

Wyndham Mortimer Collection

**Papers, 1934-1973
(Predominantly, 1940-1962)**

2 linear feet

Accession #1171

OCLC #

The papers of Wyndham Mortimer were placed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs by his daughter Irma M. Stewart in March of 1984 and were opened for research in February of 1985. The papers include a few documents given to Mortimer by John M. "Scotty" Orr.

Wyndham Mortimer was born March 11, 1884 in Karthaus, Pennsylvania. His father, an immigrant English miner, and his Welsh mother were both supporters of the Knights of Labor. Mortimer, who entered the mines at the age of twelve, continued this tradition by becoming an active member of the United Mine Workers. When he left the mines at twenty-two, he worked in a steel plant and as a railway worker. He married Margaret Hunter in 1907, and in 1908 he joined the Socialist Party.

He became an autoworker in 1917, when he joined the White Motor Co. in Cleveland. In 1932 he formed an independent union there, which became AFL Federal Local 18463. He was elected president of the local and also president of the Cleveland Auto Workers Council in 1934.

Mortimer soon became critical of the AFL's reluctance to organize industrial workers and participated in the effort to establish a national industrial union for auto workers. He was a member of the bloc which succeeded in removing Francis Dillon from the presidency of the United Automobile Workers Union at the South Bend convention in 1936 and was elected First Vice President at that convention.

Mortimer, who was somewhat older than his fellow UAW officers, was then sent to Flint, Michigan to begin an organizing drive among GM workers at the Fisher Body Co. This led to the Flint Sit-Down Strike of December 1936 and January 1937. He also participated in the negotiations, which resulted in GM's recognition of the UAW.

Mortimer figured in the factional struggles within the UAW as a leader of the "Unity Caucus," and as such, he was frequently accused of being a Communist. He denied this, but generally he supported the same positions as the Communists in internecine disputes. In 1938 he, with other officers of the UAW, was expelled from the union by President Homer Martin on charges that they intended to turn the union over to the Communists. They were reinstated in 1939, when R. J. Thomas replaced Martin as president.

In 1939 he was sent to the West Coast to organize the low-paid workers in the burgeoning aircraft industry. His efforts at the Boeing Company in Seattle failed due to opposition by the International Association of Machinists and the Teamsters and because of charges that the drive was a Communist attempt to hurt the defense effort. His next organizing effort at Vultee Aircraft was more successful. The company signed a contract with the UAW after a short strike by its employees.

The UAW succeeded in signing up a large proportion of the workers at North American Aviation, but negotiations with the company stalled. The workers, impatient to see an improvement in their pay, went out on strike. Richard Frankenstein, who headed the UAW Aircraft Division and was anxious to cooperate with the government in avoiding defense strikes, denounced the strike as unauthorized and Communist-led. The strike ended when President Roosevelt sent in troops to take over the plant. Mortimer and other UAW representatives involved in the strike were discharged from the union. Afterwards, Mortimer had some intermittent organizing assignments with the CIO and other unions before retiring from the labor movement in 1949. He died in 1966.

Mortimer wrote pamphlets, newspaper columns and letters to the editor on the subjects of labor and politics. His autobiography, *Organize! My Life as a Union Man* was published posthumously in 1971.

John Marshall "Scotty" Orr was born in 1896 in Paisley, Scotland. He worked as a plumber before volunteering for the army at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. After being wounded, he was mustered out and became active in organizing plumbers and in veterans' groups and the Labor Party.

He emigrated to America with his wife and son in 1923 to seek better employment opportunities. In Philadelphia he joined the AFL plumbers' union Local 123, becoming vice president in 1925 and president the following year. In 1926 he moved to the aircraft industry in Bristol, Pennsylvania. His attempts to organize an AFL union there failed. He worked for a number of East Coast aircraft manufacturers before going to Consolidated Aircraft in San Diego in 1936. He helped found a company union there and served as an officer.

Orr became a UAW organizer in the late 1930s but was discharged because of opposition to Homer Martin. He was working at Vultee when he was reinstated and worked with Mortimer to achieve recognition of the UAW there in 1940. He later joined the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America Local 1421 and was a trustee and delegate of the Los Angeles Industrial Union Council. He wrote for various union papers and was active in Scottish societies.

The papers of Wyndham Mortimer and John M. Orr mainly relate to their efforts to organize the West Coast aircraft industry and to factional tensions within the UAW. There is also material relating to Mortimer's writings.

Among the important subjects covered in this collection are:

Aircraft organizing, 1940-41
Communists in unions
Flint Sit-Down Strike
North American Aviation Strike, 1941

Among the important correspondents are:

Addes, George F.

Hetzel, Ralph, Jr.

Lewis, John L.

An index to subjects and correspondents will be found on page 8.

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4 manuscript boxes

Series I, Wyndham Mortimer Correspondence, 1933-1966, Box 1:

Correspondence relating mainly to his work organizing aircraft workers on the West Coast for the UAW. There is also correspondence with George Addes supporting his candidacy for president of the UAW at the 1946 convention.

Series II, Wyndham Mortimer General Files, 1934-1975, Boxes 1-4:

Manuscripts, reports, organizing and strike materials relating to efforts to organize North American Aviation and other West Coast aircraft companies. A diary and a few other documents relate to the Flint Sit-Down Strike. Other material relates to his writings, his trip to the USSR and other activities.

Series III, John M. "Scotty" Orr, 1939-1945, Box 4:

Correspondence, reports, clippings and other items given by Orr to Mortimer. Most relate to aircraft organizing.

Non-manuscript material:

Copies of pamphlets by Mortimer, books, UAW pamphlets, newspapers and agreements, and other union publications have been placed in the Archives Library. Three union hats, a convention badge, photographs, including some of the Flint Sit-Down and the North American strikes, plus some original sketches have been transferred to the Archives Audiovisual Collection.

Series I
Wyndham Mortimer Correspondence, 1939-1966
Box 1

Letters to and from Mortimer relating mainly to his involvement in organizing aircraft workers on the West Coast for the UAW-CIO. There is also an exchange of correspondence with George F. Addes in which he encouraged Addes to seek the UAW presidency at the 1946 convention. Occasional letters will also be found in Series II. Files are arranged chronologically.

Box 1

1-9. Correspondence, Jun 1939-66, & n.d.

Series II
Wyndham Mortimer General files, 1934-1973
Boxes 1-4

Manuscripts, reports, organizing and strike materials, publications, a 1937 diary with a few entries by Mortimer and a notebook recording information gathered on his trip to the USSR in 1961. Much of the material in this series is fragmentary, covering the period of his employment at White Motors in Cleveland through the posthumous publication of his autobiography. The largest single group of papers relates to his aircraft organizing activities on the West Coast just prior to World War II. Files are arranged by subject alphabetically.

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10. Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution, 1964
11. Aircraft; Boeing, 1941
12. Aircraft; Douglas, 1940
13. Aircraft; Harvill, 1940-41
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- 15-16. Aircraft; North American (Local 683), 1941
17. Aircraft; North American (Local 887), 1965-66
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4. AFL Manual of Procedure, 1935
5. American Motors; clippings, 1963
6. Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, 1948
7. "Auto Labor & Autocrats," MS, 1954
8. Automotion; clippings, 1961-64
9. Black Legion; clippings, 1936-38
- 10-11. Bridges, Harry; 1949-50
12. Civil liberties; clippings, n.d.
13. CIO; government-financed travel, 1949-50
14. CIO; Los Angeles, 1941-49
15. Coughlin, Fr. Charles; clippings, 1935-39
16. Discrimination; race and sex, 1963, 1973
17. Flint; (Local 599), 1964-66
18. Flint Sit-Down; clippings and commemorative material
19. Ford; Dearborn Workers Alliance, 1938
20. Ford; pension plan, 1949

21. General Motors, South Gate, California, 1940

Box 3

1. House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC); clippings, 1952
2. HUAC; Mortimer summons, 1955
3. Labor; miscellaneous, n.d., 1934, 1959-62
4. Labor; poems
5. Labor; songs
6. Lewis, John L., 1951, n.d.

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7. Martin, Homer, 1937-39, 1968
8. Mortimer, Wyndham (WM); biographical information
9. WM; clippings, 1935-41
10. WM; credentials
11. WM diary, 1937
12. WM; employment and salary information, 1937-52
13. WM; friends
14. WM; guaranteed annual wage, 1953
15. WM; labor speech, 1960
16. WM; labor writings, 1930's-1960's
17. WM; letters to the editor, 1940's-1960's
18. WM; newspaper columns, 1950's-1960's
19. WM; notebook

Box 4

- 1-4. WM; *Organize!* MS
5. WM; *Organize!* MS—Henry Kraus annotations
6. WM; *Organize!* MS—Kraus notes
7. WM; *Organize!*;—publicity and reviews, 1971
8. WM; scrapbook
9. WM; "Soviet Trade Unions," 1962
10. WM; Soviet trip notes, address book, 1961
11. WM; "Wyndham Mortimer meets the Soviet Auto Workers"
12. Peace and foreign affairs
13. Reuther, Walter P.
14. Soviet Union, 1962, 1969
15. Travis Defense Committee, 1963-64
16. UAW; corruption
17. UAW; miscellaneous, 1937-38, 1955
18. White Motors, Cleveland, 1935, 1968
19. World War II; clippings

Series III
John M. "Scotty" Orr Files, 1939-1944
Box 4

Correspondence, reports, clippings and other material from JohnM. "Scotty" Orr given to Wyndham Mortimer. Most relate to his West Coast organizing work for the UAW. Files are arranged alphabetically by subject.

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20. Aircraft organizing
21. Clippings, 1939-45
22. Orr, John; biographical information
23. Orr, John; correspondence, 1939-44

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(correspondence is indicated by an asterisk)

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