

Guide to the Gold Hill Miners Union Records

WA MSS S-1313



by Susie R. Bock

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: WA MSS S-1313

CREATOR: Gold Hill Miners Union

TITLE: Gold Hill Miners Union records

DATES: 1866-1925

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 6.08 linear feet (10 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The records, which document the corporate life of the Gold Hill Miners Union, contain the constitution and by-laws (1885), minutes of the union meetings (1883-1925), financial records (1866-1923), committee records (1885-1914), membership records (1881-1921), legal papers (1896-1923), and other union papers (1899-1922). The records are incomplete.

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Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.goldhill>.

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Gold Hill Miners Union Records were purchased in 1965 from Grahame Hardy with funds from the William Robertson Coe Western Americana Fund.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Gold Hill Miners Union Records. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

GOLD HILL MINERS UNION

The Gold Hill Miners Union, representing miners of the town of Gold Hill, Storey County, Nevada, was established in December 1866. Prospectors had discovered gold in the area in 1858, but it was not until 1859 that silver was detected in the ore. Individual mining soon gave way to large scale corporate organizations designed to extract the silver deposits from what became known as the Comstock Lode. By 1860, Gold Hill and Silver City, both with populations over 500, and Virginia City, with a population near 2000, were booming mine towns. Miners first attempted to organize in 1864, but their "League" failed and stable unions were not established until the winter of 1866-67.

The Gold Hill Miners Union consisted of miners working in the Alpha, Alta, Belcher, Crown Point, Kentuck, Overman Tunnel, Vivian, Woodville, and Yellow Jacket mines. A president, vice-president, warden, conductor, recording secretary, and financial secretary were elected every six months, although the financial secretary often served many successive terms. Trustees, whose primary responsibility seems to have been the upkeep of the union's hall, were elected on a less regular basis. Two standing committees carried out the union's business. The Financial Committee maintained business records while the Visiting Committee monitored the health of members and made recommendations for benefit payments. In 1885 the financial secretary was made permanent chairman of the Visiting Committee. A Vigilant Committee was established in 1885 to report on non-union miners and to look into the "standing" of members (that is, whether dues had been paid). Around 1907 the failure to obtain quorum at weekly meetings resulted in the formation of the Attendance Committee. Other special committees were organized to arrange social events and celebrations.

The Gold Hill Miners Union was closely connected with Virginia City and Silver City unions. The Virginia City and Gold Hill unions established a butcher shop in Virginia City, which they sold in 1923. The Gold Hill Union became affiliated with the Western Federation of Miners sometime before 1907 and followed the Federation into the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers.

In 1887 the Gold Hill Miners Union had 434 members, a number which fell to 77 members in good standing in 1907; by December 1913 the membership consisted of 34 members in good standing and 14 in arrears. According to reports in this collection, in 1922 there were only 16 members in the union, which was in debt \$92.20. Although the records show the union met once in 1925, the previous meeting had been three years earlier; therefore 1922 appears to mark the effective end of the Gold Hill Miners Union.

Scope and Contents

Gold Hill Miners Union Records span the years 1866-1925, but they are not complete. Important corporate papers for the 1870s, 1890s and the first decade of the 1900s are missing from the collection.

The records have been arranged to reflect the organization of the Gold Hill Miners Union. The *Constitution and By-laws* are followed by *Minutes of the Union Meetings*, *Financial Records*, *Committee Records*, *Membership Records*, *Legal Papers*, and *Other Union Papers*. Within these groupings, the majority of the material is arranged chronologically, although some records had to be kept as the union maintained them. For example, the records of several committees were often entered in one ledger and can not be separated.

Although there is no official copy of the union's [constitution and by-laws](#) in the collection, a draft with revisions made in 1885 and minutes of the constitutional committee are present. These documents contain information on the founding and governance of the union.

[The minutes of union meetings](#) are incomplete; there are no records for 1866-82 or 1890-1906. This material, however, provides the most information over the longest period. All business was transacted in the weekly meetings of the union in the hall of the Gold Hill Miners Union. Meetings followed a set format, which was written out in 1867 (See Dues Ledger, Box 2, folder 20; see also, rules prescribed in *Ritual of the Western Federation of Miners*, Box 4, folder 53). Each meeting's minutes record the current officers and if that individual was absent. Communications from other unions or individuals are noted and sometimes an abbreviated version of the message is included. The minutes record the union's bills, elections, initiations, and the reports of the Visiting Committee, which consist of a list of members visited, their medical condition ("not good," "getting better"), and a recommendation on benefits to be granted. These reports do not appear in the minutes after 1907. The minutes contain many notes on membership, from brief mentions of non-union workers to longer accounts regarding the problem of recruiting new members. Under the headings "Unfinished Business" and "New Business" the actions of special committees and motions are noted with a short summary of the who said what. Occasionally, more detailed notes were taken or public statements by the union were written into the minutes. During the nineteenth century, the union's dealings with mine superintendents and relations with other local mining unions dominated the business discussions. For the twentieth century, the minutes contain information on mining legislation and strikes throughout the West. Minutes for the 1800s include a section entitled "Good and Welfare" containing miscellaneous business, such as repairs to the hall, or a heartening message, but by the 1920s this became the heading for regular business.

[Financial Records](#) contains a variety of accounts. Treasurer's reports for 1908-14, prepared by the secretary or financial secretary, are quarterly accounts of the union's savings in the Hibernia Bank and German Bank. These reports are interspersed with statements by the trustees or the Financial Committee which examined the books. Reports to the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) cover the period 1909-13 and contain more detailed information on finances and a wealth of data on membership. Reports to the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelt Workers closely resemble WFM reports, but cover the period 1914-23.

The accounts of dues payment are complete except for 1871-89 and 1892-96. The daybooks, the daily recording of payments, are linked to the ledgers, the official recording of members' dues. The ledger page on which a member appears is noted next to the payments recorded in the daybook. An index at the front of each ledger allows one to find members by family name. At the back of the ledger for 1866-1870 are several pages containing an accounting summary for 1866-67 (See Box 2, folder 20).

The accounts of the Visiting Committee for 1877 document visits by individuals to ailing union members and the payment or reimbursement of visitors. A brief description of the visit, such as "sick child" or "to confining wife," gives some idea of the extent of the union's benefits coverage. Accounts of miscellaneous disbursements may relate to expenses, such as postage and travel, incurred by officials while on union business during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The last set of accounts are for the union butcher shop, operated jointly by the Virginia City and Gold Hill unions, as it was being sold to a private business in 1920-22. The volume records what food was purchased, freighting costs, and the original investment by the unions. The last papers in *Financial Records* are bank statements and various receipts that document payments to and by the union in the early 1900s.

[Committee Records](#) reveal the function of two standing committees of the Gold Hill Miners Union, along with limited accounts of a Picnic Committee for 1885. The Attendance Committee kept attendance records on a portion of the membership, calling roll for a different group each month. The records of the Visiting Committee consist of the weekly reports submitted at the union meetings, duplicating the minutes. Around May 1893, these reports ceased to list the names of the sick individuals who were visited or the benefits awarded.

[Membership Records](#) consist of several lists of new or reinstated members for the 1880s. A register, spanning the period 1890-1921, records in alphabetical order the members, their birth place (which was

often a foreign country), relatives, and residence; only the earliest entries have complete data. The date of the entry probably indicates when individuals joined.

[Legal Papers](#) contains a 1920 agreement with the United Comstock Mines Company which bound the union to a salary schedule which would decrease wages over the next year. There is another union-company agreement recorded in the minutes (See Box 1, folder 1, pages 196-97). This pact of 1884 documents the establishment of a working relationship between the Gold Hill Miners Union and the management of the Comstock mines. The legal papers transferring the union butcher shop to S. A. Imelli Meat Company in 1922-23 can be found in Box 4, folder 47.

The union's in-house investigation of Thomas Menary and Thomas Chappel are located in *Legal Papers*. Menary was accused in 1896 of fraternizing with management personnel of the Hale and Norcross Mines, while Chappel, who did not belong to the union, was caught working at below union wages. Affidavits, handwritten charges, and proceedings of the investigations narrate the stories of their trials.

[Other Union Papers](#) consists of material related to the Gold Hill Miners Union's association with the Western Federation of Miners. There is a handwritten report by the union's delegate to the 7th Annual Conference of the WFM. *Ritual of the Western Federation of Miners*, a manual for local branches of the federation, describes a meeting format, officers' duties, an initiation ceremony, and even a burial ceremony. On the inside of the front cover is a cipher to decode the password regularly sent out by the WFM, and there is an example of such a password inside the pamphlet. The printed flyers "Fined, Expelled and Declared Unfair" were probably also produced by the WFM as the *Ritual* and flyers have the same imprint. These handbills list members who had not paid their dues and left town or miners who would not join.

Collection Contents

Constitution and By-laws, 1885

Draft revisions

1885

[See: Oversize, Box 5, folder 56](#)

Minutes of the Union Meetings, 1883-89

b. 1, f. 1	Record book	1883-89
b. 1, f. 2	Record book	1907-14
b. 1, f. 3	Record book	1914-25

Financial Records, 1908-14

b. 1, f. 4-11	Treasurer's Reports	1908-14
b. 1, f. 12-14	Reports to the Western Federation of Miners	1909-13
b. 1, f. 15-16	Reports to the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelt Workers	1921-22
	Dues Accounts	
b. 2, f. 17	Daybook	1890-91
b. 2, f. 18	Daybook	1897-1914
b. 2, f. 19	Daybook	1914-23
b. 2, f. 20	Ledger	1866-70
b. 2, f. 21	Ledger	1905-14
b. 2, f. 22	Ledger	1914-23
b. 2, f. 23	Accounts of the Visiting Committee	1877
b. 2, f. 24	Accounts of Miscellaneous Disbursements	1899-1920
b. 3, f. 25	Accounts of the Union Butcher Shop	1920-22
	Bank Records and Receipts	
b. 3, f. 26	Statements	1901-13
b. 3, f. 27-33	Receipts, incoming money	1910-16
b. 3, f. 34-40	Receipts, outgoing money	1907-18
b. 3, f. 41	Miscellaneous financial papers	1897-1917, n.d.

Committee Records

Attendance Committee		
b. 3, f. 42	Volume A, pages 11-51	1908-14
Visiting Committee		
b. 3, f. 42	Volume A, pages 120-122	1899-91
b. 3, f. 43	Volume B, pages 1-193	1890-94
b. 3, f. 43	Volume C, pages 86, 106-20	1896-97
Picnic Committee		
b. 3, f. 43	Volume C, pages 100-105 See also: Box 3, folder 41	1885

Membership Records, 1881-90

b. 3, f. 44	Volume C, pages 122-47, 179-87, 250-77	1881-90
b. 4, f. 45	Register	1890-1921

Legal Papers, 1920 Dec 1

b. 4, f. 46	Agreement with United Comstock Mines Company	1920 Dec 1
b. 4, f. 47	Agreement regarding sale of Union Butcher's Shop	1922-23
b. 4, f. 48-49	Thomas Menary investigation	1896
b. 4, f. 50	Thomas Chappel investigation	1901
b. 4, f. 51	Miscellaneous legal papers	1920, n.d.

Other Union Papers, 1899

b. 4, f. 52	Report from the 7th Annual Conference of the Western Federation of Miners	1899
b. 4, f. 53	<i>Ritual of the Western Federation of Miners</i>	1909
b. 4, f. 54	Printed flyers: "Fined, Expelled and Declared Unfair"	1912-14
b. 4, f. 55	Miscellaneous	1922, n.d.

Oversize, 1885

b. 5, f. 56

Constitution and by-laws: draft revisions

1885

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Labor unions -- Nevada -- Storey County
Miners -- Nevada -- Storey County -- Labor unions
Silver mines and mining -- Nevada

Geographic Names

Comstock Lode (Nev.)
Gold Hill (Nev.)
Nevada -- Economic conditions
Storey County (Nev.)

Genres / Formats

Broadsides -- United States
Constitutions -- United States
Daybooks -- United States
Minutes -- United States
Personnel records -- United States
Reports -- United States

Occupations

Silver miners -- Nevada

Corporate Bodies

Gold Hill Miners Union
Virginia City Miners Union
Western Federation of Miners