

# *A History and Reminiscence: Archives for Labor in the United States*

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“In no country has the value of economic records been sufficiently appreciated,” Richard T. Ely, the Father of American Economics lamented in 1910, “but in America least of all has their bearing on national history been understood.”<sup>1</sup> Ely knew whereof he spoke. Thirty years earlier he had set himself the awesome task of preparing a comprehensive history of industrial society in the New World and had then begun gathering sources. His was largely a personal quest, for there were few archival repositories gathering business records and none accumulating labor material. He searched widely, even advertising his inquiry in the “Preface” to his *History of Labor in America* published in 1886, but he harvested mostly frustration. Even then, before half of the unions in existence today had been established, and before record keeping by unions was stimulated by federal regulations, he found the task more than one individual could accomplish. Consequently, along with his history, Ely made the creation of a center for the collection of labor records his ambition. Obtaining financing to the then princely sum of \$30,000, in March 1904, he inaugurated the American Bureau of Industrial Research in the new building of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup>

From this beginning, the preservation of labor’s documentary heritage has progressed to the present when six repositories focus particularly on the records of organized labor. To an unusual degree, the course of the development reflects a spirit of cooperation. The growth of the repositories that have survived has proceeded with an extraordinary co-ordination, voluntary but disciplined, competitive but informed, that has as its goal the preservation of as much material of enduring value on organized labor as possible. The creation of each, more often than not, has reflected also the

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1 “Preface” in John R. Commons et al., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, 11 vols. (Cleveland: A. H. Clark Co., 1910-1911), 1:19.

2 F. Gerald Ham, “Labor Manuscripts in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin,” *Labor History* 7 (Fall 1966): 313-314; Richard T. Ely, *The Labor Movement in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1886).

dynamism and dedication of a handful of persons determined to see it happen.

The American Bureau of Industrial Research is a case in point. Under Director John R. Commons, its staff worked to assemble the material upon which "a full and complete history of the American industrial society" could be based. "Every possible place was ransacked and apparently impossible ones, old book shops and dusty attics," Ely wrote proudly in 1910. "Auction lists were scanned, plantation records, family correspondence, diaries, commission reports, census tables, tax digests, deed books, probate returns, everything has yielded its treasures to these research workers."<sup>3</sup> Much they laboriously copied by hand. The guide to this accumulation, issued in 1915, proclaimed it "the most complete supply of material for the history of labor in America which has been collected in any library."<sup>4</sup>

And there the laurels rested. Wisconsin Historical Society Director Reuben Gold Thwaites, so dynamic in his pursuit of early travel narratives, feared the labor connection. At least once he wrote to Commons saying that the Bureau's relationship with a labor organization, the American Association for Labor Legislation, might "get us into some . . . trouble in the way of political criticism."<sup>5</sup> Thus, after Commons became engaged in his monumental documentary publications, the Society turned away from collecting, even from processing what had been acquired.

Interest in labor materials, indeed in labor studies, hibernated for twenty years. Not until the Depression rejuvenated latent labor activity in areas of social reform, and unions turned vigorously to organizing in mass production industries, did scholars pay labor much mind. Even then, the renewed energy resulted in only one attempt to establish a labor archives, but it was far and away the most ambitious and boasted the most prestigious list of friends of any attempt before or since. Numbered among the supporters were American Federation of Labor (AFL) President William Green, Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) President Philip Murray, and Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the President of the United States. The repository was styled the American Labor Archives and Research Institute, and was launched in 1941 under the direction of Russian scholar Boris Nicholaevsky in quarters provided by the Rand School of Social Sciences, a well-known socialist institution in New York. Observing that "there does not yet exist a special scientific center for systematic collection of material and research work in this field," the promotional flyer of the new repository announced that "the Institute has

3 "Preface" in Commons, *Documentary History*, 1:24-25.

4 *Collections on Labor and Socialism in the Wisconsin State Historical Library*, cited in Ham, "Labor Manuscripts," p. 314.

5 Reuben G. Thwaites to John R. Commons, 11 May 1909, cited in Ham, "Labor Manuscripts," p. 315.

set itself the task of making a complete collection of all material, printed or in manuscript, bearing upon any phase of labor history, from any angle—historical, sociological, political or economic.”<sup>6</sup> The founder did not feel restricted to collecting the American record, for he aimed to obtain material on European unionism from immigrants who had fled the totalitarian states. By 1946, the work of the repository, by then incorporated as the American Labor Research Institute, had grown so much that Nicholaevsky called a conference on sources for labor studies.<sup>7</sup> From it the Institute emerged with the added function of serving as a national clearing house of information on the location of materials for labor history. This effort, it was hoped, would give “an intellectual status to the field of the study of labor.”<sup>8</sup> But the Institute, so auspiciously started, fell on hard times, and the bulk of the material Nicholaevsky collected, primarily non-American, was sold in 1963 to the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University. The Archives and Library of the Rand School, along with other material, passed to the Tamiment Institute of New York and thence to New York University, where it now serves as the nucleus around which a significant collection of labor and socialist records from the New York City area is being assembled.<sup>9</sup>

Not long after Nicholaevsky initiated his project, but entirely unrelated to it, the idea that became the New York State School of Industrial and Labour Relations at Cornell University percolated in the mind of State Senator Irving M. Ives. During investigations of labor relations in the state, Ives had found appalling ignorance and misunderstanding between labor and management. Believing that many of the problems the legislature was being called upon to correct could be solved if only the facts were readily accessible and known, the Senator proposed that a school be established to that end. He succeeded in 1945 and himself became its first dean. Collecting of materials began at once. The first accession, received two months before classes began, was the records of the American Association for Labor Legislation that had so fretted Thwaites thirty-five years earlier.

Despite this initial triumph, seven years elapsed before the school formally established the Labor-Management Documentation Center for its manuscript holdings from labor and business. Even then there was no surge to take advantage of the repository. Management held back, suspecting the school of being too labor oriented, and labor did likewise,

6 “American Labor Archive and Research Institute,” flyer, [1941?].

7 Dorothy Swanson to David B. Gracy II, 3 March 1975.

8 “American Labor Research Institute” (New York: ALRI, n.d.)

9 Richard C. Berner, “Labor History: Sources and Perspectives,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 60 (January 1969): 32; Daniel Bell, *The Tamiment Library* (New York: New York University Libraries, 1969), p. 16; undated clipping in Swanson to DBG II, 3 April 1975.

apprehensive of management influence. The effectiveness of the school in its instruction, coupled with the appointment as archivist of a person able to allay apprehensions, overcame the lingering reluctance. The collecting program did triumph, and the labor material the Documentation Center houses, in addition to files of locals from within New York State, includes the records of the United Transportation Union and its predecessor railway brotherhoods.<sup>10</sup>

Did the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, no longer directed by Thwaites, see the handwriting on the wall in New York? In 1950, it resuscitated its labor archives. The Labor History Project, as the effort was known during its first two years while financed jointly by labor and by a subsidiary of the Rockefeller Foundation, focused on collecting Wisconsin labor materials. Moreover, it intended to tape record the reminiscences of labor leaders, this but a few years after Allan Nevins pioneered modern oral history techniques, and six years before labor figures became a major focus of his Oral History Research Office at Columbia University. The Project achieved such success that its scope subsequently was expanded beyond Wisconsin material to include the records of international unions, among them the Textile Workers (CIO), Machinists, Labor's Non-Partisan League, and most significant, the records of the American Federation of Labor, its successor the AFL-CIO, and the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education.<sup>11</sup>

A new era in archival preservation of labor records dawned early in 1952 when the Society of American Archivists established a Committee on Labor Union Archives charged with discovering the location and nature of labor records in the United States. Less than two years later, the Committee published its initial report, which included the results of the first survey ever made of labor records. The paucity of information from all sources was reflected by the report which listed in only four pages all the labor records available for research in the United States and Europe. Of that material held by the government, by research institutions, and by unions, it was observed that "least is known about the condition and content of the records of organized labor itself."<sup>12</sup>

The Committee then approached public libraries, academic research centres and schools of business. The response was disappointing. Merely sixteen institutions reported any holdings.<sup>13</sup> Of these, twelve have never

10 Leone W. Eckert, "The Anatomy of Industrial Records," *American Archivist* 26 (April 1963): 186-187; J. G. Miller, "Labor Resources in the Cornell University Libraries," *Labor History* 1 (Fall 1960): 319; "Railroad Industrial Relations Project," flyer, Labor-Management Documentation Center, 1973.

11 Ham, "Labor Manuscripts," p. 317; D. E. Shaughnessy, "Labor in the Oral History Collection of Columbia University," *Labor History* 1 (Spring 1960): 179.

12 Paul Lewinson, "The Archives of Labor," *American Archivist* 17 (January 1954): 19.

13 *Ibid.*, 19-24; Paul Lewinson and Morris Rieger, "Labor Union Records in the United States," *American Archivist* 25 (January 1962): 39; Eckert, "The Anatomy of Industrial Records," pp. 189-190; "News Notes," *ibid.*, 15 (April 1952): 181.

contributed information on their accumulations to the journal *Labor History* and are still largely unknown for their labor holdings.<sup>14</sup> The project at Duke University to collect the records of organized labor in the South, for example, did not survive the departure of those who initiated the scheme. A mass of organizing files of the CIO from North Carolina and surrounding states remains a monument to the program.<sup>15</sup>

Up to this time, research historians had left labor history largely to economists uninterested in promoting the documentation of labor's development. A group of labor specialists met during the American Historical Association convention of 1953, however, to evaluate the situation. The historians "brought out their concern lest labor records become so much the target of institutional collectors as to end up in faraway places with scarcely-known names."<sup>16</sup> In short, the scholars desired ready and easy access to processed collections. Far from throwing a gauntlet before archivists, the statement was one with which both groups could concur. Indeed, the archivist who reported the meeting to his colleagues argued, in sympathy with the historians, that the papers of all national labor figures be deposited with the Library of Congress. But he called upon the historians to "realize that they also have an interest in showing organized labor the necessity of taking scientific care of its 'old papers'."<sup>17</sup> Concern solely with the research value in records, he added, was—still is—a disservice not only to the creators of the records (unions in this case), but ultimately to researchers themselves.

Not long afterward, historian Vaughn Davis Bornet, writing in *The Historian*, called upon his colleagues to take their proper place in the labor field—to research and write "a New Labor History"—produced by historians, not economists, based on records, not surveys, and written to study the past, not merely as cursory background for something else.<sup>18</sup> But he recognized realistically that little could be accomplished without labor's cooperation, which had been lukewarm at best. The Society of American

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14 Ham, "Labor Manuscripts in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin," 7 (Fall 1966): 313-342; Miller, "Labor Resources in the Cornell University Libraries," 1 (Fall 1960): 319-326; Francis Gates, "Labor History Resources in the Libraries of the University of California, Berkeley," 1 (Spring 1960): 196-205; Paul T. Heffron, "Manuscript Sources in the Library of Congress for a Study of Labor History," 10 (Fall 1969): 630-638.

15 E. G. Roberts, "A Program of Labor Archives at Duke University," 15 February 1952, in "D" Miscellaneous File, Research and Publicity Office, United Textile Workers of America Records, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University; Mattie U. Russell to DBG II, 14 February 1975.

16 Henry J. Browne, "Raiding Labor Records," *American Archivist* 17 (July 1954): 263. Since 1953, the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections has come into existence to overcome this objection.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

18 Vaughn Davis Bornet, "The New Labor History: A Challenge for American Historians," *Historian* 18 (Autumn 1955): 1-20.

Archivists Committee on Labor Records reported in 1957 that after five years it still "has been frustrated in its attempt to obtain the blessing of labor's hierarchy for the circularizing of labor organizations." But, the report concluded, "this is the only part of its work in locating and describing labor records that remains to be accomplished."<sup>19</sup>

The Committee gained support a year later when archivists and librarians from across the country gathered at the Tamiment Institute to combine forces in promoting labor history and the preservation of labor records. Their fruitful meeting spawned the publication *Labor History*, which would serve as a vehicle not only for encouraging research, but also for disseminating information on sources. Moreover, the group created the Ad Hoc Committee for the Preservation of Labor Records. Early in 1959 this committee, like the archivists' committee four and a half years earlier, surveyed institutions to determine the extent of the preservation movement. Encouraged by the twenty-eight responses, twelve more than received by the archivists' group, the Ad Hoc Committee decided to notify organized labor formally of the activity, and to seek from the leaders of the AFL-CIO itself recognition of the importance of archival preservation of irreplaceable, historically valuable files. The lone dissenting voice was that of an archivist who likened the "paper collection mania in the United States" to a "wartime waste-paper drive," and who argued that unions should hire their own archivists rather than put their files "out for adoption."<sup>20</sup> His plea was lost in the chorus of the AFL-CIO convention of September 1959, that passed a "Labor Union Archives" resolution encouraging member unions to put their noncurrent files in appropriate repositories. The inaugural issue of *Labor History* reported this triumph.<sup>21</sup>

Already the 1950s had proven to be a watershed in the history of archival preservation of labor records. The grandiose attempts to establish single repositories to shelter all labor files had been whittled to a practical size. Archivists, historians and trade unionists were at last joining hands to foster the work. Much more was yet to come.

The Labor and Industrial Relations Center at Michigan State University induced the state's AFL-CIO body in the late 1950s to send a questionnaire to each of its twelve hundred affiliated unions to determine the extent and condition of records in local union halls. Less than ten percent responded, leading one scholar to the conclusion that if record keeping among labor organizations was poor in the national offices (and in all too many cases it was), it must be atrocious at the local level. Yet sixty-eight of those

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19 "AA Reports," *American Archivist* 20 (January 1957): 64.

20 Browne, "Raiding Labor Records," p. 263.

21 Eckert, "The Anatomy of Industrial Records," p. 190; *idem*, "Preserving Trade Union Archives," *Labor History* 1 (Winter 1960): 98-99; Bell, *Tamiment Library*, pp. 20-21.

replying asked specifically for guidance on disposing of their files, providing a definite spark of optimism for the surveyors.<sup>22</sup>

In 1957, the search for a University Archivist at Wayne State University led to the founding, when Philip P. Mason was appointed, of what has since become the award-winning Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs. A year or so later, United Auto Workers representative Newman Jeffrey expressed to Mason his concern that because of unsystematic, unthinking destruction of records by the labor organizations themselves, the history of organized labor in America was poised on the brink of oblivion. To determine just how desperate the situation was, Jeffrey conducted his own survey of research institutions in the country. He found but a scattering of material, and worse, "no institution had a specific program for gathering and preserving union records." Mason already was well underway in laying the foundation for the establishment in 1959 of the Archives of Labour History focusing on the records of industrial unions, Michigan unions, labor politics, and related social and religious movements. Thus the first successful archival repository devoted exclusively to organized labor was launched. The United Automobile Workers donated their international files, followed by the Air Line Pilots Association, American Federation of Teachers, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Congress of Industrial Organizations, Industrial Workers of the World, United Farm Workers, and The Newspaper Guild.<sup>23</sup> More important to the future of the labor archives movement—indeed, to the practice of archivy in general—than the establishment of this all-labor repository, even than the blanket endorsement of the movement by the AFL-CIO, was the blossoming spirit of cooperation.

Those attending the Tamiment meeting in 1958 articulated this spirit by recognizing that no one archives could contain all the labor material and then by banding together in the common cause of seeking AFL-CIO recognition.<sup>24</sup> Mason described the implications for one repository when he wrote: "A major policy of the Archives has been to avoid at all costs duplication or competition from other educational institutions in the collection of union records in the Michigan area. We have witnessed too often overly aggressive institutional rivalry for historical collections which not only confuses prospective donors but impedes scholarly research. Consequently, we made a special attempt to inform other research institutions of the program."<sup>25</sup>

22 Albert A. Blum "Local Union Archives in Michigan," *Labor History* 3 (Fall 1962): 335-339.

23 Philip P. Mason, "Labor History Archives at Wayne State University," *Labor History* 5 (Winter 1964): 67-69; Warner Pflug, comp., *A Guide to the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974); Mason to DBG II, 15 May 1975.

24 Eckert, "The Anatomy of Industrial Records," p. 190.

25 Mason, "Labor History Archives at Wayne State University," pp. 68-69.

More than informing other repositories, the Archives of Labor History struck an agreement with the University of Michigan to conduct an oral history program among members of the Auto Workers. Not only did the project generate at least twenty-five collections for the archives, and lead to the transfer from Michigan to Wayne State of two valuable labor holdings,<sup>26</sup> but also it established one center in the state to concentrate the allocation of precious resources and to simplify the researcher's quest for labor material.

For fifteen years Cornell, Wisconsin, and Wayne State had the field almost to themselves. Even the Archivists' Committee on Labor Records completed its studies by publishing in 1962 the results of its final survey, that of international and state federation records. Though hardly comprehensive, the fifteen-page text and tabulation was a marked improvement over that first four-page offering, and remains still the most extensive report printed.<sup>27</sup>

In 1966, the seed of a fourth labor archives was planted. The Association of Southern Labor Historians was formed late that year "to promote Southern Labor history by encouraging the collection of labor records and the delivery of labor papers at meetings. . . ."<sup>28</sup> One of the founders, George Green, took the charge to heart. After inquiring into the state of labor records in Texas, he initiated the Texas Labor Archives in 1967 within the Library of the University of Texas at Arlington. Not only did the agency's program call for collecting original papers, it also encompassed both the microfilming of pertinent material that could not be acquired otherwise and the conducting of oral history interviews. Laudable as the design was, until a full-time director was hired two years later, its effectiveness was limited by a complement of staff so inadequate that collections could not be processed sufficiently. Since 1969 the repository has assembled more than eight collections dealing primarily with labor in Texas. The archives has recently expanded its scope to include records of related social movements, ethnic minorities, and urban and political affairs.<sup>29</sup>

During the same period, scholars representing several departments at Pennsylvania State University succeeded in having the university designated by the Pennsylvania State Library System as the state's center for labor resources. Soon afterward, when the Pennsylvania-based United Steelworkers union named the archives as the home for its noncurrent files,

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26 *Ibid.*, p. 69; Jack W. Skeels, "Oral History Project on the Development of Unionism in the Automobile Industry," *Labor History* 5 (Spring 1964): 212.

27 Paul Lewinson and Morris Rieger, "Labor Union Records," pp. 39-55.

28 Howard Lackman and George Green, "Origin and Progress of the Texas Labor Archives," *American Archivist* 11 (Summer 1970): 341.

29 *Ibid.*, 341-344; Robert A. Gamble, ed., *Descriptive Guide to the Collections* (Arlington, Texas: Texas Labor Archives, 1974), "Introduction."



the future of the place was secured. Since then, the labor archives has expanded its horizon to include other national unions, specifically the Graphic Arts International and the United Electrical Workers.<sup>30</sup>

Several other significant holdings of labor records exist throughout the country in repositories not well known for their labor acquisitions. Most collections are either local material, such as the fine archives amassed by the Chicago Historical Society, or major individual accessions, such as the Archive of the Western Federation of Miners and its successor the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers at the University of Colorado, and the records of the Cigar Makers at the University of Maryland. The oldest institutional collection is the Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The school accepted the material, an aggregation of manuscript and printed matter created and accumulated by Charles Joseph Antoine Labadie, "the gentle anarchist," in 1911. Included are records of organizations to which Labadie belonged, such as the minutes of the Washington Literary Society, the screen for the founding meeting of the Knights of Labor in Michigan in 1878. Labadie helped establish the Detroit Council of Trades and the Michigan Federation of Labor—the latter which he served twice as president. His collection of publications, containing his writings and those of his colleagues, is extensive and for runs of some journals is unsurpassed. Various tracts document not only organized labor, but also the many reform movements it so strongly supported. The University has built upon Labadie's foundation through the years, accumulating an important record of socialist and radical activities in America, as well as material from the Congress of Industrial Organizations.<sup>31</sup>

The Catholic University of America in the late 1930s began assembling a select, but highly significant, labor collection when it received the papers of Terrence V. Powderly, Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor. Strengthening the holdings relevant to the Knights, the repository also obtained the papers of John W. Hayes. From this foundation, the institution has expanded its scope to acquire a large quantity of files relevant to the CIO, including the papers of John Brophy, Philip Murray, and records of the CIO itself. The period between these two labor leaders is filled by papers of United Mine Workers president John Mitchell.<sup>32</sup>

30 Ronald L. Filippelli, "Labor Manuscripts in the Pennsylvania State University Library," *Labor History* 13 (Winter 1972): 79-81.

31 R. C. Stewart, "The Labadie Labor Collection," *University of Michigan Alumnae Quarterly Review* 53, no. 2 (May 1947): 247-253; "Labor History Collections at the Chicago Historical Society" (flyer, Chicago Historical Society); John A. Brennan, ed., "Progress Report: Archive of the Western Federation of Miners and the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, 1967-1975" (mimeographed paper issued by Western Historical Collections, University of Colorado Libraries, September 1975); "The Cigar Makers International Union of America Collection" (mimeographed paper issued by University of Maryland, 1975).

32 George A. Hruneni, Jr., to DBG II, 22 April 1975.

The sixth and most recently established repository devoted exclusively to labor records, the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University, is the only one with a regional focus. Its seed, like that of the Texas Labor Archives, was planted during the formation of the Association of Southern Labor Historians, but the germ required five years to mature. Professor Merl E. Reed of the University's History Department had discovered bodies of labor records that had passed their usefulness to the unions, that were ripe for historical study, but that, with no place for deposit, faced an uncertain future. As the University was in the process of establishing a doctoral program in history, but lacked an archival or manuscript agency in which research could be done, he conceived the idea of a labor archives. Simultaneously, the labor community of Atlanta was seeking a means of honoring one of its long-time and most influential members. The two groups found each other and arrived at a mutually fulfilling arrangement. The University agreed to create and maintain an archival repository, providing necessary space, staff, and supplies. The labor community was to hold an annual banquet to honor outstanding members and to donate the proceeds of the affair to the archives. The understanding led to the contractual founding of the Southern Labor Archives in 1970, the year after the first banquet was held.<sup>33</sup>

The first archivist began work in July 1971, after the proceeds of two banquets had been placed to the credit of the Archives. His first three tasks were to oversee the preparation of an area for stacks within the university library, to prepare a manual of procedures for the archival processing, and to draft a formal statement of policies implementing the founding contract. Basically, the policy statement explained the essence of archival enterprise to the signatories.

Though active collecting did not begin for nine months while this work progressed, the first significant accession was received in September 1971. The records of nearly a half century, 1893-1939, of the Atlanta Typographical Union reached the archives through fortuitous accident. The archivist and the president of the Atlanta Labor Council were searching the basement of the labor temple for newspaper files, which they never found, when the beam of their flashlight chanced to graze the edge of a box on a high shelf. Investigation revealed the typographical union records neatly bound and guarded by the local's dirty, worn, but handsome labor day parade banner.

The event is noteworthy in that both the method of locating the material and its age have proven to be the exceptions, not the rule. Most collections obtained by the Southern Labor Archives have come directly from the organization that created the material. Indeed, the search for labor documents has uncovered only a small number of lost caches and very few

33 Gary Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds., "Introduction" in *Essays in Southern Labor History* (manuscript in preparation for publication, copy in Southern Labor Archives).

individuals who maintain personal files separate from their organization's records. The union official who maintains union records in his home has also been found to be a rarity. The history of the records of Atlanta Lodge 1, the founding lodge of the International Association of Machinists, provides an interesting exception to this rule. For the first several decades following its inception in 1888, the organization had no office where the files could be kept. Of necessity, officers maintained files in their homes, and often never got around to passing the documents to their successors. Even after a room had been secured for an office, few records were brought in. So it happened that when the building in which the office was located burned in the mid-1960s, the organization lost few records. After the fire, interest in the history of the lodge caused members to bring in record books of minutes and financial accounts for storage in the small union office. In this manner, records dating 1893 subsequently became available for safe keeping and research in the Southern Labor Archives.

After five years, the Southern Labor Archives holds but five collections dating from the nineteenth century. Indeed, two-thirds of the holdings are less than fifty years old. Almost any collection dating into the nineteenth century is important because so few labor organizations existed then.

The Southern Labor Archives developed two nuclei for its collecting. One is the area identified by its title. Where other labor archives work with the labor organizations within a state, the Southern Labor Archives claims an entire region. Starting with the Atlanta area where initial enthusiasm for the undertaking was strongest, the reach of the collecting enterprise has steadily spread outward. The repository now holds records of three state federations—Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina—as well as the files from several Southern regional offices, such as the Woodworkers and Service Employees. Like all the others save Texas, the Southern Labor Archives also has sought the complete records of international unions, and under this policy has acquired the files of the United Textile Workers. Finally, like other labor repositories, it has sought files of non-labor organizations with which labor has cooperated in political, economic, and civil rights battles. The Georgia Democratic Party Forum that opposed Lester Maddox in 1968 is one of these.

Obviously, the establishment of new labor repositories has increased the possibility of overlapping jurisdictions and therefore, without mutual understanding, heightened the likelihood of conflict over records. To minimize this potential for wasteful competition, the existing labor repositories have drawn their collecting boundaries as clearly as possible. Moreover, guided by the principle of provenance and the fact that no one repository could hold all the worthwhile available material, the labor archives have agreed informally that the integrity of an international union's files takes precedence over geography. Thus, the Southern Labor Archives has refrained from soliciting the records of Atlanta locals of the

Auto Workers until the Archives at Wayne State University, which holds the United Auto Workers' international records, has determined whether those local files are appropriate to the project to document the international union. Only if the Archives at Wayne State declined to acquire the files would the Southern Labor Archives strive to collect these records. Of course, the converse holds true in, for example, the case of records of locals of the United Textile Workers, whose international files are at the Southern Labor Archives.

Occasionally, stubborn locals, feeling strong bonds to their area, decline to honor the understanding and instead give their material to a nearby archives. The very existence of a choice between archives, however, buttressed by interrepository cooperation, has in at least one instance led to the preservation of records otherwise lost. In this case, the old Atlanta local of the American Federation of Teachers refused to place its informative, but in parts highly sensitive, records at Wayne State University with the rest of the American Federation of Teachers records. Mentioning this reluctance and the historical value of the files, officials of Wayne State urged the newly established Southern Labor Archives to acquire the material if possible. After three years, the records were placed in the southern institution.

In a general sense, the gentlemen's agreement among labor repositories promotes the preservation of as much appropriate material as possible in the most systematic way, but has little direct effect on securing given bodies of records. Labor is not so highly organized that the archivist can merely wait for records to flow to him in a never-ending stream as from a cornucopia. No collection has been received by the Southern Labor Archives from a source that had not been approached first in some way by the archives. In essence, collecting from labor is no different from collecting from any other group. In every case, the archivist must personally contact the potential donor and explain the particular services of the archives which are appropriate to the owner and the records in question.

Obviously, the circumstances motivating gifts of records differ from donor to donor. Nevertheless, the most commonly expressed reason of labor for placing records in the Southern Labor Archives has been education. The donors hope that the material, through use in the studies of students and scholars, will contribute to a better grasp by the public of the purposes, goals, and accomplishments of organized labor. Is it surprising then that every labor archives in the United States is on, or very close to, a university campus?

Inasmuch as the desire to promote education generally motivates a large percentage of donors to archives, it is clear that the techniques of gaining the support of labor for archival work differ little from those for enlisting the cooperation of any other body. Being formally endorsed by a labor organization is analogous to receiving the support of an influential

official in a corporation. The archivist must work continuously at establishing and maintaining contacts, for persons in charge of records change no less frequently in labor organizations than in others.

Smaller organizations, local unions particularly, rarely accumulate material rapidly enough to appreciate the need for records management. It is difficult to persuade such organizations, especially if the officers change frequently, of the necessity of even a close relationship with an archives so that non-current material may be transferred to the repository regularly. Perhaps this is all the more reason why the labor archivist must be schooled in the fundamentals of records management and be prepared to serve those organizations which would benefit from a records program. Even then, the records concept might prosper only in the central office in which initially applied. In one body of regional office records accessioned into the Southern Labor Archives were found a full set of instructions for scheduling and retiring material, which obviously had been filed upon receipt and promptly forgotten.

Perhaps this independent nature of labor organizations is one reason why international unions have not established records management systems for application throughout the organization and why few attempted to establish their own archives. Often unions have given charge of whatever program might exist not to a trained archivist, but to an old-timer to whom "history" is a simple recitation of the accomplishments of the union. Worse, the program frequently is but one of several under the person's direction, in which case it commands a low priority. Add to this the fact that good archival programs demand constant education of the generators of documentation, and it is evident that an international office is an unlikely incubator for an effective records program.

An argument commonly raised against the placement of a labor union's files in a repository outside the union is fear of the uses to which the material will be put once it is beyond labor's direct control. One labor leader informed the Archivist of the Southern Labor Archives that a ruse for obtaining information from management was to send a person to a plant in the guise of a student preparing a graduate paper. This leader declined to place files in the Southern Labor Archives to reduce the possibility of management using a similar tactic. This concern motivated the drafters of the agreement between Georgia State University and the labor community to seek the creation of a small group that could serve the archivist in an advisory capacity should the legitimacy of a researcher's interest in the material ever be questioned. The result was the formation of the Southern Labor Archives Advisory Committee composed of the Chairman of the Awards Banquet Committee, two other committee members of his choice, and four university personnel including the Archivist. Not one case has had to be considered in the past five years. In addition, the Southern Labor Archives has drawn little concern from management apart from a few telephone calls from company officials, ill-acquainted with the methods of

archival research, who were seeking short answers to long questions. Only once has litigation required company attorneys to study a portion of the contents of a collection, and this work was done in the presence of counsel for the union. Obviously, the labor archives must be highly attentive to such matters, for were its actions ever to cause the labor community to believe that labor's legitimate interests were being disregarded, the archives' sources would dry up and the overall project would wither.

Once potential donors to the Southern Labor Archives have confidence that adequate precautions exist, their relations with the repository have been open. Few collections have been weeded at all before deposit. Moreover, the number of collections bearing restrictions can be counted on one hand, and most of these limitations were imposed but for short periods because the material was less than a year old at the time of donation. Doubtless this strikes to the heart of the matter. Material in archives generally is too old to be of great interest to either side. It seems that only in the cases of large organizations with broad jurisdictions, whose files contain more sensitive information, are restrictions likely to be imposed. The United Automobile Workers, for example, closed for twenty years the international office files placed at Wayne State University. Others, such as the United Textile Workers, simply choose to give only material created before a certain date—1960 in this case—and to transfer additional materials later on a periodic basis.

Does an arrangement such as that with the United Textile Workers facilitate the acquisition of material that should be preserved? The experience of the Southern Labor Archives clearly reveals that office records are the principal concern of labor record keeping, and that few unionists maintain personal files. Consequently, it would seem that any arrangement establishing a continuing relationship will be positive. Such arrangements simplify the archivist's search for material by allowing more emphasis on the location of organizational records. It might be mentioned in passing that a source which should not be overlooked in attempting to fill gaps in documentation is the material held by labor attorneys, though these files fundamentally are also office records.

Occasionally, a labor archives may be able to obtain the labor relations files of a company. These records provide more than simply a perspective on union activity unavailable through union files. For example, one of the two such collections acquired by the Southern Labor Archives supported a study of the 1949-1950 labor unrest in Atlanta. Without this documentation, this historical work would have been virtually impossible for the union had not retained copies of transcripts, notes, exhibits and other material from the negotiating sessions of the period. The second collection documents the manner in which a defunct holding company administered individual operating companies, some of which were wholly organized by one union, some by another, and others not organized at all.

The archivist of a labor collection must undertake to serve two important, but dissimilar, information needs—the historian's and the unionist's. The historian seeks policy files, usually correspondence and minutes, so as to study the ebb and flow of union activity. The unionist, because his organization is still a functioning entity, has continuing requirements for operational information from the files, which is usually more specific information than the historian needs. For example, union offices might need to refer frequently to grievance files for documentation relevant to new grievance cases, or to consult membership files concerning pension data. The essence of the matter is that the archivist must evaluate prospective holdings in two lights—one historical, one organizational.

Two broad observations emerge from this review of labor archives in the United States. The first is that no phase of development indicates that establishing, staffing, equipping, and administering labor archives is any different from establishing, staffing, equipping, and administering other historical manuscripts collections. Perhaps the characteristics that most distinguish labor archives from other manuscripts collections are the recentness of material held and the fact that generally the creators of the materials are still-functioning bodies. Consequently, labor archives must adapt procedures to the receipt over time of several parts of the same group of records. Moreover, the potential volatility of such recent material, combined with the fact that premature or indiscreet disclosure of certain information of historical value might jeopardize the entire collecting program, means that the archivist must play a more active role than usual in coordinating the needs and wishes of both donors and researchers to their ultimate mutual benefit.

The second general observation is that the most valuable contribution of the labor archives movement to the archival community as a whole is the demonstration that voluntary, conscientious cooperation and communication are not only healthy but also highly beneficial to the preservation of the documentary heritage with which archivists are charged. This is being achieved on a broad and continuing basis among labor repositories in different states, with varying capacities, and at different stages of development. Every archivist, whatever his institution or field, shares the common purpose and goal of facilitating the preservation and use of knowledge. In these increasingly complex times, archivists can hope to achieve this goal only by continuing to explore and to develop paths of genuine communication and cooperation.

## Résumé

L'article décrit un certain nombre d'initiatives prises dans le but d'assurer la préservation d'archives documentant l'histoire des travailleurs aux Etats-Unis. Des efforts du pionnier Richards T. Ely à la création de dépôts reconnus concentrant leurs activités à ce champs d'activité spécifique, d'immenses progrès ont été accomplis. A partir d'expériences précises, l'auteur décrit un certain nombre de problèmes relatifs à l'acquisition de ce genre de documents par des dépôts d'archives indépendants des organisations syndicales.