The history of AWCI is a bright reflection of the history of the wall and ceiling industry. As this sector of construction has stretched and changed shape, so the Association has transformed itself to better fit the evolving needs of its members. In celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Association of the Wall & Ceiling Industries—International, we publish a series of articles tracing the history of AWCI, and, in turn, the history of our industry. We begin at the actual birth of the Association, the formation of the Contracting Plasterers International Association (CPU).

It all started March 11, 1918, at the Hamilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. Twenty-six lathing and plastering contractors assembled to form an industry organization, the Contracting Plasterers International Association (CPIA).

The first CPIA conference in 1918 was called by the Employing Plasterers’ Association of Chicago, an organization with more than 25 years of continuous leadership to its credit. The meeting—arranged by T.J. McNulty, T.F. O’Brien and M.P. Riley—attracted representatives from associations in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, Louisville, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Washington, D.C.

Present for this first meeting were: Charles McGarvey, Indianapolis;
The relief wallcoverings shown in this residential entrance are typical of the highly decorative style popular in the early 1900s.


The organization had three primary missions:

1. to deal with new government regulations,
2. to deal with the post-World War I boom, and
3. to create a strong contractor presence to deal with the three international unions which were then providing manpower: The Operative Plasterers & Cement Masons International Association (OP&CMIA), the Wood, Wire & Metal Lathers’ International Union (WW&MLIU), and the Bricklayers, Masons & Plasterers International Union (BM&PIU).

From the beginning, these founders planned for the CPIA to perform two important functions: to establish friendly and cooperative interests among the members and to provide service to the building public. Key interests were apprenticeship, broad labor agreements and industry promotion.

At the first meeting, John J. Earley of Washington was named temporary chairman and T.A. O’Rourke of Louisville; C.A. Murray, Washington Andrew McCallin Denver; Joseph D. McNulty, Chicago; J.W. Rowan and C. Dunn, St. Louis; T. Smith, New York; Oscar A. Reum, Chicago; H.J. Monte and W.J. Pugh, Cincinnati J.C. Humphreys, Philadelphia; and Arthur Sanford Indianapolis.

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At the first meeting, John J. Earley of Washington was named temporary chairman and T.A. O’Rourke of
New York City, temporary secretary. It was determined that a permanent organization and slate of officers should be named immediately.

The following were selected:

- President: Oscar A. Reum, Chicago
- First Vice President: Arthur R. Sanford, Indianapolis
- Second Vice President: Andrew McCallin, Denver
- Secretary/Treasurer: W.J. Pugh, Cincinnati

(Reum served continuously until his death in 1945.)

These men, and those who served with them, were to create the true character of the CPIA. Their dedicated work laid the very foundation of an organization that has survived and prospered, despite wars, depressions, recessions, crashes, political upheaval and financial troubles.

But, these “founding fathers” were not only serious and purposeful businessmen but also shared a real spirit of fun. According to the 1967 Special Report on the History of the CPLIA published for the 50th anniversary of the Association:

“Charlie Bonnell in those days was the “fun man” of the group, as well as one of its most dedicated workers and counselors, excelling on golf...he served on the board continuously from the group’s start. It is reported that its secretary-editor, Eddie McDonnell, also held much score for manly activities, frequently setting up the beer and chips for the poker sessions following gatherings, while President Reum was below decks leading the group in prayer and to good purpose.”

These early Association leaders set the stage for the years, and the changes, to come.

**Changing Names**

As time passed, the CPIA would change its name four times. Each name change mirrored a change in the industry and, consequently, in the membership of the Association.

The first name change occurred in 1955. A goal set forth in the articles of incorporation was to oppose any effort to separate the lath-
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ing from the plastering trade. Thus, newly elected CPIA President Loyd Peterson of Minneapolis, a lather by trade, urged the Board to change the bylaws to admit lathing con-

tractors into membership. That same year the word Lathers was added to the Association’s name, becoming the Contracting Plaster-
ers’ and Lathers’ International As-
sociation (CPLIA).

Fourteen years later, when the volume of drywall/acoustical tile being contracted by CPLIA members had increased significantly, the Association voted to change its name again. And so, in 1969, the CPLIA became the international association of the Wall & Ceiling Contractors (iaWCC).

After a successful merger with the Gypsum Drywall Contractors International (GDCI), iaWCC’s name was changed to a combination of the two merging organizations, iaWCC/GDCI. The two associations “consolidated” on the 1st of July 1976.

Finally, after the merger had “settled,” the Association name was changed to its present form, The Association of the Wall & Ceiling Industries—International (AWCI).

MEANWHILE, THE REST OF THE WORLD... But let’s get back to 1918, when the whole thing started. To discern the true significance of the founding of the CPIA, it is important to understand what was happening in the world at the time.

In 1917, just one year before the CPIA formed, the Russian Revolution began, and the US declared war with Germany. Freud published his Introduction to Psychoanalysis, beginning a longstanding controversy about the makeup of the human psyche.

In 1918, the Mt. Wilson Telescope was completed in Pasadena, CA, Knute Rockne was named head football coach at Notre Dame, and the World War I peace conference was held in Paris. The US population was approximately 103.5 million. A flu epidemic killed approximately 548,000 in the US, nearly 22 million worldwide.

In 1919, CPIA held its second meeting in Chicago at the La Salle Hotel. The same year, a total eclipse of the sun held the attention of the world, at least for a time. The first transatlantic nonstop flight was completed by a US Navy seaplane.

The Paris Peace Conference was held at Versailles, which produced an outline of the purpose and organization of the League of Nations.

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Prohibition, the 18th Amendment, was ratified, beginning the era of speakeasies and bathtub gin.

In the months to come, this series will cover the history of the Association and our industry a decade at a time, with an emphasis on how the Association and the industry have changed together. Next month’s article will explore The Roaring 20s.