contribution to their families income was crucial to their survival. In 1882, *The Youth's Companion*, a Boston paper, featured the story of a young girl named Phenie, a rag picker, who lived with her Aunt

---

<sup>58</sup> "The Poverty Reform Movement," American Social Reform Movements Reference Library.

<sup>59</sup> Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> "Protecting the Children.: The New Law to be Enforced on Monday—Rag-Picking a Misdemeanor," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1881.

Anna. Phenie was not keen on rag picking and neglected multiple opportunities to pick up rags during the summer. When the tin peddler visited Phenie and Aunt Anna in the fall, Phenie felt extreme guilt for not putting full effort into collecting rags because she and her aunt had less money to purchase things they needed. When her Aunt asked her if she had rags to give to the peddler, she felt “a dreadful sinking of her heart” because the small amount she had collected was only worth a few cents.<sup>61</sup> While Phenie was a fictitious character, her circumstances were not abnormal. Although Phenie is fictional, the story probably held true to emotions that many child rag pickers faced. Phenie’s story demonstrates the importance of children rag picking to help provide for their families. An article in the *New York Times* that ran in 1853 pointed out the maturity of child rag pickers, both mentally and physically. The article also noted that these children should not be punished for rag picking because it is certainly better than begging and earning a few “hard-earned pennies” may be the only way to help their families survive.<sup>62</sup> Children knew how important it was to help provide for their families and often felt the weight of poverty on their shoulders.

In 1886, the *New York Evangelist* wrote a similar story about a young girl named Janet who spent her “narrow life” in a large upper room in a paper factory surrounded by rags. The paper wrote that Janet’s childhood imagination suffered because of her occupation. “To Janet’s childish vision the whole world seemed to be made up of rags, and while her dull work did not allow much scope for imagination, yet she often wove little romances out of slender materials that passed through her fingers.” The child, Janet recognizes that the rags may not be sanitized the way the law required and that the rag room smells of “dampness, dull and disgusting

---

<sup>61</sup> “A Little Rag-Picker,” *The Youth’s Companion*, August 31, 1882.

<sup>62</sup> “Walks Among New-York Poor,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 1853.

squalor.”<sup>63</sup> The story concludes with Janet seeing the silver lining in her work at the rag factory and opening her heart to not only three sisters, but to the other workers in the factory. The story ends with an odd message of how Janet being brought under the wing of the three sisters was an act of the sisters’ charity to God through higher service to little children, like Janet, and the poor and suffering. Janet’s story offers a message that would spark interest in a social reformer. The idea that an individual who spends time with poor, little rag pickers will be serving a high power through service to the poor and suffering.

It is important to view the stories of Phenie and Janet as having a deeper motive than raising awareness about children who are rag workers and pickers. Neither story addresses the issue of child labor; in fact, the articles assume that the labor is necessary in order for both girls to provide for themselves and their families. In Phenie’s case, she faces stress from having neglected her duty to collect rags; whereas, Janet is saved by three sisters who offered their love in the name of higher service to the ministry. Considering the push by social reformers to end childhood rag picking and work, newspapers were not writing stories about the ills of childhood rag picking, but almost viewing it as an option for children to contribute to their family’s income and to be saved.

Rag pickers were harshly criticized by society, especially reformers. Despite mostly negative criticism, urban newspapers occasionally viewed rag pickers positively. The *New York Times* published an article in 1869 that praised rag pickers for their hard work and called their vocation “humble.” In fact, the *New York Times* called out citizens for not giving the rag picker enough respect by writing, “The respectable citizen pays very little attention to the ragpicker. He may have an indefinite idea that this industrious grubber gets a wretched living somehow, and

---

<sup>63</sup> “What Janet Found,” *New York Evangelist*.

stops at night somewhere, but has little notion that he belongs to the business class and conducts his affairs with great regularity, and is not an altogether unworthy member of society.” The article goes on to document the rigorous daily schedule of a rag picker who “sallies forth from his home at 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning, travels far and labors fully among the filth and garbage... A second trip is usually made in the afternoon, but in the afternoon they remain at home to sort over their merchandise.” The article even tried to earn leverage by mentioning that rag pickers attended church, had little internal conflict, and were relatively healthy because they were “early to bed and early to rise.”<sup>64</sup> Another article in the *New York Times* encouraged home owners to be kind to rag pickers because they are in fair business and should be treated the same as any other hard working member of society.<sup>65</sup>

Rag pickers lived off of single digit dollars per week. The money made from rag picking was barely enough to keep a roof over their heads. Rag pickers often lived in areas where rent was cheap and the streets were dirty simply because of the more affordable rent. Places like Rag Pickers’ Paradise and the Five Points area of New York were popular tenement housing for rag pickers. While the housing was as cheap as possible, the living conditions suffered because of this. Sanitation was extremely low and often times those that managed the cleanliness of these neighborhoods thought it better to just evict the occupants because it was considered unsalvageable.

Rag Pickers’ Paradise was located in New York City in the eleventh ward and was home to hundreds of rag and bone men; bone men collected bones rather than rags. Within this block of Paradise, rag pickers, both men and women, would gather, sort, sell, and trade their rags.

---

<sup>64</sup> “Our Ragpickers,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 1869.

<sup>65</sup> “Walks Among New-York Poor.”



About fifty to sixty dogs ran ramped at any point in the day, making it almost impossible to escape being bitten. Outside of the dogs running freely, some dogs were tied to rag carts because they made pulling heavy loads much easier.<sup>66</sup>

This construction of tenements may have been called a Paradise, but it was actually a slum. Rags were hung on lines from narrow balcony to narrow balcony, adults and children were cramped into the narrow alleyways, and the ground encompassing the buildings was littered with garbage, dead animals and waste.<sup>67</sup> (Fig. 8) The *New York Herald* in 1856 wrote, “These premises are all in a very filthy condition, especially the back stoops, which are made a repository of all their rags and bones, and the stench arising from them is intolerable, and is endangering the lives of the citizens in the vicinity. The occupants are constantly in the habit of hanging their filthy lines stretched across the back stoop, and some of them go as far as to hand them upon the gratings of the windows of the adjoining premises.”<sup>68</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, cities had very little sanitation law. In New York City, street cleaning was really just an organization of about 3,000 men and 800 horses that were responsible for sweeping the concrete, removing garbage, disposing of ashes, and removing piles of dirt.<sup>69</sup>

Rag Pickers’ Paradise served as a hub for trade, and with trade came regulation, especially because of the sanitary conditions. Rag pickers brought their rags into the premises, which was a fire hazard in itself because of the vast amount, and then rinsed them with water and allowed the dirty water to run on the floors.<sup>70</sup> The Health Warden Green supervised the Paradise in 1857 by educating rag pickers on cleanliness. Even with the Warden Green’s supervision, the

---

<sup>66</sup> “Rag and Bone Pickers’ Paradise.”

<sup>67</sup> William A. Rogers, “Rag-Pickers’ Court Off Mulberry Street,” 1879.

<sup>68</sup> “Health of the City,” *The New York Herald*, August 7, 1856, 1.

<sup>69</sup> George E. Waring Jr. “New York Street Cleaning,” *The Independent*, January 28, 1897.

<sup>70</sup> “Health of the City.”

entire area was a health hazard. Rag carts left in the alleys were filled with rotting vegetables, damaged meat, stale bread, bones, cheese, and other sundried food that omitted an obnoxious, deathly odor throughout the yard. The stench was said to be almost impossible to endure for a mortal man. Once inside some of the common areas and rooms filled with rag pickers and their collections, there was almost no room to move. Boxes, barrels, bags, pans, tables, chairs, and baskets filled with rags hoarded every inch of space. All day long people with their bags and wagons crowded into the available space and the street to trade, buy, and sell. Although the Paradise under the surveillance of Warden Green was still unfathomable, many said the Warden had significantly improved the sanitary conditions of the pickers and their space. Unfortunately for the pickers that lived and operated in the Paradise, the Warden recommended that the facility be shut down and moved outside of the city because of sanitary conditions and be held to the same rules and regulations decided by the City Inspector's Department as night-scarvengers.<sup>71</sup> Not only were the living conditions of rag pickers unbearable, but they were also in constant jeopardy of being condemned.

Rag pickers, while there are no official documents stating ethnicity, were mostly immigrants of European descent. Depictions of rag pickers in newspapers, sketches, and photos show darker skin, darker facial features, and often exaggerate certain features that are used to represent a certain ethnicity. (Fig. 9) In Figure 7, there is also a noticeable contrast between light and dark. Rag pickers again, were a very poor, labor class that became exploited by many companies. Immigrant populations were more likely to work jobs like rag picking because they worked at a much lower rate than white Americans. With this, they were also more willing to work dirty jobs in order to survive.

---

<sup>71</sup> "Rag and Bone Pickers' Paradise."

Europeans, especially Italians and Germans, were commonly noted as being rag pickers. At one rag storage and sorting building, it was estimated that about thirty Italians were working as rag sorters and binding and unbinding bales of rags. After a fire broke out, the Italian rag pickers were harshly criticized for “scampering” away and not alerting any of the other workers in the warehouse.<sup>72</sup> The law introduced in 1881 by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children that would charge those responsible for child rag pickers with a misdemeanor specifically references Italian immigrants. The society translated their law in Italian and planned to distribute it within Italian neighborhoods before the law was officially put into place.<sup>73</sup> (Fig. 10) Many Germans were also rag pickers. German rag pickers were commended for their frugal lifestyles considering the little money they made.<sup>74</sup> They were usually depicted in sketches as having long beards and scruffy hair. (Fig. 11) Racial profiling, especially among rag pickers was not uncommon. For example, in 1858, two German rag pickers were stopped and searched by precinct police while loading their handcart because the police suspected, “what they were about.”<sup>75</sup> Sketching rag pickers with stereotypical ethnic features helped further stigmatize their profession and lifestyle. European immigrants did not make up the entire rag picker population, but they dominated media sketches due to cultural stigmatization of European immigrants as being poor, dirty, and unrefined.

## CONCLUSION

---

<sup>72</sup> “A Fire Which Created Alarm.: The Building Was Destroyed and Four Women Injured,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 1891.

<sup>73</sup> “Protecting the Children.: The New Law to be Enforced on Monday—Rag-Picking a Misdemeanor,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1881.

<sup>74</sup> “Rag-Pickers of New York.”

<sup>75</sup> “Bedding from Vessels Picked up on the Beach,” *The New York Herald*, July 12, 1858, 5.

Often times, when examining booming industries of the later nineteenth century, historians have focused on the employers, the Rockefeller types, and those at their mercy, the poor factory workers. While there is a lot of discussion on how the quality of the manufacturers determined the quality of life of the worker, there is no scholarly work on how those at the bottom, the rag pickers, benefited those above, the paper manufacturer. Without manual labor from rag pickers in the street, in their tenements, and in the factories themselves, the cost of supplying rags to mills would have been much more expensive. Rag pickers were providing a service to the paper industry by scavenging the streets for rags, saving the paper manufacturer time and money because they accepted a few pennies per pound of rags. The manufacturer did not have to worry about outsourcing the work or hiring someone to perform the work, because rag pickers were doing it on their own accord. Rag pickers in all forms—collectors, peddlers, middlemen—benefitted the efficiency, growth and profits of the paper industry by providing a service to paper manufacturers.

The idea of rag pickers working in order to survive, not because they consider themselves as entrepreneurs, also illuminates the competitive nature of poverty and the dependence on poor people to do the grunt work. The reality is that rag pickers played a vital role in the economy. Factory production of multiple types of paper produced from rags created an entire economy that was dependent on the labor of rag pickers and rag workers. Without their labor both in the streets and within the factories, paper manufacturers would have suffered. As the old papermaking saying goes, “Rags make paper, paper makes money, money makes banks, banks make loans, loans make beggars, beggars make rags.”<sup>76</sup> (Fig. 12) The paper manufacturing industry relied on the cheap, skilled labor provided by rag pickers before and during the rag to paper process.

---

<sup>76</sup> “Rags Make Paper.” *Logan Elm Press*, 1983.

Rag pickers were not just poor, immigrants trying to make a living, or sad children running the streets; rag pickers were the backbone of the paper industry. Rag pickers played multiple roles in the manufacturing of paper, from the street to the factory. They scavenged the streets with wagons to collect rags, bartered and traded their rags in Rag Pickers' Paradise and worked as middlemen for paper factories. Rag pickers, while only pocketing pennies for their work, were supplying a major commodity to the growing industrial economy. In order to understand the manufacturing process of paper and the paper industry of the later nineteenth century, it is essential to recognize the role of rag pickers as main suppliers of a material that was absolutely essential to this sector of the American economy, and the role of rag pickers within the hierarchal system that turned rags into paper.

## FIGURES AND TABLES

	Collectors	Peddlers	Dealers	Processors
Nineteenth Century Scrap Metal Junkers Based on Carl Zimring's Definitions	Individuals, typically males, who gathered small amounts of light materials by scavenging	Individuals, typically adult males, who had some equipment, bought and sold small amounts of materials, working with sacks, pushcarts and sometimes horse and buggies	Individuals, typically adult males, who operated from a fixed location, usually a yard or shop where they stored their materials	Individuals, typically adult males, who were dealers that also processed materials and invested in the technology to facilitate processing
Nineteenth Century Rag Pickers Based on My Research	Individuals, both children and adults, that scavenged the streets for rags with carts, dogs, and sacks	Individuals, both adults and children, that went door to door collecting rags that had been saved in the home	Individuals, typically adults, operating in places like Rag Pickers' Paradise where they would buy, sell and trade	Individuals, both adults and children, that prepared rags in the streets, home, and in factories by removing buttons, removing seams, and cutting rags into appropriate sizes

Table 1. Nineteenth Century Scrap Metal Junker Classifications Adapted to Nineteenth Century Rag Pickers

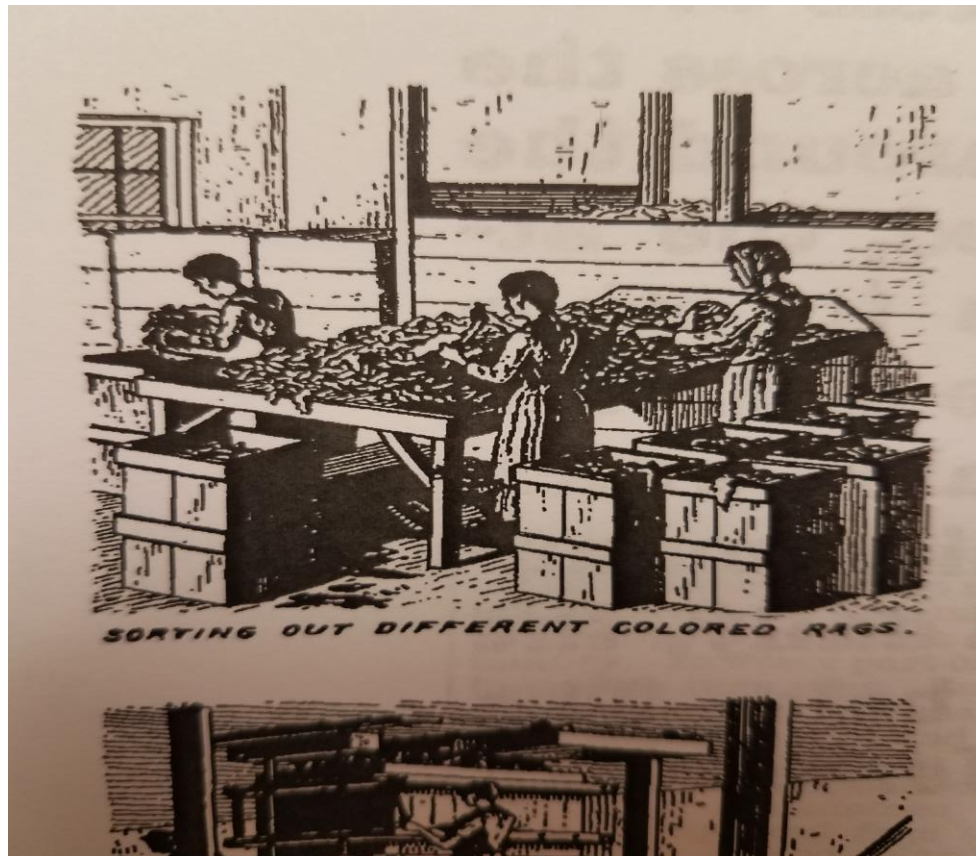


Figure 1. Women Sorting Woolen Rags

This is a drawing of women processing woolen rags by sorting a mixed pile of rags into smaller groups based on color. Woolen rags were not used to produce paper, but this image provides insight into what rag processing within a factory looked like in the nineteenth century because the shoddy trade is, “closely analogous to the paper manufacture.”<sup>77</sup>

“Preparing Old Woolen Rags for Shoddy Clothing,” *Scientific American* LXV, no. 3 (July 18, 1896): 37. American Periodicals.

---

<sup>77</sup> “Shaddy Cloth,” *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review*, May 1, 1859, 628.

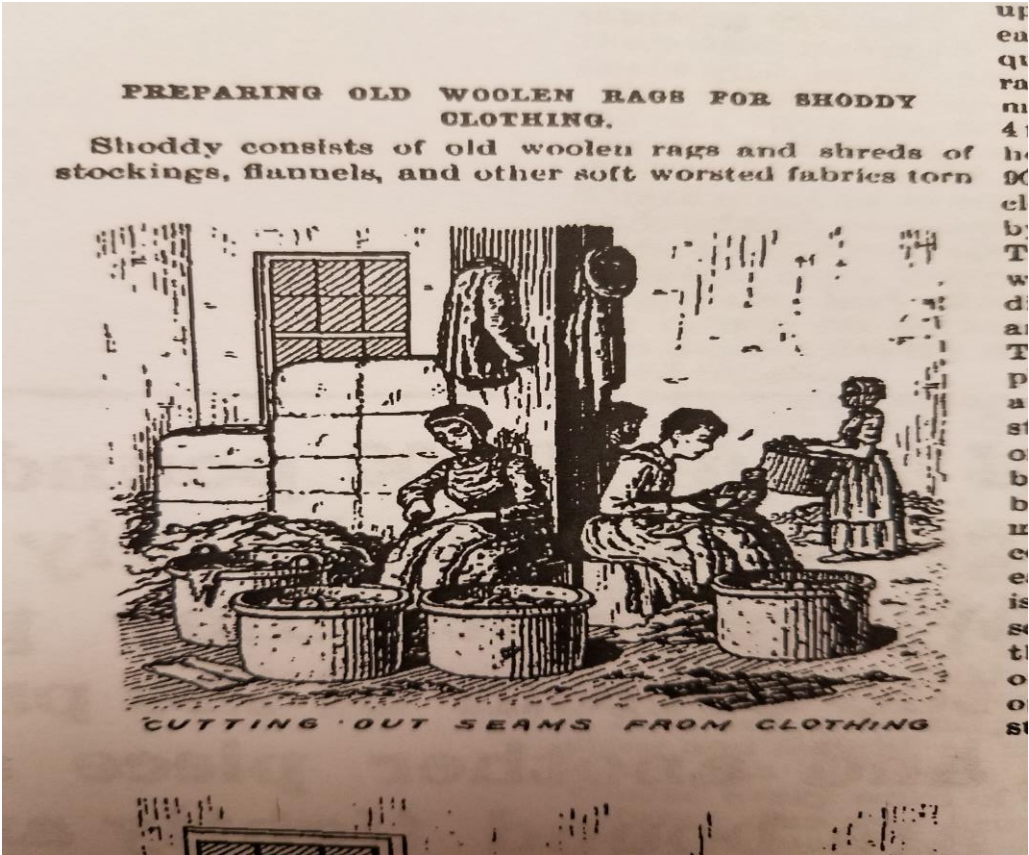


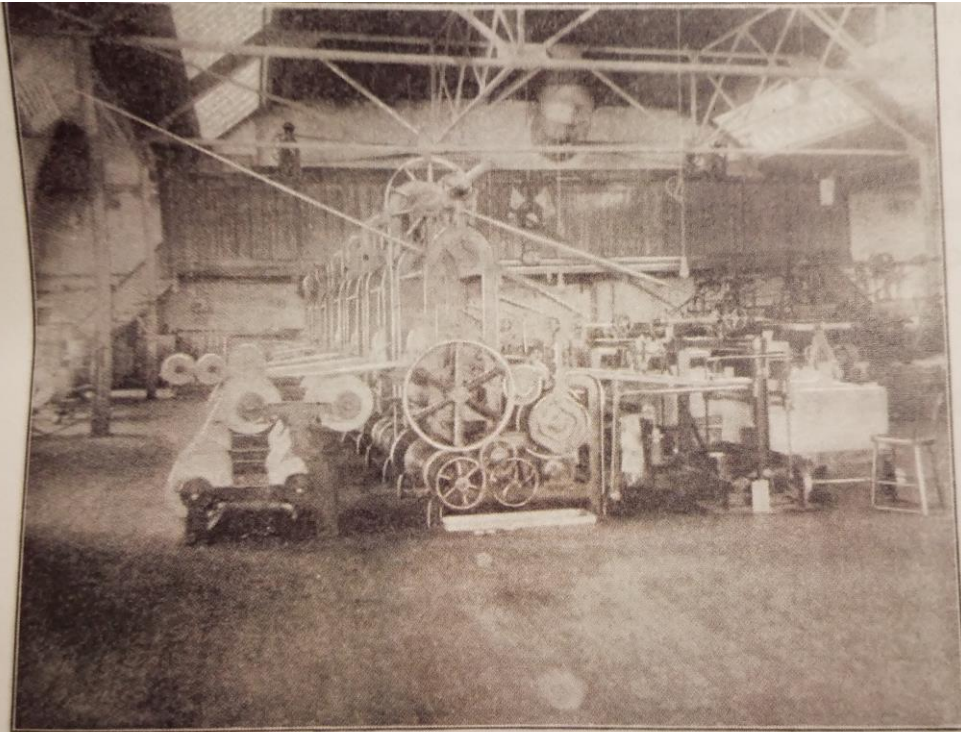
Figure 2. Women Processing Woolen Rags

This is a drawing of women processing woolen rags by cutting seams, detaching buttons and trimming the rags. Woolen rags were not used to produce paper, but this image provides insight into what rag processing within a factory looked like in the nineteenth century because the shoddy trade is, “closely analogous to the paper manufacture.”<sup>78</sup>

“Preparing Old Woolen Rags for Shoddy Clothing,” *Scientific American* LXV, no. 3 (July 18, 1896): 37. American Periodicals.

<sup>78</sup> “Shaddy Cloth,” 628.





*Courtesy S. D. Warren Co.*

**WHERE RAGS BECOME PAPER**

**The vat where the rags cook and turn over, and the big room where the web of finished paper is passed through rollers and cut into a neat pile of trimmed sheets.**

Figure 3. Papermaking Machinery

Tappan, Eva March. *Makers of Many Things*. Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1916.

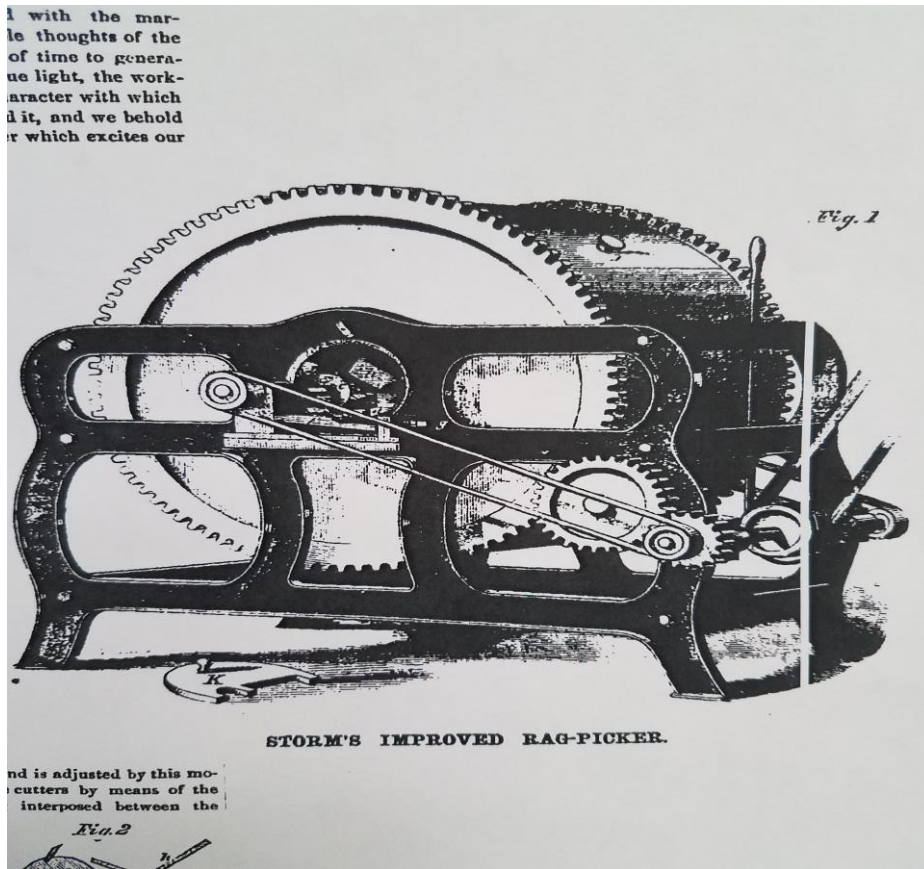


Figure 4. Storm's Improved Rag-Picker

“Improved Rag-Picker,” *Scientific American* II, no. 12 (March 17, 1860): 177. American Periodicals.

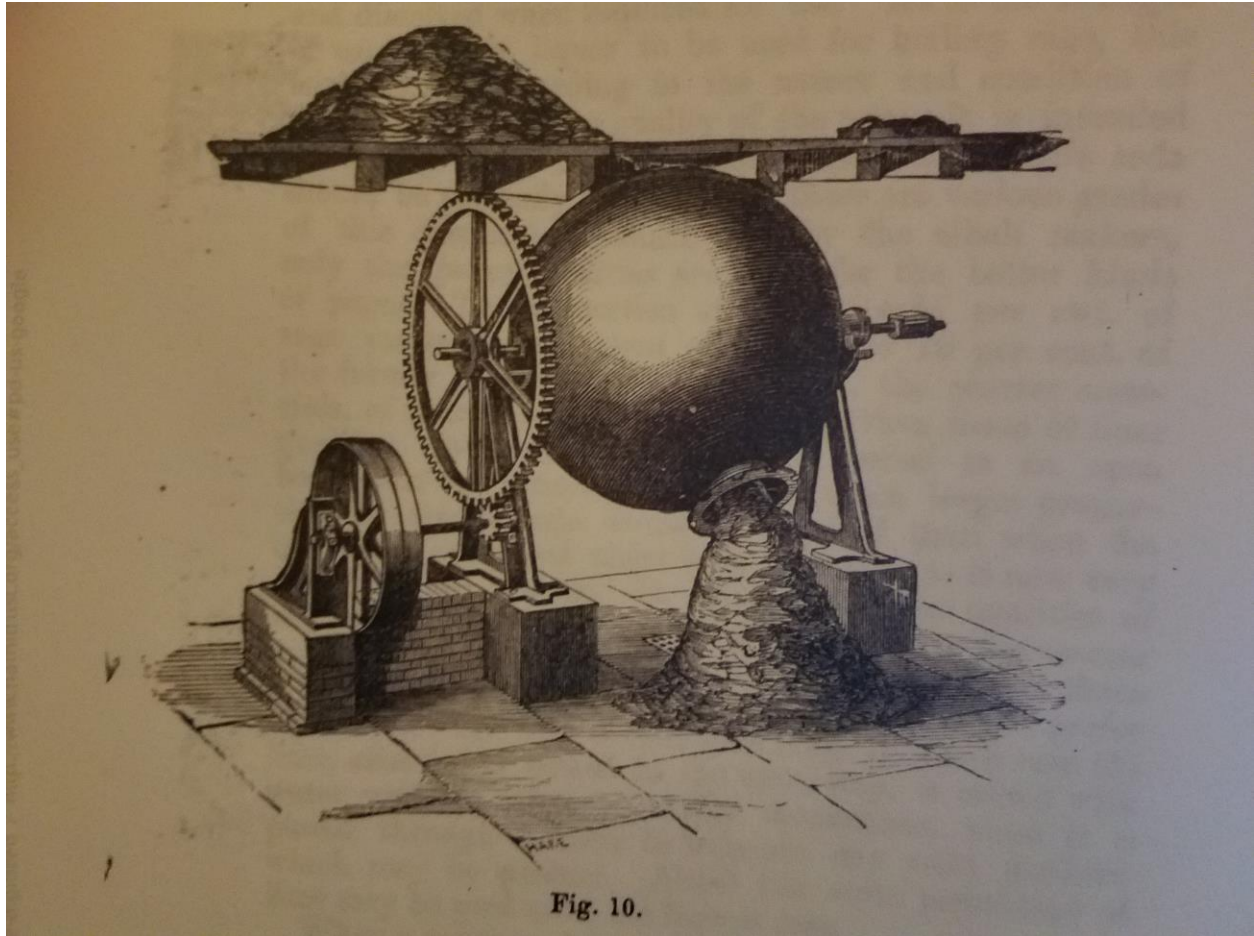


Figure 5. Donkin's Rag Boiler

Watt, Alexander. *The Art of Paper-Making: A Practical Handbook of the Manufacture of Paper from Rags, Esparto, Straw, and Other Fibrous Materials, Including the Manufacture of Pulp from Wood Fibre.* London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1890.



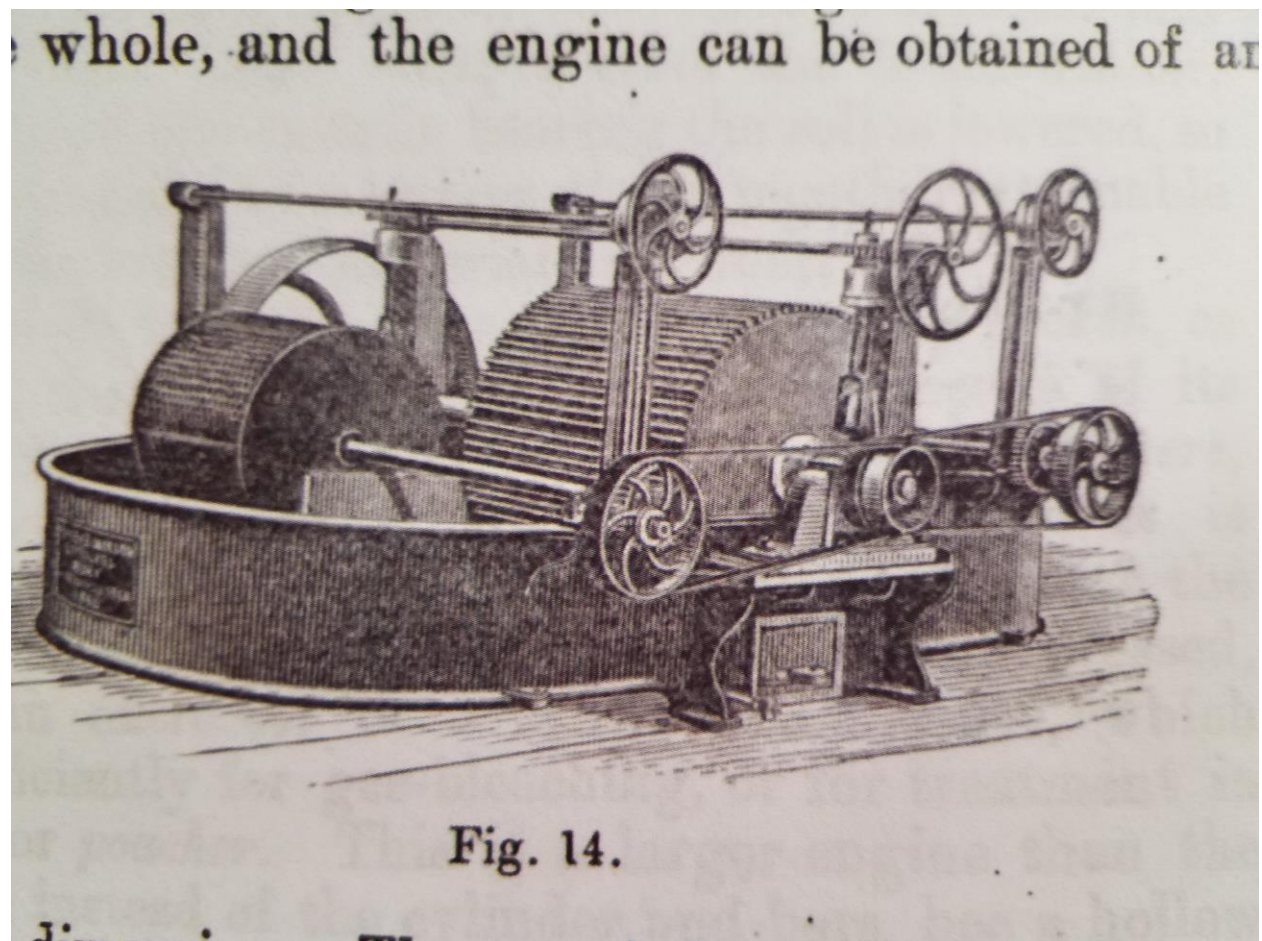


Figure 6. Bertams' Rag Engine

Watt, Alexander. *The Art of Paper-Making: A Practical Handbook of the Manufacture of Paper from Rags, Esparto, Straw, and Other Fibrous Materials, Including the Manufacture of Pulp from Wood Fibre.* London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1890.

too, sympathize with their faces and their vocation. Their backs are bent, their step is stern yet hopeless, and the entire makeup is groveling, care-



THE RAG-PICKER

placed on the sidewalk at short distances apart, in the less cleanly portion of the city, into which the people are required to throw it to be taken by these dog-carts or others.

The dogs thus harnessed guard the cart from all invasion while its master may be up alleys or in basements carrying out buckets of loading for his cart. At the word, or when the man takes hold to go on, the dogs start up and pull with all their might. The other day we saw a boy with his dogs and cart on the rail-track, in one of our streets, and when a car approached the dogs became frightened and started off at their utmost speed, barking fiercely through fear of the

fore they are not in the way of any other class of producers. Such a mass of matter as they thus collect from the streets, if left to rot in the gutters, would prejudice the public health; and the amount of paper which can be made from the rags



RAG AND GARBAGE-CART

Figure 7. Street Rag Pickers

“Rag-Pickers of New York,” *American Psychological Journal*, 26, no. 4 (October 1857): 84.

American Periodicals.



Figure 8. Rag Picker Living Conditions

Art and Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "Tenement Life In New York - Rag-Pickers' Court, Mulberry Street." New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed April 20, 2018. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-2889-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>



Figure 9. Female Rag Picker

Houghton, Arthur Boyd. "In the Rag Trade," *The Graphic* (1870). New York Public Library.





Figure 10. Arrest of a Female Rag Picker

Bush, C.G. "Arrested Rag-Pickers in City Hall Park, New York." *Harper's Weekly* (July 6, 1867): 429.



# EVERY SATURDAY

Journal of  
An Illustrated  
Choice Reading

NEW SERIES, VOL. I. No. 29.]

SATURDAY, JULY 16, 1870.

[PRICE, 10 CENTS.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1870, by Fields, Osgood, and Company, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the District of Massachusetts.



THE RAG-PICKER. (SEE PAGE 451.)

Figure 11. German Rag Picker

Darley, F.O. C. "The Rag Picker," *Every Saturday: An Illustrated Journal of Choice Reading* 1, no. 29 (July 16, 1857): 451.

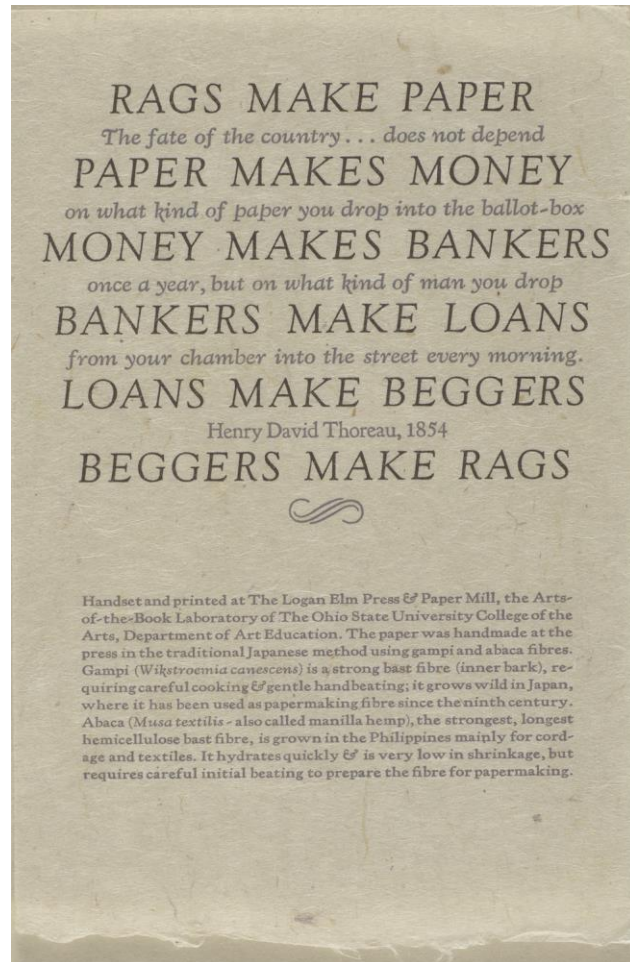


Figure 12. Old Papermaking Expression

“Rags Make Paper.” *Logan Elm Press*. (1983). The Ohio State University Libraries.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources

Kurlansky, Mark. *Paper: Paging Through History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.

Library of Congress. "Jacob Riis: Revealing How the "Other Half Lives." Library of Congress Exhibitions. Accessed March 21, 2018. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/riis-and-reform.html>.

McGraw, Judith A. *Most Wonderful Machine: Mechanization and Social Change in Berkshire Paper Making, 1801-1885*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Nasaw, David. *Children of the City: At Work and at Play*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Rockman, Seth. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

"The Poverty Reform Movement." *American Social Reform Movements Reference Library*. Encyclopedia.com. Accessed March 21, 2018. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/poverty-reform-movement>

Zimring, Carl A. *Cash For Your Trash: Scrap Recycling in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Primary Sources

"A Fire Which Created Alarm.: The Building Was Destroyed and Four Women Injured." *The New York Times*. (October 13, 1891). ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

"A Little Rag-Picker." *The Youth's Companion* 55, no. 35 (August 31, 1882): 355. American Periodicals.

“Bedding from Vessels Picked up on the Beach.” *The New York Herald*, July 12, 1858.

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

Cousin, Alice. “Adventures of a Rag.” *Messenger* 45, no. 37 (September 1876): 2.

American Periodicals.

“Fire Destroys Warehouse.: Girl Employees Frightened by Flames—Firemen Overcome and an Engine Damaged—Loss, \$25,000.” *The New York Times*, January 13, 1900. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

“Fortunes in Scraps.” *Scientific American* XXIV, no. 8 (February 18, 1871): 117. American Periodicals.

“Frauds in Woolen Cloth.” *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review* 30, no.1 (January 1, 1854): 135. American Periodicals.

“Health of the City.” *The New York Herald*, August 7, 1856. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

“Improvements in Paper Making.” *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review* 19, no. 3 (September 1, 1848): 342. American Periodicals.

“Improved Rag-Picker.” *Scientific American* II, no. 12 (March 17, 1860): 177. American Periodicals.

“One Killed and Many Hurt.: A Fatal Fire in a Rag-Sorting Establishment.” *The New York Times*. (April 20, 1888). ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

“Our Ragpickers.” *The New York Times*, November 21, 1869.

“Paper, Newspapers and Magazines.” *The Knickerbocker* 60, no. 6 (December 1862): 571. American Periodicals.

“Preparing Old Woolen Rags for Shoddy Clothing.” *Scientific American* LXXV, no. 3

(July 18, 1896): 37. American Periodicals.

“Protecting the Children.: The New Law to be Enforced on Monday—Rag-Picking a Misdemeanor.” *The New York Times*. (June 19, 1881). ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

“Rag and Bone Pickers’ Paradise.” *Friends’ Intelligencer* 14, no. 18 (July 1857): 285.  
American Periodicals.

“Rags Make Paper.” *Logan Elm Press*. (1983). Ohio State University Libraries.

“Rag Pickers: Their Haunts, Habits, Profits and Peculiarities.” *The New York Herald*,  
September 30, 1879. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

“Rag-Pickers of New York,” *American Psychological Journal*, 26, no. 4 (October 1857): 84.  
American Periodicals.

Rogers, William A. “Rag-Pickers’ Court Off Mulberry Street.” 1879.

“Shaddy Cloth.” *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review* 40, no. V (May 1, 1859):  
628. American Periodicals.

Tappan, Eva March. *Makers of Many Things*. Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1916.

“The Manufacture of Paper—Paper Made From Rags.” *Scientific American* XXL, no. 12  
(September 18, 1869): 178. American Periodicals.

“The Rag Trade.” *The New York Times*, July 30, 1871. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

“The Uses of Old Rags.” *Scientific American* XXVI, no. 22 (May 25, 1872): 348.  
American Periodicals.

“Two Women Killed.: A Fatal Fire in a Spring-Street Rag Warehouse,” *The New York Times*. (May 25, 1888). ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

“Walks Among New-York Poor,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 1853.

Waring, George E. Jr. “New York Street Cleaning.” *The Independent* 49, no. 2513

(January 28, 1897): 1. American Periodicals.

Watt, Alexander. *The Art of Paper-Making: A Practical Handbook of the Manufacture of Paper from Rags, Esparto, Straw, and Other Fibrous Materials, Including the Manufacture of Pulp from Wood Fibre.* London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1890.

“What Janet Found.” *New York Evangelist*, 57, no. 48 (December 2, 1886): 6. American Periodicals.