

# The Doorknob Collector

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## P. E. Guerin: A Different Model

BY ALLEN S. JOSLYN

P. E. Guerin Inc. is unusual among the companies that produced antique builders hardware. It still exists as an independent entity, long after the other manufacturers we hold dear in our hearts have been swallowed in waves of acquisitions, mergers and such like. Indeed, it is owned by a fourth-generation relative of the original founder, Pierre Emanuel Guerin. Guerin manufactures hardware using the same processes it began with almost 150 years ago, and the word “manufacture” is particularly appropriate, since each of its products is cast and finished by hand. Unlike many of those manufacturers who expanded their general line of useful hardware (buckets, axes, etc.) into builders’ hardware, Guerin has always concentrated on ornate decorative metal products, not only for doors, but furniture and a host of other items. And all this occurs in a factory in the middle of Greenwich Village in Manhattan.

The process used by Guerin raises the interesting question of what is an “original” piece of antique hardware. Unlike manufacturers of reproductions, Guerin today casts pieces from the same pattern that was used 100 or more years ago, using the same sand casting process. Thus one can order today an original knob which is identical – except for its age - with one made long ago. And that is what I did.

This particular story began with a pocket door pull showing an oriental man and trees (See above), which on its back bore the mark “P.E.G.” This was lucky; because of the way Guerin builds hardware, the identifying initials on a piece, such as on the backside of a doorknob pattern, are often lost in the process of casting or finishing the piece. Moreover, Guerin did not produce much in the way of catalogues until 1914, and that only illustrated a limited range of its products. As a result the only way to learn that the doorknob was made by Guerin may be to find it in Guerin’s sample cases, or illustrated in its pattern books. Those books include designs made only for special customers, such as Y & T or the Ford mansion in Dearborn, Michigan, with warnings not to reproduce them for other customers.

Once a pattern is selected, Guerin will locate the master pattern in its pattern room – although for seldom used patterns, the search may take a while. There is no way to ascertain with certainty when the pattern was first made. While the patterns are numbered, there is no apparent rationale for the numbering, and the same number may be used for unrelated products, such as or a knob and an escutcheon.

Newsletter Deadline - Monday, August 16, 2004

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In the course of going through the samples and the pattern books, a number of other items with the same design of the pocket door pull were found: a push plate (Fig. 1), an escutcheon (essentially the same design as the pocket door pull), an espagnolette bolt (Fig. 6), a cremorne bolt (Fig. 3 and Fig. 5), a key (Fig. 4), and a door knob. The pattern books also had sketches of a lock cover and a light switch plate. It was the doorknob which I decided to purchase and to follow its progress through manufacture. (BTW, an espagnolette bolt and a cremorne bolt are vertical rods to lock a door at the top and bottom. The espagnolette bolt is a single rod which locks by rotating horizontally, while a cremorne bolt has two pieces which engage the window frame by sliding vertically when a knob is turned).

The pattern is pressed into fine compacted sand in a box, which is coated with talc so it will separate. More sand is placed on top in a separate box and compacted. The two boxes are then separated, and the master patterns removed. Channels are cut into each depression, and large spaces (called "risers") are also cut to cool after the pieces being cast cool so that any contraction in the molten metal occurs there - in effect "attracting" the shrinkage and resulting imperfections. The channels are coated with graphite so that the molten metal does not carry with it any sand as the metal flows through the channels.

The two halves are closed and the mould is stored with other moulds until a sufficient number are accumulated to justify a "pour" - which happens approximately once a week. The moulds are lined up and two workers pour molten metal into each. The heat (the metal is about 2,000 degrees F.) and the fire make this a spectacular event. After cooling, the metal pieces are removed, cut into individual items, and filed to remove excess materials.

Next the pieces are "chased" - hand worked with a large assortment of little chisels to add detail and surface textures, comparable to the hair on the Kruezingler lion knob. This is a very labor intensive process; for example, one ornate bathroom spout and two handles require a full week (36 hours) of chasing. The extensive hand working of each piece and the resultant detail distinguishes Guerin from other producers of builders' hardware (although some of Yale & Towne's pieces are so finely detailed to suggest that they were chased).

One gets one's choice of finishes, and Viola!, we have an original antique knob, made yesterday. (A picture of the knob will appear in the next TDC)

That leaves several questions: how old in the pattern of this design, and where did it come from? Unfortunately, the answers are lost in history. P. E. Guerin was born in 1833 in Brittany and landed in New York in 1852 when he was 19 years old. It is the family tradition is that he learned his trade in New York and his business was started in 1857. His firm quickly became a prime supplier of metallic decoration to New York makers of French Revival furniture (reviving the designs of 18<sup>th</sup> century Royalist France), a style which was popular with the very rich after the Civil War who sought to emulate French trends. (See Barbara

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Laux, *The Furniture Mounts of P. E. Guerin*, *The Magazine Antiques*, May, 2002, pp. 140-149.)

One cannot be sure whether Guerin's patterns were imported from France, or made here, based on French catalogues or samples – or a bit of both. One Guerin knob (Fig. 8, bottom center) also appears in Fontaine et Cie catalogue circa 1900. Laux illustrates a Guerin plaque which closely resembles a plaque on a fine French cabinet made about 1785, and Guerin has an extensive collection of catalogues and design books.



Figure 1: Pushplate

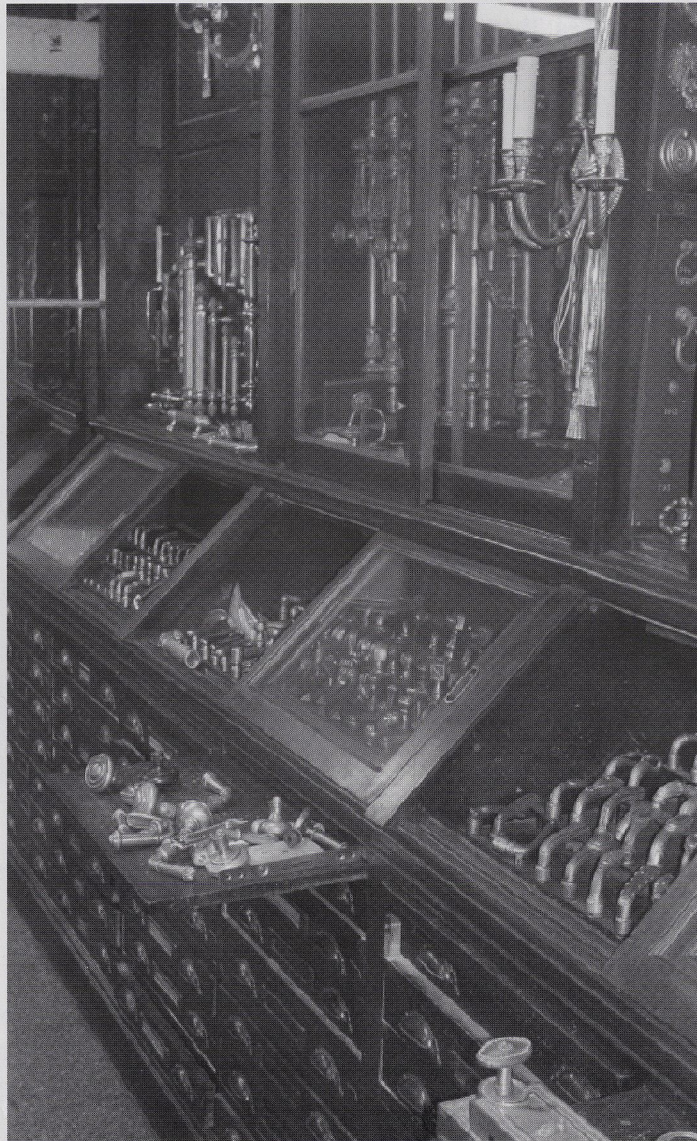


Figure 2: The Showrooms

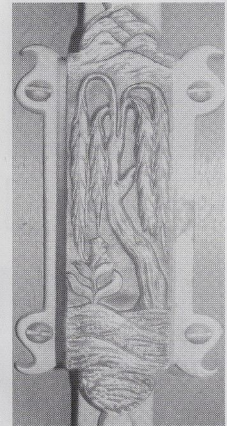


Figure 3: Cremorne

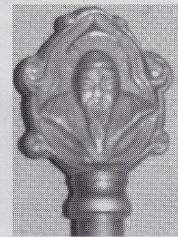


Figure 4: Key Blank

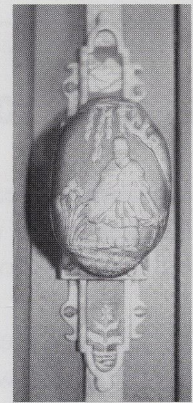


Figure 5: Cremorne



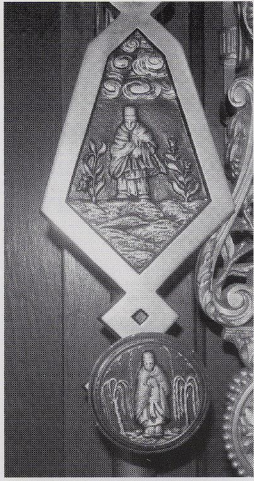


Figure 6: Espagnolette

So when was Guerin's oriental design hardware created? The design does not appear to be from the Japanese period which started in the last third of the Nineteenth century. Guerin prided itself in following classic French design, and, absent more information, the motif seems to be Chinese, not Japanese. The previous period when oriental design -- specifically Chinese design -- was the craze in Europe was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese themes no longer carried an exotic and romantic aura in the United States, that mantle having shifted to Japanese. It seems likely that in this design, as with Guerin's other designs, a firm founded almost 150 years ago and little changed since then, harks back to the previous century.



Figure 7: The Pour



Figure 8: Other Guerin Doorknobs

## WELCOME TO SAN FRANCISCO !

For almost a year now you've been reading our series of articles in TDC; you've received, in hand, a packet full of information; now, finally, our convention is just around the corner -- a reality! We'll be able to shake hands, hug, and communicate with one another -- face to face.

We are very pleased with the signups. A very nice group of you (close to 60) have registered as of this mid-June writing and hopefully more of you will have signed up by the time the convention convenes to join all the hardware hoopla.

There will be a welcome area for ADCA set up in the lobby of the Sheraton on Tuesday afternoon where a couple of our members will greet you and give you your packet of convention materials, along with additional information to make your stay in San Francisco unforgettable. We are in high anticipation of a grand time!

PATTI & LEN BLUMIN

VICKY & MARSHALL BEROL



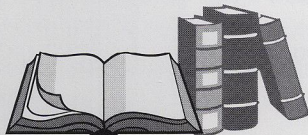
## A Matched Set

By Faye Kennedy

For years we felt lucky to own an exquisite knob having a figure of a Chinese man in the center. We just found out that we own an exquisite knob with a figure of a Chinese woman instead. A friend of ours owns the matching knob (actually she owns the full set) and when we saw the mustache we realized that ours was the woman. Our friend has a son who lives in Hong Kong and he has been promised the set. They measure 3 1/8" high by 1 1/2". There are no markings on the knobs so we do not know the manufacturer. The attached rosettes can be seen peeking out from the sides of the knobs. Note the unusual shank and rosette in the side view. The attachment hole is square. The third example of these knobs is smaller (1 3/4" high by 1 1/4" wide), and given that the shank would not accommodate another knob on the opposite side, may have been meant for a closet door. (It belongs to a friend and it is not going to Hong Kong or anywhere else.) They are truly beautiful knobs. We tend to think that they were manufactured abroad. Can anyone give us some more information about these knobs?



## From the Archives



By Steve Menchhofer

It's order time for the catalog copies! You will find your order form enclosed with this issue of the newsletter. Read it over carefully before ordering. The deadline for ordering is August 30, 2004. Any orders sent to us after this date will be returned. If you have any questions about the form or ordering, please email us at [smenchhofe@aol.com](mailto:smenchhofe@aol.com) or telephone us at (317) 291-6043.

Look for a display of sample catalog copies at the convention. They will be on the Archives table. Spend some time browsing through them to see what we offer. See you in San Francisco.

*[Editors note: The Catalogs are old and need to be handled with care. Therefore to preserve this invaluable collection, they are copied only once a year. This is your chance to order.]*



## The Roster is Coming, The Roster is Coming!

The 2004 Roster will be coming in your next issue.

Make sure that we have the correct information  
and that your dues are up-to-date.

Check **NOW**. We want you on the next roster.

### What is a Business Membership

In response to numerous requests, the ADCA now provides business memberships. The cost is \$100 per year, which in reality it is only \$75 over your normal membership cost. Your personal name will still be in the Membership Roster and your business will be listed in the Business Roster. Additionally, your business will have links from our website, [AntiqueDoorknobs.org](http://AntiqueDoorknobs.org), to your own website.

The Business Roster will include your logo as well as the information you give us about your business. This Business Roster goes out to all members as a quick reference when they or friends are looking for a particular service. We hope to have your business information prominently displayed to the general public at our conventions. It is an opportunity to get your name out there.

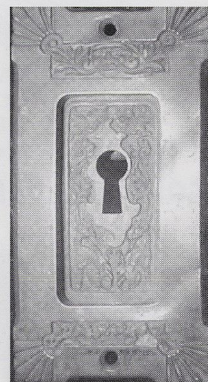
When you receive information that your membership is due, you will also be receiving a yellow sheet to be filled in if you are interested in a Business Membership. Note that we send only a single notice to members that their membership is due (see your mailing label for your date), so please respond in a timely manner.

### The Doorknob Exchange

Members are reminded that your dues entitle you to advertise items for sale, trade, or wanted at no charge. ADCA is not responsible for any transaction or the condition of the items advertised.

**For Sale:** Several different YWCA & YMCA knobs and Knights of Pythias knobs & sets, brass & iron for a picture email Craig Phillips (#297) [craigp@accn.org](mailto:craigp@accn.org) or call 269-673-2815

Unusual pocket door pull for sale. Numerous Beasties. Contact David Sherk at 585-466-3099 or email [gadaidasa@yahoo.com](mailto:gadaidasa@yahoo.com)



### Lock Show

This year the Lock Museum's annual show will be held on October 9<sup>th</sup> at the Terryville High School. For further details, call Tom Hennessey at 860-582-6897.

### Keep In Touch

Membership	Newsletter and Other Questions	Web Site
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