



The Signevierist

Issue Number 2021-2

The Official Newsletter of the Fire Mark Circle of the Americas

2021 CONVENTION NEWS

SAVE THE DATE → OCTOBER 14th to 17th

As many of you know last year's convention was postponed due to COVID-19. We have great news as this year is a go! As planned before we will be having the convention in Indianapolis, Indiana at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Indianapolis North. The address is 3912 Vincennes Rd., Indianapolis, IN 46268. The room rate is \$129 per night which is a great rate and much lower than previous years. The rate will also be good for three days before and three days after if anyone is interested in coming early or staying after the close of the convention. More information about the Hotel and surrounding area will be available when invitations are mailed out in the coming weeks. Dave Oldham is our convention host, and he has put together an amazing itinerary that encompasses a lot of what Indianapolis has to offer. Our tour will include the following stops:

- 1) Indianapolis Fire Museum
- 2) Koorsen Fire and Safety – Randy Koorsen will be our host for a tour of his personal Fire Museum
- 3) Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum

The cost of transportation and food has increased due to the pandemic so the convention fee will be slightly higher this year at \$275 per person. If you are a first-time convention attendee, you will only have to pay half the rate at \$137.50 per person.

I know there may be some concern about safety as many restrictions are being lifted across the country. FMCA will follow the safety guidelines as instructed by the city of

Indianapolis, the Hotel, the museums, and the transportation company. These of course may change as October rolls around but we do encourage all attendees to be vaccinated to ensure the safety of all attending members.

I encourage every member to make every attempt to attend this convention so please save the date and look out for invitations in the coming weeks. If you have any questions, please reach out to our host Dave Oldham or Tom Hewitt who is assisting.

Finally, Linda Anderberg is hard at working trying to complete the Live and Silent auctions. If you are unable to attend the convention you are still able to bid online or place an absentee bid. Linda is still in need of some items, especially fire memorabilia and other items that have not been up for auction previously. If you have something you would like to sell in either auction, please contact Linda directly on her phone at (312) 590-6100 or by email at Red.wing@sbcglobal.net. Please check the website and your email frequently for updates as these are the best sources for upcoming information on the auctions.

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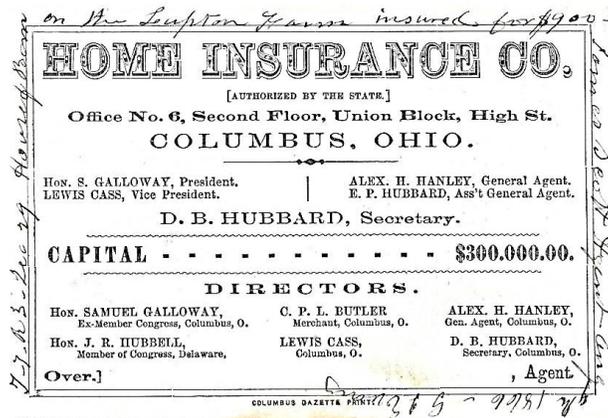
THE ABCs of AMERICAN FIRE MARKS

His for the Home Insurance Company, Columbus, Ohio
Bulau 344-346 & 346X1

Originally organized on March 20, 1851 as the Xenia Mutual Insurance Company of Xenia, Ohio, the company moved to Cincinnati in 1856 and later to Columbus on December 24, 1863. No doubt a group of investors acquired the charter sometime in 1863, which is the year of organization advertised by the company and began to convert the company to a stock insurer. It wasn't until April 26, 1864 that the name changed to the Home Insurance Company.

From the start, two names of the organizers, are particularly notable: Lewis W. Cass, director and vice president, and D. B. Hubbard, director and secretary. Both these gentlemen were connected with the Illinois Central Insurance Company of Decatur, Illinois and the State Insurance Company of Hannibal, Missouri, both of which failed. They were in fact organizers of wild cat insurers. It was no coincidence that they converted Xenia Mutual to a stock insurer; both the Illinois Central and State were originally mutual companies.

In the company's early newspaper advertising from 1864 to 1867 in Ohio the company does not list its capital. However, for the same period in West Virginia the company lists its capital as \$300,000. The 1866 trade card below also lists the capital as \$300,000.



A November 1867 ad lists the capital and assets as \$545,618.28. The Home's filed financial statement to the Ohio Insurance Department as of December 31, 1867 lists the paid capital as \$100,000 and assets as \$466,514.27. Overstating its capital or lumping capital and assets and calling it cash assets is something the Home did over the years. Something was going on here.

The company did not add additional capital when it converted from a mutual to a stock company. They concealed their liabilities and capitalized the assets, which consisted of premium notes from the mutual. They listed the premium notes as both assets and capital in early annual reports to the insurance department. Also, the fact that the Home of Columbus was able to operate in multiple states, including New York, until 1882 demonstrates the loose regulation of insurance at the time. But that's another story. It took a comprehensive audit by Ohio's Superintendent of Insurance, Charles H. Moore, to find numerous examples of overstated and fictitious assets and eventually a confession by the company's president, J. B. Hall, to reveal the extent of the company's deceit and years long insolvency.

With its extensive use of testimonials for claims payments in local newspapers the company grew with nearly 1,700 agencies. As confessed by the president in 1882,

The entire history of the company, in the most charitable sense, has been the intention to do right toward its patrons, and an abiding faith that eventually everything would come out right... Had the profits of the business continued, our experience of 1873, 1874, 1875, and 1876, we would have succeeded; but the adversities of later years has tested the actual strength of the company...

Sixteenth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Insurance of the State of Ohio 1883. Part 1.- Insurance Other Than Life, p. lii

Having paid out \$150,000 in dividends to its stockholders and operating with a relatively high expense ratio, due to high commissions and executive salaries, the Home Insurance Company was insolvent. The Home was dissolved, and the remaining assets placed in the hands of a receiver.

After years of false swearing and perjury the executive officers were not indicted by a grand jury. After all, its president, Mr. Hall, was a member of the state legislature.

The Old Underwriter

I is for the Illinois Central Insurance Company, Decatur, Illinois Bulau US-CE-1

Originally organized on February 18, 1857 as The Henry County Mutual Fire Insurance Company, Andover, Illinois, the new owners of the company amended the charter on February 2, 1861 to change the name to the Illinois Central Insurance Company and moved to Decatur. While remaining a mutual company a number of other charter changes dramatically revised the operation of the company and served as a template for future wild cat insurance companies. Rather than a premium note, policies could be paid at a definite sum in cash, assessments by the company were *prima facie* evidence and essentially could not be contested in court, and most importantly

...the board of directors may appoint an executive committee from their own number, and such committee, when the board is not in session, may exercise all the powers vested in the company, except when the company has, by its by-laws, otherwise provided.

This last change gave full power to run the company to a few insider individuals. With sloppy bookkeeping, unscrupulous individuals could prepare reports basically to themselves and other board members, whose own business or indifference to board matters would prevent them from looking into the workings of the company.

The Illinois Central Insurance Company was one of the most notorious incubators of wild cat insurers. Promoters, Louis W. Cass, Secretary and later President, and agents, D. B. Hubbard, and the Parker Brothers were connected to the failed Home Insurance Company of Columbus. Both Cass and the Parker Brothers were also connected to two additional failed companies. In addition, five other individuals connected with the Illinois Central were involved with at least one other failed company. All these failed companies issued fire marks.¹

Starting out with \$100,000 capital consisting of real estate allegedly less than five times the value and not incumbered to more than one-half cash valuation, the company extensively used testimonials for small claims payments in local newspapers. The company slowly grew and expanded to Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and West Virginia.

Except for an advertisement that this mutual company had \$200,000 capital, which did not consist of cash, It wasn't until April 1865 that I could find a financial statement dated March 15, 1865 made to the Auditor of Illinois. Most of the statement dealt with interrogatory details of premiums and policy numbers both for the year and from 1861. There were no statements of losses paid or expenses. The assets consisted of:

Chartered guarantee Fund...	\$100,000.00	[Capital consisting of mortgages]
Premium Notes in force.....	195,746.96	
Cash items.....	<u>24,574.26</u>	[\$18,000 in loans & personal property and office

furniture]

Accumulated Capital & Assets \$320,321.22

Since there was no state insurance department at the time and no standard financial form, the statement was accepted, and the company was authorized to write insurance business in Illinois.

It wasn't until December of 1866 that there was a hint of anything untoward, when an insured with about a \$3,000 claim in Kansas was only offered \$500 and payment with a 90 day note. Resisting claims and slow payment was a typical wild cat tactic. After some negative press, the company promptly settled for a \$1,500 cash payment.

On March 8, 1867 their charter was amended so that all policy premiums were to be paid with a fixed sum and the company could move to Chicago. Should they move to Chicago the company would be named "The Illinois Central Insurance Company, of Chicago." By early 1868 newspaper comments in Kansas about the company, such as "payment doubtful" and "worthless institution," began to appear. Things came to a head when the City Council of its hometown, Decatur, passed a resolution against the company and its officers for bringing the city into disrepute and authorized its publication to other cities in Illinois. The Central's reaction was simply to avoid the heat and move to Chicago.

On December 15, 1869 the Public Auditor working with the Illinois Insurance Department determined that the Illinois Central had actually failed on March 11, 1869 but that persons were attempting to collect on all the premium notes possible. This was a tactic used by some officers of other wild cat insurers to wring the last dollar out of the company. In order to protect the people, he referred the matter to the Attorney General requesting that a receiver be appointed. There was one less life to this wild cat insurer.

The Old Underwriter

¹A future article on the individuals connected with the Illinois Central will be forthcoming later this year.

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Another Unfound Fire Mark?

The following article was discovered in the Chicago Tribune, April 12, 1867, Page 4.

Insurance Plates. – The Chicago Insurance Plate Company, whose place of business is located at Nos. 52 and 54 South Clinton street, have for some time been engaged in the manufacture of metal Plates used by insurance companies as signs affixed to houses on which they have a policy. This branch of manufacture has hitherto been nearly confined to the East, but since the establishment of the present company the insurance people have found that they can obtain a superior article at cheaper cost at home than by going to a foreign market. The plates produced by the Chicago company are pronounced to be in every respect equal in point of workmanship and durability to any manufactured in Eastern Cities, while they can be purchased at less cost besides the saving in carriage. A letter addressed by Mr. J.M. Cutler, the Secretary of the Home Mutual Fire Insurance to Messrs. Cass, Miller & Co., the proprietors of the Chicago Insurance Plate Company, bears sufficient testimony to the superiority of the article. He says: "We are pleased to inform you that the plates ordered from your firm gives great satisfaction, being superior in workmanship and material to any heretofore made for the company, and we take pleasure in recommending insurance companies

in quest of plates to your firm before seeking their orders elsewhere.”

Per Bob Shea, there was a “Home Mutual Fire Insurance Company” of Chicago that was Incorporated on February 22, 1861 and J.M. Cutler was its Secretary. The Home Mutual changed its name to the “Chicago Fire Insurance Company” on February 10, 1869 and promptly went

bankrupt in 1873. The supposed assets of the Chicago Fire were mostly notes from policyholders of the Home Mutual. The assignee spent years trying to collect on the notes. J.M. Cutler showed up later with the Aetna Insurance Company of Chicago, which also went bankrupt. I would consider the Home Mutual to have been a wild cat insurer. Whether they actually had a house plate/fire mark is suspect due to the duplicity of J.M. Cutler in business matters, but it doesn't hurt to keep an eye out!

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NEW MEMBERS!

Please help me in welcoming two new members to FMCA since our last newsletter. Danny Bowman joined in March and is a retired Firefighter from Cumming, Georgia and is interested in Fire Artifacts. Next up is another Georgia resident, Mark Murphy, from Savannah, who of course is interested in Fire Marks and just joined this month. The membership directory has been updated by Bill Pope for anyone interested in member contacts. Once again Danny and Mark, Welcome to the FMCA!

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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

- 1) I have received hardly any responses on the Tin Fire Mark Rarity guide request from the previous Newsletter. I would kindly request that members who have not already responded email me a list of tin fire marks in your collection. I have a very comprehensive list of museum-owned fire marks, but I still need a list of marks from personal collections to make this Rarity Guide. Once again, I can't complete this without help from the membership.
- 2) For the last several years Logan Smith, Bob Shea, and myself have been making a comprehensive work of all known Insurance related Auto Tags. This seems to be a never-ending task as new tags show up quite frequently. We now know that over 150 companies issued auto tags!! Feel free to contact us if you have a tag that you believe to be unique. Here is an example of one our most recent finds:

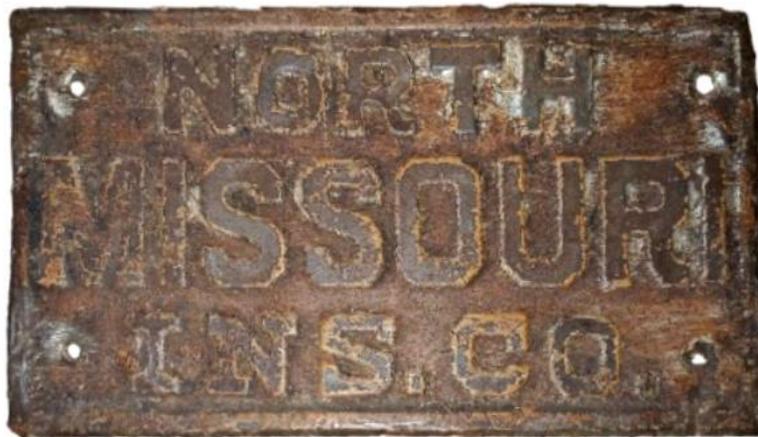


3) LASTLY PLEASE WATCH YOUR MAIL FOR THE CONVENTION INVITATION, SAVE THE DATE, AND MAKE EVERY POSSIBLE ATTEMPT TO COME TO THE CONVENTION IN INDIANAPOLIS!

Michael Brankowitz
mbranko24@mac.com

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Another Newly Documented Fire Mark



Bob Shea has discovered another fire mark from a company not previously known to have issued a fire mark. The link for the addendum page will be attached for anyone wanting to print it out. This mark is classified as US-ND-1 and comes from the North Missouri Insurance Company of Macon, Missouri. (1867-1873)

Signs, Signs, Signs Everywhere!

