Introduction

Labor in California is an expansive subject of interest to a wide variety of researchers. The California State Archives holds many records that could be used for the study of labor trends, disputes, and movements in the Golden State, as well as trends in employment and economics.

As the repository for historically valuable records produced by the State of California, the California State Archives holds the records of state agencies, including the Governor’s Office; the State Legislature; and the state’s Supreme and Appellate courts. This brochure is intended to facilitate the use of these vast holdings for the purposes of research in labor. It is important to note that the guide is not intended to be a definitive source but is rather an introduction to the holdings of the California State Archives and the information that can be yielded from these records. The guide should be used in tandem with other catalogs, finding aids, and reference services at the California State Archives, including the Archives’ online descriptive catalog, Minerva (http://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/minerva/).

A variety of record groups, subgroups, and record series are discussed in this guide. For ease of reference, the identification numbers assigned to these records are included in a list at the end of this brochure. The list is alphabetized by records creator name (most often, a state agency). Individual series and files are then delineated below each records creator. This brochure was made possible through the joint efforts of the California State Archives; the University of California, Berkeley’s school of information; and generous funding by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.
Minority Labor

The State of California has wrestled with concerns about migrant and ethnic labor since statehood was granted in 1850. Some of California’s earliest laws took on the issue of minorities in the work force. For instance, the first California State Legislature passed a law providing for a Foreign Miners Tax, levying a twenty-dollar tax per month on each foreigner engaged in mining. This tax was repealed in 1851, and a second, more moderate Foreign Miner’s Tax was enacted in 1852. The latter Foreign Miner’s Tax law stated, "The amount to be paid for each license shall be at the rate of four dollars per month, and said license shall in no case be transferable." The Foreign Miner’s Tax law was finally declared unconstitutional in 1870.

The holdings at the State Archives include various sources concerning these tax laws. Legislative papers from 1850-1852 provide insight into how French miners were treated in regard to the Foreign Miner’s Tax. The State Controller’s Office records include volumes showing the fees collected under these tax laws in the 1850s and 1860s. Numerous petitions to the Legislature were also filed in the 1850s regarding the tax.

Other records concerning labor and ethnic groups can be found in the Department of Employment’s Public Employment Offices and Benefits Payment Division, Employment Services Section files, dating from 1951 to 1973. This subgroup of records includes such files as Minority Program Bulletins 1966-1967, as well as reports on minorities and minority programs with titles including, “Ethnic Survey of Employment in California State Colleges (May 1964),” “Interracial Problems and Their Effect on Education in the Public Schools of Berkeley (October 1959),” and “Report to Governor Edmund G. Brown, Second Ethnic Survey of Employment and Promotion in State Government (July 1965).”

The Public Employment Offices and Benefits Payments Division records include files relating to Mexican labor, in a series entitled “Mexican American Files, 1962-1970. Documents found in the series include correspondence; meeting minutes; telegrams; pamphlets and related materials concerning communications and meetings with the Mexican-American community; recruitment of Spanish-speaking counselors; special services to agricultural workers; University of California, Los Angeles’ Mexican American Study project; and a 1964 presentation titled: "Employment Problems of the Mexican-American." Other materials regarding minority are found in the Public Employment Offices and
Benefits Payments Division’s Subject Files (1950-1970). Subject headings include the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) (1963-1964); and Cooperative Manpower Plans (1968). The Manpower Plans files contain records of economic plans to search out employment opportunities for minority workers in Fresno, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, the Oakland Metropolitan Area, the San Bernardino-Riverside-Ontario region, San Diego County, the San Francisco Bay Area, and San Jose Metropolitan Area.

Governor Goodwin J. Knight’s Papers include a series entitled “Farm Labor Placements” covering the years 1953-1958. This series contains information on the use of Mexican seasonal agricultural workers, and issues such as illegal entry into the United States. Information on other minority groups such as laborers from the Caribbean, Japan, and the Philippines, is also included in the series.

**Labor Camps**

Although migratory laborers were present in nineteenth-century California providing a significant portion of the state’s cultural landscape, neither the government nor private companies made an effort to document work camps or the transient labor force. The government began tracking such transitory workers and labor camps during the twentieth century. The Dust Bowl Migration and, later, the need for industrial workers during World War II, resulted in larger migrant populations that often congregated in labor camps scattered throughout the state. Faced with this population growth, California’s newly-created Department of Industrial Relations began to investigate conditions in these labor camps. Established in 1927, the Department of Industrial Relations was formed to “foster, promote and develop the welfare of the wage earners of California, improve the working conditions and advance their opportunities for profitable employment.” This record group is therefore a rich source of information regarding labor and working conditions in California.

Records of the Department’s Division of Immigration and Housing contain information concerning the living conditions of labor and auto camps in the Golden State from 1940 to 1959. From 1940–1950 the division produced monthly labor camp reports that provide detailed information about the camps, including the number of camps in each county; the classification of each camp by type of work performed (i.e. beet farming, construction, etc.); and the various nationalities employed in each camp. From 1951–1955 the Division also started to include information regarding type of living quarters (i.e. bunkhouses, tents, cabins, etc.); the number of camp residents broken down by men, women, and children;
the number of people actually employed from each camp; toilet facilities; bathing facilities; and sewage facilities. The Division even developed a camp rating system. Reports from 1956-1959, however, only provide yearly information about the number of camps in the state.

The Division of Housing and Immigration’s Labor Camp Scrapbooks are another excellent source, particularly for researchers interested in the local perspectives of newspapers. The scrapbooks cover a large amount of material concerning housing and immigrants in California spanning the years from 1920-1940. They touch on a variety of subjects, including the 1936 Filipino strikes and rioting in Salinas, women fighting for better working conditions, unsanitary labor camp conditions, and auto camps.

The records of the Department of Public Works’ Division of Highways and the California Highway Commission are helpful for researchers interested in labor camps and their relation to highway construction. The first state agencies formed for the purpose of constructing roadways were established in 1895. After a variety of administrative changes, in 1911 the state created a Highway Commission to oversee the work of constructing California’s transportation infrastructure. The records of this Commission contain files about unemployment relief camps, dating from 1932-1943 and 1949. These files include project reports; personnel lists; memoranda; circulars; correspondence with federal and state agencies regarding the funding of relief projects; correspondence with labor unions opposing the use of non-union labor; and maps displaying the location of work camps and/or road projects. Most materials deal with the financing of programs.

The California Division of Forestry records also contain information on labor camps, spanning the years 1931-1933. The Division of Forestry administered labor camps under several different programs. The first program, originating in a proposal by the State Unemployment Commission, established 28 camps for the unemployed. The camps proved enough of a success that a similar program was established in 1932. This second program only lasted until 1933, when the labor camps were absorbed by two separate federal programs: the State Emergency Relief Administration (as funded by Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Emergency Conservation Work), and the Civilian Conservation Corps Camps as funded through the Public Works Administration. The Division of Forestry files include correspondence, memoranda,
reports, labor camp statistics and records, camp site selec-
tion, staffing operation, closure, and construction of camp
facilities.

Wages, Hours, and Working Conditions

As the number of migratory laborers in California increased,
state government turned its attention to the working condi-
tions and wages of this mobile population. For instance,
records from the Governor Earl Warren’s Committee to Sur-
vey the Agricultural Labor Resources of the San Joaquin Val-
ley contain information on California’s farm laborers during
the 1940s. He tasked it with surveying all aspects of season-
al worker issues in the San Joaquin Valley, including produc-
tion, employment, welfare, nutrition, health, Mexican aliens,
labor camps and housing, and education of the workers and
their families. The Committee was then to recommend both
short- and long-term solutions for any problems that were
noted. The Committee’s records include meeting files, hear-
ing files, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and press
releases. This Committee’s records also contain several re-
ports that may be of particular interest to labor historians
studying migrant labor populations. One of these reports,
titled “Maternal and Child Health in the San Joaquin Valley,
as Related to Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Families,” out-
lines health problems and issues within migrant worker fami-
lies. Issues such as infant mortality, improper nutrition, and
the effects of environmental factors on health are ad-
dressed. An appendix at the end of the report provides ex-
tensive statistical data on infant mortality rates in California,
arranged by county and encompassing the years 1920-1949.
Another report found in the Committee’s records
summarizes twenty-eight infant deaths in Fresno and Kings
counties over a twenty-day period in 1950. The report pro-
vides great insight into the working conditions of the farm
worker, going far beyond a simple summary of each infant’s
death. The researcher can find information on the parents
of the children, including age, education level, occupation,
wages earned, ethnicity, and living conditions. Other files in
the collection include a Report on Industry in Stockton; Farm
Labor Centers files; and other labor resources.
Governor Earl Warren’s Papers contain additional record se-
ries that provide insight on a range of working condition is-
sues, particularly in regard to the ways in which World War II
and the post-war economic boom shaped how Californians
lived and worked. The researcher is encouraged to review
the detailed finding aid available for these papers in order to
determine which series may be relevant to their research in-
terest.
Convict Labor

California has employed its inmate population in numerous work activities since at least 1915. Convicts have built roads, highways, and other public works projects; fought fires; and manufactured a variety of goods while incarcerated in the state prison system. The Department of Corrections record group provides information on various forms of convict labor, from prison road camps to agricultural work. For instance, the Department’s Administrative Bulletins (1944-1951, 1955-1974) include statistics on inmate earnings, notices of hearings, and the sale of agricultural products and livestock raised by convicts. The Department’s records also include agreements and memoranda relating to women’s prison labor. Such records can be found in the “California Institution for Women, Tehachapi” series.

Inevitably, convict labor was in direct competition with union and other “free” labor in the construction of public buildings and public works projects. Similarly, goods manufactured in prisons competed with the products of more conventional factories. However, unions often cooperated with the Department of Corrections in educational and rehabilitation programs for parolees. The “Associations (Labor Unions)” series of Corrections records, from the subject files of the Department Director, contains correspondence, memos, and resolutions from 1946 to 1961 relating to this complex interaction and competition between prison labor and union and other “free” workers.

Other valuable resources within the Department of Corrections files are the records of the Conservation Camp Services Division. California’s Correctional Conservation Camp Program traces its origins back to 1915 when state highway and prison officials established honor camps to build roads. The first conservation camp was opened in 1946. As the state’s institutional population soared the program was expanded. By mid-1964, there were 37 conservation camps in operation, three of which served as training and administrative centers. The Division worked with various state and federal agencies including the California Division of Forestry, California Highways Commission, United States Forest Service, United States Army Service Forces, and the California Conservation Center.

Records of the Conservation Camp Services Division can include correspondence, reports, teletypes, newspaper clippings, agreements, petitions, resolutions, and related records. The materials shed light on various activities such as camp site selection, establishment, and maintenance, as well as the daily operations of each camp.
Records of the Correctional Industries Commission are also found in the Department of Corrections record group. This Commission has jurisdiction over most productive industrial and agricultural enterprises within the Corrections system. Series relating to the Commission may provide researchers with insight into the functioning body that oversaw inmate labor in various capacities. Theses series include: Meetings, 1956-1966; Assistant General Manager’s Files, 1956-1962; Central Files, 1949-1963; and Subject Files, 1958-1970.

The records of the Department of Corrections’ Correctional Program Services Division may be of particular interest to researchers wanting to learn more about inmate vocational training and job placement. Series include: Educational Reports, 1956-1966; Projects and Programs Central Files, 1945-1962; Increased Correctional Effectiveness Program, 1960-1966; Central Files, 1944-67; and Institutional Reports and Statistics, 1952-1960, 1974-78, 1980. The aforementioned series touch on many inmate-related labor topics and subjects including vocational training for inmates, educational programs ranging from aeronautics to upholstering, correctional and institutional labor camp projects, and parolee job placement.

**Labor Agitators**
The Labor Agitator is an individual who rallies others in order to promote or foster change in working conditions. Often times the strategies of labor agitators lead to labor strikes intended to gain the attention of employers and industries and to promote change. Labor agitators are sometimes linked to criminal syndicalism, acts of violence or terrorism intended to inspire political or social change. Researchers seeking information on labor agitators in California will be in numerous record groups at the State Archives.

Often fighting for better wages and working conditions, labor agitators have cemented their position in California history. Individuals such as Thomas J. Mooney and Cesar Chavez championed the rights of workers and the importance of labor unions for workers.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), or Wobblies, made their presence in California known shortly after the organization’s creation in 1905. Records at the California State archives regarding Wobblies are found in the records of the Department of Corrections, California’s Appellate Courts, and State Supreme Court.

**Supreme Court**

*People v. Steelik, (1921)* WPA 28388  
*People v. Steelik, (1920)* WPA 27432

**Appellate Court**

*People v. Bailey, (1924)* AWPA 1033  
*People v. Connors, (1924)* AWPA 1603  
*People v. Connors, (1925)* AWPA 2619  
*People v. Erickson, (1924)* AWPA 283  
*Ex Parte Campbell (1923)* AWPA 299  
*People v. Flanagan, (1924)* AWPA 189  
*People v. Roe, (1922)* AWPA 2070  
*People v. Tanner, (1917)* AWPA 8567  
*People v. Thornton, (1923)* AWPA 5732  
*People v. Wagner, (1924)* AWPA 7726
Many individuals convicted of Criminal Syndicalism filed applications for Pardon with the Governor’s Office. These applications are now held by the California State Archives. Indexes are available to determine whether an individual applied for a pardon. Good examples included in the applications within these Pardon files are from Charlotte A. Whitney (File No. 556) and Richard Ford (File No. 592).

In addition to court and pardon records, the California State Archives holds files regarding many of the significant events surrounding labor struggles during the twentieth century. For instance, California Attorney General U.S. Webb’s files provide information regarding the 1912 San Diego “free speech fights,” centering around the issue of free speech for labor organizers. The San Diego City Council passed measures to limit the curbside soap box speeches made by members of the Wobblies. These new ordinances led to civil unrest, and fights broke out in the Stingaree neighborhood. The Attorney General records contain reports, testimonies, newspaper articles, and correspondence regarding these events.

California Attorney General U.S. Webb also kept files on the San Francisco Preparedness Day Bombing of July 22, 1916. The bombing resulted in the arrest, conviction and the eventual acquittal of labor leader Thomas J. Mooney. Webb’s files contain information on the Preparedness Day parade as well as the Grand Jury indictment of Mooney. These files can be found within the records of the California Attorney General’s Executive Office. The records include testimonies, correspondence, and reports. The State Archives also holds three California Supreme Court cases regarding Mooney, Case numbers WPA 28793, WPA 29419, and WPA 27304. The court records include transcripts and briefs, Mooney’s application for a Writ of Habeas Corpus, exhibits, reports, correspondence, newspaper clippings, photos, and clothing.

Additional information about Mooney is present within the Department of Corrections’ San Quentin State Prison records. Mooney spent time in San Quentin as Inmate Number 31921. The researcher can review correspondence, court briefs, and photographs within these files. Mooney also successfully applied to the Governor for a pardon. This application file containing correspondence, petitions, newspaper clippings, and transcripts of Mooney’s full and unconditional pardon granted in 1939, is found in the Executive Pardons of Governor Culbert Olson.

In 1965, Latino and Filipino grape workers joined together in a series of strikes and boycotts over poor pay and working conditions. Known collectively as the Delano Grape Strikes, this influential series of events in California’s labor history brought labor leader and civil rights activist Cesar Chavez to the forefront of the state’s growing agricultural labor movement. The California State Archives holds a video interview with Chavez, conducted in 1982. In the interview, Chavez reflects on his involvement with California’s labor movement. The video, found in the Employment Development Department records, is also available online at https://archive.org/details/car_00001.

Other records regarding Chavez and the Delano Grape strike are found in the California Un-American Activities Committee’s records. The collection contains five Bay Area reports containing information on Chavez and the activities in
Delano including strikes and the organization of the grape boycott. Researchers intrigued by the topic may also find a pamphlet titled “The Grapes: Communist Wrath in Delano,” of particular interest.

**Strikes and Labor Disputes**

Labor strikes like the Delano events have proved crucial instruments for bettering working conditions in California and the rest of the United States. Several different record groups at the State Archives contain information regarding these protests, such as the Governor Goodwin J. Knight Papers. Governor Knight’s records include files on the Department of Industrial Relations’ Division of Labor Law Enforcement, covering the years 1953-1958. These records consist of correspondence, memoranda, press releases, and newspaper articles, all relating to the Governor’s role in resolving the strikes. The protests discussed include the Key System disputes (1953, 1955), San Diego-Coronado Ferry System strikes (1954), Northwestern Pacific Railway/Locomotive Engineers Brotherhood (1954), and sand and gravel workers protests (1955). Governor Knight’s Administrative Files also include a series regarding union activities containing correspondence, memoranda, resolutions, news bulletins, and newspaper articles.

Additional information on labor disputes is found within the records of the Department of Employment. The Department’s Trade Disputes Unit records (1938-1956) contain correspondence, forms, work agreements, contracts, court filings, and other information related to investigating, reviewing, and settling trade disputes between employers and employees. Most of the cases involve unemployment insurance benefits of claimants who left jobs because of trade disputes.

The Unit’s dispute reports contain information about a wide variety of clashes between workers and business owners, including the culinary trade disputes in Redding; a funeral directors’ dispute in San Francisco; Lincoln’s Gladding McBean Plant warehouse worker protest; and the Monterey Fish Pickers dispute. These files have information regarding businesses and their owners, timelines for various actions taken (such as picket lines), the number of employees that left their jobs because of each dispute; job descriptions, duties, and wages; and procedures for trade dispute negotiation. The reports offer such statements as “Employees refused to work when picket line was put on. They left the job when the pickets were established.”

The Department of Industrial Relations’ Division of Labor Statistics and Research was authorized to collect, compile, and present facts and statistics relating to the condition of labor in the state. The Division’s records are a gold mine of information as to employment, unemployment, hours and wages, cost of living, labor supply and demand, industrial disputes, industrial accidents and safety, productivity, sanitary and other working conditions, prison labor, and more. A notable record series is the Work Stoppage Reports. These reports, dating from 1963 to 1967, were created jointly by
the Division of Labor Statistics and Research and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics. The reports describe work stoppages according to: employer, union, commencement/termination dates of dispute, industry, area, issues, number of employees on/off job, and statements of facts surrounding the disputes. Other materials such as newspaper clippings and trade union bulletins can also be found in the Division’s records.

California State Employees Association

The California State Employees’ Association (CSEA) formed in 1931. The preamble of the organization’s constitution states, "The California State Employees' Association is hereby constituted and ordained for the purpose of promoting a sense of civic responsibility among state employees; disseminating knowledge of departmental activities to the end that cooperation, efficiency and harmony may prevail; and promoting the welfare of state employees in any and all ways which are compatible with the best interest of the state."

The records of the CSEA, donated to the California State Archives in 2014, reflect the creation and growth of the organization from a fraternal entity into a major American labor union. The materials contain information about collective bargaining and legislative struggles. Many photographs are included, as well as the organization’s newsletters. A portion of the collection is dedicated to the 1972 Department of Water Resources strike that ultimately resulted in a 12.5 percent salary increase for impacted workers.

As of January 2015 a full finding aid is not available for CSEA, but the records are still available for research.

Caucus for a Democratic Union

In 1992, an internal dissident group was formed within the CSEA known as the Caucus for a Democratic Union or CDU. The initial group comprised of thirty-seven CSEA members hoping to reform the association. The reforms sought by CDU included the following:

- The Caucus for Democratic Union is committed to the restoration of the rights, authority, dignity and power of our union’s rank and file membership.
- Our object is to strengthen CSEA/SEIU Local 1000 from within by building a unified movement of rank and file state employees on the job, in the political arena and within our union as summarized in the Rank-and-File Bill of Rights.
- We are dedicated to the proposition that a union is its membership. A public service union is additionally charged with unique responsibilities to promote and protect public services.
- We pledge to organize, educate and mobilize our membership and the public which we serve and to which we belong.

The California State Archives holds 20 cubic feet of records from the CDU including history files, chronological files, union leave files, subject files, and photographs. While numerous people participated in CDU over many years, many of the records document the efforts of Cathy Hackett and Jim Hard. Hackett and Hard were instrumental in the founding of the CDU and are responsible for the creation and storage of most of the records as well as the donation of them to the California State Archives.
California Un-American Activities Committees

The growth of international communism in the 1930s had an enormous impact on American politics. Coupled with the rise of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan, many Americans began to perceive of communism as a real and pervasive threat. In response to allegations that communists had infiltrated the State Relief Administration, the California State Legislature began in 1940 what was to become a thirty-one-year investigation into un-American activities in California. These legislative committees were various named: Assembly Relief Investigating Committee on Subversive Activities, 1940-1941; Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, 1941-1947; Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947-1960; and Senate Fact-Finding Subcommittee on Un-American Activities, 1961-1971.

The California Un-American Activities Committees (CUAC) files span the period 1935-1971. Over this period, the various committees produced or received thousands of documents, audiotapes, approximately 125,000 index cards tracking an estimated 20,000 individuals or organizations, and Dictaphone audio disks. The CUAC files represent one of the most significant collections for a study of modern California history and politics.

The CUAC collection is an exceptional resource in terms of information concerning labor, labor unions, and labor parties. The collection includes files such as “United Polish Workers Party, formerly Polish Workers Party, formerly Polish Socialist Party,” “American Jewish Labor Council,” “National Farm Labor Union,” “Worker’s Alliance of America,” and pamphlets. There are files on the Tom Mooney Labor School, later renamed the California Labor School. These records consist of card files on activities associated with alleged communist issues at the school between 1942 and 1945, as well as pamphlets, newspaper clippings, advertisements regarding school activities and lectures, testimony given before CUAC, and organizational history reports. Also included are the Bay Area Reports which provide information on Cesar Chavez and the Delano Grape Strike and boycott.

Women in the Workplace

Women have not always been acknowledged for their contributions to labor. When thinking of the role twentieth-century women played in the development of the nation’s economy, many conjure up images of Rosie the Riveter and the work women did in the nation’s factories during World War II. While significant, these images only scratch the surface of a far more complex history. Record groups at the State Archives highlighting the issues women faced in the workplace include the California Advisory Commission on the Status of Women and Governor Goodwin J. Knights files on the Department of Industrial Welfare.

The Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1965 for the purpose of “developing recommendations which will enable women to make the maximum contribution to society.” The record group contains meeting files, hearing files, correspondence, publications, reports to the Legislature, laws affecting women, publicity files, and subject files. The range of topics found in the record group covers many issues but subjects in respect to labor include workplace discrimination, maternity leave, women in farm labor,
pay inequity and comparable worth, the California Labor Code, faculty merit salary increases and women in education, and homemaker’s rights.

Documents regarding women in the workplace are also found in Governor Knight’s records on the Department of Industrial Relations’ Division of Industrial Welfare. These files, consisting mostly of correspondence, touch on a variety of topics including hours for working women; compensating time off for holidays; complaints regarding rest homes scheduling twelve-hour night duty shifts for female employees; wage equity; and the poor working conditions women faced at the Rio Linda Food Products Company.

Automation and Technology

Technology is constantly changing and shaping the way people work. This impact is evident in a comparison of photographs from the Highway Commission. Early twentieth-century photographs depict men constructing highways and roads utilizing mules and steam shovels, while later images show newer machinery such as oil and cement trucks.

The 1960s saw a dramatic shift in use of office technology. This decade saw the increasingly widespread use of automatic data processors and computers. The records of the Intergovernmental Board on Electronic Data Processing discuss the introduction, coordination, and efficient use of computer technology within state government. The bulk of the records pertain to the development of intergovernmental information systems and electronic data processing technology. The Board also focused a great deal of attention on the privacy, security, and confidentiality of information entered into state electronic data processing programs. The Privacy and Security Committee Files, for instance, contain information on various privacy issues that arose during the existence of the Board, including the right to access public records, confidentiality of education records, and the use of social security numbers as universal identifiers.

Improvements in technology, particularly advances in automation, have always generated anxiety within the portions of the working population that are worried about the long-term existence of their jobs. The records of the Department of Industrial Relations provide information regarding these concerns. The department even entertained the possibility that technology and automation could create a burden on
society by eliminating jobs and causing widespread unemployment. The Department of Finance also explored such issues as workloads, automation projects, and government efficiency, particularly in their Agency Survey Reports and State Agency Survey Files.

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