

PRELIMINARY INVENTORY
S0479 (SA1049, SA1057, SA2719, SA2722, SA2724, SA2751, SA2757, SA2956)
OIL, CHEMICAL, AND ATOMIC WORKERS RECORDS

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.

Introduction

Approximately 14 cubic feet

The Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Records contain correspondence, meeting minutes, financial records, contracts and negotiations, grievances, and membership enrollments records documenting the union's day-to-day business activities, including contract negotiations with gas companies, union conventions, and labor strikes.

Merger talks between the Oil Workers International Union (OWIU) and the smaller United Gas, Coke, and Chemical Workers International Union (UGCCW) began during the spring of 1954. The Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) had chartered the UGCCW in 1942 after a group of local unions, opposing the decision of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) to leave the CIO, withdrew from UMWA District 50.

An undisciplined and loosely organized union, the UGCCW, which was composed predominantly of low-wage workers living in the eastern states, experienced constant financial stringencies and probably would not have survived without CIO assistance. Like other unions in the petroleum and chemical industries, leaders of the UGCCW encountered great resistance in the effort to organize workers within their jurisdiction. Organizing failures resulted primarily from the effective anti-union tactics of the huge corporation that dominated the industry, but the trade unions themselves further exacerbated the problem through expensive and distracting rivalries that disrupted organizing drives and weakened the union position during collective bargaining negotiations. Consequently most UGCCW leaders were pleased to hear OWIU president O.A. Knight tell the delegates to the 1950 OWIU national convention:

“I think at this time...it behooves us to extend an invitation...to the Gas, Coke, and Chemical Union, which is so closely related to ours that you can't tell where theirs stops and ours starts,...to sit down with us and plan for a united movement in the oil and chemical industry in America.”

The first step toward greater unity came in 1951 with the organization of the National Coalition of Oil Unions, a collective bargaining unit that included many independents as well as the OWIU and the UGCCW. Finally, in the late winter of 1955, the two organizations agreed to a merger, creating the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union. Clearly, the OWIU was the senior partner in the merger, and its president, O.A. Knight, headed the new union.

The UGCCW, which held annual conventions, maintained its international headquarters in Washington, D.C. Full-time officers included a president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer. The executive council was composed of the full-time officers and members elected from eleven geographical districts. At the time of the OCAW merger,

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the UGCCW paid per- capita taxes to the CIO on 72,000 members.

During the remaining years of the 1950s, leaders of the OCAW devoted much of their attention to problems emanating from the merger. Both unions had long traditions of rank-and-file participation in decision making. While the OWIU had gone further toward centralizing authority, advocates of local autonomy in both unions jealously guarded their prerogatives. These state of affairs complicated the resolution of the inevitable administrative problems following the merger. Disagreements erupted over dues payments, the degree of power to be exercised by the president, collective bargaining policies, procedures for authorizing strikes, representation at conventions, and the election of officers. Although compromises were arranged on most issues, in general terms, the positions of the larger OWIU usually predominated.

The merger eliminated existing or potential jurisdictional problems between the OWIU and the UGCCW, but it did not provide the expected organizing gains or improve the collective bargaining positions anticipated by its sponsors. The OCAW steadily added new members but lost almost as many to technological changes, new production methods, craft reclassification, and rival unions. As a result, membership fluctuates but has remained relatively constant since 1957. Moreover, the merger movement initiated by the OWIU in 1950 stalled after the formation of the OCAW in 1955. Merger talks with the International Chemical Workers Union collapsed, and although a few unaffiliated unions joined, most remained independent or merged with other unions.

The OCAW, which holds biennial conventions, maintains its international headquarters in Denver, Colorado. Principal officers include a president, two vice-presidents, and a secretary-treasurer. The executive board consists of sixteen rank-and-file members. In 1973 the OCAW reported a membership of 172,000 in 596 locals.

Donor Information

The records were donated to University of Missouri by Lester Paolucci on May 10, 1977 (Accession No. SA1049). An addition was made on May 11, 1977 by Robert Tibbs (Accession No. SA1057). An addition was made on September 30, 1985 by Rose Feurer (Accession No. SA2719). An addition was made on November 11, 1985 by Rose Feurer (Accession No. SA2722). An addition was made on November 14, 1985 by Rose Feurer (Accession No. SA2724). An addition was made on June 30, 1986 by Robert Tibbs (Accession No. SA2751). An addition was made on July 21, 1986 by Robert Tibbs (Accession No. SA2757). An addition was made on June 29, 1990 by Rose Feurer (Accession No. SA2956).

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By Laws, Local No. 1439, IBEW, 1968

By Laws, OCAW International, no date

By Laws, St. Louis Labor Council on Political Education, no date

Constitution of Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers, 1946-1977 (3 folders)

Electric Light and Power Wage Structure, Sept. 1946

Employees Representation Plan For Laclede Gas-Light Company, no date

Gas Fitters' Rules, 1928

Gas Workers Sick Benefits Rules, 1937

Guide and Manual for the Local Union Secretary, OCAW, 1959

Industrial Relations Charter, 1946

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Utility Workers Newsletter, Jan 1958

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Membership Card Envelope of William Kimberling of local no. 12006,
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Newspaper clippings from 1935 Strike, 3/28/35-7/18/35

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Daily Strike Bulletin, and two volumes of Membership meeting minutes,
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Official Payroll Savings Plan, Framed Commemoration, Local No. 6, United
Gas, Coke and Chemical Workers of America, CIO, no date

Gas House Workers, Daily Strike Bulletin, 1935

St. Louis Union Labor Advocate, April 15, 1935

Newspaper clippings, Notes and Correspondence, 1937-1945

The District 50 News, Vol. 4, No. 42, Oct. 20, 1941

Financial Reports, 1945-1949

Gas Workers Journal, 35th Anniversary, April 27, 1968

Photographs:

Unidentified framed photograph

Jack Dunleavy; Tom Morley; Martin Wagner; John Hamilton

Laclede Gas Light Company during war ("S" on building for "shelter")

Rasmussen - unidentified

Rasmussen - superintendent at Laclede Gas

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Station J, Fitting Department, Californi and Gravois Streets, view
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Labor Day Parade - Hamilton, 1937

A. E. Nicholls; Sam Laudlow; Geo. D. Dodd; John Clancy; H. O. Nies;
Pat Hinnely; V. Bixler; Al Parent; Henry Schuermann; Al Knobe
(foremen), Sept. 20, 1937

Meter Readers at Laclede Gas, c. 1937

John Hamilton, organizer in meter reading department for Gas House
Workers, became president on union in 1939? Scottish, this is from
1939?

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Row 11, Tier A, Shelf 12

Oversize

Ledgers, 1950s (oversize box)

Strike Scrapbook

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Official Payroll Savings Plan, Framed Commemoration, Local No. 6, United

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Financial Reports, 1945-1949
Gas Workers Journal, 35th Anniversary, April 27, 1968

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Laclede Gas Company, Meter Department, April 29, 1930
North District Fitting Department, Laclede Gas Light, May 12, 1930
Laclede Gas Light, Street Department, May 12, 1930
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