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FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 102: 1922 (A TRIBUTE TO W. C. ROBINSON)

By Richard Schulte

The twenty-sixth Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey in May, 1922. Among the presentations at the meeting was a memoriam to W. C. Robinson:

"Memorial to William Colin Robinson.

*Late Vice-President National Fire Protection Association.
Born April 27, 1868. Died July 31, 1921.*

*Report of Special Committee appointed by Executive Committee to prepare
memorial for presentation to annual meeting, 1922.*

*H. O. Lacount,
Franklin H. Wentworth,
Committee.*

A month following our last annual meeting the sad duty was imposed upon our Executive Office to inform our members of the death of William Colin Robinson, vice-president of our Association, and vice-president, also, of our important member Underwriters' Laboratories.

At our 23rd annual meeting, held in Ottawa in 1919, the Secretary received a personal letter from Mr. Robinson stating that because of temporary illness he was unable to attend; it being the first convention in all the twenty-three years of the Association's history he had missed. Mr. Robinson was present at the first meeting in 1896, and at the 25th annual meeting last June in San Francisco took an unusually active part in the discussion of matters before the convention. He was therefore absent, and that absence was due to illness, from but one meeting in the quarter century of the life of the Association.

It is only a review of the published PROCEEDINGS of our annual meetings since 1896 that we can grasp the importance of Mr. Robinson's great personal contribution to our cause and work and the serious and irreparable loss we suffer from his passing. In his well-stored brain was a mass of information and a registered experience of great value to us and to the world, and which he gave unceasingly to meet the need not only of those in authority but of the humblest citizen who might appeal to him.

The record of his twenty-five years' association with us shows his intimate connection with the beginnings of our work upon almost every important subject. Capable fire protection engineers were rare a quarter century ago, and it is obvious that in our beginnings Mr. Robinson was a pillar of support to all our early investigations. Upon practically every early committee we find his name. The Committee on Fire Doors and Shutters created in 1897, of which he was a member, became in 1903 the Committee on Fire Protecting Coverings for Window and Door Openings. In 1905 he accepted the chairmanship of this committee, which he held until his death. Thus for twenty-four years he was a member, and for sixteen years chairman, of this important committee. He was made chairman of the Committee on Automatic Sprinklers at its creation in 1901, remained chairman during its pioneer years until 1906, and a member until 1915. In 1903 we find him a member of such important committees as Fire Pumps, Fire-Proof Construction, Hose and Hydrants, and Gate Valves; and chairman of the important Committee on Devices and Materials, the work of which was subsequently passed to Underwriters' Laboratories. In 1904-5-6 we find his creative influence exerted as a member of committees on Theatre Construction and Equipment, Hose Houses for Mill Yards, Fire Service Meters, High Pressure Systems, Uniformity of Requirements, Fire Engines, and Private Fire Supplies from Public Mains. In 1911 he took up the important subject of Fire Hose, and from 1912 to 1917 as chairman of the Committee on Standards worked out our present standard on Stand Pipe and Hose Systems, one of the last and most useful Association contributions of his later years.

Back of all these creative, constructive contributions to our active committee work lay the experimental tests and demonstrations so ably directed by him at the Laboratories. Upon these were based the conclusions incorporated in the proposed regulations that emanated from the committees of which he was a member and which made them so dependable and worthy of public confidence and respect. He insisted upon having the facts before reaching a conclusion and was willing to spend himself in the obtaining of those facts.

And behind all this constant and voluminous active service to our cause was the serenity and pose of a well-ordered mind endowed with an amazing memory for details; and a nature as generous, as sweet and as kindly as is seldom found in so capable a man. In the twenty-five years of our history we had become well accustomed to a phrase so often upon the lips of the workers in our technical investigations: "Wait till I ask Bill Robinson."

This wise counselor and good friend is now lost to us, and it is fitting that we should pause in the consideration of the business with which he was so closely identified to pay tribute to his memory.

The committee charged with the sad but grateful duty of inditing this memorial offers, therefore, the following resolution:

WHEREAS, on July 31, 1921, William Colin Robinson, our associate in the active work of the National Fire Protection Association, was taken from us by death, and

WHEREAS, his absence from our deliberations and our work is an irreparable loss to us as an Association, as well as to our individual members, so many of whom were privileged to know him and value his friendship; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that we place in our permanent records this minute in token of our appreciation of the good which came to us collectively and individually through the life, the work, the wise counsels and the generous friendship of William Colin Robinson.

The President: I will ask that you vote upon this resolution by rising, and that you remain standing for a moment that we may pay a silent tribute of respect to this man whom we were pleased to know as a co-laborer and a friend.

(The members adopted the motion by a rising vote and remained standing as suggested by the President while "taps" was sounded by a bugler.)

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Source: "Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Annual [NFPA] Meeting", Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1922.