

**FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 189: 1920
(THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS)**

By Richard Schulte

The Twenty-fourth Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) was held in Chicago in May 1920. The following is the transcript of the President's address at this meeting:

"The President: Will Vice-president Lacount take the chair?"

(Vice-President H. O. Lacount presiding.)

The Chair: We will have the President's address.

President's Address.

President F. J. T. Stewart, of New York.

In addressing you at the last Annual Meeting, it was pointed out that our neighborly enemy—FIRE—might still be expected to wage war upon us. This, of course, you may say was only to be expected. However, it might interest you to know that recently this neighborly enemy has actually advanced his lines to the extent that the fire loss has been higher during the past few months. This seems to bear out the opinion expressed last year that our sense of patriotism had carried us so far in guarding against the occurrence of fire as to result in a moderate loss during the war period when an abnormally high loss was greatly to be feared and even expected. On the other hand, we now hear general criticism of the extent to which we have reacted and become careless in many ways, such as reckless spending and the like. The state of mind indicated by such conditions might logically be expected to result in a corresponding relaxation in our anxiety to prevent fires which has been reflected in an increased loss during recent months. The ground which we have lost, however, should only serve as a timely warning that relaxation is dangerous, and that we must plan to offset the advance of our friendly enemy—FIRE. I am convinced that we were only saved from an abnormal fire loss during the time we were at war by the great patriotic impulses of our people, their attention having been called to the necessity of preventing fires to win the war. I further believe that if we may expect to hold in check the fire loss in years to come, appeals for fire prevention must have some relation and be more or less associated with an appeal for patriotism and loyalty to our form of government as opposed to radicalism of the kind that has recently come to our attention.

While on the subject of fire losses I may be permitted to particularize for a moment and say a word in regard to the electrical fire losses. The comprehensive record of the fires and their causes which is being prepared each year by The National Board of Fire Underwriters, shows that electricity has caused fires which have resulted in a greater property loss than that due to any other one cause. *An analysis of these losses clearly indicates that this heavy fire loss is due chiefly to carelessness on the part of users of electricity rather than to any fault of the electrical industry or the various authorities which supervise the construction and installation of electrical appliances.* It would, therefore, seem that there is urgent need for a campaign of education to impress upon the public the safeguards which are necessary to be taken in connection with flexible cord, pressing irons and other devices. A creditable effort has already been made by the electrical industry to prepare and circulate leaflets containing well illustrated descriptions of such precautions, and I would like to urge upon you the importance of extending this educational campaign. This can well be accomplished by concerns engaged in electrical, insurance, and other pursuits, if they will adopt the practice of enclosing a copy of such leaflets in their daily correspondence with customers. Members interested should consult the Chairman of our Electrical Committee.

While the officers of the Association endeavored at the time to adequately express their satisfaction with the exception to our usual course made in favor of meeting in Canada last year, it would seem permissible to again refer to it, in view of the continued expressions of approval and satisfaction which have reached me from time to time during the past year. There is only one point in connection with that meeting on which there does not seem to be a full agreement—both the members from Canada and those from the United States insist that they themselves received the greatest benefit from our visit to Ottawa last year. *Certainly the international character of our activity was strikingly manifested.*

You may be interested to know that plans for an American Standards Organization, referred to at some length last year, have taken definite shape, the scope of the American Engineering Standards Committee having been already broadened along the lines which I then described. Our organization is already co-operating. The importance of the work of our special committees having to do with the preparation of standards is thereby increased. I have taken a personal interest in the standard-making activities of the Association during the past year, having attended a number of meetings of special committees in order to familiarize myself with the work in hand and thereby be better able to preside at these meetings when the various reports are under consideration. We have a considerable number of new standards or revisions of standards to present to this convention. It is a pleasure to express my appreciation of the excellent co-operation which has been extended by the various committees in caring for the extensive work involved in the preparation of both new and old standards. The Association would indeed have a heavy financial burden if it were ever called upon to compensate adequately for the time and financial outlay which has been gratuitously extended so generously by committee members and others throughout this year and indeed every year of our history.

I referred last year to the fact that it was the prerogative of your President to point out each year our shortcomings financially considered and how expeditiously our worthy Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. Wentworth, had conserved our limited resources without allowing conditions to seriously interfere with the fulfillment of our duties and responsibilities to our members in particular and to everyone concerned in fire prevention. This year, however, I do not feel content to merely call your attention to these conditions, and therefore take this opportunity to remind you of my hearty approval of the recommendations of the Committee on Amendments to Articles of Association providing for an increase in dues of Members and Associate Members. In addition to my statement accompanying the Advance Report by that committee, it is particularly gratifying to be able to advise you that a considerable number of our Associate Members have indicated their willingness to cheerfully endorse the proposed increase in the dues of Associate Members, realizing as they do the necessities therefor and the inability of the Association to otherwise continue what it has done in the past, to say nothing of meeting increased demands which constantly present themselves.

As retiring President, I wish to thank you one and all for the generous co-operation extended during my term of office. The fine growth in our membership is only one evidence of the interest and activity of our members. As Chairman of the Executive Committee and as President it has been my good fortune to have been intimately associated with our valued Secretary, Mr. Franklin H. Wentworth, and our executive office longer than most of our members, and I want to say in all seriousness that the complimentary references of past Presidents and even Mr. Forster's eulogy last year on the occasion of his tenth anniversary as Secretary have not given an adequate expression of his valuable service. Much as we value his work I know he will be glad to share some of the credit for what has been accomplished with our most efficient Chief Clerk, Miss Florence S. Osborn, who has rendered this Association long and conspicuously efficient service. Any of our members who have seen as much of our executive office as I have will bear me out in this, I am sure.

There is plenty of work ahead for all of us in this good cause, and I feel sure that the inspiration we receive from the fine work of both our regular staff and enthusiastic members will spur us on to renewed interest and activity during the coming year.

Mr. C. A. Hexamer (Philadelphia Fire Underwriters' Association): In moving to accept the report I am prompted to say a word in regard to the retiring President's efforts in behalf of this Association. I have known Mr. Stewart pretty nearly since the beginning of this Association twenty-four years ago, and everybody who is here and has been closely associated with him, knows of his earnest efforts in behalf of our cause. I know that I voice the sentiment of the meeting when I say that we thank Mr. Stewart for his able address.

Mr. Albert De Roode (New York): In seconding the motion to accept the report, I should like to deal with a phase of Mr. Stewart's activities which is not perhaps so well known as it might be and should be. After all, our work depends not only on our own efforts, but upon the co-operation of various governmental agencies, and in Mr. S[t]ewart's work in that connection, more has been accomplished, I think, than the members are aware of. The diplomatic service and the political life of this country are less fortunate in that Mr. Stewart has confined his efforts to insurance and fire prevention rather than to those other fields.

The motion was adopted.

(President Stewart resumes the chair.)”

Of particular interest with respect to the codes/standards development is reference to the American Standards Organization and the American Engineering Standards Committee in this presentation.

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