BUILDING OUR UNION
The History of the United Food & Commercial Workers International Union
**1800-1900**

**THE BEGINNING** of Organized Labor in North America

- **1804** First Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers (Shoemakers) strike in Philadelphia
- **1835** National Association of Journeymen Cordwainers formed
- **1850** Clothing Cutters' and Trimmers' Union established
- **1867** Knights of St. Crispin formed to regulate machinery
- **1869** Daughters of St. Crispin formed the first women's labor union in the U.S.
- **1870** First craft unions formed
- **1881** First Knights of Labor assembly convenes in Hamilton, Ontario
- **1886** Journeymen Barbers Protective Union present at founding convention of American Federation of Labor (AFL), an amalgamation of dozens of separate craft unions
- **1887** Journeymen Barbers International Union of America founded
- **1888** Clothing, Gents Furnishings and Shoe Store Workers receive AFL charter
- **1889** First Canadian local of Retail Clerks founded in Vancouver, British Columbia
- **1890** Establishment of Clothing Cutters' Progressive Union
- **1891** United Garment Workers of America chartered by AFL
- **1895** Boot and Shoe Workers Union (BSWU) chartered by AFL
- **1897** Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (AMCBW) chartered by AFL
- **1899** Daughters of St. Crispin formed the first women's labor union in the U.S.
1901 United Textile Workers of America chartered by AFL

First Canadian local of Amalgamated Meat Cutters founded in Stratford, Ontario

1902 Catherine Schultz dubbed “Joan of Arc of Retail Clerks” in Chicago strike

1904 International Fur Workers Union (IFWU) formed

1910 Mary Anderson of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union (BSWU) named Director of AFL’s Women in Industry Service

1913 Major strikes secure minimum wage standards

1920 Mary Anderson (BSWU) named first head of the U.S. Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau

1937 Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) charts the National Leather Workers Association (NLWA)

United Retail Employees of America receives CIO charter, name later changed to Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU)

1938 Fur and Leather Workers of America created by IFWU and NLWA merger

1938 Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) begins organizing meat industry plants across Canada

1942 Patrick Gorman elected to top office of Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (AMCBW); Known as “Mr. Amalgamated” for more than half a century, he strongly supported a merger with Retail Clerks that later created UFCW

1943 PWOC becomes United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA), union dedicates itself to ending racial discrimination in meat packing plants, working against segregation, and achieving workplace equality for women

THE GROWTH of Organized Labor

1901-1944
1947
James Suffridge elected to top leadership position at the Retail Clerks International Association (RCIA), which he holds for 21 years.

1948
Holford Harris becomes the first African American elevated to Executive Board of AMCBW.

RCIA begins organizing workers in health care and non-profit hospital field.

1968
United Packinghouse Workers Union merges with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters.

James Housewright elected International President of the RCIA.

1970
Canadian Region of Retail Clerks established.

1972
Retail Clerks Minority Coalition created during the RCIA Convention to promote diversity and inclusion within the labor movement; name changed to UFCW Minority Coalition when RCIU and AMCBW merge.

1976
Addie Wyatt elected first woman Vice President of Amalgamated Meat Cutters.

1977
RCIA changes name to Retail Clerks International Union (RCIU), and is 5th largest AFL-CIO affiliate.

BSWU merges with RCIU.

William Wynn elected International President of RCIU.

Richard Perry is first African-American elected Vice President of RCIU.

1945-1978
The growth of organized labor.
1979-1993
THE BIRTH of the UFCW

1979 Merger of the RCIU and AMCBW creates the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW); William Wynn elected International President and Samuel J. Talarico elected International Secretary-Treasurer of the UFCW at the founding convention in Washington, D.C.

1980 Barbers, Beauticians and Allied Industries merges with the UFCW

1981 UFCW begins national safety and health programs to identify job hazards and create training

1983 UFCW’s first regular convention held in Montréal, Québec

The Insurance Workers International Union (IWIU) votes to merge with the UFCW

UFCW begins its affiliation with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

After 25 years with predecessor unions—UPWA and AMCBW—former UFCW Vice President Charles Hayes becomes the first trade unionist to be elected to Congress, and serves five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives (Illinois)

Ricardo Icaza becomes first Latino elected UFCW Vice President
1984 Norma Steill, elected International Vice President of the Retail Clerks in 1978, is elected the first woman UFCW Region Director.

1986 Canadian Union of United Brewery, Flour, Cereal, Soft Drink and Distillery Workers merges with the UFCW.

1987 Due to UFCW pressure, OSHA expands hazard communication standards to provide information and training to hair care and retail workers.

1987 Huguette Plamondon elected UFCW Vice President Canada Region.

1988 UFCW Canadian regions consolidate under name “UFCW Canada”.

1988 UFCW, Iowa Beef Processors and OSHA sign safety and health agreement with three-year program to reduce trauma injuries for packinghouse workers.

1988 Independent Foodhandlers and Warehouse Employees Union (IFWE) affiliates with UFCW.

1988 Local 1, Leather Goods, Plastics, Handbags and Novelty Workers Union merges with the UFCW.

1988 International Union of Life Insurance Agents (IULIA) of Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota merges with the UFCW.

1988 RWDSU merges with the UFCW and becomes RWDSU District Council of the UFCW.

1988 Johnny Rodriguez elected Vice President of the UFCW and also serves as the President of United Latinos of the UFCW.

1988 United Hispanics founded: now known as United Latinos of the UFCW.

1988 Lenore Miller, President of the RWDSU, becomes the first woman union President elected to the AFL-CIO Executive Council.

1988 fused image of Norma Steill and Johnny Rodriguez.

1994-2003 A MODERN UNION

1994
Douglas Dority elected UFCW International President
United Garment Workers of America (UGWA) merges with the UFCW

1995
Textile Workers of America (UTWA) merges with the UFCW and becomes UFCW Textile and Garment Council
Distillery, Wine and Allied Workers International Union merges with the UFCW to become the UFCW’s Distillery, Wine and Allied Workers Division

1996
International Chemical Workers Union merges with the UFCW and becomes the International Chemical Workers Union Council of the UFCW

1997
Canadian Union of Restaurant and Related Employees merges with the UFCW
Mary Finger, UFCW Women’s Network Chair, elected Vice President and named Director of UFCW’s Civil Rights and Community Relations Department

1998
Sarah Palmer Amos elected first woman UFCW Executive Vice President
Production Service and Sales District Council merges with the UFCW

UFCW members march on Walmart headquarters at Bentonville, Arkansas
International Vice President Pat Scarcelli becomes first woman appointed to head UFCW’s Legislative and Political Affairs Department

1994-2003
1999 Textile Processors, Service Trades, Health Care, Professional and Technical Employees International Union merges with the UFCW

UFCW Canada wins a Supreme Court of Canada decision for unions to communicate freely with the public about their disputes, including workplace locations where there is no union

2000 Perdue chicken catchers join the UFCW to demand a voice on the job and a right to join a union

2001 Joe Hansen elected President of Union Network International (UNI), an international labor organization representing 15 million workers, in 900 unions, in more than 100 countries

2002 UFCW launches a national Day of Action, involving workers, consumers, students and faith-based organizations, to challenge Walmart to become a positive force for workers, families and communities

2003 One hundred thousand UFCW supermarket workers from Southern California and across the country hold the line in an historic 141-day fight to protect their health care benefits

A MODERN UNION
1994-2003
2004

Joe Hansen elected International President of the UFCW

International Committee on the Future of the UFCW formed to create strategies and directives for change within the UFCW

Hundreds of UFCW Canada members in Jonquière, Québec demand union certification at Walmart, which closes its store rather than submit to Québec’s first contract arbitration law

2005

UFCW and six other unions form Change to Win, a movement to raise living and working standards in core industries

Workers at Lakeside Packers in Brooks, Alberta achieve union certifications with UFCW Canada, after a ten-year campaign

2006

Wayne Hanley elected National Director of UFCW Canada

UFCW reorganizes its structure in the U.S, transitioning the organization into a growth-focused union

Grocery Workers United unity program created, bringing UFCW retail food members together for increased bargaining power through member support, information and communication via e-mail, video, and website

2007

UFCW and AFL-CIO prevail in a lawsuit filed against OSHA; new rule will require employers to pay for personal protective equipment, preventing thousands of workplace injuries every year

A substantial restructuring of the UFCW Canada National Council is undertaken

2008

UFCW convenes a new national commission to examine the policies and practices of enforcement actions by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and holds hearings across the nation

After a decade-long struggle, workers at the Smithfield meatpacking plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, choose union representation with the UFCW

More than 1,200 H&M workers in the U.S. ratify their first contract

Ontario Courts uphold UFCW Canada challenge that Ontario Farm Union Ban was unconstitutional
2009

- Nearly 5,000 workers at a Smithfield meatpacking plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, ratify their first union contract.
- Launch of United Latinos of UFCW Canada.

2010

- Over 8,000 Pilgrim’s Pride workers win $4.7 million in back pay and liquidated damages as part of a settlement against the company.

2011

- H&M workers in New York and Toronto join UFCW.
- UFCW members hold solidarity rallies around the country in support of Wisconsin workers.

2011-2013

THE UNITY AGENDA in Action

- First UFCW Canada National Growth Summit.
- UFCW Canada launches Students Against Migrant Exploitation (S.A.M.E.).
- The Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart) is launched.
- The UFCW conducts the first ever data collection and analysis of the demographics and diversity of its membership.
- 85,000 UFCW Canada members join electronic town hall to mobilize support for Jack Layton; UFCW Canada is the first union in Canada to use this technology to mobilize members politically.
- Founding of UFCW Canada Political Action Conference.
2012

Warehouse workers at H&M join UFCW Canada

UFCW and Kroger announce an agreement to improve and secure pension funds or defined benefit pension plans for over 170,000 retired and active Kroger workers

After a 12-year legal battle, more than 12,000 Tyson poultry workers in 41 plants in 12 states receive payments from the largest settlement—$32 million—against a major poultry company

Members of OUR Walmart in more than 100 cities go on strike to protest Walmart’s illegal actions against its workers as part of the 1,000 actions in 46 states leading up to and on Black Friday

UFCW Canada certifies its ninth agriculture unit in Quebec

After long dispute between the UFCW and retail giant Tesco’s Fresh & Easy stores, Tesco decides to pull out of U.S. market

UFCW announces its support for marriage equality

UFCW Canada launches Target Fairness campaign to keep good jobs for Zellers workers

UFCW Canada launches Safety NOW for Alberta Farm Workers

UFCW Canada launches national OUR Sobeys campaign to help improve lives for workers in retail food industry

2013

The UFCW and CVS Caremark announce the signing of a cooperation agreement giving CVS/pharmacy employees at over 500 stores the opportunity to join the UFCW

The National Farm Workers’ Confederation (CNC) and UFCW Canada sign agreement to ensure rights of migrant workers are protected

Over 80 UFCW leaders write President Obama in support of comprehensive immigration reform

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