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FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 89: 1914 (FIRE PREVENTION INSPECTIONS-OHIO/WISCONSIN)

By Richard Schulte

Appendix 2 included in the *“Official Record of the First American National Fire Prevention Convention”* contains a report titled *“Report of Fire Waste Committee”* principally authored by Powell Evans, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of the U.S. of A. Fire Waste Committee. The following is an excerpt from that report:

“In the States of Ohio and Wisconsin and in the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Cleveland, New Orleans, Rochester, Youngstown, and many others, this preventive policy has yielded admirable results in practice. Friends of the movement should now bend their energies toward the application of this practice in all States and municipalities throughout the nation.

During the past eleven months to February 1, 1914, the city of Philadelphia inspected over 50,000 buildings other than residences, and reinspected 34,000 of these, principally in the congested areas of the city—the most dangerous sections—using the surplus time and energy of the active fire-fighting force without added expense for this work; and effected more than 120,000 detailed improvements in property and living conditions therein to prevent fire hazard.

The fire loss of Philadelphia during 1913 was nearly one million dollars (nearly one-third) less than during 1912, and the lowest with one exception of any year for a decade. During January, 1914, 408 fires occurred, and only 56 of these took place in buildings which had been inspected—this incident affording an indication of the efficacy of the preventive treatment of fire waste. If the third largest city in America can without added expense to the community and with the existing personnel employed accomplish these beneficial results, through leadership and inspiration of citizen effort, why cannot every other community in the country do likewise, and as well or better?”

If a system of periodic fire prevention inspections put in place in 1913 was effective, it seems reasonable to assume that such a system of inspections would also be effective 100 years later. It's true that there are (relatively) fewer fires today than there were a century ago, but the maintenance of fire protection features in a building is legally mandated. If building fire protection is actually important, then periodic fire prevention inspections are a logical extension of the rationale for building fire protection.

Source: "Official Record of the First American National Fire Prevention Convention", Powell Evans, Editor, pages 352 and 353, 1914.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=bwlOAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:
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