

## What is ILHOP?

**The Iowa Labor History Oral Project (ILHOP)** was started 40 years ago by Iowa Federation of Labor leaders who recognized the need to preserve the stories of workers whose lives shaped Iowa's rich labor history.

From the 1970s-1990s, ILHOP recorded over **1,100 interviews** recounting the lives, labors, and struggles of Iowa union members. ILHOP is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive labor oral history collections in the world and one of the only large-scale oral history projects initiated and funded by labor unions themselves.

ILHOP audio recordings, interview transcripts, and thousands of documents, photos, and artifacts are available to the public via the **Iowa Labor Collection** at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City.



Don Skalsky organizes on behalf of the United Packinghouse Workers in Cedar Rapids in the 1950s (Iowa Labor Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa City).

Cover photo: Mason City Packinghouse Workers strike, 1948 (Iowa Labor Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa City).

## ILHOP Today

A new round of ILHOP interviews is now under way to preserve important stories from more recent decades.

Areas of focus for new interviews include:

- Origins and growth of Iowa's **public sector unions**
- **Major events and struggles** (organizing, strikes, lock-outs, plant closings) occurring since the 1970s
- **Industrial, economic, and political changes** affecting Iowa workers from the 1970s to the present
- Experiences of **women, minorities, and new immigrants** in Iowa workplaces



Interviewees of **all ages, backgrounds, and occupations** are being sought to tell their stories.

Fundraising is also under way to support the creation of **digital versions of ILHOP resources** in order to make key aspects of Iowa labor history freely available on-line.

## ILHOP Advisors & Staff

ILHOP is a joint project of the **Iowa Federation of Labor-AFL-CIO, the University of Iowa Labor Center, the State Historical Society of Iowa, and the University of Iowa Division of Continuing Education.**

### Lead Interviewer

John McKerley, ILHOP Oral Historian,  
University of Iowa Labor Center  
E-mail: john-mckerley@uiowa.edu  
Phone: 301-789-4164

### Project Director

Jennifer Sherer, Director, University of Iowa Labor Center  
E-mail: jennifer-sherer@uiowa.edu  
Phone: 319-335-4144

### Project Advisory Committee

Mary Bennett, Special Collections Coordinator, State Historical Society of Iowa

Matthew Glasson, Labor Educator, University of Iowa Labor Center

Jan Laue, President, Iowa Alliance for Retired Americans

Ken Sagar, President, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO

Shel Stromquist, Professor Emeritus, University of Iowa Department of History

Janet Weaver, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries

Charlie Wishman, Secretary-Treasurer, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO

# The Iowa Labor History Oral Project (ILHOP)

## Preserving and Sharing Iowa's Labor History



Iowa Labor History Oral Project  
c/o Labor Center  
100 BioVentures Center, W130  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, IA 52242  
319-335-4144  
labor-center@uiowa.edu



THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA  
**Labor Center**

**STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA**  
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

## How Can I Get Involved?

### **Help Tell Your Union's Story**

Contact ILHOP Oral Historian John McKerley with suggestions for possible interview contacts: 301-789-4164 (cell), 319-335-4144 (office) or [john-mckerley@uiowa.edu](mailto:john-mckerley@uiowa.edu). As time allows, John works to schedule convenient times and locations for interviews anywhere within the state (or sometimes a bit beyond).

### **Preserve the Historical Records of Your Union or Labor Council**

Along with recorded oral histories, ILHOP promotes the collection of historically valuable documents, photos, and union records for permanent safekeeping in the State Historical Society's Iowa Labor Collection, housed in the Society's Iowa City Library & Archives. If you or your labor organization possess union records that are no longer in use, don't throw them out! Call us at 319-335-4144 for assistance with depositing records.

### **Volunteer to Transcribe Interviews**

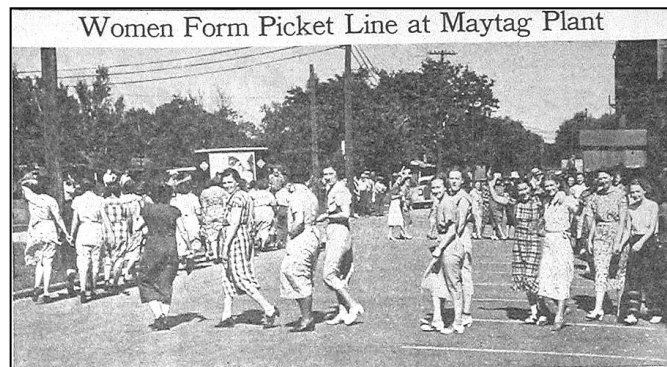
ILHOP is seeking volunteers to type out full text transcriptions of recorded interviews. If you are interested in Iowa labor history, know how to type, and have a few hours a month to donate, consider serving as a volunteer transcriber.

### **Host a Labor History Class or Display ILHOP Materials**

ILHOP materials can help labor history come alive and can be incorporated into union, labor council, school, or community education events. Contact us at 319-335-4144 to discuss the possibilities.

### **Donate!**

ILHOP has always depended on financial support from the Iowa labor movement, and donations are needed to support the collection of additional interviews in the coming year. Checks can be made out to Iowa Federation of Labor (write "ILHOP" in check memo line) and sent to 2000 Walker St., Suite A, Des Moines, IA 50317.



Women Form Picket Line at Maytag Plant  
In this Des Moines Register photo, women join a mass picket outside the Maytag plant in Newton, Iowa, during a prolonged workers' struggle to retain a union contract in 1938 (Iowa Labor Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa-Iowa City).

## Read more about Iowa's labor history

Drawing directly from ILHOP interviews, *Solidarity & Survival: An Oral History of Iowa Labor in the Twentieth Century* tells the dramatic story of Iowa labor history. Written by University of Iowa labor historian Shelton Stromquist, the book was published in 1993 after a first round of over 1,000 ILHOP interviews had been completed (University of Iowa Press, 346 pages.)

In *Solidarity and Survival*, three generations of Iowa workers tell of their unrelenting efforts to create a labor movement in the coal mines and on the rails, in packing-houses and farm equipment plants, on construction sites and in hospital wards.



The book presents the resonant voices of the men and women who defined a new, prominent place for themselves in the lives of their communities and in the politics of their state.

Copies of *Solidarity & Survival* are available at a discounted price of \$20 from the UI Labor Center. Call 319-335-4144 to order.

## In their own words: Excerpts from *Solidarity and Survival*

### **Lawrence Russell, Rubber Workers, Des Moines:**

*"Those of us they hired in the early fifties had been in Iwo Jima or Okinawa in 1945. We had a lot of fight in us. . . . We had a rule back in those days that the shift that takes you out is the shift that takes you back. If I'm on the day shift today and we walk out of that place, the afternoon shift and the night shift would not come in. If we came back tomorrow, then they would come in. Back in those days people would follow. If they were screwing around with somebody up in one end of the plant, they were screwing around with me. Whatever his reasons, that's good enough for me."*

### **Betty Talkington, IBEW, Cedar Rapids:**

*"We were working for men and women. Whenever you better conditions for one sex, especially if you're working for the women, you automatically get it for men, too. If you can send a man to the moon, you don't have to lift a hundred pounds. There are machines that can be made to do that, and no man should have to have a hernia because he has to lift a hundred pounds. Don't protect the woman. Protect both sexes. It's ridiculous to say a woman can't carry 25 or 30 or 50 pounds when she picks up her child and carries it. I've seen women's purses that weighed that much."*

### **Russ Woodrick, Machinists, Waterloo:**

*"So that fall I ran for chief steward of the whole plant, and I won that office. As chief steward, I came across many problems with piece rates, speedups, problems that different people were having, and I saw that I couldn't effectuate change by myself. I was one person. By talking and meeting with people . . . you got to know who was interested and who really felt that there should be some changes made."*