

Eyewitness at the Triangle by William G. Shepherd

I was walking through Washington Square when a puff of smoke issuing from the factory building caught my eye. I reached the building before the alarm was turned in. I saw every feature of the tragedy visible from outside the building. I learned a new sound—a more horrible sound than description can picture. It was the thud of a speeding, living body on a stone sidewalk.

Thud—dead, thud—dead, thud—dead, thud—dead. Sixty-two thud—deads. I call them that, because the sound and the thought of death came to me each time, at the same instant. There was plenty of chance to watch them as they came down. The height was eighty feet.

The first ten thud—deads shocked me. I looked up—saw that there were scores of girls at the windows. The flames from the floor below were beating in their faces. Somehow I knew that they, too, must come down, and something within me—something that I didn't know was there—steeled me.

I even watched one girl falling. Waving her arms, trying to keep her body upright until the very instant she struck the sidewalk, she was trying to balance herself. Then came the thud—then a silent, unmoving pile of clothing and twisted, broken limbs.

As I reached the scene of the fire, a cloud of smoke hung over the building. . . . I looked up to the seventh floor. There was a living picture in each window—four screaming heads of girls waving their arms.

"Call the firemen," they screamed—scores of them. "Get a ladder," cried others. They were all as alive and whole and sound as were we who stood on the sidewalk. I couldn't help thinking of that. We cried to them not to jump. We heard the siren of a fire engine in the distance. The other sirens sounded from several directions.

"Here they come," we yelled. "Don't jump; stay there."

One girl climbed onto the window sash. Those behind her tried to hold her back. Then she dropped into space. I didn't notice whether those above watched her drop because I had turned away. Then came that first thud. I looked up, another girl was climbing onto the window sill; others were crowding behind her. She dropped. I watched her fall, and again the dreadful sound. Two windows away two girls were climbing onto the sill; they were fighting each other and crowding for air. Behind them I saw many screaming heads. They fell almost together, but I heard two distinct thuds. Then the flames burst out through the windows on the floor below them, and curled up into their faces.

The firemen began to raise a ladder. Others took out a life net and, while they were rushing to the sidewalk with it, two more girls shot down. The firemen held it under them; the bodies broke it; the grotesque simile of a dog jumping through a hoop struck

me. Before they could move the net another girl's body flashed through it. The thuds were just as loud, it seemed, as if there had been no net there. It seemed to me that the thuds were so loud that they might have been heard all over the city.

I had counted ten. Then my dulled senses began to work automatically. I noticed things that it had not occurred to me before to notice. Little details that the first shock had blinded me to. I looked up to see whether those above watched those who fell. I noticed that they did; they watched them every inch of the way down and probably heard the roaring thuds that we heard.

As I looked up I saw a love affair in the midst of all the horror. A young man helped a girl to the window sill. Then he held her out, deliberately away from the building and let her drop. He seemed cool and calculating. He held out a second girl the same way and let her drop. Then he held out a third girl who did not resist. I noticed that. They were as unresisting as if her were helping them onto a streetcar instead of into eternity. Undoubtedly he saw that a terrible death awaited them in the flames, and his was only a terrible chivalry.

Then came the love amid the flames. He brought another girl to the window. Those of us who were looking saw her put her arms about him and kiss him. Then he held her out into space and dropped her. But quick as a flash he was on the window sill himself. His coat fluttered upward—the air filled his trouser legs. I could see that he wore tan shoes and hose. His hat remained on his head.

Thud—dead, thud—dead—together they went into eternity. I saw his face before they covered it. You could see in it that he was a real man. He had done his best.

We found out later that, in the room in which he stood, many girls were being burned to death by the flames and were screaming in an inferno of flame and heat. He chose the easiest way and was brave enough to even help the girl he loved to a quicker death, after she had given him a goodbye kiss. He leaped with an energy as if to arrive first in that mysterious land of eternity, but her thud—dead came first.

The firemen raised the longest ladder. It reached only to the sixth floor. I saw the last girl jump at it and miss it. And then the faces disappeared from the window. But now the crowd was enormous, though all this had occurred in less than seven minutes, the start of the fire and the thuds and deaths.

I heard screams around the corner and hurried there. What I had seen before was not so terrible as what had followed. Up in the [ninth] floor girls were burning to death before our very eyes. They were jammed in the windows. No one was lucky enough to be able to jump, it seemed. But, one by one, the jams broke. Down came the bodies in a shower, burning, smoking—flaming bodies, with disheveled hair trailing upward. They had fought each other to die by jumping instead of by fire.

The whole, sound, unharmed girls who had jumped on the other side of the building had

tried to fall feet down. But these fire torches, suffering ones, fell inertly, only intent that death should come to them on the sidewalk instead of in the furnace behind them.

On the sidewalk lay heaps of broken bodies. A policeman later went about with tags, which he fastened with wires to the wrists of the dead girls, numbering each with a lead pencil, and I saw him fasten tag no. 54 to the wrist of a girl who wore an engagement ring. A fireman who came downstairs from the building told me that there were at least fifty bodies in the big room on the seventh floor. Another fireman told me that more girls had jumped down an air shaft in the rear of the building. I went back there, into the narrow court, and saw a heap of dead girls. . . .

The floods of water from the firemen's hose that ran into the gutter were actually stained red with blood. I looked upon the heap of dead bodies and I remembered these girls were the shirtwaist makers. I remembered their great strike of last year in which these same girls had demanded more sanitary conditions and more safety precautions in the shops. These dead bodies were the answer.

Answer these questions in 3-5 sentences (except 1 and 2)

1. Who is the author?
2. What connection does he have to the fire?
3. How does he describe what he sees?
4. What is the most graphic sentence in the testimony?
5. Why were people so outraged by this fire? Who dies?

The day after the fire, the *New York Times* announced that "the building was fireproof. It shows hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it. The walls are as good as ever, as are the floors: nothing is worse for the fire except the furniture and 141 [sic] of the 600 men and girls that were employed in its upper three stories."

The building was fireproof. But there had never been a fire drill in the factory, even though the management had been warned about the possible hazard of fire on the top three floors. Owners Max Blanck and Isaac Harris had chosen to ignore these warnings in spite of the fact that many of their employees were immigrants who could barely speak English, which would surely mean panic in the event of a crisis.

The *New York Times* also noted that Leonora O'Reilly of the League had reported Max Blanck's visit to the WTUL during the shirtwaist strike, and his plea that the girls return to work. He claimed a business reputation to maintain and told the Union leaders he would make the necessary improvements right away. Because he was the largest manufacturer in the business, the League reported, they trusted him and let the girls return.

28 But the improvements were never made. And there was nothing that anybody could or would do about

Andrew Carnegie: *How to Succeed in Life*

Source: http://www.clpgh.org/exhibit/neighborhoods/oakland/oak_n751.html

From The Pittsburg Bulletin, 19 December 1903. Reprinted from the New York Tribune.

Everybody wants to preach to the young, and tell them to be good and they will be happy. I shall not enter far upon that field, but confine myself to presenting from a business man's standpoint of view, a few rules, which, I believe, lie at the root of business success.

First--Never enter a bar-room. Do not drink liquor as a beverage. I will not paint the evil of drunkenness, or the moral crime; but I suggest to you that it is low and common to enter a bar-room, unworthy of any self-respecting man, and sure to fasten upon you a taint which will operate to your disadvantage in life, whether you ever become a drunkard or not.

Second--I wish young men would not use tobacco--not that it is morally wrong, except in so far as it is used in excess and injures health, which the medical faculty declares it does. But the use of tobacco requires young men to withdraw themselves from the society of women to indulge the habit. I think the absence of women from any assembly tends to lower the tone of that assembly. The habit of smoking tends to carry young men into the society of men whom it is not desirable that they should choose as their intimate associates. The practice of chewing tobacco was once common. Now it is considered offensive. I believe the race is soon to take another step forward, and that the coming man is to consider smoking as offensive as chewing was formally considered. As it is practically abandoned now, so I believe smoking will be.

Third--Having entered upon work, continue in that line of work. Fight it out on that line (except in extreme cases), for it matters little what avenue a young man finds first. Success can be attained in any branch of human labor. There is always room at the top in every pursuit. Concentrate all your thought and energy upon the performance of your duties. Put all your eggs into one basket and then watch that basket, do not scatter your shot. The man who is director in a half dozen railroads and three or four manufacturing companies, or who tries at one and the same time to work a farm, a factory, a line of street cars, a political party and a store, rarely amounts to much. He may be concerned in the management of more than one business enterprise, but they should all be of the one kind, which he understands. The great successes of life are made by concentration.

Fourth--Do not think a man has done his full duty when he has performed the work assigned him. A man will never rise if he does only this. Promotion comes from

exceptional work. A man must discover where his employer's interests can be served beyond the range of the special work allotted to him; and whenever he sees his employer's interests suffer, or wherever the latter's interests can be promoted, tell him so. Differ from your employers upon what you think his mistakes. You will never make much of a success if you do not learn the needs and opportunities of your own branch much better than your employer can possibly do. You have been told to "obey orders if you break owners." Do no such foolish thing. If your employer starts upon a course which you think will prove injurious, tell him so, protest, give your reasons, and stand to them unless convinced you are wrong. It is the young man who does this, that capital wants for a partner or for a son-in-law.

Fifth--Whatever your wages are, save a little. Live within your means. The heads of stores, farms, banks, lawyers' offices, physicians' offices, insurance companies, mills and factories are not seeking capital; they are seeking brains and business habits. The man who saves a little from his income has given the surest indication of the qualities which every employer is seeking for.

Sixth--Never speculate. Never buy or sell grain or stocks upon a margin. If you have savings, invest them in solid securities, lands or property. The man who gambles upon the exchanges is in the condition of the man who gambles at the gaming table. He rarely, if ever, makes a permanent success. His judgment goes; his faculties are snapped; and his end, as a rule, is nervous prostration after an unworthy and useless life.

Seventh--If you ever enter business for yourself, never indorse for others. It is dishonest. All your resources and all your credit are the sacred property of the men who have trusted you; and until you have surplus cash and owe no man, it is dishonest to give your name as an indorser to others. Give the cash you can spare, if you wish, to help a friend. Your name is too sacred to give.

Do not make riches, but usefulness, your first aim; and let your chief pride be that your daily occupation is in the line of progress and development; that your work, in whatever capacity it may be, is useful work, honestly conducted, and as such ennobling to your life.

To sum up, do not drink, do not smoke, do not indorse, do not speculate. Concentrate, perform more than your prescribed duties; be strictly honest in word and deed. And may all who read these words be just as happy and prosperous and long lived as I wish them all to be. And let this great fact always cheer them: It is impossible for any one to be cheated out of an honorable career unless he cheats himself.

Lifestyles At the Turn of the Century

The average American worker's annual wage at the turn of the twentieth century was around \$450. Some earned much more; others, considerably less. For example, in 1900 a cook earned about \$5 a week or \$260 a year. A maid earned less, around \$3.50 a week or \$180 a year.

On the other end of the spectrum were the millionaires. In 1900, approximately one percent of the American population owned over eighty percent of the wealth. For example, Andrew Carnegie earned over \$23,000,000 that year, all of it tax-free, because the federal income tax system did not yet exist. Many millionaires of the time became rich quickly. They actually had to find ways to spend their money. Their spending fell into four major categories:

1. **Town Houses** – Millionaires built and furnished multi-million dollar homes, primarily in New York City.
2. **"Country Houses"** – Many millionaires had country estates in Newport, Rhode Island and on Long Island. William K. Vanderbilt's house in Newport allegedly cost over \$11 million. Another Vanderbilt house (called Idle Hour) had 110 rooms, 45 bathrooms, and a garage that could hold 100 automobiles. J. Pierpont Morgan owned a house in New York City, a country house outside the city, a 1,000-acre estate in New York's Adirondack Mountains, an apartment in a private club on the Georgia coast, a fishing retreat at Newport, a house in London, a country house outside London, hotel suites in Paris and Rome, a yacht for use on the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and a private Nile steamer to use when he was in Egypt.
3. **Art** – Many millionaires bought both foreign and domestic art objects, such as paintings, tapestries, statues, and fabrics. One family owned two pianos made of gold.
4. **Entertainment** – Lavish parties were common. Below is a description of a dinner for forty held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City in 1899:

His guests found the Myrtle Room transformed into a garden with roses, hyacinths, and tulips in bloom and with hedges of fir. Nightingales, blackbirds, and canaries sang in the greenery. (It had been something of a trick to induce the zoo authorities to loan some nightingales for the affair.) The table was set in an arbor with a vine-covered trellis overhead and with green turf underfoot. The menus were painted in gold on scraped and polished coconuts. . . . And the dinner, which was served on gold plates, went as follows:

- *Buffet Russe*
- *Cocktails*
- *Small Blue Point Oysters*
- *Lemardelais a la Princesse*
- *Amontillado Pasado*
- *Green Turtle Soup*
- *Bolivar*
- *Basket of Lobster*
- *Columbine of Chicken, California Style*
- *Roast Mountain Sheep, with Puree of Chestnuts (the sheep having been brought to New York by fast express in small portable refrigerators)*
- *Jelly*
- *Brussels Sprouts Saute*
- *New Asparagus, Cream Sauce and Vinaigrette*
- *Mumm's Extra Dry and Moet & Chandon Brut*
- *Diamond Black Terrapin*
- *Ruddy Duck (likewise rushed by express in small refrigerators)*
- *Orange and Grapefruit Salad*
- *Fresh Strawberries*
- *Blue Raspberries*
- *Vanilla Mousse*
- *Bonbons, Coffee Fruit **

What did this dinner cost the host? In 1899, the bill was \$10,000. Today, the same dinner would cost over \$100,000. Newspapers frequently carried articles about such extravagant spending by American millionaires.

18-10 People's (Populist) Party National Platform (1892)

Responding to the worsening economic situation and building on earlier organizational and political experience (the Patrons of Husbandry or Grange, the farmers' alliances), agrarians and other protesters, already active on the state level, formed a national party, framed a national platform, and ran a national ticket in 1892 (see text pp. 535-537, 585-594, and Map 18-1, text p. 587).

As the text notes (pp. 587-588), women played roles in the farmers' alliances and in the Populist Party that were closed to them in the two major parties. Mary Elizabeth Lease was one such woman, Luna Kellie another. Kellie served as secretary of the Nebraska Alliance and edited and wrote for an Alliance newspaper there. Kellie's "Personal Memoir" (Document 16-7) contains political observations within its personal reminiscences.

Source: Donald Bruce Johnson, comp., *National Party Platforms*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), vol. 1, 1840-1956, 89-91.

Assembled upon the 116th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the People's Party of America in their first national convention, invoking upon their action the blessing of Almighty God, put forth in the name and on behalf of the people of this country, the following preamble and declaration of principles:

PREAMBLE

The conditions which surround us best justify our co-operation; we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box, the Legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized; most of the States have been compelled to isolate the voters at the polling places to prevent universal intimidation and bribery. The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right to organize for self-protection; imported pauperized labor beats down their wages, a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down, and they are rapidly degenerating into European conditions. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of these, in turn despise the Republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires.

The national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bond-holders; a vast public debt payable in legal tender currency has been funded into gold-bearing bonds, thereby adding millions to the burdens of the people.

Silver, which has been accepted as coin since the dawn of history, has been demonetized to add to the purchasing power of gold by decreasing the value of all forms of property as well as human labor, and the supply of currency is purposely abridged to fatten usurers, bankrupt enterprise, and enslave industry. A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown at once, it forebodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism.

We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. We charge that the controlling influence dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them. Neither do they now promise us any substantial reform. They have agreed together to ignore, in the coming campaign, every issue but one. They propose to drown the outcries of a plundered people with the uproar of a sham battle over the tariff, so that capitalists, corporations, national banks, rings, trusts, watered stock, the demonetization of silver and the oppressions of the usurers may all be lost sight of. They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives, and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds from the millionaires.

Assembled on the anniversary of the birthday of the nation, and filled with the spirit of the grand general and chief who established our independence, we seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of "the plain people," with which class it originated. We assert our purposes to be identical with the purposes of the National

Constitution, to form a more perfect union and establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.

We declare that this Republic can only endure as a free government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other and for the nation; that it cannot be pinned together by bayonets; that the civil war is over and that every passion and resentment which grew out of it must die with it, and that we must be in fact, as we are in name, one united brotherhood of freemen.

Our country finds itself confronted by conditions for which there is no precedent in the history of the world; our annual agricultural productions amount to billions of dollars in value, which must, within a few weeks or months be exchanged for billions of dollars' worth of commodities consumed in their production; the existing currency supply is wholly inadequate to make this exchange; the results are falling prices, the formation of combines and rings, the impoverishment of the producing class. We pledge ourselves that, if given power, we will labor to correct these evils by wise and reasonable legislation, in accordance with the terms of our platform.

We believe that the power of government—in other words, of the people—should be expanded (as in the case of the postal service) as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to the end that oppression, injustice and poverty, shall eventually cease in the land.

While our sympathies as a party of reform are naturally upon the side of every proposition which will tend to make men intelligent, virtuous and temperate, we nevertheless regard these questions, important as they are, as secondary to the great issues now pressing for solution, and upon which not only our individual prosperity, but the very existence of free institutions depend; and we ask all men to first help us to determine whether we are to have a republic to administer, before we differ as to the conditions upon which it is to be administered, believing that the forces of reform this day organized will never cease to move forward, until every wrong is remedied, and equal rights and equal privileges securely established for all the men and women of this country.

PLATFORM

We declare, therefore,

First—That the union of the labor forces of the United States this day consummated shall be permanent and perpetual; may its spirit enter into all hearts for the salvation of the Republic and the uplifting of mankind.

Second—Wealth belongs to him who creates it, and

every dollar taken from industry without an equivalent is robbery. "If any will not work, neither shall he eat." The interests of rural and civic labor are the same; their enemies are identical.

Third—We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads, and should the government enter upon the work of owning and managing all railroads, we should favor an amendment to the Constitution by which all persons engaged in the government service shall be placed under a civil service regulation of the most rigid character, so as to prevent the increase of the power of the national administration by the use of such additional government employees.

Finance—We demand a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations, a just, equitable and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed 2 per cent per annum, to be provided as set forth by the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, or a better system; also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

1. We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1.

2. We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.

3. We demand a graduated income tax.

4. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all State and national revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government, economically and honestly administered.

5. We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.

Transportation—Transportation being a means of exchange and a public necessity, the government should own and operate the railroads in the interest of the people. The telegraph and telephone, like the post office system, being a necessity for the transmission of news, should be owned and operated by the government in the interest of the people.

Land—The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of the people, and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes, and alien ownership of land should be prohibited. All land now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of their actual needs, and all lands now owned by aliens, should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.