Illinois at Work:
A statewide tour of labor sites and monuments

By Michael G. Matejka

Illinois’ rich history as a transportation hub, industrial powerhouse, mining center, and union birthplace, means numerous sites honor that history. Whether commemorating an hourly wage worker, an inventor, an industrial entrepreneur or the site of a railroad, industrial or mining disaster, a quick look at Illinois’ map reveals many places where earning a day’s pay is remembered.

What follows is a list of labor-related statues, plaques, markers, memorials, and other commemorations presented alphabetically by community in which they are located (with the exception of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor and sites within the City of Chicago, which both appear at the end). If you know of a labor site not appearing in this list (and there are plenty!) feel free to contact me via email at Matejka53@aol.com.

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**Alton, Madison County Workers Memorial**: Located at the entrance to Gordon F. Moore Park, this memorial is a life-size sculpture of a worker carrying his hard hat and lunch pail on a red granite base. Winged memorials of granite contain the names of men and women of Madison County who died on the job.

**Arlington Heights (Cook County), Clerics of St. Viator Province Center Chapel**: This chapel’s lobby, 1212 East Euclid Avenue, contains a 1952 plaque from the Illinois Federation of Labor honoring Irish immigrant Father John W.R. Maguire, CSV (1883-1940). Fr. Maguire was a strong labor advocate, a World War I chaplain, eulogist of Mary “Mother” Jones, radio commentator, Illinois labor lobbyist, and a National Labor Board arbitrator appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. The chapel is open by appointment.

**Beckemeyer (Clinton County), Coal Miners Monument**: This monument honors eight miners from Beckemeyer who died in the March 25, 1947 Centralla Mine disaster. This statue is dedicated to the memory of Joseph Koch, Sr. and the other Beckemeyer victims: Rodrigo Alvarez, Andrew Farley, Luther Frazier, John Mazea, Joseph Peiler, John Placek, Anton Skrobil, and Alfred Stevens.

**Belleville (St. Clair County), Labor and Industry Museum**: Located in a 160-year-old former cigar factory, this museum (123 North Church Street) is open on Saturdays and collects materials on Belleville area workers. http://www.laborandindustrymuseum.org/

**Belleville, Emma Kunz house**: This 1851 house, moved to 602 Fulton Street by the St. Clair County Historical Society, is a typical nineteenth-century German workers’ cottage. It was built by plasterer Jacob Krill and his wife Nancy. Similar “German street houses” still survive in Belleville and surrounding communities that were favored by German immigrants. The house is named for its last inhabitant. http://stcchs.org/visit/emma-kunz-house/

**Bloomington (McLean County) labor history mural**: A twelve-by-eighteen-foot mural adorns the inside of Laborers Local 362’s old hall at 2012 Fox Creek Road. The mural depicts local labor history, including the Chicago & Alton Railroad Shops and the 1922 Shops workers’ strike; a 1917 visit by Mother Jones supporting striking streetcar workers; a 1937 strike at the Beich Candy Company; and the 1978 Town of Normal firefighters’ strike. The mural was painted by Kari Sandhas, 1984-86.

**Bloomington Workers Memorial**: This monument is located in White Oak Park, off Cottage Avenue on the city’s northwest side. The park, built around a former quarry, has 100 labor union-donated trees honoring asbestos workers and other workplace fatalities. The flagpole was assembled in 1942 from steam locomotive bearings by Chicago & Alton Railroad Shops employees and moved to the park by local union volunteers. The Bloomington & Normal Trades & Labor Assembly, AFL-CIO, hosts a ceremony each Workers Memorial Day, April 28.

**Miller Park, Bloomington, Chicago & Alton Shops whistle monument dedication, Labor Day 1982. Left to right: Harry Rhoads (railroad carman); Joseph Fellenz, Sr. (electrician); and Joseph Dewey Penn (machinist).**

**Bloomington, railroad workers memorial**: The monument, dedicated in 1982, is located in Miller Park, West Wood Street and South Morris Avenue, and commemorates the Chicago & Alton Railroad car and locomotive Shops, which operated from 1854 until the 1970s. The monument is composed of a six-foot tall steam whistle that signaled shift changes at the Shops. It is mounted on limestone blocks salvaged from the steel car shop walls. Adjoining the monument is Nickel Plate Road steam locomotive 639, built in 1923 at the Lima (Ohio) Locomotive Works.
Carlyle Lake (Clinton County), General Dean Suspension Bridge: A historical marker commemorates the 1859 construction of this suspension bridge over the Kaskaskia River (extensively restored in the 1950s). The bridge was recognized in 1950 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) as a significant architectural achievement.

Cedarville (Stephenson County), Jane Addams birthplace and burial site: A historical marker in Cedarville along Route 26 marks the birthplace of Jane Addams (1860-1935), social work pioneer and founder of Chicago's Hull House who had strong labor sympathies. Her gravesite and memorial is in Cedarville Cemetery.

Centralia (Clinton County), Fairview Park: Two memorials in Centralia's Fairview Park on Highway 161 honor the area's railroad heritage. Locomotive 2500 is an Illinois Central Railroad 4-8-2 “Mountain” steam locomotive. Adjoining the locomotive a 1960 tablet honors railroad engineer Robert L. “Polecat” McMillan who spent 67 years “workin' on the railroad.” He retired in 1956 at age 83, and at the time was the oldest locomotive engineer in the United States.

Centralia coal mine disaster (Marion County): In Wamac City Park, just south of Centralia, a historical marker commemorating the 1947 Centralia Mine Number 5 disaster, which killed 111 miners.

Champaign County Workers Memorial Monument: Located in Champaign's Dodds Park (Parkland Way just west of Mattis Avenue) is a circular concrete pad with three large black standing tablets, two engraved with the names of those who died on the job in the county since 1950. The memorial was dedicated on September 2, 2002.

Laborers Local 393 members who donated labor to build the Cherry Mine Monument, November 2009.

Cherry Mine Disaster (Bureau County): An Illinois State Historical Society marker is located in Village Park, Cherry, on Illinois Route 89. In the cemetery is a 1914 United Mine Workers (UMW) monument. Next to the village library and hall is another memorial, this one dedicated in 2009 for the centennial commemoration of the disaster. Cherry was the second worst mining disaster in U.S. history with 259 miners and boys killed in an underground fire. The outrage from the disaster led to early mine safety laws and an Illinois' workers' compensation law.

Collinsville Miners' Institute (Madison County): This 1918 structure at 204 West Main Street was built for union meetings, but also as a community gathering place, hosting graduations, films, recitals, and other live entertainment.

Crest Hill (Will County), Building the Lincoln Highway sculpture: At 1610 Plainview Road a statue depicts a 1915 road worker pouring concrete. The sculpture and associated interpretive panel are located across the street from the Crest Hill Municipal Center.

Decatur Workers Memorial Monument (Macon County): Located at the northwest corner of the Macon County courthouse lawn, 141 South Main Street, is a monument to local workplace fatalities, dedicated in 2000.

DeKalb (DeKalb County), barbed wire manufacturing: A historical marker at the Joseph Glidden Home, 931 West Lincoln Highway, commemorates the inventor of barbed wire.

DeKalb, Finnish Auditorium: Located at 637 North Eleventh Street, the auditorium opened its doors in 1914. A Finnish workers' organization known as the Imatra Society was formed in 1904, establishing a library, band and chorus, as well as sponsoring gymnastic programs and theatrical performances. In 1905 they joined the Socialist Party, but there was a conflict between Socialist Party loyalists and advocates for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). After the 1917 Russian Revolution there was another ideological split between Socialist Party and Communist Party followers leading to a decline in membership. The hall was sold in 1941. Conexion Comunidad, a non-profit Latino outreach organization, uses the site today.

Diamond Mine Memorial (Grundy County): A monument and state historic plaque are along Illinois 113 in the Diamond area. On February 16, 1883; the Wilmington Coal Mining and Manufacturing's mine collapsed from the weight of melting snow, ice and heavy rains, killing 72 miners. For 38 days steam pumps attempted to remove water from the mine. Recovery efforts did not begin until March 25. Shortly after, the mine was sealed with 46 miners entombed.

Dixon (Lee County), Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home: This house at 816 South Hennepin was a childhood residence of Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), the only U.S. president who was also a union leader. Reagan was president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) during his Hollywood days. Yet as U.S. president he fired striking Professional Air Traffic Controllers (PATCO) workers in 1981.

Elgin Milk Condensing Company (Kane County): A historical marker at North Street and North Grove Avenue marks the site of Carl Borden's 1865 condensed milk plant.
The Diamond Mine Memorial along Illinois 113 commemorates an 1883 disaster that took the lives of 72 coal miners.

**Elgin Watch Company marker:** Elgin Watch Company became the world’s largest watchmaker, producing over 60 million watches on this site from 1866 to 1906. The marker is located at the entrance of the Clock Tower Plaza, National and Grove Streets.

**Elgin Watch Case marker:** A marker at 853 Dundee Avenue notes the location of the Elgin Watch Case Company, 1890-1963, a firm that by the 1920s had produced more than 30 million watch cases.

**Forest Park (Cook County), Haymarket Martyrs’ Monument:** In Forest Home Cemetery, 863 Des Plaines Avenue, is the 1893 monument marking the burial place of seven of the eight Haymarket defendants. The Albert Weinert-designed monument was refurbished and rededicated by the Illinois Labor History Society on May 1, 2011. Numerous political and labor activists are buried near the site, including Emma Goldman, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, William Z. Foster, and others. There is also a Cigar Makers’ Union monument in the cemetery.

**Funk’s Grove (McLean County), Irish Rail Workers Monument:** This 6-foot-tall marble Celtic cross is at the site of a mass grave of 50 Irish immigrant railroad workers anonymously buried in Funk’s Grove Cemetery, eight miles south of Bloomington. The laborers were building the rail line from Springfield to Bloomington in 1853. It is presumed they were the victims of a cholera epidemic. Dedicated on Workers’ Memorial Day, April 28, 2000.

**Galena Lead Mines (Jo Daviess County):** A historical marker along U.S. 20 east of Galena marks early Illinois lead mines, first worked by Native Americans. French explorers visited the mines, which were developed after Illinois statehood. In 1845, Galena mines were responsible for 83 percent of all U.S. lead production.

**Galesburg (Knox County), Carl Sandburg State Historic Site:** At 331 East Third Street is the birthplace and boyhood home of Illinois poet laureate Carl Sandburg. The home reflects a typical nineteenth century worker’s cottage, as Sandburg’s father worked for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. Sandburg had strong labor sympathies and wrote many pieces reflecting workplace and labor themes. [http://www.sandburg.org/](http://www.sandburg.org/)

**Galesburg, Patrick H. Morrissey gravesite:** In St. Joseph’s Catholic Cemetery on the city’s west side is the grave of Patrick H. Morrissey (1862-1916), Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (1895-1909) and an advisor to President Theodore Roosevelt. Morrissey rescued the BRT after the 1894 Pullman strike and transformed it into the nation’s largest rail union. A 1930 brass plaque marks his gravesite.

**Grand Detour (Ogle County), John Deere Historic Site:** The agricultural machinery giant maintains the preserved 1836 blacksmith shop of company founder John Deere, innovator of the “self-scouring” plow. Open May through October, Wednesday through Sunday.

**Herrin (Williamson County), Coal Miners Memorial:** A statue and memorial wall, erected in 2000, is at Fourteenth and East Cherry streets. The statue, showing a miner returning home and greeting his son, honors all miners in the region.

**Jacksonville Labor Temple (Morgan County):** The 1904 building at 228 South Mauvaisterre Street in Jacksonville once housed multiple union offices. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of the nation’s oldest such “labor temples.” From 1900 through the 1920s, many labor councils built structures that combined offices for local unions with meeting rooms.

**Joliet (Will County) labor murals:** A mural completed in 1996 by Kathleen Scarboro and Kathleen Farrell, located on the northwest corner of Michigan and Cass streets, features wallpaper workers. A 1997 mural by Javier Chavira on the northeast side of Michigan and Washington streets honors steel industry workers. Also, located along the railroad approaches to Joliet Union Station are numerous murals of local history and labor significance.

**Malta (DeKalb County), Lincoln Highway development:** A state marker on U.S. 38 west of Malta marks the experimental use of concrete in 1914 on a one-mile stretch of road, part of the development of U.S. 30 / Lincoln Highway.
Marissa (St. Clair County), coal miners monument: A stone slab with a figure of a coal miner was set in Village Park on South Main Street in August 1921.

Marseilles (LaSalle County), Laborers sculpture: Outside Laborers Local 393 union hall, 322 Main Street, is a 2012 bas relief sculpture showing past and present laborers at work. Inside the union hall are two murals depicting historic scenes of construction laborers.

Marshall (Clark County), 1830s bridge: This marker along U.S. 40 commemorates a stone arch bridge, a fine example of the stonemasons’ craft, built by U.S. Army engineers for the old National Road.

Mason (Effingham County), last spike of the Illinois Central: Along Route 37 on the northeast side of town is a plaque recognizing the completion of the Illinois Central Railroad, September 27, 1856. This railroad was mainly built by immigrant labor, predominately Irish.

Mound City (Pulaski County), Marine Ways: Along U.S. 37 at Fourth Street is a marker for the Civil War-era shipyards where U.S. ironclads were built and maintained.

Mount Olive (Macoupin County), Union Miners Cemetery and Mother Jones Monument: The grave of famed labor organizer Mary “Mother” Jones (1837-1930) is beneath this 1936 monument. It consists of a granite obelisk with a medallion bearing Mother Jones’ likeness flanked by two bronze statues of workers. The monument is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is located in the Union Miners’ cemetery, “the burial place of good union people,” established after the 1898 “Virden Massacre” when Mt. Olive miners killed in that clash were refused burial in the town cemetery.

Mount Vernon Car Mfg. Co. (Jefferson County): A historical marker on Shawnee Road, between Short and Brief streets, marks this railroad car manufacturer, in operation from 1890 until 1954.

Moweaqua Coal Mine Museum (Shelby County): The museum on Route 51 commemorates the 1932 Moweaqua Coal Mine Disaster in which a gas explosion killed 54 miners. Methane gas escaped into the mine and was ignited by open-flame carbide lights. Exhibits include coal mining tools and equipment, contemporary accounts of the disaster and related artifacts. Each Christmas and Memorial Day a ceremony is held during which 54 flags, each containing an image of a coal miner and his lamp, are displayed.

Ottawa (LaSalle County), Radium Girls statue: This 2011 statue at Clinton and Jefferson streets memorializes the “radium girls,” young women who died of radiation poisoning while painting clock dials with radium paints for the watch dial industry in the 1920s and 1930s. The resulting publicity over their court cases helped lead to stricter industrial exposure laws.

Ottawa, Interstate Highway test loops: Driving along Interstate 80 near Ottawa, one passes American Association of State Highway Officials’ test loops, where from 1958 to 1960 military personnel drove continuous loops to test various highway surfaces for the planned interstate highway system. A total of 141 accidents took place during this test, with 2 fatalities.

Panama, (Montgomery County), coal miners memorial: Located in Union Cemetery off Calvin Street, this memorial features a ten-foot tall black marble monument with an etching of an early coal miner and a quotation from United Mine Workers’ President John L. Lewis, who won his first union office leading Panama miners. The memorial is dedicated to six miners who lost their lives in a 1915 gas explosion and were buried in unmarked graves. The monument was dedicated on May 25, 2003.

Peoria (Peoria County), Ironworkers Memorial: This 2001 polished granite memorial honors three Ironworkers Local 112 members killed in a scaffolding accident while repairing the McClugage Bridge, which carries U.S. Route 24 and U.S. Route 150 over the Illinois River / Lake Peoria. The four-by-five foot granite slab just off Route 29 at Lorentz Avenue includes a picture of the bridge and the names of the fallen workers.

Peoria, Labor Temple: The building at 400 Northeast Jefferson Street was dedicated on Labor Day 1925. This building still houses numerous local union offices and has meeting rooms. In 1991 the building was renovated. At the east entrance are historic materials about the structure and local unions.

Peoria, Rocky Glen Park: Recently purchased by the City of Peoria, this natural area off Farmington Road includes mine worker inscriptions on the limestone outcroppings. It’s believed that this area served as a secret union meeting spot for miners in the late nineteenth century.
Peoria, workers memorial: The memorial is located in front of Peoria City Hall, 419 Fulton Street, and was erected by the West Central Illinois Labor Council to honor union members who died on the job.

Polo (Ogle County), Buffalo Grove Lime Kiln: This historical marker west of Polo commemorates a nineteenth century kiln used to make lime for building construction.

Rock Island Arsenal (Rock Island County): Established in 1862, workers at Rock Island arsenal continue to produce armaments and ammunition for the U.S. military. Arsenal Island includes a museum, national cemetery, and historic sites.

Rock Island Workers Memorial: Behind Laborers Local 309 hall, 2835 Seventh Avenue, is a large stone with a plaque, unveiled on April 28, 1990, with a second plaque added in 2002.

Rosiclare (Hardin County), American Fluorite Museum: This museum, on Main Street off Route 34, marks Hardin County's production of fluorite, a critical mineral for open hearth steel production. Rosiclare Lead and Fluorspar Mining Company helped make this area the nation's leading fluorite production point.

Seneca (LaSalle County) "Prairie Shipyard" monument: Located in Crotty Park off Highway 170 is a monument to the Landing Ship Tank (LST), a World War II naval landing vessel. LSTs were built at inland shipyards like Seneca, and then floated down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Between 1942 and 1945, 157 LSTs were launched from the Illinois River shipyard of Seneca, which had a workforce of 11,000. The monument includes a scaled reproduction of an LST and panels that reflect the various tasks involved in shipbuilding.

Sesser (Franklin County), Coal Miners Memorial Park: This park, 200 South Park Street, features an engraved stone and monument to the area's coal mining history, including a list of local mines and UMWA locals.

Silvis (Rock Island County), Hero Street Memorial Monument: During World War I, Mexican-American workers were employed in the Rock Island Railroad Shops, first living in boxcars. By the 1930s they had built small homes along one-and-a-half blocks of Second Street. During World War II over 100 young people from this short stretch of street enlisted in the U.S. military. Six were killed in action during World War II and two during the Korean conflict. The Defense Department has confirmed that no other small area had so many serve their country in uniform. A 2007 monument and small park at 202 First Street salute these veterans.

Springfield (Sangamon County), Illinois State Capitol grounds: Three labor monuments stand on the State Capitol grounds in Springfield. The Coal Miner (1964) by sculpture John J. Szaton, was inspired by Vachel Davis, a Southern Illinois miner, poet, and artist. The Workers Memorial was dedicated April 28, 1992 to honor Illinois' workers who lost their lives in on-the-job accidents. It features a worker standing over a fallen comrade. The Illinois Firefighter Memorial was dedicated on May 13, 1999 to honor Illinois firefighters. The statue includes four firefighters and a rescued child.

Springfield, John L. Lewis grave: The gravestone of John L. Lewis is located near the burial place of Abraham Lincoln at Oak Ridge Cemetery on Monument Avenue. Lewis was president of the United Mine Workers (UMW) of America from 1920 to 1960 and founder of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1935, serving as its president until 1940. Lewis was born in Iowa and worked as a coal miner in Illinois and Iowa, but called Springfield home.

Springfield, Memorial Wall, Illinois Department of Corrections: A memorial wall at IDOC headquarters, 1301 Concordia Court, honors employees of the state's correctional systems killed in the line of duty, along with people who "courageously dedicate their careers" to the field. Dedicated May 9, 2002.

Spring Valley (Bureau County), John Mitchell markers: Historical markers are located in three places: The intersection of May and Dakota streets (US Route 6); the intersection of Strong Avenue and Dakota Street; and the intersection of Caroline and Spaulding streets (Illinois Route 89). John Mitchell was born in Braidwood, Illinois, on February 4, 1870, and began work as a breaker boy in Braidwood coal mines at the age of twelve. From 1890 to 189180 he lived at 210 East Dakota Street in Spring Valley. He joined the United Mine Workers of America at its founding in 1890, rising through the ranks and serving as president of the union from 1899 to 1908. He achieved national prominence in the settlement of the Pennsylvania anthracite miners' strike of 1902. Mitchell died September 9, 1919, in New York City, and was buried in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Staunton Labor Temple (Macoupin County): Built in 1914, this structure at 120 South Wood Street served not only as the offices and meeting hall for United Mine Workers Local 755, but also as the community's movie theater, showing films until 1972.

Streator (LaSalle County), Reuben Soderstrom statue: At the northwest corner of Kent and Park streets in City Park is a statue to Reuben Soderstrom (1888-1970), erected and dedicated on Labor Day 2012. Soderstrom, born in Minnesota to immigrant Swedish parents, was an Illinois state representative from 1918 to 1936. He became president of the Illinois AFL in 1930 and then the combined Illinois AFL-CIO from 1958 to 1970.

Taylorville (Christian County), George Franklin Bilyeu monument: In Oak Hill Cemetery, 820 South Cherokee Street, is a monument honoring George F. Bilyeu, a mining activist killed during the October 12, 1898 “Battle of Virden” between striking miners and coal company guards.

Taylorville, Christian County Coal Mine Museum: This museum at 118 South Main Street features coal mining photos and artifacts, including items from the inter-union battles of the 1930s between the United Mine Workers and the Progressive Mine Workers.
Toluca Coal Mine (Marshall County): Opened in 1893, this mine produced 379,000 tons of coal in 1905 and once employed 771 miners. A historical marker is near the two giant slag heaps from the mine (known as "jumbos") now part of a local park off East Bennington Street.

Union (McHenry County), Illinois Railway Museum: This extensive museum boasts a large collection of railroad and urban transit equipment and technology at 7000 Olson Road. Rides on vintage equipment are offered. http://www.irrm.org/

Vandalia (Fayette County), early print shop: A historical marker on Gallatin Street near Fourth Street marks the site of Robert Blackwell’s shop. Blackwell was Illinois’ first state printer (1818-1832), and he printed what’s believed to be the first periodical in Illinois—Illinois Monthly Magazine—at this site in 1826.

Virden (Macoupin County), Mine Wars Memorial: On the northeast side of Virden’s town square is this 2006 bronze sculpture, along with an interpretive kiosk, memorializing the October 12, 1898 “Battle of Virden,” when striking miners fought company guards who were trying to escort replacement workers into the mines. Twelve miners were killed during this bloody clash.

West Dundee (Kane County), Allan Pinkerton home: A historical marker on Illinois 72 notes the 1844-1850 home of Pinkerton (1819-1884), Abraham Lincoln’s bodyguard and Civil War spy service director. In labor union circles, Pinkerton’s detectives and guards were infamous for infiltrating union organizing drives and also serving as private armed guards during industrial disputes.

West Frankfort (Franklin County), Coal Miners Memorial: This granite pyramid at 100 East Main Street remembers the December 21, 1951 methane gas explosion which killed 119 miners in the New Orient Mine No. 2.

Woodstock (McHenry County), Old County Jail: This 1887 jail and sheriff’s residence, now a restaurant at 101 North Johnson Street, is where American Railway Union founder Eugene V. Debs (1855-1926) served his six-month sentence after the 1894 Pullman strike. While imprisoned, Debs became an avowed socialist. He later ran for president on the Socialist Party ticket in 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912 and 1920.

Wood River (Madison County), Refinery History Museum: On Highway 111 is a museum dedicated to the history of refining, housed in an old Shell Oil laboratory building.

Ziegler (Franklin County), coal miner statue: In the main square in Ziegler off Highway 149 on Circle Street is a 1974 statue of a coal miner. A fountain dedicated to miners was once at this location. Shortly after the Ziegler mine opened, an April 3, 1905 explosion killed 50 miners.

Multiple Locations

Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor: In 1984 the remnants of the I&M Canal became the nation’s first National Heritage Corridor. It covers 322,000 acres along a 100-mile stretch of mostly scenic (and certainly historic) Illinois. The Canal Corridor Association has placed numerous steel silhouettes along the route, based on actual individuals. There are nine in Joliet (Will and Kendall counties) depicting workers, including quarrymen, steelworkers, a mason, railroad workers and vaudeville actors. In Lockport (Will County) there is a mule driver silhouette, and in LaSalle (LaSalle County) a boat captain, lock tender, and mule driver. The Corridor Association’s visitor’s center is located in LaSalle, and here one can purchase tickets for rides on a restored canal boat. There are also restored locks and a canal tender’s home at Channahon State Park (Will County), off Illinois 6. A stone aqueduct survives at Gebhard Woods State Park (Grundy County), 401 Ottawa Street in Morris. Lockport is home to the 1838 Gaylord Building, 200 West Eighth Street, a restored warehouse used during canal construction. And in Ottawa (LaSalle County), just south of Route 6, are the remains of an 1838 aqueduct over the Fox River. http://www.ianmccanal.org/

Chicago (Cook County)

A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum: This privately-run museum at 10406 South Maryland Avenue was founded in 1995 as a tribute to Pullman porters, whose union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was the first African-American labor union to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with a major corporation.

Chicago Fire Department, “The Fallen 21” memorial: Immediately adjacent to the Chicago Stockyards’ Old Stone Gate on Exchange Street is a monument to the 21 Chicago firefighters who died battling a 1910 fire at the Union Stockyards.

Chicago Firefighter / Paramedic Memorial: Located on the bike trail near McCormick Center is a memorial to 571 Chicago firefighters and paramedics who have died while on duty since 1857; dedicated September 11, 2002.

Chicago Stockyards’ Old Stone Gate: This 1879 gate, located on Exchange Street one block west of Halsted, marks the entrance to the once world-famous Chicago Union Stockyards. Visiting tourists once included the stockyards as a “must see” Chicago attraction. Workers laboring for the large packinghouses made numerous attempts to organize unions, and their story is famously memorialized in Upton Sinclair’s muckraking novel The Jungle.

Graceland Cemetery: Located at 4001 North Clark Street is the burial place of business magnates George Pullman, Philip D. Armour, and Cyrus Hall McCormick, as well as Governor John Peter Altgeld and Allan Pinkerton.
Haymarket Police Monument: In 1889 Chicago unveiled a statue of a policeman to honor the officers killed during the Haymarket incident (see below). This statue has been moved six times and is currently on public display at Chicago Police Headquarters, 3510 South Michigan Avenue. The nation’s first monument to police officers, this statue was targeted in the 1960s and on October 5, 1969, was blown off its base with dynamite. In 2007 it was given a new base and rededicated at police headquarters.

Haymarket Square: Located at Des Plaines and Randolph streets is a 2004 monument to the 1886 Haymarket incident. Workers had gathered here on May 4, 1886, to call for the eight-hour workday and to protest police brutality. As local law enforcement converged on the peaceful demonstration, an unknown assailant threw a dynamite bomb into police ranks. This became an international incident, and eventually eight men were convicted of the crime based on circumstantial evidence and their radical beliefs. Four were hung, one committed suicide, and the remaining three were pardoned by Governor John Peter Altgeld in 1893. The Haymarket story and the conviction had international resonance, leading workers worldwide to mark May 1 as International Workers’ Day. Around the monument’s base are plaques from various labor organizations across the globe.

Hull House Museum: Two restored original buildings from Chicago’s first settlement house, founded by Jane Addams in 1889, are located at 800 South Halsted Street on the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) campus. Addams devoted her life to social improvement, the abolishment of sweatshops, and securing the passage of legislation to improve working conditions. Hull House is a U.S. National Historic Landmark and is operated by UIC.

Jewish workers mosaic: At 3003 Touhy Avenue is a 1980 12-by-14-foot ceramic-and-glass tile mosaic, created by Miriam Socoloff and Cythnia Weiss. This striking piece commemorates the life, labor, and culture of Jewish workers.

John Peter Altgeld statue: In Chicago’s expansive Lincoln Park is a 1915 statue by sculptor Gutzon Borglum of Governor John Peter Altgeld (1847-1902). Altgeld was a German immigrant who championed workers’ rights, pardoning the Haymarket participants, and protesting the Pullman strike dispatch of federal troops. Borglum is best known for creating the Mt. Rushmore National Memorial. The statue is near 2800 North Diversey Parkway off Cannon Drive.

Lucy Parsons Park: This small park at 4712 West Belmont Avenue is named for Lucy Ella Gonzales Parsons (1853–1942), organizer, feminist, and anarchist. She was the wife of Haymarket “conspirator” Albert Parsons, hanged in 1887. Lucy Parsons was a noted public speaker and writer. She attended the founding convention in Chicago of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905 and led a march of Chicago unemployed in 1915.

Margaret A. Haley plaque: Chicago Teachers Union founder and first American Federation of Teachers organizer Margaret Haley is honored with a plaque in the Merchandise Mart, 222 Merchandise Mart Plaza.

Memorial Day Massacre memorial: In 1937 striking steelworkers marched on Republic Steel on the city’s southeast side. The police opened fire and ten people in the crowd were killed and more than sixty injured. The memorial is at United Steelworkers of America Local 1033 at 11731 Avenue O.

Miner and Child sculpture, Humboldt Park: In this park, 1440 North Humboldt Drive, is a 1911 sculpture by Charles J. Mulligan showing a miner embracing his child after a day’s work. Unfortunately, it was carved from Georgia marble and has significantly deteriorated over the years.

Packinghouse workers mural: At the former headquarters of United Packinghouse Workers of America District 1, 4859 South Wabash Avenue, is a 1974 mural by William Walker, “father of the Chicago mural movement.” The mural was commissioned by the Illinois Labor History Society and funded by the Illinois Arts Council.

Pullman Historic District: Centered around 111th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, the district extends east to Interstate 94. Devised as a model industrial town, Pullman was founded in 1880 by George Pullman (1831-1897), inventor of the railroad sleeping car. In 1894, during a national economic downturn (known as “panics”) back then Pullman workers asked for rent relief after the company cut their work hours. When they were fired for their request a strike ensued. Railroad workers across parts of the U.S. honored the strike by refusing to move Pullman cars. The railroads began adding Pullman cars to mail trains (which became an excuse for federal troops to intervene) spurring a violent reaction. Pullman has since been annexed into Chicago proper. The Pullman State Historic Site maintains the Florence Hotel, 11111 South Forrestville Avenue, and has limited tours of the factory site. [http://www.pullman-museum.org/]

Samuel Gompers Park: Located at the corner of Foster Avenue and Pulaski Road, the park includes a bronze statue by Susan Clinard memorializing Gompers (1850–1924). Born in London to a Jewish immigrant family, Gompers began working with his father as a cigar maker at the age of ten. The family moved to the U.S. in 1863, and the following year Gompers joined a union of cigar makers. He was elected president of the Cigar Makers’ International Union in 1875 and in 1881 helped found the Federation of Trade and Labor Unions, which was reorganized in 1886 as the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Gompers served as the organization’s first and longest-serving president.

Sears, Roebuck and Company Complex: These remaining buildings at 930 South Homan Avenue were built from 1905-06 to house the corporate and mail order complex of this early, innovative retailer. At the time of construction this was the world’s largest commercial building.
Union Park and "Union Row:" This 13-acre park, 1501 West Randolph Street, features a 2008 statute by Tom White depicting world labor leader and Irish liberationist James Connolly (1868-1916), executed after the Easter Rebellion in Dublin. Also in the park is a 1907 statue by Frederick Cleveland Hibbard of Chicago Mayor Carter Harrison (1825-1893), popularly known as the "people's mayor." Harrison was assassinated in the final days of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition. Along nearby Ashland Avenue are numerous union headquarters, including the Workers United headquarters, 333 South Ashland, formerly the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. The building was constructed in 1928 as not only a union headquarters, but also as a cultural and recreational center for workers.

Workers memorial mural: A 1998 mural dedicated to workers who died on the job is located in the lobby of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 134, 600 West Washington Boulevard.

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Further Reading


Labor Trail Map, a Chicago neighborhood tour with working class history sites.