

# The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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SPRING 2018

## Distant Mirrors

Noel Beasley

A hundred years ago, on June 16, 1918, Eugene Victor Debs gave a speech to a large gathering of militant workers in Canton, Ohio that will always stand as **one of the most concise and clear arguments** ever made for resisting wars that enrich wealthy capitalists at the cost of suffering, impoverishment and loss for the majority of the people on Earth.



Eugene V. Debs delivering his famous speech opposing World War I in Canton Ohio's Nimsilla Park

Fifty-one years ago, on April 4, 1967, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam at the Riverside Church in New York City. It was titled **"Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence."** Dr. King's speech articulated and summed up his journey from being an outspoken champion of the rights of African-Americans to becoming a visionary leader of poor people everywhere. For the first time he publically denounced the violent aggression of the U.S. government not only in Vietnam but across Asia and Africa as well as in Central and South America.

Debs spent most of the remaining years of his life after the Canton speech in federal prisons that broke his health but never his spirit. Precisely one year to the day after Dr. King's remarks at Riverside Church, on April 4, 1968, he was murdered in Memphis, Tennessee, while he was helping to lead a strike of sanitation workers.

The events in Canton and Memphis will be recognized and commemorated over the course of this year. Historians have preserved the records of these moments at the crossroads in the lives of two of our country's greatest leaders. These are distant mirrors which we can look into and thereby see more clearly the contradictions, dangers and opportunities of our own tumultuous times.

In 1918 Debs was living in a world exploding with the conjunction of literal and political dynamite. From the power and promise of the Russian Revolution to the ruthless restructuring of nations and peoples by the victors of capitalism's incestuous global conflict, the conclusion of the second decade of the twentieth century foreshadowed the approach of the next hundred harrowing years of the struggle between progressive and reactionary forces.



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Speech, **"Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence"** Echoed Many Debsian Sentiments

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# Distant Mirrors

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By 1967 and 1968, Dr. King knew that the inherent contradictions in the U.S.A. had to be exposed and resolved in the streets. As with the experience of Eugene Debs in the Pullman Strike (for which the railroad union leader also did time in jail), Dr. King saw that by forming unions and undertaking collective action, workers could expose the desperate and dangerous conditions that they faced and demand change. The fifty years of gunfire and flames that have followed clearly illuminate the depravity and corruption with which one percent of the population will attempt to control the rest of us.

We can take this opportunity to reflect upon the strength and courage of Debs and King and countless others who fought and sacrificed alongside them. We then can emulate their actions and do our part to insure that the exciting energy, imagination and skill of the emerging generations of leaders and activists can push back globally and decisively on the tiny myopic minority who live only for themselves.

If you have a chance, please read the two speeches side by side. I have done this several times in the last few months. It can be an electrifying experience. We are the majority. Let's prove it.

## EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018

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**The Eugene V. Debs Foundation**  
Box 9454  
Terre Haute, IN 47808

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The Debs Foundation Newsletter is published twice yearly for distribution to supporters and friends of the Foundation. The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a non-profit, private organization which maintains the home of Eugene and Kate Debs as a museum and shrine to labor, and carries on educational and informational programs which aim to honor and promote the goals for which Debs struggled: industrial unionism, social justice, and peace. For those wishing to become supporters, a donation form is provided elsewhere in this issue.

## 2017 Awards Banquet

Once again we are delighted to report the success of our annual awards banquet. First and foremost, we were honored to be able to present the award to Jobs With Justice for nearly two decades of work in the fighting for the rights of working people. Presenter **Joan Suarez** presented the award to **Sarita Gupta**, Executive Director of Jobs With Justice, who accepted the award on the organization's behalf.

Attendees were also visibly delighted and moved by the musical performances of **Charlie King** and **George Mann**, who delivered a wonderful performance of labor and social justice melodies.

The banquet was also a financial success, netting the Foundation approximately \$6,000 to put toward its mission. To all those who contributed to the success of the 2017 banquet, our thanks to you. For those who were able to attend, we hope you had an enjoyable time. The 2018 event is scheduled for **Saturday, October 20**. We hope you can make it!



**Sarita Gupta** accepting Eugene V. Debs the award on behalf of **Jobs With Justice**. The award was presented by **Joan Suarez** and Foundation President **Noel Beasley**



# Museum Director's Report

Allison Duerk

While the winter months are typically a slower time at the Debs Museum, we had a successful close to the year and have exciting prospects going into 2018. Total visitor count for the year of 2017 was 775, a significant improvement from 546 total visitors in 2016. A vast majority of visitors participate in a 60-90 minute guided tour of the first, second, and third floors of the house.

In October, we hosted 25 members and organizers with the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters as they conducted a day-long training program in the attic of the home. The same month, board member **Lisa Phillips** presented a program on the organizing activity of UNITE-HERE for a group of about 30 attendees.



A spirited group from the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters after a day of training in our 3rd-floor Herman Hulman Auditorium

In January, the socialist periodical **Jacobin Magazine** published an online article profiling both Debs and the Museum. The piece, entitled "Left Americana in Trumpland," provides an interesting glimpse into the Museum and situates Debs in his midwestern context.

By the time this newsletter is published, the Debs Home will have served as the site of Terre Haute's second International Women's Day Rally. Last year,

the rally drew around 90 people to the grounds of the home, and the event's organizers expect similar or higher turnout for 2018.

Looking ahead, I will host a spring work day tentatively scheduled for May 5th from 10 am to

noon. All Debs Foundation members and directors are invited to help prepare the grounds of the home for the usual influx of summer visitors. Lunch will be provided.

I owe many thanks to **Shane Smith**, a graduate student of history at ISU who completed his public history internship at the Debs Museum during the fall semester. With guidance from board member **Cinda May**, Shane significantly improved our Pullman Strike exhibit in the John L. Lewis Room. His time and talents are greatly appreciated. I also extend my sincere thanks to our dedicated team of volunteer docents, which has grown to include community members **Cathy McGuire** and **Michael Pitts**. Individuals interested in joining the volunteer program are welcome to contact me at: [Allison.Duerk@DebsFoundation.org](mailto:Allison.Duerk@DebsFoundation.org).

## Kate Debs

Micki Morahn



Katherine Metzel Debs

If the mission of the Debs Foundation is to preserve the home and legacy of Eugene V. Debs, it is critical that we include the person who not only lived in that house for over 30 years, but also served as Gene's true partner, his wife Kate Metzel Debs. Rarely has her story been told and what has been written is largely inaccurate. In an effort to "set the record straight" I have been working for the past three years on a biography of Kate Debs. A short article summarizing her life will appear this summer in *Connections* magazine published by the Indiana Historical Society. Copies will be available for sale at the museum.

Kate was just as radical as Gene, and was devoted not only to her husband, but also to his cause. We haven't heard much about her because she chose to stay in the background, as women of her times often did. But, that doesn't mean she wasn't active. Early in his career, she traveled to conventions of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen with Gene, often sitting on the speakers' platform. She also helped in the office with mail and other clerical

duties. When Gene was incarcerated in the Woodstock, IL jail for his part in the Pullman Strike, Kate moved to Woodstock to help Gene continue his work and keep up with

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**The Eugene V. Debs Foundation  
Gratefully Acknowledges  
Donations Made in Memoriam**

**in memory of  
Dr. J. Robert Constantine**

**from Charles and Susan Ward**

**in memory of  
Anthony Natale**

**from Gail Natale**

**in memory of  
Michael Lawrence**

**from Phyllis Lawrence**

**Spring  
Board Meeting**

**Sunday, April 7 — 12 noon**

Hilton Garden Inn • 750 Wabash Avenue  
Terre Haute, IN

## Treasurer's Report

Benjamin Kite

I'm pleased to report a successful financial year for the Foundation. Though we continue to strive toward greater financial capacity in the coming years, continuing to operate in the black is a key objective.

Our supporters continue to provide a solid revenue base for maintaining the Debs Home and operating the Museum for visitors. Likewise, the 2017 Debs Award Banquet was both a financial success and an enjoyable celebration of the Debs legacy.

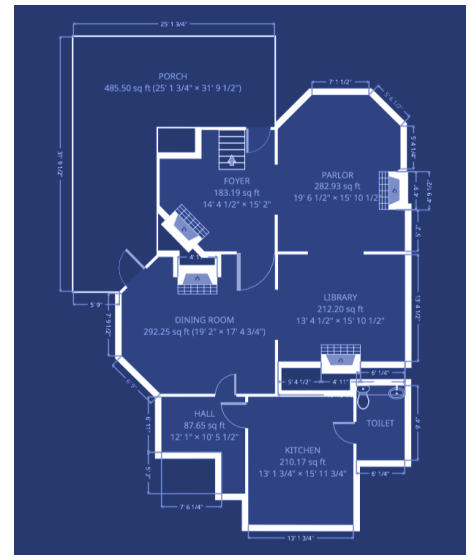
I've been working with **Allison Duerk**, our museum director, to try to expand the range of memorabilia that is available from our museum gift shop, focusing on the items that are likely to be both popular and profitable as well as filling in some omissions in the range of Debs and Debs-related books we offer.

As a result of broadening our line of memorabilia and the increasing interest in online sales, we've nearly doubled the net income from memorabilia sales.

Despite the recent correction in financial markets, the endowment fund continues to grow along with the market. Though we have made some aggressive gains, we are in the process of restructuring our investments to provide more stability in the future to protect our core endowment should markets turn volatile.

The restoration of the Debs Home is still moving forward, albeit somewhat more slowly than we might have liked. We've taken a step back from the ambitious list of renovations aimed at bringing everything at the house up to code in order to take into consideration the historical value of the architecture and potential to restore the exterior wood siding and other architectural features.

We are grateful to have the advice and assistance of Indiana Landmarks in approaching this restoration with vigilance and care, and, as always, we are grateful for your generous support.

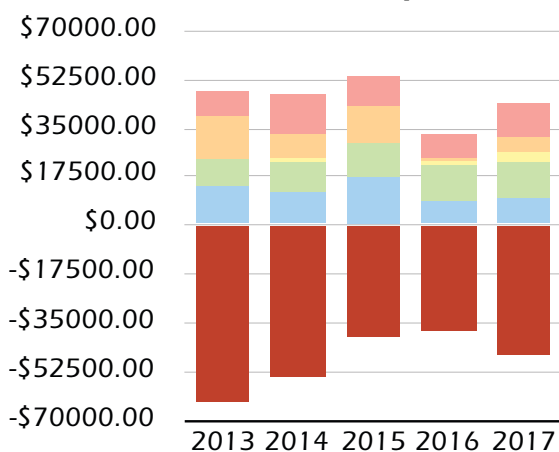


The Eugene V. Debs Historic Home and Museum remains the Foundation's most valued asset and the lynchpin of our purpose.

### 5-Year Profit/Loss Comparison

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Dues, Donations and Support</b>	\$ 8200.97	\$ 13910.00	\$ 11175.00	\$ 8848.20	\$ 11834.00
<b>Banquet Income</b>	\$ 16200.00	\$ 8920.00	\$ 13165.00	\$ 1216.00	\$ 6228.00
<b>Memorabilia Income</b>	Unavailable	\$ 1239.00	\$ 196.00	\$ 1442.00	\$ 3211.00
<b>Investment Income</b>	\$ 9877.00	\$ 10889.00	\$ 11874.00	\$ 12612.00	\$ 13280.00
<b>Capital Gains (Realized)</b>	\$ 13873.00	\$ 12303.00	\$ 17489.00	\$ 9176.00	\$ 9347.00
<b>Total Revenue</b>	\$ 36550.00	\$ 54555.00	\$ 53901.00	\$ 32421.00	\$ 54526.00
<b>Expenses</b>	\$ (62351.78)	\$ (53639.00)	\$ (40,028.00)	\$ (37,865.00)	\$ (46056.00)
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	<b>\$ (25801.78)</b>	<b>\$ 916.00</b>	<b>\$ 13873.00</b>	<b>\$ (5444.00)</b>	<b>\$ 8470.00</b>

### Income/Expenses



### Expense Breakdown (2017)

Salaries, Other Compensation, and Employee Benefits	\$ 17256.60
Professional Fees and Other Payments to Independent Contractors	\$ 13112.16
Occupancy, Rent, Utilities, and Maintenance	\$ 10072.32
Printing, Publications, Postage, and Shipping	\$ 2523.74
Other Expenses	\$ 3091.26
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 46056.08</b>

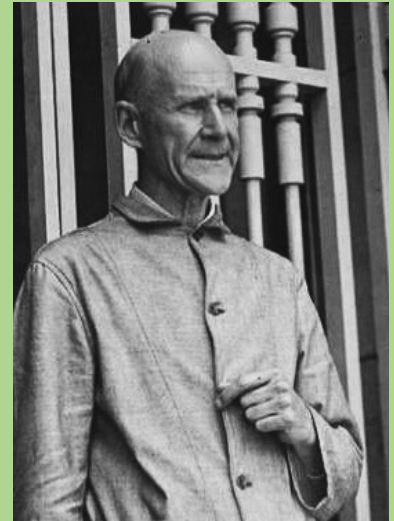
## In Debs' Words

In this excerpt from *Walls and Bars*, Debs gives his account of his conditions in the Atlanta State Penitentiary. Attitudes toward substance abuse and its treatment have scarcely changed:

"One of the most harrowing aspects of the prison hospital is the drug addict whom I learned to know there in a way to compel the most vivid and shocking remembrance of him to the last of my days. It is incredible that a human being mentally and physically afflicted should be consigned by a so-called court of justice in a civilized and Christian nation to a penitentiary as a felon, there to expiate his weakness; and yet, hundreds of these unfortunates were sent to Atlanta prison while I was there, and oftentimes I had to bear witness to the horror of their torture when they were summarily separated from the drug they craved.

"Blame them as one may, how is it possible in good conscience to punish them for their awful affliction with a prison sentence as if they were common felons. They are sick people who require special treatment, and not vicious ones to be sent to the torture chamber of a prison, and it is nothing less than a reproach to society and a disgrace to our civilization that this malady is branded as a crime instead of being ministered to as an affliction, which it most assuredly is.

"It would be quite as rational and humane to send men to the penitentiary and make them slaves of the galleys because they happened to have cancer or consumption as it is to sentence and treat them as criminals for being addicted to the use of drugs."



Eugene V. Debs scowls fiercely at the screws working for the Atlanta State Penitentiary

*Eugene V. Debs*

### Kate Debs

(continued from page 3)

correspondences.

When Gene helped found the Socialist Party of America, Kate was an ardent supporter. When asked by a reporter if she was a socialist herself, she replied, "Indeed I am a Socialist. We are all Socialists around here. My sympathies always have been with the working people, with the poor and oppressed, and I am deeply interested." A reporter asked if she was interested in politics, she stated she was indeed interested in politics and discussed them with her husband, saying "Oh yes. That's all there is at our house and I am just as interested in his ideas and works as though I was one of his men associates."

Kate's views, which were shared by her family, were rooted in the German Socialist tradition of her mother's Stuber family who came to America as part of the radical "Forty-Eighters" who left Europe after the failed revolutions of 1848. They saw women as inherently equal, based on natural or hu-

man rights, and therefore were deserving of the right to vote. In an article on women's suffrage published in 1910, Kate wrote "But woman has all the essential qualities of man, not excepting mentality and initiative, and if she is to develop the best there is in her, she must be free and she must be the equal of man in the respect to every right and every opportunity required for the untrammelled expression of her voice and will." Kate and Gene shared the ideology of the equality of men and women which was expressed by Gene when he read the poem "Katie Lee and Willie Gray" at their wedding reception. Willie asks Katie if he may carry her bucket up the hill, to which she replies, yes you may carry it, but only half way. The poem ends with the couple in rocking chairs in old age reflecting on their shared life, one of equality.

Kate Debs was a highly educated woman, who attended Indiana State Normal School, and who read and travelled widely. She was devoted to her extended family and visited them on both coasts and points in between. She and Gene also raised their nephew Oscar Baur, Jr in their home from

the time he was 18 months old until high school. In 1923, Kate and Gene attended his graduation from Cornell University. In addition to Oscar, Jr. or "Boydie" as he was called, Kate also took in her mother, caring for her from 1907 until shortly before her death, even when she became nearly blind and infirmed. Far from being lonely and bitter, as biographers of Gene have portrayed her, she led an active life, full of friends and family, and of course Gene and his work. We can thank Kate for much of what we know about Gene, since she was the one who kept the scrapbooks full of his writings and correspondences. Sadly, her documents did not survive.

So, next time you visit the Debs home, keep in mind the "lady of the house" and reflect on what a true comrade she was. Without her constant support, Gene Debs would not have been the man he was, nor have made his impact on American history. The old saying of "behind every great man is a great woman," could not be truer of Gene and Kate Debs.



## Our Gratitude to Hugh and Marilyn Devitt



Marilyn Ellrick Devitt

The Debs Foundation is honored and gratified to have received a substantial bequest this year from the estate of **Hugh and Marilyn Devitt**.

Looking back at their life together, one can see with some clarity why they shared Debs' concern for the conditions of working people. Their commitment led them both to volunteer generously with their communities, their unions and other organizations dedicated to the welfare of working people.

Hugh Devitt was a long-time member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and an officer with the United Transportation Union. During the 1966 Pennsylvania Railroad Strike, Devitt was chairman of the local Firemen and Engineers union and led pickets in Terre Haute and other nearby communities.

Marilyn Devitt worked on the human relations staff of the Sears Roebuck corporation for 31 years until she retired in 1987. During that time she was President of the Indianapolis Personnel Womens Organization. She stayed active after retirement working with the Greenwood chapter of Sears Retirees.

Going back a generation, Hugh came from German and English mining families. His Uncle (also named Hugh) was killed in a firedamp explosion while working the Indian Creek Mine near Bicknell, IN — the same mine that Hugh's father, John Devitt, worked.

In 1975, after more than 25 years with Penn Central Transportation Company, Hugh passed away while operating a railroad engine near Plainfield, IN. Marilyn passed away in December of 2016.

Our deep thanks to them both for their generosity in remembering Eugene V. Debs and supporting his legacy.



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The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit educational organization. Your contributions are tax-deductible. The Foundation owns and maintains the Eugene V. Debs Home and Museum and offers educational and cultural programs.

**Your Continued Support Makes It Possible!**