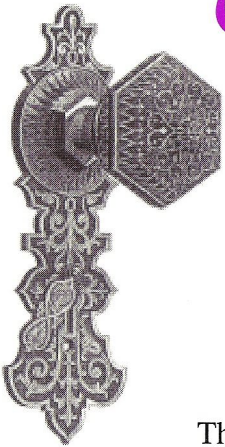


# The Doorknob Collector

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## LOUIS SULLIVAN'S GUARANTY BUILDING BUFFALO, NEW YORK

By Allen S. Joslyn

The Guaranty building in downtown Buffalo was built in 1895-96. Its architect was Louis Sullivan of Adler & Sullivan; indeed it was the last building built by that firm, which thereafter dissolved when Dankmar Adler left the firm for private industry. According to Paul Goldberger, architecture critic for the New York Times, in the history of American architecture, this building is "perhaps the most important of all" regarding 19<sup>th</sup> century skyscrapers. For our purposes, that is, antique ornamental hardware, it has perhaps the best Sullivan hardware (although some might argue for the Chicago Stock Exchange) of any of the six of his buildings with specially designed hardware. It is, moreover, the only hardware design drawing which we have in Sullivan's own hand.



The building was commissioned by Hascal L. Taylor, a native of Buffalo, who charged Adler & Sullivan to build "the largest and best office building in the city." Taylor, however, died in November of 1894 before the construction plans were announced. It was to be 13 stories, the tallest building in Buffalo. The construction company retained to build it, The Guaranty Construction Company of Chicago,

bought the property and completed the project. Construction began in 1895, and the Building was occupied on March 1, 1896. Thus the door plates bear the name "Guaranty". Approximately two years later it was refinanced through the Prudential Insurance Company, and renamed the Prudential Building.



The Guaranty is probably the most highly decorated of Sullivan's buildings. Its exterior is covered by terra cotta with foliate and geometric designs. (pg.3) Its exterior design has three elements: (1) the first two floors constitute a base; (3) floor 3 through 12 are the shaft with vertical piers which extend upwards, uninterrupted and (3) an elaborate cornice of the 13<sup>th</sup>

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floor with a row of large, round windows. The same elements can be seen in its "sister building", as Sullivan put it, the Wainwright Building in St. Louis. Both use narrow piers to emphasize the upward thrust of the building. And then it went through the slow decline of 19th century office buildings – it gradually got less fashionable as tastes changed and it seemed less comfortable or efficient. (Originally the lavatories were all on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, but each office had a marble washstand with hot and cold water.) Various owners tried to "modernize" it, with all the alterations and vandalism that suggests.

In 1955 Richard Nickel took two cross-country trips to identify Sullivan's architecture. When he stopped in Buffalo to visit the Guaranty building, which was being remodeled, the wreckers gave him and his traveling companion "dozens of doorknobs, chandeliers, push plates and a few fragments of terra cotta." (Here all true doorknobbers will have two emotions – a brown sorrow at what was being done to the building, and bright green envy.) The 1955 "modernization" involved a dropped ceiling in the lobby and a fiberglass exterior to the lower floors. Later the top eleven stories were sandblasted, damaging the intricate terra cotta. In 1974 the Guaranty suffered a serious fire on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. It was almost empty at the time. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1975, but that did not provide tenants.

Things were not looking good for the best skyscraper of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and in 1977 the mortgage holder applied for a demolition permit. Fortunately preservation was in the air, and a citizens' committee was formed to save it. The owner of the Prudential shouldered losses and looked for a preservation minded purchaser. Federal tax laws had been changed to provide special tax benefits for rehabilitating buildings on the National Register. Three developers bought the property in 1981, convinced that the building, if correctly restored, would be a premier Buffalo address. Senator Daniel Patrick Monahan, a fan of good architecture, supported the effort. The Federal government, Erie County, the Bank of New York and private investors came up

with the \$12.4 million needed to buy and restore the building. The tax deferments the owners earned were estimated at \$4 million, and made the deal the possible. The cost of the restoration itself was \$8 million.



Staircase in the Guaranty Building



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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Board of Directors of ADCA or the editors.

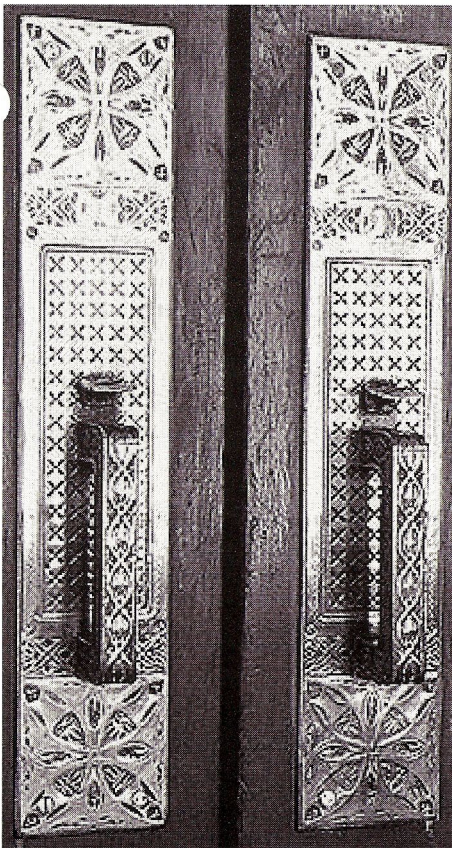
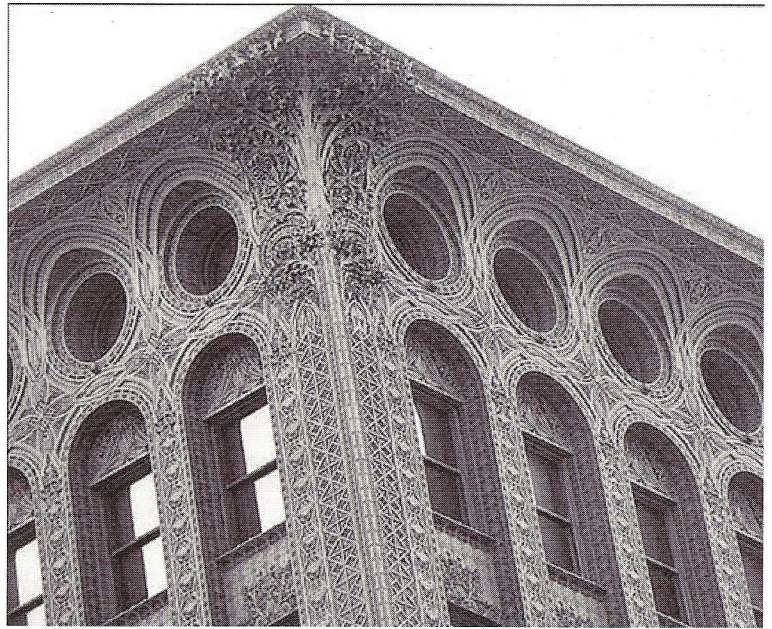
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It was restored in grand fashion. Some of the exterior terra cotta needed to be replaced, and a company which had previously only made garden pots bid for the job and won, beginning a historical preservation business.

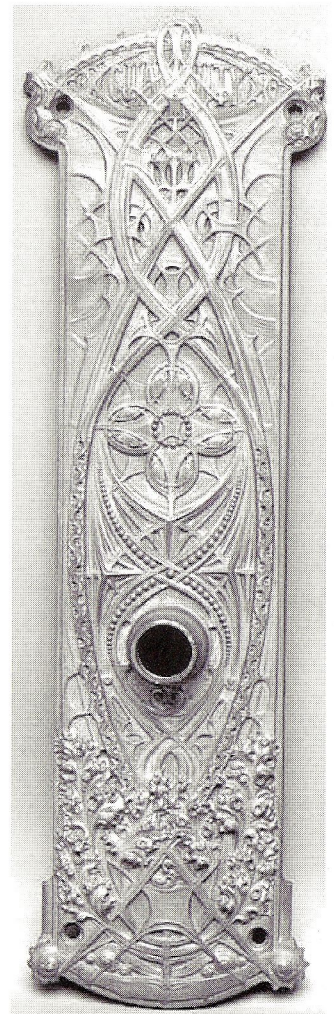
The building had more than 100 terra cotta patterns, and it was estimated that 18 had been damaged. That required coloring the replacement terra cotta so that it would not only match the old terra cotta but would also age similarly. Moreover the stairway's bronze electroplate cast iron, which had been oxidized heavily over the years, had to be stripped, cleaned and repainted with a bronze-containing liquid. Replacements for missing parts of the stairway were cast (these reproductions can still be purchased on the web).

In 1998 the building's owner filed for bankruptcy, imperiling the building again. Hodgson Russ LLP, a law firm which had been a leading force in the earlier effort to preserve the building, purchased it in 2002 at a foreclosure sale for use as its principal offices, thus ensuring that the Guaranty Building will continue as one of America's most important architectural landmarks



I hope we will all be able to see the results when we visit Buffalo next September.

**Bibliography:** In addition to the sources cited in prior articles, see Buffalo Architecture & History, Buffalo as an Architectural Museum, <http://an/bfn/org> Goldberger, Architecture: A Sullivan Gem Rescued, New York Times, 11/20/1983, C15 Huxtable, Good News and Bad News from Buffalo, New York Times, 10/2/1977, D35 Restoration, New York Times, 10/7/84, SM102 Historic American Buildings Survey No. NY 5487, Prudential Building, September, 1973, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage> Miller, Bravo for Old Buildings! <http://members.aol.com/timarends/bravo/html> Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building, [http://www.hodgsonruss.com/article\\_406.html](http://www.hodgsonruss.com/article_406.html)







Elevator doors in the Guaranty Building

## **A MESSAGE FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT, BRAD KITTEL**

For those who did not get to the convention, I would like to introduce myself to the club. My name is Brad Kittel, and though I have only been a member for a few years, I am serving as the president of ADCA this year and I want to thank the members and the board for the opportunity to serve. I think it is important for each of us to try to make a contribution to the club in any way we can as it does so much to educate, assist and support the relatively young field of antique hardware collecting. For me, the organization has been incredibly enlightening and educational. Suzanne, my wife, and I have had a great time going to all of the conventions and especially enjoy the fellowship with other members, seeing some of the nicest hardware in the world, and bidding at the auction at the end.

For those who don't know us, my wife and I have an architectural antiques store in Gonzales, Texas. Having fallen in love with antique hardware after we started the store, we have

chosen to specialize in antique door hardware and have set up a nearly museum size display to educate the public. We have learned so much and acquired so much hardware and knowledge from our relationship with the club that we consider the cost of the membership as an incredibly small investment. I have found that it is often hard to be a collector as well as to operate an antique hardware store, because I get so attached to some of my favorites, that they end up "not for sale", but rather on display only. Inevitably they are the doorknobs that some of the people want, but considering how expensive the hard to find knobs have gotten, most people will not pay the price. Still, I'll throw out a price at times in hopes that they will turn it down and I can keep the knob, but on occasion someone will grab it up and go, leaving me bound to go out and try to find a replacement. There are some that I am still looking for five years later. We have more than a thousand patterns in our collection and yet it is dwarfed by other members in the club.

My hope is that I can help increase the membership rolls and public exposure of the club while I am in office this year. We are considering altering the name of the club in order to increase the scope of collectors by expanding the field to include other items that most of us are interested in, like the door plates, doorbells, knockers, hinges, and other stuff from the 1870's to the early 1900's. Since many of us are already interested and collecting in these areas, it will hopefully draw new members and items into the flock. It could also add to our conventions by bringing both new members and inventory which should only benefit the club. Once we have narrowed down the possible new names, we will most likely publish them in the newsletter, post them on the web, and try to get a feel for how the membership feels about the idea and new names.

This year the Board of Directors approved the ADCA contributing a third display case to the Bosco-Milligan museum in Portland, Oregon in memory of Arnie Fredricks, an ADCA founder and inspiration to many.

We are also hoping to make progress on the possibility of forming a virtual museum for antique hardware. Though it would only be pictures and information, it would enable us to do what many of the members have desired for years and that is to display our beautiful hardware and educate the public so that more people will come to appreciate the industrial art that has captivated all of us. The concept is great, but the implementation is complex enough that it may take a year or more to bring it into fruition.



Finally, I hope to put up a forum on our website that will provide a place for visitors and members to possibly ask and answer questions about antique hardware. Hopefully it will act like a bulletin board for some items of interest as well as providing some good stories or history on knobs we are researching. The Board of Directors is also hoping to finish the *Victorian Decorative Art* supplement this next year. So with lots of goals and little time, I hope to forge ahead and see if we can't add a little something to the club before we get to next years convention.

Again I want to thank everyone for their support during my tenure as president and welcome anyone with good ideas for the growth and expansion of the club to send them my way so I can bounce them off the board members. While I do not have anywhere near the knowledge or expertise of the club presidents that have come before me, I hope that I too can add something to the club while I have the chance. Please feel free to contact me at [bwk@discoverys.net](mailto:bwk@discoverys.net) if I can be of help or take any incredible doorknobs and antique hardware off your hands.

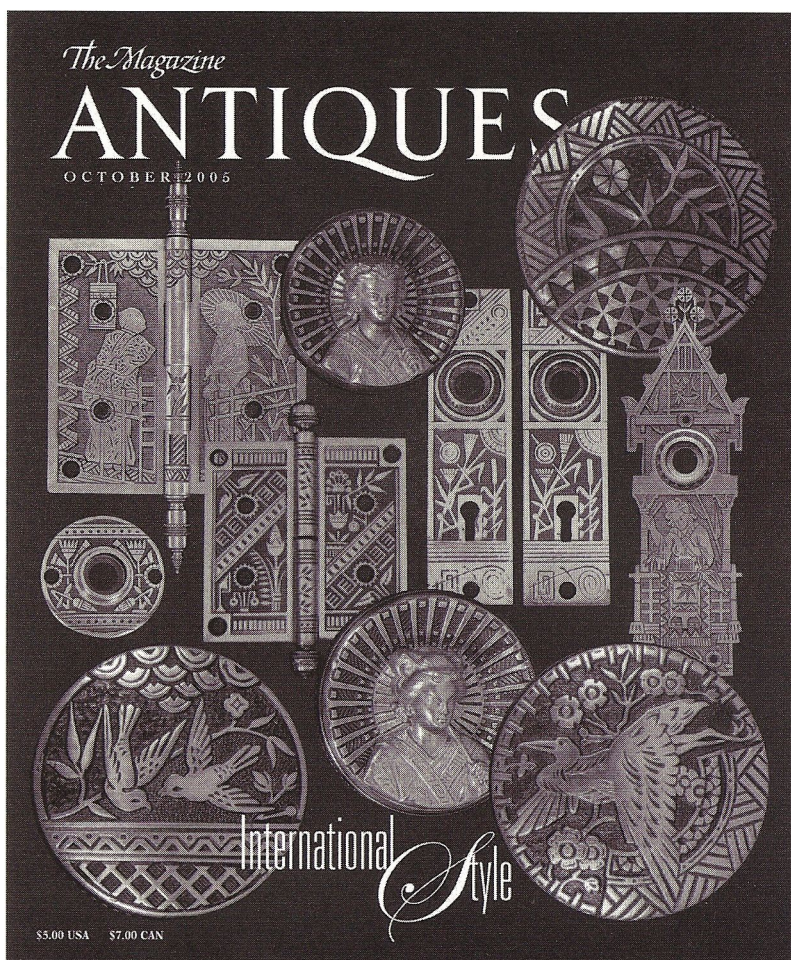
## Other Publications

### Feature Door Hardware

General public interest in Antique Builders Hardware – knobs, hinges, escutcheons, etc. – is growing. Vicky Berol sent in an article in the October, 2005 issue of *Victorian Homes* entitled “Fancy Fittings: Ornate pieces of antique hardware are crowning touches in a Victorian home.” The *New York Times* of September 22, 2005, p. D4 has a illustrated article on high-end reproductions of some of our favorites (such as the “Judgment” knob).

Finally, the cover of *The Magazine Antiques* for October, 2005 was a striking collage of some very tasty hardware, as shown on the right.

From *The Magazine ANTIQUES*, October 2005. A selection of bronze hardware, American c. 1879-1889. Collection of Robert Tuggle and Paul Jeromack; photographs by John Bigelow Taylor. Reprinted courtesy Brant Publications, Inc. These and other aesthetic hardware are included in an exhibit, *A Brass Menagerie, Metalwork of the Aesthetic Movement*, at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, New York, running from October 2, 2005 through March 19, 2006. A beautiful catalogue of the exhibit is available from the Institute, 315-797-0000.



(For back issues or subscriptions call 212-941-2806 or visit [www.themagazineantiques.com](http://www.themagazineantiques.com)).



# BUFFALO, BUFFALO, BUFFALO

Speaking of Buffalo, thanks to Dale Sponaule, the 2006 Convention will be there from September 12 through 16<sup>th</sup> at the Holiday Inn Buffalo/Amherst. Buffalo is famous for – among other things – Buffalo wings and outstanding architecture, from Richardson through Sullivan to Frank Lloyd Wright. So even if it is almost a year away, mark your calendars. (No, it does not snow in Buffalo in September; the weather then is almost always delightful.)

## *Hardware Pieces Worth a Look*

*by Faye Kennedy*

There is more to see at the convention than just doorknobs. Members of the club collect all manner of hardware. Above are three plaques that are of exceptional quality. The oval one was made by the Metallic Compression Co. This company was known for the fine quality of their work. The two to the right would have been used on doors. But, be careful when purchasing hardware. The two door panels that are approximately 10" x 4" are fine quality reproductions. Liz Gordon of Liz's Antique Hardware in Los Angeles has these two for sale if they are of interest to you.



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