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**PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN, UNHEARD RECORDINGS OF PROGRAMS IN COOPER UNION'S  
HISTORIC GREAT HALL TO BE DIGITIZED, PRESERVED, AND SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC**

TRANSFORMATIVE \$760,000 GRANT FROM GARDINER FOUNDATION  
TO FUND EFFORT AND PRESERVE NEW YORK HISTORY

NEW YORK (Dec. 12, 2018) – The Great Hall of The Cooper Union in New York City's East Village has hosted more than its fair share of heavyweights and luminaries since first opening its doors in 1858. For 160 years, the Great Hall has been a destination for shaping the pressing issues of the times, serving as the platform for some of the earliest workers' and Native Americans' rights campaigns, the birth of the NAACP, the women's suffrage movement, and the American Red Cross. Now, thanks to a new grant of more than \$760,000 from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, a collection of recorded but previously inaccessible Great Hall presentations from the 1930s forward will be digitized, preserved, and made publicly available for generations to come.

“Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, The Cooper Union's Great Hall has been an important gathering place where people from all walks of life organize and present their views on the issues that are central to the civic and cultural life of New York City and the nation,” said Laura Sparks, president of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, a private college of art, architecture, and engineering. “We have been given a significant opportunity to delve into this rich history and bring it to light for the public to access, and we are extraordinarily grateful to the Gardiner Foundation for making it possible,” she said. The extensive list of noteworthy Great Hall speakers includes American presidents from Abraham Lincoln to Barack Obama, women's and civil rights activists, artists and cultural icons, performers, protestors, civic leaders and more who have stood at the lectern made famous by Lincoln when he delivered his “Right Makes Might” speech in 1860, railing against the expansion of slavery, a speech that many have said propelled him to the presidency.

This grant is part of the Gardiner Foundation's multifaceted funding portfolio, which supports cultural heritage projects across New York State, ranging from the preservation and dissemination of collections of historical significance to the restoration of important works of architecture. “This foundation is delighted to support The Cooper Union and the historic role of the Great Hall in key conversations reflecting the American experience and to bring these speeches and moments to life as research and educational resources,” said Kathryn M. Curran, Executive Director of the Gardiner Foundation.

“There is so much to be learned from the history of this great city and state and from the people and organizations that impacted it, especially now more than ever. That's what makes the Gardiner Foundation's commitment to the preservation of New York history essential. The Cooper Union is humbled by this opportunity and the Foundation's leadership,” Sparks added.

Among the voices captured in The Cooper Union recordings are poets and authors Dylan Thomas and Carl Sandburg, American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Thurgood Marshall, architect Louis I. Kahn, psychologist and writer Timothy Leary, politicians Adlai Stevenson II and Robert F. Wagner, and so many others. Many of these recordings were made by Winston Wilkerson, who began working as a lab assistant in the Cooper Union School of Engineering Physics Department in 1960, eventually becoming Director of Cooper Union’s Audio-Visual Resource Access Center in 1988. “Over the years, Winston took on the role of guardian of this treasure trove of recordings. He singlehandedly protected this documentation of what unfolded in the Great Hall, intending that it would one day come to good use,” said Steven Hillyer, Project Director and Director of The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture Archive at Cooper. “Now with the generous support of the Gardiner Foundation, we’ll not only be able to share our invaluable history with the world, we’ll be able to create the infrastructure to chronicle and present Great Hall content moving forward.”

Building on Peter Cooper’s founding intention in 1859 to provide public access to lectures, discussions, recitations, and debate, this grant fully aligns with Cooper Union’s renewed focus on programming a diversity of events, many with profound historical significance, in the Great Hall. Once the recordings are digitized, Cooper plans to develop an online platform where they can become publicly accessible. A selection of the recordings will also be curated to inform current Great Hall programming, utilizing key historical moments in our nation’s history to inform the critical issues facing America today.

#### **ABOUT THE COOPER UNION**

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art is a distinguished private college of art, architecture, and engineering founded in 1859 by inventor, industrialist and philanthropist Peter Cooper. From its beginnings, Cooper has been dedicated to the idea that education is the key not only to personal prosperity but also to civic virtue and harmony. Today, the school continues that tradition through a curriculum that focuses on helping graduates acquire technical mastery and entrepreneurial skills, enrich their intellects and spark their creativity, and develop a sense of social justice. The institution provides close contact with a distinguished, creative faculty and fosters rigorous, humanistic learning that is enhanced by the process of design and augmented by its urban setting in New York’s East Village.

The Great Hall of The Cooper Union has stood since 1858 as a destination for free speech, civic engagement, and a witness to the flow of American history and ideas. When the Great Hall first opened, it was the largest public gathering space in New York City. Leading thinkers, artists, and historical figures have held the stage including Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Mark Twain, Susan Sontag, Cornel West, Ai Weiwei, and more. More recently, groups like PEN America, the Public Art Fund, the Architectural League of New York, and more have held events on its stage. Learn more at [www.cooper.edu](http://www.cooper.edu).

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