



The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the America

FREDERICK CONVENTION

Except for a few last minute cancellations due to the impending hurricane Isabel, the FMCA conventioners arrived at the Frederick, Maryland, Holiday Inn on Thursday with a bit of trepidation. The feeling seemed to be, well we made it here, now what? Early conversation at the buffet dinner that evening was subdued and mostly about the upcoming storm. By the end of dinner things were a bit more relaxed and people were busy catching up on the news from friends they hadn't seen since Atlanta, or even longer.

Things were abuzz at the continental breakfast the next morning. The hotel and the immediate area had little or no damage. However, surrounding areas in Frederick County did. As a result, the bus trip to Antietam National Battlefield was cancelled. Our host, Ed Grandi, made a few phone calls that morning to see what was available on short notice, and not damaged by the storm. We reassembled later that morning and got on the bus for Tara. No! Tara was last year. Sorry, that should be Tarara as in the Leesburg, Virginia, winery. That's right we toured a winery. After sampling about a dozen red, white and semi sweet wines, most chose to bring home a memento of the tour. On the bus to the Frederick Fire and Rescue Museum we sang "A Hundred Bottles of Beer On the Wall." Just kidding.

After viewing the Fire and Rescue Museum, we visited the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, which was quite impressive with its displays and tour guides. Later that afternoon we had punch and cookies hosted by the Juniors Fire Company down the street from the museum. Dinner was on your own that night, but most found time to rejoin the group in the hospitality room.

The remainder convention news is included in our new secretary's report, which is included in this newsletter.

Thank you Ed Grandi, and your assistants, for keeping us safe from Isabel, making quick decisions and a wonderful convention.

[Review 2003 Auction Prices](#)

MORE ON "HOUSE-PLATES"

"House-Plates – A supply will be furnished you, to be placed gratuitously on each good permanent risk. The advertising medium they afford will be found of service, besides other benefits they produce.

Quarterly obtain some one to put up the House Plates. An active man, with a light ladder, hammer, nails and plates, with list and address of patrons, will soon make quick dispatch of this duty."

From the 1857 Book of Instructions, Aetna Insurance Company, Hartford

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**AVOID THE LAST MINUTE RUSH.  
SAVE THE FMCA POSTAGE.  
SEND YOUR DUES (\$30) TO HOWARD GIRDLESTONE, NOW!!**  
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THE HUNT FOR AN ELUSIVE SOUTHERN FIRE MARK OR HOW WE ACQUIRED A MARK ISSUED BY THE FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANY OF NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

My father, the late A.L. Schlesinger, Jr., FMCA President from 1986 to 1988, entered the insurance business in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1946 as an independent agent. Never having previously collected anything, he became interested in fire marks in 1962 after a mentor of his in the insurance business gave me a round brass mark of the New Orleans Mutual Insurance Association [BU #423]. From that point on, we were always on the lookout for fire marks.

Having taught insurance courses at Tulane University since the late 1940s, my father also served on Tulane's Insurance Advisory Committee for many years. Before the development of the concept of the "risk manager" this committee of local agents provided free consultative services to Tulane pertaining to the University's insurance needs.

After becoming interested in fire marks my father noticed a cast iron mark issued by The Firemen's Insurance Company of New Orleans, Louisiana (1874-98) [BU #446] between the second and third floors on the front of a building located at 407 St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans' Central Business District. This structure was a mid-19th Century four story brick commercial building.

From his service on the Insurance Advisory Committee my father knew that the University owned the building at 407 St. Charles Avenue, that a developer was attempting to acquire for redevelopment all properties in the square where 407 St. Charles Avenue was situated, that this property did not fit into the University's long range plans and that the University would eventually sell this property, probably to the developer.

My father spoke with Dr. Clarence Scheps, Tulane's Executive Vice President who was responsible for running the University's business affairs. He told Dr. Scheps about the history and purposes of fire marks and that there was one on the front of 407 St. Charles Avenue.

Dad said, "Clarence, in my many years of service on the Insurance Advisory Committee, I've never asked for anything, but now I'd like to have that fire mark on the front of 407 St. Charles."

Dr. Scheps replied, "I don't know what you're talking about, but whatever you want, go ahead and get it."

And so, in the summer of 1965, my father and I went to 407 St. Charles Avenue to remove a Bulau #446 from its façade. We accomplished this by venturing out on the fire escape of that building.

The mark has resided in our collection for the past thirty-eight years.

In the title of this article I referred to "an elusive Southern fire mark". Some FMCA members may wonder just how elusive Southern fire marks are. I define a "Southern fire mark" as one issued by an insurance company headquartered in one of those states that joined the Confederate States of America.

Aside from fakes, Bulau lists 497 American fire marks. Of the eleven states that seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America, Bulau lists just sixteen 19th Century marks, namely:

1. Alabama: One, No. 395;
2. Arkansas: One, No. 472;
3. Florida: One, No. 150;
4. Georgia: One, No. 178;
5. Louisiana: Three, Nos. 423, 427 and 446;
6. Mississippi: None;
7. North Carolina: None;
8. South Carolina: Four, Nos. 62, 66, 81 and 473;
9. Tennessee: Two, Nos. 429 and 437;
10. Texas: One, No. 443; and
11. Virginia: Two, Nos. 123 and 124.

With regard to Bulau No. 446, when Ed Tufts compiled FMCA's "American Fire Mark Rarity Guide" in 1981, nine specimens were reported to be in museum collections, and two specimens were reported in private collections. All Southern fire marks are similarly elusive, namely [per Ed Tufts' figures]:

Bulau No.	Museum Collections	Private Collections
62	4	None reported
66	8	
81	4	None reported
123	1	None reported
124	None reported	None reported
150	None reported	1
178	1	2
395	4	2
423	10	3
427	2	None reported
429	7	3
437	1	None reported
443	1	None reported
446	9	2
472	1	None reported
473	2	None reported
TOTAL	55	14

While other specimens of these sixteen marks have undoubtedly surfaced in the last 22 years, it is certain that less than one hundred Southern fire marks are known today, making Southern fire marks as a group the scarcest of the three regions – Northeast, Midwest and South – where fire marks were issued in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

Ed Schlesinger

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#### **THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HOME"**

This issue's "Home" insurance company is the Home Fire and Marine Insurance Company, San Francisco, CA. Below is a copy of an ink blotter issued by the company. The agent's name, F. P. Smith, appears on the bottom right.

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"FIRE MARKS" on eBay

Recently the above item sold on eBay with the following description: "This is an old cast iron fire mark from 1860. It is from the United Fireman's (sic) Insurance Company of Philadelphia. On it is one of the first steam fire engines ever used made by Reaney and Neafie also of Philadelphia. This was

purchased at an estate auction in Bath, Ohio. The property dates back to the 1830's. The fire mark is eleven and one half inches wide and is nine inches high. It is nearly one and three eighths inches at it's thickest. The piece weighs just under six and one half pounds. It is rusty and has years of paint on the edges, but otherwise is in good condition. I am not an expert of fire marks, so please ask any questions or request additional photos before placing a bid."

No reason for the "Fire Mark Police" to step in; the seller says he/she is not an expert on fire marks. Let the buyer beware. The mark measures a BU# 315; but so does a Virginia Metalcrafters reproduction. It's not a Virginia Metalcrafters repro because there are no markings on the back of the mark.

What do you think?

Two things are wrong with the mark. It's too heavy. Six and a half pounds would be the heaviest UF by over a pound. There are no features on the back. There is no air chamber and you can't see the spokes on the wheels.

This is a reproduction that had seventeen bids and sold for \$195.00 + S&H.

Bob Shea

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## **THIS & THAT**

**H**old the dates of *September 16-19, 2004*. Plan to attend the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention of the FMCA, Columbus, Ohio.

**A** mint Phenix Insurance Company, BU# 246-X-2, was sold on eBay for \$685. Only two known of this mark.

**I**f you haven't seen the 2003-2 and 2003-3 issues of *The Signevierist* on [firemarkcircle.org](http://firemarkcircle.org), please do so. Christy Minardi worked from both electronic and paper copies. They look great!! Thank you, Christy.

**A** rare People's Insurance Company of New Orleans, BU# 427, sold on eBay for \$999. That makes three known.

**T**he archive records of the FMCA have been moved to Hilliard, OH, and are now supervised by Gabe Luabacher, our Archive Curator. Anyone wanting to research our archive material should contact Gabe for an appointment.

**A** reproduction mark of the Firemen's Insurance Company of Baltimore, BU# 417, was offered for sale as authentic on eBay. The opening bid was \$840. The mark was withdrawn after three emails from the Fire Mark Police convinced the seller that it was a repro

**A** separate attachment lists the results of the Convention Auction.

**A** reproduction of a spelled out "UF" sold on eBay recently for \$151.00 + S&H. There were thirteen bids. At first the mark was advertised as original. The seller later added, "This firemark is actually NOT an original. An eBay member has brought to my attention the VM (Virginia Metalcrafters) mark on the back. They started making reproductions of these firemarks in the 1950s. My apologies. Thank you."

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FIRE MARK CIRCLE OF THE AMERICAS GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING AND REPORT SEPTEMBER 20, 2003

Meeting called to order by President Tom Hewitt at 10:10 am.

Ted Lussem gave treasures report of the funds and monies of the FMCA.

Carl Buerger of the nominating committee presented Linda Anderberg for a two-year Directorship. No other nominations from the floor were heard, a second was gaveled and the motion passed with all in favor.

The slate of officers as presented by the nominating committee to be as follows:

Tom Hewitt, President one-year term

Bill Pope, Vice President one-year term

Ted Lussem, Treasurer one-year term

Dave Oldham, Secretary one-year term

No other nominations were heard from the floor, motion to approve by acclamation, passed.

Gabe Luabacher gave a presentation on the next convention to be held in Columbus, Ohio on September 16 - 19, 2004. He handed out brochures on Columbus and asked for ideas of things members may want to do while there. Gabe has the hotel arranged. Possible things being planned are a trip to a whistle factory, fire truck manufacturer, a trip to Van Wert to see the fire mark and memorabilia collection of the late Bill Purmort.

Bill Pope then spoke about membership and ways to get new members, attendance at conventions and the fact we need to get more current members to attend the conventions.

President Hewitt then stressed getting new members. He wants each member to get one new member in the next year and maintaining the current members we now have. We need to grow the membership if we are to survive and have conventions in the future.

The Circle will try to have a spring small item auction this next year. He encouraged members to get

more involved and clean out the closet of items not wanted and or duplicates.

Bill Evenden then asked about a materials package for new members and prospective members wanting to join the Circle. The new Secretary will make up new information packages in the near future.

President Hewitt stressed it is okay for members of the other Fire Mark Circles to join our Fire Mark Circle here in the U.S. They shall receive all the same materials as the U.S. members.

Things to be done in the future are work on web page improvements, posting things to the web page, being able to receive the newsletter by e-mail for those who have it, and those who do not have e-mail will still get all materials in the regular mail. It is hoped to cut back on some of the mailings if possible and send things that can be sent by email.

Howard Girdlestone wants all membership dues mailed to him at his address and not sent to the Secretary so it will be easier, and faster to post them to the account, again saving on postage.

Ted Hodson asked if any thought had ever been given to having the convention in the spring instead of the fall. Some discussion occurred. Bill Evenden suggested spring maybe in the month of May.

Bill Pope will work on a possible convention site for the convention in 2005.

Bill Evenden questioned the auction rules format. He thought they had changed because there was no estimate range listed on the auction form. After some discussion it was noted it had been changed 3-4 years ago by the board when Jim Giles was doing the auctioning. The auctioneer only knows the reserve price of an item. Some members felt it may invite in the IRS for an audit if the price range is known by outside organizations or non-members.

Memorials to deceased members and spouses have been set by the board at \$50.00 to be sent to the family member's charity of choice.

Those present are asked to sign cards for Al Wills, Tom Tye, Landon Alexander, Margie Marrs and others.

Business meeting adjourned at 10:45 am.

Ed Grandi introduced the morning speaker; He is the Curator of the Frederick County Fire Museum, Mr. Chip Jewell. He gave a very colorful and interesting talk about the Fire Department as it related to insurance in Frederick County.

Ed handed out copies of the history of the Independent Hose Company in Frederick.

The ladies were to be off at 1pm for a trip to shopping and antiquing in the Frederick area. While the rest stayed for the annual auction held at the hotel. It got under way around 12:30 p.m., as we had to be out of the auction room by 5 p.m. We had approximately 210 great items. The auction concluded at approximately 4 p.m.

The banquet started at 6-7 p.m. with cocktails, with dinner following. Awards were presented along with a few door prizes. Bill Evenden talked about the upcoming trip in May 2004 to Germany as he needed to get a feel of those who will be attending so final plans can be made. If you are planning to go on this trip and have not gotten with him please do so at your earliest convenience as time is drawing near.

David Hirst from the UK was welcomed and presented the words from the FMC.

We had approximately 46 members and spouses at the convention with approximately 50 registered originally prior to the Hurricane warnings, but we were spared from the big blow and high water. Tom Hardy was the only one stranded in the airport in Syracuse, New York and didn't arrive until Saturday.

Our wonderful guests from the United Kingdom this year included John Utting from the FMC, David Hirst from the FMC and his brother Basil.

Farewells were said on Sunday morning at breakfast and all were off to their home destinations.

Report from the Secretary,
Dave Oldham

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## **PASS IT ON! or Passing On**

Get involved? "I've....."  
"We've (I've) been doing this for....."  
"Let the young guys do it"  
"I've invested....."

These are EXCUSSES nothing more!

Get involved? "I've been doing this for so long...." But yet no one has seen you at a convention in how many years? We haven't seen an article written by you since when? Yes, you're involved, you pay your thirty dollars every year like clockwork. But did you? **PASS IT ON!**

"We've (I've) been doing this for so long...." Yes and a fine job you and the others have done for some 30 plus years. But have you trained anyone to assist you or to take over the positions you once held? Since Frederick, MD I have met a 42 year-old man that has NEVER balanced his checkbook. NOR does he know how! No one would: **PASS IT ON!** This is why he does not want to be treasurer of an organization he belongs to. You know how to identify real marks, but have you taught anyone else how to do so? Making a quality tape or recording would enable many to learn what you know. Those of you in the know, how about some 30-minute classes at the conventions? Do you know what red iron and black iron are? Thanks to Al Wills, I do! He did not talk down to me, he taught me. He did: **PASS IT ON!**

"I'm 74 and it's time the younger guys start to take over. Those of you who saw me on the floor in Frederick now know what caused my "fall"." I've got some very sad news for you all, at 74 you ARE one of the YOUNGER GUYS.

"I've invested....." And not very well I might add. We all have made an investment in our collections, some more than others have, from hundreds of dollars, to a hundred thousand dollars. But yet our

investments are mimicking the stock market. Our definition of an "active member" has seen us become no-shows at the conventions. We have not **passed on** our knowledge and skills to anyone younger, nor do we participate in any way, except to send in that yearly stipend. For our investments value to increase, we need new blood.

The line has been drawn in the sand, how we respond will determine our fate. We all have talents for writing, transforming VCR tapes to DVD's, photography, audio taping, marketing, sales, and **recruiting** to name a few. All are things that can be done in the comforts of your own home; you need not travel anywhere. Let us know what your specialty is! Quit expecting or relying on someone else to do what YOU think is a good idea. Evaluate and determine your asset(s) and then take that knowledge: **PASS IT ON!**

I challenge everyone to consider their membership, are you an asset or a liability? Auctions thrive on competition between bidders. New members are something we need to continue that bidding. We need competition, we need activity, and we **NEED YOU!** Give the FMCA two hours a month of your time to continue a successful 31-year history.

We **EXPECT** to see all 222 members September 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004 for one of the best conventions ever. Because we each have something unique to give our theme this year:

**PASS IT ON!**