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## The Little Falls Textile Strike

*Strikers in front of Sokol Hall.*

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New York Archives magazine is a donor-funded educational product published quarterly by the NYS Archives Partnership Trust. For subscription information, visit [nysarchivestrust.org](http://nysarchivestrust.org).

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# The Little Falls Textile Strike (1912–1913)



**T**he Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was a clothing factory in New York City where workers made shirts. It was on the top floors of a tall building in Manhattan. On March 25, 1911, a terrible fire broke out in the factory. Workers couldn't escape because the doors were locked and there weren't enough safe exits. Sadly, 146 people died in the fire. After this tragedy, people wanted to make factories safer. One result was passing the Jackson Bill, which created the law that said women and children could only work up to fifty-four hours a week. This law helped protect workers and improve factory conditions. But when the law cut the number of hours people could work, some factory owners also cut their pay. Workers were upset because they were doing the same hard jobs but getting less money. This made many workers feel angry and unfairly treated.

From October 1912 to January 1913, many textile workers in Little Falls, New York, went on strike. A strike is when workers refuse to work to protest. The factory workers wanted to show the factory owners that they didn't think this cut in pay was fair.

The strike was organized and supported by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a union that believed all workers should stand together to fight for better conditions. The IWW helped the workers form a strike committee, gave speeches, and helped spread the word about what was happening in Little Falls.

A nurse named Helen Schloss investigated how the workers were living and working. She found that the

factories and living quarters were very unsafe.

There was no safety equipment. The toilets were just barrels over holes that went into the river. The workers were sometimes yelled at or even hurt by their bosses. Many people had to share one bathroom, and sick people had to sleep in the same beds as healthy people.

On December 24, the State Department of Labor decided to investigate the strike to find out why it was happening. They talked to forty-seven people, including workers and mill owners. They found out that the main reason for the strike was that workers were getting paid less money. After the talks, the investigators made a plan to help fix the problem.

Finally, after three months, the strike ended in January 1913. The workers got what they asked for: their old pay back and better hours. But even after the strike ended, some workers had trouble going back to their jobs. The homes and factories were still not very safe or clean, and the pay was still low.

This strike showed how workers could come together to ask for better treatment and how hard it was to make real changes. The help from the IWW showed how powerful unions could be when they stood with workers and helped them speak out.



## Gnaw on This

- The Little Falls strike was part of a wave of labor actions that followed the famous Lawrence Textile Strike in Massachusetts earlier that same year. Workers in Little Falls were encouraged by the success of the Lawrence strike, which also involved many immigrant women.
- The first women-only workers' union in New York State was the United Tailoresses of New York, formed in 1825.
- Children were used for labor in many industries.

## Community Connections



- **Kate Mullany House**, Troy. This site is being renovated to create a National Trade Union Women's Memorial. [katemullanyrhs.org](http://katemullanyrhs.org)
- **The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Memorial**, New York City. In 2023, a memorial was dedicated to those who lost their lives in the fire. [rememberthetrianglefire.org/memorial](http://rememberthetrianglefire.org/memorial)
- **Little Falls Historical Society**, Little Falls. The historical society in Little Falls has information and artifacts from the strike. [littlefallshistoricalsociety.org/museum-exhibit/1912-little-falls-textile-strike/](http://littlefallshistoricalsociety.org/museum-exhibit/1912-little-falls-textile-strike/)



## Take a Closer Look

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

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### Workers Today

The standard work week in the United States is forty hours per week. This wasn't always the case. Unions worked hard for decades to improve working hours and conditions.



How many hours are in one day? \_\_\_\_\_

About how many hours do many people sleep each night? \_\_\_\_\_

If someone works 40 hours a week over 5 days in a week, how many hours a day do they work? \_\_\_\_\_

Subtracting out hours for sleep and work, how many hours does that leave each day for family, friends, housework and hobbies?  
\_\_\_\_\_



Now take a look at Miss Jennie Hackemans's timecard from the fruit cannery where she worked in 1911. Use what is on the card and the notes at the bottom to help you answer the questions below.

How many days a week did Jennie work? \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours did Jennie work on Wednesday and Saturday? \_\_\_\_\_

How much time did this leave for Jennie to sleep or spend time with her family? \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours did Jennie work in one week? \_\_\_\_\_



Why would Jennie and other workers be unhappy with their working conditions? Why would they want to strike? Using information from the article on page 2 and this document, as well as what you know, write a diary entry from the point of view of a worker in 1911.

**Time Card.**

Fruit and Produce Dealers.

N. Y. *June 26* ..... 19*11*

*Miss Jennie Hackemans*

Price, ..... cts. for one hour.

	Monday	
	Tuesday	
	Wednesday	
	Thursday	
	Friday	
	Saturday	
	Monday	
	Tuesday	
	Wednesday	
	Thursday	
	Friday	
	Saturday	

Total hours *166* ..... @ ..... cts = \$ *16.60*

Series A3209, New York State Archives

**Note:** Jennie made 10 cents per hour. In today's money that would be \$3.38 an hour. In NYS the minimum wage is \$15.50 per hour.



## Learning Activity

### Cause and Effect Chain

When we look at history, we often see cause and effect. Sometimes an event can be the start of a chain reaction, where the effect becomes a cause for another event.

The article starts with the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. From that event (cause) there is a chain reaction of events (effects). Can you find them? List them below.

1	_____
2	_____
3	_____
4	_____
5	_____
6	_____
7	_____
8	_____
9	_____
10	_____

Now take the events above and write each one on a strip of paper. Connect the strips to make a paper chain to show how one event can cause another, and another, and another.

