

Educational materials developed through the Baltimore County History Labs Program, a partnership between Baltimore County Public Schools and the UMBC Center for History Education.

RS#02: Testimony of Ethel Monick

Testimony of Ethel Monick (9th floor worker--age 16) December, 1911. This testimony was given by a shirtwaist employee during the trial of factory owners Harris and Blanck. Both were on trial for manslaughter and the burden was on the prosecution to prove that they had intentionally locked the doors of the factory.

A. I seen the fire and then I seen all the girls rushing down to the place to escape. So I tried to go through the Greene Street door, and there were quick girls there and I seen I can't get out there, so I went to the elevator, and then I heard the elevator fall down, so I ran through to the Washington Place side, and I went over to the Washington Place side and there wasn't any girls there, so I ran over the doors and none was over there. So I went over to the door. I tried the door and I could not open it, so I thought I was not strong enough to open it, so I hollered girls here is a door, and they all rushed over and they tried to open it, but it was locked and they hollered "the door is locked and we can't open it!"

[Monick rises from her chair and demonstrates the effort to open the door.]

On cross-examination:

Q. Did you ever go up the stairs?

A. Only when I work on Sundays we have to go up the stairs....I wanted to go on the fire escape, but there were too many girls there. I could not go down, so I went away to see if I could find a better way. So I could not get out there, and I did not think that I could, and I thought that I would go down the elevator--that I would go down there that was. There were too many so I ran over the Greene Street door.

[Monick is asked if she ever asked Mr. Harris about the door.]

A. I did not ask him, I used to be afraid of him.

Q. You were afraid of Harris?

A. Sure. Mr. Harris we saw most of the time on the 9th floor. He used to come down sometimes and walk around four or five minutes.

Q. Did you ever see Mr. Blank?

A. No, not very often....

Q. You do like to argue some, don't you, little girl? You do not really mean to say that you were afraid of these two men, were you?

A. Not exactly afraid, but you know they are-- I was like nothing to them because I was only a working girl...Well, I know that when a girl don't do anything right, you know, she gets discharged. That is why I was afraid - that is why I did not talk to them.

Q. Were you just as quiet and calm at the time as you are now?

A. Just as I am now, because I was never in such a fire and I didn't know it was a fire, so I ran looking for an escape. I didn't know about being excited.

"Excerpts from Trial Testimony in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Trial." *Famous Trials: The Triangle Shirtwaist Trial 1911*. <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/triangle/triangletest1.html> (accessed June 28, 2010).