259 Lives Lost

Labor Joins Cherry, IL in Memorial to Great Coal Mine Disaster of 1909

The tiny town of Cherry, population about 500, was overrun with visitors from as far away as Italy on November 13-14, 2009. All had come to join in the memorial ceremonies for the 259 men and boys who died 100 years ago in what, at the time, was the biggest coal mine disaster in Illinois history. Cherry is in Bureau County, just a few miles north of LaSalle.

ILHS Was Co-Sponsor

The event, initiated by the Cherry Booster Club and cosponsored by the Illinois Labor History Society, received essential support from the Illinois Valley Trades and Labor Council and its president Kelley Reffert (since retired).

Central to the event was the dedication of a new monument in the form of pyramids suggesting the tailing pile at the mouth of the mine where the underground fire occurred. The fire took the lives of more than half of those who were on the job the morning of November 13, 1909. Many rescuers also died. The new memorial, located in the town center, bears the names of the victims.

The Cherry Booster Club led the fundraising campaign for the memorial monument. Local unions contributed money and services.

The mine was owned by the Chicago Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. At that time employers were not legally responsible for the safety of their employees. The tragedy left behind a great number of widows and orphans. The world wide outpouring of relief funds was gratifying. Funds from private sources poured into Cherry to assist the victims and their families. The government of France offered repatriation to those with French connection. The Italian government raised funds for the sixty-nine orphans of Italian descent.

Spurred Legislation

In response to the Cherry disaster, the Illinois legislature, after lengthy wrangling, passed its first Workmen's Compensation Law in 1911.

The commemoration began with a procession to the town center, led by the color guard of Chicago Fire Fighters Local Union 2. They came to honor the Chicago firefighters who had joined in the rescue efforts.

At the dedication of the sculpture, the mayor of Cherry, Bob McCook, read a letter from President Obama honoring the disaster victims. A resolution adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives was presented by Rep. Debbie Halvorson (11th District). A similar resolution was adopted by the Illinois State Legislature

and presented by State Rep. Frank Mautino from Spring Valley.

From the United Mine Workers of America Intl. came Gary Butler. Representing the Illinois AFL-CIO was Secretary-Treasurer Tim Drea, a former coal miner. Mark Lipe of the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration spoke about issues of mine safety that persist to this day. ILHS President Larry Spivack concluded, pointing out that labor history is relevant to current political and economic issues.

After the speeches, Bucky Halker, well-known folksinger, presented a concert of appropriate labor songs. His performance was funded by a grant to the Illinois Labor History Society from the Illinois Humanities Council, a state agency.

2nd Day of Ceremonies

On Sunday, ceremonies took place in the cemetery where the United Mine Workers Memorial was erected in 1911 to memorialize all the miners. Since many of the Cherry miners had immigrated from the area around the city of Bologna in Northern Italy, Allesandro Motta, the Consul General of Italy, attended the ceremony and spoke to the gathering. Rita Cut, representing the regional government of Emilia-Romagna, reported that commemorative ceremonies were also underway in Bologna.



Laborers Local 393 members behind the Cherry Mine Monument. They and others of the Illinois Valley Building Trades Council donated their labor to set up and landscape this memorial.

ILHS Pays Homage to Union Musicians

The Union Hall of Honor event for 2009 took the unusual form for ILHS of a Reception and Concert, a change from our traditional sit-down Dinner. It took place on Saturday, November 22, 2009 at the Chicago History Museum.

Inducted was James C. Petrillo, the famed president of the Chicago Federation of Musicians from 1922 to 1961. Petrillo later became president of the entire American Federation of Musicians from 1940 to 1958. Also inducted were Clark "Bucky" Halker, Chicago's own master of labor songs; and the African-American musicians of AFM Local 208 which merged with Local 10 in 1966.

From New York came American Federation of Musicians President Tom Lee who shared anecdotes about Petrillo. Gary Matts, president of the Chicago Federation of Musicians,



Dick Kay

joined him to accept the Petrillo award. Distinguished jazz musicians, Jimmy Ellis and Art Hoyle, accepted the award for Local 208, the former African-American musicians local organized in Chicago in 1902

The Master of Ceremonies was none other than Dick Kay, long-time Chicago newscaster and former president of the Chicago local of the American

Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), who now hosts a Saturday talk show on radio station WCPT.

Bucky Halker, supported by Don Stiernberg on mandolin and Tom Piekarski on bass guitar, opened the evening's concert with lively labor songs. They were joined by Nora Guthrie of New York who heads the Woody Guthrie Archives. She read poetry written by her famous father.

The second set was devoted to jazz performed by a quintet headed by well-known Chicago musicians Art Hoyle, trumpet, and Jimmy Ellis, saxophone. The concert concluded with Jon Langford, the "Renaissance man of rock."

The music was great; the auditorium was full; the reception before the concert in the magnificent Chicago Room was memorable. Spirits were high. Income exceeded expenses. And we reached many new folks



(I. to r.) Chicago Federation of Musicians president Gary Matts and ILHS president Larry Spivack enjoy Petrillo stories told by Tom Lee, president of the American Federation of Musicians.



(I. to r.) Tom Piekarski, Bucky Halker, Nora Guthrie, John Langford, and Don Stiernberg get together to wind up the evening.



(I. to r.) Jimmy Ellis, Art Hoyle, and Dan Anderson provide some great jazz.

Y'all Come!

★ May Day Events Schedule in Chicago

- ★ Saturday, May 1, 10 a.m. Rally in Haymarket Square
 ★ (Randolph & DesPlaines), sponsored by ILHS and CFL. Japanese labor delegation will present a plaque for the Memorial
 ★ Monument.
 - Friday, April 30, 9 p.m. Jazz concert honoring May Day and our Japanese labor guests, at the Velvet Lounge (67 E. Cermack) featuring Tatsu Aoki and his Miyumo Project.
 - More information and dates to come!

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The 'Reaper' Has Passed Our Way

Some tall trees have left the labor history landscape in recent months to our deep regret. Among them have been such luminaries as Chicago's 5th ward alderman Leon Despres, once a towering figure on the political left; Studs Terkel, who was Master of Ceremonies at the 1969 rally in Haymarket Square which led to the formation of the ILHS.

Even closer to home was the death on September 15, 2009 of ILHS founding Vice President William Adelman by heart attack at the age of 73. From his position at the University of Illinois, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, Bill inspired countless union officers, staff and rank and file, a fact evident from the outpouring of 30 gifts to ILHS in his memory totaling \$3660. His guidebooks and films on Pullman and Haymarket include Touring Pullman, Haymarket Revisited, Palace Cars and Paradise, and Packingtown USA.



Bill Adelman and Bill Neebe in Forest Home Cemetery.

Almost simultaneously came word of the death of O. W. (Bill) Neebe, grandson of Oscar Neebe, one of the Haymarket Martyrs, who is buried at the monument in Forest Home Cemetery. Bill was a graphic designer who created the powerful poster which promoted "Landmark Day" when the Martyrs Monument was named a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. His presence was always evident at any ceremony connected with the events of 1886.

We also must note the death of Franklin Rosemont, an-

nounced in our June 2009 Reporter. A long-time trustee of the ILHS, he was editor of the monumental Haymarket Scrapbook published by the Kerr Co. which he headed.

More recently came word of the death of Atty. Eugene Cotton, a founding member of the labor law firm Cotton, Watt, Jones and King. Cotton was the Vicki Starr general counsel for the



United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA-CIO) and a passionate advocate for the advancement of working people. In 2001 Cotton was entered into the ILHS Union Hall of Honor. (continued next column)

The Botto House



ILHS Photo Show Closes Run at Botto House

Our impressive exhibition History of Labor in Chicago was on view at the American Labor Museum/Botto House in Haledon, New Jersey from September 6 until December 31. It opened in conjunction with the Museum's 18th Annual Labor Day Parade. The Grand Marshall of the Parade was Jason D'Errico, President of the Passaic County Central Labor Council who viewed the exhibition as did many unionist and their families from Northern New Jersey.

During its three-month run, the show was visited by school and community groups, and by college students from the Labor Center at Rutgers University, as well as students from William Paterson University.

The Botto House was strike headquarters for the famous Patterson New Jersey textile strike of 1913. It is now a National Landmark and received general operating grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a state agency. (For more information see www.labormuseum.net)

The ILHS originally developed this exhibit at the invitation of Nathan Mason, Curator of Public Art for the City of Chicago. It was displayed in the Pedway beneath the Daley Center in 2006.

(Vicki Starr continuation)

Finally, we mourn the death of Vicky Starr, November 26, 2009. Under the name of Stella Nowicki, she was one of the three women featured in the acclaimed film Union Maids which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1978. Staughton and Alice Lynd included interviews with Vicky in both of their well-known books, Rank and File and the recent sequel The New Rank and File. She had been a packinghouse worker in the formative years of the UPWA.

In the 1970s as a clerical employee at the University of Chicago she became a leading figure in the organization of Teamsters Local 743. A long-time ILHS member, Vicky bequeathed to us her work apron and union dues buttons from her days on the sliced bacon line at the Swift & Co. Chicago plant. Gifts in her honor have been received at ILHS from many of her friends and admirers.

It Was A Lovely Labor Day at Pullman

Labor Day 2009 in Pullman proved to be an even more successful event than usual. This year's crowd was bigger than ever and far more colorful due to the many union shirts worn by members of the Chicago Teachers' Union and others. The weather cooperated with the proceedings which took place on a temporary outdoor stage constructed in front of the Clock Tower at the Pullman State Historic Site.

Famed Chicago newscaster, Dick Kay, was Master of Ceremonies. Kay, who now hosts a regular program over radio station WCPT is a former president of the Chicago Local of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA).

The crowd was welcomed by co-hosts Tom Shepherd, Pullman Neighborhood Association, and ILHS President Larry Spivack. Musical entertainment was offered by folk singer Joe Bella and his son, joined by many other local musicians.

Inside the Pullman Factory Building there was an exhibition of photos selected from the ILHS 1976 Bicentennial project "On The Job in Illinois: Then and Now" funded, in part, by the Illinois Humanities Council. Ironically, almost all of these jobs have disappeared since 1976.

The speakers included: Secretary-Treasurer Jorge Ramirez, Chicago Federation of Labor; U. S. Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr.; State Senator Donne Trotter, District 17; State Representative Marlow Colvin, District 33; State Representative Connie Howard, District 34; and Chicago Alderman Pat Dowell, 3rd Ward.

The program was preceded by a picnic for workers and their families engaged in recent struggles, notably at the Congress Hotel; Republic Windows and Doors; Hartmarx Corporation; and SK Hand Tools.

Oops! Sorry to be a bit tardy.

At age 98, your elderly Editor lost a few months due to a mini stroke, but he is now back at work in the office as per usual. Hence our December 2009 publication date has turned out to be in March 2010.

Pullman Historic Site Hosts a 'Full House'



A lively labor song punctuates the Labor Day program.



Union member crowd gives rapt attention to Labor Day speakers.