

## FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 159: 1921 (FIRE PROTECTION AND THE 18<sup>TH</sup> AMENDMENT)

By Richard Schulte

The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, affectionately known as Prohibition, went into effect on January 16, 1920 (and lasted until December 5, 1933). What has the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment got to do with the history of fire protection-absolutely nothing, but it is necessary to know a little about the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to understand the comments made by Ernest Palmer, representing the National Board of Fire Underwriters (Chicago), regarding the Report of the Executive Committee at the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association held in San Francisco in May 1921. 1921 was also the fifteenth anniversary of the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire which destroyed the City of San Francisco in 1906.

*“Mr. Ernest Palmer. Chicago (National Board of Fire Underwriters): I want to call the attention of the membership to the fact that this report is a very highly concentrated extract, and if I may be permitted to speak in the language of the past, say, perhaps, **it is one hundred per cent proof**. It is, indeed, a most concrete and complete report. I am sure as we peruse it carefully, with consideration of its detail, we shall realize it is written with the modesty which is so characteristic of our esteemed secretary. But, gentlemen, I want to say that to me the most significant statement in this report is that in regard to the stability of our membership during these troublous times. If we can keep up our membership during such times of national and international disturbance, may we not be optimistic about what we can do during the times of peace and good will toward all? There are many definitions of an optimist. I heard one the other day, which, perhaps, is a fair one. **An optimist is a bartender who still pays his union dues.** (Laughter.)*

*There is no 18th Amendment against fire; that is limited to strictly fire-water, but, I believe, as that amendment was the result of the combined efforts of public opinion, we may some day hope for an 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment against fire by a concerted movement of public opinion, such movement to be headed by this particular organization and its competent officers. I want to say here, gentlemen, that if this report is properly analyzed, it shows a tremendous amount of work done at the executive offices, and I think that with the Association in its present hands we can feel as well assured of the success of our organization as we can feel assured that this magnificent San Francisco harbor is capable of holding the entire Irish navy. I move the adoption of this report.”*

Just a little humor of the times.

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**Source:** "*Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual [NFPA] Meeting*", San Francisco, California, 1921.