The Craft Apprentice: From Franklin to the Machine Age in America


The apprentice system in colonial America began as a way for young men to learn valuable trade skills from experienced artisans and mechanics and soon flourished into a fascinating and essential social institution. Benjamin Franklin got his start in life as an apprentice, as did Mark Twain, Horace Greeley, William Dean Howells, William Lloyd Garrison, and many other famous Americans. But the Industrial Revolution brought with it radical changes in the lives of craft apprentices. In this book, W. J. Rorabaugh has woven an intriguing collection of case histories, gleaned from numerous letters, diaries, and memoirs, into a narrative that examines the varied experiences of individual apprentices and documents the massive changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution.

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