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Ronald L. Becker

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LABOR HISTORY RESOURCES AT THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

by
Ronald L. Becker

Although Rutgers Univ. was founded in 1766 and has been in the process of building library collections for over two centuries, the concept of building manuscript and archival holdings in an organized fashion dates back less than 50 years. Rutgers’ Special Collections and Archives now includes approximately 3000 manuscript collections and the largest and most comprehensive collection of New Jersey books, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, broadsides, and pictorial materials. Although the major focus of the collection has been New Jersey and its history, significant 20th century holdings have been developed in such areas as the consumer movement, social welfare policy, and women’s history—all areas that have collections relating to labor history. There are records of trade unions, political organizations, and consumer associations. Also included are the papers of people involved in labor activities and in the study of labor history, collections of printed materials, and the resources of the library at the Institute of Management and Labor Relations.

The Rutgers Library serves as the official repository for the archives of the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE). To date, over 500 cubic feet of records relating to the union and its activities have been received. The papers, which date from the 1930s, include United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) files and document the split of the IUE from the UE during the late 1940s. Also included are district and local organizing files, company files, and the correspondence of IUE presidents James Carey and Paul Jennings, as well as extensive legal files which document hundreds of cases before the National Labor Relations Board and the courts. Minutes of meetings,

Ronald L. Becker is curator of manuscripts, Special Collections and Archives, Rutgers University.
convention materials, correspondence, photographs, and other topical files round out the collection.

The library has recently acquired over 105 cubic feet of records (1936–1980) of the National Maritime Union of America. Of particular interest are extensive photograph files depicting elections, hearings, strikes, ships, crews, and other maritime workers' scenes. Also included are organizational files, contract files, research department files, trial committee records, correspondence, and minutes of meetings and conventions. The trial committee records, which contain charges, disposition of cases, and personnel files, are restricted. Permission to use them must be secured from the union.

In addition to the records of these two unions, the library also holds the records of several NJ local chapters of national unions. The largest of these are the archives of Locals 56 and 195 of the Amalgamated Food and Allied Workers Union, founded as the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America. Approximately 150 cubic feet of records include correspondence of presidents Leon B. Schachter and Leo Cinaglia (1941–1981), vice-president Joseph C. Nettleton (1962–1978), minutes of the executive board, general membership and stewards' meetings (1941–1982), and other records relating to finances, health and welfare concerns, contracts, strikes, publications, memorabilia, and photographs of these Southern New Jersey/Philadelphia locals. Also represented are the records of the Scholarship Fund Committee of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen, and Helpers, Local 560 of Union City, NJ, including minutes and correspondence (1962–1965).

Other New Jersey labor organizations represented are the CIO, Industrial Union Council of NJ and the NJ State Federation of Labor. The former includes correspondence and other papers of numerous union executives (1951–1957) and materials relating to the CIO Political Action Committee (1952–1955) and the Women's CIO League of New Jersey (1953–1955). The State Federation of Labor collection includes transcripts of annual convention proceedings (1901–1973), proceedings of the Joint State Labor Board of New Jersey (1918–1920), and tape recordings of five interviews with veteran Federation members.

The library also has transcripts of and exhibits used in the dispute between the New Jersey Bell Telephone Co. and the Telephone Workers Union of New Jersey (1947) before the NJ Statutory Board of Arbitration. Hundreds of other labor-management arbitration records (1948–1965) are found in the Monroe Berkowitz papers.

Civil rights issues in the labor movement are documented in the papers of Ernest Thompson, which include files relating to his service

There is abundant material for the study of labor history to be found in the records of political parties and interest groups. Rutgers holds the records of NY’s American Labor Party (1947–1956) and the New Democratic Coalition of New York (1959–present). These collections include election campaigns, issues files, organizing files, correspondence, and numerous subject files relating to the labor movement. The records of the NJ League of Women Voters (1913–1961) document such issues as child labor, women in industry, migrant labor, and other related concerns.

Also at Rutgers are the papers of over 20 NJ politicians who have served in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, dating from William Paterson’s term in the Senate (1789–1790) to former Congressman/now Governor James J. Florio. Most of the collections are recent and document the issues that were of most concern to the office holders and their constituents. These papers contain much material on farm labor, child labor, minimum wage, labor law reform, workmen’s compensation, and numerous other related concerns. Of particular importance for the study of labor history are the papers of Harrison A. Williams, Jr., who served long terms in the House (1953–1957) and Senate (1959–1982). Extensive files relating to his service as chairman of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee document the research, framing, and passage of such legislation as the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, the National Labor Relations Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and the Federal Mine and Safety Act of 1976. The papers of Congresswoman Mary T. Norton include correspondence (1920–1959), speeches (1927–1952), and an unpublished autobiography. Norton served in the House for 35 years (1924–1959) and was chairwoman of its Labor Committee (1937–1946). Among the legislation passed during her leadership were the Wages and Hours Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, both in 1938. Norton also supported (1944–1951) unsuccessful legislation to establish a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission to combat racial discrimination.

The 20th century consumers movement in the U.S. has dealt with labor related issues throughout its history. Rutgers holds the records of the Consumers League of New Jersey (1913–present) which includes documentation on child labor, minimum wage, industrial health and safety, equal pay for equal work, industrial homework, workmen’s compensation, and other allied issues. Another major collection is the archives of Consumers Research, Inc. (1927–1980) which documents the bitter strike of 1935 resulting in the founding in 1936 of Consumers
Union by the strikers and their supporters. Rutgers also has the papers of several consumer advocates, most notably Sidney Margolius (1940-1980) and Erma Angevine (1957-1984). A prolific writer and speaker, Margolius served on a number of government and private commissions and committees including the National Commission on Product Safety. Angevine's distinguished career is highlighted by her service (1977-1982) as president of the National Consumers League.

The archives of the Rutgers Institute of Management and Labor Relations (IMLR) includes materials relating to the Bryn Mawr labor schools' activities such as the Barnard School (1920s and 1930s), the Bryn Mawr Summer School (1920s and 1930s), and the Hudson Shore School (1920-1950). Other files include the official records of the IMLR and its many programs, workshops, and seminars such as the Union Leadership Academy, Center for Human Resources, New York–New Jersey Port Authority Employment Relations Panel, and occupational safety and health workshops. IMLR also has extensive files of contracts, union constitutions, periodicals, newspapers, and other printed and manuscript material, and the papers of a number of faculty members active in the labor movement in NJ and elsewhere. The IMLR Library also serves as the repository for the records of the New Jersey Public Employment Relations Commission. As such it holds extensive bargaining agreements between state agencies and public employees as well as arbitration decisions covering NJ police officers and firemen.

Access: The Rutgers University Libraries Special Collections and Archives are open to the public 9 am to 5 pm, Monday–Friday. During the academic year (Sept.–May) the hours are extended to include Saturday, 11 am-5 pm. Information concerning these collections, restrictions, and findings aids should be directed to Ronald L. Becker at Special Collections and Archives, Alexander Library, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, NJ 08903; phone: (201) 932-7510.