

NYLHA's Youth Advisory Board



Since January, NYLHA's Youth Advisory Board (Front row, l.-r.: Courtney Francis, Joe Lopez, Prudence Katze, Darrah Sipe, Kimberly Schiller; Back Row, l.-r.: Art Fleischner, NYLHA Board Member and Membership Committee—and William Lehman) has been meeting on a monthly basis. Their mission is to connect younger generations to labor history. "Learning labor history to change the world" is their motto.

On May 13, the YAB's Film Committee—Will Lehman, Kimberly Schiller, Prudence Katze and Joe Lopez—organized a successful evening featuring nine short films and discussion with

two of the filmmakers as part of the Workers Unite Film Festival. Courtney Francis introduced the program and the films, all of which focused on current organizing struggles. "The Hand That Feeds," about organizing efforts of employees at Hot and Crusty, was the hit of the evening and led to a lively exchange with the filmmaker.

Currently, the YAB is producing a poster, which will soon be available for distribution so that young people can connect to the group.

Labor History Connections

SUNDAY, SEPT. 22 – SUNDAY, OCT. 20, 2013

On Equal Terms

Clemente Soto Velez Center (csvcenter.org)

On New York City's Lower East Side

Come and bring your classes.

Second floor gallery (accessible only by stairs)

Open daily from 3:30-7 p.m.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 26, 6-8 P.M.

Opening Reception honoring New York City tradeswomen

On Equal Terms: An exhibit about an unfinished piece of civil rights history—in a nutshell: Had federal affirmative action guidelines issued in 1978 been enforced, women would now hold 25 percent of skilled trades jobs in construction. Instead, their percentage has been held at 2.5 percent since

the early '80s. That discrepancy drives the work of journalist/author/poet and journeywoman electrician Susan Eisenberg (Resident Artist/Scholar, Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University).

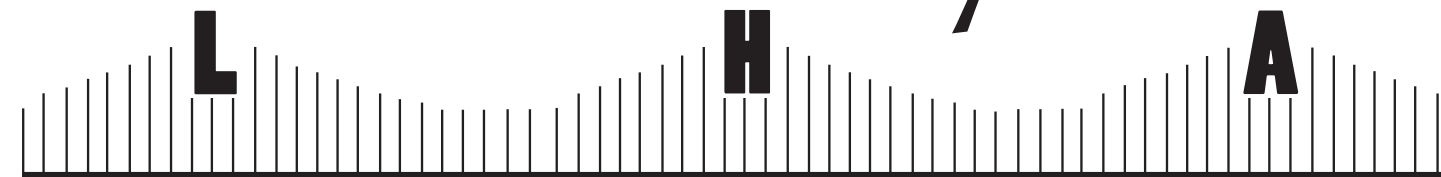
MINER'S MUSEUM - CAPE BRETON ISLAND

Situated on one of the most picturesque coasts of Cape Breton Island, on a 15-acre site filled with wild roses and grasses, the Museum pays tribute to the region's long and rich history of coal mining. It is home to profound stories of miners and their families, and the resource that helped build a nation. The Museum is also home to the famous choir of miners – The Men of the Deeps.

<http://www.minersmuseum.com>

Submitted by NYLHA member Professor Tami J. Friedman, Brock University, Ontario Canada.

Work History News



New York Labor History Association, Inc.

A Bridge Between Past and Present

Volume 30 No 2 Summer | Fall 2013

Henry Foner's Book Bash a Smash: Bound Volume Unearths Hidden Treasures

NYLHA President Irwin Yellowitz welcomed a full house to Henry Foner's Book Party at the Tamiment Library, NYU.

The event, co-sponsored by Tamiment, the NYLHA, and LaborArts, took place on February 27, just a month shy of Foner's 94th birthday. Longevity has its privileges, and the author's decades of activism unfolded throughout the program in verse and song. A life-long habit of penning poems and songs was finally collected between covers. The book, *Songs and Poems—(For Better or Verse)*—dedicated to "the next generation of activists," was made possible by LaborArts with support from Rachel Bernstein, Evelyn Jones Rich, Esther Cohen, and Donald Rubin.

Foner, a prominent, radical labor leader, served from 1961 to 1988 as president of the Joint Board of Fur, Leather and Machine Workers Unions. But, as Pete Seeger wrote, "Henry is one of the best organizers I ever knew—but I didn't know till now what a good verse writer he was." As an activist at City College, Foner collaborated with

fellow students in the American Student Union, and mounted annual shows that took aim at ivory-tower intellectuals. A duet, "Confidentially, We Think," (1939) sung by the author and Sonia Bernhardt Bloom, captured the flavor of these original shows, such as "Pens and Pencils."

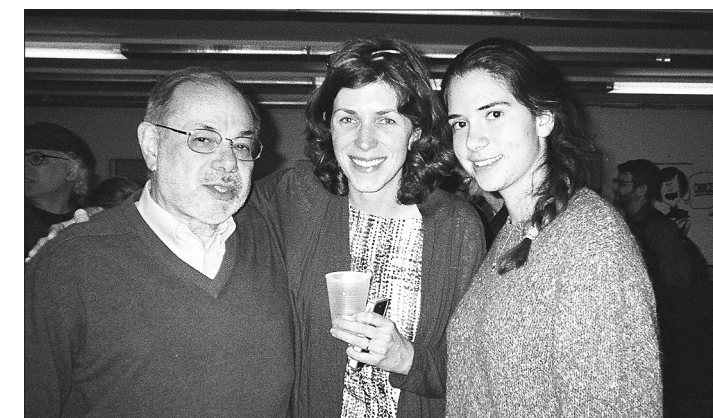
Foner penned lines to describe his experiences in the U.S. Army, and recited his "Thoughts on a Division Headquarters Clean-Up Detail" (1943)...

"I'd envisioned battles raging / With myself in them engaging – / half a hundred Nazis caging – / Caging Nazis by the score. / But instead, I cornered dust heaps – / Dirty dust heaps by the score. / Only this and nothing more."

Evie Rich, with her own stories of activism—fighting against American-style apartheid and for social justice—noted that Foner regaled the LaborArts staff at their meetings with stories of yesteryear. "He has, through his life of activism, become a legend," she said. Rich called on the audience to share their own stories of activism, and brought forth



Henry Foner and Philoine Fried.



(bottom, l to r) Leigh Benin, Keri Myers and Sonia Bloom.

anecdotes about the Free Speech Movement at Ohio State; Manhattan College; and Robert Moses foiled at Cooper Square; military recruiters foiled at

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Film Festival Celebrates Workers

By Rachel Bernstein

The second annual Workers Unite! Film Festival brought together an amazing collection of student and professional films from around the world, with panels of activists and filmmakers enlivening most of the 25 programs held over the course of the week-long event.

Many months of searching out great new worker/labor films and going through the archives of historical labor films went into the selection of the films, which cover many of the themes that affect working people today as they struggle to make ends meet, or to find a new job, during this very difficult economy.

There were films on being fifty and out of work, and films about immigrants seeking to find a decent job in their new home— anxious to make a contribution to their new communities. Films from nearby—NYC-focused *Cafe Wars* and *Judith: Portrait of a Street Vendor*, and films from afar—*Iron Slaves*, about the men who tear apart decommissioned oil tankers with their hands and simple tools in the deserts of Pakistan.

International spotlight

There was a film about the African American men who fought for dignity on the job and in their union as steelworkers—one of the most dangerous jobs in America.

Another film shines the light on mothers in Bangladesh who must put their children with their own parents due to 15 hour days in the sewing factories of high fashion sweatshops. These are the same women who survived a recent “Triangle Shirtwaist” style fire in Bangladesh, where over 111 young women perished because the exit doors to the factory were padlocked shut, and who are still reeling from the heartbreaking collapse of a garment factory there in April that claimed 1127 lives. One hundred years plus after the deaths at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in NYC and we are still fighting the exact same battles.

Joe and Harry Gantz’ film *American Winter* tells the personal stories of families who’ve “fallen” out of the middle class during the Great Recession—putting a very expressive face on the failures of our

current economic policies as we shred the social safety net, support ever increasing income inequality, and allow jobs to continue to dwindle as profits continue to soar. This screening featured co-director Harry Gantz, Working Families Party director Dan Cantor, and director of the Coalition for the Homeless NYC Mary Brosnahan, speaking about how to channel the outrage generated by the film. The new LaborArts online exhibit *Defending the Social Safety Net* is featured on the festival website www.laborarts.org as an accompanying presentation.

This year the global reach of the festival went beyond programming, as it joined with twenty other worker/labor film festivals around the world – known as The Global Labor Film and Video Festival—on May 16th—to screen films on labor issues in China, Pakistan, Mexico, Slovakia and from all over the U.S.

Action-oriented festival

Many of the speakers during the week are currently engaged in worker struggles—as documentarians, and also as activists. The combination of the filmmakers (many of them fully engaged activists themselves) and the activists on the panels provided a terrific context for the audience, which could emerge from the theatre with both a better understanding of our places in the global fight for labor rights and the motivation to get out there and participate in whatever actions are possible to make these rights a reality.

The Workers Unite! Film Festival took place at the esteemed venue for independent films, Cinema Village, on East 12th Street off University Place, May 10 – May 16, and at the Brecht Forum on May 17th.



Festival founder and director Andrew Tilson did a tremendous job, and was particularly enthusiastic about the cooperation provided by the NYLHA.

The challenge for this incredible festival is audience—there are simply too many things to do in May in New York City.

This year’s audience was definitely larger than last—the inaugural year—but the Labor History Association might try in spring 2014 to help bring important labor films to an even larger group of viewers.

Work History News

New York Labor History Association, Inc.

Work History News is published two times per year to keep NYLHA’s members informed of labor history events, activities and tours.

For more information and brochures contact:
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Triangle Commemoration

On June 3, an explosion and fire swept through parts of a poultry processing plant in northeast China, killing at least 120 people—one of the country’s worst factory disasters in years. Many of the workers who died had been hindered from leaving the factory, according to news reports, because the exits had been blocked or inadequate.

This tragedy followed that of the Bangladesh factory collapse on April 24—the world’s deadliest garment-industry accident—that killed 1,127 people. Since 2005, at least 1,800 Bangladesh garment-industry workers have been killed in fires or building collapses—in the \$20 billion industry that pays workers as little as \$38 a month.

News stories such as these have a particular resonance for the students of Kimberly Schiller, who teaches eighth grade English in the Huntington (Long Island) schools, and incorporates the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire as an important component of her curriculum. “Even though the Triangle Fire happened 102 years ago, it is unfortunately still a reality for many within our country and around the world,” she said. “My students are both horrified and fascinated by the fire, its causes, and the reforms that are still being fought for today.”

Hidden history

Schiller first learned about the Triangle Fire as a junior at Adelphi University, in a class on women’s history. “I didn’t understand why I hadn’t learned about this tragedy earlier, and I felt compelled to learn more,” she said. She decided to teach about the tragedy in her classroom because she didn’t want it to go by unnoticed. “I incorporated the Triangle Fire into my English curriculum through the novel *Ashes of Roses*, by Mary Jane Auch, and primary sources from the ILR Cornell website.

“Teaching about the Triangle Fire is very important to me,” she said. “I feel a connection to the women and men who perished in the fire and want to spread their stories. I hope that by making others



aware of this tragedy, it will help to prevent other tragedies from happening in the future.” Ms. Schiller leads field trips each year to the Tenement Museum on New York City’s Lower East Side, and also takes a contingent of students to each year’s memorial commemoration ceremony for the Triangle Fire. Her students take part in the National History Day competitive events by submitting special projects, such as creating replicas of the building which housed the Triangle Shirtwaist Company on Greene Street, and preparing for this by doing copious amounts of research.

This year, twenty students accompanied Ms. Schiller to the memorial ceremony on March 20 and shared their thoughts about the meaning of the Triangle Fire. “I loved the opportunity to write about something that Ms. Schiller made so interesting,” said Emanuel Anastos. “I was happy to be chosen to go and experience something that is real and meaningful for labor in New York City.”

Emma Pipolo noted that, “reading the book, *Ashes of Roses*, and learning about all of the horrible things that these factory girls had to go through, made me realize that if people long ago hadn’t been inspired to work on this issue, then the horrible working conditions would have continued. This holds great significance for me because I feel it is a shame that innocent people had to suffer and be exploited in order for change to occur.”

Anna Ardell recently moved back from Sweden and relates to the experiences of the immigrant garment workers. “I know what it’s like to be new,” she said. “I was inspired to work on this because many people lost their lives. They weren’t warned and didn’t have a chance to survive.”

Tragedy resonates

Kayla Ryan was inspired to work on her project for two reasons—amazement that she had never learned about it before; and after learning about it, wanting to teach other people about it. “The fire connects with the world we live in today. Because the Triangle factory owners didn’t want pieces of fabric to be stolen, they disregarded the safety hazards and so many innocent young people lost their lives.”

“It is extremely important to me that we never forget what happened to those girls,” said Delaney English, “and also, that we stop these kinds of things from happening again today. While learning about the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, we also learned about places such as Bangladesh, where a fire happened not too long ago, and a building collapsed a couple of weeks after we visited the site of the Triangle Fire. If we don’t start taking responsibility for these terrible working conditions, nothing is going to change.”

Visit the Huntington students’ website at <http://36870672.nhd.weebly.com/>.

To be continued...

NYLHA's Night at the Movies

By Bette Craig

Maynard Seider's *Farewell to Factory Towns?*, using North Adams, Massachusetts as an example of the deindustrialization plaguing our country, was the centerpiece of a film program co-sponsored by the New York Labor History Association on May 14th as part of the Workers Unite Film Festival.

The Festival, an annual event organized by Andrew Tilson, sold more than 650 tickets for a wealth of programs running from May 10 through May 17 at Cinema Village at 12th Street and University in Manhattan.

Farewell to Factory Towns?, which details the development of Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMoca) within the same buildings that housed the long-closed Sprague Electric—and before that water-powered textile mills—argues that art alone cannot provide enough economic development to provide salvation for our withering towns and cities.



Still from *Farewell to Factory Towns?*, by Maynard Seider.

First-time filmmaker Maynard Seider is a sociologist recently retired from teaching at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams and has been immersed for many years in studying the social history of North Adams and its wider implications.

Three short films completed the May 14th program:

World's Largest Unemployment Line by Phil Hopper about that 14 minutes on



Still from *Never got a Dime*, by Shelby Hadden.

March 6, 2012, when thousands of New Yorkers lined up on Broadway in a show of solidarity with the legions of unemployed;

Never Got a Dime by Shelby Hadden about Lily Ledbetter's role in fighting for pay equity; and *Tax the Rich: An Animated Fairy Tale* by Mike Konopacki about how we arrived at this time of widening economic inequality.

Priests of Our Democracy

(Continued from page 8)

the question and answer session, Heins and Schrecker both cautioned that the prognosis for academic freedom is guarded, especially with the rise of more sweeping national security measures following 9/11.

One of the vulnerabilities of academic freedom, they pointed out, stems from Justice Frankfurter's argument in a 1957 case (*Sweezy v. New Hampshire*) that academic freedom belongs to the university. Frankfurter didn't distinguish between institutional interests and

those of the faculty, leaving college teachers exposed again as many universities experience corporatization and expanding administrative authority.

Henry Foner

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to Columbia University, where NYLHA member Ted Casselman "fell under the sway of Eric Foner's brother Tom, who made me the radical I am today." Michael Zweig described the SDS—linked campaign against

the draft from the campus at the University of Michigan.

Foner resumed the program with his ever-popular "Song of the Pennies" (1946), and concluded with his heartfelt tribute to Keri Amanda Myers—his personal archivist

and loyal friend, reciting "The Ode That's Owed to Keri" (2004). As Henry prepared to inscribe his books, all present felt part of a remarkable evening—and witness to the indisputable fact that Foner devoted his life to making a better life for every one.

Labor Studies in the Classroom

Irwin Yellowitz

On May 18, the New York Labor History Association and the Association of Teachers of Social Studies/United Federation of Teachers sponsored a day-long conference on Labor Studies in the Classroom. The event, co-sponsored by the Frances Perkins Forum, the Jewish Labor Committee/Educators Chapter, the Italian American Heritage Committee/UFT and the Women's Rights Committee/UFT, was held at the UFT headquarters in downtown Manhattan. The many classroom teachers who attended received a certificate that they could submit to their schools for professional development credit.

Captivating topics

Historian Richard Greenwald, co-editor of the recently published *Labor Rising: the Past and Future of Working People in America*, presented a keynote address based on his current research, to be completed in the fall, on the rapid transformation of American

workers into independent contractors, who will compete with one another as small businesses or find approaches to solidarity. His remarks stimulated a lively, and often impassioned, discussion, which was only brought to a close because it was time to begin the workshops. The morning sessions included one on the tragic Triangle Fire of 1911 presented by education professor Rob Linne and textile artist Pamela Koehler of Adelphi University, and classroom teachers Kimberly Schiller from the Huntington Schools and Caroline Roswell-Gruss from PS 229Q in New York City. The presentations focused on how to use material about the Fire in the classroom. The second workshop was on the Bread and Roses Strike of 1912 and was conducted by Robert Forrant of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, who captivated his audience with his detailed understanding of the strike, passionate presentation, and fascinating historic photographs, and who generously offered to

share educational materials with his audience.

Participants enjoyed a light lunch and then joined in with George Altomare of the UFT, and the Vice President of the New York Labor History Association, in a set of labor songs. George has sung at many labor events, and as was true here his aim is to involve the audience. Once again he succeeded.

Rich resources

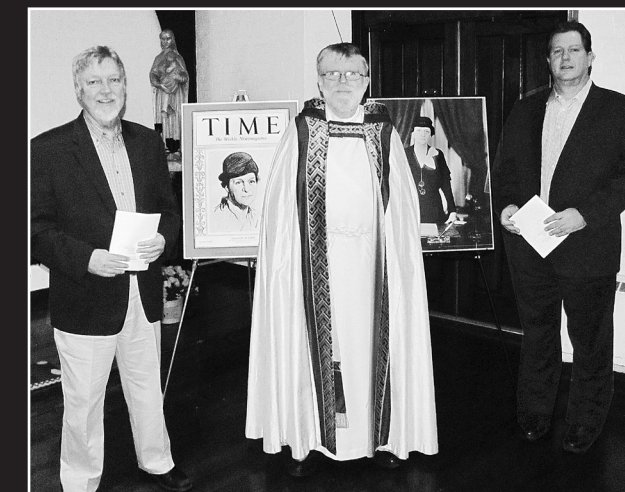
There were a second set of workshops in the afternoon. The first was on Low Wage Workers in New York: Maggie Gray, a political scientist at Adelphi University, and Irv Miljoner, Director of the US Dept. of Labor on Long Island, which is responsible for enforcing wage and hour laws, presented a harrowing picture of the exploitation of agricultural and restaurant workers in New York State. The second was conducted by Paul Cole, Executive Director of the American Labor Studies Center. He led participants through the rich resources of this Internet

site, which offer teachers many opportunities for integrating labor studies into the curriculum. The site is also a rich one for any person interested in labor history.

The conference concluded with a plenary session led by the co-coordinators of the event: George Altomare, the UFT's Director of Worker Education, and Leigh Benin, who taught social studies in NYC high schools and education at Adelphi University, and is also a member of the Executive Board of the New York Labor History Association. The aim of the concluding session was to encourage participants to continue supporting the integration of labor studies into K-12 classrooms. The conference was an exciting first step toward advancing this goal. Participants exchanged ideas and contact information.

Our thanks go to George and Leigh who worked as co-coordinators to turn ideas into reality. We also thank the other members of the planning committee: Joe Doyle, Rob Linne and Abbe Nosoff.

Frances Perkins Day



NYLHA member Donn Mitchell (left) delivered the address at the Frances Perkins Day mass May 13 at the Episcopal parish where she worshipped during her years as U.S. Secretary of Labor. He is shown here with the Rev. Charles Hoffacker of the Church of St. Monica & St. James, Capitol Hill, who celebrated the mass, and Carl A. Fillichio, Senior Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Labor, who brought greetings from the Labor Department. Also present was Perkins' biographer

Kirsten Downey (not shown). The Episcopal Church has added Perkins to its calendar of saints and holy men and women. A lay associate of All Saints' Sisters of the Poor, Perkins lifted millions of Americans out of poverty by bringing the Social Security system to fruition. Prayers at the mass included a series of petitions which ended with the phrase: "Gracious God, help us build a gracious society." Donn's spiritual biography of Perkins appears on-line at www.AnglicanExaminer.com.

Activists in the activism gallery – “I’ve Got Something to Say”

The new venue for the Clara Lemlich Awards honoring unsung activists was particularly appropriate this year—the Puffin Gallery for Social Activism at the Museum of the City of New York, and so was one of the presenters—Clara Lemlich’s daughter Rita Margules (herself a 2011 honoree).

Each of the honorees on April 3, 2013 indeed had much to say about their long lives as activists who have devoted their lives to the greater good, in the footsteps of those who sparked so many reforms in the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire over one hundred years ago.

Molly Klopot (93) arrived at the museum directly from a protest across town against drones. She talked about her days in Detroit where, as a teen during the depression she joined mass demonstrations for food and jobs, and later became the first woman to be a union rep in an assembly plant. Her efforts on behalf of unmarried pregnant teens are only a small part of her decades of advocacy for the vulnerable in New York City’s public school system, and her work in the peace movement.

Natalie Gordon was part of the team which created the first Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) program at the ILGWU’s Penn South in the early 1960s, pioneering a model that brings together a social worker, housing management, and resident senior citizens to produce a wide array of programs and support services for those over 60. One legacy—thirty four NORC programs in NYC today help the elderly remain in their homes. A self-described “old lefty,” she was active in Women’s Strike for Peace and a host of other progressive activities.

Lois Spier Gray, one of the first women field examiners for the newly created NLRB, and director of the first extension office of Cornell’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations, is a pioneer labor activist, labor educator and labor scholar. She has



Clara Lemlich awards honorees, April 3, 2013.



improved training for industry and union teachers, established the Institute for Women and Work, the Latino Leadership Center, international worker exchange, off-campus credit and certificate courses, and programs for employment and workplace systems as part of her leadership of the Cornell extension program, and published important work on labor market trends, women and minorities in the labor market, labor management relations and the governance of unions.

Glendora Folsom Buell has advocated for the rights of the community to use the

community television promised by public access TV for many decades, in court and in neighborhoods. She has created many thousands of hours of her own community show, and inspired her community of neighbors and viewers to find the power within themselves to tell their own stories, on her program or on their own, and to fight against injustice.

Julia Rosario Jorge has been a labor activist for nearly half a century, first with SEIU Local 1199, and beginning in 1969 with the Social Service Employees Union Local 371, DC 37 AFSCME. She served on the NY State Workers’ Compensation Board 1989–1999, the first (and to date the only) member of Latin descent to serve on the 13 member board. Active in the DC 37 Retiree Association, she represents the group in many city and state organizations, including the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, the Alliance of Retired Americans, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and works tirelessly on many fronts to defend the rights of working people.

Marian Thom is an early Chinatown union activist, a bilingual paraprofessional
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Gary Schoicher

Women Firefighters – a Long Story

By Rachel Bernstein

A new virtual (online) exhibit tells the story of women in the FDNY on the LaborArts web museum. Prior to 1977 there was a quota for women firefighters in the New York City Fire Department—zero. You might have won an Olympic gold medal, been named the “strongest woman in the world” or held the world-record in the marathon—if you had been born female, you could not even apply to take a test to become a New York City firefighter.

This changed when Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was finally applied to bar sex discrimination in hiring by city and state governments in 1972. But the change did not happen smoothly. First the FDNY allowed women to take the test, but developed a physical test “substantially different” than that given previously—according to Alfred Heil, Assistant Director of Personnel in charge of the test: “In my 20 years’ experience, this was the most arduous test we’ve ever given... for anything.”

Challenging bias

Not one of the 90 women applicants passed the physical portion of the test, despite their sterling performance on the written test. One of the applicants, Brenda Berkman,



filed a class-action sex discrimination complaint. Five years of expert testimony and inflammatory press coverage later, Federal District Judge Charles P. Sifton ruled that the 1977 test did not measure the abilities truly needed for the job of firefighting and the FDNY must develop a new test.

Forty-two women passed the new test, and in September 1982 entered the NYC Fire Academy, becoming the first women firefighters in the history of the FDNY.

They would need their strength for decades to come, for meeting the challenges of the job itself was only a start. Women

firefighters more than women in many other blue-collar jobs, remained a flashpoint for larger social conflicts over the role of women for decades to come.

“Women Firefighters in New York City, 1982 – 2012,” developed by LaborArts in collaboration with Brenda Berkman and using the Women Firefighters collection at the Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University and other resources, uses photographs, news clips and cartoons to tell this story.

Take a look ! www.laborarts.org

“I’ve Got Something to Say”

(Continued from page 6)

(para) who worked on reading and other programs in NYC public schools in Chinatown for 36 years, and helped organize the paras into the United Federation of Teachers. Her influence in her community, in the schools and in the labor movement is widely felt; she helped found the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, was active in the Coalition of Labor Union Women, worked closely with families of her middle school charges, served the local Boy Scout troop for

41 years, and was on the board of directors of Confucius Plaza housing for 15 years.

Presentations of awards were made by Rita Margules, daughter of Clara Lemlich; actor and writer Vinie Burrows, garment worker organizer Kathy Andrade, immigrant rights activist May Chen, filmmaker Victoria Kereszi and Rubin Museum founder Donald Rubin.

The program was enhanced by comments from Perry and Gladys Rosenstein (founders of the Puffin Foundation), a song from NYLHA’s own Henry Foner, and the display

of the Triangle Memorial Quilt created by Robin Berson.

The Lemlich Awards were organized by Evelyn Jones Rich, Sherry Kane, Rose Imperato, Henry Foner, Esther Cohen and Rachel Bernstein, of LaborArts and the Remember the Triangle Coalition.

The organizers welcome nominations for 2014 honorees—contact us at info@laborarts.org or 212 998-2637.

Find video and more about these and previous Lemlich honorees at LaborArts.org.

Labor History Matters: LAWCHA Comes to New York City

A rich smorgasbord of panels, plenary sessions, films, receptions and exhibits provided an overflowing array of events for participants to choose from at the annual conference of the Labor and Working-Class History Association. This year's theme was "Rights, Solidarity, Justice: Working People Organizing, Past and Present." The conference took place from June 5-8 at CUNY's Center for Worker Education and Brooklyn College Graduate Center for Worker Education in Lower Manhattan.

Members of the New York Labor History Association made an outsize contribution to the program. NYLHA members Immanuel Ness, Priscilla Murolo, and Daniel Walkowitz served on the program committee and NYLHA board member Stephen Leberstein also contributed to the planning.

Amazing array of research

Alice Kessler Harris, former LAWCHA president (R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of History, Columbia University) chaired the opening plenary, with speakers Professor Frances Fox Piven (CUNY), Professor Richard Wolff (University of MA and New School), Bill Fletcher, Jr. (Institute for Policy Studies), and Saket Soni (Executive Director, National Guestworker Alliance and New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice). "It was great to chair a plenary at which four well known speakers each described a different approach to moving forward in the current difficult circumstances," she said.

Board member Robert Parmet (York College, CUNY) served on the panel chaired by NYLHA member Joshua Freeman

(Queens College, CUNY) on "Corruption, Organized Crime and the Labor Movement in Mid-Twentieth Century America," and commented on two papers: David Witwer's (Penn State) "New York Garment Workers' Union: A Study in the Complexities of Union Corruption," and Roger Horowitz's (Hagley Museum and Library) "Kosher Food and the Mob: The Kashrus Supervisors Union and Labor Politics in Postwar New York City."

"Both papers were of exceptionally high quality, revealing much about the industries discussed and the corrupt state of labor-management relations within them," Parmet said. He noted that each of the other three panels he attended were all of exceptionally high quality. "The papers presented reflected amazing research and commitment, and were what labor history should be all about. They were strong evidence that the study of working people and their unions is alive and well."

Newly-elected NYLHA board member Miriam Frank (NYU) was on one of two panels at the conference to focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues in labor history. "I enjoyed preparing with my co-panelists, the historian Christa Orth and film director Jim Hubbard, and we had a lively discussion about our presentations." Frank's analysis of successes and problems of unionization at five AIDS clinics during the late 1980s and early 1990s coordinated well with an excerpt from Hubbard's 2012 documentary film about ACT UP, "United in Anger," and Orth's stories of organizing

and then keeping the union at her clinic, the Seattle Northwest AIDS Foundation.

Upstate NYLHA member Linda Donahue (Cornell ILR/Rochester) participated on a panel with NYLHA friend Bess Watts (Monroe Community College) and others, to discuss "Gaining Pride at Work: Queer Union Experiences."

Critical questions

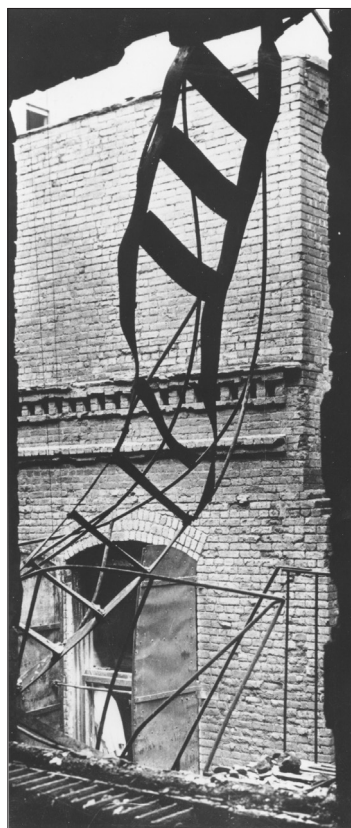
NYLHA member Chris Rhomberg (Fordham University) took part in a panel on "Union Organizing: Tactics and Strategy in the Contemporary Era," which was chaired by incoming LAWCHA President Nancy MacLean (Duke University). Rhomberg's paper examined "The De-Democratization of Workplace Governance: The Crisis of the Right to Strike." Professor Rhomberg chaired and provided comments for a second panel on "Fighting for Work: The Closure of a Factory in Southern France." He also helped organize a free guided tour for conference participants of the new Puffin Gallery exhibit on activist New York at the Museum of the City of New York. (<http://www.mcny.org/exhibitions/current/Activist-New-York.html>).

NYLHA board member Rachel Bernstein (LaborArts) took part in a roundtable about labor history in New York City—"Many Pasts, Many Publics"—and joined Sarah Henry (MCNY), Donna Thompson Ray (American Social History Project), Annie Pollard (Tenement Museum) Pennee Bender (ASHP) and Steve Levine (LaGuardia Community College and Archives) in answering the critical question posed by Bender, as moderator: How do

institutions present the history of BOTH working class experiences and organized labor in New York City?

Bernstein described the vision of Debra Bernhardt, who headed the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU, and started the *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives* project. Bernstein worked with Bernhardt on this project, which intertwined both histories in a documentation project that collected union records, oral histories—and resulted in both an exhibit and book by the same name.

The Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition put together a panel on memory in service of



activism, and Bernstein chimed in regarding the Clara Lemlich awards, and on responses to the commemoration activities. For Bernstein, the stand out

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Sarah Henry, Curating Activism: Museums and Labor History

Irwin Yellowitz

Those members who signed up for the program, Curating Activism: Museums and Labor History, on March 18, did not expect they would have to brave a significant snowfall to reach the Museum of the City of New York. Yet everyone had registered for the event, and they enjoyed a talk by Sarah Henry, the Chief Curator of the Museum, and a tour of the exhibit, *Activist New York*, in the new Puffin Foundation Gallery, led by Dr. Henry.

Labor on display

Sarah Henry began her talk by commenting on labor history in museums across the country. Some few are specifically focused on labor subjects, such as the Botto House in Paterson, NJ, or the Eugene V. Debs house and museum in Terre Haute, Indiana. However, many other museums display labor history material as part of a larger format. These include museums that concentrate on a company or an

industry. The relative importance and quality of labor exhibits varies widely in these settings. General purpose museums, such as the Museum of the City of New York, also have occasional labor history exhibits.

Dr. Henry then discussed the *Activist New York* exhibit at the Museum. It is unusual in that it will be long term. The exhibit covers several areas of activism, including anti-slavery, women's suffrage and civil rights, but it has a significant component on labor history. Dr. Henry then led the group through the exhibit explaining how content and form have to be harmonized to create a product that provides accurate information, but also can attract a public whose knowledge of the subject is limited.

Balancing content and form

Although the exhibit took advantage of modern methods of presentation, including interactive displays, it had to maintain accuracy as the major criterion. Attractiveness is important, but had to support



the content. Although this would be true of any exhibit, it is particularly challenging in preparing a labor history exhibit. Creating this balance of content and form is the responsibility of the curator.

The exhibit will not be static, and Dr. Henry asked the group to suggest new movements that should be included, and to send images to her that might illustrate these activities. If you would like

to contact Sarah Henry, you may do so at shenry@mcny.org, or by phone at 212-534-1672, ext. 3319.

Several participants were so impressed with the exhibit that they arranged to return for a more leisurely look the following week—hopefully on a sunny day. The exhibit is available on a long term basis during regular museum hours.

Labor History Matters

(Continued from page 4) comment, from a couple of twenty year olds, was how impressed they were that Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg was booed during the commemoration—the mayor—yes—honoring the celebration—but a mayor with anti-worker policies.

NYLHA board member Melvyn Dubofsky (Professor Emeritus, SUNY Binghamton)

took part in what IWW member Diane Krauthamer described as "a really thrilling panel" on the "Paterson Silk Worker Militancy and the Implications of 100 Years of Labor Radicalism." He also lent his expertise to discussions at the sessions he attended.

NYLHA member Michael Hirsch (New Politics) chaired and commented on papers at the panel on "Karl Marx, Trade

Unionist and Revolutionary." Hirsch also contributed to the LAWCHA meeting with the inspired suggestion that every LAWCHA member in the New York City area should become a member of the New York Labor History Association. NYLHA members, too numerous to include their contributions, took part. The following is a roll call of some of these members:

Kevyn Baar, Lois Gray, Ruth Milkman, Richard Greenwald, Jean Weisman, Michael Zweig, Timothy Sheard, Dan Katz, Joseph McCartin, Jeffrey Eichler, and Jay Schaffner.

In addition, the conference brought an outstanding array of world-class historians to New York City. For more information, see the conference website at: lawcha.org/annualconference.

Priests of Our Democracy, Marjorie Heins Book Talk at the Tamiment Library, February 12, 2013

By Stephen Leberstein

The NY Labor History Association together with the Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor History Archives sponsored a book talk by Marjorie Heins, whose study of academic freedom and Constitutional law, *Priests of Our Democracy: the Supreme Court, Academic Freedom, and the anti-Communist Purge* had just been published.

Introduced by historian Ellen Schrecker, author of *No Ivory Tower* among others, the February 12th event drew an overflow audience. Among those were relatives of some of the teachers who lost their jobs here in NYC in the 1940s and '50s, as well as scholars researching related topics at the Tamiment's Frederick Ewen Center on Academic Freedom.

A constitutional lawyer, Heins centered much of her well researched and cogently argued study on anti-Communist purges that took place here in New York. In introducing her book, she placed the purges in national historical context, noting that events in New York played an outsized role in developing the techniques for silencing left-wing teachers at all levels everywhere.

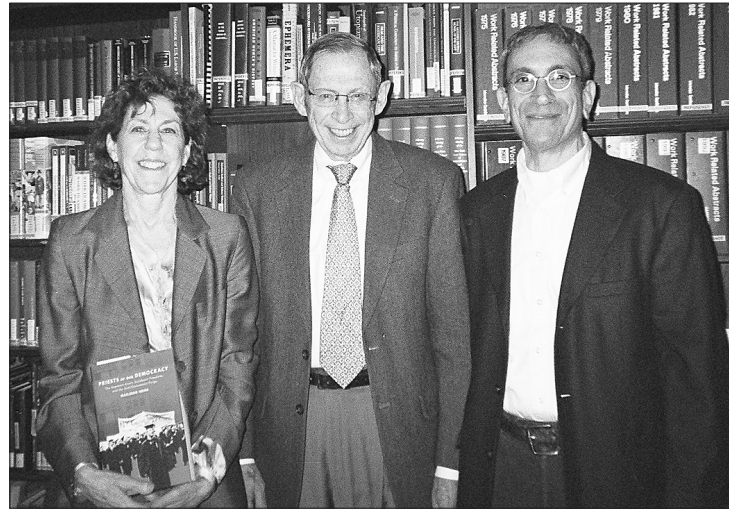
Cold War in classrooms

One of the most effective of these attacks was that of the infamous Rapp Coudert Committee, a New York State Legislative investigating body. Authorized by the State Legislature in 1940, the committee was originally created to investigate school financing and administration. But a

sub-committee to investigate subversion in New York City schools was added later, chaired by State Senator Frederick Coudert, Jr. The Coudert committee began by subpoenaing the membership lists of the New York Teachers Union Local 5 and the New York College Teachers Union, Local 537.

The investigators started with Brooklyn and City Colleges, summoning activists in the union who had been identified as members of the Communist Party. By the end of 1941, over 50 City College teachers and staff members had lost their jobs in the purge. The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union that June put an end to the Committee's purge.

But its impact lived on, for it had invented some of the techniques and trained some of the personnel who carried on the attack on teachers in the Cold War era. In particular, the Committee forced the Board of Higher Education to adopt a series of policy resolutions forcing its employees to testify before legislative committees on penalty of dismissal, and ultimately proscribing members of the party from employment in its four colleges. At the height of the Cold War purges in 1949, the state adopted the Feinberg Law, requiring an anti-Communist oath as a condition for employment. That, and a provision of the NYC Charter (§903) dating from an earlier corruption investigation, allowed education authorities to summarily dismiss any teacher who refused to sign the oath or to testify. In the Cold War



(l to r) Marjorie Heins, NYLHA President Irwin Yellowwitz and Board member Stephen Leberstein.

period, an additional 67 teachers at the four municipal colleges lost their jobs, as well as over 300 city schoolteachers. Other states adopted similar laws, but few created as many victims as New York did.

Due process violated

Heins explained how the Supreme Court dealt with cases arising out of the anti-Communist purges. Until Earl Warren's appointment as Chief Justice, the Court's rulings offered little protection for victims of the purges. In 1952, for example, the Court upheld the dismissal of science teacher Irving Adler under the Feinberg Law. In many cases, the Court held that public employers had the right to set conditions for employment, echoing an 1892 ruling by Oliver Wendell Holmes that a public employee "may have a constitutional right to talk politics, but he has no constitutional right to be a policeman."

Not until 1956 did the Court change course, she explained,

when it ruled in the case of Brooklyn College professor Harry Slochower that his summary dismissal under the City Charter §903 violated due process protections. Although academic freedom figured as a "concern" of the Court in that and other rulings, it never acquired the specific protection of the First Amendment.

The turning point came in 1967, when the Court finally struck down the Feinberg Law, overturning the earlier Adler decision. The administration at SUNY Buffalo required an anti-Communist oath as a condition for employment. Harry Keyishian, a young English professor who as a student had witnessed some of his teachers at Queens College fired, refused to sign.

A lively discussion followed, with questions about the right-wing teachers who had cooperated with investigators, for example, or the anti-Semitism of New York purges, or some points about Constitutional law. In

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A Power Among Them

Karen Pastorello. *A Power Among Them: Bessie Abramowitz Hillman and the Making of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. xx + 273 pp. ISBN 978-0-252-03230-1 (cloth)

This is a book that, at first glance, is easy to dismiss. Given the overflow of articles and books on gender and working-class feminism, a biography of a female labor leader—and a seemingly secondary one at that—seems, at best, like a minor addition to the literature. Karen Pastorello's biography of Bessie Abramowitz Hillman, however, is well worth historians' attention. In this finely textured study of Hillman's life Pastorello succeeds in bringing her subject from under the shadow of her husband, prominent labor leader Sidney Hillman. It places Bessie Hillman at the center of the history of industrial unionism beginning with the Progressive Era and extending to the emergence of second wave feminism. While not breaking any new conceptual ground, this story of Hillman's long and productive life offers a window through which to view the significance of gender on the changing shape and character of the labor movement over much of the last century.

Pastorello traces the source of Hillman's devotion to workplace justice to her Russian Jewish childhood in the late nineteenth century *shtetl*. The practice of arranged marriage and women's inequality clashed with new and often radical ideas leading Hillman and other women of her generation to leave the shelter of the close-knit community and seek a new life abroad. Inspired by socialist and reform political currents swirling around her in

the bustling industrial Chicago of 1905, Hillman immediately became an important force in the founding of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA). Although her experiences as a newly-arrived immigrant were not unique Hillman's life following her marriage to Sidney Hillman was unusual: where most working-class women relinquished their union activism and, often paid employment outside the home, Hillman persisted, often on an unpaid basis. Despite the occasional stress on family life she employed a trusted housekeeper to handle many of the domestic chores and help look after her children while she was away.

Most of the book focuses on Hillman's public, not private, life. We learn that Hillman's work for the ACWA was far ranging and included developing the union's education programs and organizing workers in "runaway" shops in small town Pennsylvania and elsewhere. She was especially effective at winning over reluctant African American workers. Although passed over for acknowledgement in these decades of the 1930s and 1940s Hillman understood the importance of her contribution. "I was Bessie Abramowitz before he was Sidney Hillman," she commented late in life (193-94).

Drawing on the work of Dorothy Sue Cobble and others, Pastorello argues that Hillman embraced a "social feminist ideology." This was a practical feminism that sought worker solidarity but drew as well on the Progressive-inspired notion that women workers needed protective legislation to address the worst excesses of industrialism. It was an

unwieldy, sometimes contradictory, ideology in which women labor leaders sought cross-class alliances with upper-class reformers such as Jane Addams (an early mentor of sorts for Hillman), but also defended the labor movement as a crucial institution for working-class Americans. When a small but influential group of upper class and professional women organized in the National Women's Party began to promote the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1920s Hillman and her union allies demurred, arguing that it would deliver a hollow equality by robbing women workers of their hard-fought protective laws. They supported alternatives to the ERA including the "Women's Status Bill" in the post-World War II period.

Hillman's life became most compelling in the decades following her husband's sudden death in 1946. As a tribute to Sidney Hillman, and an acknowledgement of Bessie Hillman's work, the union's executive board appointed her one of the ACWA's twenty-two vice presidents. They never imagined she would take the active role she did in running the union: besides travelling extensively overseas to represent the ACWA (Pastorello notes that union leaders did this as a way to get her away from the headquarters) Hillman renewed her professional and personal friendships with a wide array of women union leaders and other liberal activists. Together they helped establish union women's place in second-wave feminism in such areas as equal pay and pregnancy leave. Hillman served on John Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women and other influential panels.

She underwent a transformation of sorts in these years as she reversed her opposition to separate organizations for women within the labor movement. Hillman did so on the grounds that male union hostility to women's rights was more intractable than she first thought. Still, she remained opposed to the ERA until her death in 1970. This occurred four years before the founding of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, an organization she inspired in no small measure.

This is a carefully researched and engaging biography that makes vivid the many changes affecting union women in the twentieth century. Pastorello stumbles, however, in explaining the grounds on which union feminists continued to back protectionism through much of the 1960s even as laws such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 were making them invalid. She informs us that they did not, unlike their middle-class reform allies, do so in defense of maternalism, or in the belief that women's frailty marked them as deserving of special treatment. In a somewhat muddled passage Pastorello explains that union women acted "on the basis of women's entitlement.... They sought empowerment as citizens rather than charity as refugees" (60-61). Union women may have understood these protective measures as hard-won gains but this intriguing suggestion that they served as an underpinning to citizenship claims deserves considerable more explanation than it receives in this otherwise compelling book.

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