

## FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 160: 1921 (THE NATIONAL BOARD OF FIRE UNDERWRITERS)

By Richard Schulte

The National Board of Fire Underwriters (NBFU) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), along with Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) were all closely affiliated organizations. While the NFPA and UL have survived into modern times, the National Board of Fire Underwriters has long since ceased to exist. Just what activities did the NBFU involve itself in the 1920's? The following report of the NBFU delivered at the twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the NFPA held in 1921 provides a quick overview of a few of the activities of this organization:

### ***“Report of the National Board of Fire Underwriters. (Presented by Mr. Geo. W. Booth.)***

*There is hardly any activity of the National Board which has not a quite definite bearing on fire prevention, and no attempt will be made to report on all these activities, but only to touch on those which have a direct connection with the work of the Association.*

*The **Committee on Fire Prevention and Engineering Standards** has continued during the year **the investigations and reports on the fire protection facilities and hazards of cities**, and its success in securing the adoption of recommendations for improvements has been much advanced by the use of **the National Board Grading Schedule** which brings definitely to the attention of city officials the effectiveness of these improvements. The almost universal adoption of the Schedule, and the establishment of National Board offices in Chicago and San Francisco, have served to make the Board really national in fact as well as in name.*

*The progress in standardization of fire hose and hydrant couplings is an accomplishment which has in years past been close to the heart of the N. F. P. A. and I am pleased to report that in this matter we have still the active support and co-operation of **F. M. Griswold** who was so long the chairman of your committee on this subject.*

*It is possible that you may hear in detail later on in this convention of the educational work on fire prevention lines conducted by Mr. Fleming in the East and Jay Stevens on the Pacific Coast through the medium of addresses to chambers of commerce and other civic organizations. It will suffice at this time to mention the reports that come to us of the wonderful success of these men, and to say that it is the purpose to continue this educational program during the coming year.*

*The Committee on Construction of Buildings has further revised the National Board Building Code and has continued the distribution of copies of the Code, as well as the review of city building codes and efforts to secure their improvement through conferences and correspondence with Building Code Committees.*

*Among its other activities and accomplishments, special mention should be made of the consent by the Committee to the request from Secretary Hoover of the U. S. Department of Commerce for the services of Consulting Engineer Woolson as chairman of a committee to codify and standardize the building laws of the United States. The objects of the Committee are so thoroughly in accord with the policy of the National Fire Protection Association that they cannot fail to receive the hearty commendation and support of your whole membership.*

*Other Committees which have tendered fire prevention service are those on Incendiarism and Arson, with its record of convictions for the crime of arson and the moral effect of its campaign against suspicious fires; on Public Relations, with its publication of Safeguarding America Against Fire and the analysis of the causes of fires and their relative losses compiled from the records of the Committee on Actuarial Bureau.*

*The guiding spirit of public service is one which cannot fail to be apparent to one familiar with National Board activities, not only on the part of its committee membership but of the employees from top to bottom."*

In 1921, the National Board of Fire Underwriters was working on developing a public fire protection grading schedule for cities and towns and evaluating cities and towns using the grading schedule, fire hose and hydrant coupling standardization, making revisions to the National Board Building Code, assisting municipalities with the writing of their own building codes and public education programs.

It is also of interest to note that building code standardization was on the agenda of the Department of Commerce in 1921. Building code standardization was a task which received quite a bit of attention over the next 80 years.

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