



The Signevierist

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DOES THIS LOOK FAMILIAR?

Recently, the above recently was offered item on eBay and was described as a cast iron building medallion. It weighed about 30 pounds and 20 ½” in diameter. Certainly the medallion is much too large for a fire mark. However, except for its size and weight, it’s almost identical to Bulau 485, the Guardian Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Pittsburg.

I have always felt that origins of Bulau 485 were suspect; it’s much too ornamental for an insurance company fire mark. The item on eBay confirmed my suspicions.

The facts are the Guardian Mutual Fire Insurance Company was incorporated on October 5, 1904. The 32nd Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Department of Insurance for 1904 shows that the

company's assets were \$2,489.48 of which \$125.53 was cash. The next year's 33rd Annual Report for 1906 reported that the Guardian cancelled all of its policies and surrendered its charter. *Hyden's Annual Cyclopaedia of Insurance in the United States 1906-1907* reports that the Guardian failed.

With such a short time in business and only a small amount of cash, are we to believe that this insurance company actually issued an 8.9" cast iron fire mark for its policyholders? I doubt it.

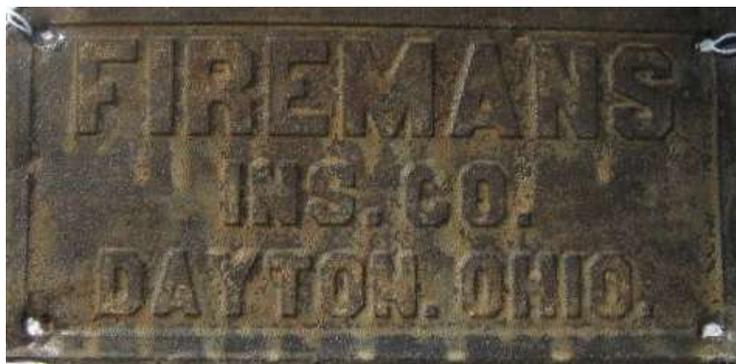
As far as I know, the only known specimen of the Guardian's mark is at the New York City Fire Museum (Object ID Number 00.3975). The cast iron mark weighs 7 pounds, 8.5 ounces and is 8.901 in diameter. I examined the mark in February 2012 and noted that the letters "M" and "F" are sharply cast but not the angel with children and owl. While I have no direct evidence, my suspicion is that there was also a smaller cast iron medallion, with a slightly different edge. Later, two mounting holes were added and the letters "M" and "F" attached. This altered medaling served as a pattern to cast the Guardian fire mark in Bulau.

Based on the above, I feel that the mark attributed to the Guardian Mutual Fire Insurance Company is questionable and should be properly listed in the "Spurious and Unidentified" section of *Footprints of Assurance*.

Are there other "marks" in Bulau you have doubts about??

Bob Shea

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## **AN UNINTENDED VARIANT?**

When I first saw the above fire mark that is included in the 2018 FMCA Live Auction, Lot 21, something didn't seem right. I checked number 293 in *Footprints of Assurance* and almost missed it. The names are different; Bulau's company name is Firemen's Insurance Company. The above is Fireman's Insurance Company. The proper use of apostrophes was not always followed on fire marks and other advertising. Is it possible that there were two different insurance companies in Dayton, one named Firemen's and the other named Fireman's? Or is this a case of a misnomer?

After much research I have determined that Firemen's Insurance Company is the correct name. Bulau's 1859 beginning date is incorrect as the Firemen's Insurance Company was chartered on February 23, 1835. The original 5,000 shares of stock were distributed among the four volunteer fire

companies in Dayton with only firemen allowed to purchase them. In addition, the president and board of directors had to be stockholders. It's not clear whether the company amended its charter or operated as originally intended, but in 1856 the company was reorganized under the same name with new directors and president.

I did not locate any other advertising from the company with the misspelling. Misnaming frequently occurred in business directories of the period. The Ohio Insurance Department 's February 4, 1886 annual report for the year 1885, misnamed the company Fireman's four times in separate premium tables, and used the correct Firemen's only once. Unable to find any reference to a separate Fireman's Insurance Company in Dayton, I can only conclude that the name of the above fire mark is most likely a misnomer.

It will never be known where the misnomer originated; whether at the company end, when the marks were ordered, or at the manufacturer. It's amusing to speculate when the company actually realized the error and what they thought. In any event, we are fortunate to have located an example of this unintended variant. The Addendum page for the variant is included with this issue.

Bob Shea

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FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANIES: FIREMEN'S INSURANCE COMPANY, PITTSBURG, PA (B.127-129)

The **Firemen's Insurance Company, Pittsburg, PA** was chartered on April 15, 1834.¹ A review of the original charter shows that while the company was managed by the firemen, there was little benefit to the volunteers other than stock ownership.

Stock

- The capital stock was \$250,000 with 10,000 shares at \$25 each. Five dollars was paid for each share at subscription. Additional payment for shares was at the discretion of the board of directors. After two weeks of public notice in the newspapers, failure to pay would cause the share or shares to be forfeited to the company.
- For the first three days of the stock offering only firemen of Pittsburg and its vicinity, or widows or orphans of deceased members could subscribe. Thereafter, any person, company or corporation could subscribe to any number of shares remaining.
- Stockholder could not transfer stock until the stock was fully paid.

Directors

- Not less than two-thirds of the directors had to be among the fire engine, hose, property, axe, hook and ladder companies of Pittsburg and its vicinity
- The company was managed by thirteen directors, who were stockholders. The directors chose a president from themselves.
- Each stockholder with one share had one vote, but no stockholder had more than ten votes.

- The directors had the authority to appoint a secretary, agents and clerks and other officers necessary to transact business with salaries they judge reasonable.

Miscellaneous

- The company was chartered to make insurance against fire, inland transportation of goods, vessels, cargo and to loan money upon bottomry and respondentia.
- No dividends could be paid that lessened the capital stock. The president and any director, who did not object and enter his protest against such a resolution to declare a dividend in the minutes, was accountable for the amount of such dividend paid.
- “Monies received as premiums on risks which remain undetermined at the time of declaring the dividends respectively shall not be computed as any part of the profits.” [While not sure what this actually means, it’s possible this refers to “unearned premium.” If so, this is a very early acknowledgement of its importance in determining actual profit.]

Unlike the typical firemen owned and managed insurance companies, the Firemen’s of Pittsburgh did not give a discount to firemen on their insurance and the company did not set aside any profits for firemen injured or disabled in the discharge of their duty.

Also, the charter did not contain many other provisions normally found in other such company charters, such as more secure payment of subscription for stock purchase, limitations on territory insured, transfer of fireman owned stock to other than a fireman, and ability of stockholders to call a general meeting of the stockholders.

Most modern sources say that the Firemen’s failed due to Pittsburg’s great fire of 1845. However, there are two references that show the company operated in 1851. The first shows that the Firemen’s Insurance Company paid a tax on its corporate stock of \$175.85 to the state of Pennsylvania.² The second reports that the company was authorized by a legislative act to receive money deposits and pay interest not exceeding six per cent.³

While no legislative activity on behalf of the company has been located, most likely the Firemen’s reorganized and recapitalized after the 1845 fire and operated more like a bank than an insurance company. Hopefully, time will reveal what actually happened.

Bob Shea

¹. *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania, Passed at the Session 1833-34*. Harrisburg: Henry Welsh, 1834, pp. 460-464. Google Book Search.

². *Report of the Auditor General on the Finances of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the Year Ending November 30, 1851*. Harrisburg: Theo. Fenn & Co., Printers to the State, 1852, p. 10. Hathitrust Digital Library.

³. Wilson, Erasmus, Editor. *Standard History of Pittsburg Pennsylvania*. Chicago: H. R. Cornell & Company, 1892, p. 916. Google Book Search.



2018 FMCA AUSTIN CONVENTION

By now you should have received your invitation from Tom Hardy for the October 25-28 Austin convention.

If not, please contact Tom.

If you did, by all means send in your registration and book your room.