



The Signevierist

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FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANIES: FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANY OF WASHINGTON AND GEORGETOWN

THE Firemen's Insurance Company of Washington and Georgetown, Bulau 139, is another one of the many fire insurance companies organized and owned by the volunteer fire companies. Unlike the Fire Association of Philadelphia, the Firemen's of Washington charter did not contain a separate organization to regulate firemen. It was organized solely to sell insurance.

The company's charter, issued on March 3, 1837, in the name of the "President and Directors of the Fire Insurance Company of Washington and Georgetown," was signed by Andrew Jackson, and was authorized to raise \$200,000 capital stock, divided into 10,000 shares at \$20 each. Two dollars was payable at time of subscription and two dollars more after four months with notes for the remaining sixteen dollars.

Each of the seven named fire companies in Washington and Georgetown were entitled to subscribe to 1,428 shares, either as a company or as individual members. Shares not purchased after three years would be subscribed by the other companies equally. Because only fire company members could own stock, shares of stockholders who ceased to be members of a fire company had to be sold at the actual value to the company or individual members. The shares of members who died became extinct and the value paid to the heirs. Also, shares could not be transferred or dividends received until debts to the company were paid or secured to the satisfaction of the president and board of directors. Dividends were authorized from profits but only if they did not lessen the capital stock. The president and board also had the "power to appropriate such portions of the profits...to the reduction of the stock notes of the stockholders..." Also, they could contribute to "...a fund for the special benefits of such members of the several fire companies...as may become injured or disabled in the discharge of their duties at any fire." A twelve percent dividend was declared on February 6, 1838 of which 6% went to the stockholders, 1% to the fund for disabled firemen and 5% to surplus. Section 10 provided that any member was entitled to purchase insurance with a eight per cent discount.

Since firemen owned the company, only shareholders could be president and board members. Each fire company or member thereof with 100 shares and not more that 500 was entitled to elect one director. Companies with more than 500 shares were entitled to two directors. Like other firemen's insurance companies "...no director of any other fire insurance company shall be allowed to be a director..." The directors were elected in each company from among the members on the basis of share ownership:

- One vote for each share up to five,
- One vote for every five shares over five shares up to fifty,
- One vote for every ten shares over fifty,
- No person could have more than twenty votes.

The directors were to chose a president from amongst themselves or from the stockholders. If the directors chose a president from among themselves, the company from which such director was delegated

would choose another director to fill his place. There was no reference to a salary for the president and directors but they had the "...power and authority to appoint a secretary, and such other clerks and officers under them as shall be necessary for transacting the business...and may allow them, together with the president, such salary as they shall judge reasonable..." For the first year the president's salary was \$200 and the secretary, as the active manager, was paid \$300 and \$1 for each policy issued. To round out the charter, the company was only authorized to write fire insurance "...within the limits of Washington in the District of Columbia" and only until June 1, 1858. [Laws of the United States, passed at the Second Session of the Twenty-Fourth Congress, which was begun and held at the City of Washington, in the District of Columbia, Monday, the Fifth Day of December, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Six, Gales and Seaton, Washington, 1837, pp. 35-37] It wasn't until 1908 that the territorial restriction was changed.

Because the volunteer fire companies had come and gone in Washington and Georgetown, no doubt causing problems of ownership and management of the insurance company, a number of important changes to the charter were made effective June 18, 1858:

- One person might have up to one hundred votes instead of twenty.
- The stockholders would now elect thirteen directors and each director was required to own twenty shares. Also, the directors would choose a president only from among themselves and the president would be allowed "...a reasonable compensation for his services...in the case of death, resignation, removal or other disqualification, the remaining directors may elect others to fill the vacancies."
- Until a contingent fund of \$20,000 was formed and maintained no more than two thirds of "clear profits" may be distributed as dividends.
- Funds from profits could also be used "...in aid of the several fire companies, and which appropriations shall not be less than one hundred and fifty dollars per annum."

[Statutes at Large and Treaties, of the United States of America, from December 3, 1855 to March 3, 1859. Vol. XI. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1859. Public Acts of the Thirty-fourth Congress of the United States, Chapter XL, pp. 492-495]

These changes and others would bring stability to the company, but events in Washington and the country would cause even more drastic changes. Due to the Civil War the population of Washington expanded and many of the young fire volunteers joined the Army. In September 1862 the Federal Government created the US Steam Fire Brigade to protect government buildings, including the White House. The city volunteers were placed under a paid Chief Engineer on November 20, 1862 and on July 24, 1863 two more steam engines were added to the government's fire brigade, resulting in the Government Fire Department under the US Quartermaster General. Finally, Washington disbanded the volunteers on July 1, 1864 and established the Washington City Fire Department.

Washington was also the scene of two unusual events concerning volunteer firemen from other cities. It just so happened that over a thousand troops of the Eleventh New York Volunteers, known as the New York Fire Zouaves and mostly recruited from the New York City firemen, had just arrived in Washington on May 3, 1861. When fire broke out on May 9 next door to the Willard's Hotel, their commander Colonel Ellsworth organized the firemen to assist the under staffed Washington fire companies. The firemen broke into the various engine houses, appropriated the apparatus and ran to the fire. In order to get hose to the roof of the hotel because the ladders were too short, a fireman suspended by his legs with his head down reached down to the man on the ladder below and coupled the hose. Other firemen were seen climbing on the shoulders of their fellow firemen to gain entrance to windows above the ground floor. Their heroics were wildly praised by the Washingtonians. The second event was on January 24, 1865 when the steam fire engine of the Philadelphia's Hibernia Fire Company No.1 was used to fight a fire at the Smithsonian Institute.

The Firemen's Insurance Company responded to the institution of a paid department by amending its charter on March 17, 1866 to repeal those sections that dealt with the volunteer fire companies, and the issuing, selling and transferring of stock would be the same as if the sections never existed. Except for the retention of stock the connection to the volunteer fire companies ceased and the Firemen's Insurance Company continued to operate as a typical insurance company.

[The Statutes at Large, Treaties and Proclamations of the United States of America, from December, 1865, to March, 1867, Edited by George P. Sanger, Vol. XIV. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company 1868. Public Acts of the Thirty-Ninth Congress, Chapter XX, p. 9]

In 1957 the company changed its name to the "Firemen's Insurance Company of Washington, DC." Today the company writes all forms of property and casualty insurance in many states, is licensed in Delaware, its home office is in Glen Allen, Virginia and continues to serve the public.

Bob Shea

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HOME"

THIS ISSUE'S "Home" insurance company is Bulau's 159-162. The "Home Mutual Fire and Marine Insurance Company," Saint Louis, Missouri, which was chartered in 1845, began business in 1846 and declared insolvent in 1880.

HOME MUTUAL
Fire & Marine Insurance Company
OF SAINT LOUIS, Mo.
CHARTERED 1845.
Face of Premium Notes to April 30, 1857, \$500,000,
AND CONSTANTLY INCREASING.
POLICIES ISSUED FROM THIRTY DAYS TO SIX YEARS.

DIRECTORS:

WYLLYS KING.	JAMES E. YEATMAN.	THERON BARNUM.
SAMUEL RUSSELL.	ASA WILGUS,	JOHN WHITEHILL.
DANIEL D. PAGE,	J. C. HAVENS,	I. L. GARRISON.

ISAAC L. GARRISON, Pres't.
JOHN F. DARBY, Treasurer.
THOMAS L. SALISBURY, Sec'y.
ALONZO CUTLER, General Agent.

Office southeast corner Main and Vine streets.

THIS AND THAT

THANKS to Ed Schlesinger for the enclosed Addenda pages, 324VB and 389VA.

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According to the Memphis City ordinance passed on June 16, 1859 the insurance companies doing business in the city of Memphis were required to "pay one-half the salaries fixed for officers of said organization [Memphis Fire Department]."

CAPTION FOR TED'S PHOTO

THE WINNING CAPTION for Ted's photo in the prior issue is "Hi, sailor. New in town? Wanna buy some fire marks, cheap?" submitted by Ed Schlesinger. Honorable mention; "The Latest Rage: What Members of the Insurance Women of Brighton, Iowa Are Wearing", Ed Schlesinger, and "Sherrie, I know Ted likes fire marks, but isn't this a bit much?", Bob Shea. Ted reports that it was a difficult choice and thanks to those who submitted entries.

Fire Marks *in situ*



The Philadelphia Fire Department in action sometime after 1950.

Note the Fire Association of Philadelphia fire mark.

Photo courtesy of Fireman's Hall Museum, Philadelphia