

UNITED ASSOCIATION

JOURNEYMEN AND APPRENTICES
OF THE
PLUMBING AND PIPE FITTING INDUSTRY
Equipment of Improvement and Apprentices in the Trade - Instruction
in every branch of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry

UNITED STATES AND CANADA.



To all whom it may concern:
Whereas, A petition in due form has been received by us praying that a charter
be granted to the Existing and Constructive and Metal Trade Unions
located at Des Moines and Water, Iowa

NOW KNOW YE
That acting under authority vested in us by the Laws and usages of the
UNITED ASSOCIATION,
Journeymen and Apprentices
of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry
OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

We direct this Warrant and Charter to be issued to the LOCAL UNION
No. 33 as set forth above to have date the first day of
November, 1891. And by virtue of this Warrant and Charter, the said
LOCAL UNION is empowered to do and perform such acts and enjoy such
privileges as are prescribed in the laws and usages of the UNITED ASSOCIATION,
and the members thereof are strictly enjoined to bear constantly in mind
and always practice the Cardinal principles of the Association
FIDELITY, EDUCATION, BENEVOLENCE & PROTECTION.

The UNITED ASSOCIATION reserves the right to suspend or revoke this Warrant and
Charter and to annul the rights and privileges therein conferred, for any
neglect or refusal to perform the duties required by the laws and usages of
the Association as adopted and promulgated by the UNITED ASSOCIATION,
or by any of its officers acting under legally invested authority.

In Witness Whereof, this Warrant and Charter has been signed
by the officers of the United Association and the Seal of said
Association has been affixed this

First day of November, 1891

[Signatures]
LOCAL SECRETARY OFFICE GENERAL SECRETARY



Local 33 Charter Members
United Association Local No. 33 charter members, pictured circa 1891: J. W. McGlue, W. Burke, James Holland, C. Shaw, A. Anderson, H. Simmons, J. Nelson, A. Fletcher, W. Moorhead, E. Van Dyck, C. Rosene, F. Cavanaugh, J. Flynn, F. Kelso, P. McAlpine, Elmer Cox, T. Boller, H. Redding and J. Boller.

FIGHTING FOR MEMBERS, INDUSTRY

During the early 1890s, wages for plumbers and pipefitters in Des Moines were between 10 cents and 15 cents per hour, and they were working 10 to 12 hours per day during 6- and 7-day workweeks. Seeking to improve those conditions, within the first six months after it was chartered, Local 33 went on strike to gain a 9-hour workday for the plumbers, gasfitters and steamfitters it was representing in the city – and won.

By October 1892, the local had grown to 20 members and had sent a delegate, Local 33 President J. W. McGlue, to the U.A. national convention that July 25 through 29. Brother McGlue served on the Committee on Law during the conference.

Mid-way through the decade, the local's

plumbers and fitters were working on several of their growing city's fast-rising edifices, including the new, seven-story **Van Ginkel Building** at the corner of Fourth and Locust streets. (Renamed the Observatory Building, it was the tallest office building between Chicago and San Francisco when it opened on April 1, 1896; it was demolished in 1937).

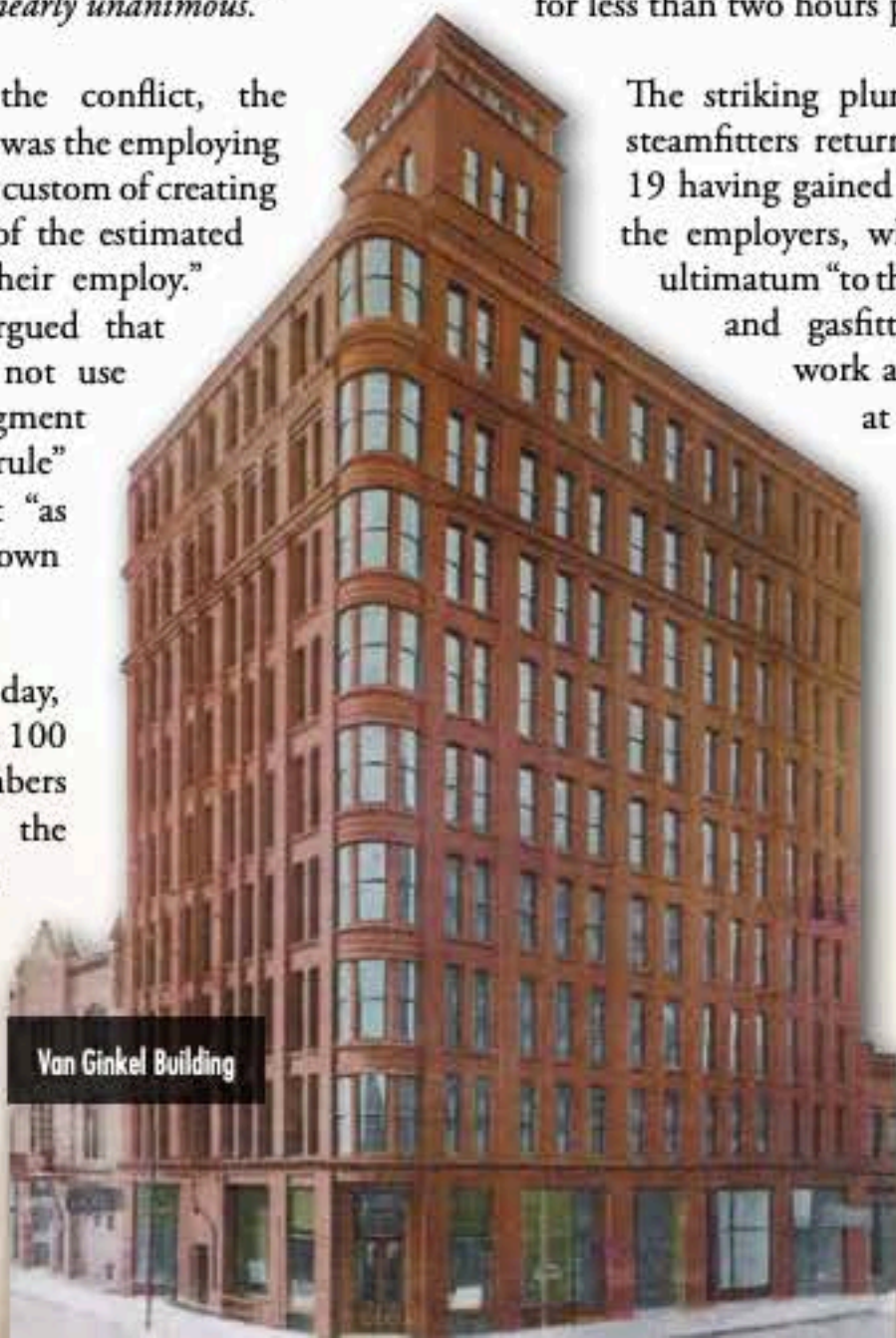
But the union, as well as the city's residents, were also facing a serious matter by that time – the lack of a city plumbing inspector, a predicament with which the local would have to deal for years to come. The issue was so critical at the time that Des Moines Sanitary Engineer H. J. Baily even wrote in the September 3, 1896, *Register*, "No doubt a number of the people here have ill health and spend no small amount of money on doctor bills, when they could dispense with both if they had healthy plumbing in the house."

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

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.

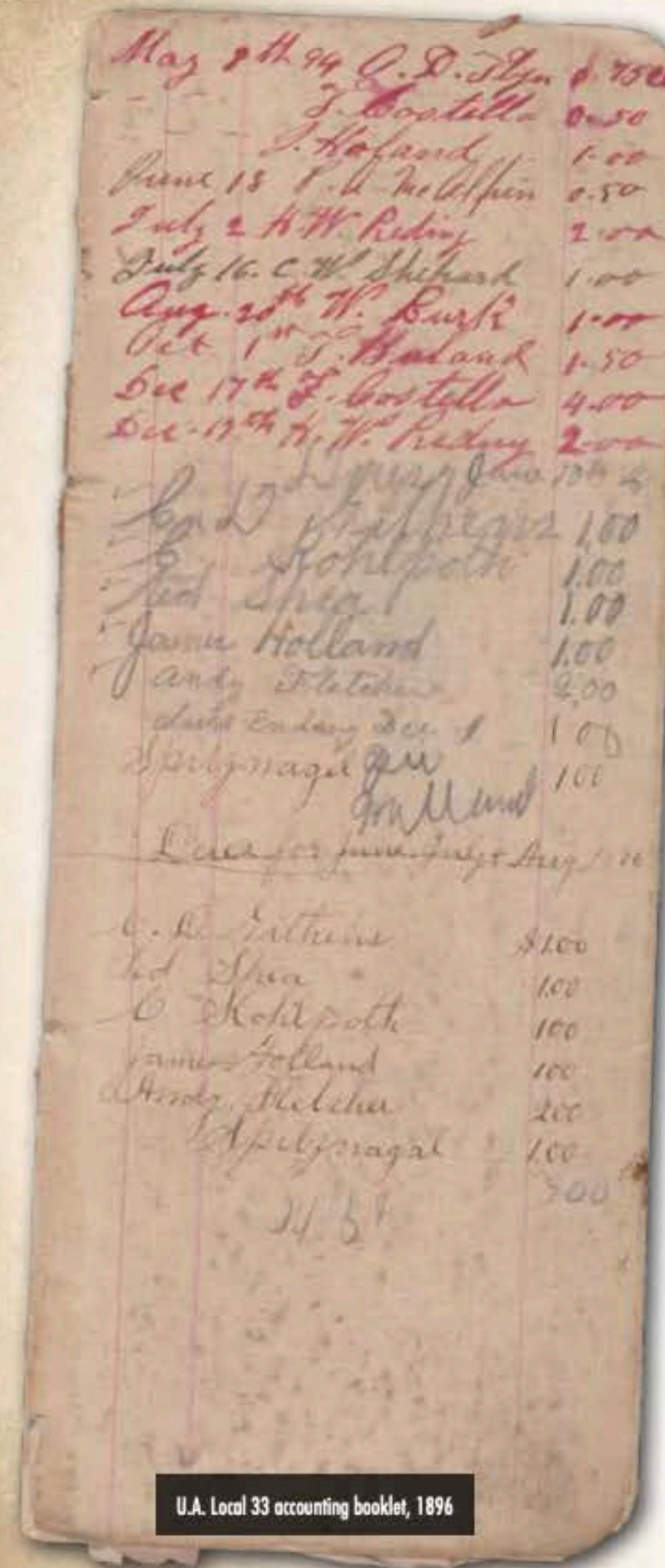
The committee also agreed that from April 1, 1903, to April 1, 1904, the journeymen would receive \$3.50 per eight-hour day.

“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.”



U.A. Local 33 accounting booklet, 1896