

Historical Perspective on Fire: A Discussion with Percy Bugbee

Fire Away: Interviews with Fire Protection Leaders

Percy Bugbee – PB

Robert W. Grant – RG

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Part 1: NFPA – Starting Up

RG: Percy Bugbee, often called “Mr. Fire Prevention”, graduated from MIT in 1920 with a degree in engineering. After brief employment with the Aluminum Company of America, Bugbee joined NFPA as its first field engineer on April the sixth, 1921. In his early years with NFPA, Bugbee assisted Managing Director Franklin Wentworth in a crusade to clean up fire hazards in major cities in the United States. He also traveled throughout the United States in a campaign to ban wooden shingle roofs. In 1938, Mr. Bugbee was successful in providing a national focus on fire protection through a 20 minute “March of Time” documentary entitled *U.S. Firefighters*. Percy Bugbee became General Manager of NFPA in 1939. He carried the message of fire prevention throughout the United States and to countries throughout the world. Under his direction, NFPA membership grew from 5,000 to 23,000 members. His administration also increased the number of scope and technical committees and the fire safety standards and codes developed by these committees. During the 1960s, Bugbee organized and became the first president of the International Conference of Fire Protection Associations, which now consists of 18 organizations on six continents. He is the author of several books including *Men Against Fire: A History of NFPA's First 75 Years*, *Principles of Fire Protection* (a fire science textbook), and a brief history of the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, of which Bugbee is its first member. During World War II, he served as Chairman of the War Department Advisory Council on Fire Prevention. In Bugbee's honor, the NFPA Board Directors has established the Percy Bugbee Scholarship, an annual award to an outstanding student of fire protection and engineering at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Percy retired as Chief Executive Officer of NFPA in 1969. Now 84 years young, he's the Honorary Chairman of the Board of the NFPA. Mr. and Mrs. Bugbee, married 60 years, now reside in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

RG: Percy Bugbee, welcome.

PB: Thank you, sir.

RG: I love to have you.

Caption: Robert E. Grant. President. National Fire Protection Association.

RG: Let's start out and talk a little bit about your childhood. I'm interested in Percy Bugbee, the person, the individual. Tell us a little something about your early childhood, where you were born?

Caption: Percy Bugbee. Honorary Chairman. NFPA Board of Directors. Former President of NFPA, 1939-1969.

PB: I was born in Marblehead at a summer place that we had, and my twin brother and I were 30 minutes apart. I was the older one so I always took precedence over him, naturally. But we started life in this Boston atmosphere. My father was active in Boston politics and we had a place on Chestnut Street, Beacon Hill, where we lived as children. My father died when I was only about ten years old, so I don't remember him too well, but he was mixed up with Boston politics for a good many years.

RG: Served as police commissioner?

PB: Served as police commissioner. He wrote a history of the Great Boston Fire of 1872, he wrote the first civil service law that was written in this country, and wrote a lot of books on city government.

RG: He must have had a great personality. He moved you around, your mother...

PB: Yes. He was a good deal older than she was, some 30 years old. My mother was a professional violinist, very attractive, a very vivacious girl. He was taken with her at the summer place there at the New Hampshire in the mountains and married her. That was the first time he was married.

RG: What do you remember about your early childhood? What memories come to mind?

PB: Well, we lived a typical life around Boston. We would play in the public gardens around the frog ponds in the commons in Boston. We went to – our first school was at a private school near Charles Street near Beacon Street. And then when my father died, my mother moved out to Winchester and we lived out there all through high school.

RG: During your childhood, do you remember anything about destructive fire or anything that sticks in your mind?

PB: The first fire I recall quite vividly was when Chelsea burned down in about 1912 and we could see, from the roof of our home on Chestnut Street, this great glow of fire across the whole sky. And that was my first great recollection of a fire.

RG: What would you say attitudes were in those days toward fire safety?

PB: I would say that very few people thought much about it except to accept the fact that fire was some kind of an act of God, that you couldn't really do anything to prevent fires. And that the fire departments hadn't even dreamed of preventing fires, but just to sit there and come out and put water on them after they started. The idea of fire prevention was not around at that time.

RG: That came around a little later. I think you had something to do with that, too. Now, you went to MIT.

PB: Yes. Yes, I graduated from MIT in 1920. And I took a job, with six other graduates, at an aluminum company in Kensington, Pennsylvania. And there was a little depression on, in 1921, and they called us all in after ten months there and said that they had no jobs for us, that they had dismissed us. We all quit the same day. I came back to Boston and went over to MIT Employment Office and in about a week they called me and said "Well, an outfit in Boston called the National Fire Protection Association looking for a boy. We don't know anything about

them, but maybe you would like to go see them?" Well, I went down there. And we had a little, one-room office on the attic floor of 87 Milk Street, the building no longer there. It was just two men and two girls in the office.

RG: Now, was Franklin Wentworth there?

PB: That was Franklin Wentworth. He was the first paid man the Association ever had. He came with them in 1908. The Association started in 1896.

RG: What was your first impression of Franklin Wentworth? He...

PB: He was a very interesting character.

RG: Well, when you were a young man and you walked in the door to be interviewed, what was your first reaction to him?

PB: He was a very stern-looking fellow in a very positive manner. But he had a lovely smile, he had a shock of wavy white hair. He was one of the country's leading artists. Maybe you've never heard of this story but some of his speeches were included in the speeches of some famous and prominent people. He was an actor, an amateur actor. He loved to be on a stage. I found it humorous that the reason he hired me was because when I was at MIT, I was manager of a tech show, which at that time was one of the big musical productions. We played in New York and North Hampton and other places. And he told me afterwards that that impressed him and that was why he hired me.

RG: Well, I can tell you...

PB: You never can tell.

RG: That's right. I think he made a wise choice. Let's go back to back to MIT for just a minute. What was the engineering school like in 1917 and '18?

PB: MIT had moved across from Boylston Street in Boston to Cambridge in 1916, so I was in the first class to be in the new buildings for four years. And the school was still pretty small then, they had maybe a 2,000 total student body, but it was a very prestigious school at that time. Now, one thing that I always remember is that the Dean of Students told us when we first came that they really didn't care whether we were there or not, that it was up to us to stay and that if we couldn't make the grade, that was too bad. And he said "Not more than one in four that come here make the grade anyway." So it was pretty rough.

RG: Sounds pretty tough, yeah. What about the quality of the students?

PB: I thought they were...it was a high grade of people. I was always impressed with my classmates and with the people at the institute and with the professors at that time. It was then, I think, the leading engineering institution of the world and I still think that.

RG: And you had several other brothers that had graduated from MIT.

PB: I had two brothers. We – my twin brother and my older brother – we all three graduated the same day.

RG: How did that happen?

PB: My older brother was in the service in France and didn't get his degree until two years after he was supposed to graduate, so we all got our degrees at the same time.

RG: Now, when you were growing up, I'm sure you had some childhood ambitions, "I'm going to be a fireman" or "I'm going to be an architect". What...

PB: Well, if you want the truth of the matter, fire had never occurred to me. And I never had given it a thought until I got this offer to come in and work for the NFPA. I had a general idea that I wanted to do some writing and my twin brother went into the advertising business and I had thought to go into some kind of advertising business. But this job came along and so I took it.

RG: Why did you choose MIT?

PB: I think mainly because my older brother went there...no other particular reason that I went there. You'll be kind of amused at this; my wife and I had been engaged for some time, in fact in high school, she was a sophomore and I was a senior. And in those days, you didn't get married, you know, until you had a job. So we had to wait until I got a job. So I got the job at NFPA in April and was married in May. And the office was very kind; they gave me two days off to have a honeymoon.

RG: What was the NFPA like in those early days, those first few years when you were there?

PB: NFPA was a very small operation in those days. The Association started with no paid staff at all. It was volunteer until Frank Wentworth was hired in 1908. And at the time that I came in there, membership might have been as many as 2,000, the dues were five dollars a year, the sales of publications might be as much as two- or three-hundred dollars a year...so we were pretty small and pretty meager. I started work at 30 dollars a week and I was quite happy to get it.

RG: Well, I guess 30 dollars then went a lot further...

PB: A lot further. Yes.

RG: Than 30 dollars does today. When you look back, I'm sure there must have been a time in that early career that you said "Gee, this is for me," because you've been associated with NFPA for 60, over 60, years. Can you remember any particular time period or any particular incident that caused you to say "This is for me,"?

PB: Well, I...I think I can. I went in there in 1921 and was in the Fire Record Department for a while. And then worked at various jobs as the assistant to the technical secretary, Bob Moulton, at that time. But Mr. Wentworth had the idea that we should start a field service program. And we'd get out and look around the country and look at the cities and figure out what could be done to improve fire protection and fire prevention. And he persuaded the Board of Directors to let him proceed with that project. And I had known enough at age 24 to go in and ask for the job of the first field manager. And I guess because he couldn't think of anybody else to take it, he gave it to me. My instructions were rather brief and rather comprehensive. He said, "Go out and visit

the top hundred cities in the country that have the worst fire records from our information and see what you can find out.” And that was all.

RG: And that was it?

PB: That was it.

RG: So what did you find out?

PB: And that was a fairly stiff challenge. And I settled in and in those days you traveled by train entirely, so it took more time to get around then in those days. But I started out and visited these hundred cities, one after the other. And I got so that I knew what to find, to ask for questions, you know? And I could...

RG: Were you well received when you went into the cities?

PB: Sometimes yes and sometimes no. Most of them were curious as to what I was there for. Some of them were quite...Some of the fire chiefs in the old days were quite resentful of anybody who would come in and ask them what they were doing.

RG: You were a pretty young fellow in those days, too, to go in and tell those fire chiefs that...

PB: I was real young and they kind of resented that. But anyway I got so I could go into a strange city and in the course of one day could tell you whether you were going to have a good fire record or not by just talking to the chief and talking to the mayor of the city manager and to the Chamber of Commerce and to any members that we might have at a time. And then I could form an opinion. Well, I decided after this initial go-around that there was three or four things that we ought to do and that I could do to help. One of them was that most of the fire chiefs complained that they didn't get much support from the people. So I conceived the idea of trying to set up a fire prevention committee in the Chamber of Commerce in each town. We'd get the business people in each town take a lot at and gain interest in the problems of the fire chief from this department and spent a lot of time setting up these local committees. The second thing was to...in those days, there was only half, maybe half, a dozen cities that had any fire prevention effort in the fire department at all. So I...well, one thing I ought to do is try to get a fire prevention bill set up in every fire department. So the men would go out and inspect properties and look for fire hazards, and they would do some education and work with the public, and this was something new to most fire departments, so that was an important development. And now that's commonplace in every city, as you know. The third this was, in those days, our cities were largely build of wood. We had conflagrations, sweeping conflagrations, burning a hundred, three hundred, five hundred cities at a time. Well, that was because all the roofs were wood shingles. So, it seemed to me that one thing we might tackle was to persuade our cities to pass ordinances banning wood shingles. This was one of the toughest things to do, you can imagine, because the lumber industry was extremely opposed to such action, taking away some of their livelihood. I would go into a city to appear before a city council and ask suggestions and they would come in, a hundred people strong, stamp their feet on the floor, hoot and holler. It was pretty rough. One...I think...

RG: What did you do when they stamped their feet, hooted and hollered?

PB: Well, I'd just keep going...smile at them...keep going.

RG: You had to have a good sense of humor.

PB: Yeah, yes. You couldn't let it get you. I think you'll be amused at one situation. I spoke at a meeting with a Canadian fire prevention group and way up in Halifax Nova Scotia, one time when I said that fires in Nova Scotia, from the records, show that 60 percent of roofs are wooden shingle roofs. Now, I thought that this was a horrible thing for a province in Canada to absorb and that they ought to ban the use of wood shingles. This enraged the Canadian lumber mill to a point when the secretary of the Lumber Association wrote the Attorney General of each of the nine provinces of Canada and asked that I'd be banned from Canada forever. Well, the fire marshals of Canada got kind of amused at this. I got letters from several of them saying "We're sorry we're never going to see you anymore." So now we've finally made our point. We've got 'most every city, except in the southwest and the south coast, pretty well protected now.

RG: You'll probably go down in history as the only person banned in Canada.

PB: I wouldn't be surprised. So those were the three major pitches I was working on in the early days as a field engineer.

RG: Well, I take it that Mr. Wentworth liked your plan?

PB: Yes, very much. He was a...he was the sort of fellow that put me repeatedly on the spot. He would write a city and say, "You'll be pleased to know that our field engineer is coming to visit your city and you will find that he can be very helpful to you." And, of course, this was pretty rough.

RG: Well, I'm sure that he set...set up a number of situations. I was interested to go back over the last week or so into your book *Men Against Fire* and to read some of the stories about Franklin Wentworth. And there's one in here from the 1924 quarterly entitled "Politics in the Fire Department". Do you remember that one from Chicago?

PB: Yes, very well. He never hesitated to speak his mind and expected me to do the same. And we got away with it surprisingly well. I'll tell you one incident that I think points this out very well. At the time in the early '20s, in Kansas City, Missouri had the worst fire record of any city in the United States. So he went out there and then sent me out there and we talked to a lot of people and found it was true that the fire chief was not very competent. But the building laws and fire prevention laws were weak or the construction was bad. Everything about the city made for bad fires. What did Franklin Wentworth do? He came out with a statement listing the fire loss of Kansas City compared with the fire loss to every other large city in the United States showing the Kansas City was really four times worse than any of the others. And said Kansas City is picking the pockets of every other city in the country because the insurance companies have to pay for these losses, insurance companies get their money from the public, and this is shameful. Well, this hit the front page of *The Kansas City Star* and created considerable commotion. The next time I went out there, I thought it was going to be a lynching party. They were really furious. But I said, "Well, what Mr. Wentworth said was so and unless you do something about it, you're going to continue having these losses," and got out of town the best I could without being hung, you know? But that was the way he was and I don't suppose you could do that these days.

RG: Now, I was interested in going back to the Chicago incident for a few seconds and just reading from his editorial and you make the point in the text that you're sure that no one could do this today, or have the nerve to do it because the libel laws. But he said, "The spectacle of a fire chief wholly incompetent for his job and a fire commissioner whose interests would've been embarrassed by competence in his administrative officer was disconcerting." And I just don't think we would say that kind of thing today...

PB: Not anymore, no sir.

RG: And get away with it.

PB: But he got away with it...because he was quite fearless about all of this. We've had...we've had a good many experiences of this kind.

RG: How big was the staff when you were out in the field operations, the total staff of the NFPA?

PB: There was about eight people in the office at that time. We hired a second field engineer three years after I took the first job in 1924. That was Horatio Bond, who was later our chief engineer for many years.

RG: And another MIT graduate.

PB: And he was also MIT. And in the course of time we had about five to six field engineers. Up to the war, when we went wholly into war work and had to drop that kind of service.

RG: Now, let's just reflect for a minute on the past and going back to your early days at NFPA. We're there any figures, incidences that stick out in your mind having a lasting impression on you in later years as you began to develop as a leader in fire protection? I'm sure Franklin Wentworth, as an individual, as a firebrand, is one of them.

PB: Yes. You must remember that in those days the NFPA was, for a good many years, was wholly a creature of the fire insurance business; they were the only people with the thought of preventing fires, in those days. They hadn't yet reached the point where it occurred to them that they ought to have their own fire prevention staffs in industry; they would depend wholly on the inspectors that came around from their insurance companies. And so, in those days, we were pretty much under the thumb of the fire insurance business. And we had to be somewhat subservient to what their wishes were. Mr. Wentworth made what later proved to be kind of a mistake when he went to the National Board of Fire Underwriters, which was the predecessor to the American Insurance Association and pleaded with them to produce and publish the NFPA standards put out by our committees. And they said they would. Well, later on when I took over and wanted to publish our own standards, they said, "Wait a minute. We made a deal with Mr. Wentworth and we're going to continue to publish these as long as we please." And it was some years later when they gave up the idea. We had that sort of hovering over us all the time. Now, that isn't to say that there were a lot of good men in the fire insurance industry who believed in the NFPA and what we were doing. But what I'm saying is the big bosses, the presidents of the companies, were concerned with the income premiums and not very much interested in the technical side. They were the fellows that kind of looked down on us.

RG: Let's take a look at the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, let's walk through some of the years that lead up to the present day. And let's start with the '20s and '30s. Let's at first look at the attitudes of the public in the 1920s and '30s about fire safety.

PB: Well, you could really say they didn't have an attitude. There wasn't any interest in it.

RG: So that's a continuation of that lack of attitude that occurred even in the earlier days.

PB: That's right.

RG: So, why do you think that is?

PB: It goes back to that feeling I had when I started in there. That nobody...nobody...it didn't occur to anybody that you could prevent fires; it was an act of God, it was too bad. If you had a fire, they didn't say anything about were you careless or not, they said "Are you properly insured?" – that's the only question that they would raise. And if you had enough insurance to pay for it, well that was totally different from the foreign attitude, you see. In Germany and France, under the old code of Napoleon, fire was a misdemeanor. If you had a fire and couldn't prove that it wasn't your fault, you're liable, not only for damages to your neighbors, but to pay for the fire department to come and put out your fire. That attitude...we tried early...Mr. Wentworth and I tried to get that personal liability legislation through in this country. Made a miserable failure of it, in those days, because people said "Oh, you can't do anything like that. Fires are inevitable. We're always going to have fires." So in the early '20s, it was pretty difficult to get any public...public interest in the subject. The fire departments were beginning to show an interest. The insurance companies were interested. But that's about the extent of it. And that's why our membership, in those days, was so limited. We didn't really begin to branch out until late in the '20s when we started to build our membership in industry, which, as you know, had been a big part of our membership ever since.

Caption: For further information on participating in this program series write: The National Fire Protection Association, Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02269, Attn: Carol Pisano, Project Manager.

Part 2: NFPA – Through the War Years

RG: In Part One of our series, Percy Bugbee tells us of his educational background in his early years at NFPA as its first field engineer. He also discusses the public's general attitude toward fire during the 1920s and '30s. In Part Two, he brings us through the 1940s and '50s, describing his personal role and that of NFPA during World War II.

RG: Now, Fire Prevention Week I believe started in the '20s.

PB: Yes. Fire Prevention Week started in 1926 as Fire Prevention Day. Mr. Wentworth and T. Alfred Fleming of the Ohio National Board of Fire Underwriters were the two men that started Fire Prevention Day and branched out into Fire Prevention Week. And that built up quite rapidly over later years, as you know. I remember when I first got into the Fire Prevention Week observance we had, maybe, not more than 50 cities that showed any interest.

RG: How about at the federal level? Was there any interest there?

PB: No federal interest in fire prevention in those days to mount anything. There was a little fire prevention activity in the armed services, necessarily, but there really wasn't any federal cognizance of it until the World War II.

RG: When did the presidential proclamations start for Fire Prevention Day or Week?

PB: I think the first presidential proclamation was by President Harding in 1927 or -8 or somewhere in there. And, incidentally, Mr. Wentworth wrote the proclamation and sent it down and they used almost verbatim because he had a way with words.

RG: When you were travelling around the country as a field engineer, how long did you stay away from home? A train is a lot different than being able to get on an airplane.

PB: Oh, yes. I used to go off for one, two months at a time. I remember, particularly, I think it was about 1928, when I was away from home ten months out of 12. Actually away from my home. And then I had two small children, so it was pretty difficult. But in those days, if you went on a trip to the west coast, you couldn't hop on a plane and get back in three or four hours, you stayed out there until you did all your business in that area. If I made a trip to the south, I'd be gone three months, so it was pretty rugged.

RG: What, did they wire you money to...

PB: Yeah. Yeah, once in a while I would wire them for some money. Course, it was fairly cheap in those days. My bills were five dollars a day instead of 120 dollars there now.

RG: What were fire chiefs like in those days?

PB: Most of them, the old school fire chief, was a fellow that believed in brawn. In other words, a strong back and a weak mind were his men. And many of them would say that to you, you know. "We've got a bunch of tough guys here. They can swallow smoke." They took that kind of attitude and it took a good deal of persuasion to get any of them to think that the men could be trained, that they ought to have a training school for them – that was another thing we worked on very hard to get setup the estate training programs for firemen. And a typical example of the attitude of some of the old timers I think you'd be amused at is I went over to Cambridgeshire one time to see the fire chief, Chasey, an old timer, and I said something about sprinklers, and he said, "Sprinklers...I don't believe in them." And I said, "What do you mean?" Well, he says, "I don't want sprinklers in my town." He said "The firemen go into fight a fire in a sprinklered building and they get wet and they might get pneumonia." Well, with kind of attitude, you couldn't expect much progress. Now, today, as you know, every fire chief thinks the sprinkler's the most important thing for building. But imagine what you were up against in those days. I had a fire chief from Springfield, Missouri tell me once, "You came in here to talk to me and I don't want anybody from New England coming in here to tell me anything. I'm not interested," he said.

RG: What did you do?

PB: So I had to leave town.

RG: You packed up and left town?

PB: And damn well he could do it. So there always was in there, and there always is in any group of men, a certain number of men that saw the advantage of these things. Jay Stevens, the fire marshal of California in those days, famous fellow, was the fire marshal of Portland Oregon, set up the first home inspection programs with fire departments.

RG: And that goes back in the '20s and '30s?

PB: That goes way back into the '20s. Jay just died at the age of 99 recently.

RG: I'm a bit interested in reading some of the proceedings of the early annual meetings and one person that stands out, speaking of fire prevention, is the fire marshal of North Carolina, Sherwood Brockwell.

PB: Brockwell, yes. A remarkable fellow. This is a rather interesting development, it happened in the early '30s: The fire marshals had a little association of their own. There were only about 25, 30 state fire marshals in those days, but in the occasion of the democratic sweep when Roosevelt was elected, all of the Republican fire marshals lost their jobs. And it so happened that the president and the secretary and the treasurer of the fire marshals saw a lot of lost jobs. So there they were with no offices and no organization. The fire marshal in Ohio...I happened to be in Columbus at the time...he told me this desperate situation. And, to compound it, this treasurer, who was the fire marshal of Louisiana at the time, had disappeared with all of the files. So, they not only had no offices but no money.

RG: No money.

PB: So, he said, "Would you – would the NFPA – take us over?" Well, we rather reluctantly said we would. And that was the origin of the Fire Marshals' Association of North America as we know it. And we nurtured it along and it's been a tremendous asset to NFPA, as you know.

RG: Absolutely. Yeah, these are the people that are out on the firing line...

PB: Yeah.

RG: And it has grown over the years.

PB: We nursed them along and kept them alive. And I think they would've disappeared if it hadn't been...if we didn't take them on.

RG: Now, at that time was it restricted to states' fire marshals?

PB: States'. Later, we added all the city fellows and county fellows and now it's a major part of NFPA and doing a great job.

RG: What were NFPA meetings like in the '20s and '30s?

PB: They were very small. We used to meet alternately between Atlantic City and Chicago. Nowhere else. And in Atlantic City, we would meet in a hotel room that seated 250 and that was comfortably enough for our meeting. We didn't get to have a thousand people at our meetings until along about 1940, I would say. In those days, most of the people that attended the meeting were engineers and inspectors for the State Insurance Rating Bureaus and the engineering

departments of the factory mutuals in the Underwriters' laboratories and people like that, nearly all technical men with the insurance companies. They would fight over every paragraph of every standard in great detail and sometimes would take a whole day to get action on a sprinkler standard or an electrical standard because every paragraph and every word had to be just right. But they did marvelous work, in those days, and they formed the basis of this tremendous technical, engineering operation that the NFPA now conducts. When I came with NFPA, there weren't more than eight or ten committees. Look at how many we have now.

RG: Sure, sure.

PB: In the hundreds.

RG: Thank goodness we don't have all that fighting over every paragraph on the floor of our annual meeting today. We'd be meeting about two months.

PB: Our competent staff has been responsible for that. They do...they get out all of the bugs in these things before they ever hit the floors, as you know.

RG: Okay, we've talked about the '20s and the '30s. Now let's talk about the next era here, the '40s and the '50s. And, of course, when you think of the '40s especially, you think of World War II. Did NFPA have any special roles during World War II?

PB: We certainly did. It's quite a fascinating story in some respects. You see, in World War I, we were too small and not sufficiently organized or wealthy enough to do much. But in World War II, we had reached the point where we felt that we could make a contribution. And at this point the Board of Directors said, in effect, to us, "Turn over your work to the war. Do everything you think you should do for the war and forget everything else." We took this seriously. We stopped our routine field work that we had been doing. And I went down to Washington. The first effort there was in connection with the Civil Defense Organization. And I was appointed Chairman of the Industrial Protection Council for Civil Defense. And quite a large committee of about 30 to 40 people were told to write a manual for fire protection for all industry in the United States and have it within six months. This was quite an undertaking. And so then we did do it, got it out, and then it took the government a year and a half to print it. But that's the way Washington was in those days, maybe still is, for that manner. So, we did a good deal of work with Civil Defense. I was...I remember Fiorello LaGuardia, he was the mayor of New York at the time. He and I were the two first speakers of the Civil Defense School held in the United States at Edgewood Arsenal outside of Baltimore. LaGuardia was a great character and I thoroughly enjoyed hearing him talk. We did a good deal of work for the Civil Defense Organization. As the war progressed, we got into the idea of destroying the German and Japanese cities with incendiary bombs. They decided to turn to the NFPA with the idea that if we had spent our lives trying to prevent fires that maybe we could spend some time setting fires. We set up a department in our office called "Arson, Incorporated" and we planned the destruction of the German and Japanese cities with fire. The German cities were difficult because that construction is massive, heavy timber and brick. So the way...the technique there was to come in with a wave of high-explosive bombs that opened up the building and then follow that with a wave of two-pound magnesium bombs to burn up the interior. It worked fine. And Japan, there was nothing to it. We could burn Japan down with the small, two-pound incendiaries without any high-explosives at all. And you don't realize it...most people don't realize it but nearly all the

Japanese cities were destroyed by fire. That was before the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Well, that was one phase of it. Then, we got into the idea of trying to help the War Department to help conserve materials that were needed. And I was appointed a member of a five-man board for the War Department under the Secretary of War. There were two major generals and a colonel, and the chief of engineers, and myself. Every inspection of every War Department property was detoured through this board. And I found, to my horror, that is was the policy of the War Department at the time, because of logistics, to concentrate their supplies of any one material to one place. In one of my inspection tours, I found all of the natural rubber left in the United States in one building. And natural rubber was pretty hard to come by, in those days.

RG: Sure.

PB: I hot-footed it down to Washington and after waiting eight or ten hours outside the door, I got into the secretary's office and said "I think this bad because," I said, "If you burn up all that rubber, you're in trouble." He said, "As I understand it, that would be true." And he said, "Why do they have it in one building?" And I said, "You've got me." And he said "That's the way it should be." And he said, "Well, I'll take care of it." Well, we had another meeting of our board, and he sent a man down there and listened to this argument. And this general got up, and he outranked these other generals, and says, "I agree with Mr. Bugbee. Have the rubber dispersed to five different locations," and walked out of the room. Well, if they could have hung me from the yardarm, they would have. And they tried to do one cute trick. They asked me if I would accept a commission as a brigadier general. And I said, "No, no thank you. I prefer to be a civilian." Because I knew damn well if I ever got in the Army they could crucify me. But I was very unpopular with the powers that be in the Army at that time. The provost martial general had another setup and he had appointed a committee to help him on fire prevention, which I was chairman. The president of NFPA at the time, a fellow with Dupont Company, was one member, and the vice president of NFPA, was an insurance company vice president, was the other. The three of us had a great deal to do of influencing the way the Army was handling the fire protection at the various barracks around the country... lot of frame barracks with no protection and that kind of stuff. We lost a good many lives before they got on to the idea. One of the most interesting stories is that the War Production Board at the time had charge of what materials could be allocated. And they decided, in their wisdom, that there should be no more metal used in sprinkler systems because they needed the metal for guns and airplanes. Well, this shocked everybody in the fire business, as you might expect. So, I went down to see my friend, the Assistant Secretary of Defense at the time, and I told him this story. And I said, "I think this is terrible. We had a fire in Fall River that burned up an awful lot of material and did a lot of damage to the war effort and we're going to have more bad fires." And he says, "Well, I think you're right." He says, "What would you like me to do?" Well, I said, "I wish you would make a protest to Donald Nelson," who was the head of War Production. He says, "You write the letter and I'll send it. Maybe." So I went back to the hotel and wrote the letter. He liked it. He transcribed it and sent it to Nelson. Two weeks later, I get a call from Lark, who was Nelson's assistant, saying "Will you come to see us in Washington?" Went down. He says, "We have a letter from the Undersecretary of War which I'd like to read to you." So he read out my letter. And he said, "What do you think about this?" And I said, "I must agree with him. I think he's got the right idea." So he said, "Would you mind writing him a letter that Mr. Nelson could send back to his office?" So I...I answered my own letter with great satisfaction

RG: Now, we've talked about the attitudes of the public, as far as fire safety is concerned, in the '20s and '30s and even earlier than that. Had the attitudes of the public changed in the '40s and '50s to any degree after World War II?

PB: Yes. I've said many times and I believe it to be true that because of the terrific effect of fire in World War II and a terrific destruction of the cities in England and in Germany and in Japan from fire. That that is when the public at large finally got the idea that fire was terrible and to be...something to be done about it because that's when NFPA really took off. That's when our membership began to grow. And that's when the public began to show and interest. And the newspapers and everybody else. So, in spite of the fact that it was a horrible thing to have happened, the use of fire as a weapon, I think it did spark the whole development of fire prevention in this country in a major way.

RG: In the NFPA office, you said that you had established Arson, Incorporated. And here we have a group of people that were dedicated to saving lives from fire...

PB: Yeah.

RG: And all of a sudden, you're turned into a group using fire as a destructive weapon. What was the feeling among the people that were really dedicated to saving lives to have to turn the apparatus in their minds around to destroying things with fire?

PB: Well, we were very unhappy about it, to tell you the truth. But the people concerned with these matters, the Air Force particularly, kept saying, "We've got to have this. We've got to do this. We've got to handle this situation." And the British were particularly concerned. We did as much work with the British Air Force as we did with the United States Air Force, with these things. And they kept saying to us, "Well, we've got to know. We've got to have this information. We need this. It'll shorten the war." So, we gradually got into the frame of mind "Well, we'll do everything we can to see that we set the worst fires possible." But it wasn't a happy experience, I can tell you.

RG: I can imagine. What...what was NFPA like during that era, as far as meetings and...Were you able to meet during World War II?

PB: We skipped one year entirely. We just had the Board of Directors come in to Boston for a one day meeting. We just didn't have a meeting one year. It's the only year in history that we didn't hold a meeting. Some of the war years I remember particularly meeting in Toronto...annual meeting during the war. We gave it over almost wholly. We had a fellow from the London Fire Service Corps come over and tell us how he handled small incendiary bombs, their techniques for putting fires out, we had a British fire chief come over and tell us about some of the blitzes they experienced, and we had a German fire chief come over...

RG: After the war?

PB: After the war. You remember him?

RG: Yeah.

PB: And made a remarkable, dramatic account of the Hamburg Fire Storm, which was the worst fire in the history of the world, I think. Thousands of people killed and a whole big city wiped out. But we, the NFPA really turned over everything to the war effort for those...for that period. We didn't do anything else. It's a wonder we survived.

RG: Did you do this under contract? Were you able to get any of the money from the government for this because you certainly had to close down your publications office.

PB: We didn't get...we didn't get any financial support from the government. We had members of the government...that's insignificant, really, maybe five or ten percent of our membership at that time. We never got a grant of money from the government for that war where we gave it voluntarily and without any charge.

RG: What were the sources of revenue for NFPA in those days?

PB: Mr. Wentworth and I set up a committee of big name people in industry. Lammot du Pont of Dupont Company was the first chairman and then we had the president of General Electric, the president of General Motors, the president of American **SciAn???5430ish**...a lot of big companies. And they were a sort of window dressing we set up to say to industry "The NFPA is doing something worthwhile and you ought to support it." And we'd send out letters to all the presidents of all the big industries and we started to build a fairly sizeable fund of money to support our work that way. That's how we did it. That was during the war and after.

RG: Okay, let's look at now the '60s and the '70s. And I know in this era, the late '50s and into the '60s, there were a number of major fires. I'm going to come back and we'll talk about that in a few minutes. But let's look at, from a historical point of view, the '60s and the '70s. And now I think we're beginning to see more involvement of the federal government, in which you had a major concern and you had a major part in shaping some of that later policy developments.

PB: Yes. The first proposals from the government came along in the early '60s. Frankly, I didn't care for it. They were blue sky. They didn't seem to have any particular purpose other than to set up some kind of bureaucracy. They didn't have any plan as to just what they're going to do. They thought they ought to do something about fire. Well, I kept saying "The NFPA's doing something about fire." Well, they wanted to set up their own. And frankly, the first proposals that were made to Congress I opposed and got some pretty bitter comments from the people at the Bureau Standards and some places that were trying to set this up. But I didn't oppose them because I was against the government, I opposed them because they didn't have a plan of anything that seemed to me useful. It took quite a while before finally they came around to setting up this national commission that President Nixon appointed in the early '70s to study the...make a sound recommendation. Before that, they were just trying to goblin around, trying to set up something and they didn't really have any place to put it or any department that wanted to take over it.

RG: Well, let me ask this because there's been a...Of course, over the years, a lot of discussion as to whether Percy Bugbee was in favor of federal government involvement or against any federal involvement. And as you know, this created quite a bit of controversy among the fire departments looking for more funds.

PB: Yes.

RG: What is your position? What was your position, in those days, on federal involvement that is providing monies?

PB: Well, I made a good many enemies in the fire service at that time because I said, “I can’t see that this will lead anything but to federal takeover of the fire departments if you do it this way.” And I said, “The fire departments are local, should remain local, and that you will lose your identity and you will be told what kind of men you can hire and what you can buy for apparatus if you follow this path.” The fire chiefs, our members at that time, set up a committee of chiefs of the large cities. And John O’Hagan of New York City was Chairman.

RG: Yeah. In fact, that Percy is developed into the present metro...metropolitan committee. Yeah.

PB: Yes. The chiefs were pretty annoyed with me at this and John O’Hagan said, “Well, come to the next meeting of this committee.” I said, “They’ll lynch me.” And he said, “No, I’ll protect you.”

RG: Well, after all the experience out in the field before hand, you were kind of used to those kind of groups.

PB: So I was kind of used to it. But they were very antagonistic. Anyway, I went to their meeting. And I got up and I said what I just said to you, in effect, “I don’t think you want the federal government to take over the fire service at this point. I don’t think it’ll be good for you or the country. And that’s what I’m saying to you.” And I said, “Get some support from the government for the kind of things you want to do for training and all that, fine, but not to take over.” And I still believe that and I believed it then. And O’Hagan backed me up, I must say, and some of the other chiefs. (Curt Volcum) of Chicago was a good supporter of mine, he got up and said so. But it was pretty bitter for a while. I had one fire chief, I think it was the Chief of Minneapolis, wanted me to be thrown out of the meeting...got up and said so. But they...wiser heads prevailed. But it was pretty rough.

Part 3: NFPA Expands Its Mission

RG: In Part II, Percy Bugbee describes NFPA’s participation in the war effort during the 1940s and NFPA’s growth and expanding influence during the 1950s. In our concluding segment, he discusses the federal government’s involvement in fire protection and some lessons learned from major fires such as Boston’s Cocoanut Grove and Chicago’s Our Lady of the Angels School.

RG: Now, you served on the National Commission for Fire Prevention and Control...

PB: Yes.

RG: Appointed by President...

PB: Nixon, yes.

RG: Nixon.

PB: And I worked very hard, as did the other members of the Commission. It was a good Commission. And I think the report was a contribution and I think that it has led to some good things. And I've been disappointed in the fact that the federal administration hasn't done as many things as they might and I can understand why. They haven't had the kind of support that they've needed from Congress and from the government. But I think that the report was useful and that some good things have come out of it and I think that NFPA will benefit from it.

RG: Looking at the Commission, what were the dominant forces because the Commission was made up of a number of very interesting people and certainly providing a lot of points of view from both the politics, from race, philosophy of government? What were the dominant forces?

PB: It was a very interesting group of people, very representative of the whole spectrum of the fire service; we had industry, we had the insurance people, both stock and mutual, we had the fire marshals, fire chiefs, we had some engineering brains, we had (John Palmer) with the National Broadcasting Company, to represent the point of view of the public. It was a first class group. We had two very good women on the Committee, one that was a doctor, an expert in fire burns, and one woman that was of political importance in the government. It was a very well balanced group. We fought very bitterly in closed sessions. We presented a united front to the public forums. But we evolved, I think, a pretty sound picture of what the fire law situation was and what ought to be done about it. I felt it was well worthwhile.

RG: Yeah. And I...having a copy of it here, *America Burning*.

PB: Yes.

RG: And I was interested to see that there is a dissenting report in here by Dr. Anne Phillips, but you went with the majority on this report?

PB: Yes. Anne was kind of a maverick in this group. She was determined to...we tried our best to stop her from issuing it, a minority report, but she wouldn't go along with us.

RG: Now, as I understand it, she just didn't want any involvement with the federal government in fire safety.

PB: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. And we said that the time was come that we got to face the fact that they intend to do something, let's make it so we can do something proper and right.

RG: Let's turn for a second to fire protection engineers and fire protection engineering.

PB: Yes.

RG: And when you and Ray Bond, who was the other young engineer that were travelling the country back in the '20s, were out on the road, did you carry the title of "fire protection engineer"? Did you even think of that title?

PB: No, I was called a "field engineer". We didn't think of the title until later, when they started talking about the idea of a society of fire protection engineers, which our Bob Moulton, in our office, our technical secretary, had proposed about 15 years before and had never come about. His idea then was too new, people didn't see any value in it at that time. It took us a long time

get that idea, that industry as well as insurance and government needed that service of a fire protection engineer.

RG: Did that really come about after World War II?

PB: Yes, pretty much so. There were some good engineers from the insurance bureaus that did a lot of useful government work, particularly in helping the government with the protection of the ports, for instance, that sort of thing. But the idea of a profession of fire protection engineers is really quite new, not more than 25, 30 years old.

RG: You, very proudly, carry card number one of FPE.

PB: Yes. That's kind of a funny story, too. The group that organized this...society met in my office, about ten of them, and decided to organize this society. So I went out to my secretary and said, "Here's five dollars. And give me a receipt for it. And just put it 'Application for the Society of Fire Protection Engineers,'" which she did. So when the others came out afterwards, applied for the first one and couldn't get it because I...

RG: You already had "number one".

PB: That's one of my prized possessions at home. I got certificate number one. The Society is flourishing now, as you know...

RG: Sure.

PB: They're doing a lot of good.

RG: This is a loaded question, but you're used to them after all these years: How did you compare the engineers today, the young engineers that are out in the field in fire protection, with the engineers of the '20s and '30s as far as education, background, knowledge, experience?

PB: I think the biggest difference today is that they're...they tend to be much more specialized. The old time fire protection engineers in insurance and in industry had to know about everything and do everything. Now as we get more specialized, we tend to have more engineering talent for certain things, such as oil storage, another one for chemical plants, and on. But the old timer, he had to know everything about everything, and that's the main difference as I see it.

RG: What do you see as the fire protection engineer of the future?

PB: I think the profession is going to grow. I think it's going to become more accepted, more useful for all the time. I am very optimistic about the future of fire protection engineering. A good example of it is...you know, I wrote that textbook on fire protection engineering for the junior colleges and it's been very much more accepted than I thought it would be, an indication to me that the fire service is recognizing that fire service talent is very useful to them. I never expected that.

RG: Let's talk about some major fires. And I'm just going to throw out some names of fires...

PB: All right.

RG: That have occurred over the years and just get your reaction to them and you can relate any experiences that you have that tie in with the fires. Let's start with a fire that occurred in this area and that's the Cocoanut Grove Fire in Boston.

Caption: Cocoanut Grove Night Club Fire, Boston, Massachusetts, November 28, 1942.

PB: Well, that was probably one of the most major disasters, as you know, that we ever had. Circumstances briefly were that this was a night club in the basement of an old building, crowded with people because it was the night of a big football game, with flammable decorations all over the place. It was...to look like a South Sea island, you know, coconut palms and stuff, all highly flammable.

RG: This was near the start of World War II, I think, 1942.

PB: It was in the, I think, early '40s.

RG: Yeah, I think '42, yeah.

PB: They had locked all the doors but one because they didn't want people to go out without paying their bill, you understand. But here was hundreds of people crowded into a basement tinderbox and this poor busboy was changing a light bulb and it broke and fell on the floor and the sparks set off this stuff and it flashed right through the room. And 500 people died. Well, it was a horrible thing. I think I might say this to you: That after every major disaster of that type, the only comforting thing is that this is saving a life because after Cocoanut Grove, every night club in the world got inspected and conditions got corrected so that actually, probably, the affect of that was the saving of lives. Horrible as that may seem, that's a fact. Well...

RG: Just so bad that so many people had to lose their lives to have that happen.

PB: Yes, to get that across. But that happens after every major disaster.

RG: Every major disaster.

PB: And it always used to annoy me exceedingly to see a wave of legislation after a fire and then, after a while, it dies down again, people forget it.

RG: And that still goes on today. That still...

PB: It still happens today.

RG: That's still a phenomena today.

PB: And an interesting sideline of this fire, this particular fire, was this: I wasn't even here at the time, I was in Chicago in a meeting when the fire happened, but Bolton was there. And he...

RG: Now, Bob Bolton was the chief engineer at the time?

PB: Chief engineer.

RG: For NFPA.

PB: Very competent man. And he developed the Life Safety Code for NFPA, he was the prime mover in that. So he was rushing his report to the printer...everybody wanted to know what happened.

RG: Now, this is a report on the fire?

PB: A report on the Cocoanut Grove Fire.

RG: Did the NFPA actually investigate this?

PB: Oh, yeah. So I get a call from the Attorney General in Massachusetts. He said, "Mr. Bugbee, I understand that you're going to print a report on the Cocoanut Grove Fire." I said, "That's right." He says, "You can't do it." Well, I said, "I've got to do it." Well, he says, "I'm telling you you can't do it or I'll put you in jail." Well, I said, "Just let me come up and talk to you a minute, will you please?" So I went to my secretary and said, "Get me a bunch of those cablegrams and telegrams and appeals for information on that fire that we've got. Give them to me and I'll put them in my briefcase." And I took them up there and I laid them on the table and said, "Everybody is asking us what happened at the Cocoanut Grove because they want to prevent it happening in their night club. And you're saying to me that you don't care about that, you don't care whether anybody else has a fire or not because it might influence your particular damage cases." And I said, "We've got to print them." He said, "I guess you're right." And a year later, they adopted our report as the official report of the Fire. This always happens after a major disaster; people get very mad if you publish anything or criticize anybody. I've seen this happen over and over and I expect you have.

RG: Sure.

PB: When there's a bad fire, people don't want you to do anything about it. But it's a fact of life and we have to do it. And if we make the point that we're not trying to make criminal prosecution of anybody, we're just giving the facts as we understand them, and we'll correct the facts if anybody proves them wrong... We've never been so jeopard and I expect that's why, because we're not trying to...

RG: No, because we try to work in the public interest. No.

PB: The public interest.

RG: Yeah. A very interesting case just recently was after the MFM Hotel Fire, which we not only produced a report but we also produced a film which talked about the fire. And there was tremendous pressure to stop NFPA from releasing this film, that it would do damage to the hotel industry in Las Vegas as well as Las Vegas itself. You have to work in the public interest.

Caption: MGM Grand Hotel Fire, November 21, 1980.

PB: Yeah. Let me tell you another example just of what we're talking about. The Livonia Fire

RG: Yeah, Livonia, Michigan. Sure.

PB: Now, that was the largest industrial loss we ever had, I guess. Probably still is...because this was an area the size of 30 football fields, one open area.

RG: What was it? A General Motors zone.

PB: A General Motors transmission plant for Cadillacs, Oldsmobiles, Pontiacs, and Chevrolets. And a huge area.

Caption: General Motors Fire, Lavonia, Michigan, August 12, 1953.

PG: And they didn't put sprinklers in the area because it was a machine shop, essentially, and they said, "Nothing in here to burn." So, there's a leak in the tar roof and the fire starts in there and it starts to melt and drops burning tar all over the place. The fire department couldn't reach more than a hundred and fifty feet into the building and the building is 30 acres in size and so the whole thing goes down. Well, it was a disaster. The fellow that ran the safety and fire protection for General Motors, Jim Frederickson, was on our Board of Directors. And I called him right up and said, "We want to make a report, of course, everybody's interested. And I've got the report of the fire chief of Lavonia and I've got the state fire marshal's data and I've got the insurance people's data. And I've got it all together and I'll send it to you and you can tell us if there's anything wrong." He said, "Fine." Before I got anything out, I got a call from the chief legal counsel of General Motors saying "You can't print a report on this fire." And I said, in effect, "To hell, you say." And he said, "You can't." Well, I said, "We're going to print the report." "Well, by God," he said, "We'll stop them." The executive of General Motors called my president in Chicago, the chairman of my Board in Atlantic City, my treasurer in Providence. "We want this fellow Bugbee stopped."

RG: Did they stop you?

PB: And they got very nervous. And they called me and said, "Maybe you better not print anything like that." And I said, "Well, either I print this report or you get another general manager of the Association." And they said, "Well, I guess we don't want to go that far." So, we printed it. And the president of General Motors cancelled all their memberships, their contribution to NFPA...as long as he was president, we never got a dime from General Motors. But that's how vicious this thing is. Now, of course, we're back in good graces and they think we're all right.

RG: Yeah, sure. Absolutely. One of our great supporters.

PB: One of our great supporters.

RG: And they really learned out of that fire, General Motors themselves as well as industry generally.

PB: If you read the report, and I expect you have, you'll notice we went out of our way to say "This fire could have happened to any industrial plant; it was not just General Motors, it was the concept that you couldn't burn down an area of this size, without protection." And we didn't say "General Motors is to blame," we just said, "This is too bad it happened and this is why it happened." But this always comes to haunt us and I hope you don't have as many as I used to have.

RG: Let's talk about one more fire and that is Our Lady of Angels School Fire in Chicago because, you know, that had a tremendous affect on school fire safety, which you know I think still carries on.

Caption: Our Lady of the Angels School, Chicago, Illinois, December 1, 1958.

PB: I think it did. That had a great affect and that's a good example of the fact that things...good things happen after disaster. I think every school building in the country and, in fact, all over the world got a look at that fire. It was a tragedy; some 80 or 90 kids burned to death. The delayed alarm, nobody there knew exactly what to do, the fire department wasn't called, it was late getting there, and the whole thing was over really before they had the chance to save any lives. We got wind out of it, sent a man out immediately by plane. Chet Babcock of our office went out there and made a remarkably good report on the fire. And we sent that all over the world. And as I say in that effect was good. The poor nuns in that building were not fire prevention minded, nobody ever told them, they didn't realize the situation was the way it was, it's a tragic happening. But we live and learn. We've had other school fires, the most famous perhaps was the Collingwood School in 1906.

RG: What was that, Missouri, I think?

PB: Collingwood, Illinois.

RG: Oh, Illinois.

Caption: Collingwood School Fire (actual location and date), Collingwood, Ohio, March 4, 1908.

PB: Yeah. Little town. The whole school burned down and every child in it. And that led to reforms in that day and age.

RG: Yeah. In fact, you can trace, Percy, so many changes that occurred in fire safety because of certain landmarked fires, like the Winecoff Hotel Fire in...

Caption: Hotel Winecoff Fire, Atlanta, Georgia, December 7, 1946.

PB: Yeah, that set off the hotel protection.

RG: Yeah, to a certain level, and now we're looking at the major hotel fires we've had recently, we're now moving into perhaps another level of safety.

PB: That's right. It all works that way. And thank God for the NFPA to keep the ball rolling, as I say.

RG: And to get out and to investigate fires, present an object report, and to look for providing a positive approach to things. Not just being a pathologist and talk about what happened, but also what can be done to prevent those in the future..

PB: Yeah, yeah. What can be done.

RG: And that's the most important thing

PB: That's exactly right, yeah. That's the most important.

RG: And, of course, that's a philosophy that goes back into the organization for many years. And I think that, if I might say, that this is a philosophy you've brought to NFPA because when you look at and in the history of NFPA, there was a tremendous change that occurred in NFPA when you became the leader of NFPA. And in terms of attitude toward fire prevention, we began to move away from completely looking at things from a property protection basis, looking at life safety and looking to a more positive approach to preventing fires.

PB: I think the biggest and most hopeful change currently is the development of our work here in public education. I think it's tremendously important and I think we're just starting now. The kind of things we're going to do with our program are going to do more to prevent fires and loss of life and injury than any other thing that we've attempted in the past. I really believe that.

RG: Yeah, and right now, I'm proud to say, we have documented 81 life saves from the "Learn Not to Burn Program". Yeah, yeah.

PB: Yeah, I think it's great. And that is a relatively new thing, as you know it. Even a few years ago, we couldn't get the schools to do much of anything. Now, it's accepted. I think it's great.

RG: Yeah. Now, what is your expression that you've coined? The three...the three causes of fire?

PB: Men, women, and children.

RG: Men, women, and children, yeah.

PB: That's true. They our prime cause of fire.

RG: You know, again, going back to your book, *Men Against Fire*, and back to the predictive chapter here, "A Look Forward", and I was taking a glance through that last night. And what is most interesting to me is the fact that many of the predictions that you made back in, what is it, 1971?

PB: Yeah.

RG: Have already come into fruition.

PB: I think that's true.

RG: And you said here, for example, that, "The greatest challenge that we face, as I see it, is to bring about a substantial reduction in the losses from fire in ordinary homes." And I think we are beginning to see some...

PB: It's coming.

RG: It's coming, yeah. And he's the public education. "A really massive effort in public education directed at the reduction in dwelling fires has been, up until now, beyond our limited financial resources." Talking about NFPA. "NFPA must and will expand its efforts to reach the family."

PB: It's coming.

RG: It's coming. "Learn Not to Burn". Yeah. And you talk about the development of computerized fire reporting systems.

PB: Yeah. Now that's coming.

RG: That's coming.

PB: I didn't realize what a good prophet I was when I wrote that.

RG: You're a great prophet, yeah. And you say here, "We will see a national fire administration academy."

PB: Yeah. We got it.

RG: We got it, yeah. "The value of services of competent fire protection engineers will be more and more recognized in the years ahead." And I think that's certainly true.

PB: It's coming.

RG: So, you're a great prophet. What do you think of the tremendously, perhaps complex, standard system that we have today with all of the various influences that we have hitting upon it – the legal, especially the legal, influences?

PB: I hate to see that. I got along all the years I was running NFPA without much legal counsel, thank God. And I realize you can't do that anymore, and I think it's too bad. I...

RG: Let me just say looking at the budget is too bad...

PB: Yeah.

RG: Because we have to budget about as much in a half a month as the total budget was for a whole year back 15 years ago.

PB: That's right. That's too bad. I don't like to see NFPA standards involved with legal hassles. I think for the most part...well, it's proven that for the most part we've resolved them in our favor. We've not lost any serious arguments, as I can recall, and we haven't been involved in any lawsuits that have cost NFPA any substantial amount of money. We have the expense of fighting them, but that's all.

RG: Yeah...and I think that improves the success of the standard system, the strength of it.

PB: Fundamentally, the standards are written properly by the people and with the public interest at heart.

RG: Interest at heart, yeah.

PB: As long as we do that, we're okay. And we've always done it and that's why NFPA standards are so widely accepted today.

RG: Any messages that you'd like to give to the future of fire protection? That's another tough one.

PB: Well, I'd like to see a lot of things happen, of course, that are developing now and have developed slowly. I think the time will come when every child living in this country will have an understanding of the single causes of fire and why they should do something about it. And when that time comes, we're going to see a tremendous reduction in fire loss and loss of life. I think it'll come...it's going to take some time but I think it'll come. That's what I hope to see.

RG: Percy Bugbee, Mr. Fire Prevention, leader in fire protection, thank you very much for sharing with us your vast experience, your humor, and your leadership over all these years. Thank you.

PB: Yes, sir. You're welcome.