



The Signevierist

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FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANIES: FIRE DEPARTMENT'S INSURANCE COMPANY, CINCINNATI

THE Fire Department's Insurance Company of Cincinnati was chartered on April 3, 1837. Various sources have three different spellings of the company's name; "Fire Department," "Fire Departments" or "Fire Department's" Insurance Company. There are even two spellings on the fire marks; Bulau 138 shows "Fire Department," while 138VA shows "Fire Department's." I will use the name "Fire Department's Insurance Company" as this was the name the company used on the company's own printing of its charter [*Charter of the Fire Department's Insurance and Fire Association of Cincinnati. Enacted April 3, 1837. Cincinnati, Kendall and Barnard Printers, 1842*]. In addition, almost all references to the company, including their ads in various Cincinnati directories show "Fire Department's."

There are a number of firsts associated with the Fire Department's Insurance Company. Cincinnati was the first U.S. city to have two insurance companies operating concurrently that were owned and controlled by the volunteer firemen - the Firemen's Insurance Company, organized in 1832 and the Fire Department's Insurance Company, 1837. Also, Miles Greenwood, who later became the first fire chief in the first city in the U.S. to have a fully paid fire department in 1853, was one of the company's incorporators of the Firemen's Insurance Company.

A review of the various sections of the charter seems to show that the purpose of the insurance company was to benefit the volunteer fire department [*Acts of a General Nature, Passed at the First Session of the Thirty-Fifth General Assembly of the State of Ohio; Begun and Held in the City of Columbus, December 5th, 1836, and in the Thirty-Fifth Year of Said State. Vol. XXXV. Columbus, S. R. Dolbee, Printer to the State. 1837. Pp. 526-531*]:

Stock

- The capital stock was set at \$50,000 with 5,000 shares at \$10 each. One dollar was paid for each share at subscription with an additional \$1.00 due before the company went into operation. The balance was secured by notes and subject to call by the directors.

- Each Fire Company and the Fire Association were allowed to subscribe to stock so that the 5,000 shares would be equally divided. New fire companies and their members could purchase stock at the original par value and the additional stock could not exceed \$150,000. Stock not subscribed by a company could be taken by other companies in equal portions.

- Each member could purchase no more than fifty shares and each fire company, except the Fire Association, no more than 1,500 shares.

▪ Transfer of stock could only be made to a member of a fire company. The shares of stockholder who died or who ceased to be a member of a fire company had to be sold to a fire company member within one year. If not sold, the directors could sell the stock of such person, and pay him the proceeds.

Directors

- The directors had to be stockholders and elected a President from their own body.
- There were not a stated number of directors. However, each company:
 - was entitled to one director,
 - with 150 - 500 shares was entitled to one additional director,
 - with over 500 shares was entitled to two additional directors.
- No director of any other fire insurance company could be a director of this company.
- Each company selected their director(s) by ballot among the members. Each stockholder had one vote for each share with no individual having more than twenty votes.

Miscellaneous

- The company was chartered “to insure all kinds of property against loss or damage by fire, to make all kinds of insurance upon life or lives, and to cause themselves to be insured against any loss or risk they may incur in the course of their business.” This was amended on February 12, 1838 to delete life insurance, not limit themselves to fire but any cause or risk, and to cover all nature of transportation, whether on land or water, on any vessel and to lend money on bottomry or respondentia.
 - Fire company members were entitled to a 5% discount on their insurance in this company.
 - Dividends on profits could not decrease the capital stock. Dividends could be paid on any stock that had not been fully paid, but would be credited for payment .
 - 10 % of the dividend was paid to the Fire Association of Cincinnati for a fund for the relief of sick and disabled firemen, and such other benevolent purposes connected with the Fire Department of Cincinnati.
 - The charter also provided for the incorporation of the “Fire Association of Cincinnati.”

It's difficult to say what happened to the company. Up until 1846 the company was listed in the Cincinnati directories as the “Fire Department's Insurance Company” and not listed thereafter. If still in existence, the company would have had to retire, or change its charter after the organization of the paid Cincinnati Fire Department in 1853, since it's purpose to benefit the volunteer fire department no longer existed.

Bob Shea

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### **THIS AND THAT**

**INCLUDED** with this issue is a short pamphlet with illustrations entitled “Making Cast Iron Fire Marks.” It's a whole new way to appreciate your cast iron fire marks. Enjoy!!

## MORE ON THE STAR INSURANCE COMPANY, BULAU 255

BACK IN the 2006-1 issue of *The Signevierist* I questioned Bulau's identification of image 255. I thought it possible that the mark belonged to the Star Insurance Company of New York City, not Ogdensburg, New York. My assumption was incorrect.

More documents on a Star Insurance Company of Ogdensburg have become available on Google Books. One document in particular has quite relevant information relating to Bulau's statement about the mark, "From building in Ohio." The *Annual Report of the Controller of the Condition of the Several Insurance Companies Doing Business in this State, Transmitted to the Legislature, February 17, 1855*. Albany, C. Van Benthuysen, Printer to the Legislature, 1855. has a comment at the end of the Star's balance sheet:

"Note-No. of agents in county [ St. Lawrence], 5; do. [ditto] in other counties of the State, 23; and in other States, 47."

With a capital of \$150,000 this insurer from northern New York State had 47 agents in states other than New York. In fact, the company was licensed as far as Wisconsin, and an agent in Cincinnati represented the Star in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. It's clear that this short lived company (1854 – 1857) was a pioneer in agency representation and competed with the large eastern insurers in the Midwest. Since more insurance companies issued fire marks in Ohio than any other state, it's more than likely that the Star issued a tinned sheet iron mark just like many other insurers did.

Recently an insurance policy issued by the "Star Insurance Company, of Ogdensburgh, N. Y." was sold on eBay confirming that the company's name did not include the word "Fire" in it. Because the mark contains the word "Fire" in it, it was reasonable for Bulau to assume that the company's name was Star Fire Insurance Company. In this case, the word "Fire" on the mark denotes the type or line of business written and not the company name.

Based on this additional information, Bulau's attribution to the Star of Ogdensburg is correct but you may want to note the correct name of the company in your copy of *Footprints of Assurance*.

Bob Shea

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## SUN INSURANCE COMPANY, CLEVELAND, BULAU 361

THE FOLLOWING is from the *Baltimore Underwriter*, December 14, 1876, p. 376:

"The president of the Sun Insurance Company, of Cleveland, Ohio, Mr. E. C. Rouse, has addressed his agents in a circular letter as follows:

In view of the extreme demoralization existing in the fire insurance business, which affords no promise of profit to compensate for the *personal liability* which attaches to this stock, the stockholders of this company, on the recommendation of the management, have decided to discontinue the business of insurance, and retire the capital.

After all losses and re-insurance shall have been provided for, it is estimated that the stockholders will receive one hundred and seventy on the par value of their stock. While the policy of the company was never so strong as at this date, the company, for the further protection of its policyholders, has caused all its risks to be re-insured in the Continental Insurance Company of New York city, a recognized standard company, possessing three millions of assets.

"Please forward to this office, by express, all supplies held by you for account of this

company; also, kindly render your final account with the company *by earliest mail*, enclosing all unpaid policies on which premium cannot be collected during the month of December. Also, please remit for balance due company, without fail, during present month, so that we may be enabled to close our books with this year.

Thanking our agents, many of whom have long served our interests with rare fidelity, we greatly regret the occasion for the severance of our connection, which has been almost uniformly mutually pleasant and profitable."

Bob Shea

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## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HOME"



THIS ISSUE'S "Home" insurance company is the "Home Mutual Fire Insurance Company," Williamsburg, Penna., which was organized in 1881. Operating as a small mutual company, it moved to Harrisburg, Penna. around 1955. The Pennsylvania Farmers and Threshersmen's Group began to acquire control of the company and on December 31, 1972 the "Home" was reinsured and the assets absorbed by the Pennsylvania National Mutual Casualty Insurance Company.

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## PACIFIC INSURANCE COMPANY, BULAU 334

SHORTLY AFTER the Chicago fire *The Insurance Times*, Volume IV, Number 12, December 1871, page 870c, published the following notice:

"Pacific Fire [sic] Insurance Company, California. This company is closing its business in an honorable and satisfactory manner by re-insuring its American risks in the Liverpool, London and Globe. The public have therefore no reason to complain of the managers and stockholders of the Pacific; and should the company reorganize under the same or any other designation it will be entitled to general confidence."

Needless to say, the Pacific failed due to losses caused by the Chicago Fire.

Bob Shea

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## SOUTHERN MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY, B.170



(Photo courtesy of the Southern Mutual Insurance Company)

I RECENTLY had a chance to visit the office of Southern Mutual Insurance Company in Athens, Georgia. A mutual friend had introduced me to the President, Allen R. Green, and he had graciously made company records and memorabilia available for me to review and enjoy. Unlike many other insurers in recent years, Southern Mutual continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to its very rich heritage with a large area off of the main lobby used to recreate an office and boardroom of 100 years ago. The handwritten minute books and many other records are maintained and displayed from floor to ceiling across one wall. Long time employee, Carol Huber, has transcribed the minute books from the company's founding to more recent days - a labor of love and quite a relief to anyone wishing to read them.

Southern Mutual is a success story that demonstrates what can be accomplished through hard work and persistence. The company charter was approved by the Georgia Legislature in late December 1847 and Southern Mutual commenced business in 1848. While the first office was in Griffin, Georgia, within months it was moved to Athens where it has thrived ever since. Originally the company sold insurance in several lines: fire, life and marine but within ten years Southern Mutual was selling fire insurance as its main line of business (it actually sold the life business to another company).

The company had just hit its stride and was growing when the Civil War started. In Georgia, like most other southern states, confederate currency was the medium for paying insurance premiums. Businesses were viewed as unpatriotic if they didn't invest in confederate bonds. Add to that the hard times the war brought, and you have a recipe for business disaster. General Sherman came through Georgia and burned most anything he saw as he marched to the sea. When the war ended, confederate bonds and currency were worthless and Southern Mutual had plenty of both. The worth of the company shrunk significantly. A lesser company would have folded but Southern Mutual endured.

In those early years, Southern Mutual had a fire mark which was made of stamped brass and displayed the company name and a four pointed star. In some of the early advertising I have seen, as well as on the company's office which was completed in 1908, a "hand in hand" was used to depict the fair dealing and mutual relationship customers could expect. The company now occupies a new office building that was completed in 1988.

Through the years the Southern Mutual has had other challenges like the Augusta fire of 1916 and the Atlanta fire of 1917, but, through them all, the company has persevered and remains the oldest insurance company operating in Georgia.

Logan Smith

## ROOM WITH A VIEW

AND what a view! FMCA member Ed Schlesinger writes that the photo below is of the view from his den. There he sits admiring his collection of eleven porcelain signs and sipping his mint julep. The signs hang outside on a 100 year old brick wall and will require a coat of paste wax every six months or so. Sure looks pretty.

