

# The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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SPRING 2019

## Views from the Edge

Noel Beasley

One hundred and twenty-five years ago, the United States of America was a patchwork quilt stretched across a continent of former colonies in the North and South of the East Coast and vast stretches of western territories that were carved into states in the period swirling around a civil war. **Jack Kelly's** new book, *The Edge of Anarchy: The Railroad Barons, The Gilded Age, and The Greatest Labor Uprising in America* is an excellent depiction of a nation in crisis. It also is a timely reflection on the remarkably parallel characteristics and contradictions of that time and our own.

1894 was the year that the Pullman Strike erupted like a volcano announcing with fire and fury the end of what Mark Twain called the Gilded Age. It was an epoch in which:

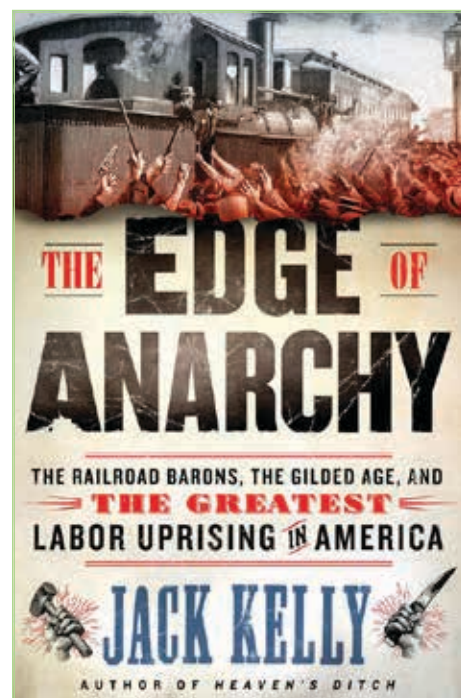
- Technological breakthroughs like the railroads and the telegraph redefined the nature of work, where people lived and how goods were distributed;
- Violent repression demolished the advances made by the slaves who had been freed and institutionalized racial discrimination across the land;
- Waves of immigrants gifted the country with new languages, cultures and aspirations;
- The incredible wealth of a few exacerbated the desperate poverty and uncertainty of the many;
- The power of monopolistic capitalism was strengthened and sanctioned by oligarchic courts and corrupt self-serving political leaders;
- Upsurges of anger from the downtrodden spawned the search for new organizational structures that could provide them with leverage and shift the balance of power.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

There are three major characters in Kelly's book – Eugene V. Debs, George Pullman and the city of Chicago. The narrative sharply defines the contrasts between the two men who became iconic representatives of the struggle for class power that ensued during and long after the strike that spread rapidly from the company town that Pullman named for himself and imposed upon his employees and their families. The complicity of the federal government in assigning troops to suppress the strikers was a glaring use of state power to secure the rich and punish the poor. Following the end of the strike, Debs was sentenced to six months in jail in Woodstock, Illinois. With time to read and reflect, the scope and complexity of the strike would cause Debs to transition from being the bold, creative founder of the American Railway Union to becoming a revolutionary leader with a broad and deep understanding of the need for the working class to have its own political party.

Kelly depicts in rich detail the Chicago that was the perfect axis for a national uprising. The Great Fire of

(continued on next page)



Jack Kelly's new book offers new insights into a familiar past.

# Views from the Edge

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Kelly depicts in rich detail the Chicago that was the perfect axis for a national uprising. The Great Fire of 1871 destroyed a significant section of the city and forced a substantial rebuilding that attracted the architects and engineers of the new emerging age. By 1893, Chicago was host to the Columbian Exposition featuring the White City which displayed the amazing machines and artifacts that gilded the sewage and industrial waste upon which they were built. A year later, at the height of disturbances across Chicago between the strikers and the military, the crumbling remains of the White City that had been abandoned when the Exposition closed exploded in flames and thousands came out to watch an eerie replay of the earlier disaster. It was an omen of the decades of struggle that lay ahead.

"The Edge of Anarchy" appears at a moment when socialism is resurgent in our country. This study of clashing social and economic forces and the people who embody them presents with piercing clarity the triumphs, defeats and consequences of a critical crossroads in the late nineteenth century that can help to guide us as we continue the fight.

**EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER**  
Spring 2019

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

[www.debsfoundation.org](http://www.debsfoundation.org)  
[info@debsfoundation.org](mailto:info@debsfoundation.org)

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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.

## Our Beginnings

Tim Kelley

It has been 57 years since a national AFL-CIO official with local connections led a cadre of college professors and members of the Terre Haute Central Labor Council to save the home of Gene and Kate Debs from the wrecking ball. This small group was quickly joined by other academics, union members, pacifists, socialists and writers to establish the Eugene V. Debs Foundation in order to preserve the Debs home as a memorial and to promote Debsian ideals. A total of 63 charter members provided financial support as well as their personal time and expertise to transform what was a rundown apartment house into a memorial and museum for the great American Socialist and labor leader.

The foundation's charter members included Tilford Dudley, a Harvard educated attorney, New Deal appointee and national AFL-CIO official, who is credited with being the driving force behind the effort. Academics like J. Robert Constantine, Woodrow Creason, Howard Hamilton and Bernard Brommel, along with local union members Ned Bush and Curtis Culver, served as the nucleus of the group. Notables such as Norman Thomas, Upton Sinclair, Albert Schweitzer and Irving Stone offered financial support and their names to this important endeavor. Remarkably, the newspaper reporter who was the chief prosecution witness against Debs in his 1918 trial also joined.

Their collective efforts were critical in protecting Debs' place in American history, but their individual lives and struggles are also very compelling. Those stories are now recorded as part of the foundation's history and are now available to read on the organization's website, [debsfoundation.org](http://debsfoundation.org).

## 2019 Eugene V. Debs Award

This year's Eugene V. Debs Award will be presented on September 28, 2019 to Mary Kay Henry on behalf of the Service Employees International Union. As President of SEIU, she has provided outstanding leadership to the Fight for \$15 campaign, the organizing of food service workers and struggles for the rights of immigrants and women.

Her courage, determination and accomplishments are hallmarks in perpetuating the legacy of Debs. We are in the process of planning a number of events and activities over the course of that weekend including the premiere of a new documentary film Eugene V. Debs: The Revolutionist being produced by WFYI Public Television. A complete schedule will appear in the Fall 2019 issue of this newsletter.

# Museum Director's Report

Allison Duerk

2018 closed on a high note at the Debs Museum. Over 1000 visitors signed the guest book in 2018, doubling the recorded average annual attendance from 2014-2016. The recently-launched Unity Study Circle has met four times to discuss Debs' writings and speeches on topics including Labor Day, prison labor and American Socialism. At our most recent



The Debs Museum is A Cozy Place to Visit on a Winter's Eve

meeting, members of the study group compared Debs' writings with those of W.E.B. Du Bois for a timely conversation on race and class.

In order to highlight Debs' relevance in the 21st century, I hosted a well-attended themed tour of the house focused on the experiences of immigrants as they relate to Debs and the labor movement. Tour participants drew thoughtful connections between nativist anti-immigrant sentiment of Debs' era to today's political climate. The event was a resounding success and more themed tours are in the works, including a Women's History Tour for International Women's Day.

Looking outward, I'm excited to see Debs getting due attention across the country. In October, the Labor Arts and Education Project (LEAP) of Cleveland hosted a successful centennial commemoration of Debs' 1918 trial for violating the Sedition Act. Between presentations by legal scholars, historians, today's free speech activists and my own talk on the Debs Museum, we also paid a visit to the East Courtroom of the Metzenbaum U.S. Courthouse — the site of Debs' historic trial.

In November, Woodstock Celebrates, Inc. hosted its first Debs-Pullman Festival. Events occurred just around the corner from McHenry County Jail where Debs served a six-month sentence after the Pullman Strike. I brought a temporary exhibit of items from our museum collec-

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

**In loving memory for two  
parents who were loyal  
members of the UAW for over  
thirty years**

from Raymond Carver

**In loving memory of  
Pete Culver  
He was a Union Man**

from Kathleen Culver

tion relating to Debs' time in Woodstock, including keys to his jail cell. **Micki** and **John S. Morahn** also made the trip to Woodstock and worked an information table for the Foundation.

For updates on day-to-day action at the Debs Museum, be sure to like our page on Facebook ([@EugeneVDebsFoundation](#)) and follow us on Instagram ([@EugeneVDebsMuseum](#)). Many thanks as always to our dedicated team of volunteer docents who ensure our continued success. Community members interested in joining the docent program are welcome to email me at [allison.duerk@debsfoundation.org](mailto:allison.duerk@debsfoundation.org).



At left: 2018 Eugene V. Debs Awardee William "Bill" Lucy poses with award presenter Clayola Brown in front of last year's Memphis sanitation strike backdrop.

## Spring Board Meeting

Saturday, April 13 ■ 1pm

Hilton Garden Inn ■ 750 Wabash Avenue

Terre Haute, IN

Photo Credit: Dwight Kirk



# Treasurer's Report

Benjamin Kite

I am sure that is evident to us all that 2018 was a year of great political and moral tribulation in our nation and throughout the world.

There is always some hope to be gained in these low times when, as an act of resistance against the wickedness of our modern world, the people find deeper solidarity and harden their resolve against the encroaching darkness.

I take it as just such an optimistic portent to see that our friends and supporters continue the commitment to preserve and promulgate the legacy of Eugene V. Debs. It is surely a good sign that this great man still represents the values and

convictions to which we aspire and the hope that we hold in our hearts.

As you can see in the report below, we received donations far exceeding previous years' support. Much of this is due to a large bequest from the estate of Marilyn Devitt\*, but even without this generous donation, our receipts from our supporters exceeded those received in the previous five years, showing that our supporter base remains stable and strong.

Our other sources of revenue also remained strong. We had no realized capital gains this year because income from other sources was sufficient to cover the operating cost of the museum and our programs, and therefore it was unnecessary for us to draw funds of any kind

from our endowment. Meanwhile, the endowment continued to grow from dividend income, further securing our financial future for leaner times, should they come.

My sincere and heartfelt gratitude goes out to all of our supporters, regardless of whether your donation is \$10 or \$10,000. Every brick is important just as is every grain in the mortar.

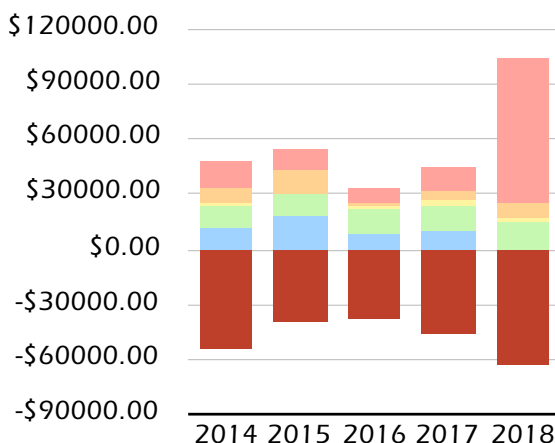
My special thanks to our museum director, **Allison Duerk**, who is in so many ways the keystone of our work. Because of her insight and skill, museum visitors invariably have a meaningful and edifying experience.

\* see our Spring 2018 newsletter (available on our website) for more about Hugh and Marilyn Devitt

## 5-Year Profit/Loss Comparison

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Dues, Donations and Support</b>	\$ 13910.00	\$ 11175.00	\$ 8848.20	\$ 11834.00	\$ 80388.48
<b>Banquet Income</b>	\$ 8920.00	\$ 13165.00	\$ 1216.00	\$ 6228.00	\$ 7709.70
<b>Memorabilia Income</b>	\$ 1239.00	\$ 196.00	\$ 1442.00	\$ 3211.00	\$ 2112.13
<b>Investment Income</b>	\$ 10889.00	\$ 11874.00	\$ 12612.00	\$ 13280.00	\$ 14261.24
<b>Capital Gains (Realized)</b>	\$ 12303.00	\$ 17489.00	\$ 9176.00	\$ 9347.00	\$ 0.00
<b>Total Revenue</b>	\$ 54555.00	\$ 53901.00	\$ 32421.00	\$ 54526.00	\$ 104471.55
<b>Expenses</b>	\$(53639.00)	\$(40,028.00)	\$(37,865.00)	\$(46056.00)	\$(61652.10)
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	<b>\$ 916.00</b>	<b>\$ 13873.00</b>	<b>\$(5444.00)</b>	<b>\$ 8470.00</b>	<b>\$ 42819.45</b>

## Income/Expenses



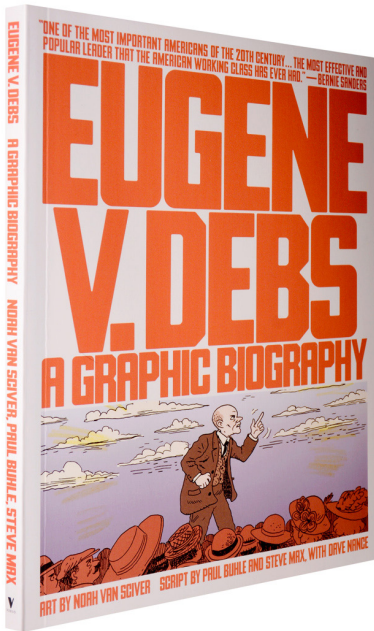
## Expense Breakdown (2018)

Salaries, Other Compensation, and Employee Benefits	\$ 28011.08
Professional Fees and Other Payments to Independent Contractors	\$ 8999.86
Occupancy, Rent, Utilities, and Maintenance	\$ 9613.99
Printing, Publications, Postage, and Shipping	\$ 4032.38
Other Expenses	\$ 10994.79
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 61652.10</b>

## Author, Author!

Michelle Killion Morahn, Secretary

The Foundation continues to offer support to authors who bring the Debs story to the world. 2019 marks the publication of two new books about Eugene V. Debs and the continuation of the series of his writings and speeches. We will be hosting two of the authors in Terre Haute for book signings in the first half of the year and will be participating in other events celebrating Debs and his work.



Eugene V. Debs: A Graphic Biography

by Paul Buhle, Steve Max  
and Dave Nance

with illustrations by Noah Van Sciver

into volumes of over 150 works each, many of which have never been published. *The Selected Works of Eugene V. Debs Volume 2 The Rise and Fall of the American Railway Union, 1892–1896*, edited by Tim Davenport and David Walters, will be out in August 2019 and covers the much of the same timeframe as Kelly's work, making it a perfect companion for those wanting more about this pivotal time in Debs' life. Volume 3 is scheduled for release next January. To learn more, visit [debsproject.org](http://debsproject.org).

The Foundation offers these works for sale at the Museum, along with books by **Ernest Freeburg**, **Nick Salvatore** and **Ray Ginger**. We even have a few signed copies! Please check them out on your next visit.

Also, board member **Mark Haworth** is working with the Vonnegut Memorial Library in Indianapolis for an event during Banned Books Week in September. The Foundation will present a panel discussion on Debs, free speech, and the Debs/Vonnegut connection on Wednesday, September 25, led by board member Mark Haworth. Details will be announced on the Foundation website, [debsfoundation.org](http://debsfoundation.org).

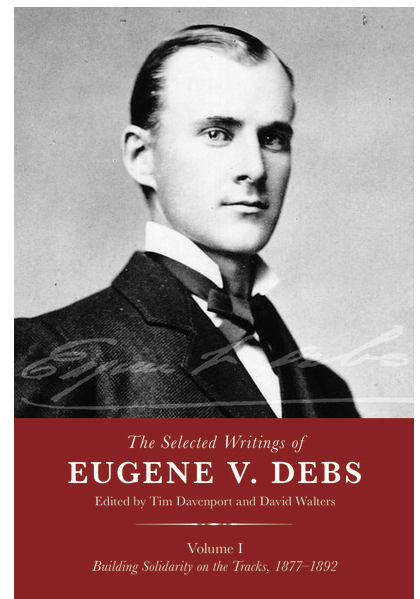
Plans are underway to present an academic conference on Eugene V. Debs, labor and social justice history and related topics tentatively planned for Fall 2020. We hope to attract Debs scholars from around the country with special emphasis placed on younger scholars. Thanks to board member **Wes Bishop** for spearheading this event. Details will be forthcoming.

The board always welcomes suggestions on events, themes or other ideas that will attract visitors and help us spread the story of Debs. Email me at [michelle.morahn@debsfoundation.org](mailto:michelle.morahn@debsfoundation.org) with any ideas you might have. As you can see, these do not have to be done at the House, so if you would like to host a Debs event in your hometown, contact us to see how we can help.

Noted left-wing scholar and historian **Paul Buhle**, author of more than three dozen books, will be at the Debs House Museum on Saturday, March 30 to speak about his latest work, *Eugene V. Debs, A Graphic Biography*, published by Verso. This book, a cross between a biography and comic book, offers a unique look at Debs' life in a format that will appeal to many younger readers, yet is researched sufficiently to satisfy the most ardent Debs fan. A sneak peek can be found at <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4117-sneak-peak-of-eugene-v-debs-a-graphic-biography>. The Foundation is pleased to offer fans of Buhle's work the chance to meet the author and introduce newcomers to this fast-growing form of literature.

Our second annual Debs Day will feature a presentation and book signing by **Jack Kelly**, author of *The Edge of Anarchy: The Railroad Barons, the Gilded Age, and the Greatest Labor Uprising in America*, published by Macmillan. This book tells the story of the Pullman Strike, which first brought Gene Debs to national attention. It is a gripping tale, well told, and backed by solid research. More of a "popular history" book, along the lines of Erik Larsen, this book captures the events and characters of the strike, placing them in great historic context. Even those who know the story will find this book engaging. This year's Debs Day will be June 15, so mark your calendars now. Our theme will be the Pullman Strike and again we will be doing a "Debs in Our Voices" reading of the speech Debs gave after his release from the Woodstock Jail.

Finally, **Tim Davenport** has been working with Haymarket Books to publish a series of selected works by Eugene V. Debs. Volume I covering 1877-1892 is now available, with a total of six eventually being published. Tim has done exhaustive research into Debs' speeches, writings, press statements and public letters, collecting them



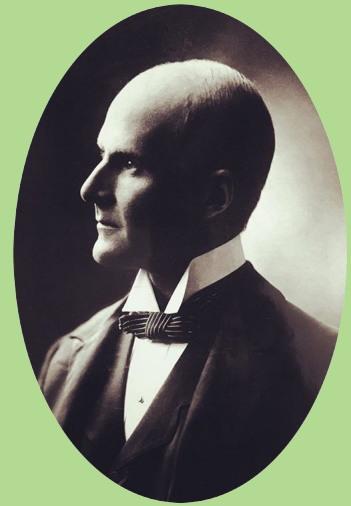
The Selected Works of Eugene V. Debs,  
Volume I

Edited by Tim Davenport and David  
Walters

## In Debs' Words

from a letter to Adolph F. Germer

"The Socialist party as the exponent of international working class solidarity can have no concern in any ruling class war. To be consistent with its revolutionary character and true to its international principles and pledges it is morally bound to stand squarely against every war save and alone the war against war, the war of the world's enslaved and exploited workers against the world's enslaving and exploiting masters."



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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!**