

Window Glass Cutters League of America Papers, ca. 1876-1970 A&M 2423

Window Glass Cutters League of America Papers
ca. 1876-1970



Title Statement

Window Glass Cutters League of America Papers, ca. 1876-1970 A&M 2423

Author: Staff of the West Virginia & Regional History Center

Publication Statement

Publisher: West Virginia and Regional History Center

1549 University Ave.
P.O. Box 6069
Morgantown, WV 26506-6069
Business Number: 304-293-3536
wvrhcref@westvirginia.libanswers.com
URL: <https://wvrhc.lib.wvu.edu>



Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2026-06-18 13:39:35 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

A&M 2423

Unit ID

[Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

/repositories/2/resources/394

Unit Date

ca. 1876-1970

Language

English .

Abstract

Correspondence, minute books, financial records, photographs, broadsides, publications, and other materials of the League, and the archives of other defunct craft unions entrusted to the Window Glass Cutters League of America. Organizations other than the League whose records are included are: Local Assembly 300, Knights of Labor (ca.1876-1905); Amalgamated Window Glass Workers of America (1904-08); Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Association of America (1907-1929); Window Glass Workers Association of America (1902-1904); Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Protective Association of America (1911-1925); and the National Window Glass Workers (1914-1924). See the scope and content note for information regarding record series found in this collection. See the control folder in the manuscripts room for a listing of contents.

Creator

Window Glass Cutters League of America

Extent

86.19 Linear Feet Summary: 86 ft. 2 1/4 in. (181 document cases, 5 in. each); (1 document case, 2 1/2 in.); (3 record cartons, 15 in. each); (2 clamshell boxes, 3 in. each); (2 large flat storage boxes, 3 in. each); (28 unboxed ledgers, 61 in.); (5 reels of microfilm, 1.75 in. each)

Physical Location

West Virginia and Regional History Center / West Virginia University / 1549 University Avenue / P.O. Box 6069 / Morgantown, WV 26506-6069 / Phone: 304-293-3536 / URL: West Virginia & Regional History Center

Repository

West Virginia and Regional History Center

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

No special access restriction applies.

Conditions Governing Use

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. For more information, please see the Permissions and Copyright page on the West Virginia and Regional History Center website.

Preferred Citation

[Description and date of item], [Box/folder number], Window Glass Cutters League of America Papers, A&M 2423, West Virginia and Regional History Center, West Virginia University Libraries, Morgantown, West Virginia.

Biographical / Historical

History of the Window Glass Cutters League of America

The history of unions in the American window glass industry begins with Local Assembly 300 of the Knights of Labor. By 1879, LA 300 represented the four major crafts in window glass manufacture -- blowers, gatherers, flatteners, and cutters. For the next two decades, the craftsmen in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana battled with employers largely through the auspices of the Knights, but craft jealousies also led to the formation of separate craft unions.

By 1900, the final attempts to salvage LA 300 as a single union representing all the crafts began to collapse, leading to three decades of rival organizations. The years between 1900 and 1910 witnessed the formation of the Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Association of America (ca. 1900-1933), the United Window Glass Workers of America (ca. 1902-1905), the Amalgamated Window Glass Workers of America (ca. 1904-08), the Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Protective Association of America (ca. 1908-36), and the National Window Glass Workers of America (ca. 1903-31). Each of these organizations siphoned off segments of the industry workforce, either on the basis of geography (the United, for instance, was based largely in

Cleveland) or by some combination of trades. The various factional splits and jurisdictional conflicts leading to this competition often resulted from struggles with employers and technological changes. Indeed, new labor processes eliminated the need for many of the skills of blowers, gatherers, and flatteners, and employers used these changes to defeat union demands and cause dissension in the ranks of the workers. Into the 1930s, then, as many as five different unions existed for window glass workers.

The traditional craft least affected by technological change was window glass cutting. Shortly after World War I, cutters in Charleston founded the first local of what would become the Window Glass Cutters League of America. Then, in 1922, cutters dissatisfaction with their treatment in other unions generated momentum for a national union of the craft. In 1922-23, Cutters League leaders Harry Kirchbenbower, Oakley Cline, and Harry Osmond began visiting cutters all over the nation, encouraging them to disaffiliate with other unions in the industry and to join the League. In June 1923, the founding convention of the Window Glass Cutters League of America, formally established the union. The following year, the League moved to Columbus, Ohio, where it maintained its headquarters for the next fifty years.

During the next decade, rival unions in the window glass industry slowly disbanded, but the dream of one all-inclusive union in the industry was more resilient. When organized labor turned to organizing unskilled industrial workers following the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933, the dynamic president of the WGCLA, Glen McCabe, took charge of recruiting what were called the "miscellaneous workers" in the industry. Over the ensuing year, McCabe organized nearly 10,000 new members.

By 1934, the elite cutters feared they would soon be overwhelmed in their own union, as the miscellaneous workers asserted their influence. Consequently, in a mutual parting of the ways, McCabe took his new members and formed the Federation of Flat Glass Workers. When the Committee on Industrial Organization was formed, McCabe became one of its first members, and when the American Federation of Labor expelled the industrial unions, McCabe's Flat Glass Workers affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Again, union rivalry reigned in the window glass industry. Although McCabe would return to the WGCLA in the 1940s (and even return to the presidency in the 1950s), the relationship between the AFL craft union and its CIO counterpart remained contentious for the next three decades.

In the post-World War II years, the WGCLA devoted much of its energy to trying to protect a declining window glass industry. Targeting cheap foreign imports as the principal reason for slumping production, the WGCLA joined with other glass-industry unions in pushing for high tariffs and import restrictions. West Virginia locals of the WGCLA were instrumental in forming the Glass Workers' Protective League which coordinated the lobbying efforts of the various unions.

The other major threat to the proud glass cutters was a new cutting machine introduced in 1955 by the two largest firms in the industry, Libbey-Owens-Ford and Pittsburgh Plate Glass. Almost immediately, the CIO union instituted a contest to obtain jurisdiction over the newly mechanized work. Although the WGCLA won a National Labor Relations Board case to maintain its jurisdiction, over the next two years the use of the cutting machine by all of the firms in the industry reduced the number of cutters needed for production.

For the ensuing two decades, the WGCLA limped along, its membership dropping well below the 1,000 mark. The once proud craftsmen even ceased taking apprentices in the 1960s due both to the lack of need for new cutters but also to government regulations that opened up apprenticeship to non-family members. What had for centuries been a closed craft fraternity was now passing into oblivion. The final blow for the WGCLA came in 1970s with the introduction of the revolutionary "float glass" process which threatened the American window glass industry. As several large companies shut down their plants and the numbers of WGCLA members continued to shrink, the League sought ought and completed a merger with the Glass Bottle Blowers Association in 1975, thus officially ending the history of the WGCLA.

Chronology of the Window Glass Cutters League of America

1865

First glass industry unions formed

1876

Window Glass Assemblies in the Knights of Labor formed

LA 300-Window Glass Gatherers

LA 305-Window Glass Cutters Association

LA 307-Window Glass Blowers

1879

Blowers LA 307 merges into LA 300

1880

Cutters affiliate with LA 300, joined by Flatteners

1894

Cutters and Flatteners secede from LA 300 and form craft unions affiliated with the AF of L, including the first Window Glass Cutters League of America

1895

Simon Burns elected president of LA 300, forces independent unions back into LA 300

1899-1900

Trade war in industry, reemergence of factionalism

1900

Window Glass Cutters & Flatteners Association of America formed

1902

United Window Glass Workers formed in Cleveland

1904

Amalgamated Window Glass Workers of America formed from remnants of LA 300

1907-08

Glass unions decimated by strike defeat; Amalgamated disbands

1908

National Window Glass Workers becomes major union in the window glass industry

1909

Strike against American Window Glass Company leads to formation of Window Glass Cutters & Flatteners Protective Association, 4th union in industry

1911

Imperial Window Glass Co. organized as a selling agency to stabilize the industry

1916

First local of Window Glass Cutters League formed at the Libbey-Owens-Ford plant in South Charleston

1922

Cutters League begins recruiting window glass cutters in other unions

1923

First convention of WGCLA

1924

WGCOLA moves headquarters to Columbus, Ohio

1926

First attempt of a merger of all window glass unions

1930-34

National Window Glass Workers and Window Glass Cutters & Flatteners Assoc. of America join WGCLA

1933

Passage of N.I.R.A. encourages organizing of industrial

1934

Glen McCabe helps form Federation of Flat Glass Workers

1935-37

Federation joins Committee of Industrial Organization, is expelled from AFL, helps form CIO

1937

McCabe resigns from Federation to preserve unity

1940s

WGCLA wages jurisdictional battles with United Glass and Ceramic Works (CIO)

1946

Formation of Glass Workers' Protective League in W.Va.

1957

Libbey-Owens-Ford and Pittsburgh Plate Glass begin using cutting machine

1958

WGCLA brings NLRB suit to protect cutting jobs

1959

Remaining Window glass firms begin cutting by machine

1964

Float glass process introduced in U.S.

1968

Ford Motor Co. begins to market float glass

1971

Merger talks begin with Stone, Glass, and Clay Coordinating Committee

1974

Merger talks with United Glass and Ceramic Workers fail

1975

WGCLA merges with Glass Bottle Blowers Association

Scope and Contents

Introduction:

This collection includes correspondence, minute books, financial records, photographs, broadsides, publications, and other materials of the Window Glass Cutters League of America, and the archives of other defunct craft unions entrusted to the League.

Organizations other than the League whose records are included in this collection are:

Local Assembly 300, Knights of Labor (ca.1876-1905)

Amalgamated Window Glass Workers of America (1904-08)

Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Association of America (1907-29)

Window Glass Workers Association of America (1902-04)

Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Protective Association of America (1911-25)

National Window Glass Workers (1914-24)

The Window Glass Cutters League of America archives consist of the records of the national union from its inception in 1923 until its merger with the Glass Bottle Blowers of America in 1975. In addition, the collection contains records from a number of the League's predecessor organizations dating back to Local Assembly 300 of the Knights of Labor. Comprising approximately 120 linear feet, the nearly complete files of letters, memos, reports, collective bargaining files, transcripts, photos, and publications document in detail the union activities of window glass cutters for approximately a century.

The League's records offer rich source material for many subjects of interest to industrial and labor historians. More than 30 boxes of collective bargaining records document industrial relations, wages, working conditions, and production changes in the industry. Together with minutes of local meetings in the correspondence files of the secretary-treasurer's office and grievances, arbitration cases, and national labor board cases, these records enable a reconstruction of shop-floor relations in the factories. Furthermore, statistical reports for each of the locals make it possible to chart seasonal changes in the industry, labor turnover, and unemployment for skilled window glass workers.

For historians interested in social history, the League's apprenticeship records dating back to the 1880s enable the study of labor recruitment and training while also making possible the reconstruction of the ethnic and familial character of the workforce. Individual membership cards dating from the early 1920s document geographic mobility and career patterns of the glass cutters. For more institutionally-inclined scholars, detailed minutes of conventions, executive board minutes, and files of the president's and secretary-treasurer's correspondence are particularly revealing for the study of national union administration.

Individual files suggest something of the richness and insularity of the craft-union culture embedded in the trade of window-glass cutting. Contentious relations with glass workers outside the craft are evident in the executive board minutes as well as the records of other unions in the industry. Moreover, craft animosity

toward the less-skilled workers certainly permeates the secretary-treasurer's correspondence with local officers after the rise of the CIO union in the 1930s.

Many files document the tensions between fiercely independent craft workers and a union committed to collective action. In the League's attorney files, for example, there are case records covering a suit brought by one glass cutter against the League for its infringement of his patent of a glass-cutting device that the League eventually sold to its members, the complaints of Jehovah's Witnesses who were shunned by their fellow workers and eventually fired in the weeks following the attack on Pearl Harbor for refusing to salute the flat, and the expulsion of a Belgian glass cutter for working in a non-union ship in Belgium when he returned to bring his family to Charleston. Similarly, in the collective bargaining files and the president's files, there is a vivid portrait of the difficulty than an exclusive craft union faced when it confronted the provisions of equal employment opportunity laws.

Finally, files from different series document the long struggle against being technologically displaced and rendered obsolete. The president's correspondence reveals the strategies relating to political action such as lobbying for high tariffs and import restrictions and relating to potential amalgamation with other glass unions. Meanwhile, the collective bargaining files contain the records of jurisdictional battles fought to maintain job security in the face of changes in production methods.

Series Description:

The archives of the Window Glass Cutters League of America have been arranged into seven series, as follows:

Series 1. Executive Files, 1921-1975, box 1 - box 24

Series 2. Legal Matters, 1925-1975, box 1 - box 5

Series 3. Secretary-Treasurer's Correspondence, 1935-1975, box 1 - box 106

Series 4. Collective Bargaining Files, 1918-1975, box 1 - box 32

Series 5. Membership Records, 1906-1975, box 1 - box 26 and 5 reels of microfilm

Series 6. Administrative and Financial Files, 1928-1975, box 1 - box 8 and 15 volumes

Series 7. Related Organizations, 1876-1970, box 1 - box 10 and 17 volumes

Photographs are stored in one large oversized box with the collection. A number of publications were removed from this collection and added to a separate pamphlet collection. A list of them can be found in the control folder for this collection in the manuscripts room.

Parts of series 5 have been microfilmed and are stored in the microfilm reading room. They are on five reels of microfilm and include:

Sistersville - Local Statistical Reports (1925-1938)

Norwood (Clarksburg) - Local Statistical Reports (September 1927-1955)

Norwood (Clarksburg) - Local Statistical Reports (1956-1970)

Fairchance, PA. - Statistical Reports (1924-1936)

Mt. Jewett, PA; Dunbar, WV; Mannington, WV; Torrence, CA - Statistical Reports (1923-1926)

Series 1. Executive Files, 1921-1975, boxes 1-24

This series is divided into three subseries representing the surviving files of the WGCLA's constitutional conventions, its executive board, and its presidents. Included in the first subseries are printed versions of the League's constitution and by-laws as well as printed copies of the convention proceedings. There are more extensive files, which include correspondence, for the 1960 and 1965 conventions. The first sub-series also contains the proceedings of a proposed merger convention of the League and other unions in the industry in 1926.

The principal decision-making body for the WGCLA was the executive board which was comprised, after 1935, of the president, the secretary-treasurer, and a board member from each of the locals. There are executive board meeting minutes beginning in 1925 and running until the League merged with the Glass Bottle Blowers in 1975. The minutes are indexed; the index to the early years is at the end of the volume, and the later years are indexed separately. The executive board minutes are quite detailed, and provide a fairly comprehensive guide to the major concerns of the League. This subseries also includes two boxes of

correspondence. Much of the correspondence is related to the formation of the League in 1922-23, and gives a good accounting of the factionalism characterizing the labor movement in the window glass industry. There are also scattered files around particular issues for the 1930s and 1940s.

The president's files only span the years from 1948 to 1975. They are divided into two groups reflecting a previous arrangement. The first group spans 1948-58, and includes incoming and outgoing letters in the same files. There are five boxes of correspondence with national and local officers, arranged by the name of the local union, and five boxes of correspondence with other organizations or individuals, or on particular subjects. The second group includes a chronological file of outgoing letters spanning 1959-75, and incoming correspondence on particular subjects. Of particular note are the files on Civil Rights, Tariffs, and the Stone, Glass and Clay Coordinating Committee.

Series 2. Legal Matters, 1925-1975, boxes 1-5

This series is comprised of documents, correspondence and other materials relating to the cases of members pursued in the courts rather through collective bargaining mechanisms or national labor boards (which are in Series 4). This series also includes those cases in which members brought charges against the union or in which the union disciplined its members. Notable in this series are the cases of Vital Daspermont (1925), suspended for working in a non-union plant when he returned to Belgium for his family; or the Jehovah's Witnesses who lost their jobs for failing to salute the flag in the days after the attack on Pearl Harbor; the Shuler recall case (1944) which resulted in the dismissal of the League's president; the trials of members in Henryetta, Ok., (1950-56) for refusal to pay League fines; and the George Philippe case (1942-53) in which Philippe sued the League for violating his patent. It is also worth noting how the number of international cases increased dramatically following the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act (1947).

Series 3. Secretary-Treasurer's Correspondence, 1935-1975, boxes 1-106

The Secretary-Treasurer's files detail the day-to-day administration of the League. For much of the time covered by the files in this series, the Secretary-Treasurer was H.D. Nixon, one of the founders of the League. His correspondence includes both incoming and outgoing letters, and the arrangement of the files is consistent for the years 1935 to 1960. For each year, there are typically four boxes of correspondence arranged in the following manner: correspondence with the president, with the members of the executive board (arranged by the local which the member represented), with the preceptors and secretaries of each local, with other organizations and followed by a general correspondence file arranged alphabetically. The largest bulk of the correspondence is with the officers of each of the locals. Indeed, it is through these files that the relationship of the national and local unions becomes evident. In addition, frequently contained in this correspondence are the minutes of local meetings, transmitted to the national office. Consequently, the Secretary-Treasurer's files are important in illuminating the problems facing locals and the rank and file members.

After 1960, the files become sparser, and the last ten boxes are grouped in two time periods, 1961 to 1965, and 1966 to 1974. In addition, there is a box of minutes of local meetings spanning the years 1965 to 1974. In general, to understand the relations and communication from the national officers to the rank and file, the Secretary-Treasurer's files are key.

Series 4. Collective Bargaining Files, 1918-1975, boxes 1-32

Collective bargaining records are divided into two subseries, Agreements and Contracts, and Contract Maintenance. In the first subseries are the documents concerning the negotiation of wage scales and working rules between the League and the various companies in the industry. There are three boxes of printed contracts arranged chronologically and by company spanning through the years 1918 to 1975. There are also nine boxes of negotiations files which include: minutes of union-company meetings to discuss wages, proposals and counterproposals, correspondence, and the union's files of documents and supporting materials for its proposals. There is also one box of material concerning negotiations over apprenticeship standards. In general, the documentation for later rounds of negotiations is superior to that for earlier years.

The second subseries contains materials relating to the ongoing relationship with the companies in the administration of the collective bargaining agreements. Included are nine boxes of correspondence with the companies spanning the years 1922 to 1970, one box of reports of meetings with company officials on a wide range of issues, and two boxes of arbitration case files. All of these files are arranged by company, and then chronologically. There are also six boxes of documents concerning cases brought before the National War Labor Board and the National Labor Relations Board. Finally, there are three boxes of material relating to grievances filed by members against individual companies. These are arranged by company, and then chronologically.

Series 5. Membership Records, 1906-1975, boxes 1-26 and 5 reels of microfilm

Included in this series are records pertaining to apprenticeships, wages, dues checkoffs, and the career patterns of members of the League. Particularly important is the documentation of nearly every phase of the apprenticeship program. There are six boxes of applications to learn the craft of window-glass cutting; the first box even predates the formation of the League. To be granted an apprenticeship; normally the applicant needed either a brother or a father already in the craft, so the application forms enable the tracing of family

relationships in addition to age, ethnicity and other characteristics. There are also tabulations charting applications, approvals, the work progress, and eventual discharge of apprentices.

Career patterns are documented by individual membership cards for all members of the League. These cards indicate the beginning and end dates for each member's work record at the different plants in the industry dating from the 1920s. One box of seniority lists documents age of the workforce at the various plants as well as the continuous time in service from the 1930s to the 1970s. Finally, weekly statistical reports from the locals charting wages and dues comprise thirteen boxes and six reels of microfilm. To reduce the bulk, these statistical reports have been sampled in the following manner: for the Clarksburg plant of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, a continuous run of the reports has been microfilmed; for the Charleston plant of the Libbey-Owens-Ford company, a monthly sample of the original copies have been preserved; for several of the smaller companies that went out of business in the 1930s or 1940s, the entire run was filmed; and for the remaining locals, either a quarterly or biennial sample was saved.

Series 6. Administrative and Financial Files, 1928-1975, boxes 1-8 and 15 volumes

This series contains principally the files relating to the administration of the League's headquarters. Reports of compliance with government regulations (i.e., equal employment opportunities, LM-2 reports following the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, and loyalty affidavits in the wake of the Taft-Hartley Act) comprise one box, while audit reports, monthly financial statements, and IRS reports fill three boxes. Also included are contracts and negotiations files with the union representing the League's office employees. Fifteen volumes of ledgers document in detail the finances of the League from 1931 to 1975. Perhaps the most interesting items in the series, however, are the published issues of *The Glass Cutter*, the monthly publication of the League. An entire run of the publication survives, but it was interrupted several times. Dates of publication span 1928 to 1932, 1938 to 1958, and 1965 to 1970. Finally, there is a box of memorabilia which includes a memorial album of League members serving in the service during World War II. The album carries the service record and a photo of each member.

Series 7. Related Organizations, 1876-1970, boxes 1-10 and 17 volumes

This series contains the extant records of the predecessor and rival unions in the window glass industry, several of which merged into the Window Glass Cutters League of America. Records for Local Assembly 300, Knights of Labor include a two-volume index to the membership rolls (1876-1902), certificates of apprenticeship and initiation, and some scattered issues of by-laws, minutes, convention proceedings, and wage scales, mostly dating from 1895 to 1905. There are a few items for both the United Window Glass Workers of America (1902-04) and the Amalgamated Window Glass Workers of America (1904-08) which were successors to the Local Assembly 300, attempting to represent all the crafts in the industry.

More extensive records exist for the two rival organizations which attempted to unite just the cutters and flatteners. For the Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Association of America, there are fairly complete executive board minutes (1904-30), some correspondence, membership records, wage scales and working rules, and two volumes of an apprentices register. A rival organization, the Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Protective Association of America (1909-36) began as a result of an unsuccessful strike in 1907-08. Its influence was limited pretty much to the Pittsburgh and southwestern Pennsylvania area. Records for the Protective Association include executive board minutes (1910-34), a membership ledger, an apprentice's ledger, wage scales (1916-33), and a scrapbook covering the formation of the Protective Association (1909-12). Of particular note in these records are the files illuminating the antitrust case brought against the companies and the unions in the window glass industry immediately following World War I.

Less complete files exist for the National Window Glass Workers of America (1903-31) and the Federation of Flat Glass Workers of America (1934-70). Both of these unions attempted to organize all workers in the window glass industry. For the National, there are minutes (1916-28), wage scale booklets, some correspondence, president's reports (1918-22), and two volumes of membership rolls (1903-22). For the Federation, which was started by former League president Glen McCabe and which became one of the founding organizations of the CIO, the files relate principally to the early years of the Federation in 1934-37.

Finally, there are seven volumes of scrapbooks and an oversize box of photographs containing historical documents spanning the years 1887 to 1957. They have been placed in this series because rarely do they focus on a single organization. Instead, it appears that window glass workers interested in the history of labor in the industry simply selected interesting items, often in a random fashion, to place in the scrapbooks. Included are letters, membership items, photos, newspaper clippings, and memorabilia documenting selected facets of the history of labor in the window glass industry.

Related A&M Collections

2423, 3911

Keywords

Glass industry.

Union names.

Unions. SEE ALSO Labor organization.

Amalgamated Window Glass Workers of America.

Knights of Labor. Local Assembly 300

Knights of Labor

Knights of Labor. Local Assembly 300

National Window Glass Workers of America

Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Association of America

Window Glass Cutters and Flatteners Protective Association of America

Window Glass Cutters League of America

Window Glass Workers Association of America