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FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 28: 8TH ANNUAL NFPA MEETING-1904 (IROQUOIS THEATER FIRE/THE GREAT BALTIMORE FIRE)

By Richard Schulte

The eighth annual meeting of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) was held in New York on May 24th, 25th and 26th, 1904. The meeting opened with an address by the president of the Association, Charles Hexamer. The following is the text of the president's address:

“ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT C. A. HEXAMER.

*Gentlemen – It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the eighth convention of our Association. The Executive Committee report will give you a general summary of the work of the Association during the past year, while the report of the Secretary will give a detailed statement of the results obtained. **The Association now consists of thirty-eight active members and over four hundred associate members, a notable gain during the year.** The amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws proposed by the Executive Committee will undoubtedly result, if adopted, in a further substantial increase in both the active and associate membership lists. I am of the opinion that the amendments referred to should have your favorable consideration, inasmuch as in largely extending its scope the Association will become in fact as well as in name a National Association.*

*The report of the Committee on Devices and Materials will be of great interest to you. During the year tests have been made at the Laboratory to determine the relative fire resistance of fire doors of various types; also of wire glass window frames of different forms of construction, to the end that by comparison of data obtained as these tests the standards for fire doors, shutters and wire glass windows can be perfected. **The work of the Devices and Materials Committee and of the Laboratories, under the supervision of the Chairman of the Committee, continues to be careful and painstaking in the extreme and deserves your fullest commendation and support.***

Rules, Regulations and Standards covering four new subjects, which were considered and approved by the Association during the year have been authoritatively promulgated by the National Board of [Fire] Underwriters, and were generally well received and adopted by the various rating organizations, members of the Association.

The pleasant relations with the National Board have continued, and I feel convinced that the work of the Association continues to meet the approval of that body. The report of the Chairman of the Committee on Lighting, Heating and Patents, submitted to the National Board at its recent annual meeting, contains a special commendation of your work.

*As your delegate, it gave me great pleasure during the past summer to visit London to attend the **International Fire Prevention Congress**, held under the auspices of the **British Fire Prevention Committee**. The results of the Congress will be presented to you in a report of the delegates, during this meeting.*

Bulletins of the Special Hazard Committee are reaching you at regular intervals. The work of this Committee should be specially recognized. There is no doubt in my mind but that the publication of the Quarterly Bulletins prepared by this Committee is largely the reason of our increase in associate membership. The compiling of sprinkle fire records is also under the auspices of this Committee, and continues to be a valuable part of its annual work.

*During the year two events of special interest have occurred – the burning of the Iroquois Theater (by which calamity five hundred and seventy lives were lost), and the great fire in Baltimore, where millions of property value were destroyed. Promptly, the members of the Association in Chicago, together with our Secretary, compiled and promulgated a comprehensive report of the theater fire; and call of its Chairman, assembled at Baltimore and secured the most valuable data on the behavior of so-called fire-proof buildings in conflagration. A detailed report of the Committee's observations and conclusions will be presented to you. One of the most important conclusion arrived at in the study of the Baltimore fire, in my estimation, is that **our dependence on so-called fire-proof buildings as conflagration stops is an error. A fire resistive building to act as a conflagration stop must have its exterior openings protected either by standard shutters, wire glass windows and open sprinklers, or by all three of these devices when necessary, to warrant our considering it an effective fire-stop.***

*As one of the immediate results of the Baltimore conflagration, the action of the National Board of Underwriters in appointing the Committee of Twenty is of special interest to all who are making a study of fire-protection engineering. **Under the supervision of our member, Mr. Herbert Wilmerding, a staff of Fire Protection Engineers is being organized, who will report on construction, fire protection, electric hazards and local conditions of cities, so that recommendation for the betterment of conditions tending to reduction of conflagration hazard may be made.** Technically educated men, and men of experience only, are at present being employed by the Committee. It is probably that the Secretary of War will detail an officer of the Engineer Corps of the United States Army to act in conjunction with the Committee of Twenty. Such action cannot but have an important bearing on the subject of conflagration hazards in cities.*

Invitations to be represented at this meeting by delegates have been extended to and accepted by the American Institute of Architects, American Society of Mechanical Engineers, American Institute of Electrical Engineers, American Waterworks Association, International Association of Fire Engineer, and National Electrical Contractors' Association. It give me great please to extend to the gentlemen acting as delegates to these important Associations our most cordial welcome and to extend to them the privileges of the floor.

It becomes my sorrowful duty to announce to you at this, the first meeting since its occurrence, the death of our beloved friend and esteemed fellow worker, Captain Wm. H. Stratton. You all knew him, and to know him was to love him. He will be greatly missed at our deliberations and the lack of his counsel and advice is a great loss to the Association. A Special Committee has been appointed by the Executive Committee, which will present for your adoption such able resolution on this our great loss.

I am now closing my fourth term as President of this Association, and desire to thank you all for the courteous consideration and help you have given me not only during our annual deliberations but throughout the year. Fully appreciating the honor of being your presiding officer, I trust you will now consent to my retiring to the ranks.

(On motion of Mr. Crosby it was voted to accept the President's address and to order it printed in the proceedings.)"

Source: *NFPA Proceedings*, Volume 1904-1907

The eighth meeting of the National Fire Protection Association was the first meeting to occur after the fire at the Iroquois Theater in Chicago (December 30, 1903) and the Great Baltimore Fire (February 7-8, 1904).

The "Committee of Twenty" was organized to address the conflagration issue in the United States. In a little less than two years after this NFPA meeting, the City of San Francisco was destroyed by the 1906 earthquake and fire.

The importance of the work of the NFPA was clearly illustrated by the fire at the Iroquois Theater and the Great Baltimore fire.

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