

The local led another breakthrough later that year when the Iowa State Association, under the leadership of Local 33 brothers **Jason A. Sneddon** as its president and **William A. Hoos** as its secretary, finally had a new state plumbing code passed in the Iowa legislature and officially adopted on October 2, 1919. The law made it mandatory for all cities with more than 6,000 residents to draft ordinances relative to the installation and inspection of plumbing and for plumbers to be examined by local boards composed of one journeyman, one employer and a member of the city's Board of Health. Cities with populations under 6,000 could elect to come under the same provisions.

With the new, statewide regulations in place, General Organizer Kennedy reflected in the 1919 *Journal*, "From the number of cities in Iowa without proper plumbing ordinances, we can all agree to the necessity of a state code to make them do things along this line."

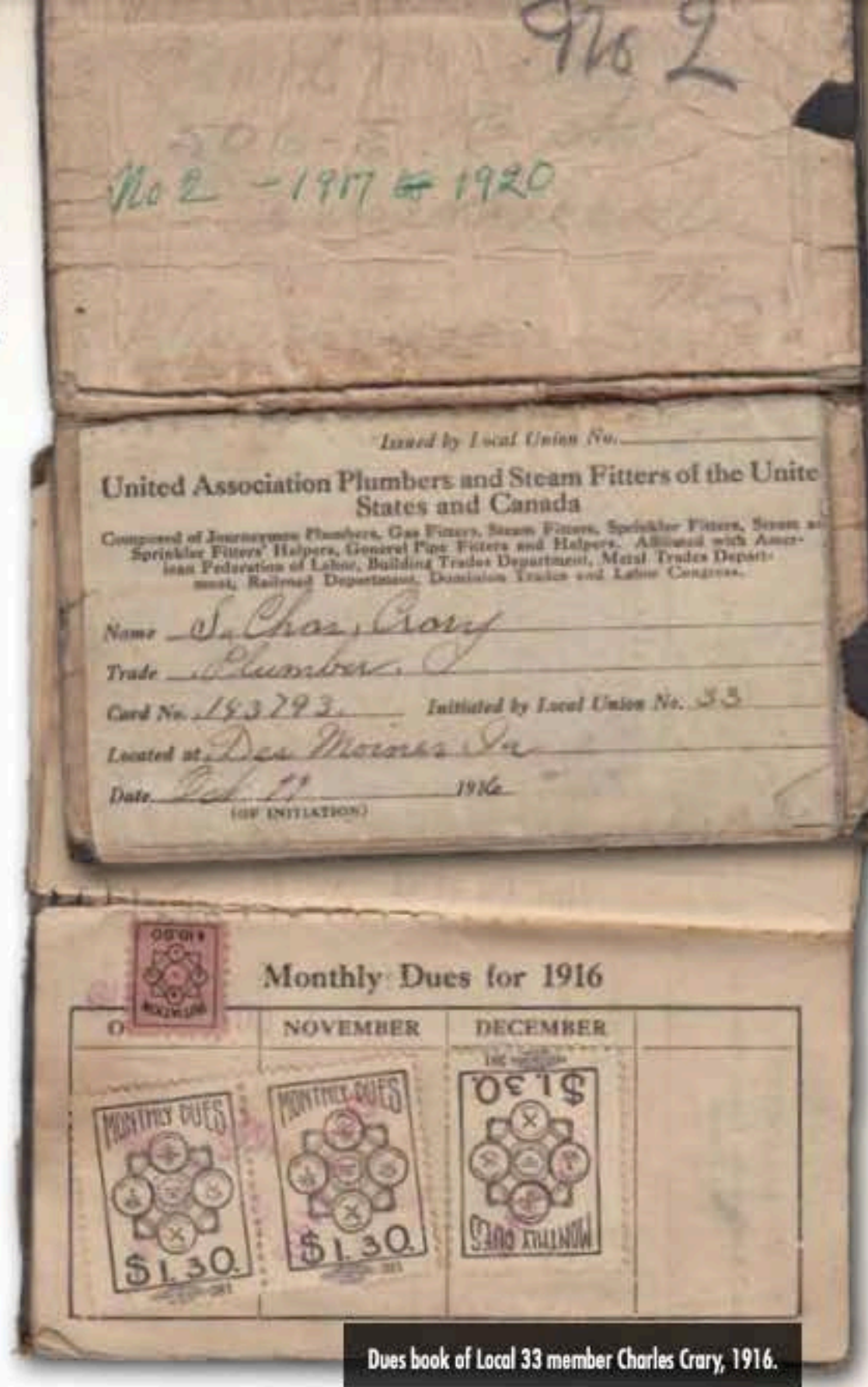
ENDURING THE 1920s AND '30s

While Local 33 had secured a \$10-per-day contract for 1920, the next two years were far less kind to the local than the previous decade had been. In fact, in early 1921, with the City of Des Moines and the State of Iowa in a serious economic and construction downturn (at one point in 1922 the city's Building Trades Council was not functioning because work was so slow),

the master plumbers cut wages to \$8 per day, effective April 1.

The following year, the local's members walked off their jobs for 10 days beginning March 1 before an agreement on wages could be reached. However, by July, more than half of the local's fitters were unemployed – while the local was fighting maintenance workers throughout the city who were performing steam-fitting work.

Worked picked up again in Local 33's



Dues book of Local 33 member Charles Crary, 1916.



Local 33 members working for Ryan Plumbing and Heating on construction of Fort Des Moines Hotel in 1918 and 1919 included (left to right, starting at top) A. Burnside; George Hunt; Paul Pennington, assistant superintendent of heating; William Robinson; L. Feezer; Ed Spitznagle; W. Wittkowsky; W. A. Rupkey; Brother McAniff; C. J. Olson; S. L. Whitmore; George Kennedy; P. A. Kehoe; S. A. Moran; Martin McGlone; Joe Fox; Charles Miller; Jerry Brown; Victor Merchant; Steve Crary; George Gerber; Harry Loring; Oscar Sparland; Tom Lynch; C. W. Stall; Charles Arkill; Charles Crary; H. E. Korneman; Joe Kohler; Dan Baldwin; William Ammison; C. Otto; Joe Burkehead; Robert Gilmore; W. E. Bunton; Dave Morgan; Paul Gustafson; W. C. Shanley; Roy Wiseman, superintendent of heating; Patrick Mansfield, superintendent of plumbing; M. Sandler, timekeeper; A. Isbell; W. E. Dike; Robert Haslett; Frank Wilson, assistant superintendent of plumbing; and J. W. Conklin, business agent.

jurisdiction, and before the end of 1922, U.A. General Organizer Richard P. Walsh was able to report in the November *Journal* that all of the local's members were employed and "conditions are very good in Des Moines."

The local joined the Building Trades in another strike in April 1923, the plumbers seeking a wage increase to \$1.25 per hour, although the employers again held firm to their refusal for the substantial wage increase. Just three years later, however, a strike by the Building Trades was averted on April 1 when annual contracts were extended by 15 days – but Local 33 signed its contract with the master plumbers that very day.

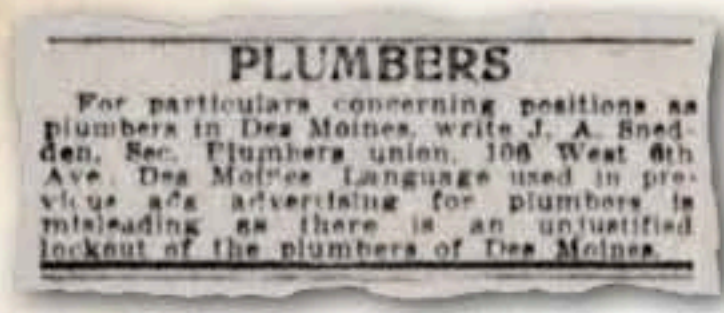
The local began to dwindle with the onset of the **Great Depression** after the stock market crashed in late 1928, and by June 1929, it numbered only 114 journeymen

and apprentices. While the local did gain a new, two-year contract in 1930 for the \$10-per-day wage rate, its situation would only get worse, as it would for many across the state and nation.

Undeniably, U.A. members throughout the country fell on hard times as unemployment soared, according to the U.A. International History. The *Journal* even ran several articles during the early 1930s that offered advice on how members could stretch their wages, such as growing food in their own gardens, but much of the focus was on calling on the government to take action to help people and on trying to offer some kind of hope and encouragement to the U.A. membership.

"... Construction all but stopped, and this led to a significant decline in manufacturing," the U.A. History recounts. "The economies of both (the United States and Canada) spiraled ever downward, until unemployment reached extremely high numbers and workers began to give up altogether." But while membership declined and no U.A. International conventions were convened between 1928 and 1938, "the union held it together."

In and around Des Moines, the depression had a profound effect, as hundreds of workers were out of work and the region's agricultural industry suffered greatly during the early 1930s. Local 33 also did not escape the distress, and by June 1932, it was down to only 96 total members.



March 20, 1921, Des Moines Register

Earlier that year, the local also endured a week-long lockout beginning March 14, during which only 18 member plumbers were at work while the **Des Moines Retail Plumbers** demanded the union take a \$3-per-day reduction in wages. An agreement was finally reached on March 22 that slashed daily wages \$2 down to \$8 per day.

As the depression continued, on May 1 the following year the local accepted a new, one-year contract without a wage increase, holding at \$1 per hour for an eight-hour day.

A light at the end of the dark tunnel began to

shine with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, which began putting U.A. members back to work in the early 1930s helping to build schools, libraries, public buildings and housing projects under the Public Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration. In Des Moines, the Federal stimulus funding provided many new improvement projects, including bridges, the Argonne Armory, Des Moines River retaining walls and the extension of several streets.

By mid-1936, all of the city's unions had reported growth over the previous three years, according to the July 5, 1936, *Register*. Over 65 union plumbers were at work in the city, the newspaper reported, and all Building Trades union members were "at work most of the time."

By that June, the local's membership had slowly increased to 105 ... and by June 1940, after the Great Depression had given way to **World War II**, Local 33 stood at 148 member journeymen and apprentices.

PITCHING IN AND GROWING

With the depression a moment in history, 1939 was a record year for plumbing in Des Moines. According to the January 7, 1940, *Register*, the city's plumbing inspectors issued 2,123 permits, and there were 48 licensed master plumbers and 142 journeymen plumbers – most of whom belonged to Local 33 – in the city.

What's more, by 1941, during which the country entered the Second World War on December 7, the City of Des Moines had grown to a population of 160,000 and its economy had stabilized as commerce and industry were converting to support the war effort. Perhaps most notably, the new, small-arms-munitions **ordnance plant in Ankeny**, Iowa, was built in 1941 with over 120 union plumbers – and would employ thousands of men and women during the war years.

Local 33 also helped convert old **Fort Des Moines** military induction center into a training base for the newly formed Women's Army Corps (WAC) beginning in 1942. (Congress passed a bill on May 14, 1942, forming the WAC to fill thousands of non-combat roles in the military; soon after, the military selected Fort Des Moines as the location at which to train the initial 60,000 volunteers, according to "Images of America: Fort Des Moines.") The installation grew so quickly, in fact, with 112 buildings springing up in less than five months and a total of 174 structures built there, that the "WACs" named the area "**Boomtown**," the book recounted, although much of it was demolished following the war.

During the war, the local's membership grew to over 175, with those in the union in 1943 making \$1.50 an hour. On June 15 of that year after a one-day cessation of work, the local agreed with its contractors that its wage-increase request for \$1.75 an hour should be

presented to the War Labor Board for arbitration.

After the end of the war and at the onset of a post-war building boom during the late 1940s that would last well into the 1950s, however, the union plumbers were not so amenable after nearly two decades of constant wage concessions. In late 1945, Local 33 went on strike for several weeks before winning an increase from \$1.62-1/2 per hour to \$1.75, the former rate having been established by the Federal Board of Adjustment (the continuation of the wartime War Labor Board, which was abolished when the war ended).

The local was again on strike in July 1946 for a new contract with a wage of \$2.08 an hour, stopping work on apartments at Fort Des Moines that would house the families of 203 war veterans to "enforce their demands," the July 25 *Register* reported. The debate was not settled until after a full day of negotiations in the office of a Federal conciliator on August 3, when the local was awarded a base pay of \$2 an hour, plus an additional 8 cents per hour into a **Vacation Fund** for the local's members and double time for all overtime (an increase from time-and-a-half).

The local signed on for a similar agreement with the Des Moines Master Plumbers for the following year, which was effective April 1, 1947. During the life of that particular contract, **John Deere** took over the closed ordnance plant – with Local 33 working on its conversion for the tractor company – and completed its first year of operations in 1948 while employing over 1,400 people.



Guy H. "Cuzzy" Brooks, shown here in 1947, the year he passed away, was one of Local 33's earliest members and held practically every office in the local before retiring.

Local 33 members working for Iowa Power & Light Company, circa 1925.

