

BY DEBRA BERNHARDT

HOW  
TO  
KEEP

# UNION RECORDS

*A Guide for Local Union Officers and Staff*

LABOR'S  
HERITAGE  
· P R E S S ·

*Silver Spring, Maryland*



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## INTRODUCTION

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**T**he amount of guidance local union officers receive in keeping the records of their locals varies greatly. Some international unions provide their locals with detailed administrative and financial records manuals, others leave the initiative up to the locals. Many call upon record-keeping professionals, such as archivists, to provide them with practical suggestions on how to maintain their records, which ones to save, and how to preserve these for posterity.

This manual represents a distillation of labor archivists' experience. It incorporates practical information for storing, filing, and saving or disposing of local union records. In addition, it provides a glossary of records management terminology. For more detailed assistance, contact one of the libraries or archives in your area listed in Appendix 3. The George Meany Center for Labor Studies now offers a workshop on records management for local unions. Interested people should call (301) 431-6400 or write to 10000 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20903.

This guide is not the last word on the subject. Local unions vary considerably in size and nature, and suggestions and examples contained here are not equally applicable. Local officers should also bear in mind that there are wide variations in the constitutional responsibilities of different unions and in legal record-keeping responsibilities of the United States and Canada and the different states and provinces. *This guide is best used in conjunction with advice and guidelines provided by international unions and by legal and financial counsel.*

**S**ometimes, especially when a local has grown large enough or has existed for several years, record keeping is a chaotic mess. Documents are difficult to locate. File cabinets are cluttered with old materials that no one knows what to do with. Things end up missing.

Records management brings your records under control and prevents such problems from occurring. It is a tool that insures the efficient and accurate creation, use, maintenance, and disposition of your records. It helps protect the benefits and rights of local members and keeps their officers well informed and effective. Finally, records management preserves the heritage and history of your local for posterity and research.

A sound records management program consists of five elements:

- Securing
- Filing
- Saving/Disposing
- Protecting
- Preserving

This manual discusses each of these. By understanding the concepts behind these elements, you can easily implement a records management program.

**Records management  
is a tool that  
insures the efficient  
and accurate creation,  
use, maintenance,  
and disposition of  
your records.**

# **R E C O R D S**

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**B**efore going further, it might help to understand exactly what a record is. Records are all materials created, received, or used for the official business of an organization. Various types of documents that exist in your local union's files are considered records. They consist of all the materials that your local generates *itself*, such as

**Records are all  
materials created,  
received, or used for  
the official business  
of an organization.**

- memorandums and correspondence
- reports
- minutes of meetings
- bylaws
- constitutions
- contracts
- accounting records
- grievance records
- arbitration records
- membership records
- election records

Materials other than paper can be records, depending on the information they contain. These include

- photographs/slides
- videotapes
- motion picture film
- architectural drawings
- computer disks (floppy and hard disks)
- magnetic tape
- microfilm

Records are unique to the institution that creates them. Therefore, externally published magazines and books are not considered records. Materials published by your local are, however, and one of each should be maintained as a *record copy*.

Sometimes records are labeled according to the frequency of their use. *Inactive* or *noncurrent* records are those never or rarely used. *Current* records are those that are accessed frequently. More definitions can be found in the *Glossary*, pp. 42-44.

**L**ocal union records are an important union asset that documents the rights and activities of all local members. Records created by local officers and staff while conducting union business are the property of the union, not the individual. Therefore, they should be kept under direct local control.

This policy should be stated in writing. If not already covered in the constitution and bylaws of your national union, consider adding the following clauses to the local's bylaws:

1. All records created by elected or appointed local union officers in the course of conducting union business are the property of this local. Such records must be complete and kept in an orderly fashion and surrendered to the local upon the retirement or removal of said officers.
2. Upon the dissolution of this local, all of its records become the property of the national union with which it is affiliated. If the records are of no interest to the national union, the local should contact a labor history repository or historical society in order to arrange for the continued care of those records deemed historically significant.

For information about labor history repositories and local historical societies, see the section on *Preserving Records for Posterity*, p. 29.

Records should be kept in the local's office, not at any officer's home or workplace. If space is a problem, then inactive records may be removed to an off-site storage facility (see *Retire noncurrent files to storage*, p. 15).

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## **F I L I N G   R E C O R D S**

**Y**ou need to efficiently retrieve information in your files. How often have you wasted time searching for records because they were misfiled, because there are numerous filing systems, because there is no organization to the files, because of some previous filer's idiosyncracies, or because the files are cluttered?

Key to timely retrieval is a single, simple, and logical *filing system*. An easy-to-follow system ensures accurate filing and retrieval. It maintains consistency in filing despite staff turnover. Finally, such a system allows for easy identification and disposition, or removal, of inactive records.

There are eight suggestions to help you revise your current filing system or establish a new one:

- Keep records of different officers or committees separate
- Divide records into official and reference files
- Separate records according to format
- Establish record series
- Arrange records within series
- Store records in filing cabinets
- Keep your files manageable
- Retire noncurrent records to storage

These points are explained in detail below.

### **Keep records of different officers or committees separate**

Keep the files of each officer or committee separate from those of other officers or committees. This practice establishes groups of records within your local according to office—and therefore according to function. It prevents interfiling of records that are similar in type but actually differ in function.

**Key to timely**

**retrieval is a single,**

**simple, and logical**

**filing system.**



### **Divide records into official and reference files**

For each officer or committee, divide the files into *official files* and *reference files*.

*Official files* relate to your local's own work and those for which your international has made you responsible. Examples include the local's minutes, officers' reports, internal publications, contracts relevant to local members, equipment inventories, local membership records, financial records, election records, and correspondence. Some of these are of permanent value and must be retained (see *Saving and Disposing of Records*, p. 18).

*Reference files* should contain materials that may provide you with information but do not directly relate to the work of your local. Reference files can consist of subject files, which contain externally produced materials on topics of interest to the officer or committee; and publication files, which contain externally published materials like the international's journal and newsletter, general periodicals such as *Time*, and government reports. Such items should be kept separate from the official files because they do not have long-term value. *Discard reference files when they are no longer useful.* Encourage union officials to receive personal publications at home. Publications that the local subscribes to should be given to the library or research department or discarded after a short period of time.

### **Separate records according to format**

Keep records of different formats separate from each other. In other words, do not interfile computer disks, photographs, film, etc., with your paper records. Store all items of a particular format together in proper containers.

### **Establish record series**

Further divide records by establishing record series within each officer's or committee's official files. A *record series* is a group of records that are similar in type, such as correspondence; that relate to a particular subject or function, such as contracts; or that are created because of a particular activity, such as election records. Because each local is unique, the division of its files and establishment of series will differ from that of another local. The table on the following page provides general guidelines for establishing series. It shows the potential officers and committees that a local could have and the record series that might be created for each.

<b>Office</b>	<b>Series</b>
General Office Files or President's Files	Correspondence—with internationals, other locals, outside people Reports Community affairs Inter-office memos Other materials originating with the local
Business Manager (Agent)	Payroll Purchasing
Recording Secretary	Correspondence Reports Election records Membership records Minutes Bylaws Constitution
Secretary Treasurer	Correspondence Reports Contracts Legal papers Financial records Audits Pensions, insurance Government reports
Executive Committee	Correspondence Minutes Bylaws
Negotiating Committee	Agreements, by year Negotiation materials—minutes, notes, drafts—by contract year
Grievance Committee	Step minutes Current grievance cases, by number Closed cases, by contract, paragraph, or BNA heading Arbitration cases, awards, transcripts

A local might have other committees and officers that would generate unique record series.

A records survey is a good way to list the contents of your records. Through the survey, you compile information about your record series into a *records inventory*. Each inventory sheet will indicate the size, arrangement, dates, storage, and content for a particular series. An example can be found on the following page. Also, a blank sheet has been provided on p. 13 for you to copy and use. Once you have completed the records inventory, keep these sheets accessible in a central office, such as that of the secretary or business agent.

### **Arrange records within series**

Arrange files and records within series for the most convenient retrieval. Examples of standard filing practices for particular series follow:

<b>Series</b>	<b>Arrangement</b>
Bylaws	by date
Minutes	by date
Reports	by date
Contracts	alphabetical by name of employer, then by date
Correspondence	alphabetical by name of outside sender or recipient, then by date
Legal papers	alphabetical by type of record (ex: arbitration decisions, deeds, legal cases), then alphabetical by name of party
Reference files	alphabetical by title of publication or subject

### **Store records in filing cabinets**

Use standard filing equipment. For materials stored in the office, use standard metal, lockable file cabinets. For materials held at off-site storage facilities, use standard cardboard record storage boxes (available through most office supply catalogs). If the items are especially valuable or irreplaceable, store them in a fire resistant cabinet labeled "UL Listed"

# EXAMPLE OF A RECORDS INVENTORY

Person Conducting Survey	TJK
Date of survey	1/1/92
Person in Charge of Records	RSC

Officer/Committee/Department Name	Record Series Title	Location
Secretary Treasurer	Correspondence	Current: S-T Office Back to 1939: Storage Room

## Record Series Description

Incoming correspondence and copies of outgoing letters of S-T. Includes items that accompanied letters.

## Record Format

Letter-size paper, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, brochures

## Arrangement (alphabetical, chronological, other)

Chronological by year, alphabetical by correspondent under year

Dates	File Break (fy, calender year, other)
1939-current	calender year

## Quantity (number of drawers, volumes, disks, other)

Current: 1/4 drawer in standard file cabinet  
Back to 1939: 3 record center boxes

## Annual Rate of Growth (quantity/year)

1/4 drawer per year

## Storage (method of storage and storage equipment)

Current: vertical storage in standard file cabinets  
Back to 1939: vertical storage in record center boxes

## Indexing

none

## Other

# **R E C O R D S   I N V E N T O R Y   S H E E T**

Person Conducting Survey \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of survey \_\_\_\_\_  
Person in Charge of Records \_\_\_\_\_

Officer/Committee/Department Name	Record Series Title	Location

Record Series Description

Record Format

Arrangement (alphabetical, chronological, other)

Dates	File Break (fy, calender year, other)

Quantity (number of drawers, volumes, disks, other)

Annual Rate of Growth (quantity/year)

Storage (method of storage and storage equipment)

Indexing

Other

(see *Protecting Vital Records*, p. 27). Keep records in letter size file folders (that hold 8-1/2" x 11" paper) unless more than 25% of them are legal size (8-1/2" x 14").

Label file drawers with the record series and beginning year:

Correspondence, 1991-

Grievances, 1991-

Every folder in each drawer should be accurately labeled with at least the series name and the date of the earliest document in the file. A single folder of current records should have no more than five years of documents in it. If you are no longer filing records into a folder, put the date of the latest document on the folder label. Examples of folder labels can be found on p.17.

### **Keep your files manageable**

After your filing system is set up, it must be maintained properly. In addition to filing documents in the correct place, you should avoid cluttering your files. The following pointers provide some guidelines.

- *Do not keep externally published materials (magazines, journals, books, newspapers) in these files except under special circumstances.* An exception is for articles about your local, which should be clipped out of the publication, photocopied on acid-free paper, and filed along with the photocopy. Be sure to indicate the name and date of the periodical or newspaper on the copy. Acid-free paper can be obtained from the businesses listed in Appendix 1, *Sources of Archival Supplies*, p. 34.

- *Do not file duplicates.* It is less expensive to make copies on demand. This rule also applies to publications your local has produced; you should keep only one copy as your record copy. An exception would be the clippings mentioned in the previous paragraph.

- *Do not file routine materials, such as letters of transmittal, form letters, rough drafts, phone messages, cover letters, or anything illegible.* If such items are needed for a brief period, keep them in a special "day" file and then discard them when they are no longer useful. With form letters, keep only one copy and write "acknowledged" next to each name. Do not keep a separate copy of each one sent! On the other hand, some "routine" materials may have annotations on them such as important comments, recommendations, or decisions that add significantly to a proper

understanding of the union's business. They should be retained as part of the official files.

- *Each time you want to create a document, ask yourself if it is really necessary to do so.* Will a phone call do instead? Writing letters can cost more (you have to type and store them) than some long distance calls. If a record is necessary, can it be an informal memo or form instead of a letter?
- *For routine incoming letters, reply on the letter itself to save time and eliminate copies if you do not need to keep a record of the exchange.*
- *File records each day to avoid a backlog.* Place the most recent records in the front of the folders. Leave one-fifth of each file drawer free for expansion.
- *Do not stuff your file folders.* They are designed to hold about 3/4" of paper. Make a second folder with the same heading if there are too many records to fit in one.

### **Retire noncurrent files to storage**

As file drawers become full, remove older materials to another storage area. If you refer to a file less than once in six months, transfer it to a storage container to free prime filing space. The following pointers will guide you in retiring records:

- Retire groups of related files together and replace with a new set of file folders. For instance, retire at one time all your correspondence files for a particular period.
- Make sure there is a closing date for each folder that you are retiring. For example:  
Contracts: General Mfg. Co., 1989-1992
- Use standard, uniform size, commercially available record storage containers.
- When transferring files to storage containers, keep them in order and place them vertically in the box.

- Accurately label the contents on the front of the container. For example:

Secretary Treasurer Files:

Correspondence, 1991-1992

Contracts, 1985-1990

Insurance Files, 1988-1991

- Make sure you follow these rules when placing records in your office's store room or off-site storage facility:

1. Maintain a constant environment—by avoiding extremes in temperature and humidity—to preserve the useful life of your records.
2. Never place boxes on damp floors, near leaky walls, or in direct sunlight.
3. Make sure that records are always stored at least 3" above the floor.  
Use wooden pallets if necessary.
4. Hire an exterminator if you notice insects or rodents.

Additional rules can be found in Appendix 2, *Archival Dos and Don'ts*, pp.35-36.



## **EXAMPLES OF FOLDER LABELS**

**Reports: Wage Increases at Ajax Co.  
1988-1990**

**Local Meeting Minutes  
Jan. - June 1991**

**Local Meeting Minutes  
June-Dec. 1991**

**Local Meeting Minutes  
Jan. 1992-**

**Grievances: John Smith vs Ajax Co.  
August 1990**

**Grievances: Mary Doe vs. Gen. Mfg. Co.  
June-July 1991**

**Contracts: General Mfg. Co.  
1989-**

**Contracts: Ajax Co.  
1991-**

**Correspondence: M-Z  
1991**

**Correspondence: A-L  
1991**

**Correspondence: M-Z  
1992**

**Correspondence: A-L  
1992**

*\* This illustration demonstrates the proper way to label file folders.*

**P**ermanently keep only those items required by law or union regulations and those that are important in recording the history of your union. In other words, keep files with administrative, legal, and historical value. Quite often, of course, these values overlap.

The following items should be kept because of their *administrative value*:

**Keep files with  
administrative,  
legal, and  
historical value.**

- charter
- constitution
- bylaws
- membership records
- minutes
- election records

These items should also be kept because of their *historical value*. Additional records may have historical value and should be kept also. They include:

- correspondence
- reports
- photographs
- clippings
- tape recordings
- leaflets

In general, save those records that document the when, where, why, and how of your local's history. These records should show how the union began, why it did or did not flourish, who held office, how decisions were made, what the priorities were, and how the organization changed over time.

Records with *legal value* are those that federal or state/provincial laws require your local to keep. For instance, the *Labor-Management*

*Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959* (PL 86-257, also called the Landrum-Griffin Act, here abbreviated LMRDA) specifies in Section 206 that organizations required to file under the Act

shall maintain records on the matters required to be reported . . . and include vouchers, work sheets, receipts, and applicable resolutions, and shall keep such records available for examination for a period of not less than five years after the filing of the documents based on the information which they contain.

Because of the case of *Communications Workers of America v. Beck*, 487 U.S. 735 (1988), it may also be prudent to keep for five years all records that are used for accounting purposes. LMRDA also requires elected officials to preserve ballots and all other records pertaining to every union election for one year.

Other legal statutes may affect your record keeping. Keep records pertaining to the *Employee Retirement Income Security Act* (PL 93-406, abbreviated ERISA). In addition, depending on the size and nature of your local, you may be responsible for keeping records for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In Canada, the *Income Tax Act*, the *Excise Tax Act*, the *Unemployment Insurance Act*, and others place legal requirements on record keeping. Consult your union's legal counsel for more advice about materials that the law requires you to keep.

*Disposition*—removing records from your files and targeting them for destruction or permanent storage—should be done systematically. Before anything is destroyed, you should create a *retention and disposition schedule*. This schedule lists those record series for which records should be retained and those for which records should be destroyed. It should also indicate the retention period—the length of time for keeping the records prior to storage or destruction—for each series. On pp. 20-23, a guide has been provided on the retention of records and series that might be held by your local. Some of the periods of retention are based on legal requirements as of January 1992; you will need to update these as the law changes.

**Record Type or Series**

1. The charter, the constitution, the bylaws, and all records concerning jurisdiction
2. Minutes of meetings (local, council, executive board, etc.)
3. Membership records
4. Copies of contracts, minutes of collective bargaining meetings, grievance files, arbitration awards
5. Correspondence relating to the records listed above and general correspondence
6. Annual and monthly financial reports, annual audits; account ledgers if these are missing
7. Official record copies of the local's publications (newsletters, newspapers, pamphlets, brochures)
8. Oral histories, sound recordings, films and videotapes
9. Photographs, photo negatives, posters, placards, badges, buttons, etc.
10. All other financial records, including bills, canceled checks, bank statements, receipts and all other vouchers, work sheets and pertinent resolutions
11. Vouchers, worksheets, receipts, and pertinent resolutions
12. All ballots and other election records
13. Personnel or employment records including application forms and other records having to do with hiring, promotion, demotion, transfer, layoff, termination, rates of pay, and selection for training
14. Records used in making up the EEO-1, EEO-2, and EEO-3 reports

**Recommended Retention**

1-9. Retain permanently, remove to storage once inactive or place in archives.

8. Audio and video tapes must be re-recorded every five years if they are to remain usable. Especially important audio tapes should be transcribed and the transcription retained permanently.

10. LMRDA requirement: retain for five years after the filing of the documents, based on the information which they contain. The IRS requires that financial records be retained for seven years. Then discard.

11. ERISA requirement: maintain for at least six years after the filing date of: (1) records for which disclosure is required, and (2) records that would have been filed except for an exemption or because of simplified filing requirements.

12. LMRDA requirement: retain for one year after election, then dispose.

13. Title VII (EEOC) requirement: maintain for at least six months after the date of the creation of the record or the date of initial personnel action, whichever occurred later.

14. Title VII (EEOC) requirement: the EEOC does not require you to retain EEO-1 records. EEO-2 records must be maintained for two years after the date the application was received by the EEOC. When an annual report is required by the commission calling for statistics as to the sex,

**Record Type or Series**

15. Other apprenticeship records made or kept by a person who is required to file an EEO-2, including test papers by applicants

16. Charges filed under Title VII

17. I-9 forms

**Recommended Retention**

race, color, or national origin of apprentices, retain the forms for two years or the duration of the successful applicant's apprenticeship, whichever is longer. Retain the most recent EEO-3 report filed.

15. Title VII (EEOC) requirement: retain for two years after the creation of the records.

16. Title VII (EEOC) requirement: retain all records relevant to the charge until final disposition of the charge or action.

17. Immigration and Naturalization Act requirement: keep on file for at least three years or for one year after termination of an employee, whichever is longer.

Retention periods for numbers 13, 14, 15, and 16 are the minimum; it is suggested that you retain these items for a longer period. In large organizations, each office should prepare a separate schedule for its records.

A retention and disposition schedule helps ensure an orderly flow of records from creation to disposition. For permanently retained records, indicate who may have access. After creating a retention and disposition schedule, have it approved by the appropriate officer and the local's president and reviewed by the local's legal counsel. In addition, check with the international to determine if it has provisions that affect the retention of your local's records. A sample schedule can be found on the following page. Also, a blank schedule has been provided on p. 26 for you to copy and use.

A more comprehensive approach would incorporate the inventory of official files with the records schedule (see *Establish record series*, p.9) by adding a column for retention, thus consolidating inventory information with instructions for disposition.



# EXAMPLE OF A RETENTION AND DISPOSITION SCHEDULE

Secretary Treasurer	2/14/92	
Department/Officer/Committee		
John Doe, Secretary Treasurer	Signature of Dept. Head	Date
Person in Charge of Records	2/15/92	
2/1/92		
Date Prepared	Signature of President	Date

RECORD SERIES TITLE	RETAIN IN OFFICE	RETAIN IN STORAGE	DESTROY AFTER	PERMANENT RETENTION
Correspondence	1 year			x
Reports	2 years			x
Contracts	Current contract period			x
General Ledger	2 years			x
Cash Books	2 years	5 years	7 years	
Checks, Cancelled	1 year	6 years	7 years	
Bank Statements	1 year	6 years	7 years	
Budgets	2 years			x
Audits	1 year			x

## RETENTION AND DISPOSITION SCHEDULE

Department/Officer/Committee		
Person in Charge of Records	Signature of Dept. Head	Date
Date Prepared	Signature of President	Date

[illegible]

**C**ertain records are essential to the operation of your local. They are called *vital records*. They are necessary to resume operation in the event of a disaster or theft, to recreate the local's legal and financial position, and to preserve the rights of the local and its employees.

There are two types of vital records:

1. those that document the rights and prerogatives of members in relation to the union, their employer, and their benefits. For example:
  - membership records
  - check-off records
  - current and past agreements
  - health and disability insurance
  - pension records
2. administrative records, the loss of which would impede the operation of the local or jeopardize its property. For example:
  - property deeds
  - bank books
  - minute books
  - mailing lists
  - staff employment records
  - property inventory

**Protect your vital  
records to resume the  
local's operation  
in the event of a  
disaster or theft.**

Vital records require careful storage in order to protect them. Depending on the volume and use of vital records, they should be stored accordingly:

*Infrequently updated vital records* saved primarily for legal reasons or because they document the operation of your local (such as deeds and insurance policies) are best protected by storage in a bank vault or other fireproof high security area away from the main premises of the local.

*Heavily used records of small volume* that are easily duplicated (such as computer tapes) should be frequently copied. Store the duplicates off premises.

*Heavily used records of large volume* should remain in the local to be housed in locked fire resistant file cabinets in locations that are not vulnerable to water leaks or floods. *Avoid basements and attics.*

Some large unions use an alpha-numerical file coding system to minimize access to selected vital records and protect them from sabotage. Appointing an office file clerk to oversee access to these records, by formally checking them in and out, is especially useful in large offices.

Should a fire or flood damage your records, it may be possible to save much of the information if the damaged records receive *prompt* treatment that is supervised by a professional paper conservator. The names of such specialists in your area may be obtained by contacting the nearest archives or your state library system.

Creating a *records disaster plan*, which contains necessary information in the event of an emergency, prior to a disaster will help guard against the destruction of your records. Such a plan should indicate

- names of people to contact (staff and outside people)
- location of mops, buckets, and other clean-up materials
- specific assignments of staff when disaster occurs
- procedures to follow
- detailed building plans (to document where materials are located)

It is important that the staff familiarize itself with this plan ahead of time in order to know the procedures when a disaster strikes.

## P R E S E R V I N G   R E C O R D S   F O R   P O S T E R I T Y

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**L**iving human memory quickly dims with time. Therefore, history is usually written from surviving records. To insure that the history of the labor movement, and your organization's part in it, is fully and accurately told, you must take certain steps for the physical preservation of important records.

One way to ensure the preservation of your records is to maintain your local's control over them. As mentioned before, your bylaws should spell out that documents generated by officers in the performance of their duties are the property of the local. All records should be stored in your offices—not at any officer's house—and they must remain with the local when the officer leaves office.

Another way of preserving your records is to establish an in-house archives or to transfer inactive historical records to an outside archival institution. Whether in-house or outside, you must make sure the archives cares for your records' physical state. Paper, magnetic tape, computer disks, film, and photographs all decompose over time, especially if kept under unstable environmental conditions. Video and audio tapes deteriorate rapidly and should be re-recorded every five years to ensure that information is not lost; erasure tabs should also be removed to prevent any loss. Any archives should be designed with controlled temperature and humidity, and records of any media type should be stored in proper containers. For paper records, storage in acid-free archival folders and boxes is essential to maximize their longevity. A list of suppliers of archival materials is contained in Appendix 1, p. 34.

*Setting up an in-house archives.* Appendix 2 lists guidelines for handling archival records. Unfortunately, this manual cannot go into all the details of establishing an archives yourself. There are several questions to consider. What is the volume of materials to be preserved? What resources—space, staff, money—will be needed to care for the materials? How will the organization develop and implement an archives? Who will be allowed to look at the records? A trained archivist can help you answer these questions. Appendix 3 contains a select list of archives that work with unions. These repositories may also put you in touch with any existing efforts in your locality or region to systematically document labor history. In Ohio, New York, and San Francisco, for example, state labor federations, internationals, and cooperating repositories have conducted inventories of historical labor records and jointly worked with locals to preserve material of lasting value.

**The best way to  
preserve your records  
is to establish an  
in-house archives or to  
transfer inactive  
records to an outside  
archival institution.**

*Finding an outside archives.* Archives are specialized repositories that contain original and unique research materials. These materials generally are not published items such as books and periodicals. Archives are typically located in universities and historical societies. Archivists are professionals trained to appraise the long-term historical value of organizational records and personal papers. They organize and catalog these materials and assist researchers using them.

When considering an archival institution as the repository for your historical records, you can expect the following:

1. The archivists will want to survey your historical records to determine whether they fall within the “collecting area” or stated purpose of their archives. If interested, they will negotiate for the transfer of records from your local to their institution. If they are not interested, ask them to recommend another archives that might be.

2. When negotiating for transfer, work with the archivists to draw up a contract (sometimes called a *deed of gift*). The agreement should stipulate the terms of the transfer and the responsibilities of both parties. It should include:

- *A statement of ownership.* You may want to retain ownership in order to terminate the agreement with the archives and regain possession of your records (after fairly compensating the archives for supplies, labor, and storage costs). Many repositories, however, ask that the local agree to deed the property to the archives or the public.

- *Any restrictions to access.* The union may choose to restrict research access to some or all of its files for a period of time. Archival institutions have a responsibility to make collections available for research, however, and few will agree to act as a long-term warehouse for permanently closed files.

- *Copying privileges.* Many archives request a transfer of copyright or permission to copy the records. This will facilitate researcher use of the materials.

- *Responsibilities for payment* of processing and preservation costs. Transportation, archival supplies, and the labor intensive work of processing the files and preparing finding aids or inventories (written descriptions and lists of collection contents) cost money. The

archives in all likelihood will ask the union to commit funds to underwrite the processing and maintenance of its files.

■ *Services* the archives will provide to the local. Many archives assist with current records management. You can enlist the archivist's assistance in setting up your retention and disposition schedule. The schedule can be adapted to indicate when historic materials should be transferred to the archives.

Other services you might ask the archives to provide include the following: copies of the preliminary inventory and completed finding aid (within a reasonable time period), maintenance of machine-readable records (for example, electronic records and microforms) and audiovisual records, access to your files during business hours, photocopies upon request (at a reasonable price), and return of original records when necessary (for legal or exhibit purposes). The archives may also mount public exhibits or help plan oral history projects to preserve memories of union veterans.

3. Once the contract has been signed, the archives will box your records in the order you kept them and arrange for their transfer.

4. Eventually, the staff will clean your records, arrange them in acid-free folders and boxes, and store them in a controlled environment that will prolong their life. They will also create the finding aid, which should include a brief history of your organization, a general description of the records, and an inventory or listing of the boxes.

**Back up your  
computer files  
frequently and  
print out in hard  
copy documents  
designated for  
long-term  
preservation.**

**N**ow that micro-computers are affordable, many local unions are taking the plunge into the computer age. Many of those who already have computers have quickly learned that automation itself does not alleviate problems associated with records storage. The procedures for managing paper records, as discussed in this manual, apply also to machine-readable records. A workable manual filing system and a retention and disposition schedule as outlined in the preceding sections are necessary before automating.

If you are considering an investment in computer hardware or software, contact your international union. In addition, the George Meany Center for Labor Studies in Silver Spring, Maryland, and many labor extension programs offer to local unions courses or workshops on using computers. Learn from the hard experience of others and do not try to reinvent the wheel when it comes to software!

Once you are automated, manage the data stored in the computer as you would hard copy filing systems. Keep documents labeled as to their proper file types. Print out in hard copy documents designated for long-term preservation. Erase documents no longer needed. This is necessary because computer storage media, such as floppy disks and computer tapes, have a limited shelf life—sometimes as little as five years.

If data is not easily translated into paper form or if it is constantly updated, create a back-up copy. Back-up procedures must be repeated frequently, perhaps weekly or even daily. If machine-readable data is considered a vital union record, then back-ups should be stored off-site.



**T**his guide was created by Debra Bernhardt, archivist at the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, as part of the Harry Van Arsdale, Jr., Labor History Documentation Project. It was revised, edited and prepared for publication by the staff of The George Meany Memorial Archives. The project, started with funds from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission in 1984, is a joint effort of the New York State AFL-CIO, Cornell University's Labor-Management Documentation Center, other New York state repositories, and The George Meany Memorial Archives to locate and preserve records documenting New York's labor heritage.

The guide is based on "How to Preserve Local Union Records for Historical Purposes," prepared by Debra Bernhardt for the Ohio Labor History Project and distributed by the Ohio State AFL-CIO in 1978. It freely and gratefully borrows from the following archivists and their publications:

Philip Mason, Wayne State University, for the conception and format based on his "File and Records Manual for the Service Employees International Union"

Richard Strassberg, Cornell Labor-Management Documentation Center, on vital records programs

Katharine Vogel, formerly of The George Meany Memorial Archives, and the George Meany Center's course materials on the ABC's of computers

Joan Warnow-Blewitt, American Institute of Physics, for "Files Maintenance and Records Disposition: A Handbook for Secretaries at Department of Energy Contract Laboratories."

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# SOURCES OF ARCHIVAL SUPPLIES

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## Appendix 1

### *Archivart*

Division of Heller and Usdan  
7 Caesar Place, Moonachie, NJ 07074

### *Conservation Materials, Ltd.*

Box 2884, 340 Freeport Boulevard, Sparks, NV 89431

### *Conservation Resources International*

8000 H. Forbes Place, Springfield, VA 22151

### *Franklin Distributors*

P.O. Box 320, Denville, NJ 07834

### *Hollinger Corporation*

9401 Northeast Drive, Fredericksburg, VA 22408

### *Light Impressions*

P.O. Box 3012, Rochester, NY 14614

### *Paige Company*

400 Kelby St., Fort Lee, NJ 07024

### *Photofile*

P.O. Box 123, Zion, IL 60099

### *Pohlig Brothers, Inc.*

P.O. Box 8069, Richmond, VA 23223

### *TAIAS*

213 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

### *University Products*

P.O. Box 101, 517 Main Street, Holyoke, MA 01041

**A**dapted from Leslie Hansen Kopp's *Performing Arts Archives: The Basics and Beyond*.

This section lists tips for establishing an in-house archives. A professionally trained archivist can provide more thorough and comprehensive information. These guidelines do not apply strictly to archival materials; many can be employed in your everyday records management operation.

1. Store archival materials in acid-free folders or envelopes.
2. Place those folders in standard size acid-free, dust-tight boxes.
3. Photocopy newspaper clippings onto acid-free papers in order to save the informational, rather than the artifactual, value of the document.
4. Remove rubber bands, rusted paper clips, and rusted staples carefully; replace them with plastic or stainless steel paper clips if necessary.
5. Open, unfold, and flatten documents. Dust off surface dirt. Store photographs flat in boxes (to avoid curling) and paper documents upright. Make sure that the items are neither crowded in the boxes nor slumping.
6. Place photographs in alkaline buffered, alpha-cellulose folders or four-flap envelopes. Use a soft pencil to make identifying marks on the backs or edges of photographs.
7. Encapsulate fragile, rare, and frequently used items in Mylar®, a clear and safe polyester film. Do not use Mylar® with pastel sketches or penciled documents because it holds a static charge.
8. Place acid-free paper on both sides of acidic documents to avoid acid migration. The acid in one piece of paper can literally burn through surrounding documents. Newspaper, telegrams, and other poor quality paper are the most acidic.
9. Avoid storage of archival materials near or under water pipes or fire suppression systems. In addition, avoid placing these materials in a damp environment. Wet documents are often stained and are the perfect breeding ground for mold, mildew, and vermin.
10. Store archival materials, in their acid-free document cases or transfiles, in a safe, secure environment. Use steel shelving because of the acid in

untreated wooden shelves. Make sure boxes are at least 3" above the floor. Avoid extremes in light, heat, and humidity. Install adequate locks and, if necessary, a security alarm.

11. Store videotapes upright and films flat, like pancakes. With videotape, a magnetic medium, it is important to keep both a master (from which you can make copies) and a viewing copy (which you can use).

12. Follow these guidelines for environment control: keep the temperature at 67° F., plus or minus 2°, and the relative humidity at 47%, plus or minus 2%. More important, maintain a constant and stable temperature and relative humidity—wide fluctuations cause the greatest damage.

13. Avoid adhesives, such as cellophane tape, mucilage, rubber cement, and Spray Mount®. Pressure sensitive adhesives yellow and become brittle over the years. Rubber cement and mucilage yellow and eventually fail to adhere.

14. Keep archival documents away from food, drink, and cigarette smoke at all times.

15. When in doubt, ask a professionally trained archivist or conservator for advice or assistance.

**CALIFORNIA**

- San Francisco State University, Labor Archives and Research Center, 480 Winston Drive, San Francisco, CA 94132, (415) 564-4010.
- Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, 6120 South Vermont, Los Angeles, CA 90044, (213) 759-6063.
- Stanford University, J. Hugh Jackson Library, Graduate School of Business, Stanford, CA 94305-5016, (415) 723-2162.

**COLORADO**

- University of Colorado Libraries, Western Historical Collections, Boulder, CO 80309, (303) 492-7242.

**CONNECTICUT**

- University of Connecticut Libraries, Historical Manuscripts and Archives, U-205, 233 Glenbrook Road, Storrs, CT 06269-4205, (203) 486-2893.

**DELAWARE**

- Hagley Museum and Library, P.O. Box 3630, Greenville, Wilmington, DE 19807, (302) 658-2400.

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

- Catholic University of America, Department of Archives, Manuscripts and Museum Collections, Washington, DC 20064, (202) 635-5065.
- Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Madison Building, First Street and Independence Avenue, S.E., Washington, DC 20540, (202) 707-5387.

**GEORGIA**

- Georgia State University, Southern Labor Archives, Pullen Library, 100 Decatur Street, S.E., Atlanta, GA 30303-3081, (404) 651-2477.

**IDAHO**

- University of Idaho Library, Special Collections and Archives, Moscow, ID 83843-4198, (208) 885-7951.

### **ILLINOIS**

- Roosevelt University Library, Archives/Chicago Labor Oral History Project, 430 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605, (312) 341-3643.

### **INDIANA**

- Indiana State University, Cunningham Memorial Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Terre Haute, IN 47809, (812) 237-2612.

### **LOUISIANA**

- University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Orleans, LA 70148, (504) 286-6543.

### **MARYLAND**

- The George Meany Memorial Archives, 10000 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20903, (301) 431-6400.
- University of Maryland, Historical Manuscripts and Archives, College Park, MD 20742, (301) 405-9060.

### **MASSACHUSETTS**

- Immigrant City Archives, Inc., 135 Parker Street, Lawrence, MA 01843, (508) 686-9230.
- Museum of American Textile History (formerly Merrimac Valley Textile Museum), 800 Massachusetts Avenue, North Andover, MA 01845, (508) 686-0191.
- University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Labor Relations Research Center, 125 Draper Hall, Amherst, MA 01003, (413) 545-2884.

### **MICHIGAN**

- University of Michigan, Hatcher Graduate Library, Labadie Collection, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1205, (313) 764-9377.
- Wayne State University, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI 48202, (313) 577-4024.

## **MINNESOTA**

- Minnesota Historical Society, Division of Archives and Manuscripts, 1500 Mississippi Street, St. Paul, MN 55101, (612) 296-6980.
- University of Minnesota, Immigration History Research Center, 826 Berry Street, St. Paul, MN 55113, (612) 627-4208.

## **MISSOURI**

- Ozarks Labor Union Archives, c/o Department of Economics, Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield, MO 65804, (417) 836-5516.
- University of Missouri at St. Louis, Joint Collections, Western Historical Manuscript Collection and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Thomas Jefferson Library, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, MO 63121, (314) 553-5143.

## **MONTANA**

- Montana Historical Society, 225 North Roberts Street, Helena, MT 59620, (406) 444-4775.

## **NEVADA**

- Nevada State Library and Archives, Division of Archives and Records, 101 South Fall Street, Carson City, NV 89710, (702) 885-5210.

## **NEW YORK**

- Cornell University, Martin P. Catherwood Library, Labor-Management Documentation Center, 144 Ives Hall, Ithaca, NY 14851-0952, (607) 255-3183.
- New York University, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Elmer Bobst Library, 10th Floor, 70 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012, (212) 998-2640.
- YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Archives, 1048 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10028, (212) 535-6700.

## **NORTH CAROLINA**

- Duke University, Williams R. Perkins Library, Manuscript Department, Durham, NC 27706, (919) 684-3372.

#### **NORTH DAKOTA**

- State Historical Society of North Dakota, North Dakota Heritage Center, Bismarck, ND 58505, (701) 224-2666.

#### **OHIO**

- Ohio Historical Society, Ohio Labor History Project, 1982 Velma Avenue, Columbus, OH 43211, (614) 277-2439.

#### **PENNSYLVANIA**

- Pennsylvania State University, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, W313 Pattee Library, University Park, PA 16802, (814) 863-2505.
- Temple University, Urban Archives Center, Samuel Paley Archives, Thirteenth and Berks Streets, Philadelphia, PA 19122, (215) 787-8257.
- University of Pittsburgh, Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, (412) 624-4430.

#### **RHODE ISLAND**

- The Rhode Island Historical Society Library, 121 Hope Street, Providence, RI 02906, (401) 331-8575.

#### **TEXAS**

- University of Texas at Arlington, Texas Labor Archives, P.O. Box 19497, Arlington, TX 76019, (817) 273-3393.

#### **VERMONT**

- Barre Museum-Archives of Barre History, P.O. Box 453, Barre, VT 05641, (802) 479-0450.
- University of Vermont, Bailey/Howe Library, Special Collections, Burlington, VT 05405, (802) 656-2138.

#### **WASHINGTON**

- University of Washington Libraries, Northwest Regional Manuscripts Collection, Seattle, WA 98198, (206) 543-1879.



### **WEST VIRGINIA**

- West Virginia University, Library, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, Colson Hall, Morgantown, WV 26506, (304) 293-3536.

### **WISCONSIN**

- State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Archives Division, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706, (608) 262-3338.

## **G L O S S A R Y**

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<b>ACTIVE RECORDS</b>	See <i>current records</i>
<b>APPRAISAL</b>	The process of determining the worth and thus the disposition of records based on their long-term legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical values
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Departmental or institutional records deemed worthy of permanent preservation because of their legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical value, also called archival materials or archival holdings</li><li>2 The agency responsible for administering archival materials</li></ol>
<b>CURRENT RECORDS</b>	Records necessary for conducting the current business of the office and therefore kept in the office. Generally, current records are those referenced at least once a month. Also referred to as <i>active records</i>
<b>DISPOSAL</b>	The action taken regarding temporary records after their retention periods expire. It occurs with records that lack permanent value and usually entails destruction of records. When in doubt about the value of any records, contact an archivist.
<b>DISPOSITION</b>	The action taken with regard to records following their <i>appraisal</i> . Types of disposition include transfer for temporary storage, permanent retention, microform reproduction, and destruction. See <i>disposal</i>
<b>EVIDENTIAL VALUE</b>	The value of records or papers as documentation of the operations and activities of the records-creating organization, institution, or individual

<b>INACTIVE RECORDS</b>	See <i>noncurrent records</i>
<b>INVENTORY</b>	See <i>records inventory</i>
<b>MACHINE-READABLE RECORDS</b>	Records that are in a form that can only be accessed through a computer, for example, files created through word processing, database, or spreadsheet programs
<b>NONCURRENT RECORDS</b>	Records no longer required in the conduct of current business. They are ready for final <i>disposition</i> . Also referred to as <i>inactive records</i> . See also <i>current records</i> and <i>semicurrent records</i>
<b>RECORD SERIES</b>	Groups of related records that are normally maintained as a unit and that permit evaluation as a unit for retention scheduling purposes. Record series are comprised of records that are filed together and have a similar physical format, relate to a particular subject or function, or result from a particular activity
<b>RECORDS</b>	All recorded information (regardless of medium or format) created or received and maintained by an organization in pursuit of its activities
<b>RECORDS INVENTORY</b>	1 A listing of an office's records 2 In archival terms, a finding aid that generally provides a history of the organization creating the records, a description of the records, and a listing of the record series
<b>RECORDS MANAGEMENT</b>	That area of general administrative management concerned with achieving accuracy, economy, and efficiency in the creation, use, maintenance, and disposition of records

<b>RECORDS SURVEY</b>	The process of making a complete and accurate listing of the records maintained by an office
<b>RETENTION AND DISPOSITION SCHEDULE</b>	An approved list that identifies the length of time record series must be retained. Such a schedule includes instructions for final disposition and the length of the retention period. Also called a records schedule.
<b>RETENTION PERIOD</b>	The length of time that records must be kept before disposition. Usually expressed in terms of months or years but sometimes expressed as contingent upon the occurrence of an event, such as employee termination, contract closure, audit, or equipment sale. Permanently valuable materials have an indefinite retention period.
<b>SEMICURRENT RECORDS</b>	Records required so infrequently in the conduct of current business that they should be transferred from the office but are not yet ready for final disposition. See also <i>current records</i> .
<b>SURVEY</b>	See <i>records survey</i> .
<b>VITAL RECORDS</b>	Records that must be protected in order to resume operations in the event of a disaster, those necessary to recreate the unit's legal and financial position, and those necessary to preserve the rights of the organization and its employees.