CHAPTER 13

Labor History through Field Trips

By William Adelman

Seeing is believing! Labor history comes to life through field trips, films, and slide presentations, or combinations of these.

The field trip approach to courses in labor history provides an effective and natural way to include women as part of the story. It develops a sense of identification for the women in these classes and educates the men about the role—so often ignored—that women have played in the country's social, economic, and labor history. I began this process with the history and materials available right in the home territory of the workers who are the students in the class. However, I have found that it is not only trade union groups that are interested in labor history, but also women's clubs, elementary and high school teachers, and such organizations as the League of Women Voters and the National Council of Christians and Jews.

The field of labor history is closely related to other fields: black studies, women's studies, ethnic history, urban anthropology, ethnic literature, and urban problems. The need for new materials for effective teaching has been my incentive. About twelve years ago, unable to find good materials ready-made for my work in the labor education programs of the University of Illinois, I began to package my own. In this chapter, I will discuss some of my experiences in preparing these materials. At the end of the chapter I list those materials available for sale or rent. Because of my close connection to Chicago, that city serves as the case example here. However, I urge readers to uncover the histories and resources of their own cities in a similar way.

The Chicago Labor Education Program of the University of Illinois is located in a metropolitan area rich in labor history and a tradition of militant unionism. In the 1880s, one-fourth of all organized workers in the United States lived in this area.

Today the home of the Circle Campus of the University of Illinois is the former site of Hull House, a center for women's activities from 1889 until
the death of Jane Addams in 1935. Many early unions were organized on
this site, such as the teachers' union, clothing workers, glove workers, re­
sertaurant workers, and Chicago shoeworkers. A number of ethnic neighbor­
hoods and old buildings still exist, providing an ideal place for labor history
field trips. Pictures of the old buildings are the basis for slide programs.
Other urban and rural areas are equally rich in labor history, for example,
Lawrence, Massachusetts, Paterson, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Detroit,
and New York. They are ready subjects for exciting films, slide shows, and
field trip tour guides. Mining areas and southern textile mills have been
scenes of tragic strikes and industrial accidents. Rural areas have seen
demonstrations of farmers and migrant workers. All these stories need to
be told.

Getting Started

A serious problem in producing tour books and audiovisual materials
is funding. In Illinois, this was solved with the establishment of the Illinois
Labor History Society (ILHS) in 1968, which set up an educational publi­
cation fund.

From the start, the ILHS had a strongly labor executive board, including
rank and file union members, labor attorneys, union staff, former Wobblies,
early C.I.O. members, and labor educators, as well as academics. It is
important that an organization like this be broad-based and offer a variety
of programs. The ILHS has lasted so long and become a leader among
state labor history societies because it developed this base.

Known at first as the Haymarket Memorial Committee, its activities centered
around the significance of the 1886 "Haymarket Affair" to labor history,
to freedom of speech, and to workers' right to organize. One of its first
programs, a dinner on May 4, 1968, honored the great teacher and early
member of the American Federation of Teachers, Lillian Herstein, born in
the year of Haymarket. Following the dinner, the group made a pilgrimage
to Haymarket Square and placed a wreath honoring the workers who died
there. Newspapers and TV were notified of the program and covered the
event.

Honoring Lillian Herstein was the perfect way to launch our program,
because of her long association with the labor movement. Among her
pupils have been Studs Terkel, author of *Hard Times* and *Working*, and
Arthur Goldberg, former secretary of labor and Supreme Court justice.
Every community has its pioneers who could be honored. Events like this
bring together people who hold different political persuasions. Eventually
many joined the ILHS, while unions and individuals began to make tax-
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deductible donations to the educational fund in honor of such labor leaders as Ms. Herstein. This provided funds for other projects.

Next Steps: Packingtown: U.S.A.

Even before this fund was established, I became interested in The Great Meat Strike of 1904, which is the focus of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. What is not generally known, however, is that the real force behind this strike was Mary McDowell, known to workers of the area as "The Angel of the Yards." Upton Sinclair lived at her settlement house during the strike and she provided him with much of the information in his book.

McDowell moved to the Packingtown community around the stockyards on Chicago's southside following the rioting that accompanied the Pullman Strike of 1894. A social worker and close friend of Jane Addams, she directed the University of Chicago's McDowell Settlement House until her death in 1936.

Quite by accident I discovered an article she wrote for the July 29, 1904, Chicago *Daily News*, "Live on Higher Plane—Unions a Peace Factor." I began to use this article in labor history classes, and was amazed at the reactions of black and white workers alike. The article describes how in 1904 black workers were being used as strikebreakers and women were being exploited as cheap labor. Everyone could see how events in 1904 related to those of the late 1960s, when the civil rights movement was at its height. I became interested in learning as much about Mary McDowell as I could.

I found that she had helped to found the first women's local of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union, Local 183. At her urging, the president of the Meat Cutters, Mike Donnelly, came to Chicago. Of his visit she said:

> The organizing of the packing trades by Michael Donnelly . . . prevented a race feud between black and white workers, broke down prejudices between different nationalities and has established a fellowship of workers. As one of the working women, a warm-hearted Irish girl, said, "It is different now: we feel that we are all brothers and sisters."

McDowell also pointed out that while the men had lost faith in the future and were drowning their sorrows at "Whiskey Corner," the women were fighting so that their sons and daughters might have a better life.

> The police captain of the stockyards district says: "The girls of the yards are behaving with dignity during the strike. It is due to their organization, for they were never so before."
The girls are a distinct influence for order and sobriety. The Union men have spoken to them, begging them to use their influence to keep the idle from drinking.

After using McDowell's article in classes for about a year, I discovered that the Chicago Daily News was going to give thousands of old glass plate pictures to the Chicago Historical Society. Many of these pictures turned out to be photos of the very events that McDowell described. It was then that the idea for a film was born, a movie that would use these pictures together with the words of Upton Sinclair, Mary McDowell, and Mike Donnelly, and contemporary newspaper accounts.

The Amalgamated Meat Cutters funded the project; they saw in it a valuable tool for educating their own members. Students in the Motion Picture Production Center of the University of Illinois, Urbana, offered their help. The film, called Packingtown: U.S.A., took eighteen months to make and cost $5,000 in cash and another $5,000 in time volunteered by students.

The film has proved one of the most popular ever produced by the University of Illinois. It is used by women's studies programs, junior high school and high school classes in history and literature, black studies courses, labor education programs, ethnic studies programs, and courses in labor-management relations. The army purchased a number of prints to show soldiers as part of a basic training human relations program. Black workers never fail to comment on how white workers in Packingtown once had the same experiences with discrimination that they have had.

Hidden away in communities all over the country are other collections of old photos, waiting to be discovered, in the picture files of newspapers, union halls, and local historical societies. While we have some motion pictures of strikes and demonstrations that date back to the 1920s and 1930s, the only way to recreate earlier events, particularly those involving women workers, is through photos, paintings, and old sketches.

Several additional projects grew out of Packingtown: U.S.A., including a film for educational television titled Stockyards: End of an Era. This incorporated some footage from Packingtown with current community scenes. A high point of this film is an interview with Sophie Kosciolowski, who as a small child worked in the stockyards. She dramatically recounts the horrors of those early days. In 1971, the stockyards closed. Just prior to the closing the ILHS held a dinner to honor many of Chicago's labor leaders. Film of this was later included in Stockyards.

Building a Program around Historic Labor Sites

Examples of three of the field trips and walking tours developed by the Illinois Labor History Society are described briefly below as “how-to” pro-
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jects that labor history associations, unions, or the Coalition of Labor Union Women (to name a few possible sponsors) could initiate. The material is there, waiting to be uncovered.

The Pullman Company

The Pullman Company, now a part of Chicago, provided a unique opportunity to develop walking tours to augment labor history classes. During a 1971 sabbatical leave from the University of Illinois, I developed a slide show and wrote the guide Touring Pullman, which describes the 1894 Pullman strike and the men and women who figured in it.

At the same time that the book was published, residents of the Pullman Community were lobbying for landmark status. In 1973, the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, and the federal government joined in declaring the area a historic district. The Illinois Labor History Society testified that "Pullman is dedicated to all the men and women involved in the Strike of 1894 who fought for democracy on the job and within their community."

Today the area, a "midwestern Williamsburg," contains over 750 pieces of property. However, unlike Williamsburg, Pullman is still a working community of small-home owners. Touring Pullman allows families or individuals to tour Pullman in two hours on their own, and to learn the often-neglected labor point of view about the community and the strike.

Although some history textbooks recount the role of Eugene Victor Debs in the Pullman strike, no book mentions the part played by the young Methodist minister, the Reverend William H. Carwardine, whose book The Pullman Strike exposed the feudal character of Pullman’s "model town." No book mentions the women involved. Yet in researching Touring Pullman, I found that Jennie Curtis, a Pullman Company seamstress for five years, was a strike leader and president of Girls' Union No. 269 of the American Railway Union (ARU). A member of the grievance committee that called on George Pullman and Vice President Wickes to protest the wage cuts of 1893–94, she pointed out that women workers had had their wages cut even more than the men's. The message need not be lost that labor history has its heroines, too.

Indeed, Jennie Curtis, a spokeswoman for all the Pullman unions, became a symbol of the strike. It was she who addressed the delegates to the American Railway Union Convention meeting in Ulrich's Hall on Clark Street in Chicago on June 12, 1894, pleading with the reluctant Debs and the convention delegates to support the cause of the people of Pullman, saying, "Come along with us because we are not just fighting for ourselves, but for decent conditions for workers everywhere."

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During the strike, Jennie Curtis and a delegation of other women workers greeted Jane Addams, who was investigating the strike for the Chicago Civic Federation. The name of Jane Addams is also left out of textbook accounts of the Pullman Strike.

Mary Alice Wood, who worked in the electric department at Pullman, was another active striker. She and Jennie Curtis testified before the U.S. Strike Commission on August 18, 1894. Wood, reporting how her family was treated by the Pullman Company, told about the injuries her father sustained at work, how he died, and how she and her younger sister eventually were fired and evicted from their homes because they took the case to court.

The homes of Mary Alice Wood, Reverend Carwardine, and Jennie Curtis are still standing. A field trip to this spot, using Touring Pullman, is far more than just a study of architecture and town planning.

Another book that deals with Pullman is the autobiography of Dr. Alice Hamilton, a founder of the field of industrial medicine. Her autobiography, Exploring the Dangerous Trades, now is out of print, but the ILHS hopes one day to reissue it. One of America’s first woman doctors, Dr. Hamilton died in 1971 at the age of 101, after working for women’s rights for nearly 80 years. In 1910 she investigated the health facilities at Pullman at the request of Jane Addams and Hull House. She found that 109 out of 489 men in the paint shop had serious cases of lead poisoning. The Pullman Company claimed the men were alcoholics, because a victim of lead poisoning shows the same symptoms.

“Dr. Alice,” as she was called by the thousands of workers who knew her, took her case to another great lady, Mrs. Joseph T. Bowen. Mrs. Bowen, a friend and supporter of Jane Addams, was a major stockholder in the Pullman Company, and used her votes at a stockholders’ meeting to force Pullman’s Board of Directors to correct some of the unsafe conditions. Workers at Pullman Standard, who today belong to the United Steelworkers of America, AFL-CIO, still benefit from the militancy of these two women, yet many young union members have never heard their names.

Since 1972, Touring Pullman has tried to bridge this gap. It has become popular with labor groups meeting in Chicago, women’s clubs, teachers, and, recently, the National Convention of Librarians. In 1973, CBS-TV produced a television show on Pullman, showing both members of the ILHS and representatives of the more pro-management Historic Pullman Foundation. The show proved exciting: members of the ILHS argued the cause of the workers and Debs, while the Historic Pullman Foundation took George Pullman’s point of view. Once again an historic question came alive—to the delight as well as education of thousands of viewers.
The Miners' Cemetery and Mother Jones

In 1972, the ILHS reissued *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* (originally published in 1925), in cooperation with Charles H. Kerr and Co. It seemed that everyone had forgotten Mother Jones. A letter written to the Secretary of the Interior requesting landmark status for her monument and grave in the Miners' Cemetery at Mt. Olive, Illinois, drew the response: “Who is Mother Jones?”

How could we make union members aware of the importance of Mother Jones? To do this the ILHS twice moved its annual meeting to Springfield and Mt. Olive, Illinois. At the first of these two meetings, folklorist Archie Green played songs connected with Mother Jones, and the meeting concluded with a visit to her grave. The second meeting was the occasion for a dramatic presentation based on oral histories from the 1930s strike of the Progressive Miners, a union with which Mother Jones had worked. The Women’s Brigade of the Progressive Miners marched to the program in their sparkling white uniforms and later joined the ILHS at Mother Jones’s grave.

Today, Mother Jones has been rediscovered. Her grave is a National Historic Site. In 1974, Dale Fetherling published a new biography, *Mother Jones: The Miners’ Angel*. A magazine now bears her name, and in 1978 a play about her toured the country.

Haymarket Revisited

In 1971, the ILHS held its annual memorial program, not at Haymarket Square, but at the gravesite of the Haymarket Martyrs some ten miles west of the square. The next year, on Sunday, May 2, the ILHS was officially given the Haymarket Martyrs’ Monument (plus the graves of Emma Goldman and Lucy Parsons) by the former trustees, the Pioneer Aid and Support Society. It now became important to produce a walking and bus tour centered around Haymarket.

The beautiful Haymarket Martyrs’ Monument in Waldheim (Forest Home) Cemetery became the symbol of the ILHS.

In 1976, *Haymarket Revisited* appeared. This book covers 124 sites. Since it takes six hours to visit all of the sites, the book is divided into four mini-tours: “Protest Meeting and the Bomb” (Haymarket Square); “Trial and Execution” (Hubbard and Dearborn Streets); “The Funeral” (a tour of the homes and neighborhood of the martyrs); “Burial and Dissenters Row” (Martyrs’ Monument and the graves of 24 other labor leaders).

*Haymarket Revisited* includes not just labor history, but also architecture and information on ethnic neighborhoods, churches, and restaurants. The
book has been adopted as a text by a class at Northeastern Illinois University. In Chicago, the book is sold by the Architectural Center as well as by the Chicago Historical Society.

Although individuals can visit the sites by themselves, using a foldout map in the tour book, groups have been requesting guided bus trips, demonstrating the versatility of and wide interest in field visits.

The Cultural Center of the Chicago Public Library was the first to request a tour. In response to an announcement in local newspapers, over 150 people signed up for the fifty-passenger bus! A second tour with two more full buses was conducted, participants including labor union members, senior citizens, social workers, teachers, architecture students, and history buffs.

The National Council of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) decided to include *Haymarket Revisited* in its training program in urban problems and human rights. A grant funded the training of five groups of community leaders, each of which took part in a specially conducted tour. These groups included black community leaders, police department human relations personnel, army personnel from nearby Fort Sheridan, and representatives of numerous women's groups.

The day-long NCCJ program began with a slide presentation in the morning, providing an overview of the Haymarket Affair. The group then was bused to Haymarket Square and the site of the trial and execution. Lunch at a Polish workers' restaurant in the martyrs' neighborhood was followed by afternoon visits to Jewish, German, and Polish neighborhoods. Throughout the trip the group had relived the struggles of ethnic workers, concluding that little had changed. Today's ethnic and racial groups are different, but the struggles and problems remain.

**Problems in Researching Field Trip Material**

The research for *Haymarket Revisited* and its tours was difficult. Many street names have changed, and in 1912 the entire city's street numbering system was altered. However, thanks to a WPA research project of the 1930s, a list of the street and address changes was available. Newspaper accounts contemporary with the Haymarket Affair gave many old addresses and even sketches of buildings and homes that proved valuable in locating the old sites again. So did books, pamphlets, and private papers that deal with Haymarket from a labor viewpoint.

Several descendants of the Haymarket Martyrs still live in the Chicago area, including members of the Neebe and Parsons families, who were interviewed. A visit to Waldheim (Forest Home) Cemetery thus becomes the story of continuing struggles of human beings.
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Lucy Parsons: A Biography Emerges

Lucy Parsons, a black with American Indian blood, was born a slave in Texas in 1853, married Albert Parsons, one of the Haymarket Martyrs, and died in Chicago in 1942. She spoke brilliantly in both English and Spanish. In 1885 she led a “Poor Peoples March” up Prairie Avenue and by the homes of George Pullman and some of the richest people in America, to demand food and jobs. On January 31, 1915, she was arrested for leading a “Hunger March” up Halsted Street by Hull House. (This march marked the first singing of Ralph Chaplin’s song, “Solidarity Forever.”)

In 1976, Carolyn Ashbaugh’s biography of Lucy Parsons was published, the first ever written about this important black woman (*Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary*). This has led to still further interest in the *Haymarket Revisited* tour, since Lucy’s grave is next to that of her martyred husband Albert.

New Program Areas: View of Today

The funding for *Touring Pullman, Haymarket Revisited,* and (in part) *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* came from the ILHS education fund, which is now known as the Ralph Helstein Fund, honoring the former president of the United Packinghouse Workers. By 1976, union and individual contributions made some $20,000 available. As books are sold, profits are returned to the fund for use in new programs.

Using these funds for matching purposes gives the ILHS leverage to obtain additional grants. The largest of these was for a project called *On the Job in Illinois: Then and Now.* Nearly $100,000 was received from the Bicentennial Commission, the Illinois Humanities Council, and several other agencies.

*On the Job in Illinois* involved shooting about five thousand pictures of men and women workers. Following in the tradition of Louis Hine and Jacob Riis, these pictures will be a valuable resource for future generations. Eventually all the pictures will become part of the collection of the Illinois State Historical Society.

The *On the Job* exhibit of 250 of the best pictures was still touring Illinois universities, libraries, and shopping centers at the end of 1978. In addition, a portable exhibit including 120 pictures was made available for rental, and a booklet that includes many of the photographs was produced.

Slide Show on Working Women

One of the most difficult programs to research was the slide presentation *Women and the Labor Movement.* Again and again groups came to me
to borrow these slides of famous women trade union leaders; the growing demand for this type of program was evident.

An early slide presentation, Labor History Rediscovered, traces the history of American workers from colonial times to today, and includes the names of famous women connected with the labor movement. Some of them, like Grace and Edith Abbott, Dr. Alice Hamilton, Florence Kelley, Sophonisba Breckinridge, and Ellen Gates Starr, worked with Jane Addams at Hull House.¹

Many of the Hull House women later moved to key positions in social welfare programs across the country. Several wrote useful books, for example, Edith Abbott's Women in Industry, available through Arno Press.² Women and the Labor Movement is now linked to a trip to the restored Hull House and adjoining Dining Hall, where so many historic events involving women workers took place.

Program Impact

CBS-TV, in cooperation with the ILHS and other groups interested in ethnic and labor history, has now broadcast close to fifty morning television shows on these topics. The response has been overwhelming, and has led to an increased demand for slide presentations and field trips.

In a period when Americans are seeking to know more about their roots, field trips and slide shows make these vivid and real. Early immigrant workers had to struggle to survive. Later generations became obsessed with status, with material possessions. Today, however, working people want a sense of identity.

For women workers especially, field trips, slide programs, and films that discuss their role in labor history can provide a link to the struggles of the past that help to build a foundation for their growing participation in the labor movement of the future.

Resources

For materials listed as available through the Illinois Labor History Society, write to: Illinois Labor History Society, Book Department, P.O. Box 914, Chicago, Ill., 60690.

¹ Hull House's research library proved a valuable source of information. Special thanks to Mary Lynn McCree, Manuscript Librarian and Curator of Hull House, and Mary Ann Johnson, Administrator of Hull House.
² Perhaps the most useful guide to books on working women is Martha Jane Soltow’s Women in American Labor History, 1825-1974 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976).
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Films

Memorial Day Massacre of 1937. Produced by Les Orear and the staff of Columbia College. Contains the original uncut Paramount newsreel plus a discussion with a steelworker who was there. Black and white; 17 minutes. Available for rent or sale, from Illinois Labor History Society.


Books


Displays

On the Job in Illinois: Then and Now. A small version of a bicentennial exhibit. Contains 120 8 × 10" pictures mounted on 11 × 14" display boards. Will be sent through the mail in three boxes of forty pictures each. Available for rent from Illinois Labor History Society.
Slide Presentations

*Labor History Rediscovered.* By William Adelman. Contains two trays of 80 slides each. Gives the history of the American worker from Colonial times until today. Available for rent from Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, 504 East Armory, Champaign, Ill., 61820. Phone (217) 333-0980.

*Women and the Labor Movement.* By William Adelman. Contains one tray of 80 slides. Through paintings, sketches, and photos, the story of women workers is told from Colonial times until today. Available for rent from Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, 504 East Armory, Champaign, Ill., 61820. Phone (217) 333-0980.