



# The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas

## THE NEW YORK CITY FIRE MUSEUM AND THE FIRE MARK CIRCLE OF THE AMERICAS IN PARTNERSHIP

### BACKGROUND

SIX MONTHS AGO the Curator of the NYCFM, Damon Campagna, reached out to the President of the FMCA, Linda Anderberg. He told Linda that over the past 18 months the Museum identified and digitally photographed over 2,000 individual fire marks. While some records were matched to the plates in *Footprints of Assurance*, the bulk of the collection was not. Although the fire mark photos have high color resolution, the actual documentation left something to be desired as most descriptions were cursory provided by student interns. There were problems of incorrect material composition, dates and transcription errors. Also, the museum suspected a number of the marks were reproductions.

While the Museum wished to make this fire mark resource as accurate and informative as possible, they were unable to devote the resources to provide proper documentation due to the large number of fire marks and their limited staffing. Because the Museum was going to release the entire collection of over 7,000 objects to the public over the next few months, they were reaching out of the FMCA members for help.

After acknowledging the email and thanking Mr. Campagna for thinking of the FMCA, Linda forwarded the emails to me.

### THE CORRECTIONS

I introduced myself by email and later phoned Damon. I said that I would contact a few members to get their ideas on how to support the project. After visiting the Museum in late January 2010 to discuss what and how to enter such items as Bulau number, "Place of Origin," "Description" and search capabilities, Bill Evenden and I got busy. Rather than sending in the changes for each record individually using the museum's email, Bill and I did the changes by country/company/city/state.

At this point, with Bill Evenden doing the foreign and I doing the United States, with Peter Faber's assistance, the following countries/states are complete:

Foreign: Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Barbados, British Guiana, Canada, Cyprus, Germany, India, Indo-China, New Zealand, Philippines, Reunion and Switzerland. Also, Bill has done the following British marks, Bulau 513 to Bulau 787.

United States: Forty-one states, including Ohio and Pennsylvania.

## **THE CHANGES**

Since the museum had a limited staff, Bill and I were submitting changes faster than the Museum was able handle them. In addition, some of the changes were involved and required someone to pull the mark and answer additional questions. This did not even consider the questionable measurements, composition of the mark or basic changes and suggestions Bill and I had made to improve the information in each record.

Some considerations we suggested the NYCFM needed to address were:

- The importance of standardizing the “Place of Origin” so that cities, states and countries could be searched.
- Show the Bulau number for each mark. This is now shown in “Other number.” While marks can be searched using the Bulau number, it takes a bit of doing. This is a work in progress.
- A new field, “Insurance Company Name” has been added to each record.
- Dates of issue, where known, should be added.

Suffice it to say, at this point not all these suggestions are incorporated in every record and all records have yet to be reviewed.

## **ADDITIONAL FMCA SUPPORT**

In March I wrote to the FMCA Board of Directors to support the efforts of Bill, Peter and myself to make this database accurate and informative for FMCA membership as well as the general public. I believed that this was an opportunity to make a major and significant contribution to the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas’ objective “of exchanging, recording information, and for the preservation of relics of the early days of fire insurance.” [From our application] To that end, I requested that the FMCA authorize a financial grant to the New York City Fire Museum to do the data entry.

The board authorized a \$3,000 grant, of which \$1,000 was sent immediately.

## **RESULTS SO FAR**

Results so far are quite favorable. The database is more informative and accurate, and getting better each week. Nomenclature in records is improving. Questions involving software are being handled. The data entry persons are better able to answer questions about composition, measurement and subtle differences. (Bulau’s distinctions between marks can be quite subtle and can be ascertained only by looking at mark(s).

Below is the URL for the Museum’s catalog, which the Museum has given permission to release to our members – the URL is not available to the general public at this time.

<http://nycfiremuseum.pastperfect-online.com/>

**NOTE** When you open the Museum’s URL, take a look at the bottom of the page. The FMCA is acknowledged with the phrase:

“Additional support and funding provided by The Fire Mark Circle of the Americas.”

Note the FMCA’s logo on the page and that this is a direct link to our website. This phrase is on the bottom of the Museum’s over 7,000 records.

Press the "Keyword Search" button and type in the words "fire mark", be sure to use the quotes. Press the SEARCH button and then press "Yes."

## **CONCLUSION**

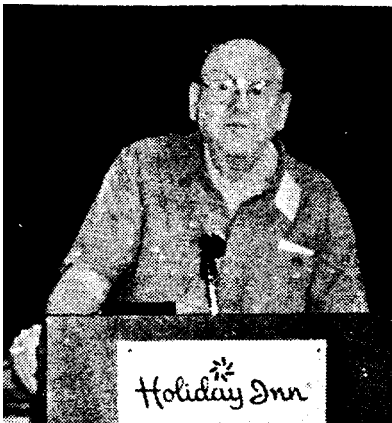
While there is a great deal of work to be done, all the hard and tedious work, for both the FMCA and the NYCFM, appears to be paying off. The database is something we both can be proud of. It is a project that enhances the NYCFM and brings recognition to the FMCA.

I'm sure that Mr. Bulau would approve.

Bob Shea

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## **IN MEMORIUM**



**I**T IS with a heavy heart that I inform you of the death, on April 1, 2010, of Ed Tufts. Ed's influence on the FMCA was as large as he was. He was our President, editor and frequent contributor of the newsletter, auctioneer at our conventions and co-author of *Signs of Insurance*. His humor and smiling face will be missed.

A donation in his name was made to the Hospice of the North Shore, Danvers, MA.

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## **THIS AND THAT**

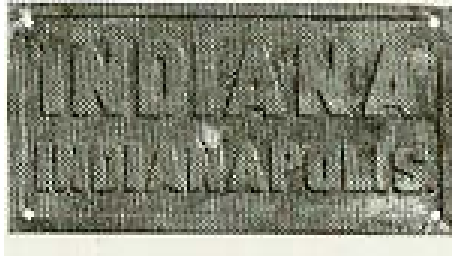
**T**HE Italian Fire Mark Circle is holding its second annual meeting in Parma, Italy, on September 25, 2010. If interested in attending, please contact the editor for more information.

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**J**UST A REMINDER to keep the dates of October 21 – 24, 2010 open for the FMCA Convention at the Radisson Airport Hotel, Charleston, South Carolina. See the enclosed flyer for more details.

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## ANOTHER INDIANA FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY MARK?



**F**OLLOWING UP on the previous article in 2010-1 on the Indiana Fire Insurance Company of Indianapolis, I note that there is already a mark in *Footprints of Assurance* attributed to the Indiana Fire Insurance Company, B208, with the dates 1851–1902.

However, the dates 1851-1902 do not refer to the Indiana Fire Insurance Company. According to the 1969 *Best's Insurance Reports: Property-Casualty* the company organized in 1851 was the "Indiana Fire and Marine Insurance Company", and the name "Indiana Insurance Company" was adopted in 1875. In 1902 the company reinsured its outstanding business and ceased operating. The beginning and end dates agree with Bulau.

Note that the company's name in 1875 was the "Indiana Insurance Company." There was no "Fire" in its name. There was, however, an "Indiana Fire Insurance Company" of Indianapolis whose dates were 1862–ca.1872. Both companies were from Indianapolis.

At this point the question is whether the mark is from the "Indiana Fire Insurance Company," 1862–ca.1872, or the "Indiana Insurance Company," 1851–1902. A review of a current *Best's* reveals that the Indiana Insurance Company was reorganized in 1960 and continues to this day. [*Footprints of Assurance* was published in 1953, which accounts for not bringing the company's dates current.]

This presented a rare opportunity to ask an operating company about its fire mark. I wrote to the President and CEO and asked whether the company could confirm if they issued the fire mark, #208. There was no reply to my inquiry.

Did Bulau correctly attributed the mark to the Indiana Fire Insurance Company but had the incorrect dates, or whether he had the correct dates but the wrong company name? We'll probably never know for sure.

While it's possible that the Indiana Fire Insurance Company issued both 208 and 482, I personally tend to favor the idea that the dates for 208 are correct but that the name should be as follows:

Indiana Fire and Marine Insurance Company  
Indianapolis, Indiana

1851 – P, 1875 changed name to Indiana Insurance Company; 1902 ceased business and reinsured in Granite State Insurance Company; 1960 reorganized and still operating.

I welcome comments from the membership.

Bob Shea

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