Chance and geography conspired early in the history of western Massachusetts to lay the foundation for both industrialization and the rise of organized labor. The Department of Special Collections and University Archives at UMass Amherst (SCUA) is engaged in a long term project to document the dramatic transformations that have affected workers in New England as the region evolved from agrarian roots through industrialization to de-industrialization and post-industrialization.

As part of this project, SCUA documents the history of organized labor and labor activism, the experience and culture of work in industrial and agricultural settings, and the history of industry and business, with an emphasis upon western New England. Our goal is to collect and preserve records of individuals, organizations, and businesses to make them available for research by scholars and the general public.

The Department houses important materials documenting the labor movement, including the official records of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and affiliates and locals of unions representing papermakers, granite cutters, clothing and textile workers, electrical workers, loom fixers, carpenters, and condenser workers. Of special note is the John W. Bennett Labor History Collection, which includes realia and ephemera associated with organized labor dating back to the 1870s. The records of corporations and small businesses are well represented by records of the Rockey Hunt Co., the Northampton Cutlery Co., Smith & Wesson, the American Writing Paper Co., and the papers of telecommunications pioneer Sidney Topol.

How you can help

SCUA documents the diverse experiences with labor, work, and industry, reflecting a broad range of ideas and perspectives. Please help us to preserve your history through donations of personal papers, organizational records, photographs, memorabilia, and other materials with historical or research value.

Materials of particular interest include:
- Letters, diaries, essays, memoirs, and talks by labor leaders, workers, union rank and file, and management
- Records of businesses, industries, and manufacturing organizations
- Records of labor unions, community groups, and fraternal and benevolent societies
- Books, periodicals, flyers, newspapers, posters, and union and employee newsletters
- Videos, films, sound recordings
- Scrapbooks, sketchbooks, and photo albums

Whom to contact

Inquiries regarding our project to document labor, work, and industry, our collections, or questions regarding donations may be addressed to the following:

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