



ILLINOIS LABOR HISTORY SOCIETY

REPORTER

Fall/Winter 2015

A Night to Remember

On October 23rd more than 300 friends of the Illinois Labor History Society gathered in Chicago at Operating Engineers Hall 399 to honor three true labor heroes in our 34th Annual Union Hall of Honor. This year our theme for the dinner was “Justice from Farm to Table,” and idea that was sparked by a ILHS Board member Debby Pope. Our goal was to pay tribute to the men and women who have fought for fair pay and dignity for the workers who put in long hard hours along every step of the food chain. We honored three of these heroes.

Elizabeth Maloney was a leader of Chicago Waitresses Local 484 who helped to organize the 1914 strike against Henrici’s restaurant. A champion of the ten-hour day, Maloney was the first women to serve as a vice-president of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union.

Olgha Sierra Sandman has spent her life working for justice for Illinois farm workers. For four decades she was a leader of the National Farm Workers Ministry and helped to launch the Illinois Farm Worker Service Center in 1981.

Ruben Ramirez, Sr. worked as a packing house worker and served four decades as a member and officer of the United Food and



Rachel Dunleavy of UNITE-HERE accepting the award for Elizabeth Maloney, Olgha Sierra Sandman, Linda O’Neal of UNITE-HERE and Ruben Ramirez, Sr.

—photo by Mike Matejka

Commercial Workers Union Local 100A. In 1985 he helped to lead a grueling 15-month strike at the American Meat Packing Corporation. In 1993 he became the first and only Latino head of his union. He dedicates his life to working people and to raising his family to follow in his footsteps.

One member of Ruben’s family is his son Jorge Ramirez, the current President of the Chicago Federation of Labor. President Ramirez delivered a stirring key-note address for the Union Hall of Honor Dinner. Chuy Negrete provided music he had selected and compiled specifically in honor of the inductees. A big thank you to Union Insurance Group for sponsoring the dinner. It was truly a night to remember!

Dear ILHS Members,

As 2015 draws to a close, I am struck by how incredibly important it is that we continue to tell the workers' stories. During the past year the hard-earned rights of union workers have been under attack in Illinois like never before in my lifetime.

As we face these attacks, we can draw strength in remembering the courageous history makers who came before us: Lucy Parsons who did not let the loss of her husband slow down her drive to free workers from what she called "wage slavery." Eugene Debs who went to jail not once, but twice, for his stances for workers and justice. Mary "Mother" Jones who traveled the country fighting for workers wherever she was needed, owning so few personal possessions she could tie them into her shawl.

Throughout this year ILHS has commemorated the 100th anniversary of the life of martyred Swedish-born labor musician Joe Hill, whose funeral was held in Chicago. A delegation of Swedish labor leaders visited our city for May Day. Joe Hill's famous last charge "Don't mourn-organize!" has rung in all of our ears this year. It is a charge we need today more than ever. And more than ever we need to share these stories so that the legacy of Lucy Parsons, Eugene Debs, Mother Jones and Joe Hill and countless others will continue to live on in Illinois.



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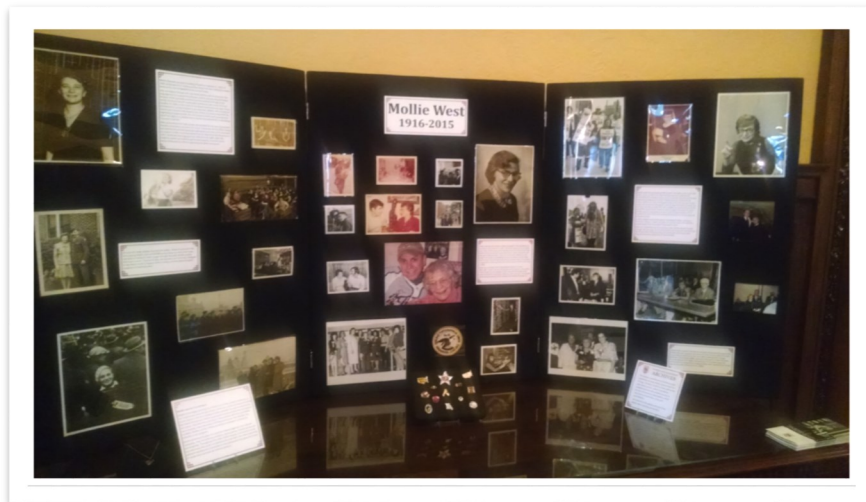
Illinoislaborhistory.org

Remembering Mollie West



This September the Illinois Labor History Society in partnership with the Women and Leadership Archives at Loyola University held a program to honor Mollie West, a leader of both the ILHS and Chicago labor movements. Mollie was a proud member of Chicago Typographical Union No. 16, a delegate to the Illinois State AFL-CIO and the Chicago Federation of Labor, a founding member of Chicago Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), and long-time Secretary of ILHS. In 2002 Mollie was inducted into the ILHS Union Hall of Honor. More than thirty friends and family of Mollie came together to share memories of Mollie, who passed away in August at the age of

nine-nine. President of the Chicago chapter of CLUW and ILHS Board Member Katie Jordan recalled how Mollie consistently challenged labor leaders to recognize the important contributions of women in the movement. Mollie's son Steve gave a touching tribute to his mother. The wonderful staff at the Women and Leadership Archives put together a beautiful display in honor of Mollie from materials in their collection (*photo below*).

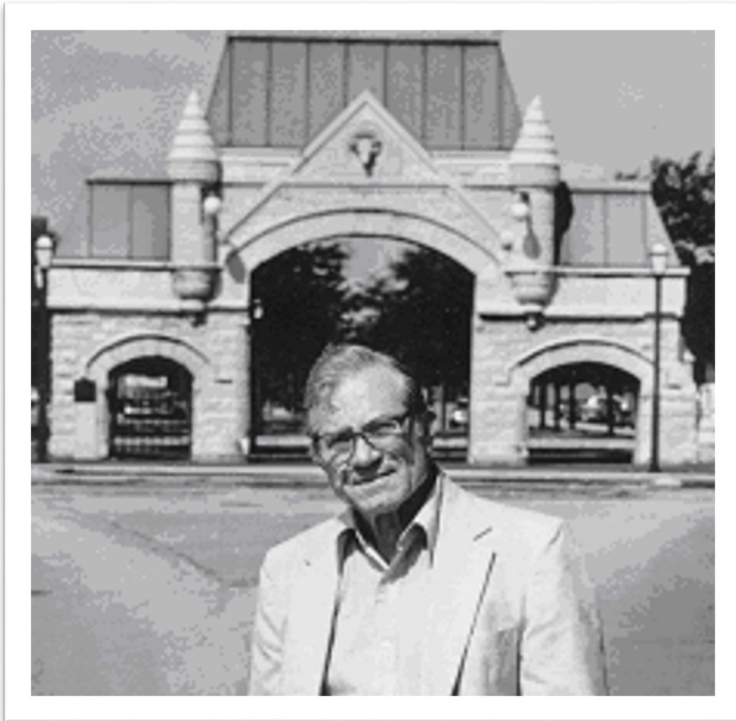


Saying Goodbye to ILHS Dedicated Volunteer, Carol Hillman

On November 16, the ILHS lost a dedicated volunteer, Carol Hillman. Carol was born on June 22, 1949 in Cicero Illinois to Anita S and James J Hillman. She was a passionate, caring and generous woman whose support for social justice never wavered. As a volunteer for ILHS she helped write our podcasts, Labor History in 2, short daily stories of important moments in labor history. She would often say she felt she was “meant to” write these podcasts. She was a board member of the Clinic Vest Project, dedicated to providing free clinical escort vests to groups that service facilities supporting the full range of reproductive health options including safe and legal abortions. Her dedication to making the world safer and more economically just permeated everything she did and earned her many friends. Please make memorial donations to ILHS, or to the Clinic Vest Project, clinicvestproject.org, 559 West Diversey No 120, Chicago, IL 60614

Memories of Les Orear

By ILHS Board Member, Tom Suhrbur



Les Orear in front of the Union Stockyard Gate

I first met Les Orear in 1980. Professor Richard Schneirov (Indiana State University) and I were students at Northern Illinois University. We were beginning our graduate research on late 19th Century Chicago labor history. The Illinois Labor History Society (ILHS) had won an Illinois Humanities Council grant to publish a pamphlet on the Chicago carpenters union. The city unions hosted the founding convention of the national United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) in 1881. The UBC was celebrating its centennial convention in Chicago. Les invited Rich and I to research and write the union's history. The pamphlet eventually ended up as a book published by Southern Illinois University Press.

Les made a lasting impression on me from the start. Despite my naiveté and limited knowledge of Chicago labor history that was painfully evident at the meeting, he treated me with the utmost kindness and respect. Over the years, I came to realize that he was a truly remarkable human being. I would like to illustrate this point by sharing with you some of my most memorable experiences with him.

Les was deeply committed to the labor movement and social justice. He was very proud of the fact that his union, the United Packinghouse Workers of America, was committed to racial and gender equality from its inception in the 1930's at a time when neither was widely accepted within many unions let alone the general public.

His tireless devotion to ILHS was remarkable. Without Les, ILHS would not exist today. ILHS did not have the resources to pay a staff person. For over 40 years, his unpaid labor on behalf of ILHS made it the premier labor history society in the nation. Despite suffering from macular degeneration and a severe back pain in his 90's, he would dutifully take public transportation from his Hyde Park apartment to the Society's downtown office every day. He was 99 years old when he reluctantly stopped coming to the office.

Have you renewed your membership for 2015?

Many of our long-time friends of ILHS have not yet renewed their memberships for 2015. If you are not sure if your membership is current call 312-341-2247.

In 2003, the ILHS Board wanted to induct him into the Union Hall of Honor (UHH). He vigorously refused stating that there were many other labor leaders who were never properly honored. The meeting ended with Les finally relenting to be the honoree that year. Several weeks later, he rescinded his decision and insisted that others be inducted. The following year, it was again proposed by the Board to induct him into the UHH. At first, he refused. But when a Board member stated that, if he would be the honoree, the event would draw a huge crowd and raise a lot of money for ILHS, Les said OK without hesitation.

When he turned 100, we celebrated his birthday at our annual meeting. Following the meeting, we visited the Haymarket Martyrs Cemetery. Les addressed the attendees. He proceeded to explain the symbolism of the cemetery statue and spoke about Albert Weinert, the artist who designed the cemetery monument. He ended his presentation by taking out copies of the Haymarket tour guide for people to purchase. Not only was he intellectually as sharp as ever but he also never missed an opportunity to promote ILHS.

Les was extremely modest. Whenever he received praise for his work on behalf of the ILHS, he would always remind people of the contributions of others. From its inception in 1969, a major goal of the ILHS was the creation of a labor monument at the Haymarket site. He worked 35 years towards that goal. When his efforts on behalf of the Haymarket monument were publicly cited, he would credit Don Turner, retired Chicago Federation of Labor

president, as the key person in getting the monument at the site in 2005. In 2011 Annual Meeting, when Les was honored for his years of devotion to ILHS, he responded by saying that Vice-president Bill Adelman, who died two years earlier, was never properly recognized for his years of service to ILHS.

Les always treated people with the greatest respect. Even if he strongly disagreed with someone, I never heard him say unkind word against anyone. He was always gracious in his treatment of others.

I wrote a history of ILHS for Illinois Heritage Magazine (Spring, 2013). Of course, I had to interview Les in my research for the article. He was 101 years old, yet he cited specific names, dates and events going back to the 1960s. At one point in the interview, he could not remember the name of a Chicago printer who gave ILHS temporary storage space in the 1970s until the Society could raise enough money for an office. Despite all of the details he recalled in the interview, Les was clearly frustrated by his inability to remember the name of the printer. I told him not to worry; we have a lot more to discuss. After finishing the interview, we ate lunch. Les was very quiet. I asked him if he was okay. He said: "I should know these things but I cannot recall the name of that printer." Incredible! I have a hard time remembering what happened last year.

These are just a few of my many experiences with Les. He died at the age of 103. He inspired me to take an active role in the labor movement. He changed my life.

Labor History LIVES at ILHS!

The fall continued to be a busy time for ILHS. The season kicked-off with an exciting Labor Day program at Pullman—our newest National Park. The Pullman State Historic Site hosted the program, and the Chicago Federation of Labor, Chicago Jobs With Justice, the National Park Conservancy, National Park Service, Historic Pullman Foundation, and National A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum all collaborated to make the event a success. More than two-hundred-fifty people enjoyed a labor day skit by members of SAG-AFTRA, music by Mark Dvorak and Bucky Halker, and tours of the Pullman Factory and neighborhood. ILHS is committed to working with these partners to tell the stories of the workers at Pullman as the National Park continues to develop.



SAG-AFTRA members bring to life Eugene Debs, Jennie Curtis, A Philip Randolph and Lucy Parsons for Labor Day at Pullman.

Fall was labor history tour season! Everyone from union members to Lawyers Guild members to students took part in bus tours of Chicago's important labor sites. ILHS also took its show on the road, giving presentations on a variety of topics, including a program on Illinois mining history held in Spring Valley, Illinois and a talk on Women Workers in World War II at Bloomingdale Library. We continued our year of remembering the life of martyred labor musician Joe Hill, commemorating the 100th anniversary of his death by participating in a series of programs and an exhibit at Uri-Eichen gallery in Pilsen.

In October, ILHS had quite a presence at the AFSCME state-wide convention. We hosted a book table for three days, led two sessions for AFSCME retirees on the history of Social Security and retirement, and also gave a talk on Illinois labor history.

Scenes from a Busy Fall Season



SEPTEMBER Staff from the Chicagoland Laborers' Apprentice Program at Haymarket Square during a day-long labor history tour.



OCTOBER Students from the Southeast Asia Youth Leadership Program at Northern Illinois University on a tour of Chicago labor history sites.



NOVEMBER ILHS Board member Bucky Halker plays some favorite Joe Hill tunes to a packed house at the Uri-Eichen Gallery as part of their "Joe Hill 100 Years: Don't Mourn Organize" Series.

Postcards Tell a Tragic History

These postcards depict scenes from the aftermath of the Cherry Mine Disaster. Watches taken from the bodies of those who died helped families to identify their loved ones; volunteers don oxygen masks to attempt to enter the mine and look for survivors; "They are alive" after eight days underground survivors emerge from the disaster.



From the ILHS *Archives*

The Illinois archives are now housed at Roosevelt University. This rich collection of documents and photographs provides unique insight into the labor history of Chicago and Illinois. One of the most recent additions to this collection is a series of two dozen postcards produced in 1909 to tell the story of the Cherry Mine Disaster. Dorothy Johnson generously donated these postcards to ILHS this past summer. Her grandfather, Archibald Frew, was a manager at the mine. This October, ILHS gave a talk on mining history held at Spring Valley, near the site of Cherry. Fifty attendees were able to look through the postcards, which poignantly capture images of the aftermath of the Cherry disaster and the efforts to rescue survivors. The postcards will be on display at our ILHS offices at 430 S. Michigan Ave, Room AUD 1851 as part of our open house on December 7th (11 am to 3 pm) and 8th (5 pm to 7 pm)

Tragedy at Cherry Mine

On November 13, 1909, tragedy struck the little town of Cherry, in the Northern Illinois coalfields. The morning began like most did at the mine. 481 men and boys descended into the mine shaft in the early morning, some going as deep as 500 feet underground to begin their hard days work. Most of the miners were immigrants, many Italian. On that fateful morning an electrical outage at the mine forced the miners to use kerosene torches to light the mine shaft. A coal car filled with hay for the forty mules who worked in the mine were fire from one of these wall lanterns. The blaze spread quickly to the timbers supporting the mine. 259 miners died in the blaze.

One of the survivors remembered: “We stopped working as usual shortly before half-past three o’clock and set out for the shaft. . . After we had proceeded about half a mile towards the shaft we detected a faint odour of smoke, which became more marked as we advanced, until it was almost unendurable. Then we knew that the mine was on fire and that there was danger ahead.” The miners who made their way to the surface attempted to rescue those still trapped. Heroic volunteers from the town hastily gathered to aid the effort. Twelve rescuers died. The mine shafts were closed off in an attempt to smother the fire but this caused many miners to suffocate from the deadly gasses in the mine.

One small group of miners were able to survive eight days until their rescue by building a wall to seal out the fire and poisonous gasses. They drank water leaking from a coal seam.

As a result of this disaster, the Illinois legislature established stronger mine safety regulations. They passed a law that later developed into the Illinois Workmen’s Compensation Act.

The 34th Annual Union Hall of Honor

In the photos below (clockwise): Honoree Ruben Ramirez Sr. poses for a photo with his family; Honorees Ruben Ramirez Sr. and Olga Sierra Sandman share a moment; Chicago Federation of Labor President Jorge Ramirez delivers the keynote address; Chuy Negrete leads the attendees in song; Racheal Dunleve and Linda O'Neal accept the award for Elizabeth Maloney from ILHS Board member Lisa Oppenheim.

Photos courtesy of Mike Matejka





Illinois Labor History Society

Membership Form

Renew your membership in the Illinois Labor History Society. Membership dues are \$30 per year for individuals and \$200 for unions (\$100 for those with less than 200 members). To join as an individual or to affiliate your local union, complete this form and send it with a check to our office, or renew online at www.illinoislaborhistory.org.

For the first time, **you can also become a recurring member.** **To become a recurring member you MUST sign and return this form.** Once you become a recurring member, we will automatically renew your membership each year. by charging the credit card provided. This means we will not have to ask you to update your membership.

To support ILHS, I want to:

_____ Become a member (\$30 annually)

_____ Affiliate my union (\$200 annually, or \$100 for locals under 200 members)

_____ Become a recurring member. (\$30, billed annually. Cancel any time)

Your Name _____ Name of Union Local _____

Address: _____ City _____ State ____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Payment (please check one):

- Check is enclosed
- Credit Card (we will call you for credit card information)

Yes! I want to become a recurring member of ILHS

Signature: _____

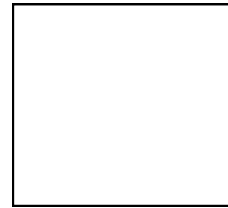
Please contact me with more information about

- Scheduling a Labor History program for my union/organization
- Scheduling a Labor History Tour
- Volunteering with ILHS

Return this Form To:

430 South Michigan Ave. Room AUD 1851, Chicago, IL 60605

Illinois Labor History Society
430 South Michigan Ave.
Room AUD 1851
Chicago, IL 60605








You are Invited

ILHS Holiday Open House

Monday, December 7, 11 am – 3 pm

Tuesday, December 8, 5 pm – 7 pm

-  Visit the new ILHS offices, **430 S Michigan, Room AUD 1851.**
-  View selected treasures from the Illinois Labor History Archives.
-  Renew your ILHS membership before the year ends.
-  Browse the ILHS bookstore for that perfect gift for the labor activist on your shopping list.
-  Enjoy snacks and conversation with your friends at ILHS.