



Looking Back Moving Forward

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SUMMER 2013

A newsletter of the Michigan Labor History Society

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TRAGEDY *at the* ITALIAN HALL Michigan's Copper Country Remembers the 1913 Strike

BY DAVE ELSILA

For hundreds of families in Michigan's Copper Country, Christmas 1913 was a time of tragedy, not of joy. Instead of celebrating, families mourned. Black ribbons replaced Christmas trees and wreaths. Horse-drawn funeral hearses moved slowly down the streets of Calumet that in other years might have seen Santa Claus waving from a reindeer-drawn sleigh.

The tragedy occurred on Christmas Eve at Calumet's Italian Hall during a party for the children of copper miners who had been on strike for nearly five months after management had refused to discuss wages, hours, and working conditions. The Western Federation of Miners organized the party, complete with gifts, candy, music, and an appearance by Santa Claus. But when someone entered the second-story hall and yelled "fire," children headed for the exit, trying to escape.

More than seventy perished, their bodies jammed against each other on the steep staircase, unable to breathe. There was no fire, and for the past century suspicion has reigned that the false cry of alarm came from an agent of the mine owners who had become increasingly frustrated by the strikers' resolve.

I knew a little about the copper mines and Italian Hall history from spending my childhood summer vacations near Calumet where my maternal grandparents, both immigrants from Finland, farmed on mine-owned land. But it wasn't until many years later, in the 1970s, that I learned of a personal family connection to the Christmas Eve tragedy.

My uncle, Ted Taipalus, was visiting in Detroit back then, and I had put on the phonograph a recording of Woody

Right: The Italian Hall, where the 1913 disaster occurred, stood on Seventh St. in Calumet. It was demolished in the 1980s. Below: Only the arched doorway remains at this memorial site developed with the help of the Steelworkers and Operating Engineers.

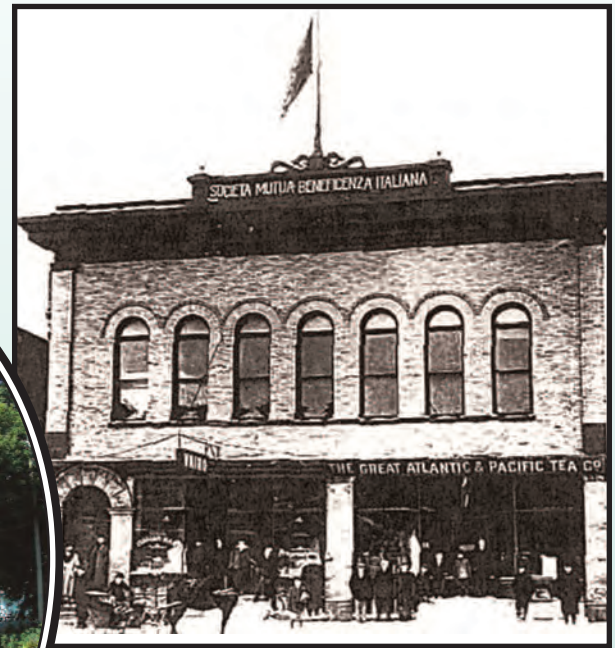


PHOTO: MICHIGAN TECH ARCHIVES



PHOTO: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



PHOTO: MICHIGAN TECH ARCHIVES

Right: Families bury the dead after a three-mile march to Lake View Cemetery.

Guthrie's ballad, "1913 Massacre," which tells the story of Italian Hall.

To my surprise, Ted suddenly said, "I was there." His father had been a striking miner, he said, and he and his two brothers and three sisters had gone to the party along with other strikers' children. While he and his brothers escaped the hall on a ladder from a second-story window, two of his three sisters, Ellen, 7, and Mildred, 5, were both caught in the staircase crush and died.

The loss of the two young girls hurt his father terribly, Ted said. "He took me in his arms and cried like a baby. I had never seen my dad cry before." After the strike ended, Ted said, a mine boss came to his father and asked him to return to work. But so devastated was he from the loss of his daughters, he would never go back into the mines again.

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Tragedy at Italian Hall

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DANGEROUS JOBS

At the time of the strike, miners were working six days a week, ten hours a day, in the deep, poorly-lit mine shafts where scores of deaths and hundreds of injuries were recorded each year. In the year before the strike, there had been at least 47 deaths and 643 serious injuries. For several years, two-man teams were used to drill into mine walls, where explosives were placed to dislodge copper ore, but then mine owners sought to replace the two-person drills with one-man drills, nicknamed “widow makers” since no one would be able to summon help in case of an accident.

The strike failed to stop these one-man drills, and although miners did eventually get some wage increases and shorter workweeks, the union failed in its attempt to get recognition and a contract.

Despite the family tragedy, Ted, at the age of 16, was hired as a “puffer

boy” at \$2.75 a day in Hecla No. 9 mine, where he operated the engine that hoisted timbers used as roof supports for a stope, the space left after ore has been extracted. Ted left the mines in 1929; finally, in 1943, miners elected the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers as their collective-bargaining agent.

This year is the centenary of the Italian Hall tragedy, and the Copper



Scores of deaths and injuries were reported every year in the Copper Country mines.

Country is hosting several memorial observances. Ceremonies are scheduled at the Italian Hall site June 20 during the national FinnFest (many of the miners were immigrants from Finland; others came from Italy, Croatia, Cornwall, Scotland, and elsewhere).

PHOTO: MICHIGAN TECH ARCHIVES

IN HIS OWN WORDS: A SCENE OF HORROR

In 1955, Ted Taipalus revisited the scene of the event. Invited by his brother-in-law to the Eagles hall on Seventh Street in Calumet, he decided to go upstairs where a dance was in progress. He experienced what he said was the “strangest sensation” as he suddenly found himself back in the very hall where, as a 10-year-old, he had been at the ill-fated party. He had once vowed that he would never enter the hall again. When he discovered where he was, “I just wanted to get away from there.”

In a memoir now in the Finnish-American Heritage Center in Hancock, Michigan, Ted wrote these words:

“[My father] had joined the union with the rest of the men. And then came the day before Christmas and the union was giving a party for the kids and mothers. Such excitement! There would be dances, musical and vocal numbers, recitations and a Christmas sock for all. Six from our family went, Hulda, age 16, with two younger sisters, Ellen, 7, Mildred, 5, and brothers Bill, 12, Ed, 14, and myself, 10 ½. The girls got there early and sat in front. Us boys were a few rows behind. The hall was filled with people — they say about 500 to 600. Close to the end of the program, a man near the stage got up shouting ‘fire.’

“Needless to say, everyone panicked. My older brother Ed said he didn’t see any smoke and that he wasn’t going anywhere so he just sat there. Bill and I joined the rush to the stairway. We ended at about the sixth or seventh step from the bottom. We both held on to each other and were side by side. The pressure was getting greater and it was hard to breathe. We both kept wiggling until our heads were close to the ceiling. The moaning and groaning and screaming was awful. I even joined in the hollering until Bill shook his head for me to stop. I don’t know how long we were being pushed; I knew I had a hard time breathing and then we felt the pressure lessening and I felt a hand on my feet pulling me back. I had to slide backward over people and on top of another. Bill was by my side. We stuck together like pants and shirt.

“We were directed to a window where we got on a ladder and descended to the ground. We then went home to Centennial Heights. We had gotten our candy and that was the main thing.

“We did not know that anyone was killed until our dad came home and broke the news. He took me into his arms and cried like a baby. I had never seen my dad cry before and thought it strange to see a man cry. Mildred was his pride and joy. Next day was Christmas. It was supposed to be a joyous day but that

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LOOKING BACK MOVING FORWARD

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Telephone: 313-577-4003

<http://mlhs@wayne.edu>

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Standing Tall in Downtown Detroit

A Young Detroiters Tells How a Visit to the Labor Legacy Landmark Gave Him a Sense of Pride

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the dedication of the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark, “Transcending,” in downtown Detroit.

Since its dedication in 2003, thousands of visitors have walked the pathway that encircles the Landmark. There they find more than a dozen bronze sculptures depicting highlights of labor and social history and telling the stories of the workers who built this city. On the center podium, they see the words of labor pioneers and social activists. Many will learn and some will be inspired.

It’s probably fair to say that few visitors have drawn more inspiration from “Transcending” than Jasen Dippel, a young Detroiters who works as a massage therapist and who came upon the Labor Legacy Landmark by accident one day, and then wrote about his experience on the Internet.

Dippel said that in his field of work he has encountered businesses that operate like sweatshops — giving only a 25 to 30 percent cut of a client’s fee to the therapist who does the work, and then burning them out with an over-demanding schedule. While training to start his own practice after graduating from a prestigious myomassology school, he was offered such a job in Detroit’s Renaissance Center, but only if he’d go through an unpaid 20-hour “training” program for which he was promised a small stipend, nothing more.

WALKING THE WALK

When Dippel went to the Ren Cen to collect his stipend he was told the owner and manager weren’t there and to come back later. So he left to take care of other business and then, in his words, “I let go of my agenda, surrendered to the



The Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark in downtown Detroit inspired young worker Jasen Dippel (left) to write about his visit there.

PHOTO: SHAWN D. ELLIS

moment, and let Spirit and my intuition guide me. In doing so, I received a gift that I never would have fathomed. I was led to the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark in Hart Plaza.”

As he walked along the pathway spiraling toward the center, he read the inscription, “Labor’s achievements are America’s strength,” and the subsequent markers that read “free public education,” “ending child labor,” “equality for women,” and the other gains pioneered by labor.

Pulling out a scrap of paper, he began writing down some of the quotations inscribed on the Landmark’s central platform. These inspiring quotations

include: “Labor creates all wealth” (Adam Smith); “The truly great man is he who would master no one and who would be mastered by none” (Khalil Gibran); “Freedom is never granted; it is won. Justice is never given, it is exacted” (A. Philip Randolph).

“The memorial,” he writes, “honors all those nameless laborers who suffered to build the foundations of our society and fought for the rights and privileges we enjoy today. The whole presence of the Landmark is ineffable.”

“I realized,” he wrote, “that I was being guided and asked to stand tall upon the shoulders of those who came before me, the ancestors of our society, who labored, struggled, and fought endlessly for the future we now enjoy.”

Fired up, he went back to the Ren Cen to confront his former employer and collect his money. “I demanded a moment of her time,” he writes, and asked that she mail him his check. “As I was leaving, I encouraged her to visit the Labor Landmark. “It may offer you some perspective

on the relationship between employers and employees,” he told her.

“Whether or not this particular business owner takes time away from her busy pursuit of money to visit, I do not know. What does the future have in store for me and my career, I do not know. What I do know is that it is easier to sleep at night after standing up for what you believe in.”

“I encourage every human being to stand tall upon the shoulders of our ancestors and fight for what you believe in. Their efforts are for naught if we choose to roll over to the unwarranted and unjust demands of business leaders and ruling elite. “



A Challenge from the 19th Century

A 113-year-old letter from workers is displayed at the remodeled Detroit Historical Museum

On New Year's Eve 1900, a group of Detroit union members gathered to compose a handwritten letter addressed to the workers of the 21st Century.

"The Council of the Trades and Labor Unions," they wrote, "desire to greet the wage-workers of the 21st Century, if there are any, and hope that they enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in the fullest degree, and that the trusts and combines that are now forming to destroy competition and crush labor will not be successful."

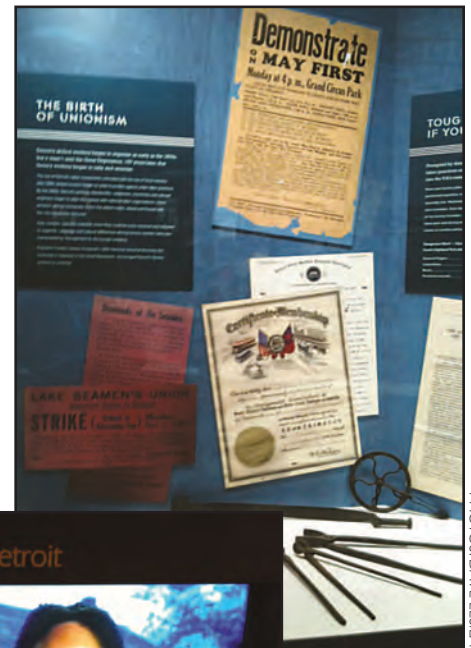
"Wage workers of the 21st Century," the letter challenges: "do your duty to posterity."

For over a hundred years that letter lay in a sealed box before it was opened and read on the occasion of Detroit's tri-centennial anniversary earlier this decade. Now a copy is on display at the recently remodeled Detroit Historical Museum in an exhibit about the history of labor and unions in southeast Michigan.

The exhibit, displayed in four large showcases, includes tools, an old factory-time clock, photos, posters, and more. Dominating one of the showcases is a huge poster from 1933 calling Detroiters to assemble at five locations around the

city and to march to Grand Circus Park for a May Day rally where workers were called on to demand unemployment insurance, and the freedom of Tom Mooney, the Scottsboro Boys, and "all class war prisoners." (Mooney was a California trade-unionist accused of participating in a bomb plot, and the Scottsboro Boys were nine black teenagers who had been accused of rape. Both Mooney and the Scottsboro Boys were in jail in 1933.)

Photos and posters describe the dangerous conditions facing factory workers as Detroit industries grew in the 20th Century. "Workers performed repetitive, monotonous operations dictated by the speed of the assembly line," the exhibit points out. "Machines had few safety mechanisms and industrial accidents were common. Even during boom times, job security depended on the whims of the factory foreman, who could hire and fire work-



PHOTOS: DAVE ELSILA



An actor portraying a 19th Century Detroit teacher talks in a video display about how schools were desegregated back then.



Above: Tools, posters, and other objects fill a showcase at the Detroit Historical Museum's new exhibit on labor history.

IBEW Anniversary



PHOTO: COURTESY IBEW LOCAL 58

Local 58 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) will mark its 100th anniversary next year with several special events. At left is the fixture workers' sub-local of Local 58 at the Statler Hotel that once stood on Washington Blvd. in downtown Detroit. The photo was taken in 1915.

ers at will." At the Ford Highland Park plant, renowned for the introduction of the automobile assembly line, statistics from 1916 report 68,000 lacerations, 192 severed fingers, 5,400 burns, and over 2,000 puncture wounds.

The exhibit also highlights union organizing drives and strikes, and has a copy of the first contract between the UAW and Ford from 1941.

In another area of the museum, videotapes of actors in the role of early teachers, cigar workers, shoe-factory workers, and others describe their work and their lives. A major exhibit, "Doorway to Freedom," chronicles the flight of slaves to freedom in Canada via the Underground Railroad through Detroit.

The Detroit Historical Museum, Woodward at Kirby, is open Tuesday-Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.



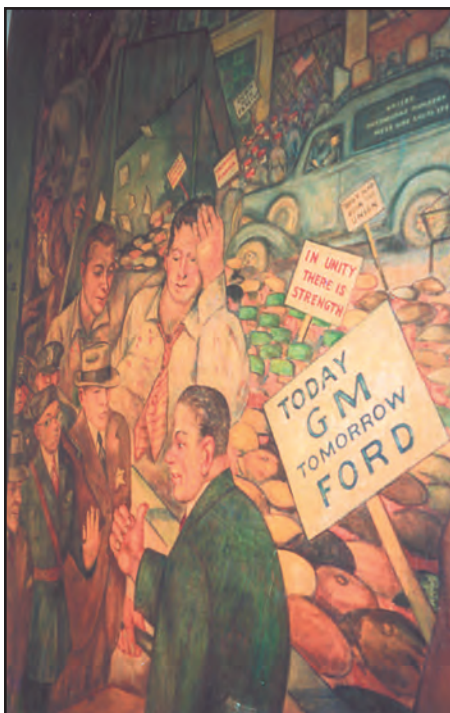
The 1937 mural by WPA artist Walter Speck hangs in the UAW New West Side Local 174 hall at 29841 Van Born Rd. in Romulus.

COURTESY UAW NEW WEST SIDE LOCAL 174

Ghost Hunting at the UAW West Side Local

BY JIM REHBERG

In 2001, volunteers went to UAW Local 174, the home local of former UAW President Walter P. Reuther, to move files, records, and — perhaps most challenging — to remove a large mural depicting many of the events in union history, from the union's hall at 6495 West Warren Ave. in Detroit and take it to the Local 157 hall in Romulus, after the two locals had merged. Walter Speck, head of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) arts program in Detroit, had painted the mural in 1937. Today it can be viewed at what is now the New West Side Local 174 hall at 29841 Van Born Rd., in Romulus. For the past several years, local members have sought to raise funds to restore the mural to its original brightness following years of exposure to ambient smoke. Jim Rehberg, a member of the UAW and the Industrial Workers of the World, recalls the days he spent during the move in this posting from his Facebook page.



Above: A detail from the mural. Contributions can be sent to the local for a fund to help restore the mural.

I remember when the old UAW Local 174 building on West Warren was being shut down to move the West Side local into the Local 157 building. I wanted to help clean out and move the local's contents. Most important was getting the mural removed to a safe place, but in the back of my mind I knew I would find an old treasure or a relic. Things don't always work out like you plan. There were boxes of old files of former members dating back to the beginning that had to be thrown away. Before they could be put in a dumpster, however, every paper had to be checked to make sure there was nothing of a person's identification such as a social security number. That was the job I got. Page after page, box after box sorted and separated, name after name, plant after plant.

This went on for days but it didn't take long for me to realize that I had found that treasure. These were the members of the local. The people who were there early on, the ones who fought



ARCHIVES OF LABOR AND URBAN AFFAIRS, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

for the rights that came easy to me because of them. The ones who paid their dues that gave the local financial power to move the union and its demands on the employers. These were names unknown to me, but they were people and workers who at one time were known by others in their shops and homes.

As I said, this went on for days — but with each name I tried to show a little respect to protect the members' identities with some gratitude for their contributions to this local. I thought of the old labor anthem *Solidarity Forever*: "Without our brain and muscle not a single wheel would turn." These were the brains and muscles that turned the wheels of the labor movement back then, but we only remember the names of the people out in front, like a Reuther — a Victor, a Walter, and maybe a Roy.

I found that treasure. It was my Fellow Workers. I didn't know their age, race, or religion, just Man or Woman. Something I have never forgotten. When I see a crowd of union people while one or two are on a stage talking, I know that hundreds and thousands are needed to hold them up.

I found the ghosts I was looking for today while looking at the mural at the New West Side Local 174. They spoke to me. I thought I heard them say, *We are the shoulders you are standing on, you have used our shoulders long enough, it's your turn.*



DETROIT DURING THE DEPRESSION

Maurice Merlin's WPA Art Captures Scenes of Hardship, Symbols of Hope



Above: Artist Maurice Merlin.

Right: "No Work Today" offers a collection of WPA artist Maurice Merlin's silk-screens and lithographs documenting life during the Great Depression.



For ten years, from 1933-1943, unemployed American artists found relief from the economic downturn of the Great Depression in a variety of government-sponsored art programs, clustered around the Works Project Administration (WPA).

This Federal Art Project was not only a practical relief program for jobless artists, but, in the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, it provided the artist a chance to render "his own impression of things ... for the spirit of his fellow countrymen everywhere."

One of those artists, Maurice Merlin, used the techniques of silk-screening and lithography to record Depression-era events in Michigan. His powerful works depict both the hardship of unemployment and the strength of public protest: portraits of hollow-eyed workers facing the misery of job-

SESSION

WORK TODAY



THE ART OF
MERLIN: 1934 - 1947

ALL IMAGES COURTESY PETER MERLIN



The image of a Black Legionnaire haunts a grieving mother and child in this lithograph by Maurice Merlin.



Right: Maurice Merlin's WPA poster for a "Mobilizing Michigan" program to help unemployed workers and farmers.

lessness, as well as symbols of courage and hope as workers strike and demonstrate.

In one particularly poignant lithograph, he depicts a sinister figure of the anti-labor Black Legion lurking in the shadows of a portrait of a woman and her young child, after this secret militia-style group had murdered her husband, a WPA employee. The Black Legion was closely allied with Henry Ford and targeted union organizers, left-wing activists, African Americans, and immigrants, and allegedly had the support of some of Detroit's top officials. Among its victims was a Flint minister, Earl Little, the father of Malcolm X.

Maurice Merlin's work includes scenes of industrial factories, farms and rural

areas, and worker protests. He belonged to one of the first unions of artists, the American Artists Congress, where he worked with Walter Speck, an AAC representative who painted the mural at UAW West Side Local 174 (see page 5). The AAC was founded in 1936 to promote the ideal of collectivism, not individualism, in art and "to create a program open to the artistic 'everyman,'" according to art historian Francis V. O'Connor.

Earlier this year, Maurice Merlin's son, Peter, organized a show of his father's work at the Huntington Library in Los Angeles. He also produced a book of his father's art that includes reproductions of many of the silk-screens and lithographs created between 1930

New Scholarship For Labor Education



PHOTO: BARBARA BAREFIELD

A new scholarship program will provide financial assistance to students enrolling in classes offered through the Labor@Wayne program at Wayne State University.

Named in honor of veteran labor activist Ethel Schwartz, the scholarship will help cover tuition for the certificate program at the WSU Labor School or degree programs in the Labor Studies Center.

Ethel Schwartz, who died last year at the age of 94, was a member of the Office and Professional Employees International Union and worked for many years on the clerical staff of both the International Union UAW and at a number of UAW local unions. She was a member of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) and a delegate to the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO.

Information and applications for the scholarship are available from the Labor Studies Center at Wayne State University, 656 W. Kirby, 3178 FAB, Detroit MI 48202, phone 313-577-2191.

and 1947.

The book, *No Work Today*, is available in both e-book and print editions at the website www.Blurb.com, and is not only a collection of remarkable art but a record of one of the darkest eras of economic challenges in the U.S. Some of the art from this period can be seen at the Flint Institute of Art, which has lent some of its artworks to the Maurice Merlin show in Los Angeles.

Stopping Evictions – Then & Now

How labor actions in the 1930s inspire today's activists

Just north of the Detroit River in the Conner Creek neighborhood on Detroit's east side lies an open field of weeds and grass. The house that once occupied 726 Lycaste St. is long gone. Only a curb cut and a partial driveway offer clues to where it once stood.

But in January, 1938, the Lycaste house was occupied and its occupants evicted. Furniture and household belongings were dumped on the street. When members of a UAW local heard about it, at least eight union members showed up at the site to pick up the mattresses, lamps, and other effects and carry them back into the home.

That eviction was hardly a unique occurrence; neither was the action to help evicted families. At times, an average of 4,500 families "with no money and no place to go were evicted every month," reports historian Robert Conot in his book *American Odyssey*. Union mobilizations kept many families in their homes.

Dave Moore, who would later become a member of UAW Local 600 and a UAW staff representative, described how in August 1932, he and fellow activists Frank Sykes and Chris Alston moved the furniture belonging to an evicted family back into their East Side home. Only 20 years old at the time, Moore had joined the Unemployed Council and participated in the Ford Hunger March five months earlier.

In 2008, a year before he died, Moore took a Michigan Labor History Society video crew to his old neighborhood near Leland and Russell Streets.



PHOTO: WALTER PREUTHER LIBRARY/WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY



PHOTO FROM DAILY WORKER

Above: UAW volunteers move furniture back into the home of an evicted family on Lycaste Street in Detroit, 1938.

Left: This newspaper clipping shows Dave Moore, Frank Sykes, Chris Alston, and others returning furniture to an evicted family's home on Detroit's East Side in 1932.

"We had blacks, Italians, and many ethnic groups living in this area; it was open to all," he said. "And one day when we saw a family being evicted, we chased the bailiff through the fields and kept the family in its home."

Although one of every seven persons was on relief during part of this period, the city's welfare department had stopped paying the rent of destitute families, had cut thousands off its rolls, and was distributing only bread and flour to those in need, according to Conot's history.

FROM THEN TO NOW

Fast forward 80 years to 2013.

Inspired in part by such events from

the 1930s, members of UAW Local 600, the United Steel Workers, AFT Michigan, and other unions are part of a growing coalition of southeast Michigan labor and community groups that are helping to defend families against evictions. In Wayne County alone, the agency Fannie Mae has foreclosed on more than 20,000 homes since being put into conservatorship by the federal government in 2008.

As in the 1930s, union members and community allies are using direct action to defend homeowners. In one dramatic episode, activists gathered bags of leaves left for curbside pickup in Detroit's Grandmont-Rosedale neighborhood, and filled a dumpster that had



PHOTOS COURTESY STEVE BABSON

Left: Protesters filled this dumpster with leaves Oct. 31, 2012, so there was no room for the household belongings that a wrecking crew had threatened to take from the Cullors family home in Detroit's Grandmont-Rosedale neighborhood.

Above left: Marchers protest the impending eviction of Jennifer Britt at the federal building in Detroit. Britt remains in her home in northwest Detroit thanks to the anti-eviction activists.

Above: Neighbors and supporters gather for a vigil at a Detroit home in 2012 to prevent bailiffs and wrecking crews from evicting the owners. Rep. Hansen Clarke addressed the crowd.

More information on the eviction defense movement is just a click away at www.peoplebeforebanks.org. Contact local activists at DetroitEvictionDefense@gmail.com.

been parked outside a foreclosed home, leaving no room for the family's furniture. A bailiff and two wrecking-crew members stood powerlessly nearby, their eviction plans thwarted. Meanwhile, an attorney for the homeowners was in court winning a stay of the eviction. Subsequent legal action has kept the family in its home.

So far, this combination of direct action and legal challenges has kept families in their homes in Detroit, Southgate, Inkster, and other communities. Detroit anti-eviction activists call for a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions.

In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, Michigan and several other states passed five-year moratoriums that were upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. Now, Fannie Mae has declared moratoriums on mortgage foreclosures to victims of Hurricane Katrina and Tropical Storm Sandy but not for others. "We have our own 'hurricane without water' here in Michigan," said Steve Babson, one of the organizers of eviction defense groups as he argued for a moratorium on Michigan foreclosures.

A little less than two years ago, hundreds joined a march on Detroit's Woodward Ave., following the same route that Dr. Martin Luther King had taken in his 1963 civil-rights march. Commenting on the Occupy movement and the efforts to stop foreclosures and advance economic justice, one young woman told a reporter, "We are sitting on the shoulders of giants. If we can connect with our history, with our roots, it's going to be amazing."

If we don't learn from the past, what will our future be like?

If you joined us on the last Michigan Labor History Society bus tour, you saw the site where 200 young women courageously challenged one of the nation's biggest retailers, Woolworth's, in 1937 by occupying the five-and-dime store in a sit-down strike.

If you read pages 8-9 of this issue of *Looking Back, Moving Forward*, you'll learn how workers in the 1930s stopped the evictions of their neighbors, inspiring today's anti-eviction actions across Detroit.

Whenever you visit the MLHS-initiated Labor Legacy Landmark you find out something new and inspiring about labor's contributions to building a stronger society.

ISN'T IT TIME YOU HELPED A NEW GENERATION LEARN ABOUT LABOR'S HISTORY?

MLHS is eager to bring the story of labor's accomplishments to union members, workers and their families, and students throughout the state. By joining up with us, you can be part of our efforts to build a speakers' bureau, offer tours and field trips, and spread labor's story to more people. Membership is just \$10 a year. Please clip and return this membership coupon today and tell us how you want to become involved.

**Mail with a check payable to Michigan Labor History Society to:
Michigan Labor History Society, c/o Walter P. Reuther Library,
5401 Cass Ave., Detroit MI 48202**

- Please ___sign me up or ___renew my membership in the MLHS.
Enclosed is \$10 for one year's dues. I will continue to receive MLHS publications.
- I want to help MLHS develop a speaker's bureau and educational materials for students and union members. Please contact me.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

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Union or organization _____

A December to Remember

Labor Martyrs in the Copper Country: Violence against Organized Labor during the 1913-14 Michigan Copper Strike



This cartoon and headline appeared in the Finnish-language Michigan newspaper *Työmies* (Worker) after the tragedy at Italian Hall on Christmas Eve, 2013.

Mahon Detective Agency “gun thugs” shot and killed two Croatian strikers: Alois Tijan and Steven Putrich at Seeberville location. Less than two weeks later, and on Labor Day, someone in a group of Houghton County deputy sheriffs shot 14-year-old Margaret Fazekas in the back of the head. Amazingly, Margaret lived, but

according to a doctor on the scene in North Kearsarge where the incident happened, “a bullet penetrated the skull and carried a good deal of brain matter, some oozing through her hair.”

Violence against labor during the strike was indeed ever-present, but a December campaign of institutionalized violence and intimidation designed to “rid the Copper Country of the WFM...and its foreign...little parasitic agitators” struck an ominous tone that led to the greatest single loss of life for Michigan’s union community: the Italian Hall tragedy.

While hired gun thugs and members of Houghton County’s law enforcement were already plenty brutal, the Citizens’ Alliance, a vigilante group comprised of those with sympathy or ties to area mining companies ratcheted up the rhetoric and action against striking workers and their families. The Alliance was organized after a December 7 shooting into a boarding house occupied by scab workers in Paines-

dale. Houghton County officials declared WFM members perpetrated the shooting, while the WFM contended the shooting was a frame-up. Citing the shooting as a sign unabashed lawlessness on the part of the WFM (which advocated non-violence throughout the strike), the Citizens’ Alliance went on an aggressive campaign to destroy the WFM in the Copper Country.

Intimidation and violence against strikers became commonplace. On December 12, Charles Lawton, general manager of the Quincy Mining Company, wrote in a letter to mining company president William Rogers Todd, “They (local ‘police’) chased the strikers far and wide...quite a number of them were caught, but we thought it was useless to arrest them, and some of them were made fit subjects for the hospital — in fact, they were very roughly treated.”

One of the primary locations on the Alliance’s list for retribution was Calumet’s Italian Hall. On December 17, just a week before the tragic events at Italian Hall, a report from a Calumet and Hecla Mining Company labor spy indicated that the Calumet WFM local received, “two letters threatening union store and Italian hall.”

In addition to the threats reported by the labor spy, on the same day James MacNaughton, general manager of Calumet and Hecla, wrote company president Quincy Shaw that “a determined effort will be made in the next two or three days, in fact has already started, by the business men, to get the strikers to return to work. I am not so hopeful of the success of this move but some of the business men think it is worth trying, and the Lord knows they are willing to help do what they can.”

A sinister act in this determined effort came on Christmas Eve at a party for striking mineworkers’ children in the Italian Hall (see page 1). After the tragic event, a number of partygoers

BY GARY KAUNONEN

In its vital labor history, Michigan has had its share of martyrs—those who have given their lives to the struggle for industrial democracy. On July 23, 1913, one of the greatest struggles in Michigan’s history occurred on the Keweenaw Peninsula, as the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) led a collection of mostly immigrant mineworkers and their families in a nine-month conflict against one of the most entrenched and domineering group of “bosses” in the United States at that time. And sadly, like many of Michigan’s future labor actions, the 1913-14 Michigan Copper Strike had a group of men, women, and children who gave all.

Deadly violence against strikers happened early in the conflict. In late August of 1913, a mix of six Houghton County deputy sheriffs and Waddell-

Tragedy at Italian Hall

Continued from page 2

year it was a day of sorrow in many homes. Our neighbors lost a mother and two daughters.

"My Dad was fortunate to get a horse-drawn enclosed carriage for the funeral. Six of us rode in it, my parents and four kids. Twelve coffins were lined up in front of the altar of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church. After the services, groups met on Pine Street and then continued on to the cemetery. My sisters' coffins were carried on the shoulders of the men walking in front of us — four to a coffin, and two extra to take the place of men who tired. From the church to the cemetery was a good three miles. My two sisters were buried with most of the other victims in a long trench, side by side in the Lake View cemetery.

"In 1980, when I looked over that stairway I was speechless and dumbfounded. I could not visualize seventy-four people having died there. I somehow was saved. I was there in the middle of it."

Ted Taipalus moved to Detroit and became a Border Patrol agent on the Detroit River during Prohibition. He later joined the Marines assigned to quell a popular uprising in Nicaragua.

reported that a man wearing a Citizens' Alliance button made a call of "Fire!" into the crowded second-floor hall. This cry of fire caused a panicked exodus of some 300 to 400 people from the hall. The rush out of the hall caused some to trip on the way down the stairs, which led to a mass of people being packed into the stairwell. The weight of this human mass crushed the air from people's lungs. An estimated 73-79 people lost their lives after the call of "Fire!" and the horrible loss of life included almost 60 children — 60 little martyrs — in addition to the other men and women who died in this struggle for industrial democracy in Michigan.

Gary Kaunonen is a Ph.D. candidate and instructor at Michigan Technological University and co-author of a forthcoming book on the 1913 copper strike.

CURRENT & COMING EVENTS

Motor City Muse Photo Show

A photo exhibit including the works of labor photographer Russ Marshall, with many of the workplace pictures shot in UAW and Steelworkers plants. At the Detroit Institute of Arts, 5400 Woodward. Tuesday-Thursday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m.-10 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Through June 16.



PHOTO: RUSS MARSHALL

'The Eyes of the World Were Watching' and 'For the Good of All: The Labor Movement in America'

Permanent exhibits on the 1937 Newton steel strike in Monroe, and on the history of U.S. labor. Monroe County Labor History Museum, 41 W. Front St., Monroe. Saturdays, 2-5 p.m. Information and photos at www.monroelabor.org.

Labor and New Deal Art



COURTESY CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

Death of a Striker by Paul Meltsner is one of the prints at the "Labor and New Deal Art" exhibit.

An exhibit of nearly 50 prints from the 1930s by Hugo Gellert, Paul Meltsner, and others, timed to commemorate the 75th

anniversary of the Little Steel Strike (which included Monroe's Newton steel plant; see above). Massillon Museum, 121 Lincoln Way East, Massillon, Ohio. Tuesdays-Saturdays 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Sundays, 2-5 p.m. Through June 2.



COURTESY CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

MLHS Annual Meeting

The Michigan Labor History Society annual meeting will include a free labor history bus tour of downtown Detroit. Bus departs AFSCME, 600 W. Lafayette, Detroit, at 10 a.m. Saturday, May 18, and returns at 12 noon for business meeting.

Upper Peninsula History Conference

The 2013 Upper Peninsula History Conference will put a spotlight on the 1913 copper strike and the Italian Hall tragedy (see page 1) when it meets June 28-30 in Houghton. For details and registration information, visit the Historical Society of Michigan's website at www.hsmichigan.org and click on "conferences."

Labor Day Mobilization Luncheon

The Michigan Labor History Society's annual Labor Day Mobilization Luncheon will be held starting at 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, August 21, at IBEW Local 58 Hall in Detroit. For tickets and information, please call Tanise Hill, 313-961-0800.

Labor Day Parade

Detroit's annual Labor Day parade will form at Michigan and Trumbull and march along Michigan Ave. to downtown Detroit. Monday morning, Sept. 2. For details, contact the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, 313-961-0800.

North American Labor History Conference

"Geographies of Labor" is the theme of the 2013 North American Labor History Conference Oct. 24-26 at Wayne State University in Detroit. Participants will discuss how workers have interacted with a variety of geographic categories such as empire, globalization, uneven development, mobility, and migration and immigration at the transnational, national, and/or local levels. Proposals for papers, panels, and roundtables in the form of a one-paragraph abstract, and brief biographies of participants, may be submitted by May 31 to NALHC coordinator Prof. Francis Shor, WWSU History Dept., 3157 Faculty Administration Bldg., Detroit MI 48202 or nalhc@wayne.edu.

GET READY FOR LABOR DAY

MLHS 2013 Labor Day MOBILIZATION LUNCHEON

Wednesday, Aug. 21, 11:30 a.m.

IBEW Local 58

Porter east of Trumbull, Detroit.

Free parking.

Tickets: \$40, including membership
In MLHS. Call 313-961-0800.

ANNUAL MLHS MEETING Free Labor History Bus Tour May 18

The annual meeting of the Michigan Labor History Society will take place on Saturday, May 18, and will feature a free labor history bus tour of lower Woodward Avenue in downtown Detroit.

Experienced guides will discuss labor history with stops for participants to get off at Grand Circus Park, the old Woolworth's five-and-dime store on Woodward near Grand River, Cadillac Square, and the Labor Legacy Landmark at Hart Plaza. Time permitting, there will also be a chance to visit the Underground Railroad monument on the Detroit riverfront. A similar tour last October drew enthusiastic accolades from those who participated.

The tour bus will leave promptly at 10 a.m. from the parking lot behind the AFSCME building at 600 W. Lafayette in Detroit (entrance off Third Ave. just north of Lafayette). There is ample free parking at the lot.

The bus will return at 12 noon and the annual business meeting of the Society will take place immediately afterward.

There is no charge for the tour, but space is limited to the first 35 people who sign up. To reserve a place, please send an e-mail message to Michlabor@aol.com or leave a message at 313-690-1053.

BLET Marks 150 Years At Detroit Convention

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen – the oldest labor union in North America — will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding in Detroit on May 8.

BLET members, friends, and colleagues will gather at the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel in downtown Detroit — the same hotel where the union celebrated its 75th and 100th anniversaries — to mark the occasion.

Detroit is where the union was founded on May 8, 1863 as the Brotherhood of the Foot-board. One year later, the name was changed to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, and the word Trainmen was added in 2004. BLET is now affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

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MLHS at History Conferences

Mike Kerwin, David Elsila, and John Dick of the Michigan Labor History Society led a two-hour labor history bus tour for some 35 delegates to last fall's annual North American Labor History Conference at Wayne State University in Detroit.

The annual Michigan Oral History Association conference Oct. 12 at the Monroe County Labor History Museum featured a presentation by MLHS Program Committee Chair Mike Kerwin and others on the uses and promotions of oral history.

Labor Heroes To Be Honored

Labor's International Hall of Fame will induct two outstanding Michigan leaders — "Big Annie" Klobuchar Clemenc, who defended workers during the 1913 copper strike in Michigan's Upper Peninsula (see page 1) and Viola Liuzzo, a Detroit civil-rights activist who was murdered while driving marchers home from Montgomery to Selma, Alabama, after the historic 1965 civil-rights march. They will be honored along with Evelyn Dubrow, a legendary activist lobbyist for the International Ladies Garment Workers, at ceremonies in New York May 16.



"Big Annie" Klobuchar Clemenc will be inducted in the Labor's International Hall of Fame.

Watch and Read

Resources related to stories in this issue include: **1913 MASSACRE**, a new film about the Italian Hall tragedy, is available on DVD for \$25 including shipping and handling from www.1913massacre.com **NO WORK TODAY**, a book of original art by WPA artist Maurice Merlin, can be viewed and purchased at www.blurb.com.

THIS WORKING LIFE, a book of photographs by Russ Marshall is available from www.blurb.com.

"EMMA GOLDMAN," a play about the life of the labor organizer by Howard Zinn, will open May Day, 2014, at the Matrix Theatre in Detroit. Watch for details in a coming issue.

Coming in Future Issues

The 100th anniversary of the Clayton Act, which strengthened workers' rights to organize and declared labor not to be a commodity, will be observed next year. Michigan Labor History Society Program Committee Chair Mike Kerwin, examines the implications of this act and what needs to be done to see it enforced in an article to appear in the next issue.

Local 58 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers celebrates its centenary next year. Watch for an account of the history of this dynamic local union based in Detroit.