

# **Finding aid for the Bricklayers' Union No 1 records Collection 379**

**Finding aid prepared by Julie Tabberer**

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This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

May 2011

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
<b>Creator</b>	Bricklayers' Union No 1. (Grand Rapids, Mich.)
<b>Creator</b>	Stonemasons' Union No 3. (Grand Rapids, Mich.)
<b>Title</b>	Bricklayers' Union No 1 records
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1886-1913
<b>Extent</b>	2.75 Linear feet
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The Local Bricklayers No. 1 was a notable and large early labor union in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was the first bricklayers' union in the state and was involved in strikes in 1891 and 1893, over wages and working hours. The Local Bricklayers No. 1 was active until 1993, however the records in the collection are limited to 1886-1913. The records include meeting minutes, list of members, financial records and some correspondence. In addition, a record book from the Stonemasons Union No. 3 (1898-1901) is included.</p>

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## Biographical/Historical note

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A good history of the local bricklayer's union is included in the article "Heyday! The Labor Movement in 19th-Century Grand Rapids" by Michael Johnston in *Grand River Valley History*, Volume 22. This summary is based on that article.

Unions were first organized in Grand Rapids around the time of the Civil War. The Bricklayers Local No. 1 was the first bricklayers union in the state and was established right after the Civil War. After experiencing an initial boom, the chapter faltered due to unpaid member's dues. It was re-established in October 1884 and grew quickly.

The Bricklayers Local No. 1 was active in two strikes in the 1890s. The first strike, in March 1891, sought to increase wages to 45 cents an hour instead of a scale of 35-45 cents per hour. The strike lasted only 45 days before contractors submitted to the union's demands.

The second strike, beginning in early 1893, sought an 8-hour workday. This strike lasted substantially longer, partially due to economic conditions. After the strike began, local contractors advertised in out of state newspapers for help. However, Bricklayers Local No. 1 had recently joined with the Bricklayers and Masons International Union and, with this association, kept all union bricklayers out of Grand Rapids. The strike was nearly successful when the nation plunged into a depression and new construction crawled to a stop. With jobs short, local members began to break the strike and the union ran out of money for strike pay. The local union sought assistance from the International Union and, after an initial refusal, were given help with strike pay. The strike ended on September 1894, with the 8 hour day granted but with wages down to 25 cents an hour.

Bricklayers Local No. 1 continued until 1993 when they merged with Local 9 of Lansing due to a shrinking membership.

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## Scope and Contents note

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The Local Bricklayers No. 1 was a notable and large early union in Grand Rapids. It was involved in strikes in 1891 and 1893, over wages and hours. The collection includes meeting minutes, lists of members, financial records and some correspondence. The member lists include lists of traveling cards granted, member initiations and expelled members. The collection is strongest used as a resource for labor research, but may also provide insight into individuals who belonged to the union.

The collection also contains meeting minutes from the Stonemasons Union No. 3. The minutes begin with the organization of the Stonemasons in 1898 and end with the dissolution of the organization in 1901. The

Stone Masons appear to have organized out of the Bricklayers union and then merged back in with them. The Stonemasons record book also includes lists of officers and a roll call.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department May 2011

### Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Local 1 Bricklayers Union, Accession number 1991.001.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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### Genre(s)

- records (documents)

### Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

### Subject(s)

- Labor unions -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids -- History

## Collection Inventory

	<b>Box</b>	
Bricklayers and Masons Union No 1 of Michigan, Record Book 1886-1887	2	
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Loose papers, Bricklayers and Masons Union No 1 of Michigan, Record Book 1886-1887	2	1
	<b>Box</b>	
Bricklayers and Masons Union No. 1, Record Book 1888-1889	1	
Record Book October 1891-April 1893	3	
Account Book 1892-1894	3	
Stonemason's Union No. 3, Record Book 1898-1901	1	
Member Records/Accounting 1909-1911	3	
Bricklayers Union No 1 of Michigan, Correspondence Record Book circa 1900-1913	2	
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Union reports, found loose in Correspondence Record Book circa 1900-1913	2	2