



The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the America

A FULL SERVICE PROVIDER

The insurance magazine Rough Notes published its Centennial Issue in November 1978. It contained, among other items, a listing of insurance agencies that had been in continuous business for one hundred years, or longer.

One such firm, The Underwood Agency of Lafayette, Indiana, received my rapt attention. Now, I have read of an insurance agency issuing a fire mark, examples are BU 282 and BU US-NC-1. Never, however, have I heard of an insurance agency that provided fire protection!

Excerpted from my copy of the Rough Notes issue is the history of this most unusual agency:

The Underwood Agency
Lafayette, Indiana

The Underwood Agency was founded in 1865 by Thomas I. Underwood and has continued in the same family for its entire 113 year history. For more than 10 years the founder ran an independent fire department at this own expense, and a replica of his horse drawn fire wagon remains today as the agency's trademark.

The agency has had eight owners in its history. Current partners are Laverne A. Kast, who had been a fieldman for The Home; John Underwood Graham; and Craig W. Graham (great, great grandson of the founder).

The Agency's remodeled office stands at the same site today where the founder had his office building constructed in 1869.



The early offices of the Underwood Agency in Lafayette, Indiana, founded in 1865.



ABOVE: Volunteer fire wagon used by the founder of The Underwood Agency. A fire dog, "Cooley," and a driver accompanied Tom Underwood on his runs.

LEFT: Fire wagon Trademark of The Underwood Agency

Dave Winges

IN MEMORIAM

It is with sadness that I inform you of the deaths of three members' wives and also of a FMCA Charter Member. Robyn Brooks, wife of Robert A. (Bob) Brooks, Dorothy Goodell, wife of Trenor Goodell and Connie Grieco, wife of Pat Grieco, passed away on January 28, 2003, May 16, 2003, and April 14, 2003 respectively.

John Childress, who died on April 1, 2003, was a Charter Member of the FMCA. John, at one time, had a great collection of St. Louis fire marks. I'm sure that he and Mort Werner, also a collector of St. Louis marks, will have a lot to catch up on.


Donations in their memory have been made to organizations selected by the family.

PHOTOGRAPH WANTED

To the attendees at the Atlanta Convention who saw Jim Giles receive the "Max Klein Trumpet Award" for the year 2001 (the Convention that wasn't), please search your photo collection. Jim was allowed to hold "the trumpet" for only a few seconds, long enough for the photographers in the audience to do their job, before he passed it on to the next year's recipient, Jack Brunson. All of you promised to send Jim a copy of the photo, but no one has. It is his only record of his achievement. If you have such a photo, Jim requests that you please send it to him.

SHADE TREES AND FIRE INSURANCE

Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now. ----- *George Pope Morris*


 We are all familiar with the story of the origin of the Mutual Assurance Company and the adoption of the green tree fire mark. It seems the originators of the Mutual Assurance were ahead of their time. Almost one hundred years later some in the insurance industry had come full circle with regard to shade trees. The following is a quote from page 12 of the 1870 "Andes Manual of Fire Insurance for the agents of the Andes Insurance Company, Cincinnati, Ohio."

"Shade trees, in leaf, afford a partial screen against the spread of fire; plant them freely. There is safety, health, use and ornament in them."

Bob Shea

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## HOUSE-PLATES

This reference to fire marks is from page 12 of the "1867, Aetna Guide to Fire Insurance for the  Representatives of the Aetna Insurance Co., Hartford, Conn.":

"House-Plates should be put up, if, possible at the time of taking the risk. Where they are merely handed to the assured, to be put up by himself, they are apt to be neglected.

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WANTED

Besides the mark in Bulau's "Footprints of Assurance" does anyone know of another United Firemen's BU#316? If so, please advise the Editor.

If you have a numbered mark of the United Firemen's Bulau#s 310-320, and you want to know when the policy was issued and to whom, I will be happy to assist you. The records are her in Philadelphia at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Bob Shea, Editor

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## FMCA ARCHIVE PRIMER

The Sales of the Primer announced earlier this year are disappointing. The packet, entitled "An American Fire Mark Primer," contains back issue articles on the fire marks not available elsewhere.

If you're a collector of American fire marks, and you don't have all the articles listed in the supplement bibliography of the 2003-1 newsletter, you should have the Primer to fill in the information gaps.

The Primer is available to members at \$20.00, which includes shipping and handling. We don't have someone standing by to take your call, but, if you make a check payable to "FMCA" and mail it to Ted Lussem, 2919 John Patterson Road, Des Moines, Iowa 50317-3136, we'll be happy to send you a copy.

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THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HOME"

This issue's "Home" insurance company is the Home Insurance Company, Columbus, Ohio; Bulau #S 344-346. Below is a front copy of a trade card issued by the company. The agent's notations on the card appear to be an 1866 binder on a farm for \$900.



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## "FIRE MARKS" on eBay



Recently the above item sold on eBay with the following description:

"Excellent example of a 19th century firemark with much of its original paint still extant. Such pieces were used in earlier times to show firefighters that the house they had come to belonged to a family who had paid for protection. These pieces are very collectible and originals such as this are not easily found. A part of the famous Tripp Americana Collection, authenticated by the experts at Butterfields. L-11", W-7 1/2."

After running for two days the following was added:

We have received information from a firemark collector indicating that the description contained in Alwin Bulau's, Footprints of Assurance of a UFIC (Union Fire Insurance Company) firemark does not correspond exactly to the piece that we have listed. We have accordingly amended our description so that the bidders will have the option to consider this information.

**Sold for \$210.00 + shipping, 11 bids.**

This is another ridiculous example of a reproduction sold as original fire mark on eBay. It's not only the size that is different than the original, but the mounting holes are in the incorrect location and the letters "UFIC" are spaced differently. These points are noted in the monograph, "Fire Mark Reproductions." You won't need the experts at Butterfields to avoid these obvious fakes.

As I said earlier, if anything, eBay is entertaining.

Bob Shea

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BE THERE OR BE SQUARE

It looks like Ed Grandi has put together some great activities for the 31st Annual Convention & Auction of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas. For the history buff, Ed has a tour of the Antietam Battlefield and a visit to the National Museum of Civil War Medicine. For the fire buff, Ed has a visit to the Frederick County Fire & Rescue Museum. Antiquing in New Market, Maryland, is sure to appeal to the antique buff.

All of the above plus an auction of fire marks and ephemera is hard to beat.

