

A storied history in Detroit



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NALC's 71st national convention will be held in Detroit July 16-20 next year. Over NALC's history, Detroit has hosted five national conventions. Next year will be the sixth time for the city.

Let's take a look at those past conventions, starting with NALC's second national convention in 1891. John J. Goodwin was president when the convention opened, but during the convention, Theodore C. Dennis was elected president by acclamation. There were 150 delegates in attendance. The delegates assembled passed a resolution to extend the application of civil service laws to the carrier workforce, classifying the salaries of all letter carriers at \$600 for the first year, \$800 for the

second year, \$1,000 for the third year, and \$1,200 a year thereafter. The per capita payments were changed from quarterly to semi-annually by the delegates in attendance.

The following note made during the convention still resonates today: "One of the principle purposes of the Association is to advance interests of Carriers, by means of legislation, that all efforts that have been made, and all money that has been spent to strengthen the organization." NALC is still paying attention to the interests of letter carriers and must watch the legislation that may affect us now and in the future.

Another note taken from the proceedings of the 1891 convention was the report by the Committee on Insurance. The committee presented a lengthy report for the establishment of a Mutual Benefit Association to be known as the Mail Carriers Mutual Benefit Association.

Delegates were back in Detroit at the 11th national convention in 1900. John Parsons of New York was national president. The Credentials Committee reported that 16 national officers, 15 state vice presidents, four MBA officers, 14 delegates at large, 631 delegates and 207 proxies totaling 887 votes were accounted for during the convention. At that time, the Committee on Constitution and Laws reported and made the following comments:

We believe that State Associations are destined to be a powerful factor in aid of the work, the aims and objects for which this National Association of Letter Carriers has been organized. We believe that through this medium the great work which must be, and is being done, can be systemized and simplified, we also believe that to achieve the best results there must be a certain uniformity of action, as without it the good work of our state associations can be neutralized, or, in fact, nullified, be the poor work of another; and that this difference in results achieved will be due in a great measure to the aforesaid lack of a uniform system.

The amendments creating the Constitution for the Government of the State Associations of the NALC were presented and passed.

Detroit again hosted the 25th national convention in 1925 with Edward J. Gainor of Muncie, IN, as president. (Brother Gainor served as national president for 27 years.) There were 1,226 delegates present, 21 national officers, 14 national and state vice presidents, 16 delegates at large and 450 proxies. I found it interesting that Resolution 20 was debated—the subject was "Vicious Dogs"—as was Resolution 33, which entitled NALC to own its own building. It took more than 25 years for this resolution to become reality.

In 1946, NALC convention delegates and officers assembled in Detroit for the 35th national convention, which had six days of proceedings. There were 1,829 delegates present with 1,515 proxies, 21 national officers, 32 national and state vice presidents, and 44 delegates at large. This convention tried to pass Amendment 38—the abolishment of the proxy system—but failed. (Today, proxies are unconstitutional.) William C. Doherty of Cincinnati, OH, was president. It was this convention that began with close-of-business sessions, the new biennial terms. One quote from President Doherty that still stands today is, "I say to you, my friends, that on the legislation and administration fronts we have but scratched the surface."

Jerome J. Keating from Minneapolis was president during the 45th national convention in Detroit in 1966. James H. Rademacher was the vice president. Many of our members today knew Brother Rademacher, who served as national president during the 1970 strike. During this convention, there were 23 national officers, 39 state field directors, 48 delegates at large and 3,401 delegates present. Proxies were still in place and there were 1,217 branches by proxy. Several resolutions were discussed, including proper route adjustments, Level 5 for all letter carriers and Resolution 36 (coffee breaks).

After going through the proceedings, it is clear that letter carriers of the past and the present have discussed and debated many of the same issues, just at different times. As is frequently said, history often repeats itself.

In 2018, it will have been 52 years since we last convened in Detroit. Many issues we faced in the past have been overcome, but many we still face today. State associations play such an important role in our legislative activities, and organizing our members for activism is still as important today as it was in the past—if not more important. We can thank all our brothers and sisters who have stood loyally by NALC, during tough times and good times, for the benefits we have today. If not for them, where would we be today? In each era, a generation of letter carriers has contributed and will continue to contribute into the future. I imagine 50 years from now the delegates saying, "Wow, our past brothers and sisters knew how to organize and advance the interests of letter carriers and working men and women."

I wish everyone a safe and happy Fourth of July!