



Special Collections and University Archives

**Manuscript Group 181
Patrick Dolan Papers
President of UMWA District 5, 1896-1906**

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**Indiana University of Pennsylvania
302 Stapleton Library
Indiana, PA 15705-1096
Voice: (724)357-3039
Fax: (724)357-4891
Website: www.iup.edu/archives**

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Biographical Note

Patrick Dolan (1858-1910) was president of United Mine Workers of America, District 5 (1896-1906), and he became one of the best-known early labor leaders in the United States. He was born in Court Bridge, Lanarkshire, Scotland in 1858. He started working in coal mines when he was eight years old. In 1886, Patrick Dolan came to the United States and settled in McDonald, Pennsylvania. After coming to McDonald, Dolan began to organize the mine workers in UMWA District 5.

The UMWA International was organized in 1890 to represent coal miners for collective bargaining purposes. The supervisory structure for the day-to-day affairs of the coal miners consisted of twenty-one district unions, based on geography. The western Pennsylvania coal mines were placed under the jurisdiction of District 5, including all of Allegheny and Washington counties as well as parts of Mercer, Lawrence, Butler, Beaver, Westmoreland, Greene, Fayette, Armstrong and Indiana. UMWA District 5, much like District 2 of central Pennsylvania, quickly became one of the most powerful districts of the UMWA. This was due, in large part, to the fact that the majority of the country's bituminous coal production was concentrated within Pennsylvania's borders.

The early history of District 5 was fairly independent from that of the UMWA as a whole. The miners of western Pennsylvania shared the concerns of other miners: wages, an eight hour work day, company control over the lives of the miners and their families, and increasing mechanization within the mines. UMWA District 5 President Costello actually led the movement for the adjudication of these issues. But, during the UMWA's first decade of existence when union membership elsewhere struggled, the UMWA in western Pennsylvania experienced some semblance of stability. The mines' proximity to the Pittsburgh area and its flourishing steel industry, which were easily accessible via river travel, created a regional network which balanced demand with supply. In 1896, when the UMWA was suffering and virtually nonexistent in several states, Pittsburgh miners negotiated a joint wage agreement with district operators. Although the operators failed to sign at the last minute, many of them adapted the agreed upon wage rate, and the need for stable rates in the region and the necessity of the union was widely recognized.

In 1896, Patrick Dolan was elected president of UMWA District 5, a position he held for ten years. By 1897, conditions in the nation's mines had grown deplorable. Low demand and increasing costs continued to push wages to a minimum. On July 4 of that year, the UMWA called a general strike. Nearly three quarters of the country's bituminous miners, 150,000 out of 197,000, complied. To support the organization at this time, Dolan mortgaged his little home and applied that money to carry on the fight during the famous strike of 1897. Although the strike produced mixed results nationwide, in western Pennsylvania, the joint wage agreement that went unsigned the previous year became a district-wide contract between the operators and the union miners. The

most significant outcome of the strike was, by far, the operators' promise to meet in an interstate joint conference the following year, which did occur in January of 1898. Consequently, by the close of the nineteenth century, the UMWA had come into its own as a bargaining unit. And, District 5 had become an important part of that unit.

From the very beginning, District 5 established itself as a particularly internally chaotic organization. In 1898, the district was troubled by difficult local contract negotiations and strikes which had not been sanctioned by the national. Then UMWA District 5 President Patrick Dolan complained that the national organization was not supporting the strikers, a complaint that apparently had more to do with Dolan's disdain for International President John Mitchell and his bid for the union's presidency than the situation in District 5. At the same time, Mitchell supporters in the Pittsburgh area claimed that Dolan was accepting operator funds for his election campaign, presumably in return for Dolan's cooperation in the next round of contract negotiations.

On December 12, 1901, at a convention of the American Federation of Labor held in Scranton, Pennsylvania, Dolan was elected as one of two delegates from the United States to attend the meeting of the British Trades Congress, which was held in England in September 1902. Dolan was at one time a candidate for national president of the United Mine Workers, but was defeated by John Mitchell. Dolan often said that the miners had selected a much better leader than himself and predicted that his opponent would make a name that would be known throughout the world. He lived to see his prophecy fulfilled.

In 1906, Dolan was removed from office by the rank and file members for violating their trust after he, acting as assistant negotiator at the 1906 wage scale negotiations, rejected the UMWA's position of demanding a single national contract. In 1906, Francis Feehan was elected to replace Patrick Dolan as UMWA District 5 President. Feehan's first task was to rebuild the trust of the miners in their organization. But, like Dolan, his term was plagued by several major strikes, broken wage agreements, pressure from the national to return to the interstate bargaining process and contract negotiations complicated by depressed wages and non-union competition.

Patrick Dolan died following a [train accident](#) at the Pittsburgh station when he was struck by the Wheeling express at 8PM on Saturday, October 22, 1910. He was survived by his second wife and ten children including John Dolan and Patrick Dolan, Jr.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains the papers of Patrick Dolan who was president of UMWA District 5 from 1896 to 1906. Click here to see [Manuscript Group 66: United Mine Workers of America \(UMWA\) District 5](#). The Patrick Dolan Papers primarily includes newspaper articles of a national scope. The collection spans from 1897 to 1910.

Provenance

The newspapers associated with Patrick Dolan were collected by Harrison Wick from Access Newspaper Archive in 2014.

Restrictions

None, this collection is open to the public.

Processor

The collection was processed and the finding aid was completed in 2014.

Content List

Series I: Newspaper Articles

1. *Titusville Herald*, September 8, 1897
2. "Miners Astonished: When Patrick Dolan deserts them and votes with the operators," *Altoona Mirror*, February 3, 1906
3. "Miners Astonished: When Patrick Dolan deserts them and votes with the operators," *Indiana County Gazette*, February 7, 1906
4. "Clings to Miners' Coin: Patrick Dolan refuses to surrender union funds to his successors," *Indiana Evening Gazette*, February 23, 1906
5. "Dolan Voted Out," *Greenville Evening Record*, March 16, 1906
6. *Tyrone Daily Herald*, March 17, 1906
7. *Bedford Gazette*, October 19, 1906
8. "Pat Dolan is Killed: Former Labor Leader Crushed to Death by Train," *Charleroi Mail*, October 24, 1910
9. "Well Known Mine Worker Killed," *Indiana County Gazette*, October 26, 1910
10. "Patrick Dolan Killed," *Indiana Democrat*, October 26, 1910