Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Oral Narratives:


In this oral narrative, Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire survivor, Max Hochfield, spoke about his personal experiences during the fire. Max was a sewing machine operator who worked on the 9th floor of the factory. This interview revealed his perspective of what it was like to work at the factory and the sense of panic that set in when the fire broke out. After listening to Max speak, I knew it would be important to provide personal accounts and reactions to the fire on my exhibit. As a result, I decided to make the personal experience during this tragedy the focus for the center panel of my exhibit.


Dora Maisler worked on the 8th floor as a sample maker. Maisler’s oral narrative provided important details about the conditions of the factory. She described the unstable and dangerous machinery and other unsafe working conditions. Additionally, she described the panic-stricken scene at the factory when the fire broke out. She was the first woman to reach the door and get out of the factory, but she saw the chaos, fear, and desperation of her co-workers who weren’t as fortunate. This oral narrative reiterated my conclusion that the human cost of the tragedy was highly avoidable. Blanck and Harris made decisions to disregard safety and those decisions had tragic consequences.


As a machine operator on the 8th floor, Pauline Pepe’s oral narrative provided a detailed account concerning the events of the fire. Even though the interview was nearly seventy years after the tragedy, her account was frighteningly real and made me feel as if I was experiencing the terrifying situation right along with her. After barely escaping the fire, she realized that her best friend had not been as fortunate. Thus, Pepe’s story showed the stark dichotomy between industrialists’ profit motives and labor’s desire to be protected. Because of the power imbalance between the two conflicting interests, the industrialists prevailed. Ultimately, it took this great tragedy to force them into finding a compromise that allowed for labor protections.
Lecture:


In this lecture, Frances Perkins described how she witnessed the fire as a bystander. Perkin’s talk provided insight regarding how this personal experience sparked within her a powerful desire to initiate change in the American workplace. After seeing the devastation from the fire, Perkins knew that serious changes needed to occur in order to protect factory workers everywhere. Her advocacy work brought about numerous safety laws and regulations that have prevented many additional tragedies from occurring. As a result, I have a picture and information concerning Frances Perkins within my exhibit. She is a tremendous example of a progressive reformer who helped balance the scales of justice so that labor could have a voice and be protected.

Government Documents:

Joint Board of Sanitary Control. “Results of Second Inspection.” September, 1911.

The Joint Board of Sanitary Control was established as a result of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911. Its purpose was to inspect factories for health and safety violations and monitor the workplace to see that problems were corrected. I placed this document on my exhibit to demonstrate the impact of the fire on government actions and workplace safety in the months and years that followed the tragedy.


This report provided information that proved to be a large component of my exhibit. The report included significant information pertaining to complaints, specific numbers of violations, and letters of enforcement. Ultimately, this report reinforced the fact that safety was absent.


This government document provided crucial background information on my topic. It included detailed accounts of personal suffering experienced by industrial laborers. This helped to bring out the idea of the personal hazards associated with industrialization. Industrialization was a major draw for immigrants seeking the American dream, but it also resulted in injuries and deaths due to poor working conditions and insufficient safety measures.
Book:


This book provided a look at the time period in which the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire occurred. Upton Sinclair is best known for *The Jungle*, his novel regarding the abuses of the meatpacking industry in Chicago at the turn of the century. His writing brought labor reform and other progressive measures to protect consumers. I took a quote from this particular book concerning the role of profit motive in determining how industrialists treat laborers. This was a key factor in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire tragedy.

Newspaper Articles:


This particular article revealed the theme of compromise within my topic. Due to the conflict concerning unsafe working conditions that led to the tragic fire, legislators worked to find common ground and, as a result, numerous laws were put into place during the years that followed this tragedy. Thus, my topic had far-reaching impact because the legislation passed in 1911 started a wave of workplace laws that are still in place today.


Rescued women from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire were able to share their experiences regarding the fire in this newspaper article. Their experiences confirmed the rumor concerning locked doors within the factory. This document also provided details that are significant to the fire. Many of the deceased women that were identified had been part of the women’s strike of 1909. These details further enhanced my knowledge of the topic, and the impact of my exhibit.


As a result of the fire, precautionary measures were put in place. This *New York Herald* article discussed regulations that resulted from the fire. Factory owners implemented and enforced these rules immediately. Many of these rules are commonplace today and were created to ensure the safety of factory workers worldwide. Without these regulations, the risk for a similar tragedy would be much greater. Thus, I put this article in the rebuilding section of my exhibit.
This newspaper article represented a critical part of both the conflict and the beginning of compromise concerning my topic. Directly after the fire, citizens were outraged and expected justice to be served. However, the factory owners got away with it. That led legislators to compromise in their efforts to create essential safety regulations.

This news article from the *New York Times* proved to be a crucial part of my exhibit. It provided information concerning rumors that were circulating throughout the community about the factory owners. It also provided evidence about a warning the factory received, which displayed the desperate need for safety laws.

Information regarding the identification of multiple deceased women from the fire is found in this source. This newspaper article revealed the human impact of the gruesome identification process after the fire. Thus, the personal nature of this tragedy is a significant part of my exhibit and overall topic.

The Women’s Trade Union League applied pressure on the district attorney to press charges against Isaac Harris and Max Blanck, owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Mrs. Belmont delivered a petition from the union to the prosecutor stating the desire for this action to occur. I put this article on my exhibit to show the push for holding the owners accountable, which was a step toward forging a compromise in the conflict between industrialists and laborers.

This newspaper article put blame for the tragedy on the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, and illustrated a large source of the conflict. Family members and friends wanted closure and for changes to occur that would protect workers from another major devastation. As tensions rose, so too did the criticism in newspapers and in the community.

The reports in this newspaper article showed an escalation of conflict after the tragedy and uncovered events that led to a large number of deaths. Additional perspectives were revealed through interviews conducted with a fire chief and a citizen riding the elevator at the start of the fire. This article provided many useful viewpoints about the tragedy, which I included in my exhibit. For instance, I used a quote from an industrial engineer in the “Factory Faults” section of my exhibit.


This newspaper article discussed a law put into place only a year and a half after the fire. Within the article, it specifically stated that the law was a direct result of the fire, which is a crucial point in my exhibit. This primary source allowed me to improve my understanding regarding the short-term impact of my topic.


This primary source article presented a personal perspective concerning the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. A women by the name of Diana was inside the building when it ignited into flames. From this, I was able to learn about her personal experience as she tried to warn other workers of the fire and the terror that ensued. As a result, I decided it was important to provide the faces of many victims in my exhibit to personalize this tragedy.


This newspaper editorial enhanced my understanding of events leading up to my topic. The *Times* editorial board criticized women who were striving to make a change, rather than supporting them. By doing so, this perpetuated conflict during the years leading up to the fire. Not only was there a dire need for change but many people, especially men, believed women were incompetent.


The concerns of the community were exhibited through this letter to the editor. Frustrations and fears were also revealed through opinions contained in the editorial. The author of the letter stated that he felt as though the safety of not only himself, but also his friends and family, was put below the desire for profit.
Advertisements:


Because the term “shirtwaist” is unfamiliar to most people today, I decided to include an advertisement for shirtwaists being sold by the John Wanamaker Company in New York. This is important background to understand my topic, so it appears on the first panel of my exhibit.


This union label was the symbol of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The union provided a voice for the otherwise powerless workers. This group played an important role in highlighting the tragedy and causing industrialists to compromise in regard to safety provisions. Thus, I displayed this symbol prominently on the first panel of my exhibit.


This union patch was yet another example of the campaign efforts put out by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. It is a reminder of how influential this group’s actions were, and still continue to be in finding a compromise between the profit motivations of industrialists and the rights of workers to be safe and receive a living wage.

Map:


A map of the Washington Square Area in New York city was the perfect visual for my exhibit. It showed exactly where the factory was located within New York City and demonstrated the compact nature of the area. This caused me to reflect on the difficulty associated with getting fire trucks, proper equipment, and the proper people to the factory when the fire began. Thus, I used this map in the factory faults section of my exhibit to show factors leading to the tragic fire.

Political Cartoons:


This political cartoon was especially important for illustrating the factory faults that led to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. Since the factory owners’ biggest mistake was locking the doors on each floor, this was prominently depicted in the cartoon. Also, it vividly displayed people in flames, while the owner pushed the door shut, which added to the extreme feeling of terror the victims must have felt.
Adding a political cartoon to my board was the perfect visual aid. In particular, this one referenced factory and building inspectors. The cartoon asserts that, if building inspectors would have done their job, the death toll of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire could have been decreased. This cartoon highlighted the conflict between angry citizens and factory owners.

This political cartoon portrayed the idea that factory owners were more concerned about profit than they were about the safety interests of their workers. This was a key problem associated with the Industrial Revolution. As a result, I included this cartoon in the factory faults section of my exhibit.

This particular photograph was extremely important to my project as a whole. One of the most well-known facts about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was that women plunged to their deaths from the 8th, 9th, and 10th floors. The police attempted to remove the bodies, which illuminated the true tragedy of this event.

This picture proved to be another historic representation of the poor conditions in factories during this time period. If the fire escape would have been in working condition, multiple lives could have been saved. This picture put into perspective just one flaw, out of many, dealing with the lack of safety measures at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, which led to a preventable tragedy.

This picture of Frances Perkins next to a ladder attached at the side of a building, showed one of the most impactful people concerning the compromise section of my board. If it was not for Frances Perkins it might have been many more months or even years before progressive laws were set into place regarding worker safety.

This picture provided a powerful visual representation concerning the human cost of this profit-driven industrial tragedy. That is why I put it on my exhibit.
Marching through Cold for Protest. 1911. Cornell University, New York.

The direct impact of the fire was displayed within this image. Women suffered through cold weather in order to raise awareness concerning the dangers of these factories. Before compromise could come into play, there needed to be conflict and actions taken to overcome the conflict, such as this strike.


The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire impacted many people beyond the victims themselves. Their family members, friends, and others suffered through this very public tragedy, which was compounded by the knowledge of the manner in which their loved ones died.

Mourners from the Union. 1911. United States Department of Labor, New York.

The significant impact of death is evident within this image. Moreover, the sheer number of deaths at once from the fire had an enormous effect on the lives of those close to the victims and those living around them. This picture enhanced my board by allowing the viewer to understand how painful it was to identify charred bodies.

Pickett Strikers. 1909. Open the City, New York.

International Ladies Garment Workers Union members staged a protest in 1909, prior to the fire. The Shirtwaist Strike represented the beginning of a large and grueling conflict between industry and labor. These women were determined to create a change for the better, and later on they would find out that they succeeded. However, it took the tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire to promote their cause and create immediacy concerning their platform for change.


This shirtwaist pattern advertisement showed the product manufactured in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory where the fire occurred. Women were forced to work for hours on end, with little pay, to produce this fashionable item. I felt it was important to show a shirtwaist on my exhibit, since it isn’t a familiar clothing item today.
The Ellis Island Immigration Station Opened on Ellis Island in January of 1892. 1892. Save Ellis Island, Ellis Island.

This picture of immigrants entering the United States for the first time displayed the significance of the Industrial Revolution. Immigrants traveled thousands of miles seeking American jobs, in order to gain a new start and a better life. However, it also made them vulnerable to exploitation by wealthy industrialists, who valued profit over worker safety. Thus, this provided important background for my topic and is why I included this picture in “The Kindling” section of my exhibit.

Secondary Sources:

Interviews:

Freeman, Dr. Joshua. Personal Interview. 4 June, 2018.

Dr. Joshua Freeman is a professor of history at Queens College (CUNY). He is also on the faculty at the CUNY Graduate Center and at CUNY’s Joseph A. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, where he is considered the premier New York labor historian. Additionally, he has particular expertise concerning the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. As a result, I was thrilled to have a thirty minute phone interview with him. Dr. Freeman greatly deepened my topical understanding and analysis by providing additional details and clarity about the trial that followed the fire, as well as the tragedy’s connection to labor reforms that followed. I used a quote on my exhibit from Dr. Freeman concerning the trial.

Sagar, Ken. Personal Interview. 15 April, 2018.

Ken Sagar, President of the Iowa Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO), willingly answered multiple interview questions pertaining to my topic. Sagar provided useful insight on labor unions, and their importance in promoting worker safety. His responses offered astute points and I utilized his expertise by placing several quotes from his interview on my exhibit.
Books:


The harsh reality of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was portrayed in this historical novel. The rationale regarding Blanck and Harris’ acquittals during their trials was also made clear. Since differing accounts of the event were told, the jury could not determine if the doors were actually locked, which contributed to their verdict. When I picked up this book in the library last fall and began reading the story, I was immediately hooked on the topic.


This novel concerned three women during the time of the fire, which allowed me consider my topic from a personal perspective. The changes that have been made to labor and safety laws, due to the severity of the fire, are changes that are still important to this day. Ultimately, the story of these women allowed me to grasp the conflict, and see the compromises and changes that occurred afterwards. This was a key reason why I chose to use pictures and biographies of some fire victims on the base of my exhibit.


Background information leading up to the fire was provided within this book. It talked about the uprising of 20,000 people, along with the rise of immigration within the United States. Thus, I gained useful background knowledge from reading this book. Additionally, it provided facts regarding the fire itself, and the reactions of individuals afterwards. As a result, it provided a good roadmap for planning my exhibit.


This book was the first significant source I read on my topic. It was fascinating to learn about this tragedy and how it affected the lives of so many. It provided an excellent overview of my topic and its significant impact yet today. I was so excited to learn more after I read this book.

Multiple interviews conducted by author Leon Stein were compiled within this book, which contained the perspectives of people on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the factory during the fire. In addition to the incredibly descriptive accounts, Stein discussed the changes that occurred after the fire. This book helped me grasp the feelings of anger and frustration that were felt by the victim’s families after this tragedy. This was the best book I encountered because it told the story from so many perspectives of people who actually experienced the fire.

Articles:


This article contained information regarding the importance of work done by Frances Perkins. Additionally, it asserted the claim that labor unions should not be prohibited, and that the work unions have accomplished in the United States has significantly lowered the number of annual casualties. The article further asserted that the Triangle Shirtwaist fire proved the need for unions, as a way to balance the interests of capitalists and laborers.


Frances Perkins found her passion after witnessing the Triangle fire firsthand. Because she witnessed the fire and its tragic consequences, she worked to establish numerous labor and safety laws. Without her determination, worker exposure to dangerous working conditions may have continued unabated.


The idea that death on the job was a commonality for immigrant workers was a harsh reality at the time of the fire. However, the most important focus of this article was how its impact carried forward to the present. Anniversary remembrances, laws, and inspection agencies have become a crucial part of making sure a fire of that magnitude never occurs again.

As the author of multiple Triangle Shirtwaist Factory articles, books, and reviews, Drehle wrote yet another useful article on the topic in *Smithsonian Magazine*. This information was useful in gaining a deeper understanding of my topic. Drehle reiterated the main point of my project, that this fire that changed factory safety forever.


From this article, I gained insight regarding problems currently taking place in the U.S. Congress and statehouses across the country regarding worker safety. Today, many individuals complain that government regulations are too strict. However, this shows that businessmen and workers need to be reminded of the disaster that took place during March, 1911.


This article contributed to my knowledge concerning the long-term impact of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory conflict. It was written from the point of view of a person who now holds the same job that Francis Perkins once held. This allowed me to truly comprehend how many changes Perkins initiated, and how those changed influence factories today for the better.

**Charts:**


This chart provided a historic view of immigrants who moved to the United States during the Industrial Revolution. In most cases, these new arrivals were looking to achieve the American Dream, and the growth of American industry provided unprecedented economic opportunity. In fact, most of the women who died in the fire were immigrant women working at the factory. As a result, I felt this was important historical context for my topic and decided to include this chart on my exhibit.
Fire Hazards. N.d. Cornell University, New York.

This chart of fire hazards correlated directly with a 9th floor map of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, which showed exactly what safety hazards were present throughout the 9th floor. This added to my understanding of how there was a dire need for change regarding factory safety.

9th Floor Model. N.d. Cornell University, New York.

This model went along with fire hazards, so I used it on the first panel of my exhibit to provide historical context. It descriptively displayed the hazards present in the building on the day of the fire.

Websites:


This website provided in-depth information regarding the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union march in 1909. Exploring this website allowed me to discover the primary conflict and reasons for the protest. From it, I was able to learn about the key leaders, the methods used during the march, and its outcomes.


This source provided detailed information about Frances Perkins. As the first female cabinet official, she advocated for the creation of new labor laws. This website was also had an abundance of useful quotes from Frances Perkins. Her work helped lawmakers find compromise positions concerning industry and labor, and forge new legislation that paved the way for factory safety today.


I was able to build basic background knowledge of my topic through studying the information on this website. It provided not only information on the fire itself, it also revealed details about laws that were passed due to the fire. This website provided a great starting point that guided the direction of my later research.

This source provided background information leading up to the primary conflict between the industrialists and laborers that began before the fire and later intensified because of the fire. It contained information regarding the large population of immigrants that arrived in America, specifically Ellis Island. I used a picture from this website under “The Kindling” section of my exhibit to show the influx of immigrants.


From this website, I retrieved multiple pictures, factory and fire department documents about the fire, and court transcripts used in the owners’ trial. It helped me become knowledgeable about what was happening inside the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory when the fire erupted. Additionally, I was able to learn about accusations made concerning the factory owners.


The timeline from this website allowed me to truly understand what was happening before, during, and after the fire. By using key events from this timeline on my exhibit, I was able to provide a quick overview of my topic to structure my exhibit.


A complete list of the names and ages of victims killed in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire were included on this website. I was able to not only look at personal obituaries of the victims, but also see just how many people suffered from the disastrous fire. This allowed me to truly understand how badly factory workers were treated, as well as how horrible the factory conditions were at this time. Additionally, I decided to use that list of victims and add them to the base of my exhibit (next to stories of some victims) to both quantify and personalize the collateral damage of this tragedy.

This website provided me with insight concerning events leading up to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. This website talked specifically about the protest led by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union. Their demands for better wages and hours for women workers is what spurred the need for change regarding labor rights and worker safety.


The legacy of the fire was better health and safety in the workplace. As a result, I placed the OHSA logo and current workplace signage on the last panel of my exhibit.


This website provided a comprehensive overview of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, and the outcome of the fire. Additionally, the website provided examples of regulations and regulating bodies that resulted from political compromises forged after the tragedy.

Photograph:


These pictures displayed three out of the six victims who were not identified until 2011. As bad as the heartache was for the families who had to personally identify their dead relatives at the time of the fire, the angst was even worse for those whose love ones were faceless and nameless until the present. I put these pictures and accounts on the base of my exhibit to humanize the fire.