

GREATER NEW HAVEN
LABOR
HISTORY
ASSOCIATION

October 2010 Update:

This inventory was conducted by GNHLHA in 2005. The U.S. Repeating Arms Company closed in 2006. The Labor History Association is currently processing the Local 609 records and preparing a traveling exhibit on Winchester Workers.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MACHINISTS LOCAL 609

344 Winchester Ave.
New Haven, CT 06511

Background

Local 609 represents about 200 workers at the U.S. Repeating Arms Company (formerly Olin-Winchester) in New Haven. It was named "Victory Lodge 609" in 1955. A history of the Local, written by a member of its Executive Board, John Palmieri, notes that "the Machinists Union was the only union that was able to organize the Olin Winchester Plant. [It] was successful because [it] used the neighborhood residents, the churches, a large machinist organizing team and the brave employees who worked at Winchester. These employees knew they were putting their jobs in jeopardy when they helped organize the other 4,600 employees to sign authorization cards to be represented by the Machinist Union. The organizing of the Winchester plant took over a year, but we were victorious and we became Victory Lodge 609."

The Local signed its first labor agreement with the company in 1956. "Approximately two months into the labor agreement," writes Palmieri, a dispute erupted in the wood line and there was a walkout by the entire Arms plant with the exception of Union Stewards and Officers. Yes, we won that grievance—we were victorious again."

In addition to a number of walkouts over unresolved grievances, the Local had two major strikes—in 1969, and 1979—as the company tried to break the union. The 1969 and 1979 strikes focused particularly on the issues of speed-ups and their impact on older workers.

The Local's greatest success, according to its current President, John Reynolds, was the agreement resulting from the strike of 1969. The contract included language to protect older and disabled workers from speed-ups. Today, the Local's greatest challenge is to combat outsourcing of work and the threat of plant closure. The struggle is to keep the remaining jobs in New Haven.

Structure of Local 609

Executive Board

President:	John Reynolds
Vice President:	Bobby Brown
Recording Secretary:	Paula Leake
Treasurer:	Vincent Carmosino
Conductor/Sentinel:	William Sanford
Business Representative:	Jeff Perinetti
Trustees:	Darrell Morbidelli, Elizabeth Agro, Jose deJesus

The Records

Local 609 currently has its offices in two adjacent rooms inside the plant at 344 Winchester Avenue. The first is President Reynolds' office, with his desk, conference table, and bookshelves containing reference materials. He has a computer and keeps current records of all types in this office. He showed me a scrapbook— given to him by company management in advance of my arrival— containing clippings from the New Haven Register and Advocate about the strike of 1979. There was also a box containing a folder labeled "Louis D. Romano" (Romano was the President of the Local during the 1979 strike and earlier). It held copies of old Local 609 by-laws, undated photographs (black and white; we guessed them to be from the 1960s given the apparent ages of some of the people we recognized!) The box also had clippings about the 1969 strike, as well as copies of *The Machinist*. It was also filled with ballots and other member records from 1996, as well as about fifteen training videos from the International.

The bulk of the records, both current and non-current, are kept in the second office. They appear to date back to 1956 and continue through the present, and are mixed throughout five filing cabinets and five boxes. An extremely important discovery was the ledger books on top of the cabinets: these contain hand-written minutes of executive board and membership meetings, as well as member and union financial records, and they date back to 1956 and continue through 1999. These are obviously are obviously crucial records for documenting the history of the Local.

Mr. Reynolds says that minutes and financial records are still recorded in ledger books, although they are "going electronic."

For information about accessing the Local's non-confidential records for research purposes, contact John Reynolds at 203-562-2683; email JohnRe@usracmfg.com