

# **A Gathering of Teamsters:**

A Look at the First Five Decades of Convention History

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# In Celebration of The International Brotherhood of Teamsters 30th Convention | June 2021

James P. Hoffa
General President

**Ken Hall**General Secretary-Treasurer



#### International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen & Helpers

of America

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

THOMAS L. HUGHER GRIVE GREYTHEAR ZEE EAST NICHIGAN STREET

INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

#### OFFICIAL CONVENTION CALL

TO THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF AFFILIATED LOCAL UNIONS. GREETINGS:

Acting in conformity with section 5 of our Constitution, you are hereby notified that the eleventh Convention of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen and Helpers, of America will convene in the City of Seattle, Washington, on Monday, September 14th, 1925, at ten o'clock a.m. for the purpose of considering such business as may legally come before it. You are therefore, instructed to proceed to elect delegates to represent your Local Union at said Convention, in accordance with our International laws.

The General Executive Board has been compelled to change the date of the Convention, due to the fact, the American Federation of Labor, voted to meet on the first Monday in October. In view of the several jurisdiction disputes, which our organization has with other trades, makes it absolutely imperative that our Delegates to this Convention be in attendance to take care of these matters, therefore, the reason for changing the date of our Convention.

BASIS OF REPRESENTATION: Section 8. "Each Local Union having two hundred members or less shall be entitled to one representative and one delegate for each additional two hundred members or majority fraction thereof, but in no case shall a delegate have more than one vote. No proxy votes will be allowed."

Section 8. "Each Local Union shall pay the expenses of its delegates to the Convention. All moneys due the International Brotherhood, whether by per capita tax or otherwise, must be received at least three days prior to the opening of the Convention."

Also see Sections 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12, pertaining to the Convention and Representation.

"No Local Union that owes back per capita tax as found by the General Auditor, or those who are in arrears for current per capita tax for more than two months, will receive credentials until such time as all per capita tax and all arrearages have been paid."

The sessions of the Convention will be held in the Eagles' Hall, situated at 7th Avenue and Pine Street.

Trusting that your Local Union will be represented at this Convention, and with best wishes and kindest regards, permit me to remain,

Fraternally yours.

General Secretary-Treasurer.

#### A CALL TO CONVENTION

he Call to the Convention has always generated excitement — and rightly so. Not only is it an opportunity to see friends and fellow delegates from around the country, it's a chance to discuss important issues facing the Union and labor in general. The Convention's most anticipated event is the nomination of candidates for International office as part of the five-year election cycle.

The constitution of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters makes the role of the Convention very clear. It states that: "The International Convention shall be the supreme governing authority of the International Union and shall have the plenary power to regulate and direct the policies, affairs, and organization of the International Union."

In the early days, the union's Conventions and elections were held every year. It was thought that, as a young Union founded in 1903, leaders and delegates needed to meet on a frequent basis to guide the union's path and build a strong foundation.

By 1908, the leadership felt the union was steady enough on its feet to meet every two years instead of annually. In 1912, it was changed to every third year and in 1915 it moved to every five years, which is still in place today.

Communication between locals was tough and meeting face to face was the best way to discuss issues and work out their differences. It also helped strengthen the bond between delegates and create an allegiance to the union as a whole, not just one's own local union. The Teamsters have always prided themselves on being a union where members know each other, whether in their hometown or miles away.

Traditions established at the early Conventions such as the use of the member ritual, wearing badges and ribbons, the Teamster song and the "retiring sign," which were then carried out at the local level, also supported this goal.

The Teamsters Union was born of compromise, change and optimism for a better future.

The men and women who attended those first Teamster Conventions, many of whom were very young, wanted change. They wanted to change how working people were treated, change who was included in the union, and change their role in the community.

Teamster were innovators helping to bring progressive ideas to the country at large. Teamsters accepted

women and minority members from the start, staunchly supported the development of motor vehicles, organized an increasingly diverse type of craft into the union, and often led the way in community service and civil rights. All these ventures came out of the Conventions.

As the years passed, Teamsters became vital players in the labor movement and gained a place on the national stage, not only in connection with labor issues, but with national service and broader political issues as well. That recognition also brought increased interest – and scrutiny – to the Conventions. It also brought some well-known guest speakers to the event.

Teamsters loved to show off their pride – in parades and at the Conventions. They loved their union and wanted everyone to know it.

They also loved to have a good time with dinners, sing-a-longs, and marches at the Conventions. As time passed, big name entertainers became de rigueur at the Conventions. They often ran longer than today, sometimes lasting up to nine or ten days due to difficulties with travel and the lack of other opportunities to meet.

In 1912, the delegates to the Convention voted unanimously that from that Convention forward, all services associated with the Convention or regional meetings had to be handled by union labor. This included everything from decorations to food preparation, wait staff and musicians for entertainment. The Teamsters Union was the first to do this and other unions quickly followed suit.

That rule continues today.

Today, Conventions last 4-5 days. Each day begins with the playing of the national anthems of the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico as well as an invocation. Political allies address the assembly and resolutions on a range of topics are presented and affirmed.

Convention activities include reports from the General President and General Secretary-Treasurer, votes on issues facing the union, committee reports, floor demonstrations, rallies and entertainment.

All the staples of our modern Conventions had their origins in those heady early days of Teamsters history when we were deciding who we were going to be and why. This book looks at the important first five decades of Teamster Conventions where all our foundations and traditions were built.

#### **OVERVIEW**

#### **Amalgamation**

n 1903, two rival unions that had once been one, met to work out their disputes to again become one stronger union. The *Team Driver's International Union* and its spinoff, *Teamsters National Union of America* had different ideas about the path the union should take. The biggest dispute concerned owner/operator issues. Could a driver own wagons and still be a member? This is an issue still debated today.

After many arguments it was decided that drivers could own up to five wagons only if they drove one every day.

The amalgamation passed and a new union, *The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen and Helpers of America* was born.



Ribbon Amalgamation Convention 1903



Amalgamation meeting hall



Albert Young TNU



N.W. Evans TDIU



Team Drivers International button



Teamsters Nation Union button

#### EDITORIAL NOTES.

Ho! for the convention.

The convention promises to be an epochmaker in our history.

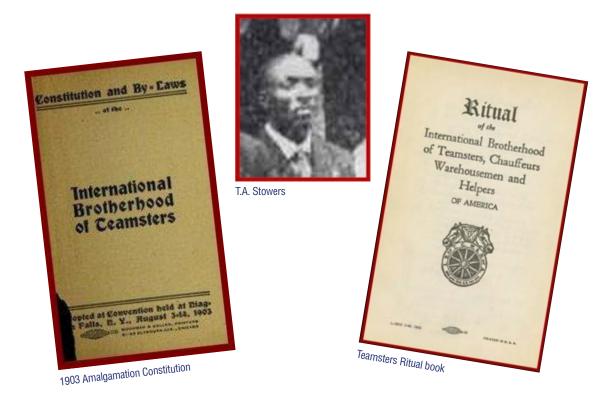
Amalgamation is a good thing, but it should be brought about properly.

Let every delegate come prepared to give his best and most earnest effort.

**Amalgamation Notice 1903** 

#### **No Color Line**

t the Amalgamation Convention, Teamsters, led by Delegate T.A. Storrs from Chicago, declared in the Constitution that a person of any race, gender, religion, or ethnicity may be a member. This was shocking to some in the public as all other industrial unions at the time only allowed white, Christian men to join. Additionally, a ritual was designed for meetings and events in order to bring members together.

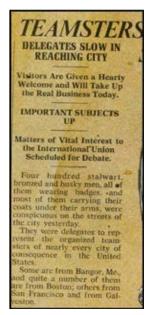


rom the Cincinnati newspaper, 1904:

"Four hundred stalwart, bronzed and husky men, all of them wearing badges . . . "

"All are the same sturdy type, freespoken and hearty, brusque and bluff and carefree . . . "

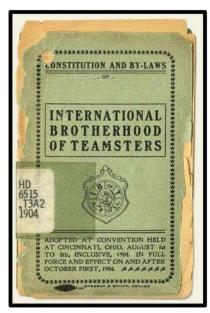
The *Teamster Journal* is established at the Convention.



1904 article describing delegates



**Delegates chatting** 



1904 Constitution





1905 "Instagram" of Convention in newspaper

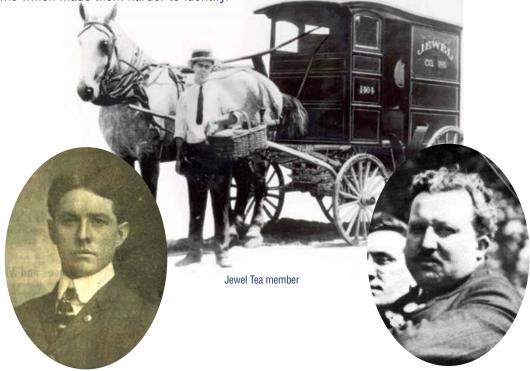


1905 Delegate badge

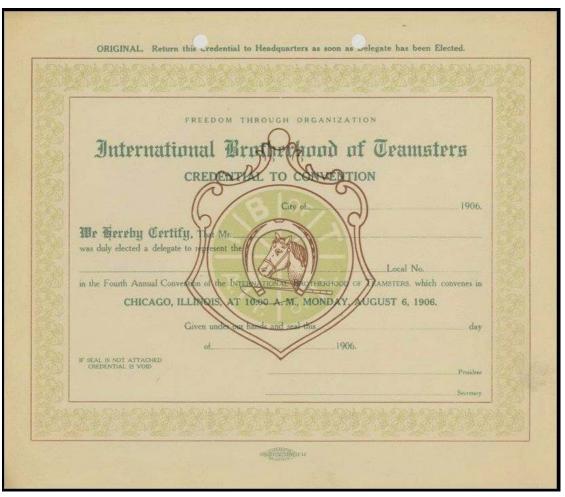
he fledgling Union ran into trouble within 18 months of its creation. An ill-advised strike against retailer Montgomery Ward in Chicago was disastrous financially—almost wiping out the union's coffers completely. Also, many members were badly injured, and the delegates had to come to terms with these realities at the Convention.

Big changes were brewing at the 1906 Convention. Fed up with poor national leadership, delegates tried to oust General President Cornelius Shea. He hung on just barely, but his GS-T Ed Turley lost to 26-year-old Tom Hughes from Chicago. Hughes went on to become one of the pillars of the Union.

Credentials into the Convention were essential as company spies, police and Pinkerton detectives tried to infiltrate meetings and events – members and leaders often used initials instead of their full name which made them harder to identify.



Tom Hughes Cornelius Shea 1906



1906 Credential form

#### 1907 Change in Leadership

n 1907, Shea is finally removed as General President. Daniel J. Tobin, a 32-year-old leader from Boston was the popular choice to replace him. So popular, in fact, that he ran unopposed for General President for the next 45 years, making him the longest serving officer of the union.

Tobin, along with Tom Hughes were the main architects of the union we know today. They brought stability, opportunity and progressive ideas into play as never seen before by members.



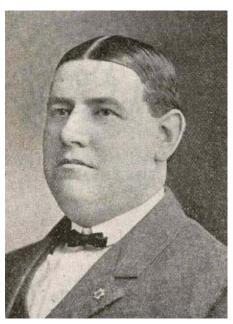
Delegate Dan Tobin 1907

#### 1908-1910 A New Look, A New Direction

n 1908, the delegates pledged to increase organizing efforts throughout the Union. The first International Organizers, John Gillespie of Boston and Thomas "Brocky" Farrell of Chicago were appointed.



John Gillespie 1908



Brocky Farrell 1910



1910 picnic ticket



1910 new logo



1910 Convention badge

A change in logo was approved at the 1910 Convention. The original logo was an adaptation of the rival unions' logos. By 1910, Tobin felt it was time for a new unified emblem. The two horses, Thunder and Lightning made their debut. The 10 wagon wheel spokes represent the qualities of a true Teamster: loyalty, integrity, honor, compassion, courage, steadfast, trustworthy, fair, just and reliable.

Teamsters also pledged to become more active in their communities.

#### **1912-1915 Supporting All Unions**

n 1912, delegates voted to hold Conventions every three years instead of annually. Delegates also decreed that services connected to the Convention MUST be union labor whenever possible. Other unions soon followed the Teamsters lead.

Other big news at the 1912 Convention: Teamsters made the first transcontinental delivery from Philadelphia to San Francisco in 90 days.



Transcontinental delivery 1912

## UNION VOTES FOR 3-YEAR MEETING

Teamsters Abandon Biennial Plan After Lively Debate on Proposition.

#### LYNCH ADDRESSES SESSION

#### Asserts Strong International Organization Has Been Benefit to Printing Trade.

After a debate continuing all afterones, the International Brotherhood
of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen
and Helpers, in session at the Indiana
Pythias Building, yesterday changed
the time of meeting of the national
convention to every three years instead of every two years. The move
is regarded one of economy, and
those who supported it assert that
much of the business transacted in
the past at expensive national conventions can be done just as well by
mail. The change was made by a vote
of 127 to 42

President Tobin pointed out that the action of the Detroit convention some time ago in changing the conventions from annual to biennial meetings had proved a wise move. He declared the international treasury would never have been what it is today if the annual convention had not been abolished.

One of the important features of this morning's session will be the election of officers. Secrecy is being maintained concerning the probable candidates. Secretary-Treasurer Hughes said that no candidates had been announced and that he could not tell in advance whose names would be presented.





1912 Convention badge

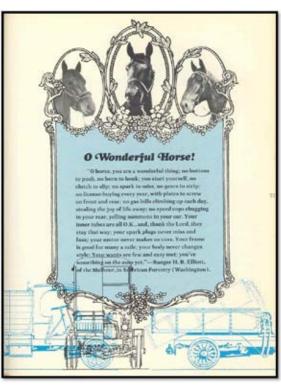
In 1915, the Convention was held at the Knights of Columbus Hall in San Francisco due to a little persuasion from Mike Casey of Local 85. He promised there would be free tobacco for all if they voted to hold the Convention in his town.

That year, the delegates voted to hold Conventions every five years in order to save members' money and devised new guidelines for organizers. The union also officially gained jurisdiction over all bakery drivers.

In 1916, a special vote was taken to ensure the two horses would always remain on the logo as advances in transportation favored motor trucks over wagons.



Michael Casey 1910



Oh. Wonderful Horse!

After talks with the Bakers had been unfruitful in 1911, the AF of L sided with the Teamsters and resolved that all drivers that had heretofore been members of the Bakers did indeed belong in the Teamsters. Time dragged on and the Bakers continued to begrudge the call to let drivers loose from their union. In 1914, the Teamsters won formal approval of the AF of L convention to have the matter settled in their favor. A similar jurisdictional dispute involving laundry workers was also resolved the same way. Still, the Bakers refused to turn over their members. Finally, in 1915, the Teamster cause won the backing of the AF of L to the extent of a threat to unseat the Bakers if they continued in their refusal to turn over drivers to the Teamsters. The Bakers complied.

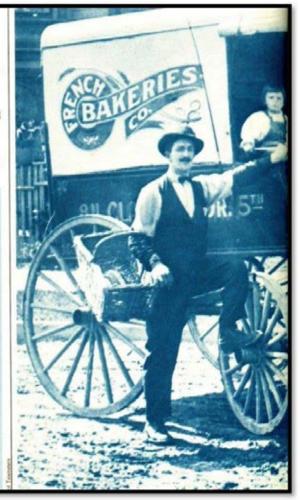
Whereas, The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen and Helpers find, in many sections of the country, that the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union have in their membership nen who distinctly drive wagons and automobiles; and

"Whereas. We believe they are estirely outside the bakery shop and not bakers; and

"Whereas, Our charter grants us jurisdiction over all classes of drivers on all kinds of wagors and automobiles; and

"Whereas. We have at the present time several local unions of Bakery Wagon Drivers and Chauffeurs organized and chartered under our jurisdiction: therefore be it

"Resolved, That this convention instruct the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' Union of America to turn over to the International organization of Teamsters and Chauffeurs, all drivers who are now members of their organization."



Bakery Driver 1915

n 1920, America was still reeling from the trauma of WWI, but economically things were beginning to look up. Teamsters were growing and at the 1920 Convention in Washington D.C., delegates voted to officially affiliate with the Canadian Labour Congress. Teamsters had stepped up to teach soldiers to drive trucks in the war and Tobin was becoming a national leader, representing

Wilson overseas during the war.



Tobin as national wartime leader 1918



Canadian Labour Congress 1920



Teaching soldiers to drive 1917

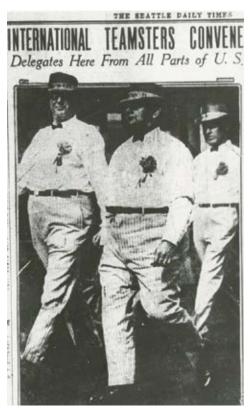
#### 1925-1935

t the 1925 Convention in Seattle, delegates learned the Teamsters had been granted jurisdiction over railway and steamship clerks as well as street and electric rail workers. And, there was 1.3 million dollars in the union's treasury.

By 1930, the Teamsters had affiliated with the Building Trades widening the membership and boosting the treasury to over \$2 million dollars,

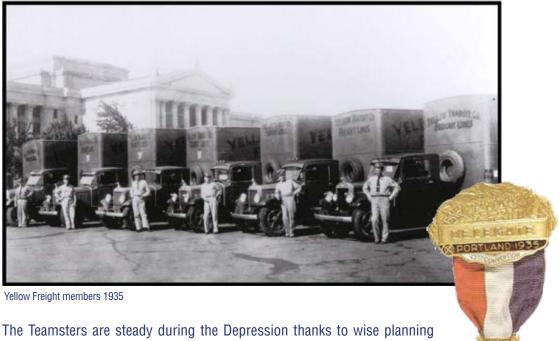


1930 Convention badge



Delegates enter 1925 Convention

which was comforting as fears after the stock market crash increased. In a return trip to Cincinnati for the Convention, there were a whopping 471 delegates in attendance – the largest ever recorded. However, some familiar faces were gone...four Vice Presidents had died since the last meeting of delegates.



The Teamsters are steady during the Depression thanks to wise planning by GS-T Hughes. News from the Portland, Oregon Convention in 1935 announced that more new locals had been chartered than in any other period of the union's history.

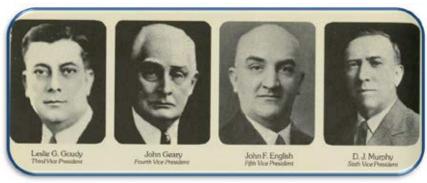
The Teamsters became very politically active in the 1930s, supporting the Social Security Act of 1935 and played a vital role in the passage of the National Labor Relations Act that same year. Teamsters threw their support behind FDR again as he made plans to run for re-election in 1936.



1935 Convention badge

1936 Teamsters for FDR





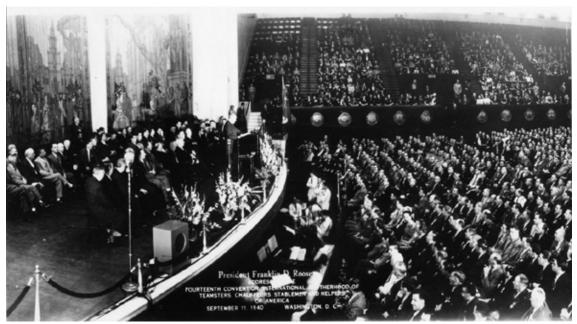


1935 GEB

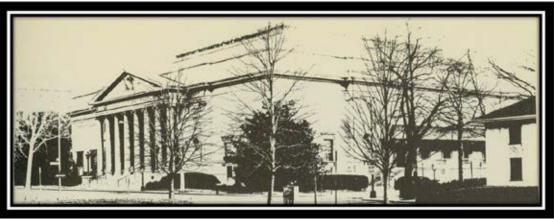
#### 1940 New Name

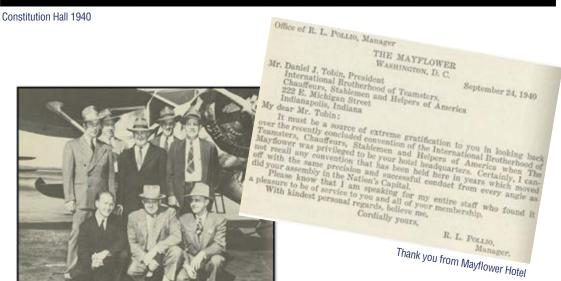
eamsters returned to the Nation's Capital for the 1940 Convention at Constitution Hall and were thrilled to have President Roosevelt as a guest speaker. 1940 brought a name change to the Teamsters as the "Stablemen" title was replaced with the more modern craft of "Warehousemen." Delegates also went "modern" as a number of them opted to fly to the event. Rumblings of war were coming in from Europe, and while the Teamsters pledged to follow FDR's lead, they also pledged to help in any crisis the country might face.

While in D.C., the Teamsters were praised for their exemplary behavior by the management of the Mayflower Hotel.



FDR speaks to delegates 1940





Delegates fly to D.C. Convention 1940

## International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers

### CHARTER CONTRACT

Know all Men by these Presents, That I,

Secretary-Treasurer of the

Local

sideration of the General Secretary-Treasurer issuing a charter to said Local, hereby agree: That located at said charter shall remain the property of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chanffeurs. Warehousemen and Helpers, and, in consideration of the premises herein stated, agree that when charter is framed the frame shall immediately become the property of the International Brother-

cal Union shall have custody of said charter until it is demanded by some person make such demand in accordance with the Constitution; and the charter and frame divered to the person authorized to demand and procure the same; and it is further person authorized may enter any premises occupied by said Local, or any of its members, and take possession and remove the said charter.

By its Scircusy-Treasure

New name, new charter

1940 Convention badge

#### **1944 National Service**

s WWII intensified, the Teamsters' 1945 Convention was postponed until after the War. However, in 1944 a "National Meeting" was called to deal with wartime labor issues and the Teamsters assistance to the country. This included calling for an end to strikes for the duration of the crisis and providing essential services on the home front and overseas.

Sadly, Tom Hughes was not in attendance. He died suddenly in 1941 while at a Western Conference event.

Tobin was once again on the national stage, making wartime broadcasts and heading up wartime production studies. FDR once again spoke to the delegates and this address was one of his most memorable – his "Fala" speech.

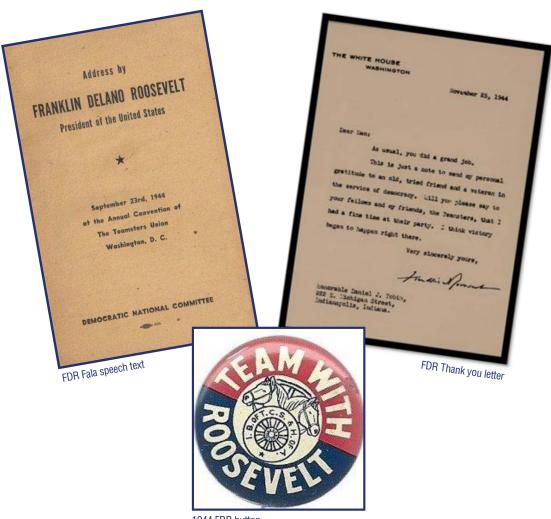


Hughes Memorial Plaque



FDR at 1944 National Meeting

The delegates voted to support FDR for the 4th time in the 1944 election and were part of the "kickoff" for his campaign.

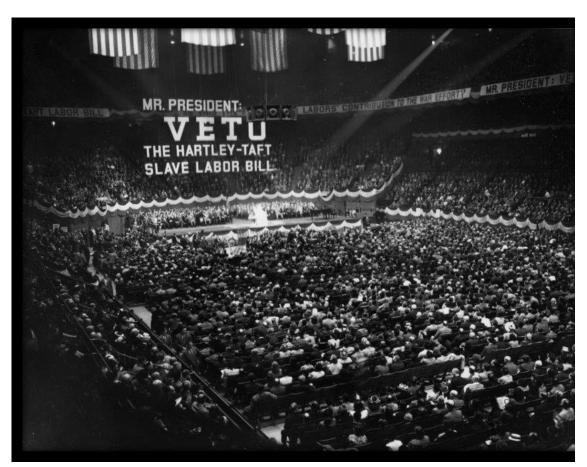


1944 FDR button

#### **1947 New Horizons New Battles**

he War was over, but Teamsters were facing new battles as they met for the 1947 Convention in San Francisco. Seen as heroes during the War, Teamsters and all of labor were now being attacked and their activities curtailed. Delegates voted to fight the Taft-Hartley Act and other anti-labor initiatives.





Veto Taft-Hartley 1947

The Teamsters also realized they need to be near the center of power and approved the purchase of land in Washington D.C. to build a new head-quarters building.

Tobin reported 900,000 paid-up members, double from 1940. The treasury stood at \$17 million, almost triple the \$6 million amount of 1940.

Another beloved leader is gone in 1947; John Gillespie died suddenly after a routine operation in 1946. John English took over as GS-T.



John Gillespie 1945



John English 1947



Teamsters Building lot in D.C. 1947



VPs Conlin, Murphy and Farrell 1947

#### 1952 End of an Era

fter 45 years at the helm of the Teamsters Union, Tobin made the 1952 Convention in Los Angeles his last. Always the innovator, Tobin arranged for the Convention to be televised four

nights running on NBC.



Tobin and Adlai Stevenson





Teamsters move to Washington D.C. 1953

Tobin also set plans in motion for the move to D.C. which was voted to take place in 1953. The construction of the new building began the same year.



New faces were appearing on the leadership ladder, including James R. Hoffa and Harold Gibbons. Western Region leader Dave Beck took on the role of General President.

The anti-labor activities were on the agenda, but so was increased membership and successful organizing campaigns. Freight was strong and diverse divisions such as food processing and public services were growing. In fact, in 1952 one of the largest divisions was Cannery.

Delegates approved for automotive and service station workers to join the union in 1952, along with a growing number of taxi drivers.

Governor Earl Warren and Senator Adlai Stevenson were featured guest speakers, and celebrity performers were a first in 1952, including Ethel Merman and Red Skelton.

Also, the press ramped up their presence at this Convention as did vendors and trade show exhibitors.







#### 1957 A New Generation

he Teamsters headed to sunny Miami in 1957 for the Convention and the first competition for the office of General President in 50 years.



Welcome to Miami 1957

Three candidates, Bill Lee, Tom Haggerty and James Hoffa all tossed their hat into the ring. They were all experienced and brought new energy into the union. Delegates were excited to show support for candidates in many unique ways.

One somber note at the Convention was the absence of Dan Tobin who died in 1955, just two weeks shy of the dedication of the new headquarters building he helped plan.

Changes in labor law were discussed, as well as possibilities for organizing in the airline industry and progress on a national contract for over-the-road drivers. Teamsters were a powerful voice in the labor movement, but they had also acquired powerful enemies who were seeking to limit the union's influence. Delegates debated the best path to overcome these troubles.



Three Candidates for General President 1957



Opening procession 1957 with Tobin memorial



Ardent Hoffa supporter 1957



Convention Press room 1957

Big name entertainers add glamour to the Convention and sightseeing excursions were arranged for the delegates and their spouses.

James R. "Jimmy" Hoffa was elected as the next General President and members began to sense a modern, revitalized union on the horizon.



The new GP toasts with coconut milk

New building, new leaders, a new day for the Teamsters, but yet the same mission remains: serve the members and bring a better life to all working men and women.



New building, new beginning



## **Teamsters Convention 2021**

James P. Hoffa General President **Ken Hall**General Secretary-Treasurer