William H. Sylvis Collection, Manuscript Group 99
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Special Collections and University Archives
4 boxes; 4 linear feet

Biographical Note

William H. Sylvis (November 26, 1828-July 27, 1869), a native of Indiana County, was born in Armagh, Pennsylvania. His father, Nicholas Sylvis, worked as a wagon-maker. As a result of the Panic of 1837, the Sylvis family faced economic hardships, and its members scattered in search of employment. William Sylvis found his way to Union County, Pennsylvania, where he learned the iron molding trade at Forest Iron Works. In 1852, he married Amelia A. Thomas, and the couple settled in Philadelphia. After being elected secretary of the Iron Molders’ Union, Sylvis proposed that a national meeting of iron workers convene. His dream became a reality in July 1859, when the Iron Molders International union held its 1st annual meeting. Sylvis gave a rousing speech to the delegates, and this address was incorporated as part of the preamble of the newly-created union constitution. In 1860, union members elected Sylvis treasurer of their organization. During the 1863 convention, held in Pittsburgh during the height of the Civil War, Sylvis was elected to the prestigious post of president of the molders’ union.

For a year immediately after the Civil War, William H. Sylvis served as editor for the Iron Molders’ International Journal, a monthly periodical (this serial is available for research in the IUP Special Collections and University Archives). As American labor leaders pressed for the establishment of a national trade union to unite the interests of workers, Sylvis advocated union solidarity. He was instrumental in the creation of the National Labor Union (NLU), instituted in 1868. In fact, Sylvis became president of the NLU and, in effect, was the spokesman for over 600,000 American workers. Sylvis advanced the labor cause, supporting the eight-hour day, arbitration of labor disputes, and tenement-housing reform during his tenure as NLU president. At the apex of his career, William H. Sylvis died on July 27, 1869, at age of 41. During his lifetime, William H. Sylvis had won the reputation as an ardent defender of the working class. His determination and dedication propelled him into the national spotlight as a popular labor leader a generation before the creation of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in 1890.

Scope and Content Note

Series A: Iron Molders’ Union Documents, Sylvius Society Files, and Pamphlets
This series contains a wide array of documents relating to the American labor movement. Numerous files focus specifically on the International Iron Molders’ Union of North America, a union which was in the forefront of labor relations for much of American history. A full-length history of the union is included in this series. In addition to housing...
Iron Molders’ Union materials, this series contains information about labor leader William H. Sylvis, who was instrumental in the formation and early development of the Iron Molders’ Union. Sylvis made many notable contributions and statements, and both a biographical file and a pamphlet of his collected quotations are of particular interest in Series A. Moreover, general pamphlets about labor unions are also housed in this series.

Series B: Iron Molders’ International Journal
Series B is a set of issues of the International Iron Molders’ Journal, a monthly periodical published by the Iron Molders’ Union. Comprehensive in nature, this collection includes journals published from 1871-1988. All iron molders’ journals are stored together on the shelves designated for rare book periodicals in the IUP Special Collections and University Archives. Journals for the years between 1871 and 1885 are unbound and stored in boxes. Journals covering the years from 1896 to 1972 are bound and shelved. Journals for the years between 1973 and 1988 are unbound and boxed.

Series C: Books and other Publications
54 books pertaining to the history of the labor movement in the United States are found in this series. The texts range from classic accounts of labor unions, to analyses of significant social and economic issues, to biographies of prominent labor leaders, and they are stored in the Rare Books Collection in the Labor and Industry collection.

Series D: Oversized Materials
Oversize materials in this collection include an original 20x24 framed portrait photograph of William H. Sylvis.

Content List
Series A: Iron Molders’ Union Documents and Sylvis Society Files, and Pamphlets
Box 1 Iron Molders’ Union Documents (15 folders)
3. Minutes of Meetings of Executive Board of the International Molders’ Union of North America, 1912-1917. (3 copies)
4. Minutes of Meetings of Executive Board of the International Molders’ Union of North America, 1907-1912.
7. Sylvis Said Pamphlet of William H. Sylvis quotes (3 copies)
8. Our Picture Gallery International Molders’ Union of North America Pamphlet (2 copies)
9. Our 36th Convention International Molders’ Union of North America Brochure

11. International Molders’ Union of North America Local Union Directory

12. Steward’s Manual (3 copies)


14. William H. Sylvis Biographical Information


**Box 2: Sylvis Society Files and Pamphlets (folders)**

1. Sylvis Society Correspondence

2. Costing Economic Benefits

3. Thompson Hearings

4. Address by John P. Frey to the Army Industrial College

5. Research and Education Department of the International Molders’ Union of North America Journal

6. International Comparison of Average Net Hourly Earnings in 1980

7. International Molders’ Union of North America Molders’ Union Correspondence

8. Newspaper Articles

9. Sand and Mold Handling Mechanized

10. Labor Political Publications

11. Job Evaluation Training

12. Employment Rights and Regulations

13. 1983 Basic Steel Agreement


16. The Reacting Americans

17. Automation and Major Technological Change (A panel discussion)

18. Canadian Labor Congress List of Audio Visual and Print Production

19. Expedited Labor Arbitration Rules of the AAA

20. Labor Arbitration: The Insecure Profession?

21. Labor Arbitration: Procedures and Techniques (2 copies)

22. Agenda, February 1966

23. Mobilize America’s Resources to Cope with Automation

24. Reaganomics: The Second Dose

25. Information for Employers and Unions Entering into a Collective Bargaining Relationship for the First Time (2 copies)


27. Education for Employment

28. Made in America

29. The People’s Lobby

30. “Bulletins and Books”


33. “Coordinated Bargaining: Labor’s New Approach to Effective Contract Negotiations” (3 copies)
35. “Point of Order”
36. “Songs for Labor”
38. “Help for the Troubled Employee”
39. “AFL-CIO Songbook” (2 copies)/
40. “Job Health, Safety, and You” (2 copies)
41. “What Is a Union?” (2 copies)
42. “What to Do When You Lose Your Job”
43. Voter, Winter 1985
44. “Men’s Jobs for Women: Toward Occupational Equality” (3 copies)
45. “How to Run a Union Meeting” (3 copies)
46. “Rights and Responsibilities Under the LMRDA”
47. “The Layman’s View of the National Labor Relations Act for Organizers”
48. “Sing for the Union”
49. “Playing Safe: Songs for Safety”
50. “ILPA Press Relations Guide”
52. “In-House Polling”
53. “Labor Looks at the 93rd Congress”
54. “Your Boss and the Union as Seen Thru [sic] the Eyes of a Baby” (2 copies)
56. “Labor looks at Automation” (2 copies)
57. “Labor Relations in an Economic Recession”
58. “Cybernation: The Silent Conquest”
59. “A Union Member’s Guide to the New Right”
60. “This Is the AFL-CIO”
61. “What Does Uncle Sam Say about Joining a Union?” (2 copies)
63. “The Worker’s Stake in Social Security”
64. “Primer for Free Americans” (2 copies)
65. “Everything You’ve Ever Wanted to Know about Unions But Were Afraid to Ask”
66. “Four Good Reasons Why I Joined the International Molders’ Union” (2 copies)
67. “When Great Men Agree” (2 copies)
68. “Strike Assistance” (2 copies)
69. “Future Aspects of Benefit Plan Bargaining”
70. “Black Trade Unions in South Africa”
71. “Union Membership in West Virginia: A Profile”
73. “Work Measurement” (2 copies)
74. “Films for Labor” (2 copies)
75. “Delivering Your Message to Congress”
76. *Labor Relations Reporter*, Nov. 22, 1982
77. “A Layman’s Guide to Basic law under the National Labor Relations Act”
78. “Seminar on Manpower Policy and Program: Measurement of Technological Change”
79. “Manufacturers’ Industrial Relations Association: 100th Annual Meeting Memento”

**Series B: Iron Molders’ Union International Journal**

**Box 3 1871-1885 and 1973-1988** (bound journals 1896-1972 shelved with Rare Book Periodicals)
1. 1871
2. 1872
3. 1973-1988 unbound journals (11 ½” x 16”)

**Series C: Books (in the IUP Libraries, Stapleton Library Circulating Collection or Special Collections, or the Orendorff Music Library)**


**Series D: Oversized Materials**

1. Framed 20x24 Portrait Photograph of William H. Sylvis (1828-1869) as seen on page 2