



The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas

REPAINTING FIRE MARKS?

LET'S SAY you just bought an "FA". Let's also say that the front of the mark is horribly painted. In fact, Joseph and his multicolored garment comes to mind.

You have three options:

1. You could display the mark with its horrid colors.
2. You could repaint the mark in the original colors over the inappropriate colors. In the event that there was some original paint still on the mark, this would preserve the original colors beneath two layers of paint.
3. You could strip the offending colors, front and back. If you did this, then any original paint that may be underneath would be lost. Once you got to the bare metal, you could either repaint the mark in the original colors or clean it and show the bare metal mark.

What have you done with some of the cast iron marks in your collection and why? Please send your comments to the editor:

Bob Shea, 12 Holyoke Drive, Delran, NJ 08075.

FIRE MARK QUIZ-ANSWERS

ONLY A FEW MEMBERS took the time to respond with the correct answer to Ed Tufts' quiz in the last issue. The company is the Liverpool Victoria Insurance Corporation Ltd., 1907-1913. The mark and a variant can be seen in Roy Addis' new book as numbers 173A and 173B. (The reviews for both versions of Roy's book are included in this issue.) The company's name is also listed on Roy Addis's website; Brian Wright's "The British Fire Mark:

1680-1879;" and the mark shown was offered for auction at the recent FMC meeting.

THIS AND THAT

I APOLOGIZE for not including Peter Faber's reviews of "British Fire Marks" and "British Fire Marks In Miniature" by Roy Addis in the last issue. They are both enclosed for your enlightenment.

Also enclosed are two addendum pages of recently found fire marks from insurance companies not known to have issued a mark. Gabe Laubacher's mark from the German Farmer's Insurance Company, Warrensville, Ohio, extends the lead for the state of Ohio for having the most insurance companies that issued a fire mark. Thank you Gabe and Ed Schlesinger for sharing your marks with us.

An auto tag of the Farmers Automobile Inter-Insurance Exchange recently sold for \$256.51 on eBay.

A documented 1848 mark of the Philadelphia Contributionship recently sold on eBay for \$3,825.



BACKGROUND NOTES ON THE FIRE MARKS OF THE PHILADELPHIA CONTRIBUTIONSHIP AND THE MUTUAL ASSURANCE COMPANY

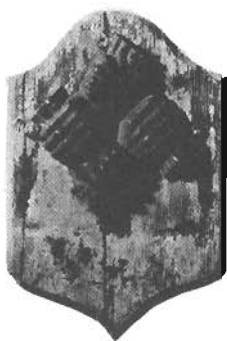
THE Philadelphia Contributionship required all policyholders to have a badge or mark on their property from 1752 to the 1830s. Thereafter, marks were optional. There was a charge for the mark. When a policy lapsed, prior to perpetual policies in 1810, or was cancelled, the company bought the mark back and reissued it by painting over the number on the wooden board.

The Mutual Assurance Company, or Green Tree, issued fire marks without a charge from 1785 to 1831. When a policy lapsed, prior to perpetual policies in 1801, the company took the mark back and reissued it. The policy numbers on Green Tree marks were painted on either wood boards or cast iron.

Both companies revived issuing fire marks in the early 20th century without a fee for policyholders who would want them. The Contributionship still issues fire marks, and the Green Tree did until its recent demise.

[Sources: "Catalog of The Green Tree Collection," Anthony N. B. Gevan and Carol A. Wojowicz [Smith]; and 1977 & 1980 Annual Reports of the Philadelphia Contributionship, Carol A. Wojowicz [Smith].]

Bob Shea



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HOME"

THIS ISSUE'S "Home" insurance company is the 'Southern Home Insurance Company of the Carolinas,' Charleston, SC. Founded in 1911, the company was liquidated in 1935, after having previously reinsured all its business.



FMCA 2005 CONVENTION SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA NOVEMBER 3-6, 2005

Bill and Blaise Pope sent information on the upcoming San Diego convention to all members.

If you did not receive the packet or have any questions contact:

BILL POPE
3755 WELLBORN ST.
SAN DIEGO, CA 92103
(619) 525-2804
bbpope@pacbell.net

Note the following deadlines:

Registration paid by September 25th is \$225; \$250 if paid later.

Hotel registration should be made prior to October 3rd.

Please check your packet for complete details.

In the 1800s, the volunteer fire companies framed in black the funeral notices of deceased members in the company minutes. It is fitting that the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas records the passing of Tomas Jefferson "Tom" Tye in a like fashion.

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Thomas J. "Tom" Tye on Monday, September 5, 2005. Tom Tye was an organizing member of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas. Even before the first FMCA convention in 1973 Tom's cartoons and design of the newsletter masthead set us apart from the English Fire Mark Circle. At the first convention in New York City in October 1973 Tom was a member of the convention committee, speaker, auctioneer and supplier of gifts to attendees.

Max Klein in Issue # 4, December 1973, of the FMCA newsletter, writes the following.

"A most unusual fireman is our Tom...in place of a firehouse, he draws his trusty quill...out comes amusing cartoons, and he quenches everyone with his rhetoric. He is quixotic...and a modern day W. C. Fields...Elected Fireman of the Year - 1972 in Philadelphia....he feels he is part of the "Over the Hill" gang. His ambitions are modest....a good cigar...and an early INA firemark...(dreamer...good cigars are hard to find). Tom is a member of the famed Philadelphia Fire Prevention Division...a division that has won more national honors than any other metropolitan fire department. As he so modestly puts it... he is an author, lecturer, artist, sculptor, historian, musician, weightlifting coach, amateur archeologist, astronomer and world traveler. "Yer putin uson Tom"! He is a prolific writer. His articles are warm, human and interesting. He records his travels with a touch of humor. He is a staff member of the Philadelphia Fire Department Museum, an indefatigable researcher in local marks, a blood hound at collecting. His latest triumph... a natural..he has been appointed Historian of the Circle. His report and slides at the first annual meeting were superb, and rank him as an excellent speaker as well. We expect a great deal in the years to come from our Tom..."

There isn't anymore to add, except to say that Tom lived up to Max's expectations and more.

Our sympathies are extended to his wife Mary Lou.

We will miss you, Tom. Rest in peace

Roy Addis
"BRITISH FIRE MARKS
A definitive collection of colour photographs"
&
"BRITISH FIRE MARKS IN MINIATURE"

By
PETER R.L. FABER, CIC

"BRITISH FIRE MARKS"

With photographs of nearly 1000 marks this is, without a doubt, the most definitive record of British fire marks, their variants, and fire plates we are ever likely to see. This is an incredible achievement on Mr. Addis' part, and one that took 10 years.

The book demands that you start with a physical description before you say anything else about it. Hard bound, it's 8 3/4" X 12", 5lbs 9oz, and 585 pages or so, it's huge. The companies are listed by year of formation with the marks from earliest to latest. Each photograph is 1/2 scale with a description. If a mark could be found that still retained the original color, it was used. The color photography is excellent, with the detail very clear. Imposing to say the least.

Roy Addis' numbering system tracks, up to a point, with the numbering scheme Brian Wright used in "The British Fire Mark 1680-1879." However, starting with the identification numbers in the 80's, the two numbering schemes start to diverge. Wright's numbers stop at 114, while Addis' continue to 194. The reason for this is the hotly debated topic of Fire Marks and Fire Plates.

Wright, whose book is no small achievement in it's own right, included only those companies that affixed Fire Marks on external walls of structures in the UK to:

"mark insured property and act as a guide to the insurance company officials and fire brigades in ascertaining which property was insured and with which company."

Anything else was considered a "Fire Plate." Addis has included Fire Plates. I applaud Addis for including both.

"BRITISH FIRE MARKS IN MINIATURE"

This book is a spiral bound soft covered book. The photographs are 1/4 scale, showing good detail and color, even in the smaller format. The photographs are identified by the numbering scheme Addis used. The only data missing is the descriptive text on each photograph. I find this to be a very good reference, and it's a size you can carry without a hand truck.

SUMMARY

Both Wright and Addis have positives and negatives. However, neither one can replace the other. Addis' book contains no information about insurance or insurance companies with the exception of a section titled "Family Trees". This section provides data on when and with whom companies merged. However, he gives you color photographs and descriptions of

(over)

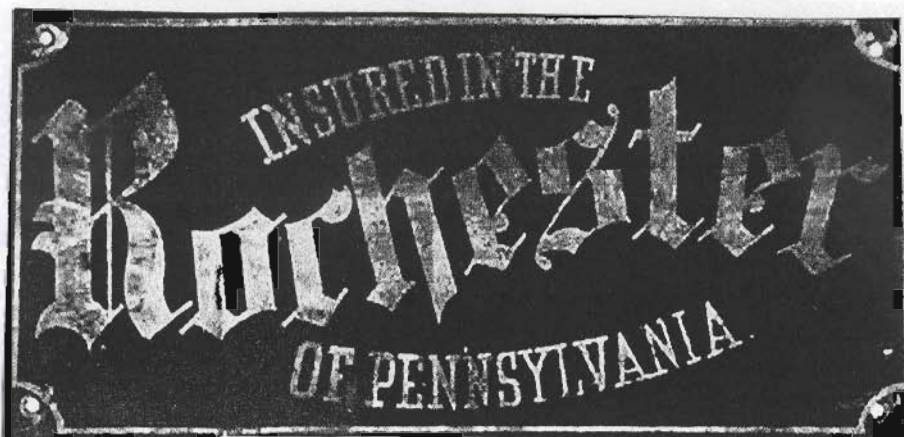
nearly 1000 Fire Marks & their variants, and Fire Plates. Unfortunately there are no measurements, but the photographs are at 1/2 scale, and can be scaled up. Wright devotes a good deal of the book to the topic of insurance history, companies, as well as to general information on collecting, care, and insurance "lore", but limits the marks included in his book to a narrower definition of "fire mark". Photos are B/W. Wright does provide measurements for the fire marks he has included, something I find a bit more useable than measuring the photos.

Neither book addresses the important topic of fire mark authentication, fakes or reproductions. Not that that is unusual, for in fact no other book on fire marks does either. With the exception of a very few articles and booklets relative to a miniscule percentage of fire marks, there is no definitive scholarly work anywhere, for any country, that addresses this critical issue. This, perhaps, deserves it's own effort. Any volunteers?

In my opinion, no serious collector of UK fire marks should be without either book. Unfortunately Wright's book is becoming hard to find, but there are still a few that show up from time to time.

In the case of Addis', while they are readily available, they are expensive. But, are they too expensive? I don't think so. When you consider the amount of pictorial information, and the fact that there is no place else you can possibly get this information, it's a bargain. Include the fact that it's highly unlikely such a task will ever be undertaken again, and a reference source such as this becomes almost mandatory. Whether you choose the hardbound or the soft cover depends on whether you just need the 1/4 scale photographs without any of the descriptive information on each mark. Other than that bit, which is fairly significant, the content is duplicated. Roy deserves a good deal of thanks for undertaking and completing such a grand project.

The Fire Marks in Miniature at 75£ is about the price of a good copper or tin fire mark. The hardbound, at 250£ is the price of an OK lead one. Spread that over your whole collection and it gets pretty affordable. That's the reasoning I used: you have to rationalize it anyway you can. I also didn't tell my wife how much they cost. You can contact Roy at roy@firemarks.co.uk.



Rochester Insurance Company
Rochester, Penna. 1872-1881

Material: Tinned sheet iron

Size: 7" x 3 1/4"

Description: Rectangular. Gold border & "Insured in the/
Rochester/of Pennsylvania." on black black-
ground. Mounting holes in all four corners.

Available Data: Very small stock company with assets of
\$34,526.20 and paid up capital of \$19,750
in 1874. Company failed 1881.

Credit: Ed Schlesinger & Bob Shea



German Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Company
Warrensville, Ohio 1860 -1944

Material: Tinned sheet iron

Size: 9 7/8" x 4 1/4"

Description: Rectangular. Raised border. Raised gold
"German Farmer's/ Ins. Co./ Warrensville. O."
on black background.

Available Data: A small mutual company that only showed up
in Best's once with the notation that it was
taken over by the Ohio Ins. Div. in June, 1944
for liquidation.

Credit: Gabe Laubacher