



The Signevierist

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The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas

2012 SAN ANTONIO CONVENTION

ON THURSDAY, conventioners were greeted in the lobby of the Drury Plaza Hotel by the smiling faces of our hosts, Tom and Pat Hewitt. After checking their overflowing goodie bags and the updated agenda, people caught up with old friends. At 5:30 most were enjoying free food and beverages at the hotel's Kickback, while at the same time the Hospitality Room was open with a chance to view some of the Silent Auction items. Since the hospitality room stayed open until 11:00, we had a chance to meet up with later arrivals and to swap stories.

Friday morning's first bus stop was at the largest and most impressive of the San Antonio Missions, Mission San Jose y San Miguel de Aguayo. The mission gave one a sense of the history of the area and an appreciation of the native people. (Check out the site at <http://www.nps.gov/saan/planyourvisit/sanjose.htm>) While on the way back, the bus drove past the smaller Mission Concepcion where we could appreciate why the Mission San Jose was called the "Queen of the Missions."

Next stop was a delightful lunch at the Historic Victorian Menger Hotel, founded in 1859 on what was the first brewery in Texas. Before boarding the bus we had a chance to view the photos of famous personalities who visited the Menger. Teddy Roosevelt recruited a number of his Rough Riders at the Menger.

Back on the bus again and the next stop was what everyone visiting San Antonio must see, the Alamo. Formerly a mission, the Alamo is Texas history with the legends of Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and William Travis. Before returning to the hotel we made a short trip to El Mercado, the world's largest Mexican Market, where we had a chance to buy some souvenirs of our trip. A few of us even managed to stop and sample a Margarita for which San Antonio is renowned. After returning to the hotel, we went our separate ways to dinner with a late visit to the Hospitality Room.

Dave Oldham, our President, conducted the Saturday morning business meeting expeditiously. (The report of the meeting is included as an attachment.) Following the meeting we were given a history lesson by a "member" of the Macon, Georgia volunteers in the Texas fight against Spain who were massacred by the Spanish at Goliad on March 27, 1836 shortly after the battle of the Alamo.

After a 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 145 items in record time. Sales for both the live and silent auctions were \$18,719.

The evening's banquet and chatter left everyone with a warm feeling of enjoyment and friendship. During the evening, awards were presented to Linda Anderberg, the Max Klein Silver Salver for meritorious service to the FMCA and the Max Klein Trumpet for enlisting the most new members for the year and to John Truitt, the Morton T. Werner award for outstanding contributions to the FMCA. Congratulations to both Linda

and John! Dave thanked and presented a plaque to our hosts, Tom and Pat Hewitt. Dave introduced the incoming President, Bill Pope, whose first official duty was to present the outgoing president with a plaque for his service from 2010-2012. As Dave closed the 2012 meeting he wished everyone a safe journey home with the hope that all will attend the next year's convention in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Thank you Tom and Pat for all your efforts and taking such good care of our group.

Bob Shea, Editor

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## **FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANIES: FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANY OF THE CITY OF ALBANY**

**T**HE FIREMEN'S Insurance Company of the City of Albany incorporated on April 23, 1831 is another fire insurance company organized and managed by volunteer firemen. (*Laws of the State of New York, Passed at the Fifty-Fourth Session of the Legislature, Begun and Held at the City of Albany, The Fourth Day of January, 1831*; Albany: Printed by E. Crowell, 1831; Chapter 261, pp. 316-320)

### Stock Ownership

- The capital stock was set at \$150,000 with 15,000 shares at \$10 each. One dollar was paid for each share at subscription with the rest secured by notes. Business could not begin until \$100,000 was subscribed.
- The distribution of subscribed stock was:
  - First – “firemen, watchmen, and such firemen whose term of service has Expired” (Commonly known as Exempt Firemen)
  - Second – “The corporation of the city of Albany”
  - Third – “the citizens of Albany”
- Stock was freely transferable.

### Directors

- The 25 directors, of whom one was the president, were elected by a plurality and served for a term of one year.
- The city of Albany could elect one director for every 12,000 shares held.
- Each director must own at least twenty nor more than five hundred shares.
- The majority of directors shall be active firemen, or firemen whose term of office has expired. [While there is admittedly little information online about the Albany fire department during this time period, I was only able to find one of the thirteen directors who had a connection to the fire department.]

### Miscellaneous

- The company was chartered to write fire and inland transportation risks.
- It was chartered until June 1, 1861.

According to the *Bi-Centennial History of Albany, History of the County of Albany, N.Y., From 1609 to 1886.*, Howell and Tenney, Assisted by Local Writers, W.W. Munsell & Co., Publishers, N.Y., 1886,

p. 526, \$112,000 was subscribed to in six hours, when the company opened the books for subscriptions on January 1, 1832. The company never wrote more than \$30,000 a year in premiums and on August 17, 1848 a \$5 Million conflagration in Albany caused \$90,000 in losses, such that its capital was reduced below the \$100,000 required. A January 18, 1849 call for the stockholders to make up the difference was not answered and business was suspended.

Bob Shea

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VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANIES AND REWARDS

“When a fire shall occur within the limits of the Village, the engine or hose company which shall throw the first stream of water upon the fire shall be entitled to a premium of seven dollars from the Village, and the engine or hose company which shall throw the second stream of water upon the fire as aforesaid, shall be entitled to five dollars from the Village, to be paid when certified by the Chief Engineer; provided, however, that a hook and ladder company which shall be present with its truck and raise a ladder upon the building where the fire is, before an engine or hose company shall throw a stream of water on the same, shall be entitled to first premium; or if said hook and ladder company shall raise a ladder on such building before the second stream of water is thrown as aforesaid, it shall be entitled to second premium, instead of the engine or hose company as aforesaid.”

Act of Incorporation and By-Laws of the Village of Montpelier [Vermont], 1890. Montpelier: Press of The Watchman Publishing Co., 1891, p. 27.

Note: One of the definitions of “premium” in the Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged, Second Edition, is, “a reward or prize, especially one offered as an added inducement to win, buy, etc.; and bonus.”

PRIMARY REFERENCES in Boston as early as 1767, New Orleans in 1807 and Pittsburgh, PA, in 1828, also show payments for either firemen or fire companies to be the “first” at a fire.

The amount of the actual premium or reward for first water seemed to vary by geographic region, with the South paying much more than the North Atlantic and Midwest states. For example, New Orleans’ “Bucket Ordinance” of January 31, 1807, Article XXX, awarded \$50.00, and an Ordinance of Memphis, Tennessee, awarded \$25.00 for the first company to throw first water on the fire. David D. Dana in his 1855 *The Fireman: The Fire Departments of the United States...* notes that Charleston, South Carolina, also awarded \$25.00.

In contrast, Ordinance No. 112 of Joplin Missouri awarded \$10.00 and \$5.00 for first and second water. The towns of Montpelier and Saint Albans, Vermont, only paid \$7.00 for the first company to throw water and the second company, \$5.00. Concord, New Hampshire, offered \$5.00 to the first of two “tub” machines in town to be the first to arrive at a fire.

Numerous cities throughout the United States offered rewards for volunteer fire companies for first water during the 1800s. As late as June 1899 a topic at the Minnesota State Firemen’s Association annual convention was, “Is it conducive to the efficiency of the volunteer departments to offer prizes for the first water on the fire?”

While rewards for first water on the fire were the most common, a December 14, 1831 Ordinance of Columbus, Ohio provided;

“That there shall be paid out of the Treasure of the Corporation, to any member of the Fire company who shall be first at the engine house in case of alarm, when any

building in said Borough may be found on fire, the sum of five dollars; and there shall be paid to the member who shall be second at the engine house as aforesaid, four dollars; and to the third member who shall be third as aforesaid, three dollars; when more than one arrive at the same time, they shall decide who is first by lot..”

No doubt this was during the period when buckets were used to fill the engines and merely being first at the firehouse entitled a fireman to a reward. The town council of Warren, Ohio, also offered \$3.00 to the first member to reach the engine house according the 1882 *History of Trumbull and Mahoning Counties*.

Having established that numerous US cities offered rewards to the volunteer firemen for “first water,” in the next issue, I will examine the evidence that some fire insurance companies also offered such rewards.

Bob Shea

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### TRUTH IN ADVERTISING

THE AD BELOW is from *The Insurance News*, Volume 42, No. 2, February 1920, p. 25.

**Fire Insurance House Plates Date Back to 1680**

**T**HEY were introduced to indicate to the Volunteer Fire Brigades the buildings insured by the insurance office maintaining the brigade, but were discontinued after the old volunteer companies were replaced by paid fire departments.

**THE EAGLE HOUSE PLATE OF THE INSURANCE COMPANY OF NORTH AMERICA was adopted in 1796, and is now very rare.**

**INSURANCE COMPANY OF NORTH AMERICA**  
**PHILADELPHIA**



Is it any wonder that the story of fire marks in the United States is so wrongly told?

Does the ad refer to English or American house plates [fire marks]? Certainly “1680” and the term “brigade” refers to England. While there were a number of provincial volunteer fire brigades in England, they were located in the smaller cities and were not maintained by the insurance companies. In the United States we use the term “fire company” not fire brigade. While English insurance companies “maintained” fire brigades, U.S. insurance companies did not “maintain” volunteer fire companies. In the United States, fire marks were not “discontinued after the old volunteer companies were replaced by paid fire department.” [See my article “The Last of the Cast Iron Fire Marks” in the 2003-1 issue of *The Signevierist*.]

In case you wondered, the fire mark depicted is not the 1776 issue. The 1796 mark was a lead eagle on a wooden board. The one shown is a 1914 copper reissue.

Bob Shea

## NEWS FROM RUSSIA

The following was forwarded by Bill Evenden from a Russian fire mark collector who has been to each of the German, Italian and Portuguese meetings. While Dmitry's Google assisted English may be difficult to follow, his enthusiasm comes through clearly. Let me know if you want his email address or a color PDF copy of his letter.

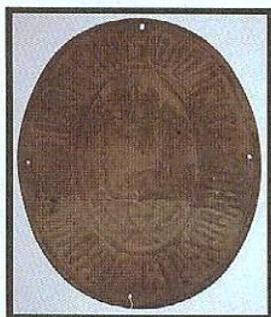
Dear friends and collectors fire marks!

I very much want to share with you my latest finds of Russian fire marks (FM)...

The purpose of my trip was the ancient city of Pskov. He was badly damaged during World War II, so the FM did not find it feasible. However, we knew that at the local museum there is the FM of city insurance company, which is of historical interest for us, because no one has a collector of this type of FM. I had to meet with museum personnel and by hook or hook to obtain high-quality photos and dimensions of the Pskov City Insurance Society for the new catalog, which we plan to launch next year.

Pskov old fortress and is located on the western borders of Russia, 700 km from Moscow. On the way to Pskov is a lot of other little old towns and villages. In some of them, where there was insurance, I went

The first unexpected finding was a typical example of Tver area of tin, but not the usual size - 9.2 by 6.3 cm! FM in the new catalog are guaranteed ☺



Negotiations with the museum staff were successful. They kindly provided the FM of Pskov City Insurance Society for photography. And the second time this trip, I was surprised a large FM size - 23.5 by 31.5 cm is not the typical size for such FMs. Typically city insurance society used 20 by 27.5 cm. The copy of the museum was never cleared of dirt and paint so badly visible sign of relief.

Back home, I went the other way and drove to the museum, where it was also his city insurance society. I was very surprised to find on display ceramic Novgorod area FM! In Russia, as elsewhere in the world, practiced

by the FM from the metal. Metal signs are more practical. They are easy to carry, not fragile and very easily. However, in front of me was a thick ceramic sign.



My last discovery was unusual kind of Novgorod area. The FM known, but only on a single photo. The FM has a very deep stamped letters, and the text is very crooked. This indirectly indicates earlier production FM to 1880-90. This is the second known to us FM.

And if you have such a small insurance and ceramic FMs?

Tell us. I think, many collectors in the worldwide be interested to know more about the FMs in other countries!

Dmitry Korneev & family

November 2012