

# **Sovereigns of Industry records**

**Ms. Coll. 1123**

**Finding aid prepared by Rive Cadwallader.**

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Last updated on October 29, 2015.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2015 September 9

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Creator</b>	Order of the Sovereigns of Industry.
<b>Title</b>	Sovereigns of Industry records
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1123
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1874-1877
<b>Extent</b>	0.4 linear feet (1 box)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The Order of the Sovereigns of Industry was a consumer cooperative which ran from 1874 to 1880 through a network of councils across New England and the Upper Midwest. With the goal of lowering living costs for the economically exploited laboring class, the Sovereigns of Industry worked with retailers to offer discounts to its members on a variety of goods. This collection contains letters, pamphlets and administrative documents mostly relating to the Subordinate Council of the Order which was based in Philadelphia. These papers highlight the nature of communication between the Order's subgroups and its National Council and generally provide insight into late nineteenth century union operation.</p>

**Cite as:**

Sovereigns of Industry records, 1874-1877, Ms.Coll. 1123, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare

Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## Biography/History

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The Order of the Sovereigns of Industry was a consumer cooperative established on January 1, 1874 by William H. Earle in Worchester, Massachusetts. Inspired by the Order of Patrons of Husbandry (and, to an extent, an outgrowth of the National Grange) the Sovereigns of Industry sought to lower the cost of living for the economically exploited working class by offering them discounts on a variety of commodities. Reduced prices of goods for members of the Order were achieved mainly by eliminating middlemen and establishing relationships with retailers who were willing to sell their products at wholesale prices. Quasi-secretive and modelled after the Freemasons, the Sovereigns of Industry was open to any industrial laborer regardless of “sex, creed, race or nationality” who was over the age of sixteen and able to pay the yearly membership fee (one dollar for women and two dollars for men). Though strongest in Massachusetts, where the National Council was based, the Sovereigns of Industry expanded a network of Subordinate Councils throughout New England and the Upper Midwest (of which Philadelphia’s Pioneer Council no. 1 is an example). The group grew rapidly; only one year after its establishment, the Sovereigns of Industry had 27,984 members. However, an economic depression that punctuated the mid- 1870s caused widespread unemployment and decreased consumer spending. Cash flow problems and animosity with other trade unions dealt a blow to the Order in 1878, and the organization was officially terminated in 1880.

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection contains materials from the Order of the Sovereigns of Industry, mostly relating to the branches of the organization based in Pennsylvania and, especially, in Philadelphia. Letters, pamphlets and administrative documents make up the bulk of the collection. The first file in the collection holds five small booklets. Two booklets (1874 and 1875), titled *Ritual of the Sovereigns of Industry* lay out the formal order of proceedings at council meetings and include diagrams of the proper arrangement of officers in the hall. Two other booklets contain the constitution for the National Council of the Order (1874 and 1875) and one more describes the constitution for the Subordinate Councils (1874). The small promotional essays, *Report of the Committee in Declaration of Principles and Purposes* by William Rounseville Alger (1875) and *A Plea for the Labor Organization Known as the Sovereigns of Industry* by J. F. Byrnes (1874) are contained in file two.

File three contains an assortment of letters (1874-1876), mostly from the National Council and addressed to J. F. Byrnes of Philadelphia. Also included are a letter from R. W. Pratt, secretary of the New Jersey State Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, a letter from W. H. H. Bradbury, the secretary of the

Pennsylvania State Council of the Order (including Bradbury's business card, a receipt, a printed notice of a State Council meeting and a printed list of Philadelphia merchants offering discounts to members), an undated letter to the editor of an unnamed periodical signed "A Working Man" and a form letter offering members a price reduction on Whitney sewing machines.

The printed and presumably circulated minutes of Pennsylvania State Council meetings (circa 1874-1877) can be found in file four. The fifth file in the collection (1876-1877, undated) contains a meeting announcement, orders for *Bulletin* (the publication of the Sovereigns of Industry) and three membership withdrawal cards. The remaining files in the collection (numbers six to ten) hold the administrative documents of Pioneer Council no. 1, the subordinate council of the Sovereigns of Industry based in Philadelphia. They contain, in order, miscellaneous receipts (1876-1877, undated), rent receipts (1877), a receipt book (1877), a ledger of membership dues (1875), and a minute book including some news clippings and correspondence with the National Council (January, 1874-January, 1877).

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## Administrative Information

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Finding aid prepared by Rive Cadwallader.

### Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

### Use Restrictions

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### Source of Acquisition

Purchased through the Ames Fund, April 15, 1951.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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CORPORATE NAME(S)

- Order of the Sovereigns of Industry.

**FORM/GENRE(S)**

- Constitutions
- Correspondence
- Financial records
- Minutes (administrative records)
- Promotional materials

**PERSONAL NAME(S)**

- Byrnes, J. F.

**SUBJECT(S)**

- Consumer cooperatives--United States--History.
- Labor movement--United States--19th century
- Socialism--United States--History--19th century.
- Unions--United States--19th century

## Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Booklets on Council ritual and constitution, 1874-1876.	1	1
Promotional pamphlets, 1874-1875.	1	2
Letters, mostly to J. F. Byrnes, 1874-1876, undated.	1	3
Minutes of Pennsylvania State Council meetings, probably 1874-1877.	1	4
Certificates and flyers of Pioneer Council No. 1, 1876-1877, undated.	1	5
Miscellaneous receipts of Pioneer Council No. 1, 1876-1877, undated.	1	6
Rent receipts of Pioneer Council No. 1, 1877.	1	7

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Receipt book of Pioneer Council No. 1, 1877.	1	8
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Ledger of membership dues, 1875.	1	9
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Minute book of Pioneer Council No. 1, including newsclippings and correspondence with National Council, 1874-1877.	1	10
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