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FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 6: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT 2ND ANNUAL NFPA MEETING

By Richard Schulte

The second annual meeting of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) was held in Chicago on June 7th, 8th and 9th, 1898. The following is the Executive Committee Report published in the 1897-1900 Volume of the *NFPA Proceedings*:

“EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT.

Gentlemen: --

Your Executive Committee deems it proper at the opening of its report to again invite especial attention to the objects of this Association. Its purposes are definitely stated and limitations clearly outlined in the following quotations from the articles of association:

“The objects of this Association are to promote the science and improve the method of fire protection, to obtain and circulate information on this subject, and to secure cooperation in matters of common interest.

“It is understood that it is not the purpose of this Association to consider the subjects of insurance rates and compensation to agents, and that through membership none are pledged to any course of action.”

This being only the second annual meeting of our organization, we are as yet without a history or experience to serve as a basis of comparison or reference as to our advantages or usefulness as a body.

Our active membership consist of those directly engaged in the work of improving properties against fire hazard, and to such the necessity of a means whereby the experiences and progress in all sections and under all conditions may be concentrated and exchanged for our general benefit is very apparent.

The reduction of hazard and minimizing of losses from fire is now reduced to a mechanical basis, and the rapid developments in this new art of "Fire Protection Engineering" has taxed the ability of all engaged in the work to keep up with the demands, and as this class of work is extended the services of a greater number will be needed and the necessities of technical information will be proportionately increased.

Your Committee desires to call the attention of all fire underwriters to the fact that this is the particular reason for the existence of this Association and the lines upon which it is proposed to operate.

The first effort in this line was most successful. It was created of necessity in defense of the underwriters of this country, and will, perhaps, best emphasize the possibilities of this organization.

Reference is made to the so-called "National Sprinkler Committee". Prior to March, 1896, there were various rules in existence throughout the United States for the introduction of automatic sprinklers. This was referred to in our last annual report, but is worthy of repeating here in support of the statement that what was true with reference to various sprinkler standards is true also in regard to all features of fire protection. We should have the same standard for construction and protection in all parts of the country. We should make a concerted effort in all our districts to interest architects and builders to introduce good construction, and to vigorously protect against all objectionable features in practice.

We feel that standing committees should be annually appointed to treat with the broad principles involved in fire protection apparatus – practically such committees as have existed in the last year – and, furthermore, that special topics should be assigned for papers and discussions, so that all of the time available during our meeting could be of profit to those who attend.

Your Committee desired to commend favorably upon the practice so far which has guided this Association in refraining from actions on special devices, and earnestly recommends that this policy be continued.

The work of this organization will be valuable to such extent as it shall be harmonious and bear the approval of underwriting officials and the general public. Therefore, we must make this purely a technical body with reference to fire protection principles, and one for our individual advancement as specialist, and when we have created universal and constant practices throughout the country the stamp of public approval will follow, and the insurance companies and the public will come to a better understanding, especially in that particularly uncomfortable features to us all – the criticisms applied to inspection and inspection departments by the assured – based upon inconsistent practice and the old story, that “your last inspector suggested certain changes which were carried as great expense, and now at this inspection your representative wants it all taken down and the money thrown away and new expenditures of an entirely different character imposed on us.” How many times we have all heard this! How humiliating and unsatisfactory it is, and what a just criticism it forms a foundation for to apply to underwriters of this country! We have hopes of correcting such inconsistencies and removing this objectionable feature, and to advance the interests of our employers as well as lighten our own burden.

We submit for your consideration the suggestion that our annual meeting should be held in different parts of the country each year, and that at each of these annual conventions arrangements be made whereby all manufacturers of apparatus or devices incidental to fire protection, either in construction or extinguishing apparatus, shall be provided at cost price with floor space for an exhibition, and that all exhibits shall be classified and commented upon by a committee.

This question is worthy of consideration, and if possible to put into practice, would certainly give all our inspectors and interested underwriters an opportunity, at least once in a year, to see what progress is being made in this particular line, to obtain catalogues and classifications of all devices and offer some permanent encouragement for merit and study of those who are inventing and perfecting apparatus for our protection.

We recommend that the President appoint one or more members to attend the annual convention of the National Fire Chiefs’ Association, and report results.

During the last year fires have occurred in factory properties equipped with a blower or suction-fan system of heating, ventilating and dust-accumulating, and it has been found that such arrangements for forced draughts or circulation of air through properties seriously affect and increase the fire hazard. Your Committee, therefore, suggests that a special committee be appointed to investigate this subject and report recommendations.

The several committees who submit reports at this meeting have given a great deal of time and study to the subjects assigned to them, and we commend their contributions to the thoughtful consideration of the organization and hope for permanent good to all from the efforts of those who have labored the last year in our mutual interests.

Respectfully submitted,

W. H. STRATTON, Chairman.

WM. A. ANDERSON.

JOHN T. NAYLOR, JR.

F. ELLIOT CABOT.

ALBERT BLAUVELT.

A. W. HARDY.

H. C. STOCKDELL.”

The Executive Committee Report presented at the 2nd annual meeting of the National Fire Protection Association is of interest for a number of reasons. In this report, the Executive Committee refers to the “*new art of “Fire Protection Engineering”*” and indicates the use of sprinkler protection makes possible “*the reduction of hazard and minimizing of losses from fire*”.

Clearly, the NFPA Executive Committee recognized that a new day in the battle against fire losses was dawning with the advent of “engineered” fire protection systems way back in 1898. It is particularly important to note that the Executive Committee referred to “*Fire Protection Engineering*” as an art, not a science.

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