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FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 108: 1927 (A TRIBUTE TO IRA WOOLSON)

By Richard Schulte

The first session of the thirty-first Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association opened at the Congress Hotel in Chicago on May 9th, 1927. The day prior to the opening of the NFPA meeting, Professor Ira Woolson died. The following is an excerpt from the transcript of the Proceedings addressing the death of Professor Woolson:

> "*The President: I want to interrupt our proceedings at this moment to mention what most of you, I think, have already learned, and that is the death here yesterday morning in Chicago of our old and valued friend and long-time member of Association committees, Professor Ira H. Woolson, consulting engineer of the National Board of Fire Underwriters, and long a member of this Association. His death after a very brief illness here has cast a shadow over all of us who knew and loved him personally, and in a professional capacity through all these years. With your permission I will at this time announce the appointment of a committee which will report to the meeting at a later session, resolutions on the death of Mr. Woolson. I appoint as members of that committee, Mr. Gorham Dana, of Boston, Mr. S. H. Ingberg, of the Bureau of Standards, Washington, and Mr. Alvah R. Small, vice-president of Underwriters' Laboratories.*"

"***Resolutions on Death of Ira H. Woolson.***

Prepared by Special Committee.

Gorham Dana, Chairman.
S. H. Ingberg, A. R. Small.

> *Your special committee begs to suggest that the Association in a rising vote, direct that these resolutions be spread upon the minutes of this meeting and that the Secretary advise Mrs. Woolson of this record.*

Resolutions.

By the death of Ira Harvey Woolson on Sunday, May 8, 1927, the National Fire Protection Association has lost a valued and beloved member who was a pioneer in fire protection as applied to structural engineering, and whose accomplishments spread his fame to all lands where modern building methods are used.

His early professional activities were centered in New York at the time when the "skyscraper" first appeared on the skylines of our cities and when the necessity for its adequate structural protection became apparent. As a teacher of engineering at Columbia University, these new problems received his careful study, and his classes were truly the cradle for the new-born branch of the engineering profession. His advice and services were freely sought and generously given in the many activities where these problems had a practical bearing.

He was early identified with the program for tests of building materials undertaken by the Bureau of Buildings of New York City, and in 1902 began fire tests of floor, wall and partition construction intended for use under the provisions of the building code. He was continuously the Chairman of the Committee on Fireproofing of the American Society for Testing Materials from its organization in 1906 to the time of his death. From this work there was developed under his guidance the current American Standard Fire Test Specifications.

When, in 1910, he entered the service of the National Board of Fire Underwriters as its consulting engineer and the building code expert he was recognized throughout the fire insurance field as an outstanding authority on these matters. In this capacity he developed the National Board of Fire Underwriters' model building code for cities, the code for small towns, and the regulations for chimneys. The prompt and continuing acceptances of these regulations, amply demonstrate his great capacity in this field of labor.

In our own organization he has long been prominent as the Chairman of the Committee on Building Construction and as a member of other technical committees working along similar lines. His work was always of a character to warrant the absolute confidence of our members.

It was in view of this record that in 1921 he was drafted by Mr. Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce, to organize a committee to prepare uniform regulations for various phases of building construction. This was a most appropriate selection and he could justifiably take great pride and satisfaction in the appointment and in the several committee reports which he so ably directed.

He was always a most friendly and accessible man notwithstanding this unusual record and the dignities so richly deserved. His accomplishments are on record and will serve as a lasting monument of his life's work. We shall greatly miss his genial, sociable, gentlemanly presence at our conventions and he leaves a vacancy in our ranks that can never be completely filled.

(The resolution was unanimously adopted by a rising vote.)

Much of the fire protection included our modern building code utilized today has as its origins the work of Professor Woolson.

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Source: "*Proceedings of the Thirty-first Annual* [NFPA] *Meeting*", Chicago, Illinois, 1927.