The Doorknob Collector

FEBRUARY 1981

EDITORS' NICHE

Yes, there still are bargains out there. Not many, especially in the dead of winter when flea markets are closed. A few weeks ago a friend of mine discovered two sets of cast iron door knobs and a set of matching plates in a local antique shop. I followed up the lead quickly and discovered the shop owner had them around so long that he almost gave them to me with the comment "No one collects this junk." I was slightly taken back by the comment, but trying not to show any emotion and biting my lip said "Yea, I think you're right." Unfortunately with the price of gas searching for doorknobs can get expensive.

With a show of hands, how many of our readers missed the November newsletter? Well, we did too. After some thought we have decided to change the publication dates of the newletter. They seemed to be falling at our most busy times of the year. The new months of publication will be February, June, and October.

MERCURY GLASS KNOBS

By Eupha Shanly

Like the original mercury glass patented by Thomson & Varnish in England in 1849, the knobs are a double layer with enough space between to allow for a wash of silver nitrate, the successor to poisonous mercury originally used to coat mirrors. After the silvering was poured out, the access vent was closed with a glass seal if made by the New England Glass Company.

Another early manufacturer of mercury glass, chiefly vases, condlesticks and compotes, was the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company which used a cork seal. Either type seal was easily broken by rough treatment or cleaning, after which the "silver" turned to nothing!

According to mercury glass authority Sondra Schneider (we do not know her address--do you?) the finest quality produced in America dates from the 1850's through the '90's.

She cites a value of $1000 upwards for a pair of

curtain tie backs in fine condition, stamped "New England Glass Co. Patented January 16, 1855." This was the original U.S. patent for knobs and curtain tiebacks made of mercury glass and pewter. We have no idea of the value of similar knobs, but few survive.

Your editor enjoyed a brief "walk and gawk" through Boston's Beacon Hill area this past June, and saw only one mercury knob still in use, but that was worth all the effort, just to admire it.

Eventually some mercury glass was made of colored glass --gold, cobalt blue, green, even red, lavendar and the vary rare deep amethyst, still using the interior silver nitrate wash. We do not know if doorknobs were ever made in this way.

From the time mercury glass was first shown on a large scale, at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibit in London, it was admired for its beauty and novelty. It's worth watching for.

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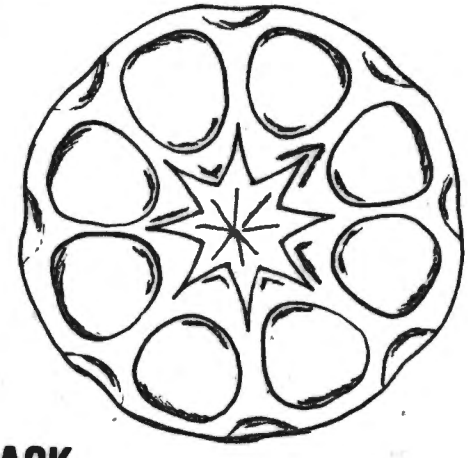
The Dicks (Minneapolis, Minn.) wrote to tell us of three mercury glass knobs in their collection, the most unusual is completely beaded inside the glass with the customary silvery color.

Fred Magnus (FT. Myers, Fla.) sent us a picture of his prize ruby red glass or crystal knob. It has eight large facets or insets of mercury, plus sixteen smaller facets. It is 3" in diameter with a brass shank. The knob is 2½" deep from top to bottom including the shank.

His son Robert, heard that an antuque shop in Montreal, Quebec had this knob and he drove from Detroit to Montreal to purchase it for Fred. Now that's real love for Dad.



FEEDBACK

When you have to begin correcting your own corrections things are not going well. When we put out the issue with the emblematic knobs, I was trying very hard to get the correct title on the Elks knob. In doing so I changed what was already correct. It is indeed, the knob of the Elks with the clock and the eleventh hour on it.

Florence Jarvis (Grand Rapids, Mich.) tells of an emblematic knob from the Board of Education, Detroit, Mich. It is steel or iron with a woman and child looking up a mountain with a star on top. We haven't seen this before.

The SP on the one unidentified knob was researched by Emil Miller as being made for the New York Savoy Plaza Hotel furnished by J.B. Hunter Company--a Yale hardware distributor.

KNOB COLOR

By Scott Klemm

It's common knowledge that

old glass door knobs change color when exposed to the sun's rays. Some turn purple, while others turn a straw-yellow color. I was curious to know why they changed color, and if the color change could be used to help date the knob. The answer involves a little glass chemistry as well as some manufacturing history.

Before 1880, not too much attention was given to the color of glass. Most glass of this period was of an aqua color due to iron—an element found in nearly all sand. After 1880, glass manufacturers began to add manganese to produce a clear glass. The manganese counteracted or neutralized the iron, but caused the glass to turn purple when exposed to the ultra-violet rays of the sun. Most of the manganese came from Germany, and with the beginning of World War I, the supply was cut off. Therefore, between 1914 and 1930 selenium was used in place of manganese. Selenium produced the same result as manganese, except that it turned a yellowish straw color from long exposure to the sun.

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DEADLINE FOR JUNE NEWSLETTER
MAY 10, 1981

EXCHANGE

E.P. Dick
6815 Humboldt Ave. S.
Minneapolis, Minn. 55423
Has a half dozen pair of Bennington type and black and white knobs to sell.

R.S. Kennedy
7 Lafayette Place
Chatham, N.J. 07928
Has pictures of many knobs that are available for trade. He would be glad to send them to you and arrange an even trade.

Along with the idea of trading comes the inquiry from Margaret Puccini.

"I wonder what the most is anyone ever paid for a doorknob? I saw a pair of Wedgewood ones at an antique show for $600. I thought the man was out of his mind asking that much, but maybe there are rabid collectors somewhere who would pay that price. Any thoughts on this?"

CONVENTION?

Is this idea worth pursuing?

Arnold Fredrick has suggested a Convention and Swap Meet about mid-way across the country in Waverly, Iowa. He is willing to do a lot of the planning if there is sufficent interest. We have heard this idea from several of our readers before and would like your reaction to it.

Perhaps a three-day weekend might be a good time to have it.