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### Howat, Alexander, collection, 1921-2011

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## **MS 438 Alexander Howat Collection**

### ***Introduction***

This collection contains materials concerning Alexander Howat and his life, but more specifically his role as the president of the United Mine Workers of America union, District 14 in Southeast Kansas.

### ***Descriptive Summary***

Creator: Alexander Howat, Randy Roberts

Title: Alexander Howat Collection

Dates: 1921-2011

Size: .3 Linear Feet

Collection Number: 438

### ***Donor Information***

This collection was compiled by Randy Roberts during his time as Curator of Special Collections at Pittsburg State University, with some materials sent in from other institutions as Roberts researched.

### ***Citation Note***

Alexander Howat Collection (MS 438), Special Collections and University Archives, Pittsburg State University Axe Library, Pittsburg, Kansas.

### ***Administrative Information***

**Restrictions:** None

### ***Historical Sketch***

Alexander Howat was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1876 and moved to the United States as a young man. Howat eventually made his way to Pittsburg, Kansas, becoming a mine worker like many other immigrants at the time, and joined the United Mine Works of America (UMWA) during this time.

Howat eventually became the president of District 14 in Southeast Kansas and leader of the miners' union. During this time, Howat was a member of the Socialist Party and a National Farmer Labor Party supporter. Howat believed in the power of the strike and supported striking as a means to make gains for his fellow union members.

Following a strike, the Kansas government passed the Kansas Industrial Relations Act in 1920, which Howat strongly opposed, as the act made striking illegal. Howat likened this idea to slavery,

claiming the strike gave labor the ability to make gains in their favor and without it they would be reduced practically to slave labor. In 1921 Howat called for a strike, and after not complying with the newly established Kansas Industrial Court, was thrown in jail. The thousands of miners from the District 14 union went on strike as a response, in support of their president, and the mines closed for months. Howat was eventually released from prison, and later reelected to his position as president of District 14. Later, likely due to alcoholism, he left his position and his career in the union. From 1930 to 1945 Howat worked for the City of Pittsburg, as an editor of a Kansas labor paper, and a state border guard before dying on December 10, 1945.

### ***Scope and Content Note***

This collection contains materials concerning Alexander Howat, and specifically his times as a union president during strikes in the early 1920s. Much of this collection was compiled for research purposes and has been put into series based on the type of materials present.

#### **Series 1: Newspaper Clippings 1921-2004**

Series 1 contains newspaper clippings from multiple newspapers such as *The Pittsburg Daily Headlight*, *The Literary Digest*, *The Kansas City Times*, *The Pittsburg Morning Sun*, *The Girard Press*, the *Pittsburg Headlight-Sun* and *The Joplin Globe*. In this series there are both clippings from actual newspapers as well as copies and scans from newspapers, the two types have been separated by the folder in which they are kept.

#### **Series 2: Writings / Publications 1974-2011**

Series 2 contains writings and publications on Alexander Howat. Writings include papers on Howat that may not have been published, including: a draft and copy of *The Howat Strike* by Ron Skaggs; *The "Hot" Winter of Pittsburg, Kansas, 1919: The People Who Fought for the Right to Strike*, by Masayoshi Yamaguchi; a paper titled "The Communists and the Capitalist Offensive, and Alexander McWirtter Howat" by an unknown author, among other untitled works.

Publications include: *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* Autumn 2011; a copy of *The New Republic* journal c. 1920; assorted copies of *The Survey* concerning labor issues in Southeast Kansas c.1920; a copy of *Labor Age* c.1921; the pamphlet *Kansas Court of Industrial Relations: Governor Allen Answered* by Samuel Gompers; a copy of "The Story of Alex Howat" by James P. Cannon found in *The Liberator* c.1921; a short biography of Alex Howat c. 1974; the article "The Development of Coal Operators' Association in the Southwest" by Frederick L. Ryan, published in *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*; *Strike News From Kansas and Chicago...* by Henry J. Haskell; and "Labor's Constitution of Freedom" by James Gray Pope, published in *The Yale Law Journal*, January 1997. Lastly there are two copies of *The Industrial Slave Law of Kansas*, by Alexander Howat.

Materials in this collection contain writings dating from 1920, but they are found as copies created during the dates mentioned in the series title.

#### **Series 3: Photographs**

Series 3 contains photos and copies of photos pertaining to Alexander Howat and his life. These include a page of scans and photos appealingly used in a presentation about Howat and his *Industrial Slave Law of Kansas* publication, a copy of a Howat portrait, and a single photo negative of Howat, this being that same portrait.

#### **Series 4: Correspondence 1940-2000**

Series 4 contains assorted correspondence related to Alexander Howat. The majority of the correspondence concerns research into the life of Howat. Also found in this collection is a letter from Phillip H. Callery who served as council for the miners' union c.1940. Some of the research-concerned correspondence contains lists of sources for further investigation. Other correspondence in this series includes copies of letters written by Howat during his time as the president of the district no.14 union c.1921. These were sent by James "Jim" Gray Pope to Gene DeGruson, and notes concerning some of the correspondence are present in the series as well.

#### **Series 5: Notes 2001**

Series 5 contains notes and research concerning Alexander Howat. This includes notes about Howat with significant dates and a compilation of dates and newspaper article titles about Howat. There are several pages of handwritten notes on Howat and further research on Howat. It appears this research and notes were done by Randy Roberts.

### ***Collection Inventory***

#### **Series 1: Newspaper Clippings 1921-2004**

- f.1 Clippings
- f.2 Copies

#### **Series 2: Writings / Publications 1982-2011**

- f.3 Writings
- f.4 Publications
- f.5 The Industrial Slave Law of Kansas

#### **Series 3: Photographs**

- f.6 Photographs

#### **Series 4: Correspondence 1940-2000**

- f.7 Correspondence

#### **Series 5: Notes 2001**

f.8      Research

Processed by Brent McDowell 7/29/2024