



# The Signevierist

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## **FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANIES: FIREMAN'S FUND INSURANCE COMPANY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA & FIREMAN'S FUND FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY, HUDSON, NJ**

Both the above fire insurance companies were organized in the 1860s and both authorized ten percent of their profit to the fire departments of their respective cities.

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company of San Francisco, Bulau 338 and Addendum 338X1, was organized in May 1863 by William Holdredge, a retired sea captain, who reasoned that the best cities to insure were those that had an effective volunteer fire department. That way losses could be minimized. To act as an inducement for the firemen to join the venture the company's initial stock offering stated,

"Subscription to the Capital Stock of the "Fireman's Fund Insurance Company of San Francisco," organized on the plan of giving one tenth part of all its profits to the "San Francisco Fire Department Charitable Fund," ...subscriptions will be received until the Capital Stock of \$200,000 is taken-divided into 20,000 shares, of \$10 each, for the purpose of giving every member of the Fire Department (or any other person) an opportunity of not only making a safe and productive investment, but of contribution to the Charitable Fund for the widows and orphans of those noble and daring conservators, who peril their lives to save the lives and property of our citizens from conflagration."

In addition, the first secretary was a volunteer and at least 12 of the 50 directors were affiliated with the San Francisco Fire Department, two of which were current and past Chief Engineer. What property owner could refuse to insure in a company that contributed part of its profits to the fireman's charity or a volunteer not subscribe to a stock of a company that had volunteer firemen on its board of directors?

However, after only a year, the firemen and insurance men were not able to agree on "profits." The firemen considered any funds left after expenses as profit and wanted the excess funds distributed as dividends, including the interest made on investments. The insurance men wanted to keep some of the funds for future losses and to grow the company. This put the firemen directors in a difficult position. The solution offered was to buy out the firemen with a onetime \$5,000 payment to the SFFD Charitable Fund. The firemen jumped at the offer and in 1865 the legal connection with the fire department ended. [The source for the above is *A Romance of Insurance: Being a History of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company of San Francisco* by Frank Morton Todd. San Francisco, H. S. Crocker Company, 1929.]

The rest is history and the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company is still operating to this day.

The Fireman's Fund Fire Insurance Company of Hudson, NJ was organized on March 27, 1868 with a capital of \$50,000 divided into 1,000 shares at \$50. The price per share was five times the price of San Francisco's Fireman's Fund. While I could only find that two of the 31 directors were associated with the Hudson fire department, Section nine of its charter stated,

"That is shall be lawful for the directors of said company to make dividends of so much of the profits of the company as shall be deemed advisable, and that ten per centum of the said dividends shall be paid over to the treasurer of the fire department fund of the city of Hudson..."

[*Acts of the Ninety-Second Legislature of the State of New Jersey and Twenty-Fourth Under the New Constitution*, New Brunswick, A. R. Speer, 1868. Chapter CCXLIII, pp. 533-537.]

"The fire department fund" referred to was the City of Hudson Fire Department Fund incorporated on February 16, 1861 for the benefit of indigent and infirm firemen and their widows and orphans. It seems that the company was acquired by disreputable individuals and moved to Jersey City; and on March 8, 1872 changed its name to the Palisade Fire Insurance Company and repealed the payment of dividends to the fire department. In 1874 its secretary, L. E. French, was convicted of conspiring with the president, Charles Sacia, of using forged bonds and mortgages as assets.

Bob Shea

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## **HARTFORD COUNTY MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY**

Looking through the Addendum recently, I came upon a listing for a "brass" Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company fire mark B.121VA. I was surprised, for I had always believed that this company had used only galvanized iron for their fire marks.

The variant is described as follows:

Material: Sheet brass  
Size: 9 5/8" X 4 5/8"  
Description: Convexed oval. Gold "Insured Mutual Hartford" on black background. Differs in size and material.

Although the photograph in the addendum is rather poor; it was good enough that I believed I recognized the "fire mark" as part of an agency representation plaque/sign issued by the Covenant Mutual Insurance Company, Hartford, Connecticut. Covenant was the name adopted by the Mutual Insurance Company of Hartford. [The dates of the Hartford are: 1831 organized as "The Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company"; 1957 changed name to the "Mutual Insurance Company of Hartford"; 1970 changed name to "Covenant Mutual Insurance Company"; 1994 rehabilitated as a stock insurer under the name "Covenant Insurance Company".] I have seen this sign many times in insurance agencies throughout Connecticut.

The configuration of the agents sign is an 11 1/2" X 6 1/2" wooden plaque with beveled edges and a brass fire mark replica attached with two small brads top and bottom of the mark. There is a "key hole" in the back for hanging on a wall.

The reproduction fire mark on the plaque has the following the description:

Material: Thin sheet brass

Measurements: 9.99" X 4.792"

Description: A stamped, slightly convex, oval.

"INSURED / MUTUAL / HARTFORD" on three lines. "INSURED" and "HARTFORD" in a slight arc following the upper and lower borders respectively. Gold letters on a black background with a gold border.

Note: The "gold" color of the lettering and the border is actually the brass metal showing through the painted black background.

My original goal was to debunk the B.121VA as a variety of B.121 for the reason it was no more than a part of an agency sign. However, a closer comparison of the replica on the agency plaque and B.121-V-A shows that they are two different "marks."

This might have been the end of my exposé had I not recalled that I had two brass "Hartford Mutual" fire marks in my collection. I had always assumed they came off an agent's plaque, and never had bothered with them. I dug them out.

The two marks that I have are clearly not the same as the replica fire mark found on the agent's plaque. Dimensions are different; they are of much heavier gage brass; they are far more convex; the gold lettering and background is painted on the base metal; the nail holes do not line up with those on the wooden plaque.

The measurements of my two "fire marks" are:

1.) 9.658" X 4.612"

2.) 9.716" X 4.6"

The description for both is:

A stamped, brass convex, oval.

"INSURED / MUTUAL / HARTFORD" on three lines.

"INSURED" and "HARTFORD" are in a slight arc following the upper and lower borders respectively. Gold letters on a black background with a gold border.

With the exception of slight differences in the measurements, my two "fire marks" are identical, or as identical as two things can be using the same stencil.

This additional information raises several important questions.

First, are my two fire marks the same as B.121VA or are we looking at another variant of B.121? While the Addendum photograph is poor and appears to be cropped, the comparison can be made that my two marks are extremely similar to B.121VA. Again, without being able to see all the examples of the fire mark it is difficult to say if there is any difference.

Below are a number of observations about the brass, as opposed to the "tin," Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company fire marks that support my assertion that they were not produced as fire marks but as an agency sign.

1 They are always nearly "mint" and show little, if any, wear. The mounting holes are small and smooth indicating they were never placed on a building with a nail.

2. The two that I have appear to have been spray painted, (not a normally available process in the late 1800's).

Lastly, I had borrowed the agency plaque that I photographed from a long time friend and former member of the Covenant Advisory Committee in the 1970's. He was also the source of one of the brass "Hartford Mutual" "fire marks" I have. I had reason to visit him recently, and asked if he remembered where he got the "Hartford Mutual" mark he gave me. His answer: It was taken off a plaque given out by the Covenant Mutual Insurance Company.

Since I have two of these "fire marks" in my collection, and it is tempting to think otherwise: it is my conclusion that B.121VA was not produced as a fire mark by The Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company, or the Mutual Insurance Company of Hartford. B.121VA was produced by The Covenant Mutual Insurance Company in 1970 or later as an agency representation plaque, seen below, to hang in the agent's office.

Based on the above, please add the following notation to the "Available data" on your 121VA Addendum page:

"A modern mark issued as part of a plaque by the Covenant Mutual Insurance Company on or after 1970."



Peter R. L. Faber

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### THIS AND THAT

#### Housekeeping

It has been pointed out that an addition to the Addendum was assigned an Incorrect Bulau number. The editor assigned Peter Faber's variant of Bulau 151 the number 151VA. Since there were already "VA" and "VB" variants that were credited to Duane Lupke and Peter Faber, respectively, please change Faber's latest variant from 151VA to 151VC.

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Thanks to Tom Hardy and Peter Faber for the enclosed Addenda pages.

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