

THE AFT: A Historical Timeline

- March 1897 The Chicago Teachers Federation was formed with Catherine Coggin as president.
- January 1912 The first volume of *American Teacher* magazine was published in New York City; Henry R. Linville, editor.
- March 1912 Federation of Men Teachers in Chicago chartered by the AFL.
- May 9, 1916 The American Federation of Teachers is received into the AFL by Samuel Gompers; Charles Stillman, president.
First eight AFT locals:
- Chicago Teachers Federation
 - Chicago Federation of Men Teachers
 - Chicago Federation of Women High School Teachers
 - Gary, Ind., Teachers Federation
 - Teachers Union of New York
 - Oklahoma Teachers' Federation
 - Scranton, Pa., Teachers Association
 - High School Teachers Union of Washington, D.C.
- The union operated from one room of AFT financial secretary Freeland Stecker's five-room bungalow in Chicago. President Stillman lived next door.
- Sept. 14, 1916 The African-American teachers of the Armstrong-Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., organize and become Local No. 9 of the AFT.
- 1918 By this time, 28 charters had been issued to AFT locals; AFL makes Charles Stillman an organizer; positions of secretary and treasurer are combined at the 1918 AFT convention.
- January 1919 University of Illinois, the first large university to have an AFT local, organizes as Local No. 41.
- 1920s Tough times begin. Court and board of education decisions begin forcing teachers out of unions and locals out of the AFT. The 1920s are turbulent times for American labor.
- 1921 *American Teacher* ceases publication.
- 1923 The AFT cannot afford to pay president Charles Stillman a salary, and he returns to teaching.

- 1924 Gary, Ind., Teacher Federation folds.
- 1925 *American Teacher* begins again, but this time in Chicago, not New York. Editorship is now duty of the secretary-treasurer.
- 1928 John Dewey joins the AFT local in New York; he writes “Why I Am a Member of the Teachers Union.”
- October 1929 The stock market crashes.
- Summer 1931 The AFT’s 15th annual convention in Chicago calls for replacement of local property tax with graduated state income tax, establishment of federal unemployment insurance, government planning of public works, and a shorter work week.
- 1931 Chicago Board of Education issues a script to its teachers.
- 1932 The New York City Health Department reports that 20.5 percent of the schoolchildren in city schools are suffering from malnutrition; the year before, a study showed that 11,000 hungry children were being fed by New York City teachers.
- 1932 Teachers’ salaries are reduced; fewer teachers are employed; school year is reduced; class sizes increase; construction, equipment and supplies are postponed; Chicago teacher salaries are cut by 23.5 percent.
- 1933 World’s Fair/Exposition in Chicago (“Century of Progress”)—28,000 teachers and sympathizers march on the Chicago banking district.
- 1934 The AFL and AFT work together to organize African-American teachers in the South; for its annual convention, the AFT moves its entire operation to another hotel upon learning that African-American delegates would not receive equal facilities. (The union did this again in 1938.)
- 1935-1936 AFT state federations formed in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Ohio.
- 1930-1940 The AFT organized 33 college locals with memberships running from seven members at University of Chicago to 610 college teachers in New York City locals.
- 1937-1938 The AFT debates CIO affiliation.
- 1941 AFT membership votes to revoke the charters of Locals No. 5 (New York City), 192 (Philadelphia) and 537 (College Teachers Federation of New York City) for communist activities and other activities disruptive and detrimental to the AFT.
- 1941-1942 Forty new locals are chartered.
- 1942 AFT president George Counts challenges members to organize 10 percent of the nation’s teachers.
- 1942-1945 The AFT supports the war efforts and addresses the issue of education and the postwar world.

- 1943 Sixty-one new locals are chartered.
- 1946 An AFT convention resolution condemns racial segregation in school systems and calls for committees on intercultural education
- 1948 John Eklund becomes 10th president of the AFT.
- 1948 Local 430 in San Francisco and Local 401—the University of Washington Teacher Union—are expelled from the AFT due to communist activity.
- 1952 Carl J. Megel is elected AFT president, becoming the first full-time president of the union.
- 1950s Congressional investigations of subversive and radical groups take center stage in the first half of the 1950s.
- 1954 The Supreme Court hands down its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*; the delegates to several AFT conventions had instructed AFT legal counsel to file *amicus curiae* briefs decrying segregation and the fallacious doctrine of ‘separate but equal.’
- 1954 The AFT annual convention instructs the executive council to order all AFT locals not racially integrated to submit reports explaining why they were not so integrated.
- Nov. 7, 1960 The AFT’s United Federation of Teachers staged a one-day walkout—the first strike by teachers in the history of New York City public education.
- 1962 The UFT wins the first comprehensive teacher contract in the country.
- 1960s The AFT leads the way in traveling to the South to register voters and to teach in freedom schools.
- 1960-1970 The AFT grows from fewer than 60,000 members to more than 200,000.
- 1963 AFT members, leaders and staff help organize, and participate in, the historic March on Washington for Justice and Jobs.
- 1969 The UFT leads the way for other AFT locals when it successfully wins the right to represent 10,000 paraprofessionals in New York City. Thousands more have been organized by the AFT since then.
- 1978 The AFT establishes a healthcare division for nurses and healthcare employees wanting the AFT’s representation in the workplace.
- 1980s The AFT lends support to the Chilean teachers union, which played a major role in ridding Chile of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship in 1988.

- 1983 The AFT creates a division for local, state and federal government employees.
- 1984 This is the first year for the AFT's biennial convention after adoption of 1982 resolution.
- 1991 The AFT's longtime secretary-treasurer Robert G. Porter dies. Porter served as the AFT's second top officer for some 30 years.
- 1994 The AFT sends 15 observers to South Africa to monitor the first free and democratic elections there.
- 1997 AFT president and national educational leader and thinker Albert Shanker dies.
- 1997-2004 Sandra Feldman takes the helm of the AFT until her untimely death in 2004.
- 2004-2008 Edward J. McElroy led the AFT until his retirement in 2008.
- 2008-present Randi Weingarten was elected AFT president at the AFT's national 2008 convention in Chicago.



AFT president Charles Cogen (right) and the UFT's Albert Shanker present car keys for \$40,000 worth of station wagons for use in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern voter registration drive.



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
26th Annual Convention
Hotel Gary • Aug. 17 to 21, 1942
GARY, INDIANA

140
BOND-FIDE
Photo
Chicago



Delegates to the AFT's 1920 convention were facing tough times as the AFT lost a third of its members from 1920 to 1923.



The AFT's third president, Mary C. Barker, 1924-1930.



A hot topic of discussion during the AFT's 1939 convention in Buffalo, N.Y., was whether the union should quit the AFL and join the CIO.