

New Bedford Textile Worker's Strike of 1928
Oral History Interviews and Research Collection

Manuscript Collection, MC 9
Guide and Collection Inventory

3.72 linear feet (6 manuscript boxes and 4 audiocassette storage boxes)

Acquisition: Transferred to the archives by Dan Georgianna in 1993.

Access: Unrestricted

Historical Note: At the turn of the century, the textile industry in New England flourished. Productivity was enormous and jobs were provided for thousands. Wages for textile workers even tripled in a short seven year period. As a result, schools were built, small businesses prospered, and banks enjoyed success as workers spent and saved their incomes. However, during the 1920s, economic collapse caused a decline in textile production across New England especially in the southeast (New Bedford, Fall River, Dartmouth). The decline was primarily caused by overproduction and high wages among the top textile officials. Instead of easing production and /or cutting back on the wages of these top officials, the manufacturers imposed a ten percent wage cut for all textile workers. The cut was announced on the day after Easter, April 9th, 1928. Protests ignited and the New Bedford Textile Strike of 1928 was underway.

The Strike was composed of two unions: The Textile Council and The Textile Mill Committee. The Textile Council, headed by William E.G. Batty with the help of Frank Manning, was comprised of "anglo-saxon" skilled workers. The Textile Mill Committee (TMC), on the other hand, consisted primarily of unskilled French-Canadian, Polish, Portuguese and Cape Verdean workers who had been excluded from entering the Textile Council due to underlying prejudices. Fred Beal and William Murdoch were among the most prominent leaders of the TMC; Eula Mendes, Joseph Figueiredo and Jack Rubenstein (young TMC organizers) also played important roles during the strike. Though both unions fought the ten percent wage cut, the TMC also demanded a twenty percent wage increase, a forty hour work week, equal pay for equal work and an end to "speed-ups," racial discrimination, and child labor. The TMC's ultimate goal was to unite all textile workers under a single union. This, however, did not happen during the strike since the differences between the TMC and the Textile Council could not, in any way, be reconciled.

The Textile Council opposed the TMC and its strike activities. It was believed that this union's activities would weaken the Council's control over the strike. As a result, the Council strengthened and increased its own strike activities. In an attempt to correct past faults, the Council tried to attract the French-Canadian, Polish, Portuguese and Cape Verdean textile workers. Their attempts proved unsuccessful since these workers, who were endlessly exploited for their unskilled labor and historically discriminated against due to their culture and ethnicity, either became members of the TMC or decided to remain neutral. The two unions seemed to compete with one another to defeat common enemies--The New Bedford Cotton Manufacturer's Association and the mill owners who had imposed the ten percent wage cut.

Members of the Textile Council were favored by the police, city officials and the media. Unlike the members of the TMC, Council members were allowed to picket and conduct meetings in public facilities free of charge. TMC members were jailed, harassed and beaten for their meetings and strike activities.

They were portrayed as being "tempestuous, excitable, unsteady, and even weak chinned" (The Strike of '28 p. 97). Members of the TMC were also excluded from negotiation meetings between members of the Textile Council, the New Bedford Manufacturer's Association and the mill owners.

After much protest by the Textile Council and the TMC, the mill owners announced that they would reopen the mills on July 9th with the ten percent wage cut still in effect. On the day in which the mills were to reopen, twenty thousand mill workers picketed in front of the mill gates. As a result, nearly all workers refused to enter. Both unions intensified their strike activities to prevent workers, or in this case "scabs," from entering the mills. Eventually, strike activities, including gatherings of over five thousand, tended to turn violent. The police force of New Bedford was pressured by both mill owners and Mayor Ashley to suppress the strikers in any way possible. As a result, both the Textile Council and the Textile Mill Committee were equally punished under the law.

As the strike progressed into the winter months, however, people began to worry. Starvation was one of their many fears. Members of both the Textile Council and the TMC tried to devise ways in which to end the striking and to begin working again without the ten percent cut in wages.

Old hatreds began to re-emerge as the TMC were excluded from strike and wage negotiations. Conferences and hearings were arranged by the Citizens Mediation Committee for the Textile Council and the Manufacturer's Association; members of the TMC were not allowed a voice. Rather than accept a cut in wages, the Citizens Mediation Committee proposed, to both the Textile Council and the Manufacturer's Association, a speed-up in production. The Council immediately opposed the offer. To add to the fury, the Manufacturer's Association proposed that both the speed-up and the ten percent wage cut be enforced. Again, the Textile Council opposed the offer. Finally, on September 25th, 1928, the State Board and the Citizens' Mediation Committee met with the Textile Council and the Manufacturer's Association (again, the TMC was excluded). The Manufacturer's Association proposed a five percent wage cut, rather than the initial ten percent, and a thirty day notification preceding any wage cut in the future. The TMC tried to persuade Textile Council members into refusing the offer, but on October 6th all seven unions which comprised the Textile Council voted in favor.

Workers, after six long months of striking, returned to work in the mills. Members of the TMC, however, continued to strike. The police quickly extinguished the TMC's attempts at renewing the strike by dispersing gatherings and arresting members. In the years to follow, TMC members were harassed, jailed and even deported. For those who returned to work, they found that their wages were not cut by the voted five percent; in many cases, wages were cut by fifteen to twenty percent. In the 1930s, as wages fell by a dramatic two-thirds, nearly all mills in the southeastern Massachusetts area began to close. This left thousands, who knew no other skills but mill work, in poverty and with no where else to turn but to suffer alongside millions during the Great Depression.

by Julie Fernandes

Source: *The Strike of '28* (1993)

by Daniel Georgianna

Scope and Contents: This collection was assembled by Dan Georgianna in the course of research for The Strike of '28 (1993). It includes 55 oral history interviews on audiocassette of strike participants, family members of strikers, and strike leaders; transcripts to a portion of these interviews; and releases. The collection also includes original photographs and a microfilm edition of Mayor Ashley's scrapbook with index. The original of this scrapbook is in the New Bedford Public Library. Secondary materials include copies of articles from socialist and labor publications (contemporary to the strike), publications pertinent to background research, a bibliography of labor history materials, summaries of journal articles, and notes compiled by the authors of The Strike of '28.

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Citation: The 1928 New Bedford Textile Strike Collection (MC 9); University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth

Processing Note: Previously, the collection was stored in a filing cabinet. To aid in its preservation, the collection was re-folded and placed into acid-free manuscript boxes. The order of the materials found in the collection did not change; the box and folder numbering scheme has been altered from its previous organization.

Box and Folder List

<u>Box #</u>	<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	1	Labor history committee mailing List, 5/23/82
	2	Newspaper articles, May - July, 1982
	3	Blank release and interview forms
	4, 5	Interview releases
	6	Correspondence of Robert Aaronson
	7	Correspondence of Dan Georgianna
	8	Jack Rubenstein (transcribed interview)
	9	William Isherwood (transcribed interview)
	10	Mary DeRoches (transcribed interview)
	11	Frank Manning (transcribed interview)
	12	Mary Alves (transcribed interview)
	13	Agnes and Vic Marginson (transcribed interview)
	14	Isabelle Millotte (transcribed interview)
	15	Oliva Lebeau (interview record)
	16	Eula (Mendes Figuerido) Pompandeau (transcribed interview)
	17	Eula (Mendes Figuerido) Pompandeau (newspaper articles)
	18	Joseph Figueiredo (transcribed interview)
	2	19, 20, 21
22		Photographs (San Salvador Mill)
23		Photographs (New Bedford trolley train and mill equipment)
24		Photographs (mill employees)
25		Photographs (Nashawena Mill)
26		Photographs (mills of Manchester, England)
27		SEMA Labor History Committee proposal
28		Thesis by Patricia M. Stone, "The New Bedford Textile Workers: Strike of 1928: An Unresolved Conflict"
29		E.J. Werly, "The G-Loom Years"
30		AFL/CIO songbook
31		Tom Tippett, "When Southern Labor Stirs" Vols. I - IV
32		Commemorative pamphlets, "Here We Come! Thousands Strong"
33		Gladys Segar and Betty Salomon, "Water Power Revisited"

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<u>Box #</u>	<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Description</u>
3	34	"Life and Times in Immigrant City: Memories of a Textile Town"
	35	"The Story of Cotton and its Manufacture into Cloth in New Bedford" (Old Dartmouth Historical Society, 1937)

4	36	" A Short Story of American Labor" (AFL/CIO)
	37	"New Bedford Mills" (Office of Historic Preservation, New Bedford)
	38	Hathaway Manufacturing Company (open house material)
	39	Hathaway Manufacturing Company (booklets on textile manufacturing)
	40	Historical maps of Lowell, 1821 - 1914 (Lowell Historical Society)
	41	William Cahn, <u>Lawrence 1912: The Bread and Roses Strike</u>
	42	Interviews and oral histories (instructional checklist and article)
	43	Interview notes
	44	Notes donated by Patricia M. Stone
	45	Interview summaries
	46	Articles from <u>The Nation</u> and <u>The New Republic</u>
	47	Excerpt from <u>The Proletarian Journey</u>
	48	Excerpts from <u>The Decline of a Cotton Textile City</u> and <u>The American Communist Party</u>
	49	Ed McConville, <u>The Southern Textile War</u>
	50	Articles from <u>The Textile Worker</u>
	51	Irving Bernstein, "The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920 - 1933" (Ch. 4 only)
	52	Joe Figueiredo (description of mill conditions prior to 1928)
	53	Jaime W. Katz, "Opportunity, Exclusion and the Immigrant"
5	54	Information on Walter H. Langshaw
	55	Job descriptions for the cotton textile industry (Department of Labor, 1939)
	56	William M. Emery and Cathryn F. Brower, "A History of the Rotch-Jones-Duff Estate"
	57	General E. Leroy Sweetser, "Report of a Special Investigation into Conditions in the Textile Industry in Massachusetts and the Southern States"
	58	"The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of New England" (Boston Chamber of Commerce)
	59	William Isherwood, "New Bedford's Textile Era"
	60	Moshe Nadir, "On Vacation"
	61	Constitution and By-Laws (Local Union #25, New Bedford)
	62	Information of William E. G. Batty (newspaper articles and personal documents)
	63	Descriptions of the 1928 New Bedford Textile Strike
	64	Gladys Howcroft (transcribed interview)
	65	Joseph Levesque (transcribed interview)
	66	Articles from the <u>Census of Manufacturers, 1921</u>
	67	Textile mill statistics
	68	Article from <u>The Bulletin of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics</u>
	69	Articles from the <u>Federated Press</u>
	70	E.J. Werly, "Portrait of New Bedford"
	71	<u>The Tomahawk</u> , September 1951 ("This is New Bedford")
	72	Articles from <u>The Monthly Labor Review</u>

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Box #	Folder #	Description
6	73	Articles concerning African-Americans in the textile industry
	74	Introduction draft to "The Strike of '28"
	75	Original outline to "the Strike of '28"

76	Bibliographies of labor history literature
77	Original inventory/index to the strike collection
78	Original inventory to oral history cassette tapes
79	Evelyn A. Sterne, "Patchwork of Protest: Social Diversity and Labor Militancy in the New Bedford Strike of 1928"
80	Bill from Joe Thomas to Roberta Aaronson for photographic services
81	Microfilm copies from Mayor Ashley's scrapbook
82	Summaries of taped interviews with Mary E. Law
83	Profiles of strike participants
84	Layouts for "Strike of '28" by Georgianna and Aaronson
85	"Community and Communism" (article from <u>Labor History</u>)
86	Postcards (one of which is a photocopy)
87	Strike Transcripts
88	Research by James F. McKenna
89	Article on noted communist, "Mother Bloor," from <u>Time</u>
90	Financial information on Grinnell, Holmes, and Neild manufacturing companies
91	"Piedmont North Carolina and Textile Production" by Jefferson Bynum from <u>Economic Geography</u> , Vol. IV, 1928
92	Book and report reviews
93	"Depressed Manufacturing Regions" by Brown and Burrows
94	<u>The American Cotton Industry</u> by T. M. Young (photocopy of the book)
95	Political Aspects of the 1928 New Bedford Textile Strike by Anne Bransfield
96	Newspaper clipping of Wamsutta Mills

Oral Histories (audiocassettes)

Box #	Tape #	Interviewee	Interviewer	Date
7	1,2	Jack Rubenstein	Dan Georgianna	9/2/80
	3	Agnes and Victor Marginson	Dan Georgianna	12/10/80
	4	Mr. and Mrs. Joaquim Cabral	Dora Bastarache	4/29/80
	5, 6	Pete Fataux (duplicate copies available)	Dora Bastarache	1/29/81
	7	Mrs. Margaret Crook	Dora Bastarache	n/a
	8	Manuel Fernandes	Beatrice Pacheco	n/a
	9	Jack Rubenstein	Gale Schultz	8/19/80
	10	Sam Shaer	Roberta Aaronson	8/2/81
	11	Mrs. Law	Gale Schultz	5/7/80
	12	Mrs. Alice Green	Dora Bastarache	n/a
	13	Rosario Potvin	Beatrice Pacheco	10/6/80
	14	Manuel Andre	Beatrice Pacheco	10/6/80
	15	Mary Roderigues	Dora Bastarache	4/8/81
	16	William Isherwood	Martin Butler	1/23/80
	17, 17b	Reverend Thompson	Dale King	n/a

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Box #	Tape #	Interviewee	Interviewer	Date
7	18	Mary DeRoches	Dora Bastarache	3/30/81
	19	William Mello	n/a	12/7/80
	20, 20b	Ovila Lebeau	n/a	11/25/80

	21	John Green	Dora Bastarache Dan Georgianna	7/21/81
	21b	Alice Green	Dora Bastarache Dan Georgianna	7/21/81
	22, 22b	Robert Meggison	Sandra Schinas	11/21/80
	23	Beatrice Pacheco	Roberta Aaronson	10/8/80
	24	Jack Rubenstein	Gale Schultz	8/19/80
	25	John Reagan	Sandra Schinas	11/10/80
	26	Alfred Severs	Roberta Aaronson	10/28/81
	27	Reverend Thompson Frank Manning	Dale King	n/a
	28, 28b	Frank Manning	Roberta Aaronson	8/18/81
	29	Mary E. Law	Gale Schultz	11/13/80
8	30	George Ripley	Beatrice Pacheco	12/13/80
	31	Mary and Charles Greaves	Dan Georgianna	12/3/80
	32	Arthur Perry	Dora Bastarache	11/18/81
	33	Al Saulnier	Dan Georgianna Ivan Costa	8/25/81
	34	Fred Watson	Gale Schultz	11/10/80
	34b	Fred Watson	Gale Schultz	11/14/80
	35	Arnold Oliver	Dora Bastarache	6/11/81
	36	Mary Alves	Dora Bastarache	8/31/81
	37	Frank Manning (inaudible)	Roberta Aaronson	8/8/81
	38	Carrie Jones Silveira	Dan Georgianna Roberta Aaronson	n/a
	39	Gladys Howcroft	Dora Bastarache	n/a
	40	Agnes and Victor Marginson	Dan Georgianna	n/a
	41	Luigi Nardella	Roberta Aaronson	10/10/81
	42	Margurite Irwin	Dora Bastarache	n/a
	43	Nora Duprey	Dan Georgianna Tricia Stove	12/1/81
	44	Joseph Levesque	Dan Georgianna Dora Bastarache	n/a
	45	Hilda Araujo	Roberta Aaronson	n/a
	46	Mary Edwards	Roberta Aaronson	n/a
	47	Angie Correira	Dora Bastarache	n/a
	47a	Angie Correira Ray Combra	Dora Bastarache	n/a
	48	Harvey O'Connor	Dan Georgianna	n/a
	49, 50	open line	Dan Georgianna Dora Bastarache	n/a
	51, 52	Isabelle Milotte	Linda J. Beatrice	n/a
	53	Mrs. Beatrice Duff	Roberta Aaronson	n/a
	54	Paul Buhle	Roberta Aaronson	n/a
	55	Harry J. Batty	Dan Georgianna	n/a
	56	Eula Pompandreu Mendes (duplicate copy available)	Dan Georgianna	8/1/85

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<u>Box #</u>	<u>Tape #</u>	<u>Description</u>		
8	57	Eula Pompandreu Mendes (duplicate copy available)	Dan Georgianna	8/4/85
	58	Eula Pompandreu Mendes (duplicate copy available)	Dan Georgianna	8/6/85

9	59	Joe Figueiredo (duplicate copy available)	n/a	3/16/83
	60	Joe Figueiredo (duplicate copy available)	n/a	3/16/83
	61	Joe Figueiredo (duplicate copy available)	n/a	3/16/83
	62	Gussie Martin	Roberta Aaronson	8/19/82
	63	Josie and Michael Linkiewicz	Roberta Aaronson	8/25/82
	64, 65	Strike events and activities (early events)		
	66, 67	Strike events and activities (clubs and soup kitchens)		
	68	Strike events and activities (speakers and rallies)		
	69,70	Strike events and activities (picket line activities and scabs)		
	71	Strike events and activities (organizers and organizing techniques)		
	72, 73	Strike settlement (vote, settlement and after)		
	74	Strike settlement (effect of strike on textile industry)		
	75	Ray Delgado (WSAR program on 1928 New Bedford Strike)		
	76	ACTWU event (5/23/82)		
	77	Magnolia Laundeu (Third World News)		
	78	Sue Benson lecture, "Women's Work Culture" (SMU Library 10/19/82)		
	79	Fitchburg Meeting (1/27/82)		
	80, 81	U.E. press conference (4/27/82)		
	82	U.E. press conference (5/6/82, 7/7/82)		

Audio reels

Box # Reel # Description

10	1	open line
	2	"Chadwick"

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Microfilm

Box # Reel # Description

10	1/2	Mayor Charles F. Ashley's scrapbook of newspaper clippings	3/23/28 - 5/30/28
	2/2	Mayor Charles F. Ashley's scrapbook of newspaper clippings	7/1/28 - 10/13/28

Oversize Materials

<u>Location</u>	<u>Description</u>
Map case, Drawer 2	Three aerial photographs of New Bedford's mill district