



Researching Labor and Industrial History at the Bridgeport History Center

By Meg Rinn

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The history of organized labor and the history of industry are both hallmarks of Bridgeport's legacy. This is thanks to a combination of factors, including extensive railroad lines to New York City and up into Boston, the presence of the Housatonic River - which creates a natural harbor that links the river to the Long Island Sound, and the development of the land by individuals and the City of Bridgeport. P.T. Barnum is noteworthy here, as his 1851 partnership with William Noble impacted the development of Bridgeport's East Side. Their combined efforts saw the development of housing, parks, and street organization that quickly attracted businesses to the area and facilitated Bridgeport's industrial boom. Companies located in the area would eventually include Bullard Machine Tool Company, the Warner Brothers Company, Wheeler and Wilson Sewing Machines, and Remington Arms among a host of others. Labor unions were organized as industries grew.

In 1977, the Bridgeport History Center began a project to collect material that spoke to the city's labor and industrial history. Funded through a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and under the auspices of archivist David Palmquist and labor records specialist Marc Ster, the Bridgeport History Center set about a massive undertaking of contacting businesses and unions in order to preserve their history. Their effort is the scaffolding that the rest of the Bridgeport History Center's collection is built upon.

Since the initial 1977 project, the Bridgeport History Center has continued to add to the labor history and industrial history collections, making the subject area one of the archive's greatest strengths. Archivist Mary Witowski's Bridgeport Working website has won multiple awards, and ensured a diverse array of voices from Bridgeport's labor history is preserved in the historic record.

This guide is divided into three sections. The first is [labor history and unions](#), the second is [industry](#), and the third contains [related material and resources](#), including mayoral papers

and personal ones. All of these categories are connected and inform each other.

Labor history and unions

Primary sources

[Bridgeport Working: Voices from the Twentieth Century](#) , also located at:

<https://bridgeporthistory.org/>

Bridgeport Working: Voices from the Twentieth Century was guided by former head archivist Mary Witowski and represents her passion for Bridgeport labor history. The centerpiece of the site is the oral histories of Bridgeporters and the work they did in the mid-20th Century: the interviewees cross gender and race lines to paint a holistic picture of the city. The Bridgeport Working website also includes timelines, glossaries, and other supplementary information to provide greater context.

[MSS 0057 Papers of Josephine and Lloyd Willard](#)

The papers outline the Willards' experiences as leaders of union locals, primarily those of the United Electrical Workers of America (UE). Workplaces represented are for the most part manufacturing plants in Bridgeport, predominantly General Electric and Columbia Records. The materials contain practical union documents, such as minute meetings, newsletters, contract agreements, and financial records, along with local and national texts reflecting the conflicts between the UE and the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE). Also included are publications from nationally-based pro-union journals as well as papers distributed by GE and the National Labor Relations Board.

[MSS 0066 Papers of Amy Heller for her thesis "The Perennial Nightmare": anti-communism Inside and Outside the U.E. Local 203, Bridgeport, 1944-1950](#)

The thesis of Amy Heller and corresponding research notes explores the complicated history of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Works of America local 203, Bridgeport, as the tensions between right and left wing factions erupted from 1944 to 1950. Included is an interview with Katya Gilden (see BHC-MSS 0124.)

[MSS 0104 Records of IATSE Local 277](#)

The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Machine Operators was founded in 1893 and is an active union to this day. Within Bridgeport, membership was weighted towards movie theater employees who worked the projection booths in the many, many movie theaters in and around Bridgeport. Founded in the 1930s and dissolved in 1993, the records of local 277 provide insight into the finances, history, and Bridgeport members of IATSE.

[MSS 0105 Papers of Steven J. Hunyadi Regarding IBEW Local 488](#)

Founded in 1913, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 488 currently

covers most of western Connecticut. This small collection offers a historical snapshot of the union thanks to the history written by union member Steven Hunyadi.

[MSS 0106 Records of Brass Workers Federal Labor Union Local No. 24411](#)

The Brass Workers Federal Labor Union Local No. 24411 represented the workers of the Bridgeport Brass Company. In the collection are various agreements and constitutions that the two parties came to agree upon over a roughly twenty year span.

[MSS 0107 Records of the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 1426](#)

The International Association of Fire Fighters was founded in 1918 for paid full-time firefighters. Due to the inherent nature of the work, firefighting requires strong protections and regulations. This collection focuses on those efforts during the 1960s and into the early 1970s.

[MSS 0108 Records of the United Steel Workers Local 7528](#)

The United Steelworkers Local 7528 served Bridgeport and was not tied to any one employer. Various agreements present in this collection demonstrate the industrial nature of Bridgeport and the needs of workers with an emphasis on the 1960s-1970s.

[MSS 0109 Records of the Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasterers Union Local No. 2](#)

The Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasterers Union Local No. 2 was a part of the Bricklayers Masons and Plasterers International Union of America, now the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers. Within this collection is a small snapshot of union activities.

[MSS 0111 Records of the United Steelworks of America Local 5623](#)

Unlike United Steelworkers of America Local 7528, Local 5623 dealt exclusively with the Jenkins Brothers, a valve and steel manufacturer. The material within the collection provides a snapshot of the work done by the union on behalf of its members.

[MSS 0112 Records of the Carpenter's District Council](#)

A part of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, the Carpenters District Council of Bridgeport and Vicinity represented all carpentry related work in the city during the early 20th Century. It regulated job ranks and paygrades, provided benefits to those injured, and was active within the larger New England region as well. This collection focuses on the earliest history of the union.

[MSS 0113 Records of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers International Union, Locals 623, 320, 601, and 719](#)

Reflecting the extensive nature of Bridgeport industry during the Second World War and

into the 1950s, the Records of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers International Union, Locals 623, 320, 601, and 719 provides a snapshot of union activity at various Bridgeport employers.

[MSS 0114 Records of the Central Labor Union of Bridgeport, Conn.](#)

Acting as a central hub for the numerous unions in Bridgeport, the Central Labor Union of Bridgeport sought to assist the workers in the city however it could, eventually becoming a political force that politicians had to work with or else lose votes. This collection represents the group's financial work, correspondence with members, and those it worked with over the years.

[MSS 0115 Labor Union Collection](#)

Over the years, the Bridgeport History Center has acquired material relating to the city's history of labor union organization. Some material came in as only one or two items, or has been located in the stacks over the years. In such cases, they have been placed in this collection and represent a large variety of material.

[MSS 0133 Papers of Louis J. Santoianni](#)

Louis J. Santoanni, born June 21, 1910, loomed large over Bridgeport's labor politics from the 1940s until his retirement in 1975. This collection primarily focuses on the activities of the International United Electrical Workers Union, with newsletters heavily featured

[MSS 0191 Constantino Pietrini Collection of Longshoremen Union Material](#)

This collection, belonging to the International Brotherhood of Longshoremen local 1398 member Constantino Pietrini, features select agreements and contracts negotiated by the union and earlier material from the Seafarers International Union strike.

[The Bridgeport General Photograph Collection](#)

Among our digitized photographs there are a number of images that show labor union members, strikes, and the day-to-day life of industrial workers within Bridgeport. Please note that only a portion of the collection has been scanned. If you cannot find what you are looking for, do not hesitate to ask the Bridgeport History Center's archivists if they can help. Please have names and local union numbers at the ready.

[Newspaper clippings collections](#)

Clippings related to labor unions are generally found in the clippings for the Democratic, Republican, and Socialist parties. Please inquire with Bridgeport History Center staff regarding specifics, as material is currently being digitized. A portion of the collection has been digitized and can be searched online on [Advantage Preservation's website](#) or on the [Connecticut Digital Archive](#).

ARC Collection

ARC represents single item archival materials, like a handbook, manual, or leaflet. There are a number related to labor unions and meetings. Please inquire with Bridgeport History Center staff for further details. Have specific names and local union numbers ready.

Secondary sources

Grassroots Historians articles

The Grassroots Historians series invites scholars and enthusiasts alike to use the Bridgeport History Center's collections in order to write short articles about whatever topic they wish to explore. A number of articles regarding various aspects of labor history have been written over the years. They are:

[Between the Hills and the Sea: Bridgeport Brought to Life Through Fiction](#)

[Bridgeport Sparks a "March to Rebuild America"](#)

[The Bridgeport Teachers' Protest of 1915](#)

[Congressional Red-Hunters Set Their Sights on Bridgeport](#)

[The Day Casco's Workers Sat Down on the Job](#)

[Everyday Heroes Fight for Patient Care](#)

[Theater for the 99% in Bridgeport](#)

Bucki, Cecelia. Bridgeport's Socialist New Deal, 1915-36. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2001. HC 975.6.B923b

This book written by Fairfield University professor Cecelia Bucki is a definitive text for labor, industrial, and political history in the first half of the 20th century. Through her analysis, Bucki highlights the ethnic dimensions of labor in Bridgeport, key strikes in Bridgeport, and the blossoming politics of socialism that eventually placed Jasper McLevy into mayoral office. It is essential reading for conducting labor and industrial research regarding Bridgeport.

Fink, Gary M. The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions: Labor Unions. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 1977. HC 331.99973.L123u

This encyclopedia offers detailed and well sourced overviews of the various labor unions in the United States up to the date of publication in 1977. Entries include key figures, moments for individual labor unions, and additional resources. While the information has since become dated, the overviews contained within this resource are still useful.

Foner, Phillip S. Militarism and Organized Labor, 1900-1914. Minneapolis: MEP Publications. 1987. HC 331.88973 FONER

A highly academic text, this publication focuses exclusively on the years prior

to World War I. This is to better explore the relationship between socialism and organized labor in the early 20th Century, the view of labor organizers towards the military and government, and key events prior to the start of the war.

Foner, Phillip S. History of the Labor Movement in the United States. Volume X: The T.U.E.L. -- 1925-1929. New York: International Publishers. 1994. HC331.88(973) FONER v. 10

Focused exclusively on the second half of the 1920s, this volume of a larger history of labor in the United States discusses both key events and key unions at the time. In addition to placing the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti into appropriate context, the text focuses on the Ladies Garment Workers union, the Machinists union, and Carpenters Union.

McAlevey, Jane. Collective Bargain, Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy. New York, New York: Harper Collins. 2020. 331.89 McAlevey

Focused on contemporary labor struggles and unions, McAlevey's text places the fight for unionization in the modern world by looking back at the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. While not a key source for industrial history, the continuity it provides with the 21st makes it an important text for modern historians.

Moret, Marta. A Brief History of the Connecticut Labor Movement. Storrs, Conn.: University of Connecticut. 1982.331.09746.M844b

Focused exclusively on Connecticut labor, this brief historical overview serves as a breezy introduction to both the state's manufacturing history and union history. While there is a heavy focus on the labor collections housed at the University of Connecticut's special collections and archives, there is repeated emphasis on Bridgeport and southwestern Connecticut's role in industry and labor.

Schatz, Ronald W. The Electrical Workers: a history of labor at General Electric and Westinghouse 1923-60 Chicago: University of Illinois press. 1983. HC 331.88.12138.S342e

This text focuses on the rise and fall of the labor unions at two of the largest electrical manufacturers in the United States. Unions included are United Electrical and Radio and Machine Workers of America.

Industrial History

[MSS 0003 Records of the Locomobile Company of America](#)

The Locomobile Company of America was founded in 1898 in Watertown, Massachusetts, and moved to Bridgeport in 1900. From 1900 to 1929 the company produced steam cars,

and then luxury internal combustion engine cars, with custom body work for the wealthiest of Americans and international customers. Locomobile was a key player and employer in Bridgeport's economy, and its presence in Bridgeport speaks to the city's manufacturing power at the start of the 20th Century. Within the records of the Locomobile Company of America are advertisements, catalogs, correspondence, legal documentation, and a wealth of images that document the history of the company from its start in 1898 to its close in 1929.

[MSS 0004 Andrew L. Riker and Riker Family Collection](#)

The Riker family had considerable impact on Bridgeport in the early 20th Century. Hired by the Locomobile Company of America, engineer Andrew L. Riker worked in Bridgeport for two decades. His time as the chief of engineering and vice president of the Locomobile Company occurred at the same time that Bridgeport was producing seemingly everything, from heavy industrial products to small consumer goods. The papers of Andrew L. Riker and the Riker Family provide a look into how Riker himself functioned, how he worked, and what his private life was like. Materials also relate to his immediate and larger family, and help to offer a full picture of the family. Prominent within is material related to the early automobile industry, as well as family photographs and patents.

[MSS 0005 Records of the Locomobile Company of Blueprints](#)

Following the purchase of the Bridgeport based Locomobile Company of America by Durant Motors in 1922, Locomobile continued to produce autos and automotive parts. The blueprints within this collection document what was produced from 1924 to 1926.

[MSS 0020 Papers of Sam Burger of Columbia Records](#)

Columbia Records was a major employer in Bridgeport, and had its origins in the American Graphophone Company, which was based in the city. Starting in the 1960s and well into the 1980s, Sam Burger saw the transition of Columbia Records' products go from LPs to tapes to CDs. Also in his records is a notebook belonging to Alfred VanSant Bodine, which contains the exact chemical makeups of various records during the late 1919s and into the 1920s, offering insight into manufacture and production in the company's early days, as well as the mid 20th Century.

[MSS 0021 Records of Warner Corset Company](#)

One of the biggest manufacturers in Bridgeport, the Warner Corset Company, later the Warner Brothers Company, then Warnaco, was a major part of the city's industrial history. Starting with Dr. Warner's Health Corsets the company expanded, manufacturing corsets and then bras and other undergarments such as girdles, later branded as slimwear. The company left Bridgeport in the 1970s. It remained in existence until 2013, when it was bought out by PVH. This archival collection documents the early history of the company

into the 1970s through family papers, corporate documents, daily operations, garment construction information, and extensive advertising material, all donated by Warnaco.

[MSS 0028 Papers of A.L. Barber and S.T. Davis Jr.](#)

The Locomobile Company of America's first two presidents were father and son-in-law, Amzi L. Barber and Samuel T. Davis, Jr. The close familial relationship the two had in running not only Locomobile but other business ventures as well, including Barber's asphalt company, is present and heavily represented in these papers.

[MSS 0043 Records of the Warner Brothers Company 20 Year Club](#)

Starting in the 1940s and continuing into the 1950s, the Warner Brothers Company held annual banquets to honor the employees that had been with the company for 20 years. An unknown company compiler created several scrapbooks documenting the event.

[MSS 0056 Select Records of Bryant Electric from Roy Wiley](#)

The collection contains four bound volumes of patents, along with several product catalogs that run from the 1920s to 1988, providing a broad overview of Bryant's products.

[MSS 0061 David E. Bullard Collection of Bullard Company Materials](#)

Featuring materials saved from his family's company, the David E. Bullard Collection of Bullard Company Materials represents a small insight into the Bullard Machine Tool Company's operations. Of particular note are the maps and patents present in the collection,

[MSS 0062 Records of Bullard Machine Tool Company](#)

Founded in 1894 by Edward Payson Bullard Senior, the Bullard Machine Tool Company was a massive industrial player in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Creating large tools to fabricate metal parts, the company was a powerhouse for much of the early to mid 20th Century. Within the collection are photographs of their major products, guides, and corporate material.

[MSS 0072 Records of Sprague Meter Company](#)

Sprague Gas Meter Company was a manufacturing firm headquartered in Bridgeport, Connecticut and founded in 1900. Over the following 85 years, it developed domestic meters featuring new methods for measuring and dispensing gas, along with many other technologically-novel products geared toward industrial machinery, home security, military tools, and cooking, made and stored within plants located across the U.S. and abroad. This collection consists of newspaper articles, advertisements and catalogs, usage and repair guides, conventional materials, newsletters, photographs, and oral histories.

[MSS 0086 Records of the AW Burritt Company](#)

Founded by Arthur W. Burritt in 1893, the A.W. Burritt Company acted in two capacities: as a lumber mill that produced building supplies and as a real estate company that bought land and built on it. This very active company was a major supplier of jobs in Bridgeport, and the material within spans the company's whole history.

[MSS 0178 Records of the Connecticut Foreign Trade Association](#)

The Connecticut Foreign Trade Association began in July 1920 at the University Club in Bridgeport, among a group of manufacturers who wished to start a group for those involved in exporting. Named the Export Managers Club of Bridgeport, it was intended to be a group that exchanged information regarding the shifting issues of export. The collection primarily contains minutes and bulletins and newsletters, offering documentation of executive level management and what was communicated to membership from the group's founding to the time of donation.

[MSS 0186, Lyman Thunfors Collection](#)

Lyman Thunfors was born in Muskegon, Michigan and was an industrial executive best known for his time as the Executive Vice President at Jenkins Brothers. The collection contains photographs of the company in the mid-20th Century along with some documents.

[MSS 0198, William T. Cole Jr. Collection of Remington Arms Company Material](#)

William T. Cole Jr. worked in product development for the Remington Arms Company from some time in the 1940s into the 1970s or 80s. The collection features some of his work with chemical lighting, along with documents relating to Remington's structure, telephone directory, and some employee photographs.

Unprocessed

The following archival collections related to Bridgeport industries reside in the Bridgeport History Center, but have not been processed at this time. Please inquire with Bridgeport History Center staff regarding research and access.

- Bridgeport Brass Company
- Coulter & McKenzie Machine Co.

[The Bridgeport General Photograph Collection](#)

Among our digitized photographs there are a number of images that show various industrial locations. Please note that only a portion of the collection has been scanned, and so if you cannot find what you are looking for, do not hesitate to ask the Bridgeport History Center's archivists if they can help.

[Newspaper clippings collections](#)

Clippings for industrial history are located under the following box names:

Bakeries	General Electric
Bassick Company	Locomobile Company of America
Bridgeport Brass Co.	Manning, Maxwell and Moore
Bryant Electric	Remington Arms Co.
Carpenter Steel of New England	Singer Manufacturing Company
Columbia Record Company	Warner Brothers Company
Dictaphone Corporation	

A portion of the collection has been digitized and can be searched online on [Advantage Preservation's website](#) or on the [Connecticut Digital Archive](#).

ARC Collection

ARC represents single item archival materials, like a handbook, manual, or leaflet. There are a number related to major industrial players, frequently in the form of advertisements. Please inquire with Bridgeport History Center staff regarding specifics, and have names at the ready.

ORC Collection - Organizational Reports and Catalogs

The Organizational Reports and Catalogs collection holds a number of reports, catalogs, yearbooks, and other ephemera published by major and minor industries and organizations within Bridgeport. For a listing of which organizations and corporations are represented in the collection, [please click here](#).

Secondary sources

Bucki, Cecelia. Bridgeport's Socialist New Deal, 1915-36. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2001. HC 975.6.B923b

This book written by Fairfield University professor Cecelia Bucki is a definitive text for labor, industrial, and political history in the first half of the 20th Century. Through her analysis, Bucki highlights the ethnic dimensions of labor in Bridgeport, key strikes in Bridgeport, and the blossoming politics of socialism that eventually placed Jasper McLevy into mayoral office. It is essential reading for conducting labor and industrial research regarding Bridgeport.

Related collections

[MSS 0002, Jasper McLevy Collection](#)

The Jasper McLevy Collection represents the professional and public life of Jasper McLevy, Bridgeport's socialist mayor from 1933-1957. It holds records from his administration,

documentation from the Socialist Party of Bridgeport including minute books and account books, and personal scrapbooks compiled by McLevy, as well as speeches and additional material.

[MSS 0087 Papers of Henry Elstein regarding Mayor Jasper McLevy](#)

Containing Elstein's thesis, "The McLevy Complex: analysis of voting behavior in Bridgeport, CT" and other research papers, this small collection offers insight and research into Bridgeport's socialist mayor six years after his last term in the position.

[MSS 0029 Jack Goldring Collection](#)

Jack Goldring was an active member of the Communist party in Connecticut. A labor leader, he was based in Bridgeport. Originally working for General Electric, Goldring went on to become a carpenter and builder, then a home inspector, through which his dedication to creating affordable housing for all was apparent and active.

[MSS 0124 Papers of Katya and Bert Gilden](#)

Writing as K.B. Gilden, Katya and Bert Gilden were Bridgeport based authors. Their novel Hurry Sundown (later turned into a film of the same name) focuses on race and class in Georgia following the second World War, and their novel Between the Hills and the Sea is set in a lightly fictionalized Bridgeport and noted for its accuracy of union politics and life on the shop floor. This collection features both their individual papers, the creative process and finished works for their novels, short stories, and screenplays. There is also some material relating to their union activity, specifically as described in Bert's testimony before the House Unamerican Activities Committee.

[MSS 0159 Papers of Herman Steinkraus](#)

Herman Steinkraus is best known in Bridgeport for being the long-time president of the Bridgeport Brass Company and one of the founding members of the Barnum Festival. The collection contains the speeches he gave as the president of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, photographs of his professional activities and interests, and information about the construction of I-95 in Connecticut.

Newspapers

Bridgeport Herald (1890-1973)

The Bridgeport Herald was frequently sympathetic to labor causes. In seeking public reaction to events such as strikes, referring to the *Herald* can often help make sense of a more labor friendly reaction. Please note that the *Bridgeport Herald* is not indexed or digitized, and must be searched on microfilm page by page.

Bridgeport Times Star (1918-1941)

Like the *Herald*, the *Times Star* was sympathetic to labor causes and can also be searched to understand a labor friendly public reaction. Please note that the Bridgeport Times Star is not indexed or digitized, and must be searched on microfilm page by page.

Secondary sources

Bucki, Cecelia. Bridgeport's Socialist New Deal, 1915-36. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2001. HC 975.6.B923b

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