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FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 36: 8TH ANNUAL NFPA MEETING-1904 (REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL FIRE PREVENTION CONGRESS)

By Richard Schulte

At its annual meeting in 1903, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) voted to send delegates representing the organization to the International Fire Prevention Congress held in London in July of that year. The NFPA representatives filed the following report on the Congress at the 8th annual NFPA meeting held in late May 1904.

“REPORT OF DELEGATES TO THE INTERNATIONAL FIRE PREVENTION CONGRESS.

The Secretary read the following report of the delegates to the International Fire Prevention Congress, held in London, England:

To the Members of the National Fire Protection Association:

*Gentlemen: -- The undersigned delegates, appointed by you to attend the **International Fire Prevention Congress in London, July 6th to 11th, 1903**, beg leave to report that they visited London, as directed, and were present at all the Congress meetings; also at a number of the Section meetings.*

From the arrangement of the Section meetings it was at once apparent that it would be impossible to attend all of the sessions. We therefore selected those sections at which subjects especially of interest to us were to be acted upon. On this account, quite a number of important papers could not be heard, and, of course, we were unable to discuss them. We were also unable to record our vote for or against the resolutions presented at the Section meetings.

At the final meeting of the Congress all the various resolutions adopted at various Section meetings were presented for adoption as a whole. To this proposition we raised objection, inasmuch as one of the resolutions presented (as translated from the French) did not coincide with our view. The objection raised was sustained, and the desired change in the resolution was made.

We would report that, owing to the limited time, and to the fact that the committee in charge had arranged for a number of entertainments for the visiting delegates, the subjects of greatest importance in our estimation, failed to receive the consideration due to them.

While some seven hundred names appeared on the printed list of the Congress, it was a great surprise to us that of this whole number but a few delegates, other than those from this country, were of the insurance profession. This apparent lack of interest on the part of the British and Continental insurance men was especially marked, as each of the American delegates representing insurance interests came to the Congress with carefully prepared papers, which were read and received with close attention. Your delegates regret exceeding that the secretary of the association, who had prepared a paper setting forth the work of our Underwriters' Laboratories, was not able to be present himself and to read his paper at the Congress as had been expected. The paper was, however, read for him by another delegate and excited considerable interest among those present.

The opening ceremonies, presided over by the Lord Mayor of London, passed off with proper éclat, and success.

It does not seem necessary to call your attention to the various sectional meetings, nor to the social functions. Suffice it so say that the delegates of this country, including your representation, were very cordially received, and especially honored at all occasions.

The papers presented were principally in the English language. Some papers, however, were in German and French, and, unfortunately, some of these were not translated into English in time to be of service to the delegates not conversant with the German or French language.

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED.

After reading their papers, many of the gentlemen proposed resolutions, which were discussed at the section meetings and adopted. At the final meeting Chairman Sachs proposed that the Congress ratify all of the acts and adopt all of the resolutions of each section, subject to an editing by a special committee. This action was taken after an amendment of the one of the resolutions by Mr. Hexamer, as indicated above. The various resolutions adopted were as follows:

At the open meeting of the Congress, Chairman Sachs proposed the following:

“That the Mutual Insurance System, as adopted in the United States, tends to the prevention and reduction of the fire risk.” The resolution was carried after adding the word “factory” before “mutual”.

In Section IV the following resolution was adopted:

“That the public authorities should encourage fire brigade officers to take an active interest in the preventing aspect of fire prevention, inasmuch as the results of fire brigade officers' experience in actual fire protection, if suitably applied in conjunction with the work of architects, engineers and public officials, would be most useful.”

A second resolution to the effect that the proceedings of the Congress be printed in English, French and German was also adopted at this section, as were also the following:

“The Congress considers that greater attention should be accorded to the maintenance of private fire appliances, where installed to meet local or insurance requirements.”

Also the following:

- 1. That fire watchers in theaters should be maintained from the public fire service, with the view of furthering the prevention and extinguishing of fire.*
- 2. That it is desirable to either provide the necessary movable fire appliances of a theater from the public fire service or to have such power to enforce uniformity of pattern and quality.*
- 3. That theaters require a duplicate water supply service.*

Also the following:

“The Congress considers it of importance that its volunteer fire brigade societies, associations and unions shall henceforth encourage among brigades affiliated to those bodies the studies of questions of fire prevention.”

Section VI adopted the following:

“That it is of the greatest importance that an official investigation be made of all fires.”

At a general meeting the following was proposed and carried:

“The Congress considers it most necessary that fire brigades be place on a sound legal basis, and that it is advisable that their efficiency be supervised by a government department.”

Mr. Markusovsky moved the following resolutions, which were adopted:

- 1. That theaters should be inspected twice a year – once at the beginning of the season, and again in the fall, when heating apparatus is put in operation.*
- 2. That the capacity of places of amusement be gauged on the number and width of exits.*
- 3. That for each one hundred persons present there should be one exit, one meter wide; and for each two hundred and fifty persons there should be a fireproof stairway not less than one and eight-tenths (1[-]8/10) meters [70.8 inches] wide.*

Note: 100 people per 1 meter door width is 0.364 inches (net) per person.

Note: 250 people per 1.8 meters stair width is the equivalent of 0.283 inches per person.

- 4. Each corridor should be at least two and one-half meters (98.4 inches) wide.*

The following, proposed by Mr. Reutlinger, were adopted:

“The Congress considers it advisable that the press should from time to time publish technical reports on fires, so that the public may benefit from the knowledge and experience gained.”

Section II adopted the following:

“The Congress considers that having regard to neglect of precautions against damage caused by lightning, the subject should have the serious consideration of the government and local authorities, the technical profession and fire service.”

Section V adopted the following, proposed by Mr. Sheppard, of the North British & Mercantile Insurance Company (the only insurance official, other than those from the United States, who proposed a resolution):

“The members of this Congress are strongly of the opinion that in the public interest it is of the utmost importance that on the occurrence of every fire an investigation should be immediately made by an official.”

In Section VI, after reading his paper, Mr. Sachs proposed the following, which were adopted:

- 1. The Congress, having given their careful consideration to the common misuse of the term “fireproof,” now indiscriminately, and often unsuitably, applied to many building materials and systems of building construction in use in Great Britain, have come to the conclusion that the avoidance of the term in general business, technical and legislative vocabulary is essential.*
- 2. The Congress considers the term “fire-resisting” more applicable for general use, and that it more correctly describes the varying qualities of different material and systems of construction intended to resist the effect of fire for shorter or longer periods, at high or low temperature, as the case may be and they advocate the general adoption of this term in place of the word “fireproof”.*
- 3. That the committee’s standards of fire resistance, as set forth, be adopted.*
- 4. That it is desirable that the standards become universal standards in this country, and also in the United States and on the Continent.*

At the Congress banquet, Mr. Hexamer was honored by being asked to propose the toast, “The British Fire Prevention Committee,” and Congress Chairman Sachs responded as follows:

“Gentlemen, only a few words of reply to this kind toast are needed. I am particularly happy that the kind words for the British Fire Prevention Committee and its executive should have come from Mr. Hexamer, as president of the National Fire Protection Association of the United States, inasmuch as that association represents the insurance interests of that great country, interests which in this country do not as yet devote much time to systematic reduction of fire waste.”

*We quote these remarks in their entirety, as they show, coming as they do from the Congress executive, that **the foreign insurance interest completely ignored the Congress.***

IN CONCLUSION.

From this report it is evident that the First International Fire Prevention Congress, has demonstrated the following.

- 1. **That in Great Britain and on the Continent, chiefs of fire brigades, as well as municipal authorities, pay more attention to the question of fire prevention than in this country.***
- 2. That the value of careful official investigation of fires, to the end that the lessons taught by a fire may result in fire prevention in the future is better understood abroad than in this country.*
- 3. **That inspection of premises by firemen with legal authority to enforce correction of defects which might cause fire is of great importance.***
- 4. That the necessity for uniform building laws through the country is emphasized; and,*
- 5. That uniform laws or ordinances for regulating the storage or use of explosives, combustibles or chemicals, is of the utmost importance.*

*We are fully convinced of the scientific value of the International Congress, and believe that it can be considered as a beginning which should lead to further international deliberations, to the end that all interested in the study of **Fire Prevention Engineering** may be benefitted.*

Before closing this report we desire here to take the opportunity to express our deep sense of sorrow and personal regret that the third member our delegation, Wm. H. Stratton, has since been called from us by the relentless reaper, Death. We desire to pay our tribute to the memory of a true friend, a wise counselor in technical matters, and one perhaps without a peer in his profession as an insurance engineer. His loss will be deeply felt by his associates throughout this country, and it will be difficult to replace him in our councils and deliberations.

Respectfully submitted,

C. A. Hexamer,

Herbert Wilmerding,

The President. If there is no objection, the report will take the usual course and be printed in the proceedings.

Mr. Crosby. Inasmuch as the report seems to contain a great many recommendations, some of which may be useful to us in our practice in this country, I should like to suggest that it be referred also to the In-coming Executive Committee for their consideration.

The President. If there is no objection, it will take that course. There appears to be no objection, and it will be considered as so ordered.

Source: *NFPA Proceedings*, Volume 1904-1907

Of the many points discussed in the report on the International Fire Prevention Congress, two points stand out from the standpoint of building fire protection. First, the issue of the use of the term “fireproof” and, second, the recommendation that the British Fire Prevention Committee’s fire resistance testing become the standard for purposes of determining structural fire resistance of building elements.

Both of these points are key developments in the fire protection field.

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