

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 154: 1918 (THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS)

By Richard Schulte

The Great War in Europe, which began in 1914, continued to drag on into 1918. For the first few years of the War, America remained uninvolved. It wasn't until 1917 that America entered the War on the side of Great Britain and France. A little over a year after America's involvement in the Great War, the NFPA held its twenty-second Annual Meeting at the Insurance Exchange in Chicago in early May 1918. As was the custom, the meeting opened with the Association President's Address. The following is the transcript of that address:

"The Chair: We will now give our attention to the President's address. (Applause.)"

President's Address.

President Louis Wiederhold, .Jr., of Philadelphia.

*Twenty-two years ago a mere handful of fire protection engineers organized the National Fire Protection Association, and boldly stated their objects: **to promote the science and improve the methods of fire protection and prevention, and to obtain and circulate information on these subjects, and to secure the co-operation of its members in establishing proper safeguards against loss of life and property by fire.** Improvement in the methods of fire protection and prevention has shown marked progress, and the co-operation of our members has been all that could be desired, but the one real problem remains unsolved. How can we make the people of this country understand their responsibility for the pernicious results which must inevitably follow unbridled prodigality? We have never quite understood what it means to save or be careful, and even with our country at war we cannot bring ourselves to believe that our resources are without end. We have been reared in the lap of plenty, and go blissfully on, wasting and wasting, ever cheerful in the thought that somehow all that has been wilfully or carelessly destroyed will be replaced. As nature abhors a vacuum, so she detests waste, and neither wisdom nor science has ever successfully ignored her immutable requirements. Facing such indisputable fundamentals, we know that ignorance must fail, and though unstated in so many words, the most important object of the National Fire Protection Association is to dissipate such ignorance and bring the public to understand that fire waste and attending sacrifice of human life can and must be checked. **Laws and ordinances***

have had some effect, but as a rule the people fail to take such regulations seriously, because they do not understand the necessity for enforcement. They must be educated, and this means that by every method available, both public and private, the gospel of fire protection and prevention must be preached incessantly. Unfortunately, the National Fire Protection Association has always been handicapped for lack of sufficient funds. We should have many thousands of dollars per annum for publicity work instead of a few hundred, and the constant aim of the executives should be to develop our financial resources. Your secretary and treasurer is deserving of the highest praise for the value he has obtained for every dollar expended. I have never known an organization to do so much with so little money.

The National Fire Protection Association has accomplished a great deal, but we are engaged in a hard, uphill fight, and it may be years before the fire waste figures reflect our success, but, working shoulder to shoulder with the Bureau of Standards, National Board of Fire Underwriters, and other members active in the campaign, we must succeed, and I hope to live to see the day when we may favorably compare the fire loss figures of our American cities with those abroad.

In the present critical period, when the protection of our factories and stores at home may have such an important bearing upon the outcome of the war, it should be a great satisfaction to our members to reflect that practically all the standards in use are the result of their labors in our struggle for sound economic conditions.

In conclusion, permit me to express my gratitude for the support you have accorded my administration, and assure you that I shall always consider it an honored privilege to lend my assistance in furthering the aims of the National Fire Protection Association.

The Chair: You have heard the President's address. What is your pleasure?

Mr. Wentworth: I would like to have the privilege of moving the acceptance of the President's address, which is consonant with his character. Being a man of few words, his report is naturally brief and to the point. We have had many able and devoted presidents of the National Fire Protection Association. The problems they have met in their administrations have not been few and have not been inconsiderable, and it is not that I in any way under-value our former presidents when I ask permission to lay a special meed of praise at the feet of President Wiederhold. Those of us who are in the thick of administration work must realize that all the world war of the past year has not been in Europe. There is war that is carried on without guns. Commercial competition is war, and out of that warfare often come feelings of bitterness to which the soldier in uniform is a stranger. We have had certain storms and stresses in the Association work this past year; storms and stresses in which harsh words, or even irritation, might have intensified feelings of bitterness. Situations of this sort, several of them, have been relieved by the calm-

ness, the dignity and the sweetness of personality of our President. I think we all regret sincerely that he could not be induced to continue his administration for another year. We should all have been so glad to have tendered him that honor. He himself has said, however, that his retirement from the presidency means no severance of his relations with or his interest in the Association, and so it is not in any spirit of farewell, Mr. President, that I present to you, on behalf of your fellow members of the Association, this slight token of our regard. It is a pearl scarf pin, and the purity of the pearl may well typify the purity of our regard for you, sir. (Applause).

President Wiederhold: I am now at a loss for words! I am not a ready speaker at any time, and I cannot explain to you how much I appreciate not only what the Secretary has said, but the gift of this remembrance itself, and I want to assure you that my heart will always be in the work of the Association. The man who occupies the president's chair is only as the drop on the crest of the wave. The drop is but one with the thousands and thousands of other drops that form the wave's base, and that is the way with the membership of this organization. I hope to resume my place as one of those drops at the base, and I thank you most heartily for this beautiful gift. (Applause).

The President's address was accepted."

Another simple and eloquent address by a president of the Association. Perhaps, the most important point made in the address was, and is, the importance of not only passing fire safety-related laws and ordinances, but also of enforcement of those laws and ordinances. Without enforcement, the enactment of laws and ordinances governing fire safety actually means very little.

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