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Traveling, Rolling, and Smoking:  
The History of the Union Cigar Makers in the United States

Senior Thesis  
History 489: Research Seminar  
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**Abstract**

This paper examines the cigar making industry in the United States from its rise in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to its decline in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, more specifically from about 1880 to 1920. It focuses on this industry mainly through the Cigar Makers' International Union. The scope of this labor union is narrowed to Local 162 of Green Bay, WI. This paper briefly covers the beginnings of the labor movement and tobacco growing in Wisconsin. The argument is that the CMIU's programs and connections with other labor unions benefitted its members including

immigrants and women. This is supported by evidence from records from Local 162, as well as US Census Data.

## **Introduction**

Tobacco is perhaps the most universally used-product in the world. Whether in the form of a cigarette, chew, or cigars, tobacco has reached nearly every corner of the globe. Regardless of one's views on tobacco, and its negative health effects, it is an important part of history. One of the most popular ways of consuming tobacco is smoking cigars. Cigar manufacturing was an important industry in the United States during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Tobacco was grown in the Caribbean Islands in pre-Columbian times. The people native to these islands smoked tobacco leaves in corn husks. Tobacco became popular throughout the world in the next centuries. All cigars at this time were made by hand. Around 1850 a mold was invented which made producing cigars by hand more efficient. By 1890, machines were invented that removed the part of the midrib in the middle of tobacco leaves and then stacked the leaves. In the late 1800's cheap cigars were very popular, as cigars were no longer only used by rich men anymore. Cigar sales reached their peak in 1904, when Americans were spending more money on cigars than any other product. In 1917, Rufus L. Patterson invented a machine which made cigars. Within five years, his machine meant the end of the peak of handmade cigars.<sup>1</sup>

Cigars were produced in the United States at a rate of 6.7 billion a year by 1909, and were America's best selling product.<sup>2</sup> This is quite an impressive statistic when one recalls that at this time most of these cigars were rolled by hand in factories or in small shops. Some of these factories employed thousands of people, while a small shop would have had only a few workers. Most of these workers were men, but as time went on, more were women. Many were immigrants, and many of these workers were represented by powerful unions. In fact, one of the most prominent unions of the day was the powerful Cigar Makers' International Union, which had branches all over the country, including in Wisconsin. Some of these branches, or

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Cigar."

<sup>2</sup> Patricia A. Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 12.

locals as they are called, were numbers 168 of Oshkosh, 25 of Milwaukee, 372 of Marshfield, and 162 of Green Bay.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will focus mostly on the cigar industry in the United States, through the scope of the CMIU, and more narrowly through a local in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Local 162. It will focus mostly on the years between 1880 and 1920. A basic overview of the cigar industry including the CMIU, working conditions, roles of women, and the eventual decline of this industry, and the stories of people who were cigar makers will be included in this paper. Organized labor at this time is an important part of this discussion as 40% to 48% of cigar makers were members of one of these powerful labor unions.<sup>4</sup> During this time period of about 1880 to 1920, women were fighting for the right to vote and immigration was exploding. This progress of women and immigrants can be found also in the workers culture of cigar manufacturing. The Cigar Makers' International Union's programs and connections with other labor unions benefitted its members including immigrants, children of immigrants, and women.

### **The United States: Circa 1865-1920**

To understand the American cigar makers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, one needs to understand the context of the time in which they lived. With the end of the Civil War, the slaves had been freed. The country had gone from fighting itself to expanding in territory, industrializing, growing in population, and moving closer to being an industrial economy as opposed to being a mostly agrarian one. In

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<sup>3</sup> General Correspondence, 1892-1927. Box 1, Folder 1. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969. Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. Green Bay Area Research Center. Green Bay, WI.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 12.

the 1880's, 5.25 million immigrants came from Europe, further changing the face of the nation.<sup>5</sup> This was a time of great change in America.

Perhaps one of the most important changes that came about in this time period was industrialization. Before industrialization, most products were made by hand. As machines became more and more prominent, products could be made very quickly and in vast quantities. A factory owner, or industrialist, could make a fortune if he could produce things as cheaply and efficiently as possible. This is where the common laborer enters the process. An industrialist needed someone to keep these machines running, and he needed someone to operate these machines. Industrialists generally hired people to run their factories as cheaply as possible.

### **Beginnings of Labor Unions in the United States**

The idea of organizing labor came as factory conditions were difficult, hours were long, and pay was low. There were no regulations on the number of hours that one could be forced to work, and it was not uncommon for workers to have shifts that lasted 10-15 hours six days a week. Workers were lucky to make enough money to survive. They lived in tenement buildings, and received low pay. Organized labor, or labor

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<sup>5</sup> Jacqueline Jones, Peter H.Wood, Thomas Borstelmann, Elaine Tyler May, and Vicki L. Ruiz. *Created Equal: A Social and Poitical History of the United States*. (New York: Longman, 200), 590-593.

unions, sought to make the conditions of the workplace more bearable by increasing pay, improving conditions, and reducing hours. They sought to do this by getting people together who worked in the same industry and organizing work stoppages, or strikes.<sup>6</sup>

One of the first labor unions was the Knights of Labor, founded in 1869. This early union sought to improve the working conditions of all people. It was made up of European Immigrants, American-born Whites, African-Americans, and women. This diversity was almost unheard of in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as society was still segregated according to race and gender. The Knights, led by Terrence Powderly would continue to be the dominant labor union in the United States until around 1886. The decline of the Knights was a result of the vast areas of work in which its members participated, as well as the union's own idea of uniting people of all racial backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>

The Cigar Makers' International Union was one of these unions that would work to further the causes of its members. Later in their existence they would be affiliated with a broader coalition of labor known as the American Federation of Labor or AFL.<sup>8</sup> The AFL was founded in 1886 and stepped into the vacuum that was created by the disbandment of the AFL.<sup>9</sup> This organization was led by Samuel Gompers, himself a former cigar maker.<sup>10</sup> The AFL would go on to be one of the dominant labor unions in the United States. The goal of the AFL was to provide "shorter hours, higher wages, and better working conditions" to its members.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia A. Cooper, "The 'Traveling Fraternity': Union Cigar Makers and Geographic Mobility, 1900-1919," *Journal of Social History*, 17, No. 1. (Autumn, 1983): 127-138.

<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "American Federation of Labor and Congress of International Organizations."

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. "American Federation of Labor and Congress of International Organizations."

In Wisconsin, cigar makers were some of the first workers to organize. The first organization of the cigar makers was established in 1852, predating the Cigar Makers' International Union by 12 years. Organization of labor in Wisconsin started in Milwaukee prior to the Civil War with the bricklayers union in 1847. The Ship Carpenters and Caulkers Association executed the first successful strike in 1848. As in the case of most labor unions at this time, the Milwaukee Labor Unions wanted two things: more pay and a work day that was shorter than twelve hours. Initially, this cigar makers' union was opposed to women workers because women earned less than men and the unionists believed that these low wages would hinder the advancement opportunities of men.<sup>12</sup>

### **Tobacco Growing and Cigar Making in Wisconsin**

When one thinks of Wisconsin today, one does not necessarily think of growing tobacco; however in southern Wisconsin tobacco was an important cash crop. It was grown beginning in the 1860's mostly by people of Norwegian ancestry. By 1880 over 10,000 acres were devoted to the growing of tobacco. The towns of Stoughton and Edgerton became the hub of this crop. By 1885, tobacco farming reached its peak, with

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<sup>12</sup> Robert W. Ozannie, *The Labor Movement in Wisconsin*. (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1984), 4.

27, 000 acres being devoted to its growth. Demand for tobacco increased as the number of cigar makers grew in the state. Wisconsin tobacco was particularly suited for the manufacture of cigars because of its coarseness, which made it ideal for cigar wrappers.<sup>13</sup>

The tobacco industry in general was going through a period of great growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The manufacture of tobacco products including cigars, snuff, and pipe tobacco was the fastest growing industry in Wisconsin between 1860 and the 1870's. In the early 1860's tobacco products were valued at only \$150,000 in Wisconsin's economy, but by 1870, they were valued at \$1,220,000.<sup>14</sup>

In 1860 there were 114 cigar makers in Wisconsin, with 85 of them being in Milwaukee County and only one of these workers was a woman. These workers earned an average of \$237.37 a year.<sup>15</sup> By 1870, the number of cigar makers would explode to 597. However the trade would remain dominated by men, as only 6 of these workers were women. Wages would increase to an average of \$290.94 a year.<sup>16</sup> From this point it is difficult to determine the exact number of cigar makers using census data because cigar manufacturing was combined in the same category as cigarette manufacturing. However, we do know that 1880 would mark another year of growth in the Cigar Making Industry. An estimated total of 1,112 people earned their living by making cigars, with 37 of them being women. Wages for this period of time are unclear

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<sup>13</sup> Robert C. Nesbit. *The History of Wisconsin Volume III; Urbanization and Industrialization, 1873-1893*. (Stevens Point: Worzalla 1985), 39-41; Richard N. Current. *The History of Wisconsin Volume II: The Civil War Era, 1848-1873*. (Stevens Point: Worzalla. 1976), 428, 479.

<sup>14</sup> Current. *The History of Wisconsin Volume II*, 479.

<sup>15</sup> US Census Bureau. Census of Population and Housing, 1860. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/> (14 November 2009).

<sup>16</sup> US Census Bureau. Census of Population and Housing, 1870. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/> (14 November 2009).

due to record keeping methods.<sup>17</sup> By 1890, the 316 men who called themselves cigar makers were making an average wage of \$655.56 a year. In 1909, there were 2,391 workers engaging in cigar or cigarette manufacturing, and earning an average wage of \$462.57 per year. The industry grew more by 1914, when there were 2,485 workers earning an average of \$531.99 per year. But by 1919 there were only 1,959 workers making an average of \$863.71 per year.<sup>18</sup>

Table 1. Cigar Makers in Wisconsin

Year	Number of Cigar Makers	Number of Women	Average Yearly Wage
1860	114	1	\$237.37
1870	597	6	\$290.94

<sup>17</sup> US Census Bureau. Census of Population and Housing, 1880. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/> (14 November 2009).

<sup>18</sup> US Census Bureau. Census of Population and Housing, 1920. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/> (14 November 2009).

Table 2. Workers in the Tobacco Manufacturing Industry in Wisconsin

Year	Number of Workers	Average Yearly Wage
1880	1,112	-
1890	1,153	\$454.22
1909	2,391	\$462.57
1914	2,485	\$531.99
1919	1,959	\$863.71

### **Cigar Makers' International Union**

The CMIU was founded in 1864. At this time cigars were starting to become popular.<sup>19</sup> Before this time, cigars were mostly made by tobacco producers for their own personal use.<sup>20</sup> When immigrants came to the United States from the Netherlands, England, and Germany, they brought with them the art of rolling cigars. These men and women established shops producing cigars in the years prior to the Civil War in places

<sup>19</sup> Printed Circulars, 1894-1920. Folder 1, Box 2. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>20</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 10.

like Baltimore, Cincinnati, Detroit, Richmond, VA, St. Louis, upstate New York, and New England. During the Civil War, tariffs on imports made imported cigars from Belgium and Germany too expensive. These tariffs, along with its product's rising popularity, gave the domestic cigar industry the conditions it needed to expand and become a powerful industry.<sup>21</sup> The Union adopted the prestigious blue label that would signify that a product was made by the union in 1881.<sup>22</sup>

The blue label of the CMIU is perhaps the most important symbol of the union. This label was placed on each box of union made cigars. The label informed buyers that the product that was enclosed was of the highest quality and that it was made by the most qualified union cigar makers. This label was important to Local 162, and close attention was paid in the delegating labels to union members. A letter dated December 15, 1894 discussed the possibility of counterfeit labels being produced. This shows the prestige of the label in that there were many imitators but only one Cigar Makers' International Union label.<sup>23</sup>

By 1901, Clovis Gallard, a reporter for the *Cigar Makers Official Journal* noted that the workers were "learning to love the union."<sup>24</sup> With the common ground of manufacturing cigars, the union was able to join people of different ethnicities and neighborhoods in their occupation. Workers from different backgrounds could be seen working together in the trade of rolling cigars.<sup>25</sup> The union also provided a sort of fraternity. Every piece of correspondence was signed "yours fraternally" by the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>23</sup> Printed Circulars, 1894-1920, 1926-1927. Box 2, Folder 2 1894-1920, Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>24</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 94.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

International President GW Perkins.<sup>26</sup> The members of the union seem to generally care about each other, united by their trade of cigar manufacturing.

Another important part of the CMIU was its political agenda. Most of the leaders of the Union had political ideals that were socialist.<sup>27</sup> Socialist ideas dominated the union. The socialist members felt that people should have a decent living and that they should have a decent place to live. This was evidenced by the work of the local New York City union to end the tenement system in 1882 and 1883.<sup>28</sup> Local 162, through its correspondences supported a man named Soloman Levitan, who was actually a Progressive, in his bid to become treasurer in the state of Wisconsin in 1918.<sup>29</sup> A letter to the Local 162 dated July 16, 1918 said that Mr. Levitan was a friend of organized labor and urged everyone to support him.<sup>30</sup>

These socialist ideas have come through in the programs that the union instituted into practice. Some of the programs that the CMIU provided its members were sick benefits, loans for traveling, compensation for striking workers, and unemployment benefits. Union members could expect to receive \$3 a week when they lost their job, and \$5 a week if they were on strike.<sup>31</sup> Traveling loans could reach the amount of \$20, and even then the cigar maker could count on the fellow unionists to help him out if his loan account was maxed out.<sup>32</sup> The union took the place of various insurance

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<sup>26</sup> Printed Circulars, 1894-1920, 1926-1927. Box 2, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>27</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Wisconsin Historical Society, "Soloman Levitan," [http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term\\_id=2790&letter=L](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=2790&letter=L) (accessed 8 December 2009).

<sup>30</sup> General Correspondence, 1892-1927. Box 1 Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>31</sup> Cooper, "The 'Traveling Fraternity,'" 127-138.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

companies and government programs that exist today but were non-existent in the days of the handmade cigar. These programs reflect the values of taking care of each other that the members of the union had for each other.

However, the union was not all about taking care of all of its members; it had ways of keeping its members in line. The union had a publication which it circulated to its members from all across the country, the *Cigar Makers' Official Journal* or CMOJ. If members failed to pay back his loans, or had committed another form of transgression, he or she could count on finding themselves reading about their transgressions. A certain member who committed a transgression could read about himself, "Chas. Rudy is wanted by Union 35. He knows what for."<sup>33</sup> The union seemed to feel that social stigma was a good way to control its members. This social stigma could also affect a union member's career as he or she was traveling around the country.<sup>34</sup>

The CMIU spread out all over the United States. It even had some branches in Canada and Puerto Rico, hence the "International" billing. In 1878, there were only 17 locals, but ten years later in 1888 there were 276.<sup>35</sup> The number of locals would grow further, in 1901 there were 414 locals and by 1919 this number would grow to 466.<sup>36</sup> The locals were mostly concentrated in the Northeast, from the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Mississippi River to the west and the Ohio River to the south, and Canada to the east. However, there were a few locals in cities and towns west of the Mississippi River such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, and Ogden, UT. States that had a great number of locals were: New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 21-22.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 80.

Michigan. Wisconsin had 23 locals in 1912. They represented cigar makers all across the state, from the city of Milwaukee in the southeast all the way northwest to the shores of Lake Superior in the city of Superior.<sup>37</sup>

Table 3. CMIU Locals in Wisconsin, 1912

Local Number	City	Local Number	City
25	Milwaukee	290	Janesville
34	Chippewa Falls	304	Racine
61	La Crosse	323	Sheboygan
85	Eau Claire	329	Fond Du Lac
100	Edgerton	341	Neenah
135	Appleton	363	Waukesha
162	Green Bay	372	Marshfield
168	Oshkosh	381	Watertown
182	Madison	447	Kenosha
212	Superior	477	Manitowoc
245	Ashland	482	Wausau
287	Marinette		

These locals represented cigar makers in small towns as well as large cities. Some large cities, such as New York and Chicago had more than one local. Cities that had a large number of cigar makers such as Tampa, Florida and San Juan, Puerto Rico both had four locals. When a city had more than one local, these locals would often band together and refer to themselves as the “united unions of...” These locals maintained close correspondence with each other and were informed via correspondences of what was happening in local unions and at the national level.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> General Correspondence, 1892-1927. Box 1, Folder 1. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

### **Local 162, Green Bay Wisconsin**

Cigar Makers in Green Bay, Wisconsin organized a local branch of the CMIU in 1881. This fledgling local would eventually become one of the most powerful unions in the city. In April of 1895, there were 39 members. Membership would grow to 68 in January of 1911. This local was connected to the other unions by correspondences and was connected by the bond of labor to other unions in the city of Green Bay and the State of Wisconsin.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Printed Circulars, 1894-1920, 1926-1927. Box 2, Folder 1. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

Local 162 was a financially stable union. Most of the time it was taking in more money than it was paying out. According to the records kept by the union the Local collected money in a variety of ways. It collected money from initiation fees, weekly dues of 10 or 20 cents from each of its members, semi-annual assessments at 50 cents, label assessments at 10 cents, fines, collected loans, assistance from another local number, equalization from another local, and interest of money that it had in the bank. It banked at the Kellogg National Bank in Green Bay.<sup>40</sup> The Local also had expenditures that it needed to pay out. These included loans on membership cards, strike benefits to its members, death benefits, rent, officer's salary, stationary, labels, postage, Tax to the international union, Label Assessments to the International union, equalization to the International union, strike assistance to another local union, and equalization to another local.<sup>41</sup>

Local 162's expenditures were limited to 20% and the rest belonged to the International. This was to pay benefits and was known as the general fund. This system of keeping the local's expenditures limited furthered a sense of fraternity among all of the locals in the CMIU. This was due to the equalization system that allowed money to be transferred from one local to another, ensuring that the locals were united in cigar making and not all competing with one another.<sup>42</sup>

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Financial Statements, 1887-1903, 1906-1919. Box 4, Folder 2. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

Financial Statements, 1887-1903, 1906-1919. Box 4, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

Wisconsin Blue Label League, Reports.1895-1896. Box 3, Folder 6. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>40</sup> Audit Reports. 1888-1896. Box 4, Folder 4. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 96.

For members to join this local they needed to fill out an application. This application asked some simple questions about the potential member. It was similar to what people fill out today as a job application. Aside from the usual blanks for one's name and address, one would have to state the date they were applying, how old they were, the firm at which they were employed, how long they had been involved in cigar making or packaging, the place they served their apprenticeship, whether or not they were affected by a disease, if they had membership in a military organization, whether or not they were a member of the International Union before, if they had been suspended or expelled from the International Union, if so why, and from which union, and if and when they were expelled whether they were indebted to the International Union at the time. Most of the men who were applying for membership in Local 162 were young men between the ages of 18 and 21. Some of the older men who were applying had previously been expelled from Local 162, or had been expelled from Local 25 of Milwaukee. There seemed to be a pattern of men getting expelled and then attempting to come back into Local 162.<sup>43</sup> This demonstrated that people wanted to be in this union because of the benefits it offered.

Perhaps one of the most defining things about Local 162 is its connection to other unions of different industries and other cigar makers in the state of Wisconsin. Local 162 had many different connections with the other labor unions in Green Bay and with the other locals of the CMIU in Wisconsin.<sup>44</sup> Correspondences from Local 162 dated 1918 ask other locals for the prices that their cigar makers were receiving per

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<sup>43</sup>Applications, 1896-1907, 1919. Box 3, Folder 1. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

thousand cigars.<sup>45</sup> This was in an effort to make sure that its members were getting fair prices for their labor.

Local 162 was well connected to the other labor unions in the state and the city of Green Bay. These organizations include the International Association of Machinists, and the Trades Union Liberty League of Wisconsin.<sup>46</sup>

### **Joseph and Peter Rutten: Father and Son Cigar Makers**

Perhaps the best person to epitomize the CMIU Local 162 is Peter Rutten, a man who made cigars until he died in 1969.<sup>47</sup> Peter was one of the last cigar makers in the city of Green Bay at the time of his death. He was a member of the CMIU Local 162 for 66 years.<sup>48</sup> Peter started making cigars when he was 10 or 12 with his father Joseph Rutten.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> General Correspondence, 1892-1927. Box 1, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Social Security Administration, *Social Security Death Index*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Clippings, 1952, 1956, Undated. Box 5, Folder 10. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Joseph Rutten was born around 1853 in The Netherlands.<sup>50</sup> He was married to Josephine, who had come from Belgium. Joseph was a member of the Local 162, an immigrant who was able to better himself through the programs of Local 162. Joseph had a son named Peter who would follow in his footsteps.<sup>51</sup>

Peter Rutten was born on March 14, 1884 in Wisconsin.<sup>52</sup> As mentioned above, he began making cigars with his father in when he was 10 or 12. Peter was a member of Local 162 for many, many years. Peter first joined the union on April 1, 1903.<sup>53</sup> According to the records available, Peter was an exceptional member of the union. He was always on time with his union dues and never took sick benefits. A further search into his past revealed that Peter was affected by World War I. On September 12, 1918 Peter registered for the draft.<sup>54</sup> However, he was never called up to serve.<sup>55</sup> At this time he was 34 years old. Peter was also living at 434 Baird Street. This address is one that Peter would keep for the rest of his life.<sup>56</sup>

By 1952, there were only a couple of cigar makers left in the City of Green Bay. Peter Rutten was one of these people. An article in the local newspaper talked about the life of this cigar maker and some of the things that happened to Local 162. Peter

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<sup>50</sup> US Census Bureau, *1920 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> US Census Bureau, *1900 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Social Security Administration, *Social Security Death Index*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009); US Census Bureau, *1900 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> Audit Reports, 1888-1896. Box 4, Folder 2. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>54</sup> *World War I Draft Registration Cards*, 1917-1918, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> US Census Bureau, *1930 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*; Income Tax Returns, 1966-1969. Box 5, Folder 11. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

described that the local would hold two or three dances and summer picnics for its members. Peter also boasted that the Local 162 had worked to provide its members the highest wages in the city of Green Bay. Even in 1952, Peter was making about 80,000 cigars a year with his assistant, M.L. Lannoye. He still made all of these cigars by hand, and insisted that handmade cigars were superior to machine made cigars. Peter also expressed his displeasure with the habit his four sons had of smoking cigarettes.<sup>57</sup>

Peter Rutten celebrated 50 years of marriage to his wife, Hannah in 1956. Peter was a Catholic who belonged to the St. Mary of the Angels Church in Green Bay. He had four sons and a daughter that survived into adulthood.<sup>58</sup>

Peter was a dedicated cigar maker. According to his sales ledger he was making cigars up until January of 1969.<sup>59</sup> According to the social security death index, Peter died in February of 1969.<sup>60</sup> He made cigars up until the month before his death, if not until the day he died. He was still living in the same house at 434 Baird Street.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Clippings, 1952, 1956, undated. Box 5, Folder 10. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Sales Ledger, 1961-1968. Box 5, Folder 2. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>60</sup> Social Security Administration, *Social Security Death Index*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 1, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Income Tax Returns, 1966-1969. Box 5, Folder 11. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

## **Cigar Workers**

Peter Rutten was just one cigar maker in this time period. Cigar makers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were a motley group. They came from several different backgrounds. The most dominant group was people of German ancestry. Other groups included Bohemians (Czechs), African-Americans, Belgians, Dutch, Jews, and Cubans. Most of these workers were men. Some of them were born in the United States, but many were born in other countries and moved the United States, as noted in the last section. These groups lived in several different parts of the country however, as Cubans lived predominantly in Tampa and Key West, FL. Many African Americans worked in shops in the South. African-Americans were, in many cases, banned from

joining the CMIU, but there were African-American locals in Mobile, AL, Charleston, SC, as well as New Orleans, LA. However, cigar makers were not necessarily a stationary workforce.<sup>62</sup>

Beginning in the 1860's, almost as soon as cigars were becoming popular, cigar makers were traveling around the country. One cigar maker "estimated that 99% of cigar makers" in the CMIU "traveled at some point in their careers."<sup>63</sup> The workers did this out of necessity. Jobs came and went but there was always a demand for skilled cigar makers somewhere. Cigar makers also traveled for a sense of adventure and finding oneself. Most of the cigar makers who were traveling around were young men without families. This demographic was the most mobile for obvious reasons, they were not "tied down" by the constraints of family obligations. These mostly young men traveled by train, sometimes hoboining, or hopping on freight trains, all around the country. However, this era was not to last. By the 1920's there were few jobs for the traveling men and women. This will be discussed later in the paper.<sup>64</sup>

Cigar making was a piecework job in most cases. This meant that cigar makers were paid for how many cigars they made, and not how many hours they spent making them. This meant that cigar makers had some control over how hard they wanted to work at any given time. The manager of the establishment did not own the time a cigar maker working in his shop. Cigar makers could walk in and out of a factory or shop as they pleased. Cigar makers were only hurting themselves if they chose to work for only half a day or take a couple of hours off of work. Union cigar makers would never work more than 8 hours in a day. Doing so would violate union rules. In July of 1918, a letter

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<sup>62</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 29, 64, 65.

<sup>63</sup> Cooper, "The 'Traveling Fraternity,'" 127.

<sup>64</sup> Cooper, "The 'Traveling Fraternity,'" 127, 129, 133-134.

sent to Local 162 official Jules Babeanu, it addressed rumors that the 8 hour work day was being violated. According to the correspondence, this was a matter that needed to be taken care of “at once.”<sup>65</sup> As one can recall, the 8 hour work day was one of the first things the organized labor movement worked to achieve.<sup>66</sup>

Women and men were not equally represented in the industry. As census records above show, the industry was heavily dominated by men. Women were generally not accepted into the culture that the male unionists had developed. The men had created a culture based on loyalty, pride, dignity, and discipline. Women were seen as inferior to men in this trade due mostly to the attitudes of the workers. Male cigar makers thought that a woman working outside of the home was a disgrace, in worst cases, female cigar makers were regarded as little more than prostitutes who would do anything for money.<sup>67</sup>

The CMIU also was less than welcoming to women. Meetings were often held in the evening when women needed to be home. Union dues were often too expensive for women to pay, based on their salaries being significantly lower than those of men. Without union support, women had a difficult time getting their grievances addressed. However, this does not mean that there were no women in the CMIU.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Clippings, 1952, 1956, undated. Box 5, Folder 10. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>66</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 42.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>68</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 220-221.

### **A Cigar Making Woman in Wisconsin: The Case of Annie Cermak**

To find the exact number of women who were rolling cigars in Wisconsin at a given time would be very difficult. However, it is known that from 1883 to 1906 in Green Bay there was a woman who rolled cigars and belonged to Local 162. This woman's name was Annie Cermak. Annie was born in Bohemia, now part of the Czech Republic, sometime between 1867 and 1871. Annie was married to a man named William Cermak, who was also a cigar maker.<sup>69</sup> He was also a member of Local 162.<sup>70</sup> The Cermaks were admitted into the Green Bay union around 1883, coming from Local 28 of Westfield, Massachusetts.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> US Census Bureau, *1910 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed November 14, 2009); US Census Bureau, *1930 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> Membership Ledgers, 1882-1917. Box 7. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Annie seemed to be doing fine in Green Bay until around August of 1893. In this month, Local 162 records indicate that she received a sick benefit of \$20. In the month of September she received a sick benefit of \$35, and in October she was given \$10 in sick benefits. Annie was sick again, according to union records in the summer of 1896. She received sick benefits in for the sum of \$15. She was apparently too sick to work for the next three months and received sick benefits for \$20 in August and September, and an additional \$10 for October of 1896. Between 1896 and 1900, it is not clear where she was working, because she was re-admitted into the union via retirement card in August of 1900. The next month, Annie received a sick benefit in the amount of \$30, and also in November of the same year received a sick benefit of \$57.15. The next year, 1901, was a year Annie was sick for a three month period. She received sick benefits of \$20 for August, September, and October. She was also sick the same time the next year, receiving benefits in August 1902 of \$20, September of \$25, and October of \$20. Annie seemed to remain productive until January of 1906 when she received a sick benefit of \$25. From the time Annie joined the local union in 1883, she had been given a total of \$337.15 in sick benefits. Finally, on November 9, 1906 Annie was removed from the union. It was reported that "insane benefit for Annie Cermak paid to Wm. Cermak her guardian." At this time, she apparently had traveled to Merrick, Massachusetts. William received a sick benefit for Annie in the amount of \$500. Annie was suspended from the union at this point.<sup>72</sup>

This is not where the story ends for Annie Cermak, however. Census data shows that she and William were living in New York City in April of 1910. It also reveals

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<sup>72</sup> Financial Statements, 1887-1903, 1906-1919. Box 4, Folder 2-3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

that the couple had 3 children, Mary age 13, Lillie age 9, and George age 5. Counting back the time of Annie's sick benefits, one could speculate that when she took sick benefits between July and October 1896, she had just given birth to Mary. One could also speculate that when she received sick benefits between August and October of 1901, that she had given birth to Lillie. If this speculation is correct, this could be a very early case of maternity benefits.<sup>73</sup>

Besides evidence that Annie was living in New York City in 1910, between 1910 and 1930, there is not lot information available. However, it looks like during this time period, things took a turn for the worse for Annie. Census data from Iowa reveals that there was a woman named Annie Cermak who was in the Iowa State Hospital for the Insane in the year 1930. The State Hospital for the Insane is in Independence, IA. This woman was born in Czechoslovakia, and spoke Bohemian before she came to the United States. She was also listed as being 59 years old, around the same age that the cigar maker would have been at this time period. How Annie ended up in Iowa is hard to tell. It is also difficult to tell how long Annie lived without the release of the 1940 census data.

With the evidence given, it is hard to tell what happened to this woman. She was working in a cigar factory in New York City in 1910 after being suspended from Local 162 for being insane in 1906. It is unclear how Annie, one of the only women in Local 162, could have gone "insane." It is also unclear as to how she ended up in Iowa and what exactly happened to the rest of her family. The last record of any of her family was

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<sup>73</sup> US Census Bureau, *1910 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (November 14, 2009).

in 1930. According to the 1930 census, her son George stayed in New York City with his wife and child.<sup>74</sup>

### **Decline of the Handmade Cigar**

The decline of the handmade cigar by the union cigar maker cannot be traced to a single event or even a single type of event. There are several factors that come into play when discussing the decline of this product. These factors include: the prohibition movement, mechanization, non-union labor, consolidation of factories, and World War I.<sup>75</sup>

Prohibition was a movement which had gained ground throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prohibitionists wanted to legally ban the manufacture, distribution, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. In the late nineteen-teens this movement was starting to become a force and its agenda was becoming mainstream. This was a problem for cigar makers because the saloon was the most

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<sup>74</sup> US Census Bureau, *1930 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>75</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 275, 310, 283.

important retail outlet for cigars.<sup>76</sup> The CMIU, as well as many other kinds of trade unions were against this kind of legislation for many years. Local 162 received a letter on July 13, 1918 from the International Union of United Brewery and Soft Drink Workers urging it to stand up against prohibition.<sup>77</sup> Despite organized labor's effort to prevent this law from passing, the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution put this ban of alcoholic drinks into effect in 1919.<sup>78</sup>

A correspondence from Local 58 in Montreal, Quebec told the news to union cigar makers across the country of a takeover by machines. The Andrew Wilson Co of Toronto locked out all 150 union cigar makers, "this firm is now using machines."<sup>79</sup> This trend would continue into the next decade. Cigar makers were confused as to how a machine could make a fine cigar, a product whose hand production took years to learn and master. This trend of mechanization would continue, and the number of skilled union cigar makers would continue to decline further.<sup>80</sup>

The union cigar maker would suffer further as the industry would become more consolidated and more and more workers were non-union. Between the years 1913 and 1918, the number of cigar factories dropped from 20,555 to 13,217. Local 162 would become more and more frustrated with the market being flooded by non-union made cigars. They would blame their falling membership on these non union cigar makers. In a letter dated February 7, 1918 the union said it only had 23 members as opposed to 57 in 1910. The letter would go on to say that it needed its fellow labor

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>77</sup> Clippings, 1952, 1956, Undated. Box 5, Folder 10. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>78</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Prohibition."

<sup>79</sup> General Correspondence, 1892-1927, Undated. Box 1, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>80</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 310.

unions to make sure its members would only buy union cigars with the blue label on them. This request was not ignored. The Retail Clerks' International Protective Association Local number 249 of Green Bay would tell their members to buy only blue label cigars. They went further to say that they would fine union members 50 cents if they were caught smoking or buying non-union cigars. This connection to other labor unions ensured that the members of the Local 162 would still be able to sell their cigars.

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World War I was another factor which led to the decline of the union made cigar. When the United States entered WWI, it set aside a list of jobs that men could do and not be subject to the draft. Tobacco production was not one of these jobs. This sent union men looking for work in other jobs. The cigar industry also lost the members who were being drafted. This led to a labor shortage, which cigar makers seized upon to make owners of cigar factories give in to outstanding demands. Workers in the CMIU went on strike more than normal in the years 1917 and 1918. This caused the treasury funds to become dangerously low. The CMIU needed to pay out a lot of death benefits due to a generation of cigar makers dying. Even when the CMIU was in financial trouble, it would still pay out the money that it promised its members.<sup>82</sup>

The membership of the CMIU was declining at this point. In 1919 there were thirty thousand members; this would fall to fifteen thousand members in 1933. The benefits that the CMIU provided were simply not sustainable in the new environment of mechanical cigar production, and a smaller membership to collect dues from. The

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<sup>81</sup> General Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969; Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 283.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-276.

traveling loans were eliminated in 1928 and the death benefit was done away with in 1931.<sup>83</sup>

With jobs in the handmade cigar industry getting more and more difficult to find, many men needed to find other work. The CMIU simply could not protect all of the jobs that it once made so desirable. Mechanization was too tempting to cigar factory owners and was severely affecting members of the CMIU. By 1974, there were only two thousand members of the Cigar Makers' International Union, located mostly in Tampa, FL, Jacksonville, FL, and York County, PA. That same year, the CMIU voted to merge with the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union of America.<sup>84</sup>

### **Adolph Behrendt: Traveler and Secretary**

Adolph Behrendt was born on October 13, 1877 in Wisconsin, the son of immigrants from Prussia.<sup>85</sup> In 1900, at the age of 22 he was living with his parents Carl and Wilhelmina in Green Bay and identified himself as a cigar maker.<sup>86</sup> He entered the CMIU through Local 268 in Escanaba, MI on July 1, 1902.<sup>87</sup> Behrendt was admitted into Local 162 in August of 1903.<sup>88</sup> According to the Wisconsin State Census, Behrendt

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 315; Cooper, "The 'Traveling Fraternity,'" p. 134.

<sup>85</sup> *California Death Index, 1940-1997*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (Accessed December 6, 2009); US Census Bureau, *1910 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

<sup>86</sup> US Census Bureau, *1900 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Records of Travel Loans and Out-of-Work Benefits, 1910-1917. Box 3, Folder 7. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>88</sup> Financial Statements, 1906-1919. Box 4, Folder 2. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

was living in Brown County with his wife Ellen, and his son Marbert.<sup>89</sup> Union records show that he was living at 1165 Lawe Street in Green Bay at this time.<sup>90</sup>

Behrendt was not just a regular member of Local 162. He was a financial secretary, in charge of all of the financial records of the local, from January 1907 until July of 1908. Behrendt was also a member of the Finance Committee from July of 1908 to October of 1908. He capitalized on the benefits the CMIU had to offer as he collected sick benefits of \$5 in January of 1906 and \$15 in June of 1907.<sup>91</sup>

As a young man with a family, Behrendt made the curious decision to take his cigar making skills outside of the Green Bay area. Financial Records of Local 162 show that Behrendt was removed from Local 162 in December 1909 by way of traveling card, but returned on January 10, 1910.<sup>92</sup> For this trip he took out a traveling loan of \$20, which he started to pay off.<sup>93</sup> Behrendt then decided to travel in March of 1910.<sup>94</sup> According to the US Census taken in 1910, Behrendt was living in Sparta, WI, in a household headed by a man named William Frazer. He was listed as a boarder in this household, which had many other boarders and servants.<sup>95</sup> According to union records he came back to Local 162 in April of 1912, admitted under a traveling card from Local 61 of La Crosse, WI.<sup>96</sup> For time away from Green Bay, Behrendt took out a \$7 loan,

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<sup>89</sup> Wisconsin. *Wisconsin State Census, 1905*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> Financial Statements, 1906-1919. Box 4, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> US Census Bureau, *1910 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

<sup>96</sup> Financial Statements, 1906-1919. Box 4, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

which he began paying back.<sup>97</sup> This is the last record of Adolph Behrendt from Local 162. It is unclear how he was able to live for this period of time, over two years, on the other side of Wisconsin without his family, as they are not listed as living with him in the 1910 census. One could speculate from his travels that something had happened to Behrendt's wife and son.

Adolph Behrendt did not stop making cigars. On his registration for the World War I draft, dated September 12, 1918 he listed his occupation as cigar making. At this time however, he was living in Calumet County.<sup>98</sup> Behrendt was listed as a cigar maker in the 1920 US Census. At this time, he was living in the village of New Holstein. He was listed as a lodger in a household headed by a 73 year old woman named Martha Larson. There is also a 9 year old girl named Hazel Behrendt living at the same address, more than likely his daughter. The name identity of Hazel's mother is unclear from the records available. This house also had many other men from many different occupations living there.<sup>99</sup>

Between 1920 and 1930, Behrendt's life took a strange turn. For nearly all of his adult life he had been a cigar maker. He had been a member of the CMIU, took advantage of their loans and sick benefits, and even held a position in Local 162. However, as noted above, the handmade cigar industry had taken a turn for the worse. According to the 1930 US Census, Adolph Behrendt was living in Plymouth City, Wisconsin, working as a laborer in a cheese factory. He was living in a house where he

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<sup>97</sup> Records of Travel Loans and Out-of-Work Benefits. Box 3, Folder 7. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>98</sup> *World War I Draft Registration Cards*, 1917-1918, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

<sup>99</sup> US Census Bureau, *1920 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

was not related to anyone, as he had before. The reason for his change in career is open to speculation, but most likely he could simply not find work as a cigar maker any longer. Behrendt was between the ages of 41 and 52 when this change in career happened. This is not usually a time when one thinks about changing careers, so this suggests that he was forced to change careers.<sup>100</sup>

The rest of what is known about Adolph Behrendt is open for speculation, as is much of his life. According to the California Death index, he died on March 31, 1949 in Los Angeles, CA. Why he was there is unclear. Until the release of the 1940 census, this may not be known, and even then it may never be known. Ultimately, it appears that Behrendt was a victim of the decline of the cigar industry. He was forced to give up a very skilled occupation with one that required less skill late in his life.<sup>101</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The rise and fall of the cigar industry and its workers took less than a century. Cigar makers, like many other workers of in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century organized themselves into labor unions to fight for things such as safe working conditions, eight hour working days, and higher wages. The most powerful of the labor unions for cigar makers was the Cigar Makers' International Union. The CMIU had locals all across the country and even some in Canada and Puerto Rico.

The CMIU established a system of benefits for its members including loans as well as sick, death, and strike benefits. This union had several locals in the state of Wisconsin including Local 162 in Green Bay. This local was progressive in the fact that

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<sup>100</sup> US Census Bureau, *1930 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> *California Death Index, 1940-1997*, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (Accessed December 6, 2009).

it provided immigrants and women with membership and gave them access to benefits in a time when this was not especially popular.

People like Joseph Rutten, Peter Rutten, Annie Cermak, and Adolph Behrendt were all members of this local. Joseph Rutten joined the local after coming to the United States from The Netherlands; he enjoyed the security of union benefits. Peter Rutten made cigars nearly until the day he died.<sup>102</sup> Annie Cermak may have collected some of the first maternity benefits, until she was removed from the local because of insanity.<sup>103</sup> Adolph Behrendt took advantage of the traveling loans as well as the sick benefits the CMIU had to offer.<sup>104</sup> But it seems that the decline of the handmade cigar forced him into the cheese making industry later in his life.<sup>105</sup>

The Cigar Makers' International Union's programs and connections with other labor unions benefitted its members including immigrants, children of immigrants, and women. This has been demonstrated by examples of how actual union members from Local 162 were able to take advantage of the benefits that the CMIU provided. The cigar industry declined due to factors such as prohibition, mechanization, and consolidation. This led to the end of the Cigar Makers' International Union in 1974 after it had done so much for its members throughout its history.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Clippings, 1952, 1956, Undated. Box 5, Folder 10. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>103</sup> Correspondence, Printed Circulars, 1884-1917. Box 7. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

<sup>104</sup> Financial Statements, 1906-1919. Box 4, Folder 3. Cigar Makers International, Local 162 Records, 1881-1969.

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<sup>105</sup> US Census Bureau, *1930 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/default.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2009).

<sup>106</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*, 315; Cooper, "The 'Traveling Fraternity,'" p. 134.

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