



# LABOR'S LEGACY

*A landmark for  
Detroit*



# THE MICHIGAN LABOR LEGACY PROJECT, INC.

Gerald Bantom, President  
Donald Boggs, Secretary-Treasurer  
Ken Terry, Trustee  
David Elsila and David Ivers, Coordinators  
David Hecker, Fund Raising Committee Chair

**CREATORS OF "TRANSCENDING":  
DAVID BARR AND SERGIO DE GIUSTI**

**WITH SPECIAL THANKS FOR THEIR WORK ON THE LABOR LEGACY PROJECT TO**

Mike Kerwin, UAW Local 174  
Lisa Canada, Metro Detroit AFL-CIO  
Richard Berlin Steven P. Bieda Sheryl Singal  
Al Carnes James V. Settles Jr. Alberta Asmar Mary Ellen Riordan Patrick Devlin  
Marilyn Wheaton, director, Detroit Dept. of Cultural Affairs  
The Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs  
City of Detroit Mayor's Office; City Council; Planning, Recreation, and Civic Center Depts.  
And to our jury, which chose the winning design from 55 entries:  
Dr. Graham Beal, director, Detroit Institute of Arts; Camille Billops, co-director, Hatch-Billops Collection, New York;  
Bill Black, director, legislative and community affairs, Teamsters Joint Council;  
Dr. Melba Boyd, director, Dept. of Africana Studies, Wayne State University; Paul Krell, director, UAW Public Relations Dept.

## **ARCHITECTURAL CONSULTANT AND PROJECT COORDINATOR**

Merz & Associates, LLC  
Charles Merz, AIA  
Tony Maceratini  
Ron Alpern

## **SITE CONTRACTORS**

Turner Construction: Steve Berlage, vice-president and general manager;  
Ron Dawson, project executive; special thanks to Charlie Hornacek and Sean Hollister  
Aristeo Construction: James E. Like, vice-president, William Litz, project director  
Barton Malow: Douglas L. Maibach, vice-president and chair, AGC Greater Detroit chapter,  
and John Csont, superintendent, trade labor  
Walbridge Aldinger: David B. Hanson, senior vice-president; E.G. Clawson (recently deceased), group vice-president;  
Michael Smith, Associated General Contractors (AGC), Greater Detroit Chapter

Kirlin Electric Motor City Electric Guideline Plumbing Herman Rousseau Booms Stone

Arcs Fabricated by David Barr with Capitol Welding

## **LEGAL COUNSEL**

David Radtke and Lisa Smith (Klimist McKnight Sale McLow and Conzano)

## **SITE CONSTRUCTION BY MEMBERS OF THE FOLLOWING UNIONS:**

Ironworkers Local 25 • Intl. Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 58  
Tile Marble and Terrazzo Workers Local 42  
Laborers International Union of North America  
Intl. Union of Operating Engineers Local 324 • Carpenters and Millwrights  
Plasterers and Cement Masons

## **SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL THOSE OTHERS WHO GAVE OF THEIR TIME, INCLUDING**

Mark Alexander Steve Babson Barbara Barefield Natasha Bradley Nancy Brigham Shawn Ellis  
Barb Ingalls Frank Joyce Ann Kerwin Susan Kramer Norris Krastes Tom Lonergan  
Maude Lyon Dennis McCann Patrice Merritt Dori Veda Middleton Jim Pedersen  
Jim Pita Mike Poterala Phil Schloop Larry Sherman Frank Singer Mike Smith  
Ann Steel Reina Sturdivant Beth Thoreson Laurie Stuart and many others

# A VISION — Rises —

**M**ore than 120 artists and sculptors from throughout the U.S. gathered in downtown Detroit in early March 2001. Under a bright winter sun, they walked along the river side of Jefferson Avenue just west of Woodward with cameras and sketchbooks in hand imagining what they could build there to tell the story of working men and women.

The Michigan Labor History Society had invited the artists to Detroit after deciding to present a gift of public art to mark the city's tri-centennial. Detroit officials were enthusiastic, and designated the Jefferson site, just north of Hart Plaza, as an appropriate place. It was a location rich with history. A few blocks west, at Third Street, Huron Indians had established a community at the time of the arrival of French settlers in 1701. Fur traders, ship builders, and other workers had plied their trades nearby. In the modern era, auto and other industrial plants had set up shop just a few blocks to the east. And whenever the labor movement rallied, downtown Detroit was a magnet. The big organizing rallies of the 1930s, the Labor Day parades of the 1950s, and the historic civil rights march of 1963 all had taken place within a few blocks of this site.

At the nearby UAW-Ford National Programs Center, the artists met with Labor History Society officers who laid out a challenge: come up with a work of art to inform the public about labor's history, honor the working women and men who built our city, and inspire visitors with labor's vision for a better future.

Two months later, 55 proposals ranging from simple sketches to complex drawings had been received. A panel of five jurists — Graham Beal, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts; Camille Billops, director of the Hatch-Billops gallery in New York; Bill Black, community affairs director of the Teamsters Joint Council; Melba Boyd, poet and teacher; and Paul Krell of the UAW President's staff pored over the submissions on which the names of the artists had been masked out to insure impartiality. After selecting three semi-finalists, the jury agreed on a joint collaboration by David Barr and Sergio De Giusti, both of whom have created public art installations throughout the world. "It was," said Detroit 300 Director Maud Lyon, "a wonderful example of democracy in action in selecting a plan for a major work of art."

*Transcending*, as Barr and De Giusti named their design, was to rise 63 feet above street level in the form of two stainless-steel arcs, geared on the inside to reflect Detroit's industrial might, and open at the top to symbolize labor's unfinished work. At night, the gap would be lit as a reminder of the energy of working people. A spiral walkway at the base would lead visitors to eight granite boulders split in half, with the inside faces holding bronze reliefs telling labor's story. Embedded in the walkway would be milestones describing labor's achievements. A raised dais would include quotations from prominent activists for labor rights and social justice. Beneath the dais would be a time capsule holding letters, badges, newspapers, and other labor mementos of the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Barr-De Giusti vision excited the labor community, and over the next several months, unions, rank-and-file members, and various enterprises would contribute some \$1.6 million to bring the vision to reality. Members of several building and construction trades unions laid the foundations, erected the arcs, and embedded the tiles that, two years later, would complete *Transcending*. On August 22, 2003, hundreds gathered under a blazing sun to dedicate the new landmark, hailed as the largest work of public art in the nation honoring workers. At the dedication, members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, represented by the Detroit Federation of Musicians, composed and played an original fanfare.

Since its dedication, *Transcending* has been visited by thousands of residents and tourists and has been hailed in local and national news media both for its artistic merits and for the story it tells. On any day, you can find people sitting on the benches that surround the Landmark, walking along the spiral pathway past the bronze sculptures, or standing on the dais to read the words that reflect hopes for a better world. Visitors often pause in front of one of the two engraved tiles at the base of each arc to read the moving words of Martin Luther King Jr.:

*"The arc of history bends toward justice."*



# DREAMING —of a better— FUTURE

*“All skilled labor in Detroit is organized into trade unions,” wrote streetcar driver Malcolm McLeod in 1901. “And through the efforts of those unions we have bettered our conditions, reduced the hours of labor, and increased wages so that we now can find time to educate ourselves and our children and take the place in society which has been denied them.”*



**M**alcolm McLeod was the head of the street railway workers union at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In this letter, buried in a time capsule opened a hundred years later, in 2001, he described how during his lifetime he saw streetcars pulled by horses replaced by ones powered by electricity. And he told of his dreams for the future. “It is my earnest hope,” he wrote, “that the union movement will continue to grow and prosper and that class society will be wiped out of existence in this new century, and that we will all stand on the same plane.”

While McLeod’s hopes have not yet come true — the gap between rich and poor is still wide and growing wider — the labor movement has never stopped dreaming about, or struggling for, a better future. “What does labor want?” asked AFL President Sam Gompers. “More schoolhouses and less jails; more books and less arsenals; more learning and less vice; more leisure and less greed; more justice and less revenge.” Much later, UAW President Walter Reuther echoed that call: “If it was just a question of winning six cents an hour, I wouldn’t be interested... I will be dissatisfied as long as one American child is denied the right to education. As long as one American is denied his rights, I will do all I can to dispel the corruption of complacency in America and seek a greater sense of national purpose.”

## Dates in Detroit’s LABOR HISTORY

### Years of Struggle

When Malcolm McLeod spoke of labor’s achievements at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, he did not have to look far to remember what life had been like for many Detroiters — particularly those who were not part of the skilled trades or crafts. In 1883, the first annual report of the Michigan Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics described life in the suburb of Springwells, where children as young as seven were put to work in a brickyard several hours a day next to their mothers, while their siblings of 10 years or older were working hard from sunrise to sunset in the same brickyard, living with their families in “filthy, dilapidated, little hovels” situated in muddy alleyways. “The inmates of our houses of correction and our prisons are better fed, more comfortably clad and housed than these people are,” declared the report. Indeed that same year dozens of Detroiters were seeking voluntary admission to the Detroit House of Corrections, even though they had committed no crime, in order to be housed and fed.

Abolishing child labor, providing decent working conditions, raising wages, and helping to end poverty were the dreams that motivated many of Detroit’s labor leaders and social reformers over the years.

The labor movement had its earliest beginnings here in 1818, when the Detroit Mechanics’ Society was founded. More of an educational and fraternal organization than a

1818

Detroit Mechanics’ Society founded

1837

Carpenters march for high pay, shorter worktime

1839

Printers strike

1852

Detroit Typographers Union, oldest continuing union, founded

1885

First Labor Day parade

1891

Detroit trolley workers strike with strong community support

1892

Detroit Council of Trades and Labor Unions (later to become Detroit Federation of Labor) founded

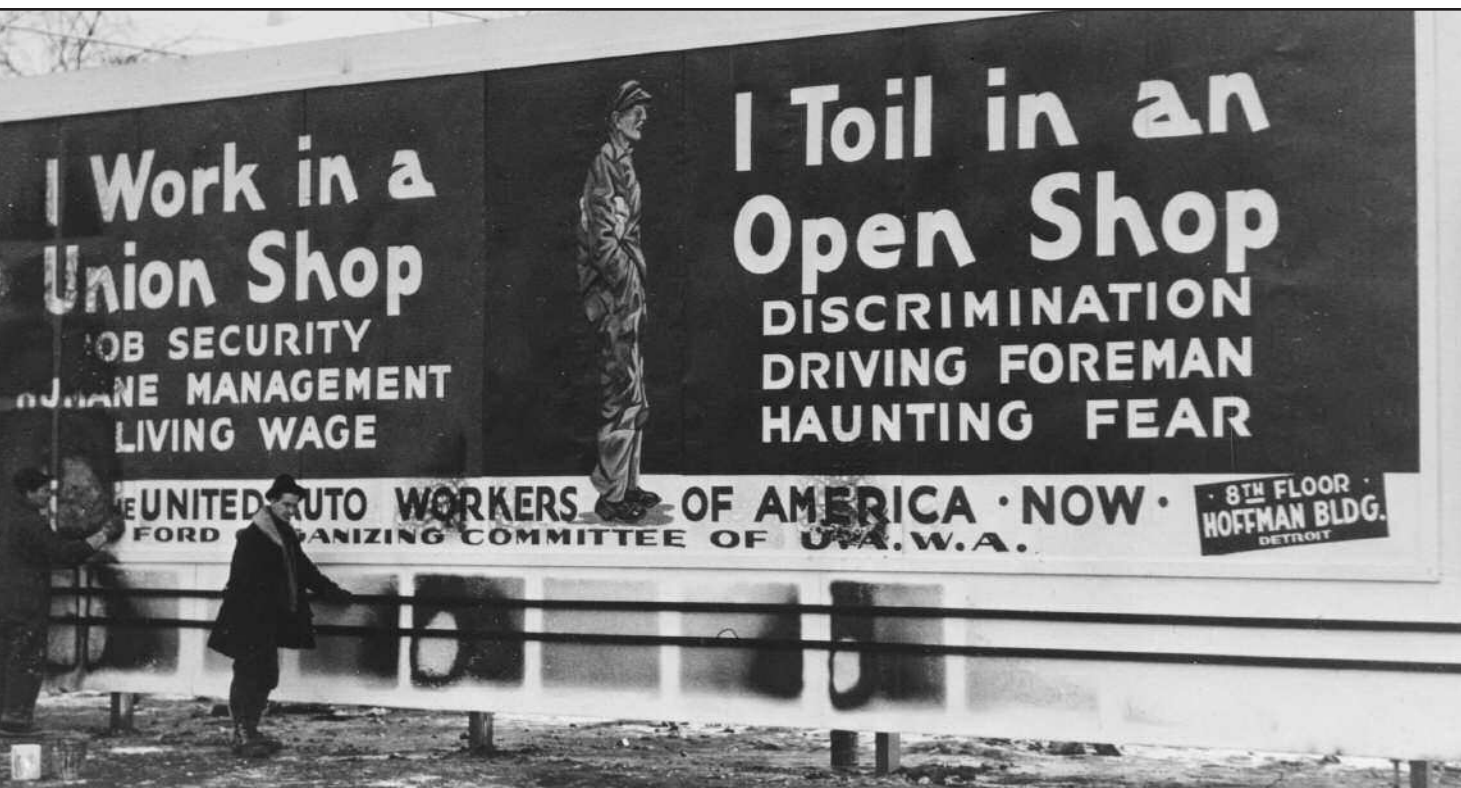


Photo courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

union, the Society was able to bring skilled workers and businessmen together to create a mutual insurance fund and a library. In the 1830s, carpenters and printers organized. Carpenters struck for shorter hours and higher pay in 1837 in what was probably the first strike in the city's history, and printers struck two years later. By 1852 the printers had established the Detroit Typographical Union, the oldest continuing functioning union in the city's history. Three years later, the city's clerks demanded and won shorter work hours. In 1863, railroad workers struck and two years later dockworkers in the city's growing port sector went on strike. In 1865, the burgeoning labor movement marched as a separate division in the Fourth of July parade. By 1886, the labor movement was strong enough to bring more than 10,000 workers out for a Labor Day parade.

But most of the organizing took place not in the brickyards or other areas of unskilled labor. The dominant American Federation of Labor concentrated its efforts among the crafts and the skilled workforce. As they gained members, struck, and won shorter worktime and higher pay, employers sent spies into the unions and established a blacklist of union activists. In the early 20th Century, efforts were made to organize the growing industrial workforce in the

auto industry. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), staged the first auto strike at Studebaker in 1913, and tried to organize the Ford plant in Highland Park where thousands labored on Henry Ford's new assembly line. Still, little progress would be made in organizing along industrial lines until two decades later.

### *The Turbulent Thirties*

In March 1932, thousands of unemployed workers marched through Detroit and Dearborn to Ford's River Rouge plant, not far from where the brickyard workers had labored fifty years earlier. Facing the hunger and homelessness of the Great Depression, they brought petitions asking Ford for jobs and health care. As they approached the plant, these hunger marchers were met with a barrage of bullets from Ford's security forces. Five workers died from their wounds and thousands honored them at a funeral service a few days later, some bearing signs reading "We asked for food; Ford fed us bullets."

A year earlier, at a Kroger grocery warehouse, workers led by Jimmy Hoffa, who would become president of the Teamsters Union in later years, struck to protest the sudden layoff of two of their crew members. With a load of straw-

**1901**  
Machinists strike for shorter worktime

**1913**  
Industrial Workers of the World leads strike of Studebaker workers

**1931**  
"Strawberry Strike" wins contract at Kroger's

**1932**  
Ford Hunger March

**1935**  
UAW founded

**1937**  
Sitdown strikes hit Detroit

**1941**  
UAW wins contract at Ford





Previous page: Organizing in the 1930s.

Left: Solidarity during the 1995-2000 newspaper strike.

Building and construction trades workers have continued to train increasing numbers of workers from previously underrepresented groups, including women and African Americans, as journeymen. Workers in music and the arts bring new cultural experiences to fellow union members and

Photo: George Waldman

berries in danger of rotting, management agreed to talk with the union, rehired the workers, and signed a contract.

As the Depression continued, events like the hunger march and the “strawberry strike” and sporadic strikes in industry began to embolden the growing industrial workforce. In 1935, auto workers met to form the UAW and, in late December, 1936 began the sitdown strike in Flint that would force General Motors to recognize the union and bargain. Sitdowns spread to Detroit — not just in auto plants but at hotels, department stores and cigar factories. The result was a massive membership increase in the newly founded Congress of Industrial Organizations and the signing of dozens of union contracts across Detroit. By 1941, Ford, the last holdout in auto, had agreed to a representation election, and when the UAW won, it signed a contract. The decades of struggle to organize the unorganized had succeeded on many fronts.

### *Economic Gains, Social Justice*

Over the last six decades, Detroit’s labor unions have sought to build on their early successes, widening their reach, strengthening ties to their communities, and expanding their fight for social and economic justice. When teachers and other public workers won the right to collective bargaining in the 1960s, thousands joined the labor movement.

the broader community.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. marched down Woodward Ave. in June, 1963, thousands of union members joined him in the quest for human rights. Detroit union members were among the strongest supporters of the grape and lettuce boycotts led by Cesar Chavez to bring justice to farm workers. Groups like the Interfaith Committee on Workers Issues and Jobs with Justice continue the tradition of bringing together labor and faith communities for building a community of justice. The Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Trade Union Leadership Council, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Latin American Coalition for Labor Action, Pride at Work, and other groups seek to unite all sections of the labor movement to work for social justice. As the globalization of the economy continues, some of Detroit’s unions have reached out to their colleagues in Canada, Mexico, and other countries to build solidarity without borders — a global alliance of workers.

The vision that inspired early labor leaders like Malcolm MacLeod today faces challenges that those early unionists could not have imagined. Labor’s work, as symbolized by the gap at the top of the Labor Legacy Landmark, is never finished. We continue to strive, as Sergio De Giusti’s final sculpture at the Landmark reminds us, to “bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old.”

## *Dates in Detroit’s* **LABOR HISTORY**

<b>1946</b> UAW strikes General Motors	<b>1963</b> Workers march with Martin Luther King, Jr.	<b>1965</b> Public workers win collective bargaining rights	<b>1970s</b> Detroiters join grape boycott	<b>1995-2000</b> Newspaper strike	<b>2003</b> Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark dedicated
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