

Annual Membership Meeting Minutes, 2012

Posted on June 9, 2012 by Rosemary Feurer

Saturday, April 21, 2012, LAWCHA luncheon (at OAH-Milwaukee Hilton City Center).
Meeting called to order at 12:30 p.m. by President Shel Stromquist.

- Report by outgoing president Kimberley Phillips: LAWCHA, in this past year of challenges to public-sector unionism, has heightened its scholar-activist profile, and will continue this work. She thanked the OAH President Alice Kessler-Harris and the OAH Program Committee chair Nancy MacLean for their encouragement of LAWCHA's key role in this OAH Annual Meeting. She also announced that the next LAWCHA conference will be held in NYC in early June 2013.
- Treasurer's Report by Tom Klug: This has been a remarkable decade in terms of LAWCHA's growth. In 2002, we had \$5000 in the bank, and in 2012 we have nearly \$30,000. In 2003 there were 289 LAWCHA members, while in 2011 there were 506. He noted a slight decline in grad-student memberships this year. Overall, the organization is healthy.
- Nelson Lichtenstein presented the 2012 LAWCHA Herbert G. Gutman Dissertation Prize to Marjorie Elizabeth Wood for her 2011 University of Chicago dissertation, "Emancipating the Child Laborer: Children, Freedom, and the Moral Boundaries of the Market in the United States, 1853-1938." Advisor: Thomas Holt.

The Gutman Prize Committee wrote: "In her expansive and imaginatively structured history of child labor reform, Marjorie Elizabeth Wood demonstrates how the effort to ameliorate or abolish underage work has been inexorably linked to evolving conceptions of childhood, child development, the growth of a consumer society, and the organization of work, both in the factory, on the farm, and at home. Wood's narrative, backed by remarkable research in a highly variegated set of sources and archives, takes her from the world of the antislavery movement to late 19th century conflicts between labor and capital and on to the conservative social politics of 1920s America and the reformism of the early New Deal. In the process, she finds no Whiggish path toward child labor reform. Abolitionist commitment to a free labor ideology might well lead toward a celebration of the moral, redemptive value of work

among children, while the early 20th century effort to eliminate child labor in Southern textiles was often predicated upon racist assumptions that strengthened the emerging Jim Crow regime. And in the 1920s and 1930s, reform efforts to legislate an end to underage work faced sustained opposition from a reactionary political coalition, often religious and rural in orientation, whose ideology is not without contemporary resonance. Wood's dissertation is therefore a multidimensional probe which draws upon scholarship from slavery and emancipation studies, from gender and family history, from the history of consumption and from work on Progressive and New Deal era state building in order to cast a new and revealing light on one of the central issues of labor history. This is therefore a dissertation very much in the tradition pioneered by Herbert Gutman."

Nelson also pointed out that the University of Illinois Press series "The Working Class in American History" has been very prosperous, and announced that its acquisitions editor Laurie Matheson has just been promoted to Editor-in-Chief of the Press.

- Ileen DeVault presented the 2012 Philip Taft Labor History Book Award to Cindy Hahamovitch for her book, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor*, published by Princeton University Press.

The Taft Award Committee wrote: "Based on extensive research in archival collections and oral history interviews across national and imperial borders, Cindy Hahamovitch offers an incisive and expansive history of Jamaican 'guestworkers' in the United States since World War II. Revealing the intricate dynamics between local and global contexts and between individual aspirations and corporate demands, Hahamovitch's engrossing interpretation stands as a cautionary tale of how the state regulation of labor migration produced working conditions detrimental to all workers, especially to guestworkers subjected to a permanent state of deportability."

- Leon Fink, the editor of *LABOR*, presented the Best Article Prize to William P. Jones for his article "The Unknown Origins of the March on Washington: Civil Rights Politics and the Black Working Class," published in the Fall 2010 issue.

Fink commented: "The essay offers a sharply revisionist understanding of an iconic moment in modern American political history, the 1963 March on Washington. Jones argues that the march has been mistakenly assimilated into an understanding of the civil rights movement that too easily separates an earlier movement confronting class and economic injustice from both a 'classic' movement period that narrowed its focus

to a “liberal” assault on Jim Crow and the ‘radicalism’ of the Black Power era. Instead, Jones emphasizes how A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and the Negro American Labor Council (NALC), created to challenge discrimination within the AFL-CIO, framed an expansive March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, initially fueled by the energies of local unions and civil rights organizations in black working-class communities, mostly in the urban North. Only in the late 1960s, Jones argues, did growing ruptures within the movement lead historians as well as contemporary activists to fasten a more conservative ideological mask on the March than it deserved.”

- Conference travel grants (\$250 each) were awarded to three graduate students: Janine Giordano (U of Ill-Urbana), Brandon Ward (Purdue), Joey Fink (UNC-Chapel Hill).
- Kim Phillips, on behalf of the LAWCHA Executive Board, recognized the work done by past LAWCHA presidents Joe W. Trotter Jr. (Carnegie Mellon U.) and Alice Kessler-Harris (Columbia U.) in the organization and in the field, presenting each with an Award for Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-Class History.
- Announcements:
Cecelia Bucki made a brief announcement about the creation of an LAWCHA-OAH Book prize in David Montgomery’s name, with fund-raising to begin soon. Also, the LAWCHA board was creating a LAWCHA Research Award for graduate students in Montgomery’s name – details will be forthcoming.

Dan Katz (National Labor College) made a brief announcement about of the George Meany Archives, which are threatened with closing. He asked members to support the survival of the archives.

- President Stromquist asked if there was any new business that members wanted to bring to the floor. Hearing none, it was moved and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. Unanimously in favor, meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cecelia Bucki
National Secretary
5/26/12

Author



[Rosemary Feurer](#)

Rosemary Feurer is Professor of History at Northern Illinois University. She is the author of *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900-1950*, among other books and essays. She is working on *The Illinois Mine Wars, 1860-1940* and a new biography of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones.