

# The

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NUMBER 10



# Doorknob Collector

"Milan"  
Italian Renaissance  
Yale & Towne - 1894

THE FOLLOWING IS EXCERPTED FROM "INDUSTRIAL CHICAGO"

Published in 1891

In the early days of Chicago the phrase "builders' hardware" conveyed the idea of nails, common latches, staples, hasps and perhaps a padlock. The pioneers sought only for the absolute necessities of life, and the iron articles named answered their seeking. In 1843 a few church buildings were erected in the city, wherein specimens of ornamental hardware were sparingly used. Within the following half decade regular builders' hardware stores were established, and with such establishments came new goods to be introduced to house builders. Year after year the trade grew in importance.

A history of the rapid progress in the line of builders' hardware and the few prominent firms that have been most closely allied with it cannot fail to be interesting, both to those who can look back and remember what Chicago was before the fire of 1871, and to those who only know Chicago as it is. Recollections of Oswald Lockett begins with the year 1863. At that time, he states, "there were but two houses in this line that made any pretension of carrying anything like a fair assortment of builders' hardware and mechanics' tools". These two houses were Larrabee & North, then doing business at 174 Lake Street, and the still older house of Edwin Hunt at 84 Lake Street, and a person in search of anything a little out of the regular line would be referred to those two houses with the remark "if you cannot find them there, there will be no use in your looking any farther". Plain substantial hardware, black japanned cast-iron hinges and white porcelain knobs with plated or porcelain roses and escutcheons, were about as fancy as the average person cared to indulge in, even for a reasonably good house. Occasionally someone would be found who wanted something better or more showy, and to such persons electro-plated silver or hand-plated silver hardware was furnished. About the year 1868, Edwin Hunt fitted up a new office and used some ornamental bronze goods made by Rankins of Philadelphia. This, however, was nothing but white metal or some cheap soft composition artificially colored dark, and without merit. Next came P. & F. Corbin, with a small line of what we now know to have been very ordinary bronze metal hardware, though at that time it created quite a sensation. Rapidly following this came a line of compression bronze goods made by the Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company, which together with a very pretty lava knob and escutcheon to match, constituted the first complete line of real artistic hardware that had been put on the market. This was in the years 1869 and 1870, and they continued to hold the lead until after the great fire of 1871.

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Editors: Lee & Jim Kaiser, 4125 Colfax Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55409

## INDUSTRIAL CHICAGO - Continued

In the latter part of 1872, Hopkins & Dickinson of Newark, N.J., brought out a comparatively full line of ornamental bronze metal hardware of more or less meritorious designs, claiming that the bronze metal mixture used in them was a richer and purer than that used by any other manufacturer. Closely following them came the Branford Lock works with an entire line of very pretty designs and various finishes. Then came the Norwalk Lock Company, Mallory, Wheeler & Co. and others, each with his own particular line of specific merit. About this time, or in the spring of 1887, the Yale & Towne Manufacturing Company of Stanford, concluded to enter the field as competitors for the trade in fine builders' hardware. Then began, in earnest, the fight for supremacy, and for some time each sought to produce something a little better than the others, and as a result, there was a rapid advancement in the art. The manufacturer showing goods invariably called the attention of the dealer to the superior merits of the particular articles he was presenting, relying on the quality and not on the price to sell the goods. But this condition of trade could not continue undisturbed, and the increased demand for bronze metal goods brought into life a host of small manufacturers, who would select some article already produced by one of the larger manufacturers and offer to duplicate it for much less money, which he could easily do, as he had no cost for designing or pattern work, but the result was never satisfactory, the dealer did not get the same article for less money, what he really got was a very poor imitation, for which he paid a good round price. But the change had come, the inroads made by these pirates caused many of the older manufacturers to reduce the quality of their goods, and instead of trying to sell goods on their superior merits, as heretofore, they offered them as something a little less in price.

Imitation was the order of the day, and the market was soon flooded with numberless lines of cheap bronze and imitation bronze, which, though cheap enough at the price charged for it and a great blessing to parties of limited means, putting up inexpensive buildings, was nevertheless, a great drawback to the art, and, in the hands of unscrupulous dealers, very injurious to legitimate trade, as many of the limitations were so close, that while perfectly fresh, non but an expert could detect the fraud. Happily, there are some manufacturers who have had the courage to continue making honest goods and who have made rapid strides forward, until today, in spite of the flood of worthless stuff offered on the market, America can justly claim to produce the finest builders' hardware in the world, and Chicago claims to have been the foremost city in its use and to have originated many of the best designs-its handsome residences, magnificent office buildings and its world-renowned Auditorium are furnished with hardware which cannot fail to attract attention for its richness and perfect fitness. For many of these buildings, the hardware was specially designed and manufactured-that on the Phenix insurance building was designed by the late John W. Root and furnished by Orr & Lockett, this was the first large building for which a special private, design was furnished throughout, coupled with an agreement that it should not be duplicated. The Rookery lays claim to being the first office building in the world on which Bower-Barffed iron hardware was used. This was also designed by the late John W. Root and furnished by Orr & Lockett. Many of the other buildings were furnished with special hardware, but these two mark distinct steps in the art and are worthy of special attention.

Thanks to Art Paholke for sharing  
this interesting information

# ROMANESQUE

Excerpts from "Locks and Builders Hardware"  
by Henry R. Towne

Romanesque has been well defined as the school based on and preserving Roman forms, which was founded by inhabitants of Roman colonies in Southern France. The wide extent of Romanesque work throughout Europe can be traced to the influence of conquest and colonization, notably in the case of Norman invasions of England and Sicily as well as France.

The characteristics are distinguishable but hard to define. In general massiveness, though frequently in later work delicacy is noticeable. The acanthus is used with sharp points as a rule, bounded with an interlace of acanthus stems in full vigor.

Bulging form in preference to receding; the convex rather than the concave, are stamps of the school. Its lasting features are weight and strength.

Romanesque ornamentation in France and Italy was like the first faint notes of spring after a dismal winter of dark ages following the fall of Rome.

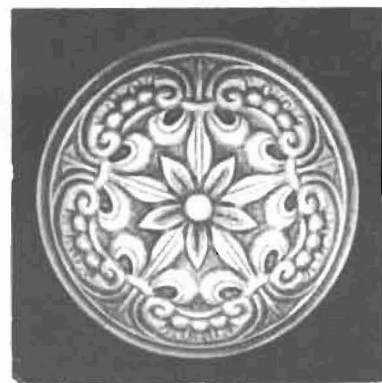
It was decidedly an awakening, because in spite of the temptation to continuously employ the classic fragments or copy them, we see a turning to nature for inspiration, which was later to lead to the realism of Gothic art.

Conventionality is its strong point as in all good schools of ornament, and yet it gives the almost perfect suggestion of natural forms without ever becoming realistic.

The knobs featured are notable examples of the Romanesque school of design.



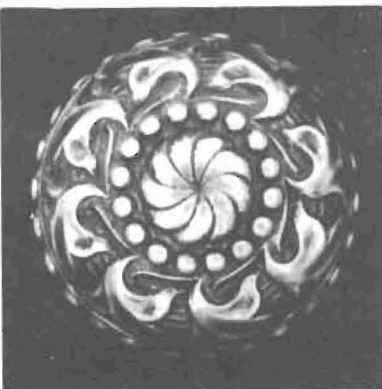
"Florence"  
By Corbin



By Lockwood



"Milo"  
By Reading



"Auvergne"  
By Yale & Towne

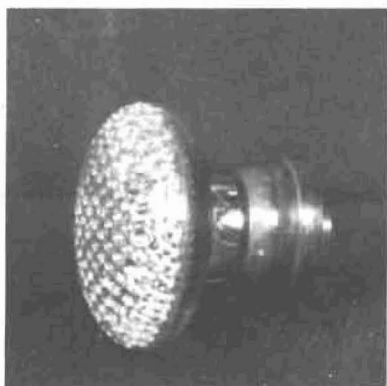
## MY FAVORITE KNOBS

By John Holland

I have been collecting doorknobs and related hardware since 1975. During that period of time, I have become fond of certain knobs, for one reason or another, but when I was asked to nominate my favorite knobs, I found it like trying to sort out my favorite relatives. They are all special and for different reasons, but here goes...



Waterford crystal. Knob was recovered from the Crystal Ballroom of the Grand Union Hotel, Saratoga Springs, N.Y. The Grand Union was built in the 1870's and was dismantled in 1955. It had the reputation of being the "meeting place of the world".



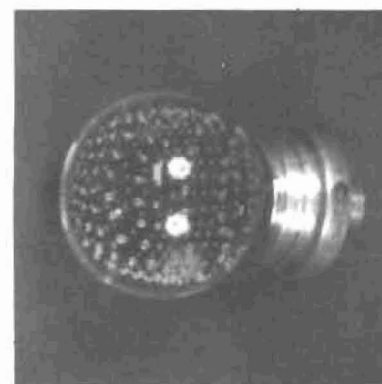
"Dew Drop" by Nashua Lock Co. 1879  
This knob is made of mercury glass or silver glass and is commonly called reflective glass.



"Punted" by Nashua Lock Co. 1879  
Pressed glass with umbrella shank. Found in junk store in Portland, Oregon. Cost \$1.75



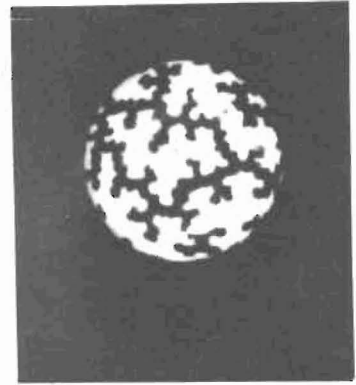
Sandwich glass. Cutglass with metal screw attaching knob to spindle.  
By Sanwich Glass, Cap Cod, Mass.  
(Closed operations in the late 1880's)



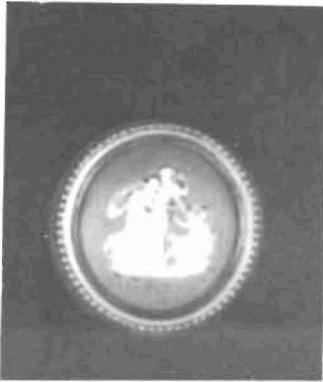
Pairpoint glass - also called "controlled bubbles". Has umbrella shank - 1880.



Cut Spheroid - Russell & Erwin  
Patented October 12, 1886



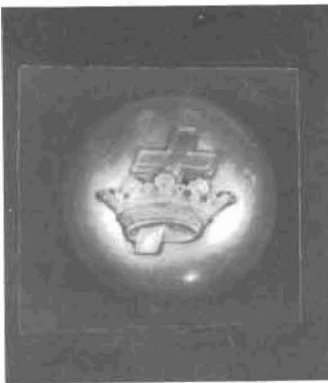
Porcelain - cobalt and gilt design.  
Thought to be English.



"Cupid Asleep" or "Two Nymphs stealing  
Cupid's arrow". This knob features a  
thin Wedgwood type jasperware cameo  
insert. White figures on a blue back-  
ground.



"Hummingbird" Exquisite design and  
workmanship. By Russell & Erwin in  
1880.



"Knights Templar" A Masonic Order  
emblematic from a mansion in Port-  
land, Oregon - circa 1900.



Indian bust - finely cast in deep  
relief, life like. Reportedly came  
from the Mizpah Hotel in Tonopah,  
Nevada, circa 1900.

We were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Emil Miller of Omaha, Nebraska, on March 2nd, as a result of complications following quad by-pass heart surgery.

Emil was instrumental in the formation of our club and devoted a great deal of time and talent to our objectives. He was appointed archivist at the last convention and was busy establishing a permanent archive for ADCA.

Emil, a native Nebraskan, was born December 27, 1917. Upon graduation from high school, he spent seven years in the Navy during World War II.

He later earned a degree from the

University of Nebraska school of Engineering. This was followed by specialized study and experience in the field of builders hardware, and subsequent employment with the Schlage Lock Company. December 31, 1983 marked his retirement after thirty years with Schlage.

Emil was an active member of several trade related associations including, The Door and Hardware Institute, The Cornhusker Builders Hardware Club and the Nebraska Locksmith Association.

The membership expresses their sincere condolence to Emil's wife, Dorothy Ann, ADCA secretary, and to her family.

David Olafsen of Caledonia, Illinois, has graciously responded to our request to tell his "story".

I started dealing in new and used general merchandise in 1955 when I was ten years old. My family was always very helpful, driving me to auctions and taking telephone messages. I learned about running a business and dealing with the public by trial and error, since none of us had any formal training in business. It was all quite low key at first.

Although a lack of capital is quite a detriment to most businesses, it tended to force me to examine abandoned and castaway items. This type of training prompted me to salvage from abandoned houses and farm buildings, cashing in on resalables and scrap metal. I found a decent doorknob that when I was about 18. It was quite large and egg



This whetted my appetite and acquainted with most of the dealers, bought many and sold

done and castaway items. This me to salvage from abandoned buildings, cashing in on resalables. The first house with a doorknob I recall, came along when I was about 18. It was quite large and egg shaped. I still have it.

for doorknobs. I got acquainted with most of the area scavengers and scrap dealers. I sold a few....

Over the years I became more involved in antiques and a better class of architectural artifacts than I was able to gather around home. Hence, I started traveling, first to the south (mostly Mississippi), later to New England with its great markets in Brimfield, Mass. and elsewhere including thousands of independent shops. All in all, it has been a prime opportunity to collect doorknobs.

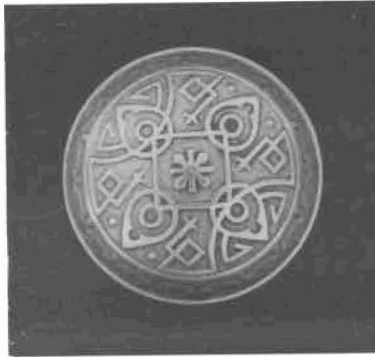
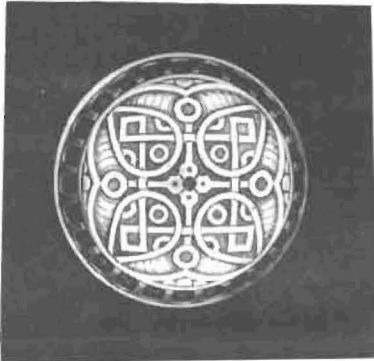
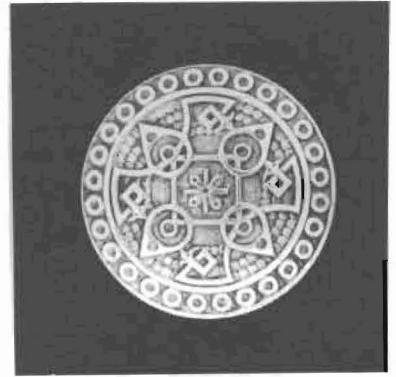
For me, the real jewels in the crown are the members of ADCA. Although I collected for twenty years, I never knew much about what I had, nor did I realize that others shared my interests. Belonging to the organization has enriched my experiences considerably. As far as knowledge - it's only the beginning.

David Olafsen

# MORE VARIATIONS



Test your memory  
Which ones do you have?  
- Before you look -



The June issue of the D C will include a membership directory. Only your name(s) and address will be listed unless you wish to include supplemental information such as; interest in trading, specialty and phone numbers. If you wish this additional information included, please complete the form below.

Members listed in the 1983 directory need not respond unless they wish to change the listing as it appeared.

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## Information for the 1984 Doorknob Collectors' Directory

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Name(s) Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
 City State zip ( ) Home Phone

( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Interested in Trading: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
 Day Phone

Specialty: (Emblematics, Victorian - etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Please do not include my name in the directory

## RESTORATION NEEDS CORNER

The restoration need for this issue was submitted by Len Blumin. He is seaching for 15 pairs of knobs illustrated here, for a friend who is restoring a victorian structure.

Escutcheons or roses are not requested.  
The center pattern must match exactly.  
One quarter inch shank opening preferred.

If you can help, please contact:

Len Blumin  
382 Throckmorton Ave.  
Mill Valley, Ca. 94941

