



The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas

2009 ALBANY FMCA CONVENTION

Conventioneers were greeted in the lobby of the Hilton on Wolf Road on Thursday by the smiling faces of our hosts, Hal Sandstrom, Bill Thomas and Donna Conyer. Dorie Sandstrom was at home recovering from an injured leg suffered just before the convention. After checking their goodie bags for the updated agenda, people caught up with old friends and made arrangements for dinner. Later, in the hospitality room, we all caught up with other arrivals and previewed the silent auction items.

Friday morning's first bus stop was the Martin Van Buren Home for a video and tour of the grounds and home. (A virtual tour of this National Historic Site is available at <http://www.nps.gov/features/mava/feat01/>.) Our eighth president (1837-1841) was quite a fascinating person and lived the life of the gentry in Kinderhook, NY. Back on the bus for a short trip to Hudson, NY, and lunch downtown at the Wonderbar. Those who were served first got the jump on the rest of us to visit the local antique shops along the main street. A copper Sun fire mark was sighted in a shop window; turns out the dealer didn't know what it was and it was overpriced.

Next stop was the fantastic FASNY Museum of Firefighting. (Visit their web at www.fasnyfiremuseum.com/) The collections' manager even laid out their fire marks for us to view. There were so many unique and jaw-dropping pieces in the museum that it was difficult to pick out a favorite. I could have spent another hour in the museum. I plan to return to take in the exhibits I didn't have a chance to see.

Back on the bus again and the next stop was a tour of the New York State Museum in Albany. (Visit their web at www.nysm.nysed.gov/) As a museum volunteer I could only view the various exhibits with envy at how the objects and graphics told their stories so beautifully. The return trip to the hotel was short so everyone was ready for another night of dinner on our own and a visit to the hospitality room.

Linda Anderberg, our President, conducted the Saturday morning business meeting expeditiously. (The report of the meeting is included as an attachment.) After a nice sit down buffet lunch, we made our final bids on the silent auction items and returned at 1:00 for the main auction. Gabe Laubacher ran the auction of 101 items flawlessly. The highest item was an INA tin, Bulau 49, for \$1,400. See Ed Schlesinger's report on more auction highlights in this issue.

The evening's banquet and chatter left everyone with a warm feeling of enjoyment and friendship. Linda thanked and presented plaques to our hosts, closed the 2009 meeting and wished everyone a safe journey home with the hope that all will attend the 2010 Convention in Charlotte, South Carolina.

With everyone making their final goodbyes, we enjoyed a sit-down breakfast on Sunday. With this convention over, most people were already making plans to attend next year's.

Thank you Hal, Dorie, Bill and Donna for taking such good care of our group.

Bob Shea, Editor

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## A REVIEW of the ALBANY AUCTIONS

Live and absentee bidding in both auctions was intense at our 2009 Convention in Albany.

Almost 91% of the lots in the Live Auction sold. This percentage of lots sold exceeded the corresponding percentages of lots sold in the two previous live auctions. 74% of the lots in the Silent Auction sold. This percentage of lots sold represents a reduction from the percentage of lots sold in the 2008 West Palm Beach Silent Auction.

### *The Live Auction*

The Live Auction contained 98 lots [three lots having been removed because the Auction Lot Verification Committee determined that they were reproductions] consisting of the following types of material:

- A. Fire marks:
  - 1. United States: 22;
  - 2. British Isles [United Kingdom and Ireland]: 26;
  - 3. Other countries: 19;
- B. Signs: 11; and
- C. Other items [ledger markers, grenades, etc.]: 20.

Eighty nine (89) of these lots sold.

As may be expected, eight of the ten lots realizing the highest prices consisted of American fire marks. The two remaining "Top Ten" lots consisted of one British fire mark and a brass Australian fire helmet. Of the nine fire marks in the "Top Ten", five were composed of tin, two of zinc, and one each of lead and copper.

The following is a list of the top ten Live Auction lots, ranked in the order of the price realized by each lot:

| <u>Lot No.</u> | <u>Bulau No.</u> | <u>Description</u>                                  | <u>Price Realized</u> |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 56             | 49               | INA, Philadelphia, tin                              | \$ 1,400              |
| 45             | 290              | New England F&M Ins. Co., Hartford, Ct., tin        | 1,000                 |
| 75             | 306              | Laclede Mut. F&M Ins. Co., St. Louis, zinc          | 670                   |
| 74             | 347              | North St. Louis Mut. Fire Ins. Co., zinc            | 600                   |
| 66             | 168              | Ohio Farmers Ins. Co., Le Roy, OH, tin              | 350                   |
| 50             | 737              | Kent Fire Ins. Co., Maidstone, UK, copper           | 305                   |
| 33             | 85               | FA, Philadelphia, lead                              | 300                   |
| 32             | 353              | Springfield Fire Ins. Co., Springfield, MA, tin     | 260                   |
| 92             | ---              | Helmet, New South Wales [Aust.] Fire Brigade, brass | 215                   |
| 36             | 61               | Baltimore Equitable Society, cast iron              | 210                   |

### *The Silent Auction*

There were 131 lots in the Silent Auction. 97 lots sold.

Lot No. 123, a paperweight from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention, SFA, held in Philadelphia in October, 1901, realized \$115.00. Lot No. 127, a badge from the Veterans Association of New York, realized \$90.00.

Of the ten Silent Auction lots realizing the highest prices, the remaining eight lots were:

| <u>Lot No.</u> | <u>Description</u>                                         | <u>Price Realized</u> |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 6              | Reproduction BU 40, the "squatty Green Tree" fire mark     | \$ 80                 |
| 102            | Conwell, <u>History of the Great Fire of Boston</u> (1872) | 60                    |
| 10             | Reproduction BU 195, Eagle Ins. Co., Cinn.                 | 55                    |
| 33             | Auto tag, Farmers Mut. Liability Co., Indianapolis         | 46                    |
| 17             | Reproduction BU 153, Germantown Mut. Fire Ins. Co.         | 45                    |
| 18             | Reproduction BU 57, Baltimore Equitable Society            | 45                    |
| 31             | Reproduction BU 38, Mutual Assurance Co., "Green Tree"     | 45                    |
| 29             | Framed picture, "Rushing to the Conflict"                  | 35                    |

FMCA thanks all consignors and bidders who participated in both auctions for making them as successful as they were.

Thanks to the Auction Lot Verification Committee [Bob Shea, Chair, and members Bill Evenden, Peter Faber and Tom Hardy] for its yeoman work in examining and authenticating all of the fire marks in the Live Auction.

Finally, thanks to Tom Hewitt, our Auction Chair, Linda Anderberg, our Auction Assistant Chair, Gabe Laubacher, our auctioneer and Tom Hardy, Jan Hardy, Ted Lussem, Sherrie Lussem, Pat Hewitt, Joe Baczewski, Donna Conyer and Bill Thomas who assisted them in staging both auctions.

Ed Schlesinger

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ENHANCED MEMBERSHIP

The fire mark collecting is a very small niche in the antique world. Yet, judging by the interest on eBay, there appears to be a wider group of interested people out there. While these individuals may not be as avid fire mark collectors as some of us are, they might enjoy learning that authentic early Americana fire marks are available and meet some their collectors.

This year our President, Linda Anderberg, and Vice President, Dave Oldham, will concentrate on getting new FMCA members and they could use your assistance. You can either join them in a newly formed committee or contact them with some thoughts on how to accomplish this. They are especially looking for members who have contact with the publicity person of insurance and firefighting groups.

FMCA members comprise individuals from many walks of life and varied interests. If you know someone who is interested in insurance, firefighting or even fire marks, please reach out to them to join the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas...even if it's just to refer them to our site at firemarkcircle.org.

Bob Shea

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## **OBITUARY**

### **Giorgio Stilli, President of the Italian Fire Mark Club**

It is with great sadness that I must report the death on July 10, 2009 of long-time FMC Life Member Giorgio Stilli of Florence, Italy. Giorgio was born on Sep. 22, 1922 in southern Tyrol, where he grew up speaking both Italian and German. This enabled him to become a translator for General Wolf, who was the German SS Commander in Italy during WWII. As a result, he was hunted down and captured twice by the Italian underground during the final weeks of the war in Italy. The first time he managed to escape, but the second time they lined him up in front of a firing squad. Just as he was about to be executed, an American Army unit came upon the scene and put a stop to it and set him was over.

After WWII he entered the insurance profession and eventually became Manager of the La Previdente Insurance Co.'s office in Florence, Italy. This company's fire mark is shown as No. 1108 in Footprints of Assurance, but incorrectly assigned to Brazil. He began collecting fire marks in 1953 and for many years was the only collector known in Italy. He joined the FMC and was a very enthusiastic and active collector; making swaps with other collectors in the UK, USA and Germany. In the 1950's and 1960's he increased his collection significantly by writing to all the fire insurance companies in the world asking them for one of their marks. In those days, the cities and towns in Italy were full of fire marks, and he traveled extensively throughout the country collecting many from buildings. To make this easier, he had a special steel rod made of one-meter sections, which would fit in the boot of his car and could be screwed together to make a 5 meter long pole with a forked end to pry the four corners of a mark loose.

Giorgio always had a good tale to tell about his collecting experiences, but his favorite was about the night in Rome when the police came around the corner while he was in the process of removing a couple of fire marks from a large building. It turned out that the building was the home of the Italian President, and Giorgio was taken away to jail to spend the night. He always carried some photos of his collection, so the next morning when the police chief arrived, Giorgio showed him the photos and explained that he collected these fire marks as a hobby. The police chief then drove him back to the President's house with blue lights and sirens going and stood by while Giorgio was allowed to take the fire marks down. Viva Italia!

In 1983 the Fondiaria Insurance Co. purchased his large collection and still has it displayed at their offices in Florence. By 1987 at least 20 other Italians were known to have taken up the hobby, so Giorgio founded the "Club Italiano Targhe Incendio", serving as its President for many years.

Even though he did not speak English, he was always proud to be a Life Member of the FMC, a fact that he mentioned to me on several occasions. He especially enjoyed attending our joint five day venue in England with American FMCA and German Club members in 1984.

Giorgio Stilli will forever be remembered as the pioneer of fire mark collecting in Italy, and his love and enthusiasm for the hobby was exceptional. He was a very special friend to Lore and me, and all who knew him will miss his Italian humor and charm.

Bill Evenden