



The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the America

THE UNION ASSURANCE SOCIETY

While at the 2002 Atlanta auction, I became the new owner of two related objects. The first is a Union Assurance mark, Bulau Addendum 575-X-2, and the other is a mint copy of, "The Union Assurance Society Bi-Centenary 1714-1914", company history. This booklet is fascinating reading, and contains excellent pictures. From 1714 to 1805 the company wrote fire insurance on household goods and merchandise, and maintained it's own fire brigade. The following excerpt from page 19 is most interesting:

"The firemen also had instructions to enquire and discover what houses were on fire and endangered, and to remove the goods therefrom. If there proved to be no insurance with the Society they were to offer their services to the people most exposed, to hire carts for the speedy removal of their goods to such places of safety as the owners should direct. Bags were also provided for conveying small articles."

In other words, if the burning property did not bear the Society's fire mark, the firemen did not just watch the fire, but acted for the public good!

It would be interesting to find if other British companies sponsored by fire brigades had similar instructions.

As a point of interest, the Society began writing fire coverage on buildings after 1805.

Dave Wings

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## "TV FIREFIGHTERS"

FMCA member and retired firefighter Richard Yokley has written the first and only comprehensive look at the rich and exciting history of firefighters on television. Dick covers them all from *Rescue 8* and *Emergency!* to *Third Watch*, including Singapore's *Code Red*, Australia's *Fire*, and England's *London's Burning*. Every TV series and mini-series that has ever been aired on any network, anywhere in the world, as well as many related documentaries, are mentioned. *TV Firefighters* is a one-of-a-kind encyclopaedia, which is packed with exclusive interviews and rare photos. It is described as a treasure trove of facts and trivia.

It can be directly purchased for \$16.95 with \$3.95 shipping and handling, CA residents add \$1.31 sales tax, from Black Forrest Press, 914 Nolan Way, Chula Vista, CA 91911-2408 or by calling Black Forrest Press offices at (888) 808-5440. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the San Diego Blood Bank.

If you wish Dick to autograph your book, with or without your name as well, please indicate that when you place your order.

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A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME


Fire marks have many different names and spellings in the literature. I didn't realize how many until I started to keep records. Following is an alphabetical list of the ones that I found:

badge, device, fire mark, fire-mark, fire plate, fire-plate, firemark, firemarker, house mark, house plate, house-plate, insurance plate, insurance sign, insurance-sign, mark, plaque, plate, shield, tin label, tin plate, tin sign

Bob Shea

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## WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

 Not all fire marks are worth their weight in gold. Heavier is not necessarily better. An important characteristic of fire marks is their weight. With that in mind, a serious collector of cast iron marks requires something to weigh their marks, both future additions and marks already in their collection.

There are a number of FMCA members, myself included, who have purchased fish scales at Wal-Mart. These digital scales are both accurate, compared against the post office, and easy to carry. The thirty dollars is a worthwhile investment.

Bob Shea

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"INSURANCE SIGNS"

The above reference to fire marks and following is from the "Manual: Cleveland Insurance Company of Cleveland, Ohio: Instructions to Agents", 1869:

The advantages derived from placing signs upon every risk, cannot be over-estimated. It not only gives notice that the owner is insured, and thus prevents a great many incendiary fires originating through personal enmity and revenge, but brings the name of the Company into prominence, and serves as a recommendation from the owner, by means of



which numerous risks are secured to the agent."

Thanks, again, Logan Smith for sharing another piece of fire mark history.

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## WHERE TO FIND FIRE MARKS "IN SITU" (MAYBE)

Over the years I have often recalled my first FMCA convention when one member described how, as a poor, young-married, insurance agent with children, he would entertain his brood. On Sundays (with the company car, since they paid for the gas) he would take his "tribe" for a drive in the country, leaving Mom at home to rest (or do laundry, or ironing). The trips had a dual purpose: on one hand, the family had an outing; on the other, it allowed our "hero" to engage in his alternate passion, looking for fire marks. As a prelude to having three, or six, pairs of eyes (depending on how large the family was at the time) searching for "the second love of his life," he instructed everyone in early 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture. His philosophy was "Why look in the *wrong* place?" That is a very sound idea. It took me many years to gain the necessary facts. I am going to save you younger members a long, trying search for the proper information. My insight came is a "flash" last year, when a friend sent me a postcard from my hometown, New Bedford, Massachusetts. The card, copies of pen and ink drawings by Arthur Moniz of the "Arthur Moniz Gallery," Fairhaven, Mass., depicts five types of early 19<sup>th</sup> century homes. All are located in New Bedford, as well as many variations thereof, as the city was the home of many millionaires, whose wealth came from whaling. I have enlarged each, and changed the layout from the postcard, in order to provide a clearer picture of each. For those of you who live west of the Allegheny Mountains and come east looking for fire marks, I recommend you carry this report with you to aid in your search. **GOOD LUCK.** (Most of the marks have long since been removed, so you would probably do better at flea markets.)

Jim Giles

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"FIRE MARK POLICE"

*"Outstanding 1860's Vintage Firemark"
"Basement Discovery!!!"*

"Up for auction is fantastic item from the 1860's era. This is a Firemark with beautiful old paint intact. This is one of the highlights of a collection. The owner consigned it to me for eBay. This was found over 35 years ago in the basement of a building in this fantastic condition. The piece is up there [\$699.95], but if you want the best in quality it is well worth the money."

The above ad for a United Firemen's of Philadelphia fire mark recently appeared on eBay. I sent an email to the seller pointing that the original paint on a United Firemen's did have a red steamer. I also asked for the weight of the mark.

The mark was withdrawn soon after my email. It appears that a number of people emailed the seller about the dubious nature of the mark. The seller apologized for the representation of the mark explaining that the owner, who should have known, led him on.

I later found that FMCA member Charlie Severson also emailed the seller.

I like to think that there are a number of interested FMCA members out there who take the time to "police" some of the more egregious examples of fakes on eBay. This is a real public service.

Bob Shea
Editor

THIS AND THAT

Ed Tufts' "British Fire Mark Reproductions" is enclosed as a supplement to this issue. This will be extremely helpful to identify the repros on eBay, of which there are quite a number. [Click Here to view article.](#)

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Virginia Metalcrafters, the maker of those "vintage" repros sold as antiques, reproduced fire marks from the mid 1950s to the early 1990s. They stopped making them due to the lack of demand. Judging by eBay, the demand is there. Looks like they didn't know how to market them. Their reproduced marks either have a casting number or logo. The logo is a "V" and "M" with a dish like "Betty Lamp" in the center.

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Thanks to Peter Faber for the enclosed two pages of variant marks for the Addendum.

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THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HOME"

Ted Lussem sent in the following "Home" item. It's a copy of the policy masthead of The Home Mutual Insurance Association of Iowa.



Frederick, MD – Crossroads of Historic America

You are cordially invited to attend the 31st annual convention of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas to be held September 18-21 in beautiful, historic Frederick, Maryland

A full day of activities is planned for Friday. Saturday's business meeting will conclude with a local speaker on a topic of interest ...oh yes, there will be a great auction Saturday afternoon.


Frederick is located about an hour from the Baltimore-Washington International Airport and Dulles International Airport. Check with the airlines now for the best airfares.

And for those with extra time, either before or after the convention, nearby Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD holds many attractions.

Watch for details in a separate mailing shortly and the registration material in early July.

Ed Grandi
2003 Convention Chair

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**By the time you receive this issue of the newsletter you should have already sent in your list of firematic/insurance items to Joe Gundermann for the mid-year sale. Whether or not there is a sale depends on the members' response. Let's hope there were enough responses to justify a sale.**

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2002 ATLANTA AUCTION PRICES

Item – sold for:

1-pass	2-pass	3-20	4-140	5-25	6-85	7-50	8-pass	9-pass	10-95
11-pass	12-pass	13-800	14-850	15-pass	16-pass	17-pass	18-100	19-pass	20-260
21-800	22-110	23-125	24-200	25-90	26-90	27-pass	28-575	29-55	30-10
31-pass	32-pass	33-250	35-30	36-pass	37-50	38-15	39-30	40-425	41-140
42-60	43-30	44-55	45-175	46-250	47-pass	48-5	49-75	50-40	51-375
52-325	53-275	54-165	55-90	56-80	57-40	58-10	59-5	60-700	61-5
62-120	63-40	64-50	65-50	66-pass	67-pass	69-385	70-75	71-w	72-pass
73-95	74-155	75-135	76-95	77-545	78-225	79-45	80-25	81-w	82-45
83-60	84-85	85-60	86-70	87-40	88-105	89-60	90-10	91-60	92-25
93-pass	94-35	95-30	96-pass	97-45	98-120	99-40	101-30	102-30	103-35
105-80	106-90	107-190	108-25	109-120	110-60	111-130	112-55	113-pass	114-pass
115-25	116-135	117-35	118-645	119-pass	120-pass	121-pass	122-pass	123-90	124-pass
125-pass	126-10	127-25	128-160	129-110	130-60	131-20	132-pass	133-150	134-30
135-230	136-pass	137-25	138-45	139A-25	140-190				

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**FIREMEN'S MUSTER**

**Question – "What in tarnation is a muster?"**

According to "Mr. Webster" a muster is a verb meaning to gather, or collect. Years ago, it was common for the local military to assemble for training. This was referred to, "as the mustering of the troops."

How and when did musters become a function of the fire service?

First, firemen's musters seem to be indigenous to the eastern part of the country, particularly New England. Secondly, as time went by and the country developed, the practice of musters expanded accordingly.

How did musters start and what precipitated this unique form of competition?

From my research, the first appearance was in the form of an advertisement of an engine manufactured touting the ability of his engine to "fly" a stream over a known local icon, i. e. the local village church steeple.

When a local town became interested in purchasing its first engine, or replacing an existing engine, inquiries were made to builders, who, in all cases, were motivated into how powerful their engine was and generally bragged about the steam it would create. If there was another engine locally or nearby, a challenge would be issued to see which could send a stream over the local church steeple. Obviously the competitive spirit of rival companies would work overtime to shame the new engine in its performance.

I remember seeing an article in one of the local papers of the period, recording the results of the contest between the local engine and the new replacement.

"Our engine put a stream over the steeple of the old South Church with ease." The local engine failed in its effort to do so. This is a prime example of the competitiveness of the young locals to answer the challenge.

In 1844 in Amesbury, Massachusetts, twenty hand pumped fire engines gathered to test their metal against one another for a suitable prize – a silver trumpet.

Fourteen of these engines were made by William C. Hunneman of Roxbury, and of these, four predated suction ability, so that these "tubs" had to be filled by bucket or a hose. There were two Lesley engines, a Stephen Thayer, and a Moone engine, with two no shows.

Haverhill #1 came in first with a stream of 196.6 feet, while the Rapid #2 of Salem and the General Foster #7 of Danvers were tied at 191.4 feet.

There is a lack of information relative to musters until 1849 when Bath, Maine invited five Maine engines to compete against each other at the annual July 4<sup>th</sup> fair.

Over the next one hundred plus years the July 4<sup>th</sup> muster has been one of the most interesting and prolonged events ever held. The "Kennebec" of Bath won the initial muster with a stream of 156 feet. The "Kennebec" engine was made by the William C. Hunneman Company of Roxbury, Mass. in 1792 and was named "Experiment." In 1847 the name was changed to "Kennebec."

Meanwhile, time took its toll on musters and like a yo-yo, competition ran the gamut from one or two engines to a gala field day where as many as one hundred engines pumped for the grand prize of a silver trumpet and the bragging rights to "best of the year."

The sport found its way westward and now there are several musters held on the West Coast. Yes, it has even become international with hand pumps from Europe coming to America to compete against the best of the East and West.

In conclusion, while the rules of play may differ in other geographical locations, and the apparatus has gone from hand pumps to modern motor vehicles, the excitement and joy is the same. But most of all, people get to see their engines and firemen in action.

Ed Tufts

