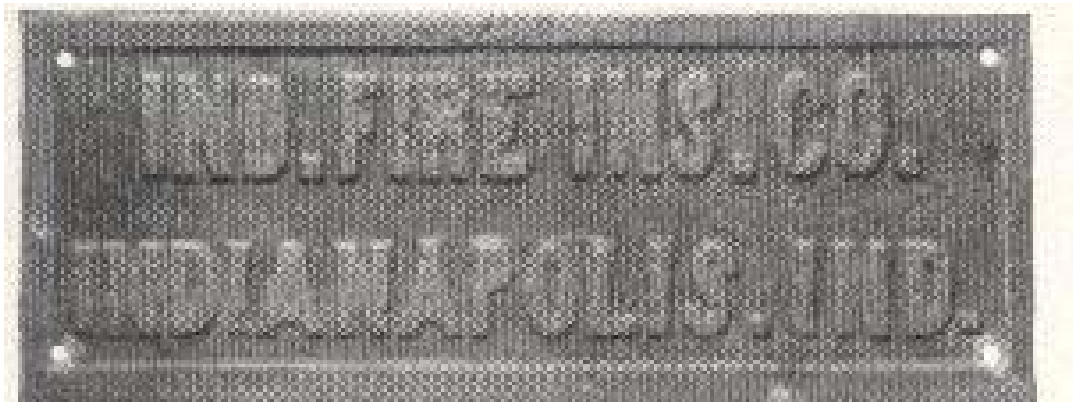




# The Signevierist

Issue Number 2010 – 1

The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas



WITHOUT looking it up in *Footprints of Assurance*, can you tell the name of the insurance company that issued the above fire mark? Did you say the Indiana Fire Insurance Company. So did I! Bulau attributes this mark to the "Indianapolis Fire Insurance Company," B482. That is, Bulau wants us to believe that the abbreviation "IND." refers to Indianapolis on the first line and Indiana on the second line.

After trying to validate this on "Google," which I could not, I contacted Dave Grider, a FMCA member, who lives in Indianapolis. Dave agreed to check if Indianapolis was ever abbreviated "Ind.," especially in the mid to late 1800s. Dave reported that he, Dan Dumbalt, another FMCA member, and a two of his history guys could not find any abbreviation of Indianapolis using "Ind."

Another thing about this mark bothered me; the dates 1899–1908. All the Indianapolis marks were issued by companies that were organized in the 1850s and 1860s. With all but one of these carriers gone, and fire marks probably not used any more in Indianapolis, why would an insurer organized in 1899 issue a mark?

Based on the above I conclude that mark #482 should be attributed to the Indiana Fire Insurance Company.

I welcome comments from the membership on my conclusion.

Bob Shea

## CARL SANDBURG'S FIRE MARK

**F**OLLOWING is an excerpt from *Carl Sandburg: His Life and Works* by North Callahan, 1987, The Pennsylvania State University Press, page 5:

“Life picked up somewhat for the family when the elder Sandburg bought a larger house, on Berrien Street in Galesburg [Northwestern Illinois]. It had ten rooms with a long garret running the length of the house. There were four rooms in the cellar, two of them having floors. Behind the house stood the usual two-section privy, with a henhouse behind it. The big lot on which the house stood had a spacious garden containing gooseberry bushes and a front yard with maple trees bordered by a picket fence and a brick sidewalk. Over the front door of the house a small tin sign read “Etna Fire Insurance Company” to show that house was insured.”

[Editor's note: While there is an Etna Insurance Company, it is in Dublin, Ireland, B950. No doubt the author is referring to the Aetna Insurance Company, Hartford, Connecticut. As described, no such mark is recorded. I guess that's what they call that poetic license.]



## MORE ON THE ROCK RIVER INSURANCE COMPANY

**M**Y ARTICLE in 2007-1 of the *Signevierist*, page 2, concluded that the name of Bulau's 219 and the Addendum's 219-V-A should be “Rock River Insurance Company,” not the “Rock River Mutual Fire Insurance Company.” Additional research online has provided more information of the company. It turns out, both Bulau and I are correct.

The company was originally chartered on June 2, 1852 as the “Rock River Mutual Fire Insurance Company.”

The *Private Laws of the State of Illinois Passed by the Twenty-Second General Assembly, Convened January 7, 1861*, pages 422-423, states that that the name of the “Rock River Mutual Fire Insurance Company” was changed to the “Rock River Insurance Company” on February 16, 1861.

Page 105 of the *Reports Made to the General Assembly of Illinois At Its Twenty-Sixth Session, Convened, January 4, 1869, Volume I* reports that the State Auditor had certified that the Rock River [Insurance Company] had failed and requested the appointment of a receiver.

Based on the above, the listing for the company should be:

Rock River Mutual Fire Insurance Company  
Rockford, Illinois, 1852 – 1869, 1861 dropped “Mutual Fire”; 1869 failed.

Bob Shea

## THIS AND THAT

WHILE checking out eBay, I notice that more and more “fire mark” sellers are indicating that the mark takes a magnet. I guess if you ask the obvious question a number of times, they get the message. I wish I had a nickel for every advertised “cast iron” mark that did not hold a magnet.

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Just a reminder to keep the dates of October 21 – 24, 2010 open for the FMCA Convention at the Radisson Airport Hotel, Charleston, South Carolina.

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Thanks to Frank Smith for the enclosed Addendum page, US-KB-2.

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## UNITED FIREMEN'S BEER SIGN

AN ARTICLE on “Early Fire Protection and Use of Fire Marks” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. XLVI, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1922, page 260, has the following:

“In connection with this company [United Firemen’s Insurance Company of Philadelphia] it is related that some years ago a well-known citizen affected insurance with them on a row of houses and shortly after, finding the company had put their fire mark on each house, wrote to them a letter stating that he did not want any “lager beer signs” on his property, and to send at once and have them removed or he would order the policies cancelled.”

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## YOU'RE IN GOOD HANDS

IN PAGES 4-5 of the *Ninth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Insurance* for the year ending December 31, 1878, the Kansas Superintendent writes:

“The “Illinois Central,” of Decatur [Addendum US-CE-1], was a wild-cat. It offered to sell out to a citizen of Kansas for \$5,000, and take the company’s note in payment. It had at one time thirty traveling agents in Kansas; collected about \$50,000 in premium, had several losses, but never paid one. The “Winneshiek,” of Illinois [Bulau 326], was another bogus company. It did considerable business, but paid no loses in Kansas....The “Indiana Central”, of Indiana [Bulau 340], a fire company, was a fraudulent concern – had traveling men in every nook and corner of this State, and is supposed to have taken \$60,000 to \$75,000 in premiums. Its statements showed paper assets of \$400,000. It paid one or two small losses, and failed, being totally insolvent.”

Bob Shea

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## FIRE MARKS THAT “NEED NO CLEANING”?

WHILE TAKING DOWN a display of fire marks at Fireman’s Hall Museum, I noticed the following 2 1/2” x 1 5/16” tag on the back of two different company fire marks:

### Need No Cleaning

If dust or dirt defaces, clean with soft damp cloth.

### **George Rutledge Co.**

Factory, 302 Broadway,  
309-311 East 22d Street NEW YORK

The marks were Addendum US-53-X-2, Insurance Company of North America, and B113, Pennsylvania Fire Insurance Company. Both marks were brass and the companies came from Philadelphia.

That fire marks had this tag got me to examine them more closely. The INA mark did not have mounting holes in each corner. There were only two holes at the top; from the left front there were holes at 1 1/2” and 5 1/2”. The Pennsylvania Fire mark had mounting holes at each corner. However, there were two additional holes at the top; from the left at 1 9/16” and 5 9/16”. I don’t recall seeing such an arrangement of holes on any other fire marks.

However you define a fire mark, it should have at least been issued to attach to a building. Were these marks issued to attach to the outside of a building? Clearly the INA, with only two holes, was not. Perhaps the Philadelphia Fire was, but why the two extra holes on the top?

I then reviewed *Signs of Insurance* by Ed Tufts and Lynne Leopold-Sharp. Sign 272.5 of the Niagara Fire Insurance Company is described as, “Brass with chain. 4 x 8 inches.” Except for the name, it is identical to US-53-X-1. The two holes on the INA mark are used for a chain. Also, sign 240.1 of the Millers National Insurance Company has a label on the reverse. Except for the “Need No Cleaning” wording, the label is the same as that on the INA and Pennsylvania Fire marks.

I believe that these two marks are not fire marks, they are signs. That is, they were sent to the company’s regional or agent’s offices for advertising display. If someone happened to put them on a house, so much the better as the company got free advertising.

The Editor welcomes your comments.

Bob Shea, Editor

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