

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 62: 1912 (ANNUAL NBFU MEETING/WOOD SHINGLE ROOFS)

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 on Thursday, May 23, 1912. Part of the President's address at this meeting touched on the issue of the use of wood shingles. The following is an excerpt from the President's address regarding the use of wood shingles in large cities:

"SHINGLE ROOFS.

*I beg leave to recommend another forward step of importance – a campaign against shingle roofs. With the growth of urban population have come large, congested, frame, residential districts, flanking or surrounding our cities. Frequently large frame tenement houses are closely grouped in these districts, and special hazards are sometime interspersed. The roofs are generally covered with wood shingles. Such congested areas exist adjacent to nearly all our large cities. I believe that many of them – perhaps all of them – are more likely to be the scene of a devastating conflagration than the central congested district of the city, and while the aggregates loss in the frame residential district would be smaller than in the central city district, I believe there will be more conflagrations in number in the former. Indeed, we have already had more such conflagrations. The need of taking hold of this matter is greater now than formerly, since the congested areas are larger and the hazard greater. **I recommend that a campaign against shingle roofs, except in cases of strictly isolated risks, be actively started, and that members of the Board work through all available channels to secure their prohibition in further new construction, and as rapidly as possible, their removal where now existing.** We must expect opposition from interested parties, but should be resolved not to falter in this fire prevention effort."*

Even in 1912, the use of wood shingles on the roofs of buildings was identified as an important fire protection issue.

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