

**FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 239: 1916  
(BOSTON)**

By Richard Schulte

The twentieth Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association was held in Chicago, Illinois in May 1916. Among the various reports presented at this meeting was a report of the local fire protection/fire prevention committee in the City of Boston. The following is a transcript of the Boston Committee's Report:

***“Report of Boston Committee.***

*W. O. Teague, Chairman.*

*Frank I. Cooper, Gorham Dana, C. M. Goddard, R. L. Gay, I. L. Greene, G. A. A. Pevey, H. V. Thayer, Nelson Whitney.*

*The Boston Committee of nine members was appointed by the Executives in June of last year with the object of furnishing in Boston a flexible and efficient local organization to keep track of and influence fire prevention activities and legislation in city and state. One special dinner-meeting was held during the year, but no regular meetings were attempted. The methods of the committee are wholly informal. Each member scans the daily press for items of interest to the committee, reporting same to the chairman. The Fire Prevention Commissioner of the Metropolitan district also reports all items, and copies of all bills on fire protection introduced in the legislature are furnished. On receipt of any item of interest the Chairman immediately delegates by telephone one or more members of the committee to investigate and report on that particular item. At many public meetings, legislative hearings and conferences the committee is frequently represented by but one member, any unnecessary burdens upon the busy members being avoided. Important matters are delegated to the members of the committee best fitted to handle them. This simple, informal and uncomplicated method of work brings results by promptness of action and the absence of all red tape.*

*The Committee has endeavored to make its influence felt during the year in all fire prevention matters that have come up in Greater Boston and was even called upon for help in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where the housing needs of the munition factories had tempted jerry-builders to the erection of the form of wooden six-flat building known in the East as the "three-decker." An ordinance prohibiting this conflagration-breeding construction was passed in Bridgeport after a hard fight. A still severer contest over this form of construction was waged in Brookline, Mr. Gorham Dana of our committee devoting much time to this matter, in which we were finally victorious. In Newton an organized attempt was made to repeal the ordinance prohibiting shingle roofs inside the city limits. The attempt was defeated, Mr. C. M. Goddard of our committee appearing in opposition. The Committee through its members Messrs. Frank Irving Cooper and Gorham Dana, has been active since the Peabody school holocaust in drafting and promoting the passage of a bill still before the Massachusetts legislature providing for the safeguarding of the lives of children in schools. In this effort we have co-operated with the Fire Prevention Commissioner and a state-wide committee of citizens appointed at a Faneuil Hall mass meeting.*

*Several legislative measures aimed at limiting the powers of the Fire Prevention Commissioner were successfully defeated, as were also the attempts of the film exchanges to invade the business center of Boston. We succeeded in so stirring the enthusiasm of the Mayor of Boston that he personally put a bill into the legislature fixing liability for preventable fires upon citizens disobeying fire prevention orders. This bill was subsequently withdrawn by the Mayor's political advisers who were afflicted with the distemper known as cold feet.*

*A movement of the real estate interests in Boston to revoke our present building height limitations is now engaging the committee's attention.*

*In every city there are interests constantly at work pursuing their private gain with no regard for the collective safety; on the other hand there are many citizens of character and influence whose aid can always be enlisted in any good work if it is solicited and the situation explained by such a committee as that of the N. F. P.A. Ever since the night when the Boston City Council met in secret sessions and repealed the fire limits ordinance we have been convinced there is a place in Boston for a wide awake group like our own."*

Even though the Great Boston Fire destroyed a large portion of the city in 1872, the collective memory of the Great Fire appears to have faded after 4 decades.

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**Source:** *“Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual [NFPA] Meeting”*, Chicago, Illinois, 1916.

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