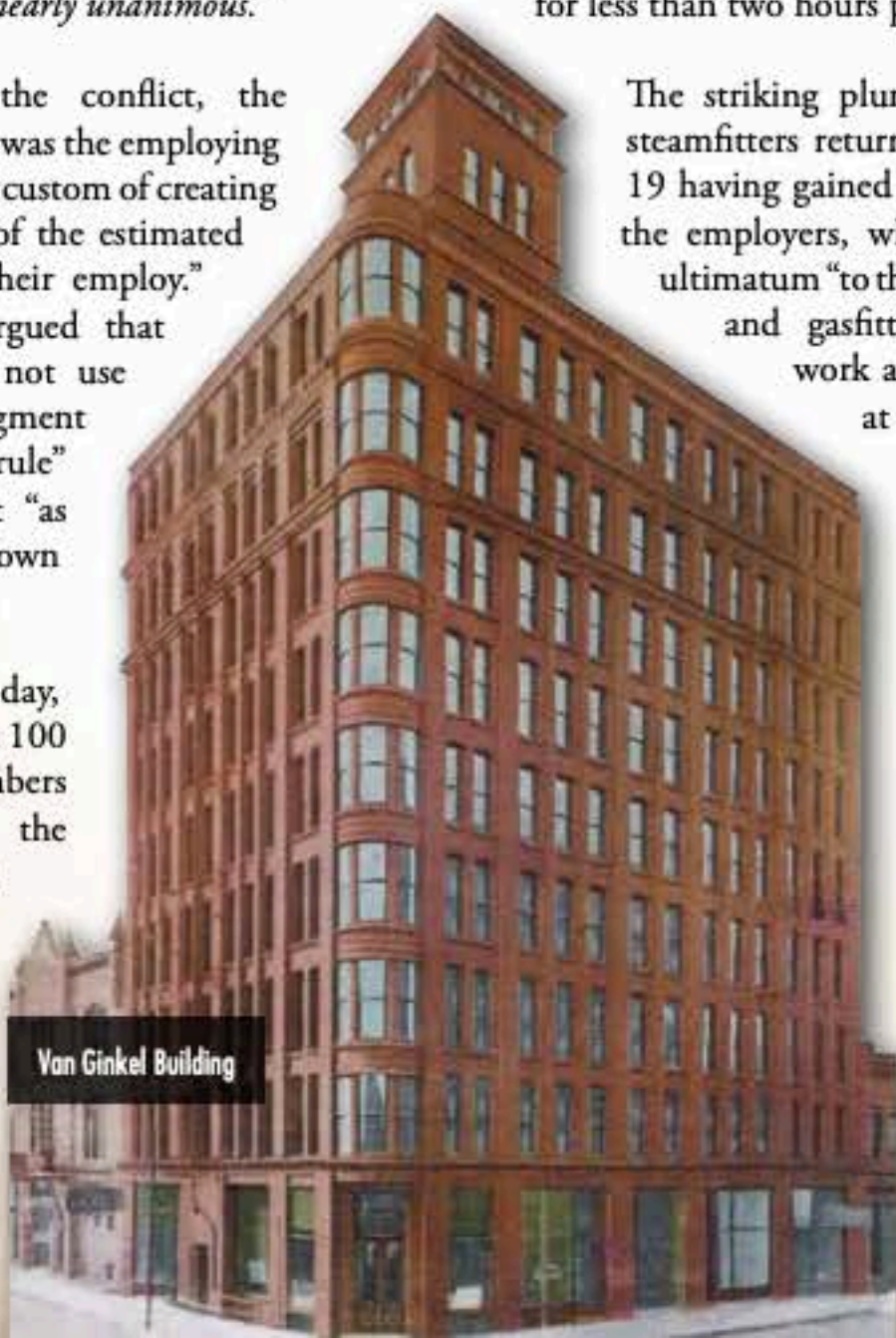


That issue notwithstanding, before the end of the decade and the century, Local 33 went out on a prolonged and bitter strike for the 8-hour day and higher wages. Beginning April 10, 1899, the journeyman plumbers walked off their jobs after contractors – including the Des Moines Plumbing, Wallace & McNamara and Van Dyke companies – refused to raise wages from 33-1/3 cents per hour to 40 cents per hour and shorten the workday by one hour, with the April 11 *Register* describing the proceedings:

“The striking plumbers repaired to Trades’ Assembly Hall and sent out skirmishers to notify men at work elsewhere of the action taken and requesting all plumbers whose employers declined to concede the demands to quit work and unite with the strikers in an effort to enforce the new scale. Soon there were 27 men assembled at the Trades’ Assembly Hall, the response to the request of the striking workmen being quick and nearly unanimous.”

At the crux of the conflict, the newspaper reported, was the employing plumbers’ “prevalent custom of creating wages on the basis of the estimated ability of men in their employ.” The journeymen argued that the employers did not use “discriminating judgment in applying this rule” and instead used it “as a pretext to scale down wages generally.”

By the following day, every one of the city’s 100 journeyman plumbers was not working, the *Register* reported on April 12. It even went on to cite a master plumber who stated that



Van Ginkel Building

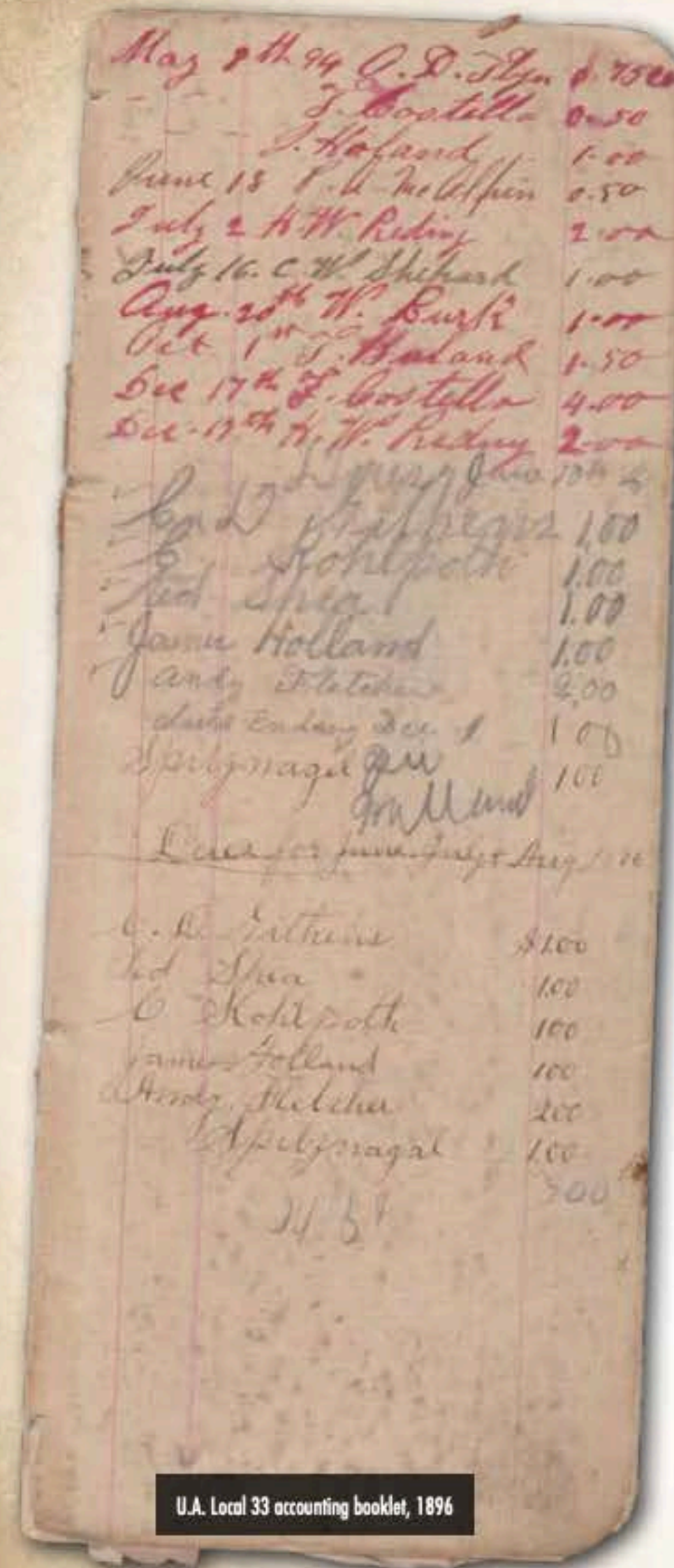
the employees were “sewed up tight, and the strike is a success as relates to the absolute unanimity with which the men have responded to the call to quit work.”

The local’s solidarity eventually won out. However, to begin the 20th Century, it would again have to strike in 1900 – with far less success – and, yet again, two years later after contractors refused to meet several requests from the union.

Local 33 gave a list of 12 demands that would go into effect on May 15, 1900, including a wage scale of \$3 per 8-hour day for journeymen and \$1.50 per day for apprentices who have served five years of a six-year apprenticeship. The local also requested that no laborer be allowed to do any pipe work in the city, that a member’s railroad fare be paid by the employer if he is sent to a job outside of the city, and that “no plumber, steam or gas fitter shall do any work for less than two hours pay.”

The striking plumbers, gasfitters and steamfitters returned to work on May 19 having gained no concessions from the employers, who had delivered an ultimatum “to the effect that plumbers and gasfitters must return to work at the old scale or not at all,” according to an article in the *Register* that day.

Two years later, the plumbers were still being paid \$3 per day (while their peers in Chicago were earning up to \$4.50 a day), and June 2, 1902, the 40-man strong Local 33 membership



U.A. Local 33 accounting booklet, 1896

again attempted to gain an increase in wages and went out on strike – but with a much better outcome. While the local was asking for a raise to \$3.60, after six days, during which the master plumbers suspended business while work on many buildings was idled, an arbitration committee of employers and journeymen decided on a wage increase to \$3.25 for Local 33 effective from September 1, 1902, to April 1, 1903.

The committee also agreed that from April 1, 1903, to April 1, 1904, the journeymen would receive \$3.50 per eight-hour day.

“The news of the settlement of this strike was received with much appreciation by contractors throughout the city Saturday, because of the fact that a large amount of work has been delayed through the strike,” the *Register* reported on June 8.

FOCUSING ON IMPROVED CONDITIONS

Throughout the first decade of the 1900s, Local 33 was continuously forced to fight for better wages and working conditions; however, it was not always by way of strikes and work-stoppages. Case in point, when the local was again struggling to have its demands met through a strike in April 1904, it instead created its own contracting firm – which the April 26 *Register* detailed:

“Yesterday, the ‘Sanitary Plumbing Company,’ organized by the striking journeymen plumbers, began business with a shop in the basement of the Marquardt building and began operations by starting several jobs of plumbing in several parts of the city. ... The shop is the outcome of a scheme which has been underway by the officers and members of the journeymen plumbers’ union for some time, and the members state that the business will be a permanent one.”



Local 33 charter member E. Van Dyke in 1902 while running for the office of Alderman of Des Moines' Fourth Ward, by which time he was operating his own successful business.

After two weeks, the journeymen and master plumbers came to a "final understanding," according to the May 6 *Register*, by which "the discrimination against union men is not to prevail." Ultimately, the plumbers returned to work for the contractors and the journeymen's shop was shuttered.

There continued to be no quit in the union plumbers of Des

Moines, as they walked off their jobs again in April 1906 and won a raise to \$3.75 per day and the continuation of the "closed" union shops in the city for the ensuing year. Again in April 1907, when the previous agreement expired, Local 33 went on strike and won a two-year contract for \$4 per day through May 1, 1909, after a joint committee of both parties agreed to arbitrate the local's original request for a 75-cent wage increase.

Having won those concessions, during that time, U.A. General Organizer John M. Love reported in the January 1908 United

Association *Journal* publication that the local "is in a good flourishing condition and will in the near future take a hand in the formation of the State Association for Iowa."

Nevertheless, when its two-year contract concluded, Local 33's nearly 120 members went right back on strike beginning May 10, 1909, when contractors refused their demands for a pay increase to \$5 per day, a "half holiday Saturday afternoon" and a closed-shop agreement. The May 12 *Register* explained, "The fact that there are a few master plumbers in the association of employers who do not work union men makes it difficult for the employers as an association to consider the closed-shop proposition."

The union journeymen would remain out for more than a month, during which time construction operations in Des Moines – which was in the middle of a building boom – were "seriously crippled" while over 25 contracts were held up, State Labor Commissioner E. W. Van Duyn declared in the June 4 *Register*, despite his own efforts to mediate a resolution. What's more, the contractors had brought in about a dozen strikebreakers to work the abandoned jobs – but that, too, was to no avail.

After a June 16 conference between the local and contractors, the plumbers gained a three-year contract with wages of \$4.65 for the first year and \$4.75 for the remaining two years, and they subsequently returned to work on June 17. In reaching the agreement, the local did recede from its request to have all shops in the city "closed," as the three non-union contractors would remain "open" shops, and its demand for a half holiday each Saturday afternoon, although they would "enjoy that privilege whenever the other building trades are given it," the *Register* reported on June 18, 1909.

There was no need for the local to stop working when the next contract negotiations

came around in 1912, as it made a three-year agreement with employers that spring that carried with it a \$5 wage scale the second and third years, as well as a closed-shop provision and restriction on the number of apprentices that could be used on jobs. The successful settlement even prompted U.A. General Organizer Frank J. Kennedy to declare in the October 1912 *Journal*:

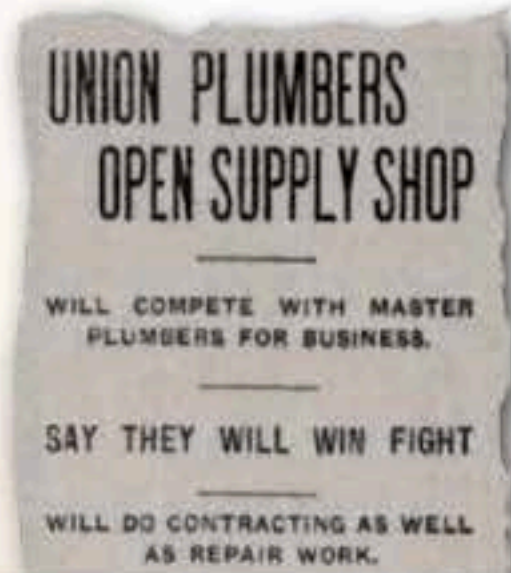
"Local 33 is one of the best locals in the state."

By that time, the local was charging a \$25 fee for initiation into the union – but any applicant had to first pass an examination. The local was also a member of the **Trades and Labor Assembly**, and its members spent Labor Day 1912 at the Assembly's picnic.

Local 33 also focused much of its efforts to improve its industry on bolstering outdated

plumbing ordinances in the City of Des Moines and the State of Iowa. To that end, a committee of representatives from the local and its employing master plumbers met on September 3, 1912, (the day after Labor Day) to draft a state law "regulating the licensing of plumbers and to supervise and inspect plumbing as well as to lay out a plan of action to ensure the passage of the law at the coming session of the legislature," Organizer Kennedy reported.

The committee presented the proposed ordinance, which called for "the examination of all persons as to their knowledge of plumbing before permitting them to engage in the business of contracting for plumbing, and also examine plumbers as to their knowledge of the trade," to the City Council in November, according to the November 30 *Register*. The plan also proposed to require an annual fee of \$25 from contracting plumbers and \$1 from journeymen.



Headline in the *Des Moines Register*, April 26, 1904.



Local 33 member employees, along with other neighbors, stand outside the shop of union plumbing contractor Steele and Shea at 417 West Ninth Street in Des Moines in 1907.

LOCAL HAS HAD ONLY SEVEN TREASURERS IN 125 YEARS

Local 33 had only two men serve as its treasurer during its first 99 years: **Brother James "Jay" Holland** was the local's first treasurer from 1891 until October 1940, when he passed away, and **Brother Frank A. Lynch** was then treasurer until 1990. The two men helped guide the local through its early years and into the complex piping industry of the mid-20th Century.



Brother James "Jay" Holland



Brother Frank A. Lynch

Brother Holland, a charter member of Local 33, was initiated into the United Association in 1889 and held Steamfitter Card No. 7280. His son, Elmer Holland, and two grandsons, Gerald Holland and James Holland, were also members of Local 33.

(A 1939 article in the *Des Moines Register*, at which time Brother Holland was the local's only surviving charter member, commented, "Jim ... may be the only man in the world who ever served 50 years as treasurer for a plumbers and steamfitters union.")

Brother Lynch joined the local in 1918 and held a then-record 53 years of continuous good-standing membership. He was Chief Plumbing Inspector for the City of Des Moines for many years before retiring.

With that foundation, during its first 125 years, Local 33 has had a total of only six brothers and one sister hold the position of treasurer (the business manager took over the role of treasurer beginning in 2001). Following Brother Lynch, **Brother Steven R. Boggs** served as treasurer from 1990 to 1998; **Sister Patricia A. Broerman** served from 1998 to June 2001; **Thomas F. Gillespie** from June 2001 to July 2007; **Brother Gregory B. Foshe** from July 2007 to July 2010; and current treasurer **Brother Andrew "Andy" Roberts** has served since July 2010.

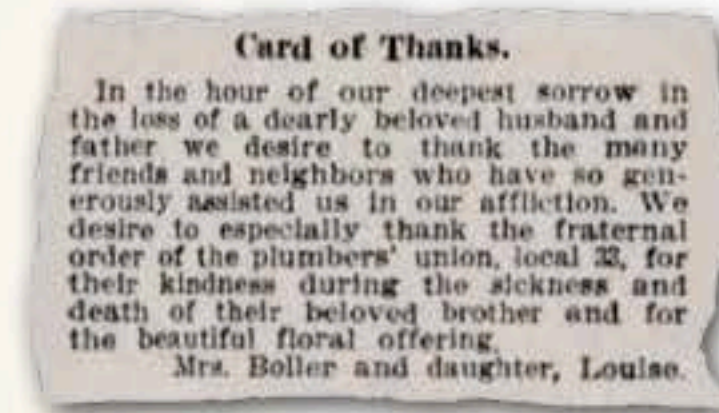
Before the ordinance was approved, however, it was considerably altered to, among other things, reduce the proposed Board of Examiners from five to three members and to disallow the master plumbers and the journeymen plumbers from having representatives on the board. After some further debate, it was then passed in October.

Soon after, the first group of 10 of the approximately 160 plumbers in Des Moines were being examined at City Hall by the plumbing board on December 20, 1913, "tinkering with lead pipe and other material to demonstrate their ability to do sanitary plumbing" – which an article in the *Register* the next day described as "the oddest examination ever held in Des Moines." But in the end, General Organizer Kennedy was able to convey in the January 1914 *Journal*:

"The first of January the ordinance creating a Board of Examiners of Plumbers goes into effect. The ordinance compels any person desiring to work as a journeyman plumber to first pass an examination as to his qualifications to work at such trade. Under the ordinance, the boss plumber is not compelled to take an examination to engage in the plumbing business, but if he desires to do his own work he must first take a journeyman's examination and procure a certificate before proceeding to do the work of a journeyman. This ordinance is backed up by a state law, which was passed at the last session of the legislature. I trust the other locals of the state will take advantage of the rights granted by the state law and insist on the city authorities of their various cities passing a similar ordinance."

MAKING SUBSTANTIAL GAINS

By 1915, Local 33 had not only contributed to creating the **Iowa State Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters**, but the local's Business Agent H. P. Willey and Brother Harry Loring were kept busy helping to run it, the later as its president, while the association's primary energies focused on passing state legislation to protect and improve the plumbing industry (which more often than not was a struggle). The local even hosted all of the state's U.A. locals on May 2 in Des Moines for the group's annual state convention.



Letter in the *Des Moines Register*, March 26, 1910.

Meanwhile, Local 33 was enjoying a good measure of prosperity into 1916, during which time wages for its plumbers and fitters were at \$5.50 per day. U.A. General Organizer Edward W. Leonard even commented in the May 1916 *Journal*:

"I am pleased to say that the affairs of the Des Moines Local Union are in excellent condition and the energy shown by their business agent is manifest by the unity that was exhibited by all the members and the confidences imposed in their officers."

The local endured a lockout in 1917 while it squabbled with its employing contractors over a new contract, and again the following year was forced to strike for an agreement. As a result,

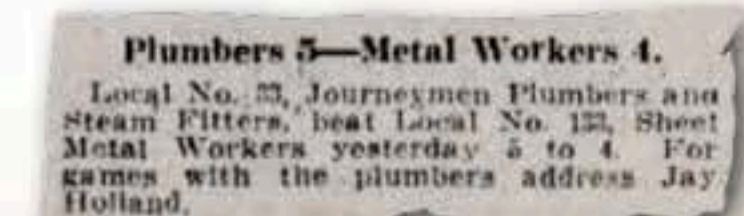
The wives and girlfriends of Local 33 members formed **Ladies Auxiliary No. 7** in 1915 to help support the local and its social and charitable activities.

by the spring of 1918 the local had secured "a good substantial increase in wages and one that is in keeping with the general increase of all our locals," General Organizer Kennedy reported in the August 1918 *Journal*.

Many of the local's men at that time were working on construction of the 400-room **Fort Des Moines Hotel**, which would open in 1919 after local business leaders pooled their money to build it, citing the need for a marquee hotel downtown. (At least 13 presidents would be guests of the hotel, as well as foreign leaders, musicians and celebrities.)

During the spring of that year, Local 33 joined the other building trades of the city in an eight-week-long strike that ended on May 25 with a new, two-year contract. While the labor dispute was conducted in a civilized manner and was "not nearly so costly as a 'labor war' would have been," a May 26, 1919, *Register & Tribune* editorial commented, it also forewarned:

"The employer who still believes that labor unions can be broken by a determined resistance is merely blinding himself to the commonest experience. ... While the terms of the agreement for the coming two years in Des Moines have not been published, it is plain on the face of it that the employers have recognized the right of labor to act in a body"



Baseball game score announced in a June 23, 1912, newspaper.