

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 95: 1914 (FIREPROOF BUILDING CONSTRUCTION)

By Richard Schulte

The eighteenth Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association held in Chicago in 1914 included a presentation of the Report of Committee on Fire-Resistive Construction by the Chairman of the Committee, Professor Ira Woolson. Part of the presentation included a discussion of the use of the term "fireproof" building. The following excerpt of this presentation addresses the use of this term:

"Some thirty-five years ago when fire-resistive buildings of the steel beam type were first erected, fear was expressed by some officials of the insurance companies of those days, that if this new type of fireproof building were to become popular, insurance against fire would soon be unnecessary. This feeling of security though inversely expressed is still more or less indulged in by many well-meaning people who take it for granted that their lives and goods are safe, if within what was then called a fireproof building, and what we now have more properly designated a fire-resistive building.

In spite of some lamentable disasters, the popular imagination still is that the contents of a fire-resistive building will not burn, so that when flames are seen issuing from the windows of a building known as "fireproof" there are some people who will refer with derision to the "fireproof" building, and even some journals will print "fireproof but it burns."

This feeling that all depends upon the building has been reflected by those who are intrusted with the making of building laws, for though they endeavor to make building construction more and more fire resistive, they devote little or no attention to the contents.

Many lives and much property have been lost due to the inflammable nature of the building's content and there are many instances where this loss has occurred with little or no damage to the building itself, though of the most ordinary non-fire-resistive type.

*Much time and thought have been given to the planning and construction of buildings to render them fire resistive with good results, but **the Committee feels that with comparatively little expense greater results may be obtained by providing fire-resistive furnishings and equipments to protect the lives of the occupants and the contents of the building.** Although it is not expected that the standard here recommended will be universally adopted, the Committee have reason to believe there is a demand for such a standard, and that many will avail themselves of some if not all of the suggestions herein contained, and the Committee is strong in this belief because already there are many buildings equipped in accordance with the standard herein proposed.”*

Needless to say, the “fireproof” building has not ended the need for fire insurance.

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