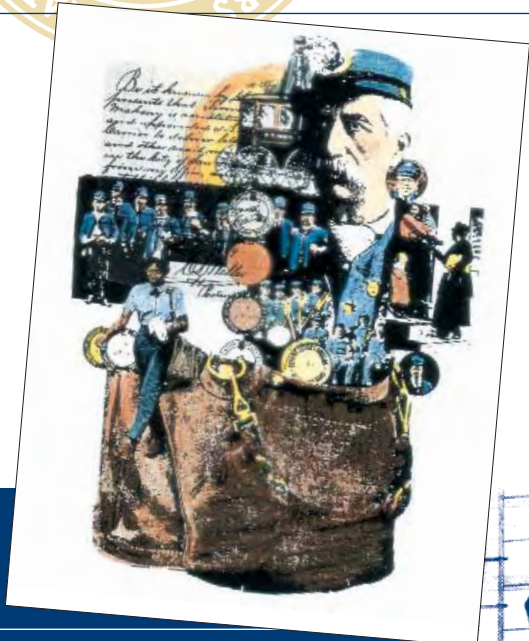




NALC: 120 YEARS OLD AND GOING STRONG

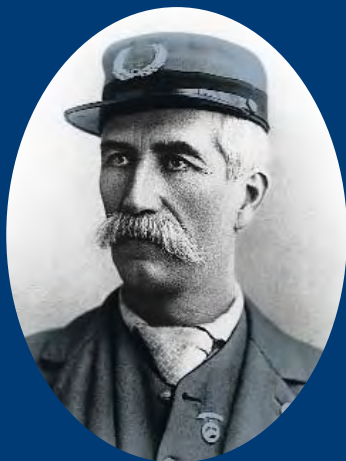


This month marks the 120th anniversary of the founding of the National Association of Letter Carriers in Milwaukee in 1889, as recounted below from the pages of *Carriers in a Common Cause*, the official history of the NALC.

The magazine-size volume traces the evolution of the letter carrier craft and the union from the Revolutionary War into the 21st century. It recounts the challenges NALC members have confronted and their victories in the quest

for workplace rights, respect and decent wages and benefits. Briskly paced and richly illustrated, the history has been praised as an inspiration for both new members and hardened veterans of the struggle to secure a middle class lifestyle for letter carriers and their families.

The 131-page perfect-bound publication is available for \$5, postage paid, by writing to the NALC Supply Department, 100 Indiana Ave NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144. ✉



William H. Wood, NALC's first president.

THE NALC IS BORN

Letter carriers had tried to organize a national union at least three times—in 1870 in Washington, DC, in 1877 in New York City, and in 1880 again in New York City. Recognizing that these earlier attempts had failed in part due to the expense of regularly convening enough carriers to sustain a national organization, in 1889 the Milwaukee Letter Carriers Association decided to time their call for another national meeting of carriers to coincide with the annual reunion of the Grand Army of the Republic—an organization of Union Army veterans—so that letter carriers who were veterans could take advantage of reduced train fares.

In issuing the invitation sent to every city delivery post office in the United States, the Milwaukee carriers advised delegates without regulation postal uniforms “to bring a letter of introduction from the postmaster or superintendent” and to bring “credentials from superior officers.”

THE NALC SYMBOL: A LEGACY THAT LIVES

The Milwaukee carriers also set forth a partial agenda for the meeting:

1. The formation of a national organization.
2. Petitioning Congress for an increase of carriers' salary.
3. Organizing a U.S. Letter Carriers' Mutual Ins. Co.
4. The pensioning of carriers after continued service of [number to be debated] years.
5. Providing substitute carriers with a fixed salary during their period of probation."

Ironically, the 60 carriers who answered Milwaukee's convention call—48 accredited delegates and at least 12 other participants—were not from the large cities such as Philadelphia and New York that had worked so hard for the passage of the eight-hour law, but primarily from small and middle-sized cities. So when August Dahlman of Milwaukee called the convention to order on Thursday, August 29, 1889, in the meeting hall above Schaefer's Saloon at 244 West Water St., delegates elected John J. Goodwin of Providence, Rhode Island, as temporary chairman, perhaps in an effort to balance regional concerns.

Delegates moved quickly, unanimously adopting a resolution to form a National Association of Letter Carriers and then, on the next day, elected William Wood of Detroit as the first president and appointed an Executive Board to coordinate all legislative efforts. ☒

"The badges of the National Association have been received and the boys are highly delighted with them, and we are constantly being complimented on their beauty by the public."

So said a Branch Item submitted to *The Postal Record* from Indianapolis in 1891, referring to the new NALC symbol and reflecting the pride and enthusiasm letter carriers felt for the infant union.

The decision to adopt a union logo was made at the first NALC convention in August 1890, with the delegates appointing a committee to come up with a suitable design. The result—a hand bearing a letter addressed "U.S.A." within a circle encribed "National Association of Letter Carriers"—was adopted in January 1891. Produced as a gold badge hanging from a sheaf pin, the symbol soon became popular with carriers throughout the country.

The reason for producing a badge with a distinctive symbol was to help letter carriers—as union members and as

skilled workers—identify one another. As reported in the 1890 *Postal Record*, "these badges or emblems will be quite universal, and will protect Carriers and Postmasters of smaller offices from being imposed upon by anyone claiming themselves as P.O. men in good standing when they are not."

To ensure the sanctity of the badge, they could only be ordered by a branch secretary—at \$1.20 apiece in solid gold and 55 cents in gold plate.

NALC's decision to adopt a logo paralleled a trend developing throughout the young trade-union movement to identify goods produced by skilled union craftsmen. Among the oldest in the American labor movement, NALC's symbol continues to stand for letter carriers' pride in their union, their craft and their service to the public. ☒

