



The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas

2013 CINCINNATI CONVENTION

ON THURSDAY, October 23rd, conventioners were greeted in the lobby of the Radisson Hotel Cincinnati Waterfront Hotel, actually in Covington, KY, by the our hostess, Jan Hardy. After checking their goodie bags and the updated agenda, people caught up with old friends. At this time the Board of Directors met and went over the past year's activities and set the agenda for 2014. The Hospitality Room was opened with a chance to view some of the Silent Auction items and make dinner arrangements for the evening. Later, after dinner, the hospitality room reopened and everyone had a chance to greet late arrivals and to welcome new members and those attending their first convention.

Friday morning's first bus stop was at the historic Cincinnati Union Terminal. The huge Art Deco styled and decorated building was magnificent. Google "Cincinnati Union Terminal Photos" to get an idea of its size and beauty. Next stop was at St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption. The interior is based upon the Abbey Church of St. Denis, near Paris, and is truly awe inspiring. The vaulted ceilings, high stained glass windows, altar, woodwork and baptistery are all done with great beauty. Check out Wikipedia's "Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Kentucky" for photos.

Next stop was a quick visit to a park overlooking a beautiful vista of the Ohio River with a view of Cincinnati across the river. We then drove through downtown Cincinnati and were impressed with its public areas, sculptures and history. Just before lunch we stopped to view the only known Cincinnati fire mark *in situ*, the "Eagle Insurance Company of Cincinnati." Back on the bus; we were dropped off at the Fire Museum of Greater Cincinnati, where we were greeted by a restored antique fire truck on the sidewalk. Before and after lunch we had a tour of the museum, which is in a building on the National Register of Historic Places. We hated to leave because we could not view all its outstanding collection of so many unique pieces. Its gigantic fire alarm drum, 1804 – 1824, was especially fascinating.

Next stop was Lenny Diaspro's American Sign Museum. If you think there is something strange about people collecting small insurance company tin signs, wait till you Google "Cincinnati Sign Museum." Not only is Lenny passionate and knowledgeable about signs, he has thousands of them. Truly something to see.

Naturally our hosts, Tom and Jan Hardy, saved the best for last, which was to visit their home and view their outstanding fire mark collection. There's nothing like viewing beautiful fire marks along with a glass of wine and a snack. They had to use cattle prods to get us back on the bus. We were a tired but happy group of campers on the way back to the hotel.

On Saturday, Bill Pope, FMCA President, conducted the morning business meeting, the report of which is included as an attachment, we were taken down memory lane as Duane and Carol Lupke, assisted by their daughter, Andre, recounted their early days of fire mark collecting. Using slides they showed the homes their marks came from, the people who lived in them and the marks acquired. It was a joy to hear them recount how the entire family would join the hunt for those elusive tins.

After a box lunch, we made our final bids on the silent auction items and returned at 1:00 for the main auction. Gabe Laubacher ran the auction of 145 items in record time. Sales for both the live and silent auctions were \$24,285.

The evening's banquet was at the revolving restaurant above the hotel with the most amazing views of the Cincinnati skyline and the Ohio River. The great food and service along with the chatter imparted a warm feeling of enjoyment and friendship. During the evening, Tom Hardy was awarded the Max Klein Trumpet for enlisting the most new members for the year, and the Morton T. Werner award for outstanding contributions to the FMCA for his years as Secretary and his work with the auctions was awarded to Logan Smith. Bill thanked and presented a plaque to our hosts, Tom and Jan Hardy. As Bill closed the 2013 meeting he wished everyone a safe journey home with the hope that all will attend the next year's convention in Montgomery, Alabama.

Thank you Tom and Jan for all your efforts and hosting a wonderful convention.

Bob Shea, Editor

P. S.

Lot 113 in the Silent Auction has been misplaced. See below:



Would those who purchased in the Silent Auctions check to see if it was accidentally included in your batch. Please advise Linda Anderberg if you have it.

Thank you.

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### **THIS AND THAT**

**CHARLES NELSON BISHOP**, former Chicago Manager of the Western Department of *The Spectator*, writes in the May 23, 1918 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue of the old insurance days when:

“The purchaser of a policy covering building or household effects would be furnished with a tin house-plate, which was to be nailed on the building insured. It was not unusual for the customer to walk off with the house-plate and leave the policy in the office, thinking the plate was the more important.”

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Included with this issue is an Addendum page of a fire mark by a company not listed in Bulau, the Fire & Marine Insurance Company of Wheeling, WV, US-FG-1. Thanks to Nick Jennings for spotting this mark.

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Found in the *Western Insurance Review*, Volume 1, April-May, 1868, p. 246, is an advertisement for a Chicago firm that made insurance fire marks, also known as “plates” or “house plates.”

**CHICAGO**  
**Ins. Plate Co.**  
(ESTABLISHED 1866.)  
MANUFACTURERS OF  
**INSURANCE PLATES,**  
OF ALL STYLES.  
**CASS, MILLER & CO.,**  
PROPRIETORS,  
*52 and 54 S. Clinton St., Chicago.*

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**FIREMEN’S INSURANCE COMPANIES:
CHICAGO FIREMAN’S INSURANCE COMPANY &
FIREMAN’S INSURANCE COMPANY, CHICAGO**

THE Chicago Fireman’s Insurance Company was incorporated on February 14, 1855 and failed in the 1871 Chicago fire. It is difficult to determine if the Chicago volunteer firemen owned and controlled all the stock of the company as the charter [1] is ambiguous. The charter says the subscription books were kept open for;

“...fifteen days and until at least one hundred thousand dollars shall be subscribed, during the first ten days of which none but firemen or exempt firemen of said city [Chicago] shall be permitted to subscribe for said stock.”

Also; “The stock ...shall be considered personal property, and shall be assignable and transferable to such rules and restrictions as the board of directors shall from time to time make and establish.”

Typically, insurance companies controlled by firemen required stock be assigned and transferred to only firemen. There was no requirement that any directors be firemen and I was able to determine that only two of the six incorporators were connected with the volunteer firemen.

Another facet of firemen controlled companies had to do with voting. Always conscious that a small group of wealthy individuals could take control of a board of directors, the firemen companies almost never had elections by a plurality allowing one vote for every share. This is precisely what the Chicago Fireman’s Insurance Company did. Since the paid department was organized in 1858, it is doubtful that this was truly a firemen’s insurance company.

The original charter limited their writing fire insurance in the city of Chicago and on February 16, 1865 that was changed so they could write insurance anywhere. The Illinois Annual Insurance Report for 1870 [2] shows company assets of \$372,544.48 and premium writings of \$221,088.22. Noteworthy is the fact that the company had no agents and that nearly all business was in Illinois. No doubt most business was in Chicago, which accounted for its failure. In fact, after the 1871 Chicago fire, depending on the source, its liabilities were \$6 or \$7 million and its assets were only approximately \$400,000.

Even though the **Fireman's Insurance Company, Chicago**, is a completely different company than the above Chicago Fireman's Insurance Company, the former company Secretary of the burned out Chicago Fireman's, S. P. Walker, shows up again later. Originally organized on February 21, 1867 in Decatur, Illinois, as the Union Insurance Company, the company moved to Chicago and on May 23, 1876 changed its name to the "Fireman's Insurance Company." On May 31, 1876 the company reorganized with a paid up capital of \$100,000 and began business by reinsuring the business of the Globe Insurance Company, also of Chicago. [3] It turns out that S. P. Walker, former Secretary of the Chicago Fireman's Insurance Company, was the Secretary of the Globe Insurance Company since its organization in 1871. [4] According to The Insurance Times the Globe Insurance Company was investigated by the Illinois Insurance Department and found to have grossly misrepresented its mortgages. The company represented they held first mortgages when they were in fact second and third liens. In addition, other securities were found to be of little or no value. The company was later kicked out of Michigan and New York and before they could be brought to court in Illinois the Globe reinsured their business with the Fireman's Insurance Company and declared bankruptcy.

As a result of all these shenanigans, The Insurance Times, in the same newsletter, reported:

"If the promoters of a company are unreliable, the company itself will be equally untrustworthy. All our experience and observation verify this maxim. The men who had the defunct Globe Insurance Company, of Chicago, in hand when it made false statements, under oath, to the New York Insurance Department, and who brought the company to a disgraceful end, have organized a fire insurance scheme in Chicago, called the "*Fireman's Insurance Company*," and we consider it our duty to warn the public against it. The victims of the Globe were sufficiently numerous and there is no reason why their number should be increased. Let no honest fire insurance agent defile his name by connecting himself with the company in any shape, and we trust that the insuring public, lessened by bitter experience, will let the Fireman's Insurance Company, of Chicago, severely alone." [5]

Even with this denouncement the Fireman's of Chicago wrote insurance until 1896, when it too went bankrupt.

It's clear that both of these fire insurance companies had little or no relationship with the Chicago volunteer firemen.

Bob Shea

¹ *Private Laws of the State of Illinois, Passed at the Nineteenth General Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Springfield, January 1, 1555*, Springfield, Lanphier & Walker, Printers, 1855, pp. 422-426.

² *Third Annual Insurance Report of the Auditor of Public Accounts of the State of Illinois, 1871*, Springfield, State Journal Printing Office, 1871, p.46.

³ *Ninth Annual Insurance Report of the Auditor of Public Accounts of the State of Illinois, Part 1-Fire and Fire-Marine Insurance, 1877*, Vol 1-1, p.4.

⁴ *The Insurance Times*, Volume IX Number 5, May, 1876, pp. 319- 320.

⁵ *The Insurance Times*, Volume IX, Numbers 7 & 8, July & August, 1876, pp.458.

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## A Review of the Cincinnati Auctions

LIVE and absentee bidding in both auctions was spirited and very competitive at our 2013 Convention in Cincinnati.

Nearly 88% of the lots in the Live Auction sold, and over 82.5% of the lots in the Silent Auction sold. These percentages represent, respectively, increases of 6% and 2.5% over the corresponding percentages of lots sold in the 2012 Live and Silent Auctions in San Antonio.

### The Live Auction

The Live Auction contained 140 lots [two lots having been removed because the Auction Lot Verification Committee determined they were reproductions] consisting of the following types of material:

- A. Fire marks:
  - 1. United States: 47;
  - 2. British Isles [United Kingdom and Ireland]: 25;
  - 3. Other countries: 24
- B. Signs: 22;
- C. Other insurance-related items [ledger markers, etc.]: 2; and
- D. Fire fighting material: 20.

123 of these lots sold, with some sales being made after the conclusion of the Live Auction for not less than the amounts reserved by the consignors.

Continuing the trend in our recent live auctions, of the ten lots realizing the highest prices, eight were American fire marks. The remaining two lots were lead British fire marks. Of these "Top Ten" fire marks, four were composed of tin, three of cast iron and three of lead.

The following is a list of the top ten Live Auction lots, ranked in the order of the price realized by each lot:

| <u>Lot No.</u> | <u>Bulau No.</u> | <u>Description</u>                                                           | <u>Price Realized</u> |
|----------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1              | 157              | City Insurance Co., Cincinnati, cast iron                                    | \$ \$3,000            |
| 46             | 117              | Firemen's Ins. Co., Baltimore, cast iron                                     | 1,600                 |
| 3              | 57               | Baltimore Equitable Society, cast iron                                       | 1,175                 |
| 20             | 729              | Suffolk & Gen'l. Country Amicable Insurance Office, Bury & Ipswich, UK, lead | 1,000                 |
| 57             | 242              | Phenix Ins. Co., Brooklyn, NY, tin                                           | 950                   |
| 19             | 85               | Fire Association, Phila., lead, Pol. #3348, repainted                        | 700                   |
| 7              | 697              | Norwich Gen'l. Assur. Ofc., Norwich, UK, lead                                | 600                   |
| 42             | 475-X-1          | State Ins. Co. of Des Moines, IA, tin                                        | 550                   |
| 101            | US-ME-1          | Metropolitan Fire Ins. Co., New York, NY, tin                                | 510                   |
| 92             | 331              | New York Central Ins. Co., Union Springs, NY, tin                            | 500                   |

### The Silent Auction

There were 149 lots in the Silent Auction, 150 lots were listed, but one lot, No. 35, never made it to the Convention. 123 of these lots were sold, and 11 of them realized at least \$40.00.

Of the eleven lots realizing the highest prices, three were reproduction fire marks and two were books.

The following is a list of the top eleven Silent Auction Lots (there having been a tie for “No. 10”), ranked in descending order by the price realized by each lot:

| <u>Lot No.</u> | <u>Description</u>                                                                          | <u>Price Realized</u> |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 55             | Brass sign, Insurance Company of North America, Parcel Post Insurance                       | \$75                  |
| 9              | Fire Extinguisher – Minimax, water type                                                     | 70                    |
| 49             | Book - Evenden, <u>German Fire Marks</u> (1989)                                             | 70                    |
| 1              | Reproduction fire mark - BU 6, The Philadelphia Contributionship                            | 55                    |
| 5              | Match holder - States Ins. Co. of Des Moines, IA                                            | 55                    |
| 6              | Banknotes - \$1.00 & \$2.00 Augusta Ins. & Banking Co., GA                                  | 50                    |
| 29             | Glass paperweight - Northwest Fire & Marine Ins. Co., Portland, OR                          | 50                    |
| 36             | Reproduction fire mark - wood, BU 155/6, Montgomery County Mutual Fire Ins. Co., Dayton, OH | 50                    |
| 76             | Brass ashtray - Northern Assurance Co., Ltd., London, UK, Centennial (1836 – 1936)          | 45                    |
| 15             | Reproduction fire mark - cast iron, BU 81, Charleston (SC) Fire Ins. Co., by John Wright    | 40                    |
| 68             | Book - Tufts & Leopold-Sharp, <u>Signs of Insurance</u> (1991)                              | 40                    |

FMCA thanks all consignors and bidders who participated in both auctions for making them as successful as they were.

Thanks to the Auction Lot Verification Committee [Bob Shea, Chair, and members Peter Faber, Bill Evenden and Tom Hardy] for examining and authenticating all of the fire marks in the Live Auction.

Finally, thanks to Linda Anderberg, our Auction Chair, Gabe Laubacher, our auctioneer, and Tom Hardy, Jan Hardy, Ted Lussem, Logan Smith, Tom Hewitt, Pat Hewitt, Linda Borgstrom, Jane Cyva, Elaine Schlesinger, Bill Thomas and Sam Smith who assisted Linda in staging both auctions.

Ed Schlesinger