

# Chronology of Minnesota Workers and their Organizations

Last ice age: People first come to Minnesota, following herds of large game as the glaciers melted.

Late 1600s: French fur traders arrive in Minnesota. They find long-established communities of Dakota people.

## 1800s

1820s: Fort Snelling is constructed. In the next decades, large numbers of immigrants come to Minnesota. In 1838, St. Paul (originally called Pig's Eye) is settled. The land where Minneapolis stands, once part of the Fort Snelling reserve, is opened to settlement in 1855. Duluth is incorporated in 1857.

1830s: Dred Scott works as a slave at Minnesota's Fort Snelling, property of the fort's surgeon, Dr. John Emerson. At Fort Snelling, Scott meets and marries Harriet Robinson, also a slave, and they have two children. In 1846, the Scotts turn to the courts to gain their freedom, citing their years of residence in free states. For the next 10 years, the case moves from court to court. In an infamous decision, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that as a slave, Scott is not a U.S. citizen, not entitled to sue for freedom in federal court, has never been free, and has to remain a slave.

1854: The Daily Minnesota Pioneer carries the first known report of a strike in Minnesota, by journeymen tailors in St. Paul. The outcome is unknown.

1856: St. Paul printers organize the first union in Minnesota during a dinner to commemorate Benjamin Franklin's birthday. It eventually becomes International Typographical Union Local 30.

1858: Minnesota becomes the 32nd state. The vast majority of the 150,000 inhabitants work as farmers, small business owners, mill workers, teachers, and in-home workers.

1860: Tourists from southern states travel by boat up the Mississippi River to Minnesota to see famous sights like The Falls of St. Anthony, sometimes bringing slaves with them. Minnesota abolitionists say state law declares that no man or woman can be held in bondage in Minnesota, even if they are just visiting. In the summer of 1860, a slave named Eliza Winston is brought to Minnesota by her master, a Mississippi plantation owner. Anti-slavery activists in Minneapolis successfully petition a judge to have her freed. She eventually moves to Canada.

1860: Training schools for teachers open in Winona, Mankato, and St. Cloud. For the first time, women are allowed to attend and train for a profession outside of the home.

1861: The Minnesota Education Association (MEA) is founded as a professional organization for teachers and administrators.

1860s: Minneapolis and St. Paul printers' unions lose their charters as members leave the state to fight for the Union Army. The charters are reissued after the war.

1863: At the Battle of Gettysburg, the First Minnesota Regiment makes a heroic charge, losing 215 of 262 men.

1867: Oliver Kelley, a Minnesota farmer turned government clerk, holds the first meeting of The Grange, with a focus on fighting high rail rates for shipping farm products.

1867: German immigrants in Minneapolis establish a Workingman's Society to find jobs for Society members, the first mutual benefit group of its kind formed in the state.

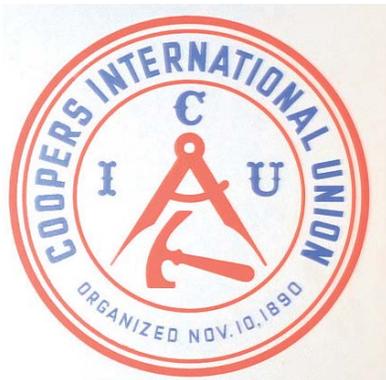
1868: About 75 Minneapolis and St. Anthony coopers strike for 3 cents more pay per barrel, which would mean a \$1.05 increase in their \$20 weekly earnings; two Cooper leaders are arrested but the charges are later dropped.

1870: The Minnesota Legislature provides the first legal basis for cooperatives. Among the first producer co-ops are barrel shops. Most failed by the late 1880s, however, as sacks replaced barrels in the milling industry.

1873: Nationwide financial panic ruins most unions, leads to widespread unemployment.

1875: Minnesotan Ignatius Donnelly helps found the National Greenback Party to challenge the rail and timber monopolies. In the 1880s he gets involved in starting the People's Party (also known as the Populist Party) which champions the 8-hour day among other causes.

1878: The Knights of Labor establish an Assembly in Minneapolis, the next year in St. Paul.



1878: On May 2, the Washburn 'A' Mill - the largest flour mill in the United States at that time - explodes when flour dust in the air inside it ignites. The explosion claims 18 lives, decimates the surrounding area, and brings instant notoriety to Minneapolis. The tragedy leads to safety reforms in the milling industry, including the installation of ventilation systems. The ruins of the mill are now part of the Mill City Museum.

1878: First organization of the Stonecutters Union in St. Paul.

1880: Minnesota farmers are among those who form the Northern Alliance (also known as the Farmers Alliance) which along with The Grange challenges the power of the railroads and banks.

1881: The first Knights of Labor assembly is established in Duluth.

1880s: Throughout the decade, many Building Trades unions are formed in Minnesota, including the Bricklayers, Plasterers, Plumbers and Carpenters.

1882: The St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly is founded with the assistance of the Knights of Labor Assembly. The Minneapolis Trades Assembly forms in 1883, Duluth in 1887, all with assistance from the Knights. Later they become central bodies under the American Federation of Labor.

1883: Longshoremen on Duluth's waterfront, although they have no formal union, win a strike for a wage increase.

1884: First shipment of iron ore from the Vermilion Range to the port of Duluth. The Mesabi Range ships its first ore to the port in 1892 and the Cuyuna Range in 1911. From 1900 to 1980, the Mesabi Range contributes about 60 percent of the country's total iron ore output. The mines are worked mostly by immigrants; the dominant nationalities are Finnish, Swedish, Slovenian and Croatian.



**Eugene V. Debs**

1884: Retail store workers in St. Paul and Duluth begin forming "Early Closing Societies" to seek shorter hours and join the Knights of Labor to enlist its support for a 7 p.m. closing time.

1884: A total of 73 local unions are reported to be operating in Minnesota, 27 in St. Paul, 17 in Minneapolis and 29 in Duluth and elsewhere.

1885: The Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen establishes its first lodge in Minnesota, Great Northern Lodge 83 in St. Cloud. By 1890, the various railroad brotherhoods have 47 lodges in the state.

1885: Other new unions form, including the Teamsters Protective Association and Hack & Cab Drivers Union in Minneapolis, the United Laborers Union in Winona and the Scandinavian Laborers Association in Minneapolis.

1885: Knights of Labor Master Workman Terence Powderly speaks to about 1,000 workers at Harrison Hall in Minneapolis and an equal number at a St. Paul rally.

1885: First observance of Labor Day in Minnesota. The Twin Cities and Stillwater Knights of Labor Assemblies call for a picnic at White Bear Lake. The crowd is estimated at 3,000. Duluth holds its first Labor Day celebration in 1887.

1886: Printers in Duluth organize, followed within a few months by the Cigar Makers.

1886: The Knights of Labor, the Northern Alliance, The Grange and the trades assemblies hold a joint convention in St. Paul. The convention calls for creation of a Bureau of Labor Statistics, arbitration of disputes, an industrial compensation system, no child labor in factories or mines and no convict labor contracts.

1886: The Minnesota Legislature passes the first child labor laws, although a state law fully prohibiting child labor is not passed until 1909.

1886: Establishment of the American Federation of Labor at Columbus, Ohio. That same year, the Haymarket Riot in Chicago marks the beginning of the decline of the Knights of Labor.

1887: The opening of a Pinkerton Detective Agency in St. Paul arouses strong protests from the St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly. The governor and mayors of both Twin Cities declare themselves opposed to the use of Pinkerton men.

1887: The Minnesota Legislature prohibits some convict labor, although convict labor is not completely prohibited until 1913. The Legislature also establishes a rule that railroad companies are liable for injuries to their employees, the first move toward workers' compensation laws.

1888: Organizer Louis Nash calls a mass meeting of retail clerks in St. Paul. Three hundred people, half of them women, turn out to protest the 16-hour day and six-day week. They donate 25 cents each toward handbills, hall rent and the cost of an application for a union charter.

1888: Some 260 female employees walk out at the clothing factory of Shotwell, Clerihew & Lothman in Minneapolis. Dubbed "the striking maidens," they are members of the Knights of Labor. The strike fails, but the company does not win, either. A community boycott leads to its eventual closure.

1888: Labor organizer and reformer Eva McDonald Valesh (a.k.a. Eva Gay) writes a series of articles for the St. Paul Daily Globe, revealing the intolerable and unsafe conditions endured by female factory workers.

1889: In the first major transit strike in the Twin Cities, nearly 1,500 street railway employees in the Twin Cities stop work. Despite public support, the walkout fails and many strikers are blacklisted.

1889: With support from the local Knights of Labor, immigrant laborers working on Duluth streets and sewers strike when contractors renege on their pay agreement. When the mayor calls out the police, violence ensues and three people are killed.

1890: The Minnesota State Federation of Labor is formed. Its platform includes the 8-hour day; state inspection of mines and factories; free textbooks for all schoolchildren and state ownership of the railroads, telegraph and telephone system.

1890: According to a census report, 4,460 children, between the ages of 10 and 14, are "gainfully employed" in Minnesota. While most children work on farms or as household servants, over 1,000 work in manufacturing plants or in the trades.

1892: The St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly raises money to help defend the Homestead steel strikers who have been arrested and sends famous Twin Cities criminal lawyer W.W. Erwin to Pittsburgh to help in their defense.

1893: Workers in Minneapolis bakeries begin the first union organizing in that industry in Minnesota.

1894: The year of the great railroad strikes by the American Railway Union, formed by Eugene V. Debs. In the Great Northern strike, James J. Hill - "the Empire Builder" - is humbled and forced to rescind a wage increase. But later that year the Pullman Strike is crushed when President Grover Cleveland sends in federal troops. The ARU never recovers and Debs is sent to jail.

1896: The first of the state's three central labor council newspapers, the Duluth Labor World, is founded. The St. Paul Union Advocate follows in 1897 and the Minneapolis Labor Review in 1907.

1896: The Duluth Assembly gets a report that Minnesota mining companies have posted bulletins threatening immediate discharge of any miner who joins a union. The Minnesota State Federation of Labor convention demands a state law requiring mining companies to remove bodies of miners buried in cave-ins after officials at Eveleth's Vega mine apparently ignore a fatal cave-in and order crews to keep right on working. By the late 1890s, the Western Federation of Miners is actively organizing miners on the Iron Range.

1897: The Minnesota Federation of Labor hires its first lobbyist to promote worker issues at the state Legislature.

## **1900s**

1900: Boot & Shoe Workers organize a Minneapolis plant in 1900, two St. Paul plants in 1901.

1902: Charles James, African-American leader of the Boot & Shoe Workers, is elected president of the St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly.

1903: Brewery workers organize in St. Paul.

1903: Beginning of the culinary unions in Minnesota. St. Paul founds the Cooks Alliance and Waiters Alliance, Duluth establishes a Cooks and Waiters Alliance while Minneapolis has a Waiters Alliance. Cook wages average \$6 a week plus meals. Waiters, who receive no regular salary, have to buy their jobs in hopes of recovering the price plus a living from tips.



*Child labor was still common at the beginning of the 20th century.*

1903: Some 1,800 workers at the Pillsbury, Peavey and other Minneapolis flour and grain millers unsuccessfully strike for an 8-hour day. Owners hire scabs, including dozens of University of Minnesota students. The employers' win is a huge boost to the fledgling Citizens Alliance.

1903: Minneapolis Sprinkler Fitters & Helpers Union Local No. 417 is organized with 15 members.

1904: St. Paul packinghouse workers join in the first national strike by the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen. The walkout fails, many strikers are blacklisted and replaced by African-American and immigrant workers.

1905: Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is founded in Chicago. The Wobblies, as they are known, would build strong representation among Minnesota lumberjacks and lead the Mesabi Iron Range strike of 1916.

1907: The Western Federation of Miners leads a strike against the Oliver Iron Mining Co. Hundreds are blacklisted after the walkout fails.

1907: Minnesota joins two other states in setting minimum standards for nurses, the main employment option available to women interested in the medical field. Nurses generally work 12 hour shifts, 6 days a week, for minimal pay.

1908: The Theatrical Stage Employees International Alliance holds its national convention in Minneapolis, with American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers attending and giving a speech.

## **1910s**

1910: St. Paul Post Office clerks are the first to organize in Minnesota.

1910: Women represent 1 in 4 workers in the waged workforce. By 1930, they represent 3 in 10, and by 1940, they are 1 in 3. These numbers only refer to waged work, and do not count women who are employed in seasonal, temporary, or part time work.

1911: The Building Trades Council of Minneapolis is founded, with a membership of 18 local building craft unions. The council's motto is "We must hang together or hang separately."

1912: The Rev. John Ryan, "the workers' priest," calls for creation of a State Minimum Wage Board.

1912: Duluth streetcar workers strike to seek recognition of their union and reinstatement of nine fired union men. Thousands of workers riot, destroying railcars and barricading streets. Despite strong community support, the strike is lost.

1913: The Minnesota Legislature passes a workers' compensation law, one of the first in the nation. W. E. "Billy" McEwen, secretary of the Minnesota State Federation of Labor and editor of the Duluth Labor World, is considered to be the "father" of this first compensation law because of his work in drafting its terms.

1913: Motion picture machine operators begin organizing at the many theaters popping up to show silent movies. Membership in the union reaches its peak in 1927, about the time "talkies" are introduced, and before the advent of new technology and competition from television and video.

1916: Students at the Work Peoples' College in Duluth distribute Joe Hill's ashes outside the school, in accordance with his wish that his remains be spread in every state except Utah (site of the IWW organizer's execution). The Work Peoples' College, operated by the IWW, teaches a curriculum that includes English language, bookkeeping, parliamentary procedure and "the works of Marx, Engels, Kautsky and others of the best authors on socialism."

1916: The Wobblies lead an unsuccessful strike among miners on the Mesabi Range. One striker is shot by agents of the Oliver Mining Co. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, one of the IWW's founders, raises legal and relief funds for the strikers. Her patriotism called in question, Flynn remarks, "It is better to be a traitor to your country than a traitor to your class!"

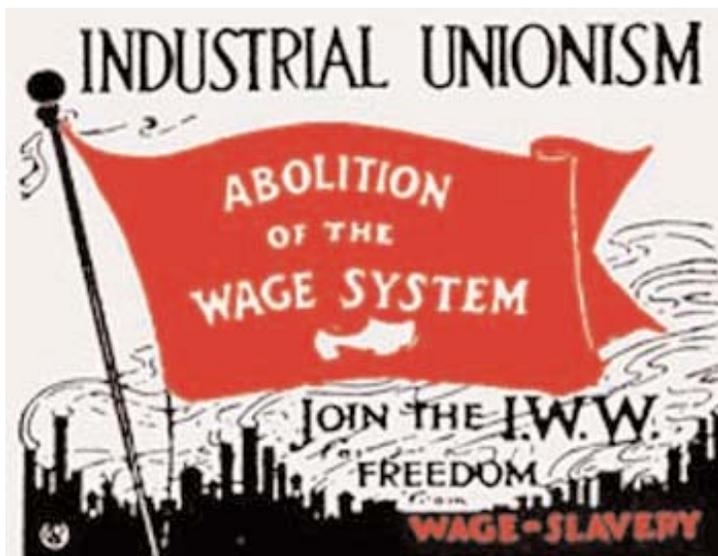
1916: The Wobblies also lead a strike by 4,000 workers in the timber industry for the 8-hour day and a 25-cent wage increase.

1916: The Duluth Federation of Labor launches the "Labor Forward" movement and signs up 4,000 new union members.

1916: Municipal firemen begin organizing in unions in Minnesota, preceding the creation of the International Association of Fire Fighters.

1917: The Minnesota Commission on Public Safety, created during World War I by the state Legislature, assumes near unlimited power and is hostile to organized labor.

1917: Thousands of people rally in support of workers employed by the Twin City Rapid Transit Company, but the workers' strike is crushed with the help of the St. Paul Civilian Auxiliary and units of the State Home Guard. With the United States involved in the First World War, the strikers are condemned as unpatriotic.



1917: The Minneapolis Cooperative Association is organized at Federation Hall. The company sells groceries to union members on a cooperative basis.

1917: Three hundred newsboys organize to protest a cut in pay by the Minneapolis Tribune.

1918: The first Minnesota local of the American Federation of Teachers is formed in St. Paul.

1918: A special census taken of women workers on the Iron Range reveals that American-born workers average 25 cents per hour for 56 hours per week, while immigrant women average 13 cents per hour for 67 hours per week. Women who work in boarding houses fare worst of all, averaging 10 cents per hour for 100 hours per week. These waged work hours are all in addition to women's unwaged work within the home.

1919: The first labor unions for city and county employees in Minnesota are chartered by the American Federation of Labor in St. Paul, Minneapolis and Duluth. Seventeen years later, these locals have an influential part in the founding of AFSCME, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. State and local government workers and school district employees lack full collective bargaining rights until passage of PELRA in 1971.

1919: Twin Cities residents crowd Commonwealth Hall in Minneapolis for a showing of "The Blacklist," a realistic film depicting the massacre of miners and their families in Ludlow, Colorado, five years before.

## 1920s

1920: Women get the right to vote when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution is adopted.

1920s: Lena Hill becomes the first black woman to practice law in Minnesota. She goes on to become the first female president of the Minnesota NAACP.

1922: Rail workers across Minnesota join in the nationwide shopmen's strike, which ultimately fails but leads to passage of the Railway Labor Act.

1923: St. Paul teacher Florence Rood is elected president of the American Federation of Teachers.

1924: The Farmer-Labor Party is formed. It eventually elects many lawmakers, including two governors and several members of Congress, becoming the most successful third party movement in U.S. history.

1924: Mud and water from a nearby lake flood the Milford Mine near Crosby, Minnesota, drowning 41 of the 48 men working underground. It is the worst mining disaster in Minnesota history.

1925: The Minnesota Federation of Labor passes a constitutional amendment prohibiting delegates who are Communists or advocate Communist principles from being seated at the state convention.

1926: On Jan. 13, Local 3 of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters holds its first meeting, at Welcome Hall in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood. Frank Boyd, an early leader of the union (along with A. Philip Randolph) is elected secretary-treasurer of the local. He is immediately fired by the Northern Pacific Railroad and has to take a job at the Armour Meatpacking plant in South St. Paul to support himself and his family while he continues the work of organizing the union. In 1987 a park in St. Paul is dedicated in his honor.

1926: Farmers open a sugar beet processing plant in East Grand Forks, the first of seven to be built in the Red River Valley along the Minnesota-North Dakota border and in southern Minnesota.

1928: In his book, "Spies in Steel," Frank Palmer exposes the Oliver Mining Company's extensive network of spies, thugs and strikebreakers.

1929: The stock market collapses on Wall Street, and the administration of President Herbert Hoover is powerless to halt the spread of the Great Depression. By the next year, almost one in five Minnesota workers is unemployed.

## 1930s

1930: Farmer-Labor candidate Floyd B. Olson is elected governor, a position he holds for six years. "I am not a liberal. I am what I want to be - a radical," he declares. Considered a shoo-in for the U.S. Senate and a possible challenger to President

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Olson dies suddenly of stomach cancer in 1936.

1930: Northwest Airlines pilots in Minneapolis organize a pilots council, which a year later becomes Council 1 of the new Air Line Pilots Association.

1932: St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly President and Union Advocate editor William Mahoney is elected mayor of St. Paul. He successfully lobbies the federal government to help the city's many unemployed workers during the Great Depression and calls for city ownership of the electric utility. Business interests and the St. Paul media line up against him, leading to his defeat in the 1934 election.

1932: Farmers organize the Farm Holiday Association, which sponsors the only significant farm "strikes" in state history. John Bosch, the association's Minnesota leader, seeks a 10-day shutdown of produce deliveries in an effort to exhaust supplies so farmers could fix their own prices.

1932: The Seventh Street Club for Girls opens to provide temporary housing, food, and counseling for unemployed women in Minneapolis. The Club serves an average of 50 women per day, and is sponsored in part by the Women's Occupational Bureau (which assists over 10,000 women that year) and the Federation of Labor.

1933: Congress passes the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) with Section 7(a) granting employees the right to organize. The NIRA is later found unconstitutional and is replaced by the National Labor Relations Act.

1933: First union contract won on Twin Cities Rapid Transit Lines. Twenty years later, the last streetcar lines are ripped out and replaced with buses. Today the Amalgamated Transit Union represents workers employed in Metro Transit's bus system - and its Hiawatha Light Rail Line.

1933: The first sit-down strike in American history takes place at the Hormel Plant in Austin. Hormel demands that Governor Olson call out the National Guard to oust the sitdown strikers, but Olson instead mediates an agreement.

1933: The hospital and Nursing Home Employees Union begins in the Twin Cities with 100 members. Today, the union is known as Service Employees International Union Local 113, with more than 14,000 members statewide.

1933: Union organization efforts begin among Mississippi River workers, largely as a result of the National Industrial Recovery Act.



**Scenes from the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters' strike.**

1934: Workers employed at the Pioneer Press and Dispatch in St. Paul and the Star, Journal and Tribune in Minneapolis form Local 2 of the American Newspaper Guild. In 1938, it takes a long strike - in which police use tear gas on pickets - before the Guild wins recognition at the Duluth daily newspapers.

1934: The Minneapolis Teamsters' Strike, the most significant single labor struggle in state history, is a showdown between Minneapolis employers and workers that divides the city and forces Minnesota's Farmer-Labor governor,

Floyd B. Olson, to step in. The strikers use a new tactic - roving pickets - and publish their own daily newspaper to counter the corporate-dominated press. They enlist the support of farmers and the community as they ultimately break the back of the fiercely anti-labor Citizens Alliance. The victory comes at the cost of four lives - two strikers and two strikebreakers.

1935: The Minneapolis Teamsters' strike, the San Francisco general strike and the Toledo Auto-Lite strike spur Congressional passage of the National Labor Relations Act. This landmark legislation declares that it is the policy of the United States to encourage "the practice and procedure of collective bargaining . . ."

1936: The Steelworkers Organizing Committee launches the first successful organizing drive in Minnesota, winning representation for workers at the U.S. Steel plant in Duluth. The mines on the Iron Range soon follow.

1937: AFL President William Green, his federation challenged by the rival CIO, orders state and city central bodies to expel CIO unions. The Minnesota AFL-CIO reports, "In Minnesota, many of the central bodies were reluctant to carry out the expulsion order handed down by the national officials. However, orders to these groups finally resulted in the dropping, one after another, of the CIO affiliates." That fall, CIO unions in Minnesota form their own organization.

1937: Workers at Greyhound, the national bus line founded in Hibbing, unionize. In 1990, workers at the company engage in a three-year strike, with the company eventually seeking bankruptcy protections.

1937: Members of the Hotel & Restaurant Employees and Bartenders win a contract covering many Twin Cities hotels.

1937: The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers achieves its first contract with Northern States Power Company (today Xcel Energy).

1937: Workers at Duluth's Woolworth stores strike for and win a \$16 minimum weekly wage.

1937: Civil Service established for state employees in Minnesota.

1938: Congress passes the Fair Labor Standards Act that creates a national minimum wage and 40-hour work week.

1938: An important step for many female clerical workers is reached when union organizer Florence Huber raises the membership of Stenographer, Bookkeeper and Tax Accountants Local 17661 from 23 in 1936 to more than 600. With so few women working as union organizers, Huber faces open hostility and sexism.

1939: The Minnesota Legislature passes a Minnesota Labor Relations Act patterned after the National Labor Relations Act.

## 1940s

1940: Unionized workers in Minnesota represent nearly 25 percent of the state's non-agricultural workforce.

1940s: Women fill many jobs in Minnesota workplaces during World War II. Between 1940 and 1945, the number of female workers increases by 54%, or 60,000 workers.

1941: St. Louis County secures special legislation establishing Civil Service for county employees and paves the way for other Minnesota counties to establish Civil Service.

1941: The United Auto Workers win the first contract covering workers at the St. Paul Ford assembly plant.

1942: Workers in Duluth's shipyards successfully organize with the Boilermakers and Iron Ship Builders and Helpers unions.



1944: The Minnesota Democratic and Farmer-Labor parties merge to create the DFL. One of the new party's leaders, Hubert H. Humphrey, moves to purge the organization of anyone suspected of being communist.

1945: Nellie Stone Johnson, a leader of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union, becomes the first African-American elected to a citywide office in Minneapolis, winning a seat on the Library Board. Throughout her life, she is active in the labor movement, civil rights and politics.

1946: Frank Thill, secretary of the St. Paul Building Trades Council, draws up the first successful contract between the council and construction contractors.

1946: St. Paul teachers engage in the first organized teachers' strike in the nation, winning improved conditions for themselves and their students.

1946: Two years of intense effort by the Gas, Coke & Chemical Workers finally succeed in winning recognition and a union contract at Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing - 3M - in St. Paul.

1947: The Communication Workers win a long fight for union recognition and a contract for Upper Midwest employees of Northwestern Bell Telephone Company and Western Electric.

1947: Artists and performers on Twin Cities radio stations form a local of the American Federation of Radio Artists. By 1951, the local is expanded as part of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists.

1947: After the largest strike wave in U.S. history occurs in 1946, Congress passes the Taft-Hartley Act to prohibit sympathy strikes and secondary boycotts and restrict many of the most effective tactics of unions.

1948: Minneapolis Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey delivers an electrifying speech at the Democratic national convention, challenging the forces of segregation within the party. "The time has arrived for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadow of state's rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights," he declares. The Minneapolis Labor Review praises the speech in a front-page article, noting that Humphrey "reached an audience of millions, telling the story of tolerance and liberty with an effectiveness that should unify the forces of progress throughout the nation."

1949: The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union -- which represents workers at Minneapolis Honeywell -- is

expelled from the CIO for being communist-dominated.

1949: Toni Stone, a black woman from St. Paul, becomes the first woman to play professional baseball when she signs with the Indianapolis Clowns. Years later, in the 1990s, pitcher Ila Borders would also make history when she plays for the St. Paul Saints.

## 1950s

1950: The Minnesota Council of Churches issues a report on the miserable conditions facing migrant workers in the state. Approximately 16,000 migrant workers settled in the farming communities of the Red River Valley, Crookston, Moorhead, Albert Lea, Owatonna, Hollandale, St. James, and Madelia after the war. Sugar beets farms required approximately 6,000 workers for a successful season.

1951: The University of Minnesota Labor Education Service is established, with a focus on quality, noncredit training for workers and unions. In later years, it also builds an award-winning video and communications program.

1954: The Duluth Building Trades negotiate one of the nation's first medical care programs in the construction industry.

1955: Minnesota passes the Human Rights Act prohibiting discrimination in employment based on race, gender, religion or national origin.

1955: Retail Clerks Local 2 engages in a six-week strike of downtown St. Paul department stores. They win a small wage increase, but not the union shop they had sought.

1955: The AFL and CIO vote to merge at the national level. A year later, the Minnesota organizations do the same, forming the Minnesota AFL-CIO. Robert Olson, a Duluth Motion Picture Operator, is elected president. Robert Hess, a leader of the Gas, Coke & Chemical Workers union at 3M, is elected vice president.

1959: Congress passes the Landrum-Griffin Act to prevent union racketeering along with further limiting picketing rights and completely outlawing secondary boycotts.

1959: The United Packinghouse Workers strike the Wilson Company meatpacking plant in Albert Lea. Workers from throughout Minnesota donate food and money to the striking meatpackers. The strike is successful when Governor Orville Freeman orders the National Guard to shut down the plant, rather than allow the company to hire strikebreakers.



**The Willmar 8**

## 1960s

1962: President Kennedy signs Executive Order 10988 allowing federal employees to collectively bargain, although it remains illegal for them to strike.

1964: Passage of the Minnesota Taconite Amendment paves the way for creation of the taconite industry in northeastern Minnesota. Eight taconite plants are built over the next 15 years.

1965: Minnesota's Commission on the Status of Women uncovers a general pattern of discrimination against women in the waged workforce, including discrimination in wages, promotions, titles and job categories.

1966: Nearly 150 City of Duluth Public Works employees stage an illegal - and successful - three-day sitdown strike to protest civil service reclassifications.

## 1970s

1970: Minnesota can boast one of the most active labor movements in the United States, with almost 375,000 union members in the state.

1970: More than 200,000 U.S. Post Office workers in 15 states, including Minnesota, engage in a wildcat strike to force Congress to raise wages. It is the first major strike by federal employees, for whom striking is illegal and a felony.

1970: A landmark strike by Minneapolis teachers leads to the passage, in 1971, of the Public Employment Labor Relations Act, granting collective bargaining rights to public employees in Minnesota.

Early 1970s: The Minnesota Legislature passes a host of labor legislation, including a state minimum wage law and an occupational safety and health act.

1973: Significant changes are made to PELRA, allowing state, local and school district employees a limited ability to strike.

THE VERY THOUGHT OF IT SCARES 'EM

1973: Minnesota ratifies the Equal Rights Amendment with the support of organized labor. But the ERA fails to receive the state ratifications necessary to become part of the U.S. constitution.

1977: Eight women in Willmar rock the corporate world - and win international support - when they strike the local bank. Though they fail to gain union recognition and most lose their jobs, their walkout is a milestone in the history of women's and workers' rights.

1979: A grain millers' strike at Duluth-Superior idles dozens of ships on the Great Lakes.

1979: Machinists Lodge 459 member Donald Pilla is killed when a truck plows through a picketline outside the Plastics, Inc., factory in Coon Rapids. His death leads to landmark state legislation requiring all vehicles to stop before attempting to pass through a picketline.



## 1980s

1981: The newly-elected Reagan administration signals its hostile intent to organized labor when it fires thousands of striking Professional Air Traffic Controllers (PATCO) members. Minnesotans join more than 400,000 union members in labor's first Solidarity Day demonstration in Washington, D.C., to protest Reagan administration policies and the firings.

1981: AFSCME members engage in the first strike by state government employees in Minnesota history.

1982: After receiving \$10 million in tax-free bonds, the company that purchased Diamond Tool begins moving work for the Duluth plant to a non-union operation in South Carolina. This action spurs a lawsuit and fight by local union members to prevent the move. Though unsuccessful in keeping the Duluth plant open, the effort lays the foundation for Duluth's living wage and corporate accountability movements.

1983: Taconite production plummets to 25 million tons on the Mesabi Iron Range (from 60 million tons just four years earlier), and thousands of steelworkers lose their jobs. The Minnesota AFL-CIO publicizes the plight of unemployed Minnesotans with a "jobs train" to Duluth, to attend a full-employment rally.

1984: Some 6,000 members of the Minnesota Nurses Association go on strike against 15 hospitals to protest low wages and unfavorable working conditions. The nurses win their strike and bring national attention to the professional status of traditionally female dominated occupations.

1984: Minnesota becomes the first state in the nation to implement pay equity, also referred to as comparable pay for comparable work, for all local and state government jobs.

1985: Workers at the Hormel meatpacking plant in Austin walk off the job in a dispute over wages and working conditions. The strike pits Hormel workers against both their company and their international union in one of the most complex labor-management struggles in state history.

1987: Workers at American Linen Supply Co. in Hibbing, St. Cloud, and Bemidji go on strike over dangerous working conditions, pension plans, and unfair labor practices. The workers at St. Cloud and Bemidji are unsuccessful in their efforts and go back to work without a contract or a union. The seven female strikers in Hibbing, known as the "Hibbing 7," hold out and win their case after five years of protesting. The women are awarded almost a half million dollars of back-pay and benefits, and reinstated in their jobs.

1988: Boise Cascade of International Falls announces a major expansion of its pulp and paper mill and selects BE&K, a non-union firm, as its general contractor. BE&K attempts to build the mill on an "open shop" basis, sparking fierce resistance by Building Trades unions, including a mass rally at the state Capitol.

1989: Twelve Hmong immigrant workers are among the 28 members of IUE Local 1140 who conduct an eight-month strike against Quality Tool, Inc., in St. Paul. They are among the first members of the city's Hmong community - now the largest in the nation - to become active in organized labor.

## 1990s

1990: Congress passes the Americans with Disabilities Act, prohibiting discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere against people with disabilities.

1990: Paul Wellstone, Minnesota's self-declared "labor senator," is elected to the U.S. Senate. He serves until his death in a plane crash in 2002.

1991: More than 3,000 University of Minnesota clerical workers join AFSCME.

1991: Minnesotans join more than 350,000 union members marching in sweltering weather in Washington, D.C., to demand workplace fairness and health care reform. The event is the second Solidarity Day demonstration (the first took place 10 years before, following the PATCO firings).



**2004 Metro Transit strike**

1992: Unions join with environmental, farm, faith and community organizations to form the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition. Its immediate goal is to stop Congressional passage of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement; its long-term vision to seek alternatives to corporate globalization. The Minnesota organization is the only continuously operating, state fair trade coalition in the country.

1993: Organized labor is part of a broad-based coalition that successfully advocates for passage of an amendment to the state Human Rights Act, guaranteeing fair treatment of workers regardless of sexual orientation.

1993: Congress passes the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which allows workers up to 12 weeks off - unpaid - without fear of losing their job, to deal with serious illness or to care for a child or spouse with serious illness.

1997: The St. Paul Union Advocate celebrates its centennial with a year-long series of articles about workers and unions (available at [www.workdayminnesota.org](http://www.workdayminnesota.org)).

1997: While 70% of Minnesota women are employed in the waged workforce, only 1 in 10 of the top corporate positions are filled by women, and women hold a mere 6.25% of the seats on corporate boards of directors.

1997: Thousands of Minnesota Teamsters are among 180,000 who launch a successful 15-day strike at United Parcel Service over excessive reliance on part-time workers. It is the largest strike in the United States in 20 years.

1999: The Holiday Inn Express in downtown Minneapolis fires eight undocumented workers when they try to organize with the Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees union. The union successfully fights the deportation - and ultimately convinces the AFL-CIO to change its policy and champion the rights of immigrant workers.

1999: About 150 workers represented by the United Steelworkers of America strike M.E. International Foundry in Duluth over unfair labor practices and safety concerns. After six months on the picketline, they offer to return to work but are locked out. Thousands of community members rally in support of the workers, who finally win a fair contract and return to work in July 2000, ending one of Duluth's longest strikes/lockouts.

1999: Several hundred Minnesota union members - the largest delegation from east of the Mississippi River - participate in protests at the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle.

## **2000s**

2000: A study by the Minnesota Budget Project finds that income inequality is increasing in Minnesota. The incomes of the poorest 20% of families did not grow since the late 1970s relative to inflation, while the incomes of the middle 20% of families grew 16.6%, and the incomes of the top 20% of families grew 42.6%.

2000: By an overwhelming margin, Minnesota court reporters vote to join Teamsters Local 320, becoming the first statewide bargaining unit of court reporters in the nation.

2000: A landmark strike by the largely immigrant workforce, members of HERE Local 17, shuts Twin Cities hotels.

2000: The Minnesota AFL-CIO and its affiliates launch the Workday Minnesota website, [www.workdayminnesota.org](http://www.workdayminnesota.org)

2001: Some 1,400 workers, most of them members of the U.S. Steelworkers of America, lose their jobs when LTV Steel Corp. closes its iron mine and taconite pellet plant. The company also reneges on its health care and pension commitments to retirees.

2001: More than 1,300 registered nurses strike Fairview Health Systems in the Twin Cities. Their key issue is understaffing and their focus on patient safety wins broad popular support.

2001: Nearly 30,000 state employees - members of AFSCME and the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees - engage in a two-week strike for a better contract with the state of Minnesota.

2002: St. Paul's Main St., which borders the Labor Centre, is dedicated as Mahoney Street to honor the former mayor and labor leader.

2003: Members of Twin Cities Labor Against the War are among more than 7,500 people who march to protest the start of the U.S. war in Iraq.

2003: SEIU Local 113 members participate in a series of "rolling strikes" to achieve a fair contract with 14 Twin Cities hospitals.

2003: Minnesotans take part in the national Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride to support workers' rights and immigration reform.

2003: University of Minnesota clericals, members of AFSCME, picket in the first walkout at the university in 50 years.

2004: Hundreds of Building Trades volunteers spend thousands of hours erecting a frame, cutting and shipping ice and building a massive ice palace - the largest in the history of the St. Paul Winter Carnival.

2004: Legislators learn that some state services are being performed by workers in India, prompting them to call for new legislation to stop the practice.

2004: More than 2,000 members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1005 go on strike, shutting down Metro Transit bus service. As in many struggles, health care costs are a key issue.



**2006 immigrant rights march**

2004: The United Food & Commercial Workers union steps up its campaign against Wal-Mart when the giant retailer opens its first store in St. Paul.

2004: Longtime American Postal Workers Union leader Greg Pofertl serves a 90-day sentence in federal prison for protesting at the U.S. Army's School of the Americas.

2004: Members of the Grain Millers union, BCTGM Local 369-G, are locked out at the Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative in Renville. Community pressure helps bring an end to the lockout and a fair contract settlement after four weeks.

2004: Unions in Cloquet hold their 85th annual Labor Day Celebration.

2004: Northland Poster Collective in Minneapolis, which provides art to many unions and social justice organizations, celebrates its 25th anniversary.

2005: Organized labor joins in coalition with other organizations to successfully pressure the Minnesota Legislature to raise the minimum wage to \$6.15 an hour – the first increase since 1997.

2005: Union leaders blast Gov. Tim Pawlenty and legislative leaders for causing a partial government shutdown that throws more than 9,200 state employees out of work and jeopardizes state and local services.

2005: The SEIU, Teamsters and UFCW split from the national AFL-CIO to form their own federation, Change to Win. Unions in Minnesota establish a state Change to Win organization.

2005: Major strikes in Minnesota include walkouts by teachers in the Crosby-Ironton School District and by mechanics at Northwest Airlines.

2005: More than 300 people pack the Carpenters hall in St. Paul to hear two Iraqi union leaders call for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and pledge solidarity with workers in the United States and around the globe.

2005: Machinists Local 1956 member Sue Eichstadt garners headlines when she walks from her home in Windom to the state Capitol – a 154-mile, seven-day trip – to demand action on health care reform.

2006: More than 40,000 people march to the state Capitol in the largest pro-immigrant mobilization in state history.

2006: Hope of maintaining 1,800 good-paying jobs at Ford's Twin Cities Assembly Plant plant are dashed when the company announces the facility will be closed as part of its national restructuring plan

2006: Starting in October, Twin Cities janitors represented by Service Employees International Union Local 26 launch a six-month, landmark "Justice for Janitors" contract campaign.

2006: United Food & Commercial Workers Local 1161, the union representing 1,700 workers at the Swift packing plant in Worthington, condemns a massive worksite raid by immigration authorities that split families and spread fear in the community.

2007: Hotel workers known as "The Rochester 19" post a big win when the National Labor Relations Board rules that the management of the Holiday Inn Express must recognize their union.

2007: The Interstate 35W bridge collapses into the Mississippi River in downtown Minneapolis, killing 13 people – including Operating Engineer Local 49 member Greg Jolstad, who was working on the bridge – and injuring scores of others. The Aug. 1 collapse renews calls for reinvestment in public infrastructure.

2007: University of Minnesota clerical, health care and technical workers represented by AFSCME engage in a three-week strike.

2007: Building on the success of the 2006/2007 "Justice for Janitors" campaign, private security officers represented by SEIU Local 26 launch "Stand for Security," ultimately winning major improvements in wages, health care and job safety.

2008: Minnesota unions win landmark legislation to address the problem of employee misclassification. More than 17,500 Minnesota employers – one in seven – illegally misclassify workers as "independent contractors," according to the Legislative Auditor.

2008: Workers at Walker Methodist Health Center in Minneapolis vote on their first union contract, a milestone in a nearly five-year struggle for union recognition.

2008: For the first time in 25 years, union membership rose when measured as a percentage of the workforce, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports. Union membership reaches 12.1 percent of the U.S. workforce and 16.3 percent of the Minnesota workforce.

Compiled by Barb Kucera, University of Minnesota Labor Education Service  
Questions/corrections/additions? E-mail [kucer004@umn.edu](mailto:kucer004@umn.edu)