

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 167: 1921 (PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON/NATIONAL FIRE PREVENTION DAY)

By Richard Schulte

Woodrow Wilson was elected the 28th President of the United States in 1912. The Great War, World War I, began in Europe in July 1914 and America entered the war in Europe in April 1917. The Great War ended on November 11, 1918 with the defeat of Germany and her allies. The switch from a war-time economy to a peace-time economy in the United States produced severe economic dislocation in the country.

Meanwhile, the National Fire Protection Association continued working on its mission. One of the accomplishments of the NFPA in the post-World War I period was a Presidential Proclamation on Fire Prevention Day. The following is an excerpt from the transcript of a portion of the twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the NFPA addressing Fire Prevention Day:

*"The past year has marked a new era in Fire Prevention Day activity. For years, the National Board of Fire Underwriters and the National Fire Protection Association have endeavored to secure national recognition and international cooperation in the observance of the day and its work. **Through the efforts of your President, W. E. Mallalieu, who is also General Manager of the National Board of Fire Underwriters, and your Secretary, Franklin H. Wentworth, acting with this committee, we were able to secure the first Presidential Proclamation of Fire Prevention Day from President Woodrow Wilson; thus the observance became national, permanent and continual.** The Fire Marshals' Association of North America also assisted in this work. By securing the same recognition in Canada, our Canadian Committee members have enabled us to make the celebration international.*

The first proclamation, original suggested draft of which was prepared for the Committee by your Secretary and passed by your President, is as follows:

(Fire Prevention Day–1920)
**BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.
A PROCLAMATION.**

WHEREAS, the destruction by fires in the United States involves an annual loss of life of 15,000 men, women and children, and over \$250,000,000 in buildings, food stuffs and other created resources, and

WHEREAS, the need of the civilized world for American products to replace the ravages of the great war is especially great at this time, and

WHEREAS, the present serious shortage of home and business structures makes the daily destruction of buildings by fire an especially serious matter, and

WHEREAS, a large percentage of the fires causing the annual American fire waste may be easily prevented by increased care and vigilance on the part of citizens:

Therefore, I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, do urge upon the Governors of the various states to designate and set apart Saturday, October 9, 1920, as Fire Prevention Day, and to request the citizens of their States to plan for that day such instructive and educational exercises as shall bring before the people the serious and unhappy effects of the present unnecessary fire waste, and the need of their individual and collective efforts in conserving the natural and created resources of America.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done in the District of Columbia this 7th day of September, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Twenty and of the Independence of the United States, the One Hundred and Forty-fifth.

Woodrow Wilson.

By the President:

*BAINBRIDGE COLBY,
Secretary of State.*

Unusual results immediately followed. Forty-four governors of states and 95 per cent of our municipal executives issued strong public appeals by similar proclamations. This exceptional development brought out extensive avenues of the work hitherto unknown. Government departments following the President's appeal, set in motion the Federal Department machinery and throughout the entire country the weight of federal recognition was felt.

Your Committee, realizing the importance of the National Proclamation, at once took up with the calendar manufacturers the possibility of specially designating Fire Prevention Day on all calendars. We are pleased to report the complete cooperation of this industry in our request, after 1922. As the plates were all made and much of the stock run for that year, it is impossible to secure concerted action until 1923.

We received the hearty and unanimous support of the following organizations: National Board of Fire Underwriters, with all affiliated companies; National Mutual Insurance Companies; Fire Marshals; Insurance Commissioners; National Association of Insurance Agents; Conservation and Fire Prevention Associations; International Association of Fire Engineers; National Safety Councils; Chambers of Commerce; The Press, Clubs and Educational forces, in fact, all forces educational and constructive.

New and varied activities marked the observance of the day in different states, and Canada, involving extensive newspaper and editorial publicity; press advertising; display cards for store windows, street cars and automobiles; window displays; pulpit presentation; motion picture films; four minute speeches; parades; state fair exhibits; general city inspection, and candy and other manufacturers supplying an attractive Fire Prevention Day special, etc. The consensus of opinion of all connected with the work is that this past year has marked a new era for effectiveness.

Recognizing the benefit of a satisfactory emblem for Fire Prevention, your Committee, after carefully considering the diagrams suggested by members, has decided to adopt the emblem as presented last year by the National Board of Fire Underwriters, which was used extensively in the campaign, namely, Red Shield with Fire Prevention Day printed on it. We recommend all organizations to use this emblem on advertising matter, stationery, etc. This design has also been endorsed by the Fire Marshals' Association of North America.

This year, we want to begin early and continue late, making permanent the unified movements of all. Every member should be a unit of responsibility to start and foster the work in his community. Keep in touch with your Committee, advise them of your willingness to represent them in your district and thus make this year a "still better one" than the banner year of our History.

Mr. Fleming: Since writing this report we have some other important matter which should be added. Through the untiring efforts of certain members of our committee we have been able to secure the agreement of the calendar manufacturers throughout the United States and Canada to properly designate on their calendars the fact that Fire Prevention Day is one of our particular and important holidays. I want, in particular, to refer to the very earnest and persistent efforts of Mr. James I. Banash, as a member of the committee, and Mr. George E. Lewis of Ontario, Canada, who is not here. These two men were particularly helpful in securing the consent of the largest number of calendar manufacturers to begin such work with the 1923 calendars, as the plates and most of the printing for the year 1922 have already been executed. I can't help but feel that, in the work of fire prevention, there isn't any organization in North America that can be more influential and do more good than the National Fire Protection Association. In the first place, our members are well and thoroughly informed; and, in the second place, they are representative. There isn't

a State in the Union or a province in the Dominion where you won't find influential and practical men representing the National Fire Protection Association. We have made in the last twenty five years fire prevention standards that are known throughout the world and are recognized everywhere in practically every province and state, but the one thing, and the most important thing, that is now needed is the creating of a public sentiment. We have supplied the material, but the fact remains that if the people do not realize the need of the material, our efforts are in vain. Therefore, the educational campaign is the present most important one, and if we are ever to secure the ordinances which you want in your respective communities it only can be done by arousing every community through the representatives of the National Fire Protection Association in that community; by properly educating the civic organizations, the chambers of commerce and all the business men to the utter necessity for a fight against fire. I have here, quite a large number of pictures of window displays and the like used in various communities and also a copy of the Federal Proclamation. I will place them in the hands of the assistant secretary, Mr. Moulton, and if any of you may wish to see them, they will be at your service. (Applause.)

Mr. Newman T. Miller, Indianapolis (Fire Marshal of Indiana): I wish, Mr. President, to supplement what has been said by Mr. Sanders by adding my note of admiration for the work of this excellent committee. I think that when Mr. Fleming said it was with some difficulty that he secured the issuance of the first fire prevention proclamation ever promulgated by the chief executive of this country he spoke the truth. I am advised, reliably, that Mr. Fleming personally secured the issuance of that proclamation, and I think that was a very great achievement. Coming from the chief executive of our country that message lays the foundation, so to speak, upon which to build some effective educational propaganda. It helps to accomplish just what Mr. Fleming has said—teach the citizenship of this country how to protect their own lives and save their own property. I move the acceptance of the report.

Miss Anna Brown, Bemidji, Minnesota (Reynolds and Winter): Mr. President, I wish to second that motion, and, in passing, might state that Fire Prevention Day was very effectively observed in our little city of Bemidji, in Northern Minnesota. Our first work dates back to the fall of 1919, initiated by our Mr. Reynolds, a member of this organization. He was instrumental in getting the civic and council associations to appoint committees to make inspections of the buildings in our business district, and a report of these inspections was made and read at the Wednesday luncheon of the joint associations. This work was followed up by circular letters from our office, issued at least once a month throughout the year.

Later on, photographs were taken of the alleys in our city and they were displayed at a subsequent luncheon and attention called to the hazardous fire conditions surrounding many of our business buildings. A great improvement was made there as a consequence, in some cases, by bringing condemnation proceedings against the owners of buildings in the office district. Of these a great number were torn down

the following spring. Some day soon we expect to have all our hazardous buildings torn down and modern structures in their place. Attention of the city officials was also drawn to the fact that we needed a building ordinance and one that could be strictly enforced, which would make for the improvement of our city in the future. We are a city of between nine and ten thousand, and I think we have a great future. A few weeks before fire prevention day, our office sent out a circular letter to the business men, and also to the community at large. Last year we assured our school authorities that if they would be willing to have the students study fire prevention we would gladly furnish them with copies of "Safeguarding the Home" for the schools. They accepted and we furnished them between six and eight hundred copies of these books. Our office, the only member of the N. F. P. A. in our city, has become a sort of information bureau for the city at large on anything in the line of fire prevention. In the case of new buildings going up, the owners and architects have consulted us with regard to the construction as far as fire prevention is concerned, which makes for safety to life and property. When it came to the construction of our school buildings and county buildings, we were consulted in regard to the latest improvements in fire prevention, and we now have the city buildings in mind. (Applause.)

The President: A fine indication of what just one member can do in his own community. Thank you, Miss Brown! We will now vote on the motion to accept the report.

The motion was unanimously adopted."

The issuance of a Presidential Proclamation of Fire Prevention Day by President Woodrow Wilson was quite an accomplishment for the NFPA.

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Richard C. Schulte

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