

**FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 241: 1919
(THE NATIONAL BOARD OF FIRE UNDERWRITERS)**

By Richard Schulte

The twenty-third Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association was held in Ottawa, Canada in early May, 1919. Among the reports presented at this meeting was a report on the activities of the National Board of Fire Underwriters. The following is a transcript of this report:

*“**The President:** I am sure we all agree with the Secretary's remarks on this point. It is certainly a very interesting report. Will Professor Woolson report briefly the special fire prevention work of the National Board of Fire Underwriters during the past year? These activities are well known, of course, to many of us, but we like to have something for definite record in our Proceedings.*

Report of the National Board of Fire Underwriters.

***Mr. I. H. Woolson:** The fire prevention activities of the National Board of Fire Underwriters normally constitute a very large part of our total work, and during the past year this proportion has been increased through the war needs of the government service.*

For the first time in history, fire prevention has been recognized as an essential and important adjunct to military efforts, and the National Board of Fire Underwriters has been intimately concerned in almost every phase of this effort. Engineers from the staff of our Committee on Fire Prevention were assigned to the Construction Division of the United States Army; to the Bureau of Yards and Docks of the Navy Department; to the Fire Prevention Section of the War Industries Board; to the Emergency Fleet Corporation of the United States Shipping Board, and to the U. S. Housing Corporation, and with them were associated engineers from other insurance organizations. Conservation associations in every state under the general direction of the National Board contributed most effective service.

The work of our engineers lasted, in most instances, up to January 1, 1919, and in some cases for several months longer, and covered so great a variety of important duties that it would be impossible to enumerate them without taking considerable time. In general, however, it may be said that they dealt with the entire subject of safeguarding hundreds of government-owned properties and thousands of privately-owned plants in service to the Government from fire destruction. To some important parts of this work our Committee on Building Construction, through its Consulting Engineer, also contributed effective service. In magnitude and in the nature of certain of its problems this entire effort has probably been without precedent.

Our Committee on Incendiarism and Arson contributed its quota of co-operation with the United States Department of Justice along lines that undoubtedly served to prevent fires in some instances, although not in the forms of activity usually denominated fire prevention.

*The educational work of our Committee on Public Relations was greatly extended in scope and in influence. It produced and circulated more than 250,000 copies of a manual of instruction for school children in connection with the United States Bureau of Education, and thus introduced fire prevention instruction into thousands of schoolrooms. It also secured the co-operation of the sixty thousand speakers of the "Four Minute Men" organization directed by the United States Committee on Public Information, and paid for the circulars of instruction to the speakers. **In order to arrange for this speaking campaign, it was necessary to change the date of Fire Prevention Day from the usual date of October 9 to November 2. This change was made upon the direct request of the Hon. W. G. McAdoo, then Secretary of the Treasury, in order not to interfere with the campaign for the Fourth Liberty Loan. Mr. McAdoo's request was telegraphed to all governors and fire marshals, who promptly and cordially concurred in the temporary change of date for the single year of 1918.***

In addition to many other fire prevention activities, the same committee developed its bulletin, "Safeguarding America Against Fire," into the status of a regular eight-page periodical, with a circulation of 45,000 copies.

*Since the signing of the armistice, there has been a steady return to normal functions as rapidly as the government requirements would permit the return of our engineers. **Thus the usual functions of our Committee on Fire Prevention and Engineering Standards and our Committee on Construction of Buildings have now been resumed in large part, and various engineering surveys of American cities for conflagration hazards have now been made. This form of work has been carried on for a number of years and has resulted in lessening conflagration hazard in many cities. It is too well known to need description at this point, as also is that of the Committee on Construction of Buildings, whose review of building codes is also being actively promoted.***

One of the outstanding features of the year was the two days' fire prevention conference held in our offices upon January 9 and 10 with the "Committee on Co-operation with the National Board of Fire Underwriters," appointed by the Fire Marshals' Association of North America at its last annual convention. Many valuable points were brought out in the conference and arrangements made for more effective co-operation in the future.

The above will serve for a very brief review of a highly diversified year of great activity.

The Secretary: I have here four brief reports, tendered by letter, of which I would like to move acceptance and printing in the Proceedings in the regular way."

With the National Board of Fire Underwriters' studies of municipal fire defenses, the use of the National Board's model building code and the replacement of horse-drawn fire apparatus equipped with coal-fired steam fire pumps ("steamers") with motorized fire apparatus, the era of the "Great Fires" had come to a close.

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