

ANNUAL REPORT OF STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER

W. S. RIDGELL, STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER, MADE INSPIRING AND INTERESTING SPEECH

REPORT PRINTED IN FULL

American Extravagance Will Be Curtailed By The Necessities And Prevent Fires

During the past year this Department has used every effort to reduce the fire loss of Nebraska to the minimum, and we believe that each year the effectiveness of the Fire Commission Law is more pronounced and its merit and worth more forcibly felt by the citizens of the state. The gradual co-operation which is manifested from year to year is noticeable to a remarkable degree. The seriousness of the country's situation at the present time is probably one reason that during the past year we have received more hearty co-operation from the public than ever before. The necessity of conserving from destruction by fire our food, grain and all necessities of life has interested the country as a whole, so that as never before, our citizenship is ripe to receive lessons in Fire Prevention and Fire Protection that cannot help but produce permanent and beneficial results.

The present war has already done and will continue to do more toward curtailing "American Extravagance" than years of teaching and preaching could possibly have done. Ours was a country of prosperity and plenty and it was almost impossible to teach or impress upon our comfortable people the importance of conserving our resources from a prolific destruction by fire. "Insurance" seemed to solve the whole "fire" situation. Business men, from the smallest up to the largest rested easy and unworried in the fact that their property was insured and therefore they had nothing to fear from "fire". Now with our scarcity of food, lumber, grain and all the necessities of life, it is drawing upon our people that insurance money cannot replace that which has been destroyed by fire, it cannot bring back to its material form that which has been reduced to a heap of ashes. Insurance reimburses with money the cash value of what has been destroyed but if there is a scarcity of the commodity destroyed dollars cannot purchase or create it and now when we are facing a scarcity of grain and food, people will realize that our citizens or soldiers cannot eat money and the only and sensible course to pursue is to conserve and save from destruction by fire that which we have. Of a certainty this lesson in conservation is being taught us now in a way that will so popularize the science of Fire Prevention that this country will never again lapse back into its lax methods and habits regarding America's great and unnecessary Fire Waste.

Our own careless, negligent extravagant fire losses are sufficient to cause us to use every preventive method to reduce them to the minimum, but if a more glaring and impressive object lesson is needed to prove the deadly destruction and irreparable devastation waged by fire we have but to look at what value as a weapon our enemy places upon it. If Germany could destroy by fire in this country, our food, grain, mills, munitions, and other necessary war and life sustaining necessities, with what could we wage war against her? And it is not alone and direct destruction of munitions and direct necessities of war that will undermine our wealth and power if we do not reduce our fire losses; every dollar worth of property destroyed is just that many dollars worth of wealth forever wiped out of our existence. It is irrecoverably lost.

President Wilson and Mr. Hoover have both repeatedly warned and pleaded with the nation to curtail our tremendous fire losses. "President Wilson says "Preventable fire is more than a private misfortune. It is a public reflection. At a time like this of emergency and of manifest necessity for the conservation of national resources, it is more than ever a matter of deep and pressing consequence that every means should be taken to prevent this evil." The President evidently had in mind not alone the munitions and direct necessities of war but all waste by fire. He had in mind the annual fire loss of more than \$250,000,000, and the extent to which the prosecution of the war would be interfered with by calling away from it the labor and materials represented by the even partial reconstruction and replacing of over \$250,000,000 worth of property.

Naturally the seriousness of the handicap to our country through its enormous fire losses first impressed itself upon the Insurance Fraternity of the country, because Fire Insurance men, more than any other business or professional men, realized long ago the terrific drain upon our

resources that our annual fire loss meant. Early last spring after the United States declared war upon Germany, The National Board of Fire Underwriters placed at the disposal of the Government its entire amount of detailed information regarding Fire Prevention and Fire Protection together with the individual services of the organized Fire Insurance Companies, and through the consent of these various companies their State and Special agents throughout the entire United States volunteered their services to the Government for the inspection and safeguarding of property against fire. The government through the National Council of Defense accepted this offer of service from these experienced men and thereby have received most valuable results.

In Nebraska last June the National Board of Fire Underwriters organized and appointed its committee to carry on the conservation work in this state.

The western committee of the National Board, headed by Walter H. Sage of Chicago, as chairman; James F. Joseph, Secretary, and F. S. Danforth, Charles R. Street, Charles LeRoy Hecox and John H. Carr, members of the committee met in the Governor's office at Lincoln, Nebraska. At this meeting were present all the State Officials, The State Fire Marshal and the State Council of Defense. The committee of the National Board was assured by the officials present that they would at all times receive their willing and hearty co-operation and support.

At a meeting of the Insurance men of the State, in Lincoln, a State Committee was organized with W. C. Lyle, as chairman, C. U. Hendrickson, Secretary, and W. H. Ahmanson, E. S. Freeman, W. S. Harding, C. R. McCotter, C. G. Robertson, J. F. Zimmer, W. S. Ridgell, State Fire Marshal, members of the executive committee. Keith Neville, Governor, Robert M. Joyce, Chairman State Council of Defense, George Coupland, Vice-Chairman Council of Defense as associate members.

We then appointed every state and special agent of the fire insurance companies doing business in the state as special deputy fire commissioners, with power to inspect and require the necessary repairs of all elevators, mills and wholesale houses in the state of Nebraska. These honorary inspectors and with the fire chiefs and Deputy Inspectors of this Department have made a thorough canvass of the state and there is scarcely a town in the state which has not been inspected by one or more of these men together with the Fire Chief of the town. There were two elevator fires early in the spring of last year and the large mill fire known as the Maney Mill at Omaha, but since these inspectors have been appointed there has not been a single mill or elevator fire in the State of Nebraska, and only one mill fire which was situated at Broken Bow, and the owner was unable to get any insurance on this building and the tenant only carried enough grain in this building to run him from one day to another.

This Department has no way of telling how many fires have been prevented from May 21, 1917, but we believe that there has been wonderful saving of food and provisions in the last six months.

There has been two or three instances in the state where we were compelled to threaten elevator and mill men, and we have also had to take the matter up with the State Council of Defense. The Council of Defense has been a great help to this Department in enforcing the orders of the inspectors in the past year. Manufacturers, business men, and citizens, generally throughout the State, have been most anxious and willing to receive suggestions and comply with orders and corrections asked for by these inspectors. Never before have merchants and business men been so cautioned and instructed regarding fire hazards; carelessness to a great degree has been corrected and negligence in providing ample fire protection has been brought to the attention of citizens in a manner that will surely bring good results. The cleaning up of premises, keeping buildings free from combustible materials, oily waste, excelsior and rubbish of all kinds will reduce losses to a marked degree. The installation of fire extinguishers, water pails and buckets, the placing of reliable watchmen at buildings, all these prevention measures have been taken cognizance of during this past year as never before.

Necessity compels and enforces conservation as nothing else will, and never before in the history of this generation has necessity so serious and widespread confronted us. Not only a shortage of food supplies for ourselves and our allies confronts us, but the shortage in supplies of every kind makes this conservation movement general in every line of agriculture, commerce and manufacture.

Fire Chiefs Now Deputy Fire Marshal
Besides these fire insurance men who have been made honorary members of our Department, we have also commissioned every fire chief throughout the state as a Deputy of this Department. As in past years the fire chiefs throughout the State have given us most valuable service and assistance and when requested to do so they have made particular and special inspections of properties that would have necessitated the expenditure of a great deal of money in sending one of our paid men to look into matters which the fire chiefs have attended to locally for us.

Without doubt the most valuable asset to the Fire Commission Department is the service rendered by local fire chiefs. Citizens in many cases do not realize the really valuable if not heroic work performed by the local fire Departments. The National Board of Fire Underwriters and the National Board of Defense recognizes the valuable service rendered by the fire departments and they were anxious for their co-operation in this work of conservation.

The Fire Commission Law provides for a report to the Fire Commission Department of all fires in organized towns and villages and provides a \$25 fine for any fire chief failing to report at a reasonable length of time. There has been three or four instances where the fire chief has failed to live up to this law and quite a few instances where after the first of January the fire chief has sent in reports for the year preceding. We want to say that in the future any chief, mayor, or city clerk, failing to send in his report within a reasonable length of time after the fire, will be prosecuted, and those fire chiefs who fail to send in their report after it is too late to get into our annual report will not only be prosecuted but will not receive any compensation for their work.

The Gasoline Hazard
We believe that practically all the merchants in the state keep their supply of gasoline buried in a safe underground tanks. We are constantly watching the careless storing and handling of gasoline and we mean to make Nebraska as safe as possible from this dangerous explosive.

While we believe that during the past seven years we have accomplished our purpose of having all the gasoline handled by the merchants in the state, buried in safe underground tanks, yet it seems impossible to compel the owners of automobiles to limit the supply of gasoline kept above ground in their garages to five gallons or less. It was rather impossible to reach all automobile owners. So complicated was the matter and so needless seemed the task that last August we issued a ruling to all oil companies in the state prohibiting them from filling any tank or receptacle, that was not buried underground, with more than five gallons of gasoline. To be sure and eliminate all possibility of any controversy between the Oil Companies and this Department we first secured an opinion from the Attorney General.

We also notified every fire chief in the state as to our ruling in this matter and requested them to see that no gasoline in excess of five gallons was stored above ground. Will state that the oil companies as a general rule are co-operating with this Department in this matter and very little gasoline is being stored above ground in the state today.

Moving Picture Shows—Theatres—Fire Escapes—Exits Etc.

The Legislature of 1917 amended Fire Commission Law and took away from the labor department the jurisdiction over moving picture shows, theatres, school houses, hotels, and all public buildings, and placed the supervision of same under this department. During the past year we have taken up the matter of fire escapes and insisted that they be installed on all public buildings according to law. Last August we sent a letter to the chairmen of all School Boards throughout the State, and we are pleased to report that a great many School Boards were interested in having their schools properly equipped with fire escapes. State Superintendent W. H. Clemmons also sent a letter to the various School Boards and we are sure these letters were the means of safeguarding the lives of a great many children in schools where up to this time fire escapes had not been installed.

The Law Governing The Use And Sale Of Fireworks

The sale and use of fireworks has been the source of ardent many deaths, injuries, and destructive fires. For the past ten or twelve years a great many instances enacted laws prohibiting the sale and use of fireworks, so that now in a number of cities the Fourth of July and other holidays are celebrated without the use of any destructive explosives. Having in mind the elimination of any unnecessary fires, this Department made a ruling last year that there would be no fireworks sold in the state. Owing to the fact that when this matter was taken up last summer a number of wholesale houses already had purchased their 1917 supply and not wishing to work a hardship on them we allowed them to sell fireworks last summer, but all wholesalers have been notified that they must not sell them in the state in the future.

We then notified the mayors of every town in the state, of our order in regard to fireworks to July 1918, and requested them to pass an ordinance along that line. We had an ordinance passed and endorsed by the National Board of Underwriters and sent to every mayor in the state of Nebraska, with a request that they pass this ordinance and assist the Fire Commission Department in doing away with needless danger, not only to life but to property also. All towns have answered and have complied with our request. Lincoln, Nebraska, has the ordinance before the city council and it will no doubt pass it before long.

We want you firemen to go back to your towns, see your city council and try and have them pass this law, as we would like to see a sane Fourth (Continued on Page 6.)

STATEMENT OF R. R. WAGE COMMISSION

Commission Announces That It Desires To Represent Interests Of Railroad Employees

Director General Of Railroads Washington January 18, 1918. General Order No. 5

Pursuant to the authority vested in me as Director General of Railroads by the President of the United States in his proclamation of December 26, 1917, I hereby create a Railroad Wage Commission and name as the members thereof, Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior; Charles C. McChord, member of the Interstate Commerce Commission; J. Harry Covington, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia and William R. Willcox of New York.

It Is Ordered And Directed That
The Commission shall make a general investigation of the compensation of persons in the railroad service the relation of railroad wages to wages in other industries, the conditions respecting wages in different parts of the country, the special emergency respecting wages which exists at this time owing to war conditions and the high cost of living, as well as the relation between different classes of railroad labor.

The Commission shall begin its labors at once, and make report to the Director General giving its recommendations in general terms as to changes in existing compensations that should be made.

Officers, agents and employees of the railroads are directed to furnish to the Railroad Wage Commission upon request all information it may require in the course of its investigations.

(Signed) W. G. McAdoo
Director General of Railroads.

This Commission understands that its duty is not to sit as a body of judges to determine a contested case as between the railroads and their employees. The Government has taken over the control of the railroads for the period of the war and to meet war needs. It is a matter of necessity that we secure from the roads their fullest usefulness. They must be made to play their part to the limit in the making of war, the carriage of goods and men. To this end it is fundamental that the employees shall feel that a spirit of justice animates the Government. We should seek to give not what may be forced by contest, struggle, intimidation and coercion, but what is fair, all things considered. This is our attitude. We look at the problem before us as not, "what does organized labor or unorganized labor demand," but what with war upon us and living costs as they are, should be the compensation given for the services rendered. We seek for no counsel of perfection. The status of labor for all time is not to be determined by our studies. We shall not expect to give all that under pressure the workman might compel any more than we shall ask him to accept the wage that our soldiers receive for their unequalled sacrifice. But a working basis must be arrived at between the Government and those who are employed on the roads by which good feeling shall be maintained and the fullest service obtained.—for this is the prime need of the hour that each man's hand and brains shall serve the nation now as never before. We wish, in short, to stimulate production by doing what is just.

This being a Government inquiry we shall hear those who wish to contribute anything that is helpful, but it is mandatory that we shall reach a quick conclusion. Therefore the greater part of the data upon which we must act will be gathered for ourselves. There are 1,800,000 employees on our railroads. Some are organized and have great power for self-help. The great majority more than two-thirds, are, however, not organized. We shall consider both classes, and upon an equal footing, so far as that may be practicable. This very statement of the number employed makes evident the unparalleled size of the task that is before us. If with this fact is considered the extent of the territory covered and the significance of the different conditions obtaining in the varying sections of the country it will at once be realized that no such hearing as this has been held before, nor one that carries such possibilities in affecting for good or ill the mass of our workers in all industries and the part they will play in carrying on the pressing duty of making war with characteristic American energy, enthusiasm and masterfulness. We wish first of all to know what present conditions are. What data has already been gathered as to the number of employees, their classification in groups according to their duties, their compensation in money and that compensation converted into terms of support for themselves and their families. This leads into a study of the present cost of living as contrasted with the cost at other periods. The various Governmental agencies, the railroads themselves, the larger organizations of labor and individual studies will doubtless prove to have already gathered the greater part of these facts. Wherever there is a shortage this must be supplemented, and to this end we shall feel free to call upon railroads and employees, the Government de-

partments and other agencies for such facts as they can furnish. We shall also seek from foreign governments and from the industries of the country for the presentation of methods by which conditions such as we must meet have been met. In word, we shall make this inquiry upon the broadest possible lines consistent with an early closing of our research, and the great body of the material we shall gather will, we trust, come to us in compact written or printed form rather than by oral statement. Each one who appears in person or otherwise shall be regarded as being animated by the same purpose that animates the Government itself. No selfish or narrow ends are to be served by this hearing. We are looking to the greater welfare of mankind. Our end is not to justify a theory or to reach or approximate an ideal, but rather as practical men to deal with a situation present in a spirit of fair-mindedness.

The Australian "Bush."
What is known as the Australian "bush" is the country beyond the communities. The life followed in these regions is similar to ranch life in New Mexico.

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It is when you have a severe cold that you appreciate the good qualities of Chamberlain's Cough Remedy. Mrs. Frank Crocker Pans, Ill., writes: "Our five-year-old son Paul caught a severe cold last winter that settled on his lungs and he had terrible coughing spells. We were greatly worried about him as the medicine we gave him did not help him in the least. A neighbor spoke so highly of Chamberlain's Cough Remedy that I got a bottle of it. The first dose benefited him so much that I continued giving it to him until he was cured."

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