

State of Iowa

1926

FIFTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF

STATE FIRE MARSHAL

FOR THE YEAR 1925

J. A. TRACY
State Fire Marshal

Published by
THE STATE OF IOWA
Des Moines

State of Iowa

1926

FIFTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Des Moines, Iowa, January 30, 1926.

HON. JOHN HAMMILL, *Governor of Iowa:*

Sir:—In compliance with the provisions of law I have the honor to submit herewith the fifteenth annual report of the affairs of this office covering the period beginning January 1, 1925, and ending December 31, 1925, both dates included.

J. A. TRACY, *State Fire Marshal.*

J. A. TRACY
State Fire Marshal

THE STATE OF IOWA

STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Appointed by the Governor. Term, Four Years. Expires July 1, 1927.

Office	Name	Legal Residence	Birthplace
Fire Marshal.....	J. A. Tracy.....	Sioux City.....	Iowa
Deputy.....	E. J. Frowick.....	Des Moines.....	Iowa
Assistant Deputy.....	W. C. Rabbitt.....	Des Moines.....	Indiana
Assistant Deputy.....	G. G. Shanafelt.....	Sigourney.....	Iowa
Stenographer and Clerk.....	May A. Carr.....	Ames.....	Iowa

The entire expense of the State Fire Marshal's office is paid out of the general revenues of the state.

REPORT OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL

In presenting this, the Fifteenth Annual Report of the State Fire Marshal, I wish to call your attention to some of the outstanding features which to my mind are worthy of careful consideration by the general public.

We have endeavored in our Fire Prevention Campaign to educate the people to habits of carefulness. The newspapers throughout the state have been most liberal with their space in publishing extracts from our report. Newspapers give knowledge to their readers which cannot be had in any other way, and I deplore the fact that no provision is made whereby we can keep up a campaign of publicity in the press throughout the year. We have several states where the Fire Marshal issues bulletins each month containing articles which are of great interest to the general public. These articles are of such a character that the newspapers are glad to print them. Too much publicity cannot be had through the press in keeping before the public the necessity of daily fire prevention activities for the conservation of both life and property.

If you will carefully study the figures set out in the tables in this report, they should convince you that we should exercise greater care in eliminating fire hazards which are likely to start fire and which often cause great conflagrations, loss of life as well as loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in property. It is safe to say that 85% of all of these fires are caused from carelessness or indifference.

I also call your particular attention to the great number of fires that occur in the homes from defective heating plants, defective stove pipes, defective gasoline and oil stoves and children playing with matches, etc., the homes being left in charge of the housewife and children without any means of putting out the fires in their incipency. About three-fifths of all fires occur in the home, and I earnestly urge that every man inspect his own property and eliminate hazards that he may find in and about his premises, thereby giving his family a fair chance for their lives, and impress upon the children the necessity of cultivating habits of carefulness and the danger of playing with matches, also caution the women folks not to use gasoline for cleaning purposes and coal oil to aid a sluggish fire.

It appears to me that the only hope of cutting down the criminal ash heap is by educating the rising generation not only in the public schools, but in the Sunday Schools as well.

Deaths from Fire. In 1925 there were 86 deaths reported as the direct result of fire, of which number 22 were men, 31 were women and 33 were children.

In 38 cases fatal to life, gasoline or coal oil was involved.

In 5 cases persons were burned to death as the result of bonfire carelessness, and 7 children were burned to death playing with matches.

For the year 1925, 6,118 fires were reported to this office totalling a loss of \$9,724,482. This is an increase of 683 fires and an increase of loss of \$1,794,832. Five hundred and ninety-seven of this increase in numbers was on town dwellings, and 407 of an increase of causes was from sparks from flues, (most all of which were on wooden shingles).

There were 41 fires totalling a loss of \$3,403,441, being almost one-third of the entire loss for the year.

The loss from unknown cause was 109 fires over 1924 and an increase of \$1,027,195. This is an alarming condition which calls for greater care on the part of the general public, as well as the insurance companies, to inspect their risks and make investigations as to bad moral hazards.

A list of forty-one of the largest fires which occurred during the year 1925. Loss—\$3,403,441, which is almost one-third of the entire loss:

Adel.....	January 22nd.....	\$ 81,400
Boone.....	May 23rd.....	26,000
Calumet.....	March 1st.....	35,000
Cedar Rapids.....	February 21st.....	145,000
Cedar Rapids.....	May 22nd.....	28,000
Cedar Rapids.....	June 2nd.....	138,480
Centerville.....	June 1st.....	26,000
Colesburg.....	February 2nd.....	26,500
Council Bluffs.....	May 11th.....	25,722
Council Bluffs.....	December 3rd.....	886,343
Cresco.....	February 26th.....	25,800
Davenport.....	January 2nd.....	28,952
Davenport.....	October 22nd.....	48,000
Des Moines.....	January 5th.....	42,720
Des Moines.....	June 11th.....	30,716
Des Moines.....	October 19th.....	93,000
Des Moines.....	November 24th.....	143,433
Dubuque.....	April 28th.....	56,000
Fort Madison.....	September 9th.....	155,000
Garwin.....	January 26th.....	28,000
Gilbert.....	January 15th.....	27,000

Grinnell.....	July 14th.....	45,000
Keosauqua.....	February 3rd.....	60,000
LeMars.....	July 6th.....	197,000
Leighton.....	December 5th.....	33,000
Magnolia.....	September 28th.....	27,000
Manning.....	September 3rd.....	55,000
Murray.....	April 13th.....	27,500
Newburg.....	January 26th.....	25,000
Odebolt.....	June 10th.....	29,800
Onawa.....	June 3rd.....	69,900
Osage.....	February 19th.....	65,000
Ottumwa.....	February 2nd.....	175,700
Ottumwa.....	November 29th.....	31,000
Paullina.....	December 21st.....	27,723
Pleasantville.....	January 17th.....	65,800
Pleasantville.....	October 18th.....	25,000
Rockwell City.....	September 5th.....	52,000
Rockwell City.....	November 11th.....	215,000
Sioux City.....	August 4th.....	45,000
Strawberry Point.....	May 5th.....	36,552

No. of fires.....41 Loss.....\$3,403,441

KINDS OF STRUCTURES IN WHICH THE MOST DISASTROUS FIRES OCCURRED

	No. Fires	Loss
Town dwellings	3,063	\$1,329,657
Farm dwellings	535	1,668,691
Stores, various kinds	254	1,704,509
Garages	253	330,191
Autos and trucks	196	24,581
Town barns	144	100,971
Apartment houses	107	77,342
Offices and office buildings.....	87	421,794
Warehouses	80	102,714
Restaurants	76	144,731
Schoolhouses	47	233,843
Total.....	4,588	\$4,434,525

SPECIAL MENTION

Domestic Oil Burners. The heavy loss and the great number from defective oil burners, oil stoves and overheated heating plants, the reporting officer failed in most cases to explain whether or not they were the domestic oil burners. In view of this omission, I only mention the domestic burner when it was so reported.

Lightning. The loss from lightning, especially on farm barns, was exceedingly heavy. These barns were not rodded.

Defective Flues. The loss from defective flues was \$630,000.

Sparks from Flues. The great number of sparks from flues on shingle roofs should convince the most skeptical of the necessity of eliminating wooden shingles, especially on dwellings.

Electric Wiring. All wiring should be done by a competent electrician in accordance with the National Electrical Code, then use the fuse intended to be used.

A COMPARISON OF FIRE LOSSES BY MONTHS FOR 1924 AND 1925

	—1924—		—1925—	
	No. Fires	Loss	No. Fires	Loss
January	790	\$1,150,160	975	\$1,227,379
February	600	958,126	732	1,229,337
March	584	523,387	772	711,088
April	570	801,340	608	802,758
May	423	831,862	462	569,000
June	208	325,646	261	527,786
July	250	326,316	330	685,715
August	233	489,891	278	590,380
September	260	390,258	231	569,698
October	343	401,292	315	427,048
November	455	738,973	487	905,002
December	719	992,399	667	1,479,291
Total	5,435	\$7,929,650	6,118	\$9,724,482

STATE FIRE MARSHAL

A COMPARISON OF THE LOSSES IN NINETEEN LARGEST CITIES IN IOWA IN 1924 AND 1925

	—1924—		—1925—	
	No. Fires	Loss	No. Fires	Loss
Boone	33	\$ 14,724	49	\$ 57,882
Burlington	50	49,819	50	54,251
Cedar Rapids	164	88,934	211	406,111
Clinton	113	31,407	151	64,838
Council Bluffs	205	149,090	312	1,012,864
Davenport	250	304,640	212	175,561
Des Moines	689	798,463	707	637,079
Dubuque	113	70,271	118	98,949
Fort Madison	39	56,282	39	190,303
Fort Dodge	53	114,539	66	80,760
Iowa City	45	40,548	44	12,606
Keokuk	103	113,411	97	49,606
Marshalltown	90	58,492	116	17,238
Mason City	62	62,681	74	59,650
Muscatine	63	43,567	79	35,725
Oskaloosa	30	54,633	20	27,826
Ottumwa	111	75,830	148	291,984
Sioux City	436	143,710	508	164,948
Waterloo	196	167,271	219	128,826
Total	2,845	\$2,438,292	3,212	\$3,558,560

CAUSES OF THE GREATEST NUMBER OF FIRES

	No. Fires	Loss
Sparks from flues	2,011	\$ 885,606
Unknown	1,079	4,010,836
Defective stoves, heating plants and pipes	465	432,846
Defective flues	399	630,282
Adjoining	361	1,179,145
Defective electric wiring	199	411,181
Bonfires and rubbish	197	65,790
Lightning	167	531,440
Smokers' carelessness	164	111,162
Spontaneous combustion	146	313,385
Defective auto wiring	100	39,595
Incendary	96	168,591
Children playing with matches	93	52,148
Total	5,477	\$8,831,954

INSPECTIONS

During the year 1925, the Fire Marshal's Department made inspections in 80 different towns in the state. At least 95% of the orders issued for corrections have been complied with. In addition to the personal inspections, a great number of defects have been remedied through correspondence.

The Iowa State Fire Prevention Association, of which I am a member, made the following inspections, which resulted as follows:

Town	Properties		Recom- men- dations	Correc- tions	Ad- dressed
	Inspected	Defective			
Des Moines	1,897	1,695	8,362	80%	450
Pella	133	127	549	47%	1,300
Marshalltown	278	269	4,407	56%	2,468
Fort Madison	292	246	1,115	73%	3,255
Fort Dodge	385	335	1,412	49%	1,418
Davenport	957	758	3,068	79%	8,977
Burlington	482	428	2,279	61%	6,198
Albia	142	126	438	54%	1,404
Iowa Falls	123	116	622	67%	780
Total	4,689	4,000	19,252		\$26,250

EDUCATIONAL WORK

This office has been sending out 30,000 large size fire prevention posters each year, also supplying the schools with bulletins on "Causes and Dangers of Fires." In addition to the posters and bulletins, we have sent out many thousand pieces of fire prevention literature, furnished by the various fire prevention agencies. We have also addressed schools, chambers of commerce, insurance people, farm gatherings, fire departments, etc., on fire prevention.

We took an active part in the Iowa Firemen's Association which resulted in having the Iowa State College at Ames, Iowa, hold a four day Short Course for firemen. Professor Rolland S. Wallis should be congratulated on the program and success of the first Short Course of its kind to be held in the state. Plans are also being made for another Short Course which will be announced later.

The Iowa Firemen's Association is very much interested in this course, as well as the 49th Annual Convention which will be held

at Manning, September 14 and 15, 1926. The firemen of both volunteer and paid departments should by all means attend the Firemen's Convention, as well as the Short Course. Members of the City Councils should aid in every way to have members of the Fire Department attend these meetings.

STATISTICAL WORK

This office is the only office or agency in the state concerned in securing and publishing certain data pertaining to fire losses, kind of structures, causes of fire, etc. For more information, see Tables I, II and III.

By state statute, fire chiefs are required to report all fires that occur in their respective towns. In incorporated towns where there are no fire chiefs, the Mayor is required to report the fires. Outside of incorporate towns, the township clerks are required to report fires. In addition to the fifty cents paid by this department, for the report of each fire, township clerks are allowed ten cents per mile each way for travel actually made from their residence to the scene of the fire and return. If the information was obtained without travel, kindly mention same on your claim.

Many of the fire chiefs in the smaller towns are not reporting promptly and this delays this department in compiling statistical information.

I urge that reports be made promptly on blanks furnished by this department. If you do not have these blanks, kindly drop me a postal card for the number desired.

INVESTIGATIONS

During the year 1925, this office investigated 165 fires in 64 counties which resulted in sending 29 cases, involving 38 persons, to the County Attorney for prosecution. In many of the cases investigated, there was evidence tending to show that the fires were set for the purpose of collecting heavy insurance, but in our opinion the evidence was not sufficient to warrant a prosecution, and the only cases sent to the County Attorney were those, that in our opinion, should be presented to the grand jury for their action:

- In 11 cases no indictments were returned.
- In 4 cases no action yet taken by the grand jury.
- In 12 cases no arrests were made, cases pending.
- In 9 cases confessions were made.
- In 1 case suspect committed suicide.
- In 1 case suspect sent to Insane Hospital.

TABLE NO. I

Showing the Total Number of Fires Reported by Counties. Cities of More Than 10,000 are set out separately. Damage to Buildings and Contents is combined.

Counties and Cities of 10,000 and Over	No. of Fires	Loss
Adair	12	\$ 28,925
Adams	19	30,026
Allamakee	13	22,475
Appanoose	51	120,783
Audubon	15	27,615
Benton	38	41,340
Black Hawk—Waterloo	219	128,826
Bal. Black Hawk Co.	38	54,413
Boone—Boone	49	57,382
Bal. Boone Co.	29	85,994
Bremer	15	19,735
Buchanan	24	56,281
Buena Vista	23	36,391
Butler	32	36,557
Calhoun	40	249,540
Carroll	41	125,211
Cass	48	58,583
Cedar	27	74,355
Cerro Gordo—Mason City	74	59,660
Bal. Cerro Gordo Co.	16	9,085
Cherokee	16	18,370
Chickasaw	19	38,744
Clarke	24	60,139
Clay	37	69,882
Clayton	41	123,926
Clinton—Clinton	151	64,838
Bal. Clinton Co.	43	50,796
Crawford	22	55,920
Dallas	38	145,491
Davis	23	58,879
Decatur	21	31,221
Delaware	39	103,221
Des Moines—Burlington	50	54,253
Bal. Des Moines Co.	23	61,296
Dickinson	11	21,502
Dubuque—Dubuque	118	98,949
Bal. Dubuque Co.	24	32,840
Emmet	15	34,273
Fayette	39	5,700
Floyd	22	17,945
Franklin	37	45,263
Fremont	24	53,662
Greene	23	15,668
Grundy	37	55,353
Guthrie	30	58,374
Hamilton	21	35,395
Hancock	15	17,722
Hardin	45	95,455
Harrison	37	76,521
Henry	24	52,164
Howard	12	53,976
Humboldt	24	17,759
Ida	16	31,147
Iowa	25	119,380
Jackson	25	36,337
Jasper	105	171,531
Jefferson	33	40,725
Johnson—Iowa City	44	12,606
Bal. Johnson Co.	22	59,436
Jones	22	32,173
Keokuk	28	40,633
Kossuth	34	44,855
Lee—Ft. Madison	39	196,313
Keokuk	97	49,606
Bal. Lee Co.	20	32,020
Linn—Cedar Rapids	211	406,111
Bal. Linn Co.	41	88,873
Louisa	17	23,088
Lucas	24	94,054
Lyon	26	54,493
Madison	15	48,471

TABLE NO. I—(Continued)

Counties and Cities of 10,000 and Over	No. of Fires	Loss
Mahaska—Okaloosa	30	27,826
Bal. Mahaska Co.	36	172,500
Marion	68	181,392
Marshall—Marshalltown	116	17,238
Bal. Marshall Co.	20	63,842
Mills	17	56,630
Mitchell	13	74,702
Monona	18	90,338
Monroe	35	77,043
Montgomery	16	29,395
Muscatine—Muscatine	79	35,725
Bal. Muscatine Co.	24	75,290
O'Brien	35	95,957
Oceola	16	9,675
Page	60	60,195
Palo Alto	17	21,234
Plymouth	33	250,486
Pocahontas	19	30,448
Polk—Des Moines	707	637,079
Bal. Polk Co.	47	82,217
Pottawattamie—Council Bluffs	312	1,012,864
Bal. Pottawattamie	36	53,451
Poweshick	63	94,625
Ringgold	28	44,722
Scott—Davenport	212	175,561
Sac	52	87,142
Bal. Scott Co.	22	69,905
Shelby	28	31,234
Sioux	20	43,555
Story	79	156,743
Tama	42	77,642
Taylor	24	30,056
Union	52	56,334
Van Buren	19	89,260
Wapello—Ottumwa	148	291,984
Bal. Wapello	28	61,430
Warren	19	21,947
Washington	23	77,350
Wayne	34	38,836
Webster—Ft. Dodge	66	80,760
Bal. Webster Co.	20	54,325
Winnebago	39	31,971
Winnesaukee	25	33,414
Woodbury—Sioux City	508	164,948
Bal. Woodbury Co.	35	70,262
Worth	9	10,927
Wright	40	36,795
Total	6,118	\$9,734,482

TABLE NO. II

Showing the Kind of Property Destroyed; Damage to Building and Contents Involved, Which Are Set Out Separately. Value of Buildings, \$167,806,453. Value of Contents, \$121,095,367. No. of Fires in Wooden Buildings, 4,983. Also in Brick or Stone, 876. No. of Fires Outside of Buildings, 259.

	No. of Fires	Damage to Buildings	Damage to Contents
Amphitheatre and armory	5	\$ 7,009	\$ 100
Auto salesroom	15	5,850	11,558
Autos and trucks	196	24,581	0
Awnings	12	2,347	5,200
Bakeries	29	23,829	38,547
Banks	12	30,875	13,110
Barns—Farm	227	699,530	313,956
Town	144	70,161	30,810
Livery, feed and sales	7	11,372	6,530
Battery stations	4	2,652	2,645
Cars—Box and bunk	12	7,332	411

TABLE NO. II—(Continued)

	No. of Fires	Damage to Buildings	Damage to Contents
Street	5	126	6
Chicken brooders and poultry houses	65	50,639	23,079
Churches	34	62,418	12,370
Cleaning and dyeing plants	27	3,401	9,669
Corn cribs and granaries	31	37,725	51,582
Creameries, and cream stations	7	3,465	1,075
Dance halls	6	27,195	7,010
Depots and freight houses	7	680	3,500
Dwellings—Farm	533	1,394,760	373,911
Town	3,063	972,550	356,707
Elevators and seed houses	22	121,743	33,467
Engine and boiler rooms	5	600	12,545
Factories, various kinds	35	104,730	144,700
Filling stations and oil storage	21	16,315	8,736
Foundries	5	6,519	3,500
Garages—Private	187	44,159	70,361
Public	66	107,366	108,306
Hay, grain, straw and meadow	39	19,955	14,644
Hospitals	2	327,902	3,625
Hotels	41	327,902	180,971
Houses—Apartments, flats, etc.	107	59,082	18,260
Hog	11	5,855	3,750
Ice	11	8,585	4,673
Junk yards	9	1,491	1,279
Old people and orphans	5	1,235	50
Summer, wash and kitchen	10	1,285	856
Laundries	14	3,069	2,125
Lodge halls	14	8,518	8,256
Lumber yards	14	51,731	151,421
Marble works	5	3,666	3,402
Mills—Flour and feed	10	218,649	78,077
Hemp, planing, and paper	4	31	829
Office and office buildings	87	221,125	200,669
Packing plants and stock yards	10	12,392	6,405
Pool halls and bowling alleys	22	11,998	9,928
Post offices	3	550	350
Poles, telegraph and telephone	8	0	1,110
Printing plants	14	7,854	20,711
Public buildings	23	9,698	1,583
Pump houses	8	4,685	12,430
Restaurants and soft drinks	76	71,046	72,685
School houses	47	199,809	34,034
Sheds, coal, wood, etc.	80	8,532	3,473
Shops—Barber	24	9,430	10,980
Blacksmith	11	2,200	2,134
Electric and equipment	11	2,831	7,779
Harness	7	5,150	4,580
Machine	8	7,331	10,381
Meat	23	9,640	9,650
Paint	6	1,580	1,334
Plumbing	3	2,010	1,500
Shoe repair	6	859	1,396
Tailor	10	4,055	5,069
Stores—Clothing	22	29,296	131,279
Confectionery	11	7,028	7,729
Drug	24	52,448	97,846
Dry goods and general merchandise	73	210,935	528,774
Flour and feed	4	530	935
Furniture and carpet	17	83,980	156,050
Grocery	67	40,268	154,150
Hardware and implements	16	39,764	59,807
Millinery	6	5,830	17,224
Shoe	11	7,668	48,113
Various kinds, combined	3	1,096	11,019
Theatres	22	32,005	17,438
Warehouses—and storage	80	16,332	86,381
Miscellaneous	69	79,535	274,041
Total	6,118	\$5,643,172	\$9,061,710
Grand total			5,640,172
			\$9,724,482

TABLE NO. III

Containing a Summary of the Origin of the Various Fires Reported, the Number of Each, and the Damage to the Buildings and Contents, for the Year 1925.

Causes	No. of Fires	Loss
Acetylene explosion	3	\$ 58,830
Adjoining	361	1,179,145
Ashes or coals against wood	37	5,745
Automobile backfire	67	66,813
Blow and oil torches	17	15,062
Bonfires, rubbish and grass	197	65,790
Brooder lamps and stoves	30	33,256
Candle and lamp carelessness	36	28,532
Children playing with matches	93	52,148
Cleaning clothes at home with gasoline	10	10,339
Clothing and bedding too near stovepipe	21	10,756
Curtains blowing into flame	9	1,752
Defective auto wiring	100	39,595
Defective electric appliances	11	16,613
Defective electric wires	199	411,181
Defective fire places	17	4,863
Defective flues	399	630,282
Defective and overheated heating plants	177	223,684
Defective oil burners (domestic)	31	30,174
Defective oil and gasoline stoves	159	93,463
Defective pipes to stoves	98	84,985
Electric irons with current left on	24	8,347
Films	6	11,668
Fireworks	18	7,946
Gasoline or coal oil to start fires in stoves	11	12,931
Gasoline and volatile oil explosions	86	273,226
Grease, paint, tar, boiling over	25	9,856
Incendary	96	168,591
Lightning, no rods	161	518,374
Lightning, rodged	3	6,600
Lightning, running in on wires	3	6,466
Match carelessness	62	27,747
Smokers' carelessness	164	111,162
Sparks from engines and locomotives	40	49,147
Sparks from stoves and fireplaces	2,011	885,606
Spontaneous Combustion: coal, coke and dust	13	8,468
Hay and straw	13	28,712
Only rags and rubbish	59	180,661
Thawing water pipes	74	132,712
Unknown	10	730
Miscellaneous	1,079	4,010,836
Total	75	211,076
	6,118	\$9,724,482