

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 49: 1912 (UNDERWRITERS' LABORATORIES)

By Richard Schulte

The 46th annual meeting of The National Board of Fire Underwriters (NBFU) took place at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City on May 23, 1912. The meeting included an address by the president of the NBFU, George W. Babb. The following is an excerpt from the NBFU president's address at the 1912 meeting regarding Underwriters' Laboratories:

"UNDERWRITERS' LABORATORIES

*The work of the **Underwriters' Laboratories** continues to grow in volume and usefulness. **More building space is required and a new building is now nearing completion, and a further extension is regarded as necessary in the near future.** As you are aware, the National Board has furnished the money for erection and construction of the buildings and plant, and receives no rent or dividends on the investment. Inventors and manufacturers whose models and products are tested and reported on, or tested and labeled, are charged, as nearly as may be, their share of the operating expenses applicable to the work done in the individual case. **This work is done for conservation in safeguarding lives and property, and not for profit.***

That portion of the Laboratories' work covering the application of National Standard specifications for rubber compounds, particularly wire coverings and hose linings, has presented unusual difficulties, owing to the nature of the ingredients used and conditions met with in the sale of these articles.

Fortunately, the situation in Rubber-Covered Wire, after a discussion extending over a period of five years, has now been adjusted to the satisfaction of all concerned, the manufacturers being a unit with the Laboratories in a combined effort to raise the standard of quality of wire covering through the medium of the Laboratories' service of inspections at factories and labeling – thus insuring a larger measure of safety in one most important factor of the electrical fire hazard.

The Hose situation is not yet completely adjusted, although some of the manufacturers are cooperating, and the others, with a single exception, are in negotiation with the Laboratories at the present time, acting through their Committee appointed for the purpose.

I congratulate the Board on the ability and expert qualifications of the manager and engineers of the "Laboratories," and, what is of equal importance, on the integrity with which the operations of the "Laboratories" are conducted.

*The National Board, in its long career, has not been a participant in litigation of any character until December last, when a summons was served on our Treasurer through the attorney for the Gutta Percha and Rubber Manufacturing Company (makers of fire hose), **the complaint alleging that the Board, through its agents and other associations, had damaged the business of the complainant and was a monopoly in restraint of trade.** A special committee was appointed by the Executive Committee, consisting of the President, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, the Chairman of the Committee on Laws and the General Agent, to consider the complaint, engage counsel, and take such action as they should deem necessary in defending the suit.*

In January last the counsel for the Board moved to strike out parts of the complaint on the ground that they were immaterial, irrelevant and redundant. In April the Judge who heard the motion granted it in part and struck out a number of allegations of the complaint, but did not grant all of our requests in this regard. As the complaint still contains matter which our counsel considers the Court should have stricken out, he has taken an appeal to the Appellate Division. We have obtained extension of time to make answer to the complaint pending determination of the appeal."

Of interest here is the relationship between the National Board of Fire Underwriters and Underwriters' Laboratories. Also of interest is the mention of the litigation addressing the issue of "**restraint of trade**".

* * * * *

Copyright © 2011
Richard C. Schulte