

## FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 262: 1918 (THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS' REPORT)

By Richard Schulte

The twenty-second Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association was held in Chicago in May 1918. The presentations made at this meeting included an update on the activities of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) relative to fire protection and fire safety. The following is the transcript of the AIA Report:

*“**The President:** Next in order are five-minute reports from local chapters and organization members on their special work in fire prevention. We will be very glad to hear now from such members as have anything special to report.*

### **Report of American Institute of Architects.**

***Mr. George C. Nimmons:** I represent Mr. Robert D. Kohn, of New York, chairman of **the Fire Prevention Committee of the American Institute of Architects**, who is in the Government service and regrets very much that he is unable to be here and take part in the program. **The American Institute has always regarded Mr. Kohn's service in this Association in the very highest way. Among the architects he has spread the gospel and has done more than any other architect to improve conditions for fire prevention.** I was requested by him to briefly state the work that has been done by the architects for this year.*

*Mr. Kohn, early in the year, inaugurated a campaign among the chapters of the American Institute of Architects to get them to follow the program adopted by his chapter, the New York chapter. After every fire in New York or Brooklyn, the New York chapter receives a written report from the local underwriters, and when these reports are of such a nature that faulty building construction is indicated as the cause of such fires, then the New York chapter has those reports re-printed and sent to every member of the New York State chapter of architects. They have also a joint committee which meets with the representatives of the engineers and underwriters, and they discuss matters bearing on fire prevention and endeavor to influence legislation of a proper sort. **It has come about that they have a great deal of influence in New York and have succeeded in controlling and influencing the making of certain laws that have worked very satisfactorily.***

*In Chicago there has also been a work conducted by a committee of the architects, whose duty it is to watch the work of the Underwriters' Laboratories, to be present at some of their experiments and to report such tests and experiments as may be of most interest to the architects throughout the country. This committee has during the last year, sent out two reports, and **has also taken upon itself the burden of trying to make the architect realize that he, above all others, is responsible for the prevention of fires.** In these reports this committee has tried to place that responsibility just as firmly and strongly as it could. Reports of tests made on building materials are given and appeals made to the architects to utilize the better materials and utilize the benefits which the laboratories have secured for them by determining which are the better materials and constructions to use in certain industries. Now this committee has this in mind about the architects; it takes a sort of fatherly attitude towards them because the committee are architects themselves and they feel that the architects of the country need a hard stirring up; they must be made to realize the indifferent attitude of the architect who, in a community outside of a big city, usually puts in only such fire prevention measures and makes his buildings only so fireproof as may be required by the laws of his particular locality. It may be just enough to get a decent rate of insurance. **What this committee is trying to do is to make the architect take the lead and see to it, first of all, that the occupants of the building have a safe exit and that he will introduce as many fire resistant and fire prevention methods and materials as the owner in every case will permit.** (Applause.)*

**The President:** *We all regret that Past-president Kohn could not be here with us this morning, but we are indebted to Mr. Nimmons for a very interesting report from the architects.*

**The Secretary:** *May I read into the records, following this report, a letter I have received from Mr. Knickerbacker Boyd?*

**The President:** *Proceed.*

**The Secretary (reading):**

*THE JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.  
May 1st, 1918.*

*Mr. Franklin H. Wentworth, Secretary [Secretary],  
National Fire Protection Association,  
87 Milk Street, Boston, Mass.*

*My Dear Mr. Wentworth:*

*Present indications are that it will be impossible for me to attend the Convention in Chicago. This will be a great disappointment to me, and I wish for the N. F. P. A. a most successful Convention and increased activities to follow in the important work for this country which the N. F. P. A. is doing.*

*In case Mr. Robert D. Kohn, the Chairman of the Committee on Fire Prevention of the American Institute of Architects is not present to report in person, you need, of course, no assurances of his continued interest, but I desire to inform you of further activities undertaken by him in connection with arousing interest in each chapter of the Institute in matters of Fire Prevention and the creation of a chapter Committee on Fire Prevention wherever possible. This was the main theme of his report to the Convention of the Institute just held in Philadelphia at which Convention, *I, also, had the pleasure of urging a greater co-operation on the part of the Institute nationally, as well as of individual members locally, in the work of the N. F. P. A.**

*An instance of what may be accomplished in this direction is contained in the following extract from a letter received by me as Editor of the Structural Service Department of The Journal of the American Institute of Architects. In response to an inquiry from a firm of architects in Michigan as to certain references made in the department I suggested that the inquirer should become a member of the N. F. P. A. and also get in touch with the National Education Association. In reply he says:--*

*"I became, as you suggested, a member of the N. F. P. A. and have received their publications. I have also applied for associate membership in the National Education Association and I have received some documents from them. These, with the data that I already had on hand, convinced the School Board to such an extent that I feel satisfied that alterations will be made to the halls and stairways in the present buildings that will make them safer for the pupils, instead of increasing the danger by adding fire escapes."*

*Very truly yours,*

*D. Knickerbacker Boyd, Associate Editor."*

From the above, it is evident that the American Institute of Architects took an active interest in the affairs of the National Fire Protection Association and was instrumental in shaping the direction of the NFPA in its early years.

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**Source:** *"Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual [NFPA] Meeting"*, Chicago, Illinois, 1918.

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