



Harry Von Romer Collection (S0471)

Collection Number: S0471

Collection Title: Harry Von Romer Collection

Dates: 1880-1981

Creator: Von Romer, Harry, 1906-1986

Abstract: The Harry Von Romer Collection contains labor agreements, bylaws, union buttons, and correspondence chronicling Von Romer's life as a laborer, union organizer, Central Trade and Labor Union convention delegate, and collector of union memorabilia.

Collection Size: 7 cubic feet
(150 folders, 7 photographs)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Harry Von Romer Collection* (S0471); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection by Harry Von Romer on March 3, 1977 (Accession No. SA1021). Additions to the records were made on June 16, 1981 by Harry Von Romer (Accession No. SA2407); May 2, 1983 by Harry Von Romer (Accession No. SA2532); September 15, 1983 by Harry Von Romer (Accession No. SA2558); and on February 29, 1984 by Harry Von Romer (Accession No. SA2605).

Related Materials: Additional materials related to the Harry Von Romer Collection can be found in the following collections:

[Socialist Party of Missouri Collection](#) (S0090)

[Carpenters' Local 1596 Records](#) (S0163)

[Harry Von Romer Autobiography](#) (S0171)

[Camp Solidarity, Inc. Records](#) (S0184)

[Leather Goods, Plastics, and Novelty Workers' Union Records](#) (S0240)

[St. Louis/Southern Illinois Labor Tribune](#) (S0521)

[Missouri Teamsters Photograph Collection](#) (S0559)

[Oral History Collection](#) (S0829)

Notes: Previous WHMC Staff originally arranged the Artifacts series second and the Bumper Stickers, Decals, and Labels series fourth in the collection. At a later unspecified date, WHMC staff moved the Artifacts and Bumper Stickers, Decals, and Labels series to the end of the collection but did not renumber the folders. SHSMO archivists have kept the original numbering therefore, folders 9-30 and 41-43 appear out of sequence.

Please note that this collection has been minimally processed and has not been heavily indexed.

Processed by: Processed by WHMC Staff, 1977-1984. Finding aid revised by Rachael Heriford, February 2024.

Biographical Note:

Harry Von Romer was born on August 11, 1906, to Adolph and Mildred Von Romer in St. Louis, Missouri. Adolph Von Romer, a German immigrant, helped organize Teamsters Local No. 600 in St. Louis. Von Romer joined his first union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, in Granite City, Illinois, after becoming an apprentice millwright in 1924. Von Romer began working for General Motors Fisher Body Plant in 1929. Von Romer joined his first union, American Federal of Labor Local No. 18366, in 1933. The following year, the Fisher Body Plant workers switched to the independent Federated Automobile Workers of America Local No. 1. Workers at the Fisher Body Plant remained with the independent unions through its strike in 1935 but rejoined the American Federation Labor Local No. 18366 in 1935.

During the Great Depression, Von Romer failed to find consistent work and became increasingly frustrated by the constant hiring and firing, Von Romer subsequently began to dedicate more time to union causes and organizations. From 1935 to 1936, Von Romer served as the chairman of St. Louis City's Central Committee of the American Workers Union after unemployed workers in St. Louis organized the union to achieve better welfare benefits. After an employee at the Fisher plant wore an American Workers Union button to work, a plant supervisor mistook the pin for a United Auto Workers button and dismissed the employee. The American Workers unsuccessfully picketed the Fisher plant. After this incident, Von Romer became a lifelong collector of union memorabilia.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Von Romer continued to participate in strikes, walkouts, and lockouts against companies such as General Motor Company in 1934 and 1937, Laclede Gas in 1934, and Kroger in 1937. In 1941, he supported his wife, Marie Von Romer (1906-1998), during the Luggage Workers Local No. 25 strike against the Gardner Pocketbook Company. Von Romer joined the Wire and Corrugated Glass Workers AFL Local No. 59 in 1942 and the United

Steel Workers in 1943. After World War II began, Von Romer was drafted as an artilleryman in 1944 and served in Europe.

After returning from the war, Von Romer joined the Upholsterers International Union and Carpenters Local No. 1596. He remained with Carpenters Local No. 1596 until his retirement in 1970. Throughout his career, Von Romer joined nine different unions. He also was elected as a delegate to the Central Trades and Labor Union, later renamed the St. Louis Labor Council in 1957. After his election, Von Romer's collection of union buttons grew enormously. While he had previously relied on donations of union buttons from fellow union workers in St. Louis, as a delegate, he began to travel more and collect buttons, badges, and memorabilia from union halls throughout the country. He continued this hobby throughout his retirement as well. In 1983, the University of Missouri-St. Louis displayed Von Romer's union button collection in an exhibit entitled "Symbols of Solidarity."

Aside from being a labor activist, Von Romer was a member of Camp Solidarity, Inc., a recreational farm founded by the St. Louis Workmen's Benefit Fund, and unsuccessfully ran as a Socialist Party candidate for the St. Louis Board of Alderman during the 1950s. Von Romer and his wife also had two children: Mildred Von Romer Sutter (1926-2011) and Harry E. Von Romer (1927-2013). Harry Von Romer died on October 26, 1986, in St. Louis.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following 14 series:

- Agreements
- Artifacts
- Badges
- Bumper Stickers, Decals, and Labels
- Buttons
- Cards
- Constitutions and Bylaws
- Personal Papers
- St. Louis Labor Council Meeting Minutes
- Souvenir Notebooks and Address Books
- Union Literature
- Union Membership Dues Books
- Photographs
- Duplicate Buttons

Scope and Content Note:**Agreements**

The Agreements series contains contracts, labor agreements, pension, and benefit plans negotiated between St. Louis corporations such as General Motors and the Airplane Division of Curtiss-Wright Corporation, and unions such as AFL-CIO, International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and Aerospace Agricultural Implement Workers. The materials have been arranged chronologically from 1942 to 1981.

Artifacts

This series consists of three-dimensional artifacts such as plaques, pens, ashtrays, and a strike umbrella commemorating union anniversaries, campaigns, and other observances from 1909 to 1981. All items contain insignias of individual unions, and some reflect the names and dates of anniversaries. The artifacts have been arranged alphabetically by union name.

Badges

This series consists of delegate badges from labor conventions hosted by organizations such as the Missouri State Labor Council, Missouri State Federation of Labor, and AFL-CIO from 1895 to 1978. The badges have been arranged alphabetically by occupation.

Bumper Stickers, Decals, and Labels

This series consists of bumper stickers, decals, and labels from labor union boycotts, United Autoworkers, Carpenters District Council of St. Louis, and Cigars Makers International Union Local No. 44. The materials have been arranged alphabetically and consist of materials from 1967 to 1981.

Buttons

The Button series contains union buttons, pins, and ribbons reflecting Harry Von Romer's membership in nine unions, the union halls Harry Von Romer visited while traveling as a delegate to the Central Trades and Labor Union, and donations made by members of other union chapters. This series consists of buttons from occupations such as meat cutters, longshoremen, luggage workers, and letter carriers. The materials have been arranged alphabetically by trade and contain materials from 1900 to 1981.

Cards

This series contains Harry Von Romer's working, convention, and delegate cards with the United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers, the Carpenters District Council, the Building and Construction Trades Department, and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. The materials have been arranged alphabetically and contain materials from 1944 to 1979.

Constitutions and Bylaws

This series consists of the constitution and bylaws of union organizations such as the Carpenters District Council, the International Brotherhood of Longshoremen, the St. Louis Labor Council, and Allied Products and Warehousemen. The materials have been arranged chronologically from 1941 to 1979.

Personal Papers

The Personal Papers series contains correspondence, union delegate credentials, captions from the "Symbols of Solidarity" exhibit, and newspaper clippings about Von Romer's union button collection. The papers have been arranged chronologically from 1941 to 1979.

St. Louis Labor Council Meeting Minutes

This series consists of St. Louis Labor Council meeting minutes from 1965 to 1974. The meeting minutes are arranged chronologically.

Souvenir Notebooks and Address Books

This series contains souvenir notebooks and address books produced from 1953 to 1979 by organizations such as the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, St. Louis Auto Employees Credit Union, and United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. The materials are arranged chronologically.

Union Literature

The Union Literature series contains booklets, newsletters, pension and insurance plans, and manuals from union groups such as United Autoworkers, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, Missouri State Labor Council, and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) from 1947 to 1976. The materials have been arranged alphabetically by union organization.

Union Membership Dues Books

This series consists of membership and due books for the following unions: Brotherhood of Railway Carmen, Leather and Luggage Workers, United Steelworkers, Upholsterer's International Union of North America, International Stove Mounters' Union, and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. The membership and dues books are arranged chronologically and contain materials from 1919 to 1975.

Photographs

The Photographs series contains seven photographs: undated images of badges, buttons, and ribbons from Von Romer's collection and a 1920 photograph postcard of Socialist Party presidential candidate Eugene Debs. The photographs are arranged numerically by their label number.

Duplicate Buttons

This series contains duplicates within Von Romer's Union button collection.

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- General Contractors of St. Louis and the St. Louis District Council, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, AFL-CIO, 1942-1960
- f. 2 Collective agreement, St. Louis Joint Board International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, AFL-CIO, with Associated Garment Industries of St. Louis; Associated Cabinet Makers of St. Louis and the Carpenters District Council of St. Louis, and Vicinity; Area Millwork Employers and the Carpenters District Council of St. Louis and Vicinity; Manufactured Homes Industry and the Carpenters District Council; Local agreements between Warehouse Parts Division, General Motors Corporation and Shop Committee of Local No. 24, UAW; General Motors Corporation and the UAW-AFL-CIO, 1960-1966
- f. 3 Supplemental agreement on unemployment benefits, General Motors and UAW; Supplemental agreement on pension plan insurance, Fisher Body Division, General Motors Plan; Local Seniority, wage rates, shift preference, statement of policy administration paragraph 71, General Motors Corporation, 1964
- f. 4 Associated General Contractors of St. Louis and the St. Louis District Council, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners agreement; Local seniority, wage roles, shift preference, agreement on the administration of paragraph 71, Chevrolet Division, General Motors Corporation St. Louis plant; Aluminum Storm Window and Door Manufacturers of St. Louis and the Carpenters District Council; Carpenters District Council; St. Louis Display Builders Association and the Carpenters District Council; Carpenters agreement, 1966-1974
- f. 5 Carpenters' agreement; pension plan supplement General Motors and United Auto Workers; and Area Millwork employers, 1969-1975
- f. 6 Agreement between General Motors and United Auto Workers; insurance program supplement General Motors and United Auto Workers, 1973-1976
- f. 7 Pension plan supplement General Motors and United Auto Workers; local agreements between Warehouse Parts Division; General Motors and United Autoworkers; agreement between Carpenters District Council and St. Louis Millwork Manufacturers, 1973-1981
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