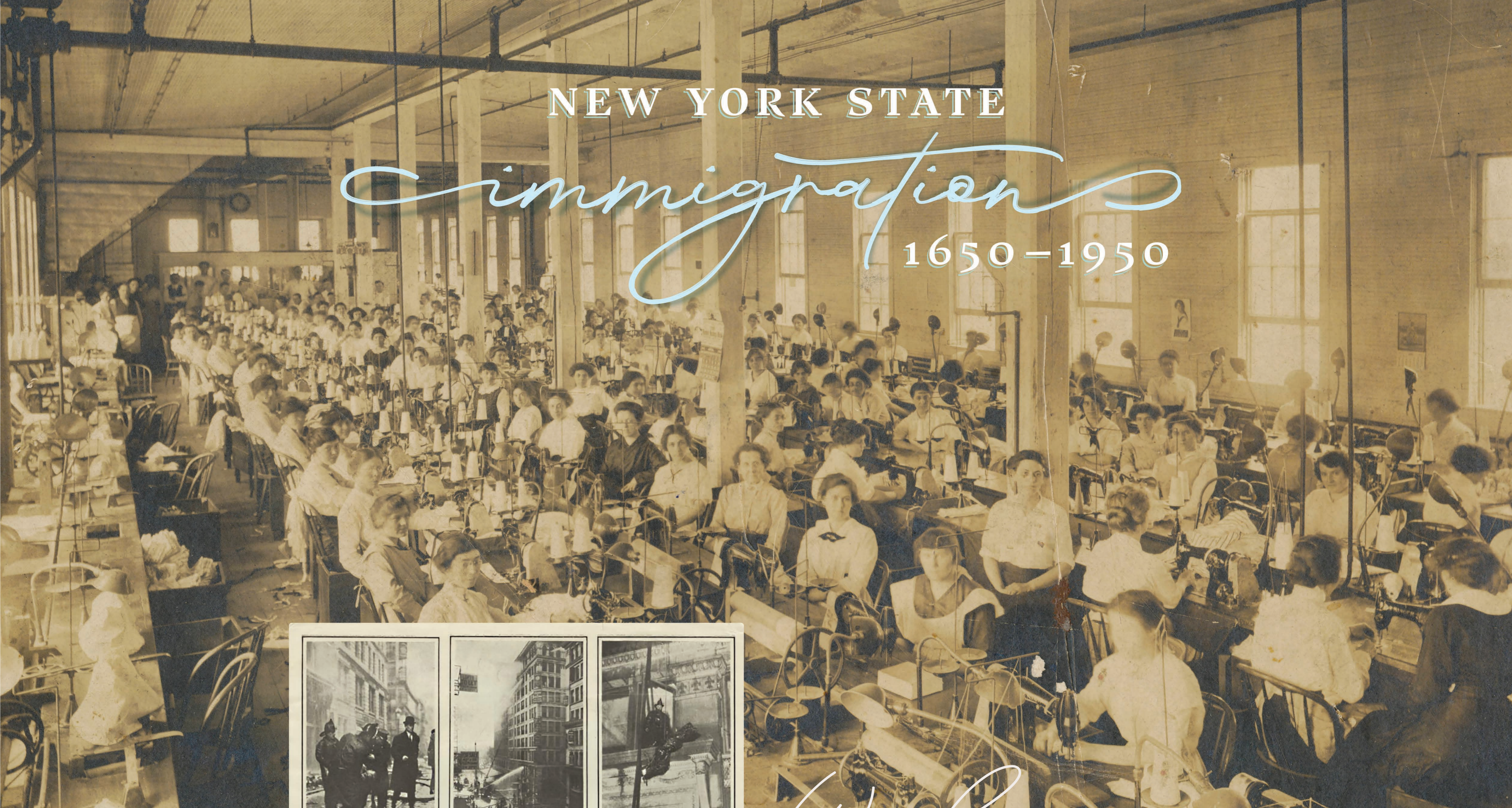


NEW YORK STATE

immigration  
1650-1950



Work

NEW YORK STATE'S DIVERSE ECONOMY attracted immigrants from all around the world and from a variety of occupations.

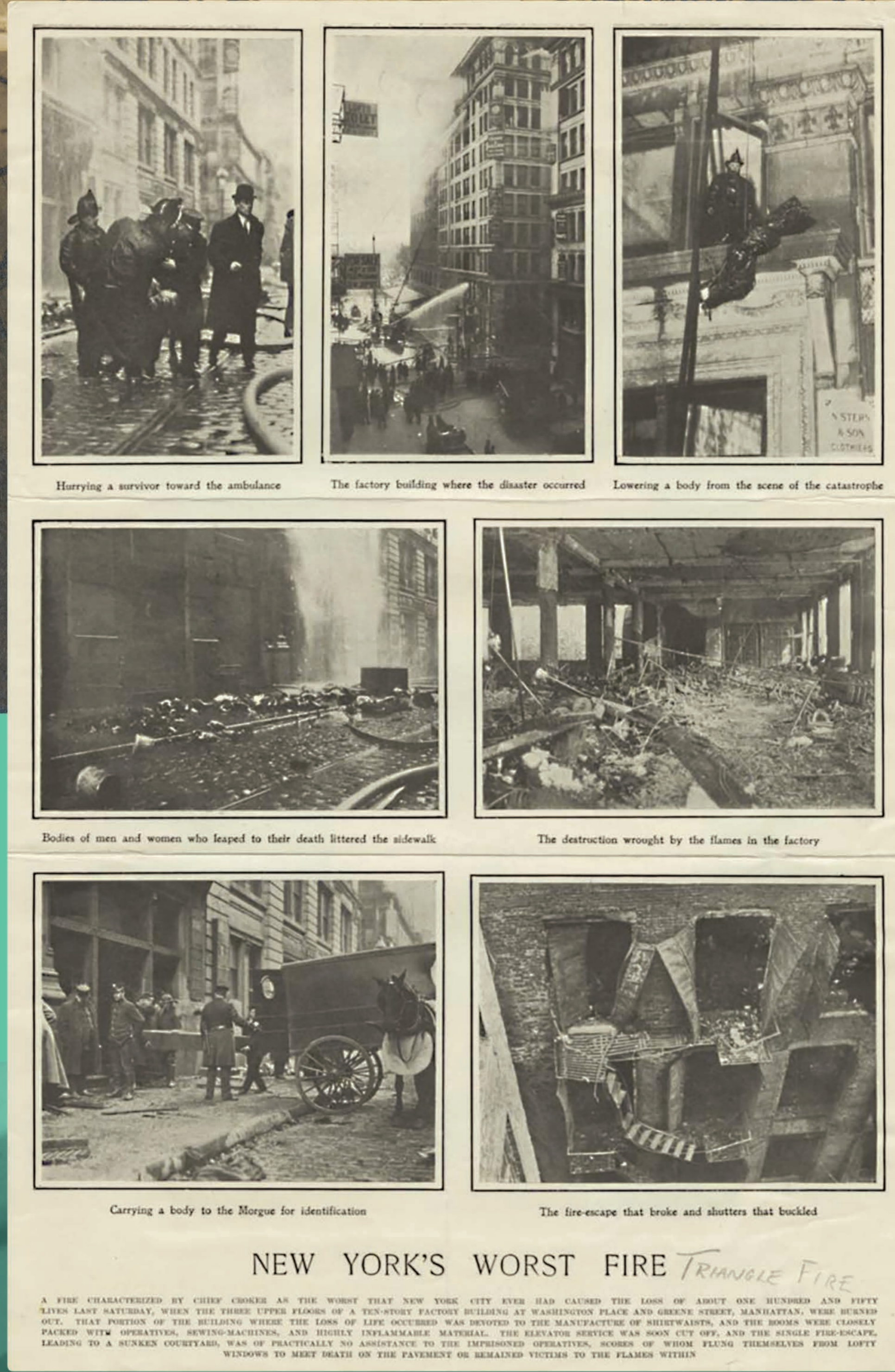
Most immigrants found work through networks of relatives and friends already settled in the United States. Approximately two out of every three immigrants to America came through New York City. Many made their way to the growing cities upstate. Many others settled in rural areas, often establishing new ethnic communities.

Jobs were plentiful in the industrializing American economy. However, the low pay, long hours, and difficult conditions fell far short of the immigrants' expectations for American life. New workers were often victims of unfair labor practices and other forms of discrimination. In 1911, a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in Greenwich Village killed 146 garment workers. Most of those workers were young, female, and recent immigrants. This horrific event led to the Factory Investigating Commission to investigate workplace conditions. The commission's six-volume report resulted in important safety laws that continue to protect workers now.

Workers, many of whom were immigrants, formed unions to protect themselves. New York City was a hotbed for organized labor and labor reform movements.

Samuel Gompers, a Jewish immigrant in New York City, founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The AFL advocated for workers' rights, which benefited immigrants already in New York. Yet the AFL also favored restricting new immigration as a means to keep wages higher.

Today, almost 1 in 4 workers in New York State is an immigrant. Earlier waves of immigrants were mostly unskilled laborers, artisans, and farmers. Contemporary immigrants tend to be more highly educated, but still face many of the same challenges.



Hauling a survivor toward the ambulance. The factory building where the disaster occurred. Lifting a body from the scene of the catastrophe.

Blocks of iron and women who leaped to their death littered the sidewalk. The destruction wrought by the flames in the factory.

Carrying a body to the morgue for identification. The wreckage that broke and shattered glass bottles.

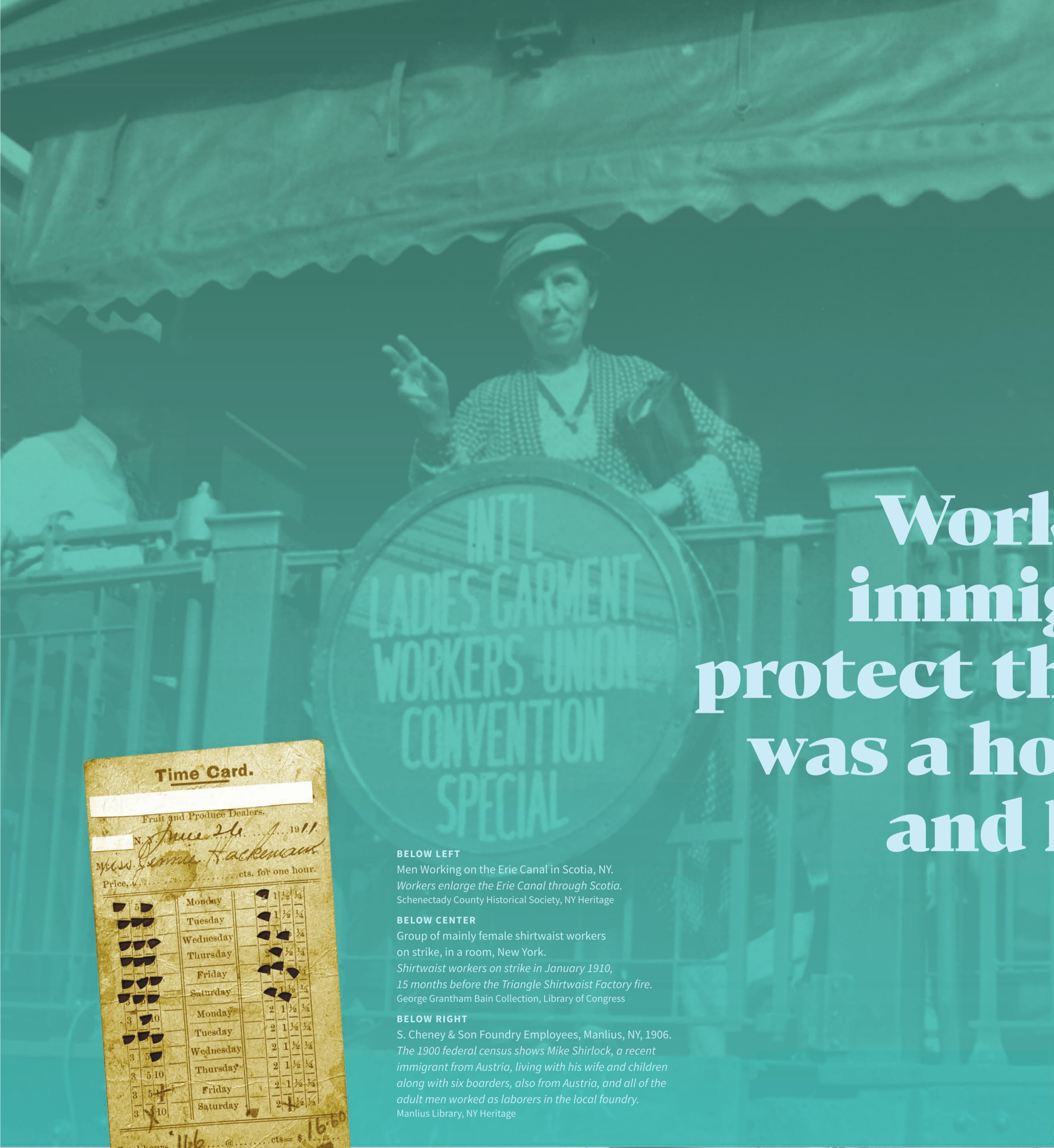
NEW YORK'S WORST FIRE *Triangle Fire*

**TOP**  
F. Jacobson and Sons, 77 Cornell Street, Kingston, New York. Employees of F. Jacobson and Sons work on sewing shirts. The factory was opened and was opened on February 23, 1937. The company had factories in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and New York. Friends of Historic Kingston, NY Heritage

**ABOVE**  
New York's Worst Fire. Harper's Weekly published many photographs from the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, including those of bodies on the street. Frances Perkins kept a copy of this page in her personal files. Columbia University Library

**BELOW**  
Fania Cohn waves from an ILGWU Special Convention Train. Cohn was elected as the first female vice president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) after years of prominence in the labor movement of New York City. The Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Archives

**BOTTOM**  
Time card for 117 hours. Time card from 1911 for Miss Jennie Hockemans, who worked for 168 hours over two weeks and earned \$12.00 for her efforts. New York State Archives, Factory Investigating Commission



**BELOW LEFT**  
Men Working on the Erie Canal in Scotia, NY. Workers cutting the Erie Canal through Scotia. Schoenecady County Historical Society, NY Heritage

**BELOW CENTER**  
Group of mainly female shirtwaist workers on strike in a room, New York. Shirtwaist workers on strike in January 1910, 15 months before the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress

**BELOW RIGHT**  
S. Cheney & Son Foundry Employees, Manlius, NY 1906. The 1900 federal census shows Mike Shirlock, a recent immigrant from Austria, living with his wife and children along with six boarders, also from Austria, and all of the adult men worked on laborers in the local foundry. Manlius Library, NY Heritage

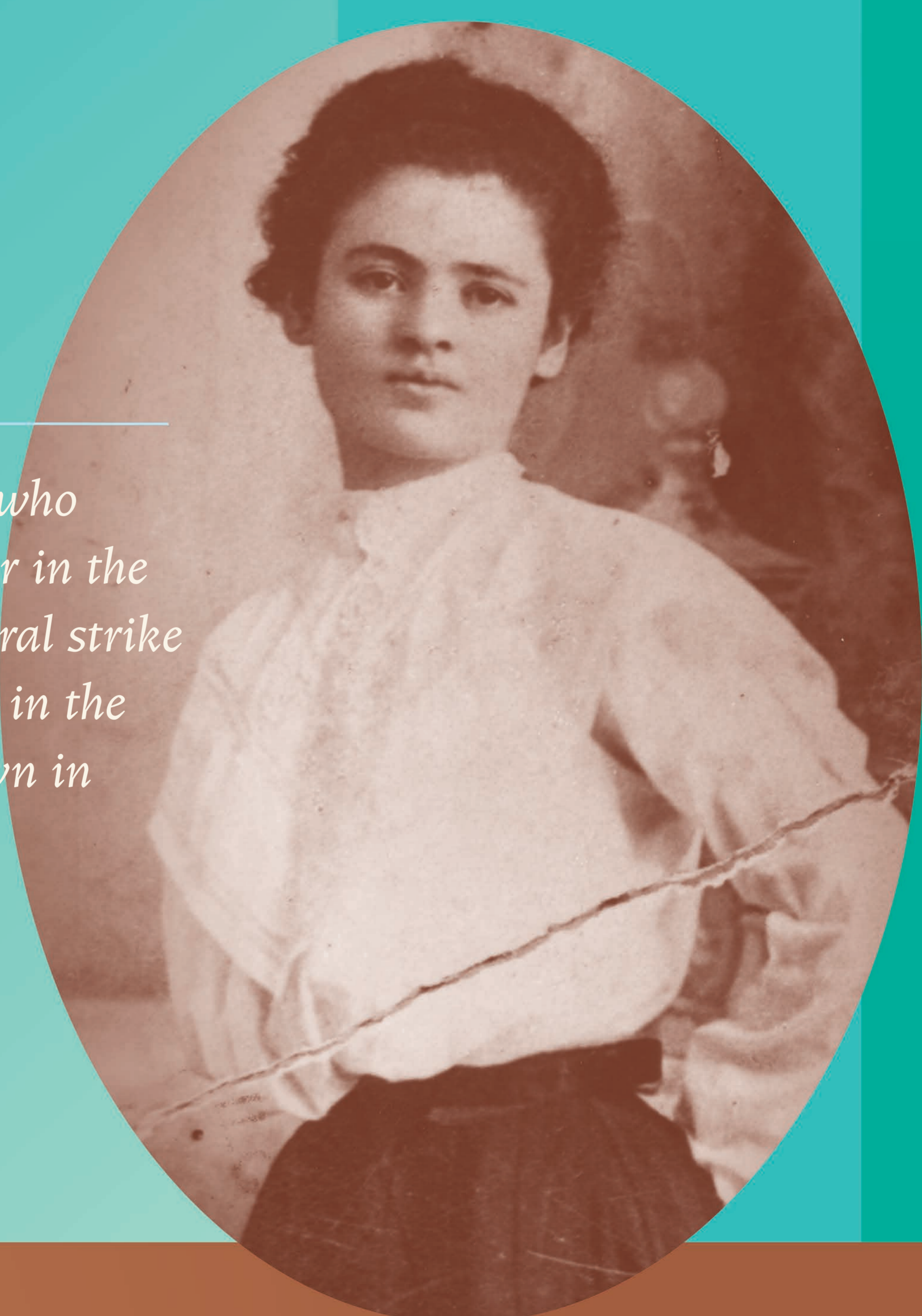


Karl August Rudolph Steinmetz

Karl Steinmetz, born in Prussia, was studying at the University of Breslau in the 1880s when he faced arrest for being a socialist. He fled to New York, where he changed his name to Charles Proteus Steinmetz. He made significant contributions to the development and growth of the electric power industry.

Clara Lemlich

Clara Lemlich was a Jewish immigrant from Russian Poland who arrived in New York City in 1903. She quickly became a leader in the women's trade union movement, and led the eleven-week general strike in 1909 known as the Uprising of 20,000. She was also active in the women's suffrage movement in New York. Lemlich settled down in Brooklyn with her husband, Joe Shavelson.



**LEFT**  
The 1900 federal census shows Mike Shirlock, a recent immigrant from Austria, living with his wife and children along with six boarders, also from Austria, and all of the adult men worked on laborers in the local foundry. Manlius Library, NY Heritage

**RIGHT**  
Clara Lemlich was a Jewish immigrant from Russian Poland who arrived in New York City in 1903. She quickly became a leader in the women's trade union movement, and led the eleven-week general strike in 1909 known as the Uprising of 20,000. She was also active in the women's suffrage movement in New York. Lemlich settled down in Brooklyn with her husband, Joe Shavelson. The Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Archives

Work

Explore the entire exhibit online: [NYHERITAGE.ORG/IMMIGRATION](http://NYHERITAGE.ORG/IMMIGRATION)

