BHC-MSS 0229
Guide to the Papers of John Chernak
By Lisa Furchtgott
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Descriptive Summary
Creator: John Chernak
Title: Papers of John Chernak
Dates: 1943-1979, undated
Quantity: 1/2 manuscript box
Abstract: John Chernak was a plant-floor supervisor at Bridgeport's Metropolitan Body Company, a manufacturer of vehicles and engines founded in 1919. It was bought out by the Chicago-headquartered International Harvester Company in 1948. The collections consist of plant communications, newspaper clippings, advertising, in-house journals, and photos.
Language: English
Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Administrative History:

John Chernak was born in Trumbull, Connecticut, in 1897. He served as the works-manager of the Metropolitan Body Company over the 1940s and 1950s, responsible for supervising everyday production, obtaining plant equipment and materials, and negotiating labor contracts. He also helped arrange dinners and factory tours for groups of Bridgeport youth interested in joining the city's manufacturing sector, such as the YMCA Young Men's Industrial Forum. He died in Bridgeport in July 1975.

The Bridgeport-based Metropolitan Body Company was founded in 1919 as a new version of its predecessors, Metropolitan Carriage Company, begun in 1908, and the Metropolitan and Carriage Company, begun in 1912. The firms were established by Philip and William Carlson, brothers who had immigrated from Novomish, a small town near Minsk, then under Russian-imperial rule, to New York in 1905 and 1907, respectively. By 1908, both had moved to Bridgeport. After holding jobs in textile and sewing-machine plants, the Carlsons began a blacksmithing business, reflecting the trade practiced by their Jewish family in Novomish. A door-to-door setup quickly evolved into a stable shop building and selling horse-drawn wagons. By 1919, Metropolitan's carriages had evolved into gas-powered commercial trucks. Its first popular model applied technological patents filed by Philip, which placed engines under the front of the truck, increasing cargo space in the rear.

The Metropolitan Company claimed a sizable body of customers by the 1930s. Bakeries and dairies were major clients, but many others were public, ordering Metro trucks for mail delivery, highway repair, and Army transit. During World War II, the firm landed substantial contracts with the Navy, winning awards for high-quality and efficient production. In 1948, the growingly-profitable company was bought out by International Harvester, a Chicago-based corporation with a division devoted to selling farm and highway trucks. That year Metropolitan moved into larger Bridgeport

plant grounds – formerly the site of Saltex, a textile manufacturer –and installed new equipment, including a quarter-mile-long assembly belt. By 1959, its employees numbered almost 1200 and typically produced about 66 trucks per day, still sold to private companies, government services, and abroad.

In October 1968, suffering operations costs, International Harvester sold the plant to Dynamics, a conglomerate aiming to continue manufacturing Metro truck bodies. Although the new "Dyno-Truck" subdivision was awarded contracts with International and the United States Postal Service, their terms could not be met and profits sank. Production was halted in 1972 and the factory shut down in 1973.

Scope and Content Note:

Chernak's papers give glimpses into labor relations at the Metropolitan plant. Notices he distributed to floor workers in 1952 and 1954 chide them for poor-quality workmanship that drew the ire of customers and urge foremen to undertake disciplinary action against employees with repeat offenses. Materials for attendees of a 1954 Annual Labor-Management Conference, held at the now-defunct Labor-Management Institute of the University of Connecticut, list union leaders and members as participants on conference panels also featuring company and National Manufacturing Association representatives. Elsewhere, a news-clipping from 1950 records International Harvester executives touring the Metropolitan factory; another, from 1955, celebrates the achievement of the Metropolitan local of United Autoworkers and company managers, including Chernak, in negotiating the first such arrangement – ensuring members' stable payment over the next year, even if production contracts dragged – in Connecticut. Copies of the International Harvester in-house magazine *International Trail*, issued to the corporation's workers across its national range of plants and dating from around 1957, offer financial and political advice and a history of the Metropolitan Company complete with photos and descriptions of employees**.** A series of photos depict an unmanned plant as well as a set of international executives touring its interior and grounds. Spontaneous snapshots date from company dinners in 1950 and 1952.

Arrangements

Series I contains papers related to the Metropolitan Company's plant evolution, production processes and finances, social events, and advertising and in-house journals produced by the parent company International Harvester. Series II consists of photos documenting the firm's involvement in World War II industry, company dinners and picnics, a tour of the Bridgeport plant given to International Harvester executives, worker portraits, and mail-delivery truck and small-group bus models from the mid-1950s.

Administrative information:
Provenance: donated by the Chernak family
Preferred Citation: Papers of John Chernak (BHC-MSS 0229), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

Names and Subject Tracings
Personal names
Chernak, John
Carlson, William
Carlson, Philip

Corporate names
Metropolitan Body Company
Metropolitan and Carriage Company
International Harvester Company of America

Subject tracings
Trucks
Truck body and trailer manufacturers

Series I, Manuscripts

1. Telephone transcripts and conference reports, Naval Gun Factory, 1943, 1945
2. Programs, company picnics and dinners, 1947, 1948, 1950, 1952, 1958, undated
3. International Trucks advertisement, 1949
4. Newspaper clippings, 1950-1965, 1979, undated
5. Notices to employees, 1952, 1954
6. YMCA dinners, 1953, 1954
7. Labor-Management Institute conference, 1954
8. International Trail, 1954, 1957, undated
9. International Trucks with Metro Bodies catalogs, undated

Series II, Photos

10. Army-Navy "E" Day, c. 1944
11. Company picnics, 1944, undated
12. Plant interior, 1948, undated
13. Plant personnel, 1948, 1950, 1952, 1957, undated
14. Company dinners, 1950, 1952, undated
15. Metro trucks in use, c. 1954, undated
16. Metro World War II gun cartridges, undated