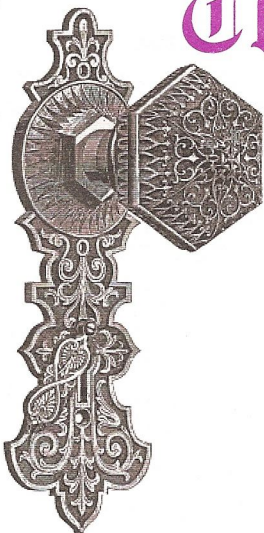


The Doorknob Collector



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“FOUND IN A BOTTLE”

Hardware Company Wars Mallory, Wheeler & Co. and Sargent and Company: The Importance of Patents and Business Contracts

There is much we do not know about the history of decorative builders’ hardware, and lots of work to be done. In this issue Len Blumin shares with us a fragment of an untitled manuscript he found in the files of the New Haven City Library where he was searching for material on Mallory Wheeler & Co. There was no indication of the author of the piece, which consisted of pages 5-8 of a type-written article that might have been submitted as a thesis, or for some other project. It appears to have been considerably longer and obviously was the product of considerable research in original records and provides fascinating tidbits about the close relationship between Mallory Wheeler & Co. with Sargent & Co., both located in New Haven, CT

In the next issue Len will provide suggestions for further research into the history of hardware companies. These generally require travel to Connecticut, but it’s a beautiful State in which to spend a vacation. Below is the text of the fragment.

Sargent & Co., of New York, in its advertisement in September 1863 in Hardware Reporter and Iron and Steel Manufacturers’ Circular (later to become Iron Age) mentioned that it was sales agent for Davenport, Mallory & Co., “manufacturers of door locks, knobs, padlocks, etc.”, whose factory was in New Haven. Initially the agency excepted the cities of Philadelphia and Baltimore. Those exceptions did not continue for long, for the 1866 Sargent catalogue stated that Sargent & Co. was then sole agent. Davenport, Mallory & Co. had been founded as Pierpont & Hotchkiss in 1834, and in 1865 was thought to be the largest lock manufacturer in the United States. It was the first in this country, in 1835 under the Hotchkiss patent, to use a coiled spring in a lock or latch to protract the latch bolt.



When John Davenport Wheeler in 1868 purchased from his uncle’s estate one-tenth interest (showing a total valuation of \$350,000 for the firm) the name was changed to Mallory, Wheeler & Co. In

Inside		
Found In A Bottle.....1	A Little Place Called Brimfield...4	Notes.....5
In Memoriam.....5	The Buffalo Convention.....5	The Doorknob Exchange.....6

1871 it published 1,000 copies of a catalogue, very extraordinary for the time, a quarto in colors, reported to have cost \$40,000. (Atwater's History of New Haven gives the cost as \$60,000 for 2,000 copies.) [A copy in excellent condition was offered by a Rare Book dealer a year or two ago; it was described as containing "page after page of large illustrations of locks and keys, executed in silver, gilt and copper." – Ed.]

The loss in 1872 of a lawsuit brought by Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Co. for infringement of the Rushby patent for a reversible lock put Mallory, Wheeler & Co. in quite a dilemma without a reversible lock. Sargent & Company came to the rescue with a "pull-out reverse" feature patented October 19, 1869 (No. 96049) by William E. Sparks, who had assigned the patent to his employer. (The cash book shows two payments to Sparks in December 1868: \$150 on December 17 and \$60 on December 20. Both were charged against patents, but what they covered does not appear.) Under a contract dated October 30, 1872, Sargent & Company assigned to Mallory, Wheeler & Co. all rights under this patent, and took a license under it from the latter on the same date. The contract provided that the latter would manufacture a line of cheaper, lower priced locks, with cast iron inside parts, as had been previously urged by Sargent & Co., of New York, in order to compete with locks of that grade on the market; and that the assignee would be exempt from the payments of royalty, if, up to the expiration of the patent, Sargent & Co., of New York, and Mallory, Wheeler & Co. continued cordial business; but in the event of a break and severance of the selling agency agreement, then the assignee was obligated to pay to Sargent & Company, of New Haven, a certain royalty for all goods made under and during the life of the patent. This last provision proved to be a very important one.

Burton Mallory, managing partner of Mallory, Wheeler & Co., died in December 1878 and was succeeded by a son, Fred B. Mallory. Clouds began to gather, and the business relations between the company and the Sargents became less and less cordial. The break came in 1884. Sargent & Company collected the royalty due under the 1872 contract, the terms of which the new Mallory, Wheeler management apparently had not known or had forgotten, for the patent had only two years to run, expiring in 1886. Nor did it realize how serious was the loss of their sales market. The contract has disappeared. What the royalty rate was is not now known, but Sargent & Company's books show the receipt on October 22, 1885, from The Mallory, Wheeler Co. – it had been incorporated in 1884 – of \$2,000, undoubtedly the total royalty payment, the amount possibly being the result of a slight compromise.

While known to the trade, no direct reference to the termination of the sales contract appeared in Iron Age. In fact in its issue of June 12, 1884, announcing the opening of a new Mallory, Wheeler sales office at 55 Chambers Street, the article concludes: "The trade who have for years been purchasing Mallory, Wheeler & Co.'s goods through Sargent & Co. will be pleased to learn that the arrangement above referred to does not in any way interfere with their arrangement with this house, who will continue to sell their goods as heretofore at factory rates." Indirect reference to the break was made on July 24, 1884, when it reported: "Frederick G. Brower, their [Mallory, Wheeler] sales agent has issued a circular to their customers inviting a call at their New York office when in the city."

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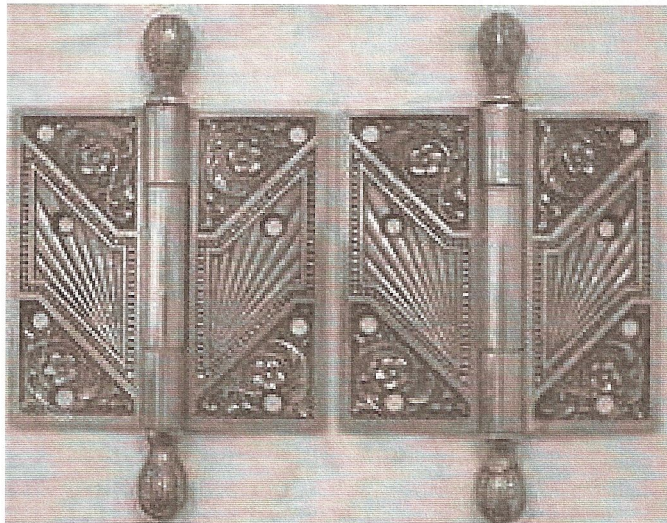
Founded Sept 1981, the **Antique Doorknob Collectors of America** is a non-profit organization devoted to the study and preservation of ornamental hardware.

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Though some store handles with elongated escutcheons had been made since 1874 (Mallory, Wheeler supplying the latches), the real manufacture of locks and trim by Sargent & Company began early in 1884 when William E. Sparks, after several years' experience in the Mallory, Wheeler & Co. and P.F. Corbin plants, returned to Sargent & Company and began making lock patterns. On September 1 four lock makers were employed: Henry Tolles (who had retired from P. & F. Corbin) as foreman for about a year, Henry Foulkes, John Hauth, and James Maley. Russell Sargent, son of Joseph B. Sargent, and a recent graduate of Yale, was assigned to grow up with and help in the development of the lock business. George Munson, the buyer for Sargent & Co. of New York, for some years spent one day a week regularly at the factory as a consultant. A new building (S) was constructed primarily for lock manufacture.

In the lay out of the Sargent lock line there was studied and continued endeavor to depart from the Mallory, Wheeler line (except as to general size, recognized as trade standard), to simplify inside construction, and to standardize parts, improvements to which the older lock manufacturers had been paying but little attention. Standardization included having all knob locks of a size made with the same



distance between the center of the keyhole and the center of the spindle-hub. This made escutcheons interchangeable. New designs were adopted for the exterior of the locks, the name was cast on lock cases, and a monogram "S & Co" stamped on the outside face of brass or bronze bolts. A new numbering system was adopted. W. E. Sparks devised the "easy spring" on the latch bolt, first used in lock 5234.

Mallory, Wheeler & Co. never manufactured the now popular pin tumbler or cylinder lock, the original patent for which was issued in 1861 to Linus Yale, Jr. There is an interesting side-light on the lock industry. In 1871, J. D. Wheeler and W. M. Andrews, superintendent of Mallory, Wheeler & Co., by invitation visited in Stamford, Conn., the Yale & Towne Manufacturing Co. to inspect the plant with a view of purchasing the door lock and drawer lock business, in which what little business was done was reported as with substantially no profit. Mallory, Wheeler would not purchase the real estate, which Yale & Towne would not exclude from the proposal, and besides the former feared some patent or other litigation, which seemed "in the air", so negotiations were dropped. Not many years after 1884 Mallory, Wheeler confined their manufacture to padlocks, and in 1913 went out of business. While Sargent & Company was not a successor of Mallory, Wheeler & Co. in the same sense as it was of Peck & Walter Manufacturing Co., it was not long before in the lock industry it replaced Mallory, Wheeler, whose product Sargent & Co. of New York had been selling since as early as 1863.

The ownership of land on the waterfront with property rights to the harbor line was useful in the expansion of the factory. On the south side of Water Street opposite the main building (A) were "flats", for the most part barely covered at high tide and exposed at low tide. As soon as the company operations in New Haven were begun in 1864 scrap and other materials not otherwise usable were dumped on the flats to make new land. The early cash books show that some sand was purchased at various times for the same purpose.

In 1869 the first building (L, later added to both horizontally and vertically) was constructed on the filled-in land south of Water Street, and like all subsequent buildings was built on piles. Other build-

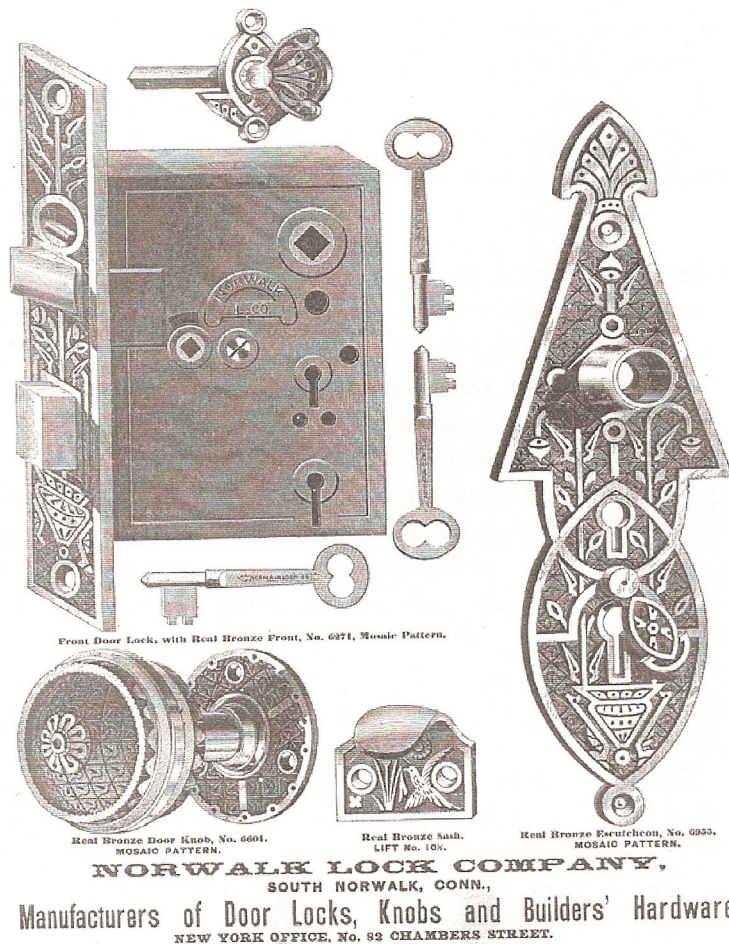
ings followed in 1871. Then came a lull in the company's building construction till 1878 when in that and in the following years through 1885 there was considerable building in the blocks on both sides of Water Street. The first bridge across Water Street, connecting building A and L, was constructed in 1869.

A Little Place called Brimfield

By Norman Blam

Have you ever heard of a little place called Brimfield, Mass.? Three times a year this small New England town comes alive with literally hundred of thousand of people from all over the world looking for antiques. The farmers open their potato fields to antique vendors every May, July, and September. Usually it rains in May, and the fields are muddy, but you get great deals, July is brutally hot and deals are made more easily, and September is perfect, but you are contending with more shoppers, so the deal must be made faster.

Cheryl and I began going to Brimfield twenty five years ago, when we could buy knobs for five or ten dollars, and come home with twenty or thirty knobs. Much has changed over the years since many vendors now sell over the internet,



and now we come home with maybe four or five expensive knobs. My first experience with a vendor was when the gentleman told me to come back in the afternoon, and "what Ed Thrall didn't take, I could have, but Ed always has first choice." I knew then that I had to develop my own pickers. Over the years we did have vendors that would think of us first, and seeing them three times a year made the venture worth while.

We tried to work the field smartly like all the dealers. This was BCP, **Before Cell Phones**. We watched dealers running from field to field with walkie talkies, talking back and forth, "what should I buy this for?", and "don't buy that I just bought it." So that's the way you do it, huh? After our purchase of walkie talkies Cheryl and I split up and agreed to meet for lunch. I had a brisk day of socializing with my "pickers" and covered lots of ground. At noon I was greeted with a wife madder than a wet hen. She had been trying to reach me all morning, but I had never turned my walkie talkie on! That was the end of taking on two fields at a time. She was so mad she bought jewelry instead of knobs. Now we do the same field together. My mother didn't raise a fool.

Cheryl also made me into a walking billboard, which I hate to admit worked. She made a tee shirt that said, "Looking for: Doorknobs, bookmarks, and sugar bowls," both on my front and back. All the things we were interested in. Nine times out of ten a vendor would see the shirt and say, "Heh, over here I have a....." Guess it pays to advertise, even if you look funny.

There will always be for me a memory that stands out at Brimfield. Cheryl was working at the time, and would have to check in by pay phone every hour for her messages. Pay phones were few and far between, so she would stand in line like everyone else and get to know everyone in line while waiting. This time when the man behind her heard we collected doorknobs he described a wonderful Rail Road knob with a train coming out of the mountain tunnel. Even though she had invested over a half hour wait she and the man left the line and came looking for me, so we could buy the doorknob of our dreams. The man was thrilled to get one doorknob off his hands. When we got to his space his partner informed us he had sold it literally ten minutes ago to a gentleman from Indiana. You guess it, our own friend Steve Menchhofer! It has always been to me the knob that got away, but then I'm glad it went to my fellow collector and good friend. Isn't that what collecting is all about? Maybe we will see you at Brimfield.

NOTES

Brent Hines, an artist in Akron, Ohio, produces artwork and offers to do so incorporating members' own doorknobs. Anyone who is interested should contact him at 408 Reasch Ave, Akron, OH 44307, tel 330-535-7162.

Vicky Berol, our very own "Gofer", has been featured in articles in Old House Interiors: May issue, "News & Views", Page 14, a national publication, and in Bay Area By Design. An Insider's Guide To Secret Sources, a local publication about hard-to find, different types of services in the San Francisco Bay Area. Vicky also had a letter publicizing the ADCA published in the April, 2006 issue of Victorian Homes magazine, in response to an article about vintage hardware.

Please let the Editor of TDC know of any other activities of members in the doorknob field, including article, letters, presentations, etc.

IN MEMORIAM

Loretta Nemec has heard from a fellow member, Lillian Balasa #71, that her husband Dick of 50 years passed away suddenly on February 13, 2006. Richard was born June 13, 1930, was a Korean War Veteran, father of four and grandfather of four.

Lillian and Dick became members of ADCA in 1983 and hosted a memorable convention in 1992 in Elgin, Illinois. Outstanding entertainment for that fun evening in 1992 was the ADCA Barber Shop Quartet, which consisted of Rich Kennedy, Charlie Wardell, Bill Byington and Len Blumin, all suited in their Victorian costumes with their high hats and mustaches. The women wore their elegant Victorian costumes which made the convention evening, "Excellent in Elgin" one to remember. (See issue #55 to reminisce).



MORE ABOUT THE BUFFALO CONVENTION

By Dale Sponaugle

The 26th Annual convention of the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America will be held in Buffalo, NY from Wednesday September 13 through Saturday September 16th. The hospitality suite will be open the evenings of the 12th through the 15th. Wednesday will be devoted to tours of the Buffalo area. Display set-up will start at 7:30 am on Thursday the 14th.

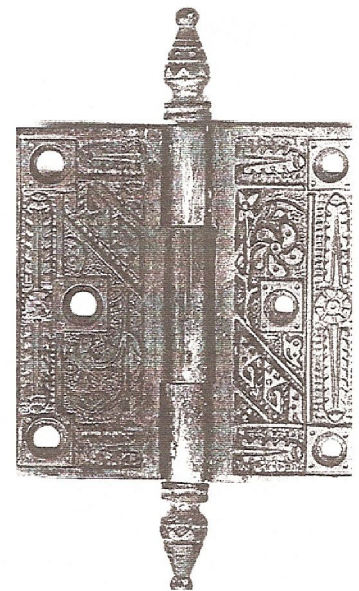
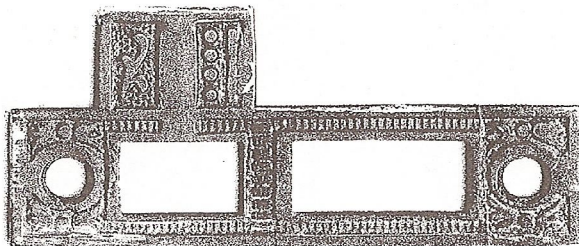
The auction will be the morning of Saturday, the 16th and the convention will end at noon that day. The convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Amherst, 1881 Niagara Falls Blvd. Amherst, NY, 14228; 716-691-8181. Our room rate is \$79 per night. I suggest you make reservations now so you are not forced to stay at another hotel. The Holiday Inn is immediately adjacent to exit 3 from interstate 290 West and exit 3B from 290 East. It is 10 minutes from the NY State Thruway, 15 minutes from the Buffalo Niagara International Airport and 20 minutes from Niagara Falls. The airport serves all the major airlines. The hotel has a free shuttle from the airport. When you arrive in the luggage area there is a courtesy phone for the Amherst Holiday Inn.

If you want to ship hardware ahead, then ship it to my home: Dale Sponaugle 175 Koster Row, Amherst NY 14226-3444. Call, write or email (dsponaugle@adelphia.net) me in advance so I know what to expect. You can also leave your hardware with me if you drive but plan to enter Canada. Customs can be unpredictable and I personally would not risk confiscation. Every fast food and casual dining restaurant in the world is within 10 minutes of the hotel, and downtown boasts many fine restaurants (as well as being the home of Buffalo Wings) The hotel also has its own restaurant. The convention room, restaurant and banquet room are conveniently located next to each other on the first floor.

The Doorknob Exchange

Wanted:

Vicky Berol needs ten "Ceylon" strike plates and eight 3.5" hinges, steeple finials (not ball finials), in cast iron, bronze plated or brass. Contact her at 415-771-9899 or sfgofer@yahoo.com



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