

State Fire Marshal Sherwood Brockwell Dies, 1953

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On Tuesday, June 2, 1953, State Fire Marshal Sherwood Brockwell died at the age of 67. He had been ill for nearly five years, following a serious operation, though had continued working nearly to the end of his life. He died at 1:15 a.m. at his home on West Hargett Street. He was the State Fire Marshal, having served for 39 years. He was appointed on August 1, 1914, by Col. James D. Young, then Commissioner of Insurance. Brockwell was the nation's oldest fire marshal.

He was born on October 12, 1885, and started fighting fires when he was 10 years old. He lived in uptown Raleigh, next door to the fire chief. By 1896, he was following the fire wagons when the alarms sounded. "I went to fires and helped some" he told people in his later years.



Brockwell attended State College, graduating in 1903 with a degree in mechanical engineering. While in school, he played sports for four years, participating in football, baseball, basketball, and wrestling. While still in school, he became a special member of the Rescue Steam Fire Engine Company in 1902. He was too young to become a regular member, which he became on January 1903. That was eight months before he turned 18, then the minimum age for membership. He also became a member of the North Carolina State Firemen's Association.

He served for many years in the Rescue Company, including as Foreman. He helped set several "world's records" with the Rescue Company in state firemen's tournaments. Brockwell became Chief of the Raleigh Fire Department on June 7, 1912, becoming the city's first full-time fire chief. He helped organize the Raleigh's first fully paid fire department. At that time, he was the nation's youngest paid fire chief.

Two years later, he resigned to become the first North Carolina State Fire Marshal. Two days after his appointment, he initiated a statewide firefighter training program. This was the first of its kind in the country. The program led to the development of the State Fire College, which was started in 1929. Brockwell later helped organize fire colleges in Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia, Florida, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and South Dakota. As Fire Marshal, he helped write both the North Carolina Hotel Fire Law and the state building code.

During his career, he served as president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, as chairman of the Fire Marshals Section of the National Fire Protection Association, as president of the Fire Marshals Association of North America, as president of the Southeastern Fire Chiefs Association, and as secretary of the North Carolina Association of Fire Chiefs. He was also an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects.

Brockwell was survived by his wife, Mildred Bagwell Brockwell; four children, Sherwood Brockwell Jr. (Southern Pines), Kenlon Brockwell (Charlotte), Mrs. Langdon Joslin (Danville, VA), and Miss Mary Brockwell (Rye, NY); two brothers, Philip and Robert (both Raleigh); sister Mrs. Katherine Covalt (Raleigh); and four grandchildren.

Funeral services were held on Wednesday, June 3, at the Church of the Good Shepherd. Where was Brockwell buried? What does his grave look like today? To be determined.

Source: *News & Observer*, June 3, 1953

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