On November 21, 1885 journeyman bakers in St. Louis elected delegates to the first national convention of bakery workers held in Pittsburgh in February 1886. At the Convention the delegates voted to join the Bakery Workers' National Union and were granted a charter as Local No. 15. The delegation also voted to join the eight-hour movement and to send delegates to help from the Central Trades and Labor Union.

Bakers' Union No. 15 went on strike in 1888 to demand an eight-hour work day but it failed because of inexperienced leadership and the questionable loyalties of some union members. The secretary of the national union came to St. Louis in December 1888 and reorganized the local with only 18 members.

In 1893 Local 15 began a monthly newspaper called St. Louis Baker to report labor organizing news and events. The newspaper also publicized the union and helped increase its membership to over 150. Local 15 organized a few union shops and led several boycott efforts.

 Strikes by street car workers in 1900 inspired members of Local 15 to strike against the Welle-Bottlers and McKinney bakeries in St. Louis. Another local employer, the Heydt bakery, agreed to hire only union labor and to use the union label, but it made no wage concessions. Within two years, however, union bakers were working a nine-hour day on a minimum wage scale.

In August 1902 workers at the McKinney bakery formed a union shop but refused to join Local 15 because its meetings were conducted in German. In order to keep a union shop at the McKinney bakery, the national union granted a separate charter (No. 238) to the English speaking local. The two groups remained rivals until November 1906 when they amalgamated as Local No. 4. Local No. 4 led successful efforts to shorten working hours, establish the six-day week and improve sanitary conditions at St. Louis bakeries.

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