



# The Signevierist

Issue Number 2006 – 2

The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas

## EARLY CHICAGO INSURANCE BUILDINGS

In 1812 the Fort Dearborn Massacre occurred in Chicago. The Indians were finally subdued and civilization, of a sort, came to the prairies. Wooden buildings provided great firewood for the devastating fire of 1871, resulting in a vast urban renewal project of great consequences.

The rebuilding of Chicago brought into play the Chicago School of Architecture with emphasis on multi-storied fire resistive buildings. The so-called skyscrapers or 10 to 14 stories featured the new-fangled, but necessary elevators; the hydraulic version in the 1870's, and the electric type of the 1880's by a German inventor Ernst von Siemens. Innovation had to be the key, as Chicago did not have solid bedrock to build on, only sand or clay as a base. The solution was to pound wooden pilings into the ground and make thick rafts of layers of timber, concrete and iron beams. These massive foundations are still supporting some old Chicago buildings with no apparent settling problems, even after some 100 years.

The Home Insurance Company building erected in 1884 was the world's first iron and steel framed edifice. The architect-engineer was William Jenney who previously built bridges for the Union Army. In his book "Lost Chicago," author David Lowe states that it was Jenney who was the pioneer who anticipated the modern skyscraper. Jenney showed that it was possible to erect buildings of great heights and to replace brick and stone walls with thin curtain walls and larger windows. It took a long time for architects to realize the possibilities of this kind of construction. Architects still lament the fact that the Home Insurance building was demolished in the name of progress. The building was leveled in 1931 and the Home never again owned a building in Chicago.

One year after the Home Insurance Company put up their building the Royal Insurance Company, Liverpool, England, erected their ten story building at a cost of over one million dollars. The structure was remodeled in 1897 and torn down in 1920. I imagine the Royal would like to have just the land back as it and the adjoining land is now occupied by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago and worth millions.

Another major insurer in Chicago is the Hartford Insurance Company, who rented the Montauk building, built by Burnham and Root in 1882. It was another famous skyscraper that met the wreckers' ball in 1902 to be replaced at the site by the First National Bank of Chicago.

### Sources:

*Lost Chicago*, David Lowe

*Old Chicago Houses*, John Drury

*History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago*, Frank A. Randall

Carl Buerger

## PROVIDENCE WASHINGTON'S AMERICAN FIRE MARK

In his *Footprints of Assurance*, Alwin Bulau recounts on pages 32 and 33 the frugality of John Brown in his recommendation for low salaries for officers of the Providence Insurance Company. Bulau imputes this "conservatism" to the fact that the new company formed by the merger of the Providence Insurance Company and the Washington Insurance Company "failed to issue a fire mark in America." The new company did, however, issue fire marks in Spanish and Chinese for use in Latin America and China, respectively.

While visiting the Baltimore Equitable Society new offices, Peter Faber and I spotted a mint black and gold Providence Washington Insurance Company mark in English hanging on the wall of their new office. Having recently done a survey of American insurers issuing marks outside the United States, I recalled that the Providence Washington did not have a recorded American fire mark. Well, it appears they did!

The newly found mark is included in this issue as an update for your Addendum. Thanks to the Baltimore Equitable Society for letting us photograph the mark.

Bob Shea

## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HOME"

This issue's "Home" insurance company is the "Oakland Home Insurance Company," Oakland, CA, which was incorporated in 1880 and reinsured in 1894 by the Fireman's Fund.



## THIS AND THAT

The Autumn Meeting of the English FMC will be held on October 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> 2006 in Portsmouth, England. For more information, please contact our Secretary, Dave Oldham.

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The Smithsonian Institute has a fine article on their website about CIGNA's donation of their firematic and marine collection. The site's long address is: <http://www.history.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibition.cfm?key=38&exkey=676>.

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Plan now to also attend the FMCA 2007 convention in Louisville, Kentucky, The Gateway to the South, October 25-28, 2007.

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Two additional pages for your Addendum are enclosed. A new company's mark, Kansas Farmers Alliance Insurance Company, US-KB-1 and a correction for Bulau's 140.

## ADDENDUM UPDATE

US-QA-1 & 2 in the Addendum are incorrectly identified as "marks issued by a source not listed in Bulau." The Farmers and Merchants Insurance Company, Bulau #324, issued the marks.

The measurements of QA-1, 7" x 3 1/2", differ slightly from B324, 6 3/4" x 3 3/4", and should be identified as 324-V-A. Since the length of QA-2 is the same as B324, it is mostly the same height and not a variant

Bob Shea

A black and white illustration of a hand holding a white rectangular card. The background is a dark, stippled oval shape. The card contains the following text:

**YOUR INVITATION  
TO THE  
34<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
FNICA CONVENTION**

SEE REVERSE FOR DETAILS

## UPCOMING FMCA CONVENTION

Williamsburg, Virginia, is the meeting site of the FMCA Convention on October 26-29, 2006.

Headquarters for this convention will be the Best Western - Patrick Henry Hotel and Convention Center which is walking distance across the street from the east end of Colonial Williamsburg.

We'll have a Ghost Walk of Colonial Williamsburg on Thursday night the 26<sup>th</sup>; sightseeing on Friday the 27<sup>th</sup>; meeting, auction and banquet on Saturday the 28<sup>th</sup> and farewells on Sunday morning the 29<sup>th</sup>. There will be a Silent Auction and surprises throughout the Convention.

What has become a "new" tradition, the Silent Auction managed by Linda Anderberg, and the "old" tradition, the Saturday Auction, will be the big events. There is a large room for the Board Meeting, which will also serve as our Hospitality area. A large banquet room is nearby and will serve as our auction and meeting room.

We are encouraging guests to come early and/or stay later. There are gazillion outlets and there are places to visit such as The Williamsburg Winery, The College of William and Mary, the Muscarelle Art Museum, the Schwerm Library. (Unfortunately, the Busch Gardens wonderful roller coasters will have already closed for the season.) President's Park and Richmond are 50 miles west; Norfolk is 50 miles east; and Yorktown is in between. Jamestown is only about 7 miles away and a free ferry from Jamestown to Surry takes 20 minutes and connects with places like Bacon's Castle and Smithfield. Along Virginia Byway Hwy 5 are several plantations, Evelynton, Shirley and Berkeley, to name a few.

Besides the events in Williamsburg, Jamestown will be preparing to celebrate its 400th anniversary as the first English Colony in America. Many special exhibits are already in place. Yorktown will be celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle that ended the Revolutionary War. There is no place one can step around here without touching something that isn't related to Colonial or Revolutionary history.

Our motel is an older motel but the most convenient to the Colonial area. Included is FREE parking and Continental breakfast. Rates will be in the area of \$80-depending on taxes and such. We do not expect them to be over that. Exact details of prices and REGISTRATION fees will be sent later. Please contact us for more information.

Ted and Keeta Hodson



Providence Washington Insurance Company  
Providence, RI 1815 -

Material: Tinned sheet iron

Size: 6 3/4" x 3 5/16"

Description: Rectangular. Border, lines and "Providence / Washington / Providence R I / organized / 1799" gold on a black background. Mounting holes in all four corners.

Note: The company is a result of the 1815 merger of the Providence Insurance Company and the Washington Insurance Company, which were incorporated in Rhode Island in 1799 and 1800, respectively.

Credit: Collection of the Baltimore Equitable Society  
Peter Faber & Bob Shea

"Footprints of Assurance" attributes this mark to the Windham County Mutual Fire Insurance Company, Bellows Falls, Vermont. Research shows that the Windham was located in Brooklyn, Conn., 1826-1906.

This type of mark is common to Connecticut mutual insurance companies. Other examples are:

Greenwood Mutual Fire Insurance Company, B119;  
Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company, B120-121;  
Litchfield Mutual Fire Insurance Company, B151;  
Middlesex Mutual Assurance Company, B133 &  
Tolland County Mutual Fire Insurance Company, US-TA-1.

Credit: Bob Shea  
May 2006



Kansas Farmers Alliance Insurance Company  
McPherson, KS, 1889 - presently under the name of  
the "Farmers Alliance Mutual Insurance Company"

Material: Stamped light tin

Size: 7 15/16" x 3 3/8"

Description: Rectangular. Silver border and lettering on a black background. While "Farmers Alliance" is raised, the words "Fire," "Wind" and "McPherson, Kans." are not. Mounting holes are in each corner.

Credit: Peter Faber