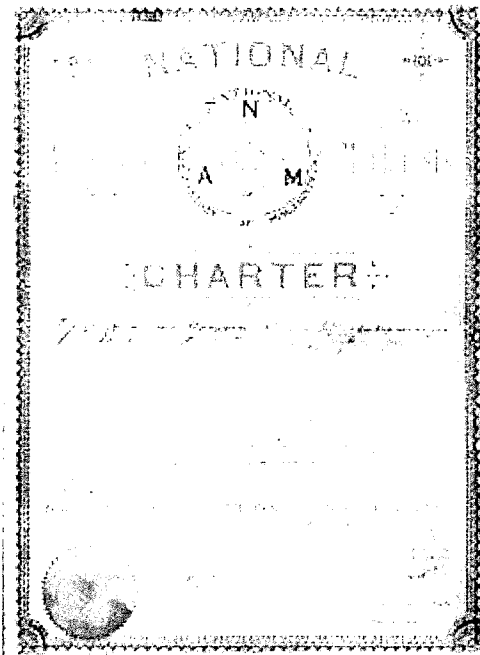


International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers COLLECTION

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General History

In 1888, nineteen machinists joined together to found the Order of the United Machinists and Mechanical Engineers. This small organization eventually became known as the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, which today has a membership of about 800,000 in various North American industries. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers has had a long and interesting history, which follows the struggles of the labor movement during the twentieth century as well as advances in transportation since the days of the railroad.



Thomas Talbot, a machinist in one of Atlanta's railway yards, gathered 18 of his fellow machinists together in May 1888. Believing that machinists needed a union to cope with problems particular to their craft, they formed the Order of United Machinists and Mechanical Engineers. The Order remained secret for several years since it was formed during a time when employers were often hostile to organized labor. Despite the Order being secret it spread beyond Georgia, partially thanks to the "boomers." (Boomers were men who traveled the railway lines for work wherever they went. They would establish locals in these areas if there was not one already present.) Within one year, there were 40 lodges; by 1891, there were 189.

The First Convention of the Order was held on May 6, 1889 in the Georgia Senate Chamber in Atlanta. Talbot was elected Master Machinist, and the organization's name was changed

to the National Association of Machinists (NAM). A Constitution was drawn up at this same Convention and it was agreed that a monthly journal should be published consisting of "no less than 16 pages."

1890 and 1891 were important years for the N.A.M. Its first Canadian Local was founded in Stratford, Ontario, and locals were formed in Mexico as well. Hence, the name of the union was changed at the 1891 convention in Pittsburgh to the International Association of Machinists. I.A.M. headquarters were moved to Richmond, Virginia around this time.

By 1895, the I.A.M. was on the move again as headquarters were moved to Chicago, Illinois. The Machinists became affiliated with the American Federation of Labor in the same year. Shortly thereafter, the Machinists won one of their first big victories in 1898 when they successfully struck and earned a nine-hour work day. By 1915, they would win an eight-hour day.

In 1899 the Machinists moved East again and set up headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Shortly thereafter, I.A.M. President James O'Connell signed an agreement with the National Metal Trades Association (a group representing company owners' / employers' interests). Known as the Murray Hill Agreement, it would begin 35 years of labor-management antagonism when the N.M.T.A. would refuse to pay workers the same pay for fewer hours per week one year after the agreement was signed.

In 1911, the I.A.M. began allowing some new types of workers into its ranks. Since its beginnings, the I.A.M. had been primarily for skilled, white, male railroad workers. In that year, they changed the Constitution to allow unskilled machinists as well as women workers. "Colored" people would be allowed to become full members in 1948. Both colored and female workers, however, had been members of the I.A.M. well before the constitution was changed to officially allow either of these groups to enter the union.

Soon, some of the local lodges began printing their own newsletters. President Brown, possibly fearing undermining of the International by the local lodges, decided to supplement the Journal with a weekly I.A.M. paper, the Machinist, in 1946. Eventually, the Journal's production was cut back to twice a year, and then it was voted out of existence. The Machinist was turned into a "monthly tabloid" three decades later, and then it too was closed down in 1994. It was replaced with a quarterly magazine, the I.A.M. Journal, which is still in publication today.

During the post-World War I era, I.A.M. membership slowly dropped off as war production began to end. During WWI, the Machinists' membership had reached 300,000, making it the largest union in the nation in 1918. By 1923, membership had plummeted to 80,000. The situation worsened during the Great Depression. By 1933, membership was at 50,000, and 23,000 of those workers were unemployed. The 1930s and 1940s did see new laws passed to help get the unemployed back to work, mostly under F.D.R.'s New Deal and with industrial production for World War II. The jobs, however, decreased again with the end of the war and returning anti-union sentiment. In 1947, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which affected the rights of organized labor and laid the foundation for several states to pass "right to work" laws. Despite these

reverses, the railroad machinists, however, did manage to win a 40-hour work week in 1949.

Beginning in 1935, the Machinists started organizing within the airline industry, and won several victories there, such as the 1948 strike by Lodge 751 in Seattle by Boeing workers. In 1951, the IAM re-affiliated with the American Federation of labor. The shift had changed the composition of the organization from skilled craftsmen into essentially an industrial union. The bulk of the membership had moved from the railroads to the metal fabrication industry with aircraft industry workers composing the largest component of the workers. From new worksites and plants in California down to Cape Canaveral (later Cape Kennedy) in Florida, aerospace workers began joining the I.A.M. By 1954, the I.A.M. changed its name one more time to the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. The newly named union was able to shut down most of the airline industry two years later by striking against six of the largest airlines in the business. These included Eastern, National, Trans World, and United Airlines.

One of the community service projects supported by the I.A.M.A.W, Guide Dogs of America under International Guiding Eyes, was launched in 1948 by retired Machinist member Joseph Jones, Sr. Jones requested aid from the Machinists executive council to research the need for guide dogs nation wide after he had been rejected from all other guide dog services due to his age. Finding a need for guide dogs, International Guiding Eyes was founded. Today Guide Dogs of America serves visually impaired persons in the United States and Canada.

After 1970, several new departments were added to headquarters to meet members needs. These included the departments of Civil Rights (1976), Organizing (1976, 1987), Older Workers and Retired Members (1981), and Women (1996). At the 1984 Convention in Seattle, Washington delegates voted to fund the Placid Harbor Education center to train and educate members of the union. This center was renamed the Winpisinger Education and Technology center in 1998 to honor the late International President. Delegates at the 1988 Centennial Convention in Atlanta, Georgia ammended the Constitution so that Canadians were able to elect the Canadian General Vice-President.



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Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library, 100 Decatur Street SE, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3202
Phone: 404-413-2880. Fax: 404-413-2881, Email: archives@gsu.edu | [Text Version](#)