



The Signevierist

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Plaster Insurance Company Signs

Late last year I was fortunate enough to search through some of the archival information that was compiled while Edward Tufts and Lynne Leopold-Sharp put together the book "Signs of Insurance". This contained several boxes of note cards either containing descriptions of known insurance signs or Polaroid pictures with descriptions. As you may know the sign book is quite extensive so photos could not be published for every single sign. This made looking through the note cards interesting as there were many photos of signs I had never seen before. One of which sent me down a rabbit hole of researching all the known American insurance company plaster signs. The sign pictured below is listed in the signs book as 134.10 from the Fire Association of Philadelphia and the material is listed as paper with a wood frame. On the note card with the photo is the following statement from Ed: "Lynne, if you examine closely, you'll note print is what I would call a molded clay design, almost three dimensional. Don't know if you wish to include such description or not." It looks like they decided against this description, but my thought is it might be a plaster sign. If anyone knows anything further on this sign or any others not listed below, please contact the editor.



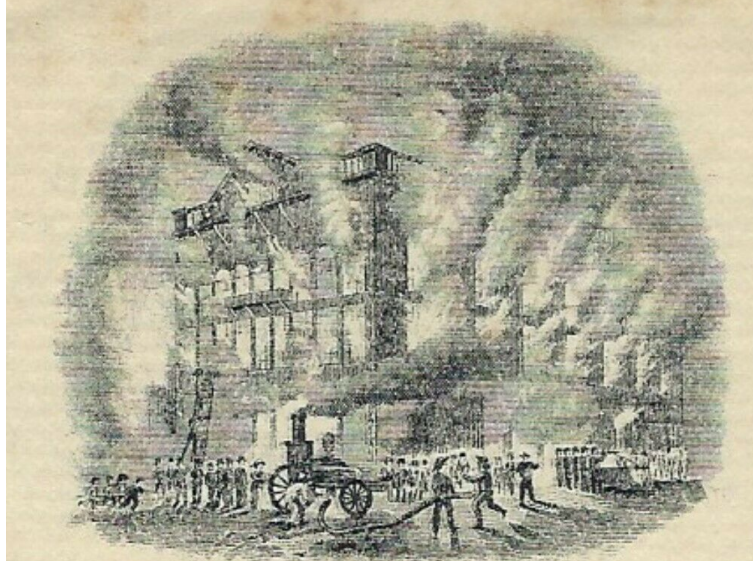
After looking into the Fire Association sign, I then proceeded to look through the signs book and the internet for all the known plaster signs that have come up for auction to compile a definitive list. To my surprise I did find several signs not listed in the book. On the next page is an alphabetical list of all known signs and pictures of the ones not listed in "Signs of Insurance".

- 1) American Fire Insurance Company of New York (19.2)
- 2) Continental Fire Insurance Company (94.15)
- 3) The Delaware Insurance Company of Philadelphia (99.2)
- 4) Fireman's Fund Insurance Company (Not listed)
- 5) First National Fire Insurance Company (140.2)
- 6) The Hartford Fire Insurance Company (171.22)
- 7) Insurance Company of North America (189.18 and 189.18a)
- 8) The Pennsylvania Fire Insurance Company (301.9)
- 9) Phoenix Insurance Company (313.10, 313.10a, and 313.11)
- 10) Springfield Fire & Marine Insurance Company (Not listed)
- 11) United Firemen's Insurance Company (Not listed)



Springfield Fire & Marine Insurance Company

The image below is from a March 7, 1893 letterhead on company stationary sent from the home office in Springfield, Mass. The dramatic firefighting motif of a steam fire engine battling a fully involved building is on the top left of the letter.



While I have seen similar firefighting scenes on insurance ephemera from insurance policy mastheads to company and agency envelopes, this is a unique find for stationary.

While not the type of imagery to enhance a brand such as the Aetna's Mount Etna in Sicily or the racing steam fire engine of Philadelphia's United Firemen, its fire scene rather tells of the mission for fire insurance in general. That is, indemnify the policyholder from the ravages of the red demon, fire. While the mission is the same today, the steam fire engine image on the letterhead places this mission statement in the historical context of the steam fire engine.

For example, images from earlier insurance company ephemera would picture a hand pumper, while more modern ephemera would show a motorized apparatus.

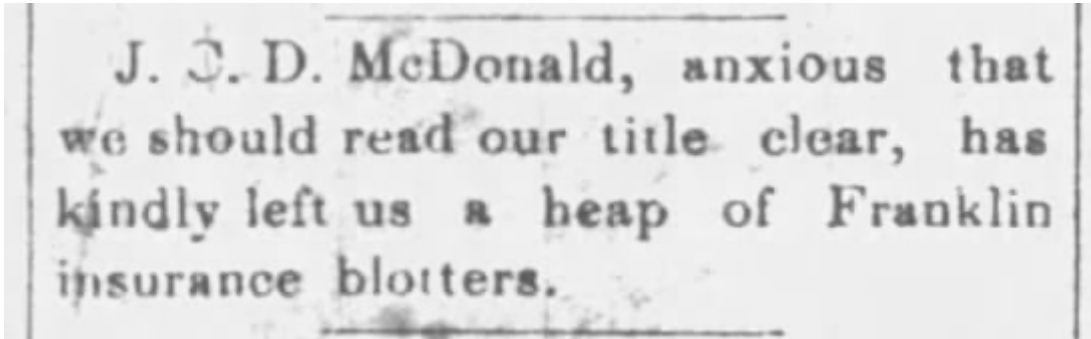
Whatever the era, these graphic images and the accompanying typeface are always a delight to encounter.

Bob Shea

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MORE ON BLOTTERS

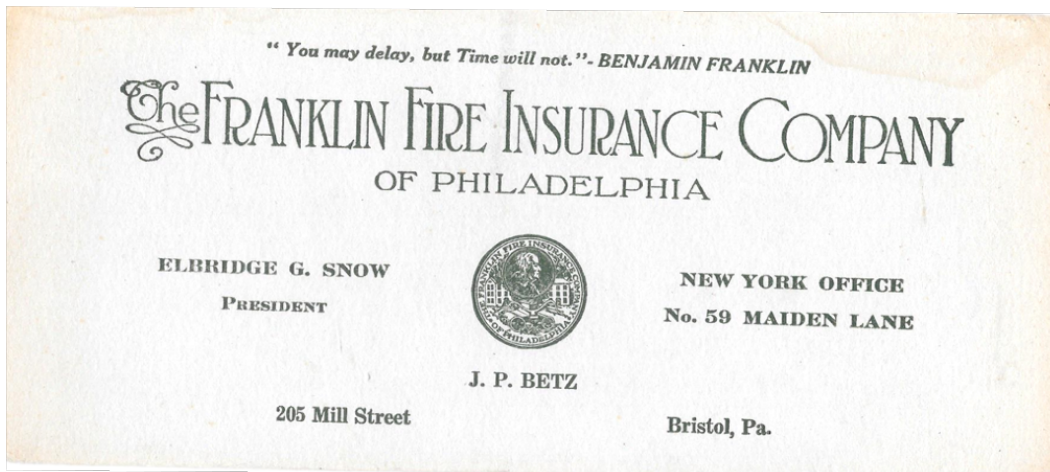
The July 26, 1877 newspaper clipping below from the *Saline County Union* of Crete, Nebraska caught my eye. Could the blotter be from the Franklin Fire Insurance Company of Philadelphia?



J. C. D. McDonald, anxious that we should read our title clear, has kindly left us a heap of Franklin insurance blotters.

A newspaper ad in 1878 showed J. C. C. McDonald represented the Continental, Shawmut, North British and Mercantile, and the Franklin. Additional research confirmed that the Franklin Fire of Philadelphia was a much advertised insurer in Nebraska for numerous agents during the 1870s.

Perhaps the blotter below is similar to the one that McDonald dropped off to the newspaper's editor.



Bob Shea

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MISCELLANEOUS

Known as fill, the following piece appeared in local newspapers across the country during the 1870s:

“A Detroit man, anxious to protect himself from the frequent and annoying visits of traveling agents and patent rights men, has put a fire insurance plate over the door of his house, a sewing machine in the window, a patent washing machine on the porch, a patent hat rack extension in the hall and a lightning rod on the roof.”

Bob Shea

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I was sorry to hear about the passing of member Dave Fannin recently. I personally met Dave at the Gettysburg convention a few years ago and he was active on our Facebook page too. He was super nice and taught me a little Ohio fire history. Below is the link to his obituary for anyone interested.

https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/portsmouth-dailytimes/name/david-fannin-obituary?id=54862535&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR3IUt7Kr9OFFIzBDx3OUjEUBryl3XzbeqhGfrl8o5jIS1Ubc-PoZAcMiRs_aem_ZmFrZWR1bW15MTZieXRlcw

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Local Fire Museum Serves as Prime Destination for 150+ Years of Rich Philadelphia Firefighting

History, Leading Fire Prevention Initiatives

Photos and video linked [HERE](#).

PHILADELPHIA, PA | March 24, 2024 – Located in the heart of Philadelphia’s historic Old City District, the **Fireman’s Hall Museum** (147 N 2nd Street, Philadelphia, PA) is one of the nation’s premier fire museums with nearly 2,500 pieces of fire memorabilia and artifacts in its collection detailing Philadelphia’s significant fire history over the last three centuries while also promoting fire safety.

The free museum, operated by members of the Philadelphia Fire Department, allows guests to take a step back in time and learn all about the city’s rich firefighting history. From the birthplace of the nation’s first true volunteer fire company, which was founded by Benjamin Franklin and his associates in 1736, to the creation of the city’s paid fire department in 1871, the museum offers an in-depth overview of the Philadelphia Fire Department for visitors of all ages to enjoy.

Housed inside a fully renovated 1898 firehouse, visitors can tour the museum to see one of the oldest surviving steam fire engines in the United States on display as well as other apparatus from the 18th through 20th centuries. Or patrons can find and read the stories of the first African American men to join the Philadelphia Fire Department and see just how far firefighting has come in the city over the last 300 years.

“The Fireman’s Hall Museum’s location in a restored 1898 firehouse and its collection of fire apparatus, unique fire memorabilia, and memorial display make it a must-visit for the fire buff, historian, and all children and adults fascinated by fire engines and the men and women who protect us,” says Robert Shea, a member of the Board of Directors for Fireman’s Hall Museum.

Upon entering the first floor of the two-story museum, guests will find the brightly restored London-built 1764 Newsham & Ragg “Arrow” Hand Engine and the Philadelphia-built 1835 Joel Bates Hand Engine. In the Apparatus Room, a collection of 19th and 20th-century hand-drawn, horse-drawn, steam-powered, and diesel engines is led by the 1858 Reaney, Neafie & Co. steam engine. An interactive fire alarm call box system which dispatchers used to alert fire companies is also on display. It shows visitors how dispatchers directed different fire engine companies to the locations they needed to respond to. Guests can also find the nation’s first exhibit commemorating the brave firefighters who died on September 11, 2001, with the names and pictures of each fallen firefighter. The museum’s hauntingly beautiful display showcases leftover residue and panels from a destroyed NYFD fire engine and a stone from the damaged portion of the Pentagon. The museum is one of only a few to exhibit dirt from Shanksville, PA, where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed.

The second floor of the museum features more displays on the origins of Philadelphia firefighting, with several pieces of 18th-century Philadelphia fire equipment, including a 1792 Richard Mason Hand Pumper, and the oldest fire engine in the city, the 1730 Richard Newsham “Shag Rag.” A premier collection of British and American insurance fire marks dating back to the 18th century are also on display. Highlighting this floor is a visually stunning 14-foot-wide semicircular stained-glass window honoring the more than 300 members of the Philadelphia Fire Department who died in the line of duty since 1871. An interactive computer screen located next to the memorial encourages guests to learn more about each fallen firefighter and read their service records and news articles pertaining to their deaths.

To help achieve the museum's mission of promoting fire prevention, there are also several interactive elements throughout the building to teach children about fire safety. These include fun activities, including practicing how to call 911 on a telephone, taking a virtual "when to call 911" quiz, and touring the museum's "Blue Room," which has floor-to-ceiling comic strips on its walls sharing fire safety prevention stories. Firefighters' boots and coats are available for children to try on in the Fire Prevention exhibit. The Fireman's Hall Museum mascot, Firefighter Ben, may also be found here teaching about fire safety.

A gift shop is available inside the museum and online for guests to purchase souvenirs to support the Fireman's Hall Museum. Items available for purchase include t-shirts, mugs, blankets, and embroidered fire department unit patches.

The Fireman's Hall Museum is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission is free for guests, and [donations](#) are welcome. Guided and group tours are available by calling in advance at 215-923-1438 or by emailing the museum curator at Brian.anderson@phila.gov. Fireman's Hall is also available for guests to rent out to host events, including cocktail receptions, fundraisers, and corporate events.

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About Fireman's Hall Museum

Fireman's Hall Museum, located in a historic firehouse in Old City, preserves the history of firefighting in Philadelphia and encourages fire prevention practices. Initially established in 1967 to commemorate the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Philadelphia Fire Department, the museum expanded in 1977 with professionally designed exhibits. Fireman's Hall Museum is owned by the City of Philadelphia, operated by the Philadelphia Fire Department, and supported by the Philadelphia Fire Department Historical Corporation.

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**Don't forget to save the date for the 2024
annual convention in Baltimore:
October 9th – 12th.**

**Registration packets will be mailed in the next
month or two so be on the lookout!!!**

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Fire Marks In Situ

While not terribly uncommon to find old photos of fire marks in situ, especially in Philadelphia, it is quite uncommon to find one on a building ravaged by fire. The following photo is that of a gas main explosion on Greenwich Street in Philadelphia that destroyed nearly a block of homes in the south Philadelphia Italian district. Five people lost their lives and at least another 40 were injured. Second and third explosions came after rescue squads had reached the scene. February 11th, 1941.

To the right of the closest ladder, you can see a United Firemen's mark and off in the distance to the right and left of the other ladder are Fire Association marks. I wonder if any of the marks were saved or just discarded when the buildings were demolished?

