

At Cooper Union



125th

Anniversary

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125th Anniversary SPECIAL ISSUE

At Cooper Union
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*William A. Lohman, an 104-year
old alumnus is interviewed by the
editor of At Cooper Union. See
page 2 for the full story.*

A Message from the President

When people learn of my association with Cooper Union the reaction is invariably, "I know Cooper Union. It's a great college." Many know about us because their daughter or uncle or grandfather went there. Or they may have come to an exhibition or a Great Hall Program. But often as not, they will follow their remarks of praise with, "I've never really been there, but I always hear good things about it."

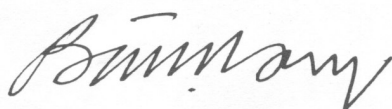
Institutional reputations are interesting academic phenomena. One is never quite sure when such reputations are acquired, or how. And at what point an institution is deemed to have a "good" reputation rather than a "bad" one, or for that matter, little reputation at all. I am gratified that Cooper Union is in the category of institutions of higher education labeled as a place of academic distinction; one founded on noble principles with a present day community of students and faculty of surpassing excellence. I suspect that reputations do not come full blown, but are built one brick at a time by every student who attended Cooper over the past 125 years and by those faculty members who shared Peter Cooper's dream and helped make it come true by shaping generation after generation of graduates from this unique place.

We are very conscious of our reputation and our efforts are constantly directed toward maintaining and improving our good name.

During this celebratory year marking the 125th anniversary of the founding of Cooper Union we are especially aware of the enduring nature of the college and the obligation to measure up to the high standards of that legacy.

This special issue of *At Cooper Union* is dedicated to the future of the college, but always with a view to our illustrious past. The range of articles gives evidence, I believe, of the fact that after a century and a quarter Cooper Union still remains faithful to the credo of its founder and continues to be in the vanguard of professional education in this country.

We are changing to meet new needs and contemporary challenges, but our "good" reputation remains constant.



Bill N. Lacy
President
The Cooper Union



Cooper Union's History At-A-Glance

A chronology of Cooper Union's history was recently compiled by assistant librarian, Virginia Weimer-Vogl. We have had to edit some of the facts and dates due to space requirements. However, what remains is an impressive record of the malleable spirit of Cooper Union, an institution always ready to meet the changing needs of each generation.

•1838-1851•

Peter Cooper purchases 16 individual pieces of land side by side until he owns the entire block between 7th St. and Astor Place and between 3rd and 4th Avenues.

•Nov. 1852•

Peter Cooper announces his plans for the Cooper Union.

•Sept. 17, 1853•

Cornerstone of Cooper Union Foundation Building laid.

•Feb. 17, 1857•

New York State legislature grants a charter to enable Peter Cooper to found a scientific institution. Peter Cooper introduces two stipulations in this charter; that Cooper Union be open to the working man and his children, and that its education be "equal to the best."

•1858•

Cooper gives permission to the School of Design for Women to occupy a suite of rooms in

continued

The Life & Times of William Lohman

I had never met an 104 year old man before. Either had Al Malkin, our designer for *At Cooper Union*, or Jose Pelaez, our photographer, both young Cooper grads. We didn't know what to expect as we drove through the flower-encircled driveway of the Courtland Gardens Nursing Home in Stamford, Connecticut to visit CU's oldest living alumnus, William A. Lohman.

Willie, as he is called, graduated Cooper Union in 1900. What better way to celebrate our 125 years than to span the historic moments with a very spunky, intelligent and humble informant. The chance to record an oral history of the place and times was not to be missed.

When we arrived on that Sunday afternoon of Mother's Day, Willie Lohman was casually dressed and sitting up in a large chair near the window. His skin, like so many people who have lived long, threw off a pink, soft light, reminiscent of many new borns. Although his eyesight is poor and he is hard of hearing, Mr. Lohman easily grasped my hand and held it tenderly to his chest for awhile, as if he were taking in who I was on another realm of the senses. He knew why we had come and was eager to get started. After presenting him with a number of small gifts, a Cooper T-shirt, a coffee mug, a pen, a chocolate Foundation Building bar, and an I LOVE CU button, we began our history.

Mr. Lohman had been born in Brooklyn, New York on October 2, 1879. Mr. Lohman's parents were German immigrants who arrived in this country over 112 years ago. His father was a machinist, who, according to Mr. Lohman, "Could have been more." He remembers life at the turn of the century as difficult. "It was a very crude existence, we were just getting out of the farm age of severe living."

At 15 he was working as a messenger boy in New York City. It was at R.G. Dun and Co. that he learned to operate "a new fangled invention . . . the typewriter." He

would work there during the day and attend Cooper Union at night, taking classes in science and engineering. "It was quite difficult to work all day and then attend college for two or three hours," reflected, Mr. Lohman. He also remembers that the "professors were recognized authorities." One such professor was Mr. Plimpton, son-in-law of Peter Cooper, who according to Mr. Lohman was outstanding in his field. He remembered that Plimpton's name was on a plate in the center of the Brooklyn Bridge, having been one of its engineers. He also recalled the name of Messrs. Anthony and Brackett as having co-authored the chemistry text book used in most colleges. "Mr. Anthony," he said, "when asked by students why he had left a leading college to teach at Cooper, expressed surprise at the question and answered that boys who worked at day and attended classes at night showed their desire for knowledge." Mr. Lohman asserted, "In response many students attained outstanding achievements to justify Mr. Anthony's beliefs and leadership."

What impressed Mr. Lohman about Cooper was the school's ability to take students coming from grammar school into a program of technical study. Today, he said, that would be impossible. "It was, in my mind, a tribute to the teaching skills and dedication that existed at Cooper Union that allowed it to be so successful."

In a stream of memories, Willie Lohman talked about how after

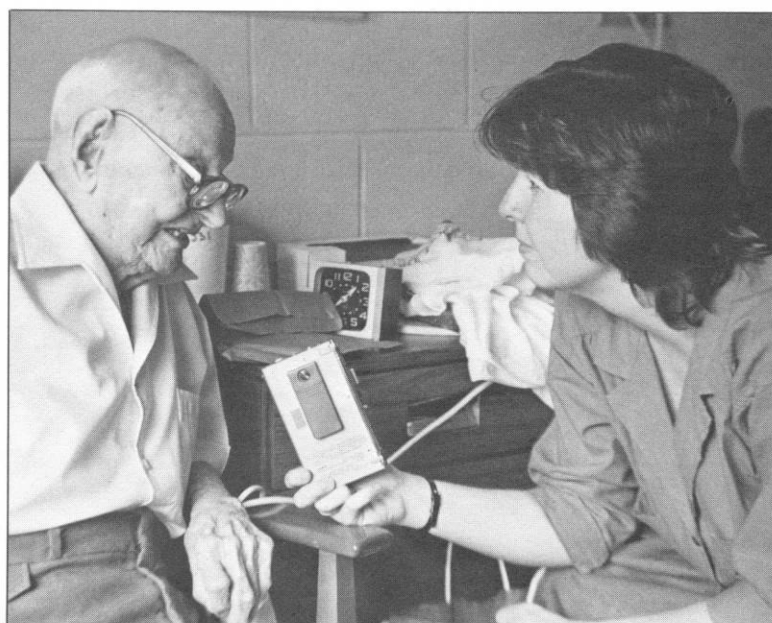


photos: Jose Pelaez

school hours, late in the evening, he and his buddies would walk to the Brooklyn Bridge via the Bowery. He lamented, "No one ever bothered or annoyed us then." Then, as if the thoughts were connected, he added, "We respected our fellow students. Some had advanced experience and were of immeasurable assistance in introducing novices to difficult subjects."

In 1900 Mr. Lohman emerged from Cooper with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Engineering. However, because he could not make a connection with any engineering firm, his career in engineering never materialized. Instead his career advanced at R.G. Dun & Co., now Dun & Bradstreet. He moved from typist to assistant to the manager of the City Department. He learned "to analyze and be proficient in figures." And soon, Mr. Lohman was handling the responsibility of ensuring accuracy of reports and ratings

Judith Garten, editor of At Cooper Union, elicits, through a series of questions, remembrances of things past from 104-year old William Lohman.



that went into the Dun Registry.

After being in the City Department for awhile, Willie Lohman advanced to the position of a sales representative. There he experienced and learned to weather stock market fluctuations and crisis. By 1929 he was "seasoned" and ready to cope with the stock market crash. He said he was very fortunate because he had lost very little money. His experiences made him very conservative and cautious in money matters. According to Harrington Drake, chairman of The Dun & Bradstreet Corporation, William Lohman after 56 years of service to the company earned himself the reputation as "The Dean of Dun & Bradstreet's New York Sales Department."

He also developed a very cautious approach to living after having es-

challenges, whatever they may be." He adds, "Get the most out of your schooling. It broadened my mind and made me understand the part of life that is so necessary to be successful. I believe in the importance of every human life and the challenge that faces every person; specifically, the struggle to work hard and fulfill one's dreams."

His 3 children, 7 grandchildren and 20 great grandchildren have heartily accepted his advice. They honor their father's life as the acceptance and achievement of that challenge.

Now, 125 years after Peter Cooper met the challenge of his dream, The Cooper Union still stands in a light that illuminates the way for many young men and women who aspire to sharpen their

Although Willie Lohman's graduating class picture could not be obtained, this photograph of the 1899 class conveys the look of the graduates of his day.



aped two episodes with firearms. One incident occurred on a fourth of July, early 1900's, when a man practicing his aim accidentally released the trigger of his rifle and the bullet grazed Willie Lohman's chest. The second terrifying event happened in, of all places, a church. A meeting was taking place when an angry drunk armed with a pistol yelled to Mr. Lohman, "Stop or I'll blow your brains out." His intoxication saved Willie Lohman. The man missed, but to this day Mr. Lohman can still feel the bullet whizzing by his head.

Looking back over his many years, our oldest alumnus holds Andrew Mellon up as his hero of all time. He trusts completely the financial advice of "Barney Baruch." And he believes that Herbert Hoover was the best president during his lifetime.

He is quick to give advice to young people. He tells them, "Many things come in the course of life that you never foresee at all—they just happen. You have to accept these

talents and who wish to contribute their gifts to the world.

Meeting Willie Lohman was for us a way to visualize the vast influence Peter Cooper had on so many generations. His generous spirit offered the opportunity to those who otherwise could not afford an education to manifest their dreams and ideals. And while longevity in itself is not a real value, we can appreciate the richness of longevity when it is embraced by a spirit that adheres to the ideals of human dignity and the belief that man has the potential for perpetual growth.

Judith Garten
Director of Public Information,
Publications

Editor's Note: As this story was being prepared for *At Cooper Union*, we heard the sad news that William Lohman had passed away on June 17th. We salute his strong and steadfast spirit.



his building. This school had been organized some years before by a private society of philanthropic New York women in order to give design instruction at moderate cost to teachers and industrial tradeswomen.

•May 10, 1858•

Great Hall of Cooper Union opens for the first time. It was used in celebration of the 14th anniversary of the Ladies Home Missionary Society. The Cooper Union is not yet completed.

•1859•

Free reading room established, open to all. Volumes numbered 4,000 and increased rapidly. The Library also had nearly 300 magazines and newspapers.

•1860•

Peter Cooper institutes a three-year night course in the application of science to industry.

1,165 pupils admitted to the following types of classes: applied mathematics, chemistry, photography, mechanics, and drawing.

•Feb. 27, 1860•

Lincoln's historic Cooper Union speech under the auspices of the Young Men's Central Republican Club of New York.

•1861•

Women's Central Relief Association, precursor of the American Red Cross, founded at the Cooper Union April 29th.

Joseph G. Fox, first Director of the Cooper Union, is appointed.



·1863·

Susan B. Anthony is given office space (Room 20) to serve as headquarters of the Women's National Loyal League.

Engineering night school course extended to a 4-year curriculum which was a *coordinated* course of physics, chemistry, math and mechanical drawing. First night course in the application of these sciences in the country.

·May 1864·

Cooper Union's first "graduates" complete the 5-year course—"2 clerks, an engraver, a machinist, and a coachmaker."

·1865·

Peter Cooper offers the American Geographical Society of New York a room for meetings and a library at no cost. Society was about to disband for lack of funds.

·1866·

The first systematic course of lectures on culinary art in the U.S. offered at Cooper Union.

·Oct. 10, 1870·

Meeting of the Reform League in the Great Hall to protest anti-Negro discrimination in New York City.

·1870's·

6th and 7th floors added to the Foundation Building, making more room for academic study.

·1872·

Arrangements made with Western Union Telegraph Co.

continued



for instruction of women in telegraphy at Cooper Union.

Feminist Victoria Woodhull speaks in Great Hall—ran for President on the People's Party ticket.

·1880·

2,000 readers a day are recorded to be using the Library.

·1881·

Peter Cooper spends \$100,000 for additions and improvements to the Foundation Building, including 2 extra stories on the south side.

·1883·

Death of Peter Cooper.

·1886·

Inventors Institute installed on the ground floor of the Foundation Building.

·1895·

Cooper Union grants space to United Charities organization to establish an employment bureau. Store on 3rd Avenue side of Foundation Building is provided.

·1896·

Eleanor Garnier Hewitt and Sarah Cooper Hewitt establish Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration.

·June 28, 1897·

People's Institute incorporated. Permitted use of Cooper Union facilities. The People's Institute

continued



of New York City, organized in 1897, addressed the social problems of the working class by organizing programs that helped new immigrants assimilate into American society.

•1899•

Andrew Carnegie comes forward with an offer to supply the sum needed for the purpose of establishing the day School for Mechanics.

•1903•

Abram Hewitt dies. A group of leading citizens in New York's City Hall opens subscriptions for a special Cooper Union endowment fund as a memorial to Abram Hewitt. Funds contributed by Andrew Carnegie and J. Pierpont Morgan help implement the construction of the Hewitt Building.

•1910•

Donations from such notables as J. P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie (who served on the Board of Trustees) permit Cooper Union to use the Foundation Building entirely for educational purposes.

•1911•

Almost 2,000 students are studying freehand drawing, architecture, telegraphy and various disciplines of engineering.

•1912•

Hewitt Building opens—Engineering classes move to Hewitt Building from Foundation Building.



•1915•

Student body swells to 3,500 students. Cooper Union reduces its population by means of portfolio presentation for art students and a battery of Edward Thorndike intelligence tests for engineers.

Day courses become registered with the Regents of the University of the State of New York.

•1916•

Women's Suffrage Party begins to hold meetings in the Great Hall.

•Dec. 1920•

Samuel Gompers addresses mass meeting of engravers, firemen and oilers employed in power plants in New York.

•Mar. 3, 1921•

ILGWU holds mass meeting at Cooper Union.

•1925•

Growth of interest in mechanical engineering warrants a separate ME department. Course in Chemistry changed to one in Chemical Engineering.

•1933•

Architecture programs are merged with the Women's School of Design to form the School of Art and Architecture (co-ed).

•1936•

Cooper Union as a learning institution consists of 8 divisions at this time: Institute of Technology (4-year courses in Engi-

continued



neering leading to a B.S.); Night School of Engineering (6-year course); School of Art and Architecture, Day Art School (4-year course), Night Art School (5-year course); Dept. of Social Philosophy; Museum for the Arts of Decoration; Library & Reading Room—open to the general public; Evening classes in oratory and debate.

•1938•

Edwin Burdell, formerly Dean of Humanities Dept. at M.I.T. is inaugurated as President of Cooper Union and adds Humanities courses in history, literature, philosophy and economics to the curriculum.

•Mar. 1939•

Humanities Department established—William S. Lynch appointed Head.

•Mar. 12, 1939•

Athletic program is adopted by Cooper Union for the first time—academic program in drama also introduced.

•1940•

Norvin Hewitt Green, Peter Cooper's great-grandson, donates Green Engineering Camp to Cooper Union as a memorial to his mother, Amy Hewitt Green.

•1946•

C. Hathaway becomes curator of the Cooper Union Museum.

•Sept. 17, 1959•

Cornerstone ceremony for the new building of the School of Engineering takes place.



•1962•

Cooper Union Foundation Building declared a National Historic Landmark.

•1964•

A graduate curriculum in engineering is added to the School of Engineering and Science, breaking Cooper Union's tradition of concentrating solely on undergraduate education.

•Oct. 9, 1967•

Agreement reached with Cooper Union and the Smithsonian Institution to transfer holdings of the Cooper Union Museum to the Smithsonian provided they be retained intact in NYC and supported by private funding.

•Feb. 8, 1971•

The Board of Trustees unanimously accepts the following policies regarding the student body of the Cooper Union:

1. Cooper Union must remain basically an undergraduate and professionally-orientated school.
2. It must remain small.
3. Cooper Union must remain an "all-scholarship" institution.

•1972–Fall 1974•

John Hejduk, Head, Division of Architecture, and Professor Peter Bruder of the School of Engineering are commissioned by the Cooper Union Board of Trustees to design a contemporary interior space to be set within the Foundation Building's 19th century shell.

•Oct. 24, 1974•

Cooper Union Federation of College Teachers created in an

continued



election of the faculty and certified as the exclusive collective bargaining representative of the full-time faculty.

•July 1, 1975•

The Division of Architecture of the School of Art and Architecture is upgraded to a full-fledged, autonomous School of Architecture. John Hejduk, Head of the Architecture Division is appointed Dean of the School. The School of Art becomes a separate school with George Sadek, Dean.

•Sept. 1979•

The establishment of the Cooper Union Center for Design and Typography.

•Jan. 1, 1980•

Bill N. Lacy becomes ninth president of the Cooper Union. He is officially inaugurated Oct. 1.

•June 1980•

President Lacy withdraws recognition of the Cooper Union Federation of College Teachers as being inconsistent with a recent Supreme Court ruling and the nature of the college.

•1981•

The Board of Trustees votes to re-name the School of Architecture, The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture, in honor of Irwin S. Chanin, a 1915 civil engineering graduate of Cooper Union and a renowned architect, builder, and philanthropist.

Lee Anne Miller is appointed Dean of the Cooper Union School of Art. Michael G. Sun-

continued



dell is appointed Chairman of the Cooper Union Department of Humanities.

•Feb. 1982•

Irwin S. Chanin makes a gift of \$2 million to Cooper Union, in anticipation of the institution's 125th anniversary, to be used for the benefit of the School of Architecture.

Trustee and alumni (E'33) Albert Nerkin makes a gift of \$1 million to Cooper Union, to be used for various purposes including The Endowment, fundraising, and minority student admissions.

•June 30, 1983•

The Cooper Union Board of Trustees announces the election of Alan Green as Vice President, Policy and Planning, a new position within the Cooper administration.

•1984•

A change in the designation of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Michael G. Sundell is appointed Dean of the newly designated faculty.

President Lacy, announced as Chairman of the Astor Place Committee, the successful groundbreaking of the Astor Place Subway Renovation.

•May 23, 1984•

Honorary degrees are bestowed for the first time in the college's history, at the 125th Anniversary Commencement. The recipients of the honorary degrees were: Arthur A. Houghton Jr., Ada Louise Huxtable, Louise Nevelson, Frank Stanton, and Lisa Taylor.