A Thread In Time

Newsletter of the National Society of Descendants of Textile Workers of America, Inc.

www.textileworker.com

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President's Message

The 2016 annual meeting of the National Society of the Descendants of Textile Workers of America, Inc. was held March 13, 2016 at 1:30 pm, at the Willimantic Brewing Company, 967 Main Street, Willimantic, CT. It was well attended with eleven members and 2 guests in attendance.

On the agenda was the election of officers. Each of the current officers, with the exception of Vice President, was reelected to a second three year term. Their terms will expire in the spring of 2019, at which time the elected officers (President, Secretary, and Treasurer) be term limited from office. Dawn Darche replaces Melody Guillemette as Vice President, we thank Melody for her service and welcome back Dawn, one of the founding members of the society.

The 51st annual Connecticut Massing of the Colors will be held on Sunday October 2, 2016, at 3:00 PM The First Congregational Church 588 Exeter Rd., Lebanon, CT 06249. This years' host is The Connecticut Society of the Sons of the American Revolution.

This is the gathering of lineage, hereditary and patriotic societies that includes a procession of their flags, a short service, and light refreshments. This colorful event is always an interesting time to meet old and new friends from other societies. Our society is normally well represented with all of our officers present. Our members are welcome to attend. From 12:00 to 2:00 the Connecticut DAR will hold an open house at the Jonathan Trumbull house nearby, so plan on getting there early.

Our society has agreed to host the event in 2018, the 250th anniversary of Samuel Slater's birth. A committee was formed at our annual meeting to work on this project. Mary Brown and Ann Sheedy have volunteered to work on the committee to create an agenda, select a site, and help organize the event. Please contact me if you are interested in assisting.

To help cover the expenses of hosting the our Treasurer has opened an account to accept donations designated for the event. Please send your charitable donations with your annual dues to NSDTWA, c/o Nancy Merwin, 284 Chesterfield Road, Oakdale, CT 06370.

We have been printing a series on different mills in our newsletter, one member suggest doing an article on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire (see page 2).

Please contact me if you would like a mill in your area highlighted in one of our issues,

We are also investigating the possibility of the presence of the society on Facebook, in addition to our website. This will give our members a chance to share their heritage and to share information on our ancestors. Please contact me if you are interested in managing the Facebook site.

I would like to welcome our newest members. Please contact me if you have suggestions to improve our society. Also, if you have information to share on your ancestors, please submit it to our webmaster for inclusion on our website.

Best Regards, Bill Warner

New Members

We welcome our newest members to the society.

#66 - Mrs. Sheilia Boyd - Fairplay, SC

#67 - Mr. Sumner Gary Hunnewell, MO

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire
Manhattan, NYC - March 25, 1911

In one of the deadliest moments of America's industrial history, a rag bin caught fire in the Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory. The fire was put out within a half hour, but not before killing 146 garment workers, on Saturday, March 25, 1911. Of the 123 women and 23 men – who died from the fire, smoke inhalation, or falling or jumping to their deaths. Most of the victims were recent Jewish and Italian immigrant women aged 16 to 23, of the victims whose ages are known, the oldest victim was Providenza Panno at 43, and the youngest were 14-year-olds Kate Leone and "Sara" Rosaria Maltese. The tragedy led to the development of a series of laws and regulations that better protected the safety of factory workers.

The Triangle factory, owned by Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, was located on the eighth, ninth and tenth floors of the Asch Building, at 23–29 Washington Place in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, now known as the Brown Building and part of New York University. The Asch Building, built in 1900–01, was only ten years old at the time of the fire. There were four elevators with access to the factory floors, but only one was fully operational and it could hold only 12 people at a time. There were two stairways down to the street, but one was locked from the outside to prevent theft by the workers and the other opened inward only. The fire escape, as all would come to see, was shoddily constructed, and could not support the weight of more than a few people at a time.

Blanck and Harris already had a suspicious history of factory fires. The Triangle factory was twice scorched in 1902, while their Diamond Waist Company factory burned twice, in 1907 and in 1910. It seems that Blanck and Harris deliberately torched their workplaces before business hours in order to collect on the large fire-insurance policies they purchased, a not uncommon practice in the early 20th century. While this was not the cause of the 1911 fire, it contributed to the tragedy, as Blanck and Harris refused to install sprinkler systems and take other safety measures in case they needed to burn down their shops again.

Added to this delinquency were Blanck and Harris' notorious anti-worker policies. It was a sweatshop in every sense of the word: a cramped space lined with work stations and packed with poor immigrant workers, mostly teenaged women who did not speak English. Their employees were paid a mere $15 a week, despite working 12 hours a day, every day. When the International Ladies Garment Workers Union led a strike in 1909 demanding higher pay and shorter and more predictable hours, Blanck and Harris' company was one of the few manufacturers who resisted, hiring police as thugs to imprison the striking women, and paying off politicians to look the other way.

On March 25, a Saturday afternoon, there were 600 workers at the factory when a fire broke out in a rag bin on the eighth floor. The manager turned the fire hose on it, but the hose was rotted and its valve was rusted shut. Panic ensued as the workers fled to every exit. The elevator broke down after only four trips, and women began jumping down the shaft to their deaths. Those who fled down the wrong set of stairs were trapped inside and burned alive. Other women trapped on the eighth floor began jumping out the windows, which created a problem for the firefighters whose hoses were crushed by falling bodies. Also, the firefighters' ladders stretched only as high as the seventh floor, and their safety nets were not strong enough to catch the women, who were jumping three at a time.

Blanck and Harris were on the building's top floor with some workers when the fire broke out. They were able to escape by climbing onto the roof and hopping to an adjoining building.

The fire was out within half an hour, but not before 49 workers had been killed by the fire, and another 100 or so were piled up dead in the elevator shaft or on the sidewalk. The workers' union organized a march on April 5 to protest the conditions that led to the fire; it was attended by 80,000 people.

Though Blanck and Harris were put on trial for manslaughter, they managed to get off scot-free. Still, the massacre for which they were responsible did finally compel the city to enact reform. In October, 1911, in the aftermath of the fire, New York State passed the Sullivan-Hoey Fire Prevention Law, requiring that factory owners install sprinkler systems and creating a single fire commission with powers previously divided among six agencies. New York also set up the Factory Investigating Commission, and overhauled or enacted around three dozen laws dealing with factory safety.

The text for this article is taken from History.com and Wikipedia.com.

Scholarship

A goal of our Society is to provide scholarships to Vocational School students. The scholarship does not have to be used for college. It can be for licensing fees, tools, etc. The student must meet the following criteria:

1. Exemplary work ethic
2. Respect for self, family, peers, and authority
3. Strong background and interest in American History
4. Good academic performance
5. Attendance record indicates no suspensions or unexcused absences

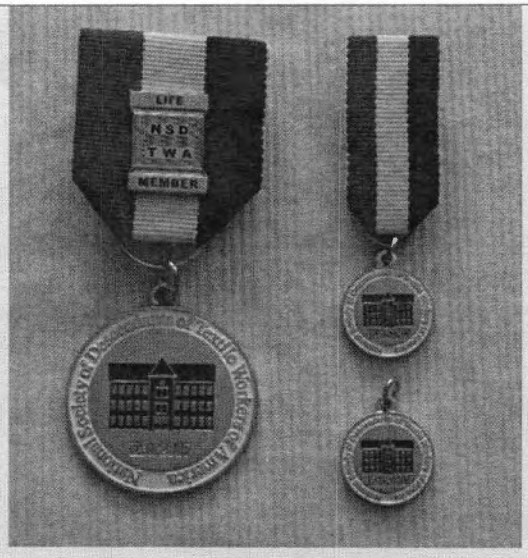
This year's scholarship of went to Joseph Wilson of Windham Tech.

Website

Once again, I invite you to visit our outstanding website at www.textileworker.com. Our newsletters are available on the website in full color. You will also notice that some of the honor roll members have special attachments with anecdotes about their life. You are welcome to submit material about your ancestor. Please contact Bill Warner at wwarner13@gmail.com or Mary Brown at mbrown06239@gmail.com for submission of this material.

Treasurers Report

Checking Account	$1,152.44
Scholarship Fund	$2,586.15
Life Member Endowment Fund	$2,180.97
Total as of December 31, 2015	$5,919.56



Insignia

You may order our insignia pin for $40, our mini insignia for $30, our charm for $30 or the life membership pin for $10 (available to Life Members only). Send a check, including $5 for shipping and handling, made out to NSDTWA to Ms. Nancy Merwin, 284 Chesterfield Road, Oakdale, CT 06370. Insignia is always available at the annual meeting. All proceeds from the sale of insignia are placed in the scholarship fund.

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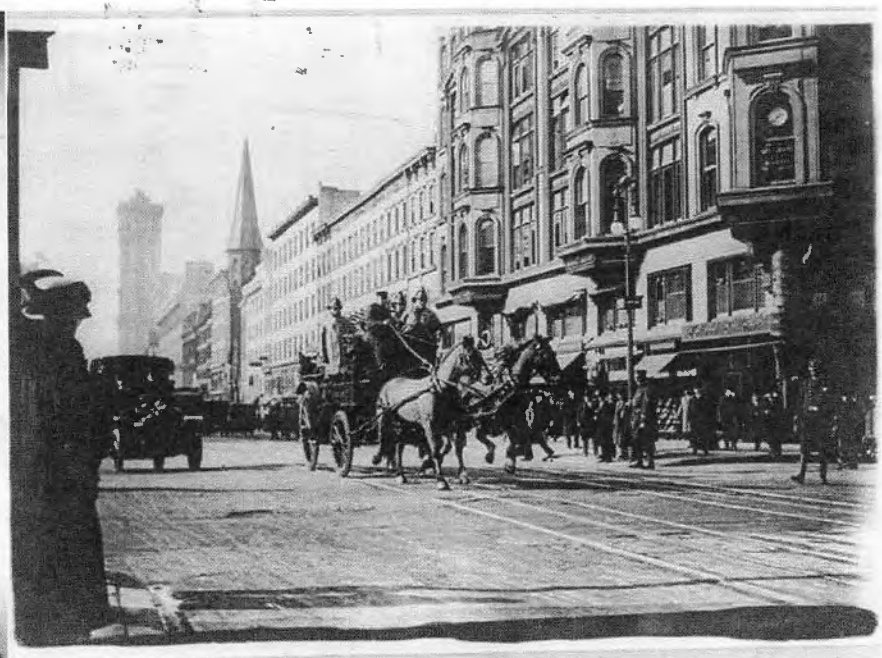
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Public Domain, commons.wikimedia.org



Horse drawn Fire Engines responding to the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory fire.
Manhattan, March 25, 1911