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Recommended Citation

Betts, Vicki, "'The Girls Were All Faithful': Organizing Local Union 172, United Garment Workers of America at Long-Hargrove Manufacturing Company" (2018). *Presentations and Publications*. Paper 58.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10950/1867>

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“The Girls Were All Faithful”:

Organizing Local Union 172, United Garment Workers of America, at Long-Hargrove Manufacturing Company

by Vicki Betts

Army Clothing May Be Made In Tyler

The Long-Hargrove Manufacturing Company of this city has received an invitation from the United States government to submit a bid for the making of three hundred thousand pair of army trousers and two hundred thousand coats.

The company will submit a bid for a part of the contract and if successful

in landing it will commence work at once and will immediately install one hundred additional machines.

It will mean a big thing for Tyler if the local company is awarded a contract as somewhere in the neighborhood of nine to ten thousand dollars a month pay roll will be added to what the company is already spending in this city.

Tyler Daily Courier-Times, April 23, 1917, p. 1.

The decades leading up to World War I had seen the rise of two major movements in the United States—organized labor and women’s rights. In Tyler those two causes came together when the women garment workers at the Long-Hargrove factory created a local union and went out on strike during the middle of a major military uniform contract. With the assistance of members of the Cotton Belt union and representatives of the American Federation of Labor on the state and national levels, the women and girls at Long-Hargrove won their right to organize, and for the next eight years their civilian products proudly bore the union label.

Long-Hargrove Manufacturing Company was chartered by the state in early February, 1909, with a capital stock of \$10,000. Richard B. Long, John Ennis Hargrove, and Gus F. Taylor incorporated the new enterprise to manufacture shirts and overalls. The three men were related by marriage. Gus Taylor was the brother of Richard Long’s wife Mattie Jane Taylor and the uncle of John Hargrove’s wife, Byrdie Taylor Hargrove. The 1912 Sanborn map shows Long-Har-

grove to be on the second floor of 102 West Erwin, on the corner of South Broadway. By January, 1913, the company had increased its stock to \$25,000.¹

At that point the factory moved to a two-story extension behind the five-story Moore Grocery Company, still standing at 408 North Broadway. Long-Hargrove used a 419-423 North College address according to the 1913 Tyler city directory. They filed a patent in October for Dragon Brand overalls and trousers, and by October, 1915 had been steadily increasing their workforce to be operating almost one hundred sewing machines. They advertised for seventy-five women and girls, no experience necessary.²

Almost as soon as the United States declared war, Long-Hargrove seized the opportunity to secure a government contract to make uniforms. “Two hundred patriotic women are wanted at once to help [the] government clothe United States troops. . . Here is a chance for the women folks to show their patriotism and help their country as well as offering remunerative [sic] employment to them.” Factory owners agreed to turn out 20,000 complete uniforms per month, about



American Expeditionary Forces Quartermaster Corps sergeant's khaki cotton drill tunic, made by Long-Hargrove Manufacturing Company, Tyler, Texas. Australian War Memorial, reference number REL/17988.01.

one complete uniform every half minute. A government inspector would be on hand to make sure that all garments met the standards. Additional sewing machines were installed and more floor space arranged.³

The first uniforms were summer weight khaki drill. One Quartermaster Corps tunic for the American Expeditionary Forces survives in the Australian War Museum. It includes a white calico label in the lower right pocket printed "Long-Hargrove / Mfg. Co, / May 8th, 1917 / Spec. No. 1136, / St. Louis Depot, / Q.M.C." All seams are double-stitched, and the jacket features blackened bronze buttons embossed by the Great Seal, manufactured by R. Liebmann in Newark.⁴

By June 6, the government contract had been extended. Long-Hargrove agreed to produce 100,000 to 120,000 uniforms in Tyler by August 31, which was the estimate of "all the uniforms it can turn out. . . in time allotted." That, of course, depended on the work force. Five weeks later the Tyler newspaper headline read "Employees [sic] of Uniform Factory Quit Work Early This Morning."⁵

According to a later report, on June 30 "the girls" had met to organize a union "to secure better working conditions and better pay." When the management heard about the meeting, the girl who had hosted it was fired. Other workers went out until she was rehired, and when that happened they all went back

to work. The workers then approached J. M. Bogard, blacksmith at the Cotton Belt, a unionized company, to help them get a charter as a branch of the American Federation of Labor. Ike Haskell, international organizer, spent several days in Tyler. Hargrove stated that if every girl signed a petition to unionize, he would consider it, but when the girls gathered signatures during work hours, he ordered them from the building. When they delivered a completed petition, he fired the committee members, and his entire workforce went out on strike. During negotiations they presented him with a proposed wage scale and contract, but he "declined" to sign it, stating "he will work whom he pleases and pay wages he wanted," which he declared were good for the industry. Experienced machine operators averaged \$7 to \$12 per week, and he was paying seven cents per dozen more than similar factories and "never discharged an employee except for infraction of working rules." "We feel that there are enough patriotic women who will be glad to work for the wages we have been paying." Hargrove backed up his challenge to the patriotism of his employees by publishing a letter from William E. Horton, Office of the Depot Quartermaster in which "all concerned are requested to do nothing which would in any way hinder or delay the progress of the work."⁶

By July 27, 1917, Tyler community leaders

became involved in the negotiations between labor and management at the factory. Employees met at the Tyler Labor Hall with Nat Gentry, representing the Chamber of Commerce, and John Bryant, a machinist working for the Cotton Belt, speaking for the women. The Chamber of Commerce committee went back and forth between the two sides, presenting terms, and declared that they were not far apart. The main sticking point was creating a closed shop, which management opposed. On July 28, the newspaper reported that "If both sides stand firm the strike will probably not be settled and Tyler will probably lose the factory."⁷



Myrtle Berry, *Garment Worker*, October 4, 1918, p. 1

The women workers finally brought in Myrtle Berry of Dallas, representing the Garment Workers Union, to negotiate for them. Berry was the highest ranking female labor officer in the state, serving as second vice president of the Texas State Federation of Labor, vice-president of the Dallas Central Labor Council, and director of the Dallas Labor Temple Association. She also had personal experience as a financial secretary and business agent of the overall workers union in Dallas, and she was active in organizing women workers in Galveston, McKinney, Corsicana, Sherman, Houston, Denison, and San Antonio. On August 2, fifteen days after the women walked out, James E. Hargrove of management, and Myrtle Berry, representing the union, signed an agreement satisfactory to both sides. "The girls were all faithful, not even one deserting." Local Union No. 172, United Garment Workers of America, became official.⁸

Workers returned to their sewing machines the next day, with all old employees taken back without

discrimination. Berry urged all union men to support both the women's union and the factory. Hargrove announced that all efforts would be focused on producing uniforms to fill the government contract.⁹

By late fall, 1917, Long-Hargrove advertised for six additional women to sew hooks and eyes on uniform coats, which was handwork, no experience necessary. They would be paid six dollars per week, for short hours. That might have been part of an additional contract that ended in mid-March 1918 with the completion of 50,000 uniforms. At that point the newspaper noted that the government inspector had gone home, and the factory, with a payroll of 100 women and girls, would go back to producing overalls. Two months later, however, they were working on a "still larger" contract, and Hargrove was discussing an additional contract with the quartermaster at Fort Sam Houston.¹⁰

During the last week of September 1918, Hargrove traveled to New York City to put in a bid on 20,000 pairs of olive drab wool trousers. He returned home, evidently convinced that he had won the bid, and died on October 13, 1918 from influenza. After the war the company placed a claim for reimbursements for its expenditures on that bid, but were denied by the War Department Board of Contract Adjustment.¹¹

Also during the fall of 1918, Effie Slaughter and Amy Currie, representing Local Union 172, travelled to Cleveland, Ohio to the convention of the United Garment Workers. They presented a report from Tyler signed by Helen Edwards, president, and Nautie Parker, recording secretary, in which they related the history of the strike and its settlement. The report also noted that now Long-Hargrove was insisting on the union organizing in their branch factory in Shreveport—"They found the union worked to better advantage for both employer and employe [sic]." All of their members were in good standing, and they met every first Saturday with good attendance. As of August 30, 1918, when the report was compiled, they were still working on a government contract.¹²

After the war ended Long-Hargrove returned to producing overalls, jumpers, unionalls, shirts, and pants. The newspaper advertisement of April 9, 1920, proudly proclaimed their products were "UNION MADE." In 1923 *The Garment Worker* noted that Long-Hargrove was still authorized to use the union label. However, after wartime labor shortages and government contracts disappeared, across the country corporate management began establishing open shop

associations, and labor power faltered. By 1924 Local Union 172 had failed—Long-Hargrove no longer employed union members nor used the union label. The company still advertised in 1925, but by 1926 Lipstate's Department Store announced a sale of the entire stock of the company bought at fifty cents on the dollar. Evidently the company had closed.¹³



Tyler Daily Courier-Times, May 21, 1918, p. 5.

Of course that was not the end of clothing manufacturing in Tyler. A. F. Sledge, president of Moore Grocery Company which occupied the adjacent building facing Broadway, bought Long-Hargrove's machinery and equipment and had the building and sewing machines overhauled. Sledge Manufacturing organized in November 1927 beginning with 25 to 30 machines, still making overalls, pants, and shirts. The company continued in operation until the early 1960s.¹⁴

Footnotes

1. "The Day's Charters," *San Antonio Daily Express*, February 9, 1909, p. 5; Gayle Basaldu, "Josephus Taylor Family," accessed October 24, 2017, <http://www.etgs.org/txsmith/pioneers/engledow/taylor.html>; "Byrdie Taylor Hargrove," Findagrave.com, Memorial #35948683; Tyler, Texas Sanborn Maps, 1912, sheet 16; "Charters Filed," *Dallas Morning News* [hereinafter referred to as DMN], January 12, 1913, p. 8.
2. *Worley's Directory of Tyler, Texas, 1913* (Dallas, Tex.: Worley, 1913), 131; "National Register of Historic Places Application for Moore Grocery Co. Building," accessed October 24, 2017, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/NR/pdfs/02000991/02000991.pdf>, p. 8; Tyler, Texas, Sanborn Maps, 1919, sheet 4; "Trade-Marks Published February 24,

- 1914," *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office* 199 (February 24, 1914): 1229; "75 Women and Girls Wanted for Long-Hargrove Manufacturing Co.," *Tyler Daily Courier-Times* [hereinafter referred to as TDC-T], October 15, 1915, p. 5.
3. "U. S. Uniforms to be Made in Tyler Now," TDC-T, May 7, 1917, p. 1.
4. "Other Rank's Tunic: Quartermaster Corps, American Expeditionary Forces," accessed October 24, 2017, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C110097>.
5. "Will Make 100,000 to 120,000 Uniforms in Tyler by August 31," TDC-T, June 6, 1917, p. 8; "Employees [sic] of Uniform Factory Quit Work Early This Morning," TDC-T, July 18, 1917, p. 1.
6. "Report of Local Union No. 172, Tyler Texas, August 30, 1918," *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Convention, United Garment Workers of America*, Cleveland, Ohio: United Garment Workers, 1918, 270; "Employees [sic] of Uniform Factory Quit Work Early This Morning," TDC-T, July 18, 1917, p. 1; *Pruden's Directory of Tyler, Texas* (Tyler: M. M. Pruden, 1918), 38; Depot Quartermaster to Whom It May Concern, July 18, 1917, TDC-T, July 24, 1917, p. 5.
7. "Attempt Being Made to Settle Strike Differences," TDC-T, July 27, 1917, p. 8; "Looks Like No Agreement in Uniform Factory Strike," TDC-T, July 28, 1917, p. 6.
8. "Long-Hargrove Mfg. Co. Resumes Business Today—Satisfactory Contracts," TDC-T, August 3, 1917, p. 3; George Norris Green, "Texas ... Unions ... Time: Unions in Texas from the Time of the Republic Through the Great War, 1838-1919," in *The Texas Left: The Radical Roots of Lone Star Liberalism*, edited by David O'Donald Cullen and Kyle G. Wilkison (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 103; "Organizing Labor in Texas," *The Garment Worker* 17 no. 51 (October 4, 1918): 1; Grady Lee Mullennix, "A History of the Texas State Federation of Labor" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1955), 171-2; "Report of Local Union No. 172," 270.
9. "Long-Hargrove Mfg. Co. Resumes Business Today—Satisfactory Contracts," TDC-T, August 3, 1917, p. 3; "Report of Local Union No. 172, Tyler, Texas, August 30, 1918," *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Convention, United Garment Workers of America, Held in the City of Cleveland, Ohio, Oct. 14-16, 1918* (N.p.: n.p., 1918?), 270.
10. "We Want Six Women," TDC-T, November 2, 1917, p. 6; "Tyler Overall Factory Completes Contract on Uniforms," TDC-T, March 18, 1918, p. 8; "Tyler Concern Gets Another Contract for Soldier Uniforms," TDC-T, May 21, 1918, p. 5.
11. Case No. 366 in re Claim of Long-Hargrove Manufacturing Co., *Decisions of the War Department Board of Contract Adjustment* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1919), 1: 578-583.
12. "Report of Local Union No. 172," 270.
13. "Demand 'Dragon Brand' Overalls," TDC-T, April 9, 1920, p. 8; "Garment Manufacturers Using the Union Label of the International Union of the United Garment Workers of America," *The Garment Worker*, 22 no. 27 (April 20, 1923): 7; Green, 103-104; *Proceedings, Texas State Federation of Labor*, 25 (1924): 44; "Ask Your Dealer for Dragon Brand Overalls," *Tyler Journal*, June 19, 1925, p. 15; "Lipstate's Announcing a Gigantic 48th Anniversary Sale," *Tyler Journal*, November 5, 1926, p. 8; "Tells of Remarkable Growth of Work Garment Plant at Tyler," DMN, October 14, 1929, p. 15.
14. "Moore Grocery Company Buys Long-Hargrove [sic] Overall Factory, Reopen Soon," TDC-T, February 14, 1927, p. 1; "Tells of Remarkable Growth of Work Garment Plant at Tyler," DMN, October 14, 1929, p. 15; "National Register of Historic Places Application for Moore Grocery Co. Building," p. 8.