

The Roebling Wire

No. 36

News From



ROEBLING MUSEUM

Spring 2022

Roebling Museum Wins Major Grant to Digitize Thousands of Worker Records

Nine years after he immigrated to the United States from Hungary, Mike Krivacs started work as a laborer at the John A. Roebling's Sons steel and wire mill. It was 1910, and Krivacs was Employee No. 3256. He had four years of schooling, could speak English but not read or write it, and stood 5'6" tall with dark hair and a luxuriant mustache. Supporting a wife and three children, he lived on Third Avenue and had his first citizenship papers.

This snapshot of a Roebling worker from a century ago is just one of thousands captured by company employee records in the collection of the Roebling Museum. Now, thanks to a major grant from the American Historical Association, these records will be digitized and available to the public.

The 13,000 employment records date from 1910 to the early 1950s. They were rescued from the Roebling mill when it abruptly shut down in 1974 and Lou Borbi, a founder of the Roebling Historical Society and the author of *Roebling, Company Town: Steel, Immigrants, Moonshine and Crap Tables 1905-1947*, donated the records—still in their original file drawers—to the museum in early 2021.

"This digitization project will reveal hundreds of new stories about the lives of Roebling workers," says Lynne Calamia, executive director, who created the project. "We are really excited about giving descendants of Roebling workers the opportunity to learn about their family history using these records."

The digitization grant is part of an American Historical Association program to sustain the work of historical organizations adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Roebling Museum is one of only 50 organizations nationwide to receive an American Historical Association grant and the only one in New Jersey. "As a small museum, we are honored to have the country's foremost historical organization recognize our work and the importance of Roebling history," Calamia says.

The digitizing project will take a while—each of the 13,000 individual cards must be scanned, conserved, and entered into a searchable database. But a selection of the worker records will be on display this summer in the upcoming exhibit, *Roebling Works*, produced in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution.

NAME KRIVACS, MIKE (MIKE GREVASH)		TRADE		EMP. NO. 3256	
ADDRESS TEL. NO. 110-5 Ave Roebing N.J.		AGE 36	NATIONALITY Hungary	WORK HERE BEFORE	SINGLE WIDOWER MARRIED DIVORCED
CHANGE OF ADDRESS 144-W		BIRTH DATE 10/29/88	BIRTHPLACE Hung.	PHYSICAL CONDITION Good	
HOW LONG IN U. S. 9 Yrs.		CITIZEN 1st Paper Yes	INTENTIONS TO REMAIN TO REMAIN BECOME CITIZEN Yes	FATHER BORN IN Hung.	MOTHER BORN IN Hung.
SPEAK ENG. Yes		READ ENG. No	WRITE ENG. No	EDUCATION 4 Yrs.	
Wife - 3 Child DEPENDENTS		AMERICA Yes		FOREIGN COUNTRY	
WILL GET TO WORK BY TRAIN WALK <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		TROLLEY <input type="checkbox"/>		RELATIVES IN COMPANY EMPLOY No	
EMPLOYER J. A. R. Son's		DEPARTMENT 146-32	POSITION Laborer	BEGAN 1910	LEFT Date
SIGNATURE Mike Krivacs		REMARKS Census			
WRITTEN BY DATE		J. A. R. SONS CO. EMPLOYMENT RECORD			

EMPLOYMENT RECORD							ACCIDENT RECORD		
DATE	KEY	PLANT	DEPARTMENT	CHECK NO.	POSITION	P.P. No.	DATE	DATE LOST	COMP. COST
8/1/19		Kinkora	#1 Clean House	146-32	Laborer	387	2-28-43	4 months	.82
4-21-47	T	Roebing	Annealing	188-8 377-6	Helper				
TERMINATED RECORD									
DATE	KEY	RECORD							
4-21-47	T	Seniority Cutback							
4-7-50	FTT	(Loader Coils Annealing Furnaces) Compulsory Retirement.							
KEY: E- Employed T- Transferred R- Re-Employed CC- Check Change N- Worked Notice D- Discharged S- Suspended LV- Leave of Absence Q- Quit DR- Dropped IN- Injured SK- Sickness LO- Laid Off									



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A Letter from the President

We're so happy that this spring, for the first time since 2019, the Museum is open on a full schedule and we're able to welcome everyone to the Museum galleries. It's been a minute, as they say.

We've added a regular walking tour of the unique company town of Roebling, on Saturdays at 1 p.m. The tour is free with Museum admission and it's led either by Lynne Calamia, our executive director, or one of our excellent volunteers, each of whom brings their special twist to the Roebling story. Well worth checking out even if you've visited before!

We were also glad to be able to host the Roebling Car Show again, and, with luck and the right amount of sunshine, the annual Garden Tour on June 18.

One Museum event we are continuing from the past two years is our monthly Zoom talk on a variety of Roebling-related topics. The magic of the internet allows us to present a wide variety of speakers and reach an audience that might be too far away to attend an in-person event at the Museum. So far our "Roebling Roadtrips" have taken us to Saxonburg, Pa., the town founded by John A. Roebling on his immigration to the United States in 1831; to upstate New York for a talk on Roebling's aqueducts for the Delaware and Hudson Canal; and to Cincinnati, for a history of the John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge. We just has a zoom talk to cover Emily Warren Roebling and her remarkable life before, during, and after the Brooklyn Bridge, and up next in June is a look at an unusual Roebling structure built for the 1964 World's Fair. You can sign up on the Museum's website. And remember, it's Zoom – no hard pants required.

Of course, everyone at the Museum is working hard for our big in-person event of 2022: the *Roebling Works* exhibit we are presenting in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution. It is a big honor to be selected by the Smithsonian and the team of community volunteers is putting together a great exhibit, which will occupy two galleries in the Museum.

We rely on the generosity of our members and friends to do justice to the Roebling story. I hope you will consider making a special donation to the Museum this spring to underwrite the cost of making this new exhibit the best it can be.

See you at the Museum!

Martha Moore
President, Board of Directors

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Roebling Museum is to document, preserve, and exhibit the history of the John A. Roebling's Sons Company, the Roebling family and the village of Roebling. The focus of the museum is both the industrial and technological achievements of the company and the unique social history of its workforce and the town it created. The museum connects a storied past to the present while also serving as a valuable resource for school curriculum enhancement and academic research. It is the only museum in the world dedicated solely to the accomplishments of the Roebling family, its businesses and workers and the engineering innovations of the company in Trenton and Roebling, New Jersey.



Membership at Roebling Museum has its privileges! Become a member and enjoy free general admission for a year while supporting all that we do, from education programs for local schoolchildren to conservation of nationally important art and artifacts.

Join or renew your membership at roeblingmuseum.org today, and help keep history alive and enlightening in this unique village!

A Look Back: Founders of the Roebling Museum

Linda McDonald, a descendant of John A. Roebling, served as the first President of Roebling Museum when it was founded in 2007 by members of the Roebling Historical Society. She remains an active member of the Museum to this day. In this reflection, she honors her longtime friends and Museum co-founders, Roebling residents George and Kathie Lengel.

You never know what can happen when people care.

George or Kathie Lengel are dedicated to sharing and preserving history. Working with them to tell the story of Roebling has been a true inspiration.

The Lengels were among the dedicated people from Roebling, Florence and elsewhere who established Roebling Museum in 2007. The massive undertaking to bring up artifacts from the Roebling mill site and to assist the Environmental Protection Agency in plans to restore the Main Gate Building and the Millyard took teamwork. Together, George and Kathie brought experience, knowledge, and an incredible work ethic to the table every day. Without them, Roebling Museum would not exist.

At the same time, the Lengels have raised an awesome family and worked tirelessly to support their community

George was born and raised at 105 3rd Avenue in Roebling. Kathie hails from West Union Street in Burlington City, N.J. They met at a Knights of Columbus dance in Burlington, in 1959. The newlyweds bought their first home in Roebling, at 26 4th Avenue, for \$10,000. Their mortgage, including taxes, was a whopping \$72.00 a month! Their two daughters, Irene and Suzanne have given them four grandchildren. In August, they will celebrate their 58th wedding anniversary.

George's father, mother, grandfather, and entire family all worked at the Roebling mill. His father, also named

George, worked in the Number 3 Wire Mill for 48 years. His mother worked in the screen shop during World War II. Growing up, George worked in the Blooming Mill at the Roebling steel plant. But, at his father's insistence, he became the first person in his family to go to college, at Rowan University. Always a teacher at heart, George taught history for 30 years in the Roebling School and Florence Township Memorial High School. George jokes that he made more money working at the mill than being a teacher—but that just shows his passion for education. Kathie worked for Florence Township as secretary for the planning and zoning boards and as deputy court clerk. She also worked for The Bank of New Jersey in the mortgage department, and then as secretary to the principal at Florence Township Memorial High School.

Together, George and Kathie joined the Roebling Historical Society when Lou Borbi was president. The RHS was the driving force behind the initial plans to establish the Roebling Museum. In 2005, for the 100th anniversary of the town's founding by the Roebling company, George and Kathie led a team from the community in a successful Centennial Fundraiser for the museum. It was accomplished with enthusiasm and a roll-up-your-sleeves-and-get-it-done attitude, the Roebling-Florence way. I am truly inspired by the history of the Roebling community, and its work ethic.

So if you ever see George or Kathie around town and have any questions, I guarantee you will get an informed and interesting answer. This is what happens, as George says, "when people care."



Kathie and George Lengel



George and Kathie as newlyweds



George and Kathie Lengel with Lou Borbi



The Lengel Family



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Upcoming Events

Virtual Program
Roebbling Roadtrip: How did Roebbling help build the New York State Pavilion?
June 16, 2022 • 6 pm - 7 pm
FREE - Registration is Required

Did you know that the iconic NY State Pavilion was built using Roebbling Wire Rope?

Originally built for the 1964/65 World's Fair, the structure was meant to be an enduring gift to the people of New York, and it ended up having a fascinating life after being abandoned following the Fair.

Salmaan Khan and Aaron Asis of People for the Pavilion will be joined by Justin Rivers of Untapped Cities to present on the past, present, and future of the Philip Johnson designed New York State Pavilion in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.



Roebbling Museum Garden Tour
Saturday, June 18 • 10 am - 4 pm
Details To Follow!



HOURS & ADMISSION

Due to COVID-19 our hours will vary. Check out our website or follow us on Facebook for the most up to date information about hours and upcoming events.

March through December:

Thursday through Saturday 11:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

January and February:

Open by appointment for groups and researchers

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Day & Easter

\$7.00—Adults; **\$6.00**—Seniors and Children 6-12
Free for Members and Children under 6

Roebbling Museum is supported by a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the federal CARES Act.

Roebbling Museum received an operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.



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www.roebblingmuseum.org