The TWU was formed in 1934 during the depths of the Great Depression when New York City’s transit companies were abusing the nation’s dire situation. Taking advantage of the country’s 25 percent unemployment rate and subsequent surplus of job applicants companies hired and fired at will, and underpaid, overworked and mistreated their employees. Transit companies were all powerful, managers were brutal and working conditions were dangerous and abusive. For the first two decades of the 20th Century company hired goons crushed workers’ attempts at unionization, including four major strikes held between 1905 and 1919.

The largely Republican, Irish-born transit workforce reached its threshold just as an ideal leader emerged, Michael J. Quill. Quill’s audacious approach at unionization led to the formation of the desperately needed Transport Workers Union. TWU’s pioneers coined the motto, “United-Invincible,” and strongly believed that an organized, united front was the only way to win fair working conditions for themselves and for their members. They also fought for equality in the workplace, and spoke out against discrimination based on race, job title and ethnicity.

Mike Quill, President and founder of the TWU, stood on top of a soapbox as he held a shop gate meeting outside of the IRT Powerhouse on 59th St. in New York City in 1937.

TWU’s founders spent the mid-1930s organizing strikes and sit-ins to fight the powerful transit companies until the robber barons realized the union had gained its own power and was there to stay. Read about TWU’s defining moments here.

In the early 1940s transit workers from New York, Ohio, Nebraska, New Jersey and Pennsylvania joined the TWU. By the end of the decade, San Francisco and Houston’s transit employees were members, and airline and railroad workers began to join the union by the thousands.

Over the last 75 years we have gained members from states spanning the country and have grown to represent the four divisions we consist of today.