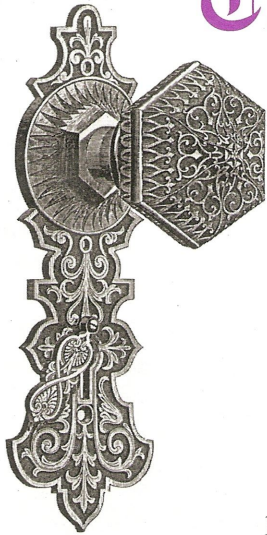


# The Doorknob Collector



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**A Publication of The Antique Doorknob Collectors of America**

*A Nonprofit Organization Devoted to the Study and Preservation of Ornamental Hardware*

## EYE CANDY – ENAMELED HARDWARE STEP RIGHT UP !!

*By Allen S. Joslyn*

As a bit of temporary relief from this dull academic publication, we present herein pictures of examples of enameled hardware. The stuff is very rare, and often only one example remains. The process started with stock hardware items, which were then enameled.

“Enameled” is a broad term. Reportedly, R&E employees’ would take home hardware pieces which their wives and children would “enamel and bake in their ovens” in the evenings. This undoubtedly referred to “japanning” hardware, baking a resin (based on linseed oil) coating to produce a rust resistant surface. Home ovens, no matter how diligently attended, could hardly produce the temperatures necessary to melt glass. There are also a number of references in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to enameling iron, etc., but they also had nothing to do with the current subject of discussion, but appear also to have been methods of inhibiting rust. How can you recognize the enameled hardware that is the subject of this article? You know it when you see it. (In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, R&E and Corbin produced some special hardware with polychrome finishes, but these are stylistically quite different from the 1870s enameled hardware. One R&E knob is shown on the first page of TDC 136.)

The “enameling” referred to herein involved heating metals with glass chips and other chemicals, which then melted and produced a highly colored translucent surface. The technical explanation of the process involved, “champlevé”, involves metallic objects with areas of lowered surfaces – flat-bottomed cavities, if you will – which are filled with a metallic oxide and glass fit and fired. The metal might be ground down to be even with the fired glass. To render them opaque, white enamel was blended in. This process can be contrasted with cloisonné, where metal wires are glued or soldered to a metallic body, and the depressions are then filled with glass and fired.

The fullest documentation of enameled hardware is Comstock’s *The History of the House of P. & F. Corbin* (1904, p. 58). The following quote is from the Wisconsin Club website:

“In 1874, the most decorative hardware ever produced by any manufacturer was added to the Corbin line in the form of bronze goods with surfaces finished in enamel of different colors, just as enameled jewelry, badges, lodge and class pins, etc. are made to-day. It did not achieve a large sale, owing to the high cost and unpropitious time for its introduction, the country being then in the throes of a panic with the following season of depression. The style of ornament then prevailing, with its flat design rising above a level background, was particularly favorable to this treatment and no special designs were required. An enameling jeweler from Providence named Horace Bunting, had charge of the work and finished the goods in a room especially fitted for the purpose in the factory basement.

“The goods were very high in price, being expensive to produce, and their use was limited to the houses of very wealthy people. One residence in Taunton had a number of rooms fitted with this class of hardware, the enamel being tinted to correspond with the color scheme of each room. The cost for the enameled hardware used in this house was over three thousand dollars, a very unusual expenditure in those

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days, when special designs and finishes were comparatively unknown. The enameled knobs used on this job were billed at \$8.50 and \$9.50 per pair – and other items in proportion. The front door trim alone cost \$103.50.

“The finish on the enameled hardware was practically everlasting, and such of these goods as have been in use since the time they were made present the same appearance to-day as when first applied.” (Note: the full text of the volume can be found by searching for “Comstock & Corbin.”)

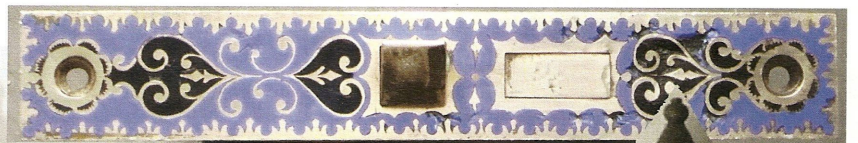
The range of colors used by Corbin is indicated in the enclosed photographs. Corbin was not, however, the only firm to produce enameled hardware, but, as shown, MCCC/R&E, and Hopkins Dickinson and even Enoch Robinson produced them. Dickinson’s 1879 catalogue refers to gold-plated hardware, “matted with enamel, in all colors” and nickel “matted with enamel” as optional finishes (p. vi), so it was up to the customer to decide. Robinson produced an enameled version of L-125. It is unlikely that Bunting did the enameling for the other manufacturers, since (a) reportedly the R&E pieces are different in quality from the Corbin enameled hardware, and (b) Hopkins & Dickinson was located in New York and Newark (with a factory in suburban New Jersey), and Robinson was in the Boston area.

So who was Horace Bunting? He was born in Cranston, R.I. in 1852 and his father was an engraver from England. By the 1870 Census he is living in Providence and is listed an enameller. In 1875 he is in New Britain and is listed as at P&F Corbin. His employment there did not survive the demise of Corbin’s enameled hardware for in 1877-78, he is listed simply as an enameller, no employer. In 1879, he married Ella Maria Welton in New Britain and the 1880 Census states that he “keeps livery stables” and they live with Ella’s parents.. Apparently he gave up jewelry and enameling, for in the 1881 New Britain City Directory, he is listed at Bailey & Bunting, a livery, feed and boarding stable. In 1885 it burnt at a loss of \$200,000, presumably not covered by insurance. That appears to have wiped him out, as thereafter he is listed as a hackman, as employed by a manufacturer of cutlery and small appliances, and as a driver for Adams Express (except for a period at the end of his life, when he was described as a “mechanic”). He died in 1897 in New Britain of apoplexy (now called a stroke). His obituary describes him as a “well known citizen.”



Wisconsin Club

Corbin’s enameled hardware was installed in some very rich private homes far from Connecticut. For example, the Wisconsin Club in Milwaukee still retains a little of its Corbin enameled hardware. It was founded in 1891 as a gathering place for prominent German-Americans in the former Alexander Mitchell mansion. The mansion was originally a modest home which grew with the wealth of its owner, Alexander Mitchell, who by 1876 controlled the banking and insurance industries in Milwaukee, as well as the Milwaukee Railroad and served in Congress. In 1876 an architect “was hired to transform Mitchell’s home into the French Second Empire mansion it is today. Many rooms were added, including a ballroom, a library and a conservatory. The conservatory featured a small stream, palm trees and many exotic plants. Artists from Europe were commissioned to adorn the interior of Mitchell’s home with elaborate hand carved mahogany woodwork, stained glass, plaster and inlaid tile. The Grand Staircase in the East Hall of the house with its twenty-four lion heads took one craftsman seven years to build. In the Oriental Room there are over sixteen hundred, hand carved pansies on the ceiling. The walls of the Moorish Room are covered in embossed leather panels poly-chromed in red, blue and gold arabesques. The Belvedere, built by an Italian woodcarver in 1871, is said to be the finest structure of its kind in the country. From the late 1900s until 1950 (when Ninth Street was widened), a porch and a terrace directly east of the mansion were used as an outdoor dining room. Polly Prospect of The Daily Wisconsin News wrote, “The East Porch at the Club is a popular spot these days, especially with women members. Enlarged by means of screens covered with a stunning blue and tan striped awning and surrounded by window boxes fitted with bright flowers, it makes an ideal place for bridge parties. Pierrot lanterns hang from the ceiling and the chairs have been covered with white linen decorated with designs symbolizing the carnival spirit.” Over the years, many famous and noteworthy guests have been entertained here such as Julia Ward Howe, Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, Prince Henry of Prussia, General Grant and Presidents Cleveland and Roosevelt.”





Obviously there has been much renovation over the last 135 years. The enamel hardware is now only found in the ladies room on the second floor. The Wisconsin Club is private with an annual membership fee, but its staff has indicated that a private tour might be arranged if you call ahead.

Another house in Milwaukee that had enameled hardware was the Plankinton 1876 mansion, but it was demolished by Marquette University in 1970. A noted architectural historian of the area (H. Russell Zimmermann) was in the last stage of negotiating the purchase of all the hardware and some stained glass windows when others intruded into the vacant house and removed all of them, except for one hinge. His hinge is the white and blue one shown. An early picture shows that mansion had the white eagle Corbin escutcheons. (Ed: and so it went in those wild & woolly days of Urban Renewal, when the ultimate issue was not so much who rescued the artifacts but that someone should do so before the bulldozers arrived. One still wonders where they went.)

Unfortunately, the enamel was brittle, especially when amateurs tried to remove it from doors. Still it survived in sometimes strange places. The spectacular Corbin white eagle plate and knob were found, covered with paint, on a chicken coop in Oakland, California, presumably salvaged after the great 1906 earthquake! So keep your eyes open and your hopes up.

Thanks to: Jeff Beutner (# 98); H. Russell Zimmermann; Maud Eastwood; Steve Rowe; Rhett Butler; Loretta Nemecc; Pat Watson of the New Britain Public Library; Margaret Chevian of the Providence Public Library; John Potter of the Connecticut Historical Society\_The Wisconsin Club, the New Britain Industrial Museum and The Lock Museum.

## Places and Spaces in Washington, D.C.

*By Steve Hannum*

Washington, DC has become a tourist center with millions of visitors each year. Either before or after the convention you should plan on a visit. Driving in DC is a hassle and parking is limited and expensive. From BWI there are two public transportation options. Amtrak runs trains from BWI to Union Station which is just north of the Capital. The cost is \$18 each way for the 30 minute trip. Metro runs bus B30 from BWI to the Greenbelt rail station. The Green line will take you to L'Enfant Plaza, just south of the Mall. This is about an hour trip and the cost is \$5.45.

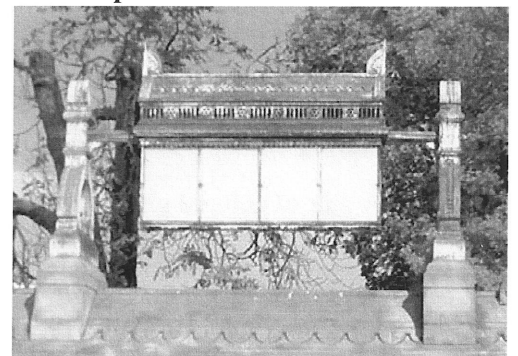
I live a short Metro ride from the Capitol building and have enjoyed many visits to the city center. I know that doorknob collectors are also interested in whole buildings; their architecture, their decorations, the use of space every thing about what makes a building great. Here are some of the places I like to visit and the spaces I enjoy.

At the east end of the Mall is the **US Capitol Building**, east of that is the **Library of Congress** Thomas Jefferson building. It was built in the 1890's in the Italian Renaissance style. After a hundred years it has been restored to its original splendor. After you pass through the main entrance with the bronze doors you enter the **Great Hall** which vaults 75 feet above the marble floor. As you study the decoration you will find many of the elements found in hardware from the same era. Climb the stairs to the second floor to the visitors' gallery to view the Main Reading Room. This is a magnificent eight-sided room with marble columns, statues of literary figures, stain-glass windows and a great dome. Check out the Library of Congress web site for pictures.

There is a tunnel from the **Library of Congress** to the new **US Capital** visitors' center. There you can get tickets for a short film on the working of Congress and go on a short tour of the **Capital Rotunda**. The visitors center has a large display area with items of historical interest and several models showing how the Capitol building and the Mall area have changed over time.

On the northwest Capitol lawn is a neat little "**Summer House**". It is a small open brick structure built around a fountain. The four covered stone benches, decorative brick work and drinking fountains provide a cool resting place for visitors to the capital. As you leave the Capital grounds do not miss the Japanese style light fixtures shown here.

West on Constitution Avenue from the Capitol is the **National Gallery of Art**. The East Building is a very modern building with mod-



ern and contemporary art. The underground concourse linking the West and East Buildings has a dynamic light display in the tunnel and at the end a large window showing the water cascade from the fountain at the street level. The main floor of the West Building has a series of great spaces beginning with the East Garden Court, a very pleasant place with a fountain, palms, roses and comfortable seating. The main hall of the building has high ceiling with sky lights and several pieces of sculpture. There are galleries on either side. The center rotunda is a circular room with black marble columns supporting a great dome. In the center is large fountain containing a bronze statue of Apollo. The west end of the building mirrors the east with a central sculpture hall and the West Garden Court.

To the west on Constitution Avenue is the **National Museum of Natural History**. This building also has an outstanding rotunda. It is octagonal with balconies supported by marble columns which are in the style of this neo-classical building.

On the south side of the Mall, beginning at the east is the **National Museum of the American Indian** with its sweeping curvilinear architecture and amazing cantilevered protrusions. Next is the National Air and Space Museum, recently featured in the Night at the Museum film. The **Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden** is just west. This building is shaped like a donut on stilts. There is a large circular fountain in the center of this round space. It is very pleasant to sit in the shade of the building and see the sun on the inner walls of the building above and the water in the black circular fountain.

Next we come to the **Art and Industries Building**. Designed in the high Victorian style it opened in 1881 and had the Kreuzenger "lion" knob. It is currently closed in preparation for (we hope) renovation; however it can still be admired from the outside. The Castle is the original Smithsonian building, completed in 1855 and built in the Norman style.

There are two buildings on F Street, 4 blocks north of the Mall that should be mentioned. **The National Portrait Gallery** is housed in a building originally built for the US Patent Office. It was the third public building constructed in early Washington, D.C., (after the **White House** and the **U.S. Capitol**) and is considered one of the finest examples of Greek revival architecture in the United States. The four wings were built over a period of 30 plus years. It occupies the block between 7th and 8th Streets, NW. The third floor has some wonderful spaces. The great hall in the south wing is reached via a curving double staircase. This area was built to house display cases contain patent models with a two story central hall and balconies on the sides. The tile floor, stain glass sky lights, and faux marble columns make this a wonderful space. On the east wing is the **Lincoln Gallery**, so called because Lincoln's second inaugural ball was held in this area.

The **National Building Museum** 401 F Street, NW. It is housed in a building originally built for the US Pension Bureau. It is a red brick building with terra cotta frieze, stretching around the exterior of the building and depicting Civil War soldiers. Center of the building is a great hall. Corinthian columns, among the largest in the world measuring 75 feet tall and 8 ft. in diameter divide the hall. Offices surrounded the court on two upper floors. The Building was designed to allow air to come in at the first floor and to exit through the office and ceiling windows. The Museum is a private organization. You can find more information at [www.nbm.org/](http://www.nbm.org/).

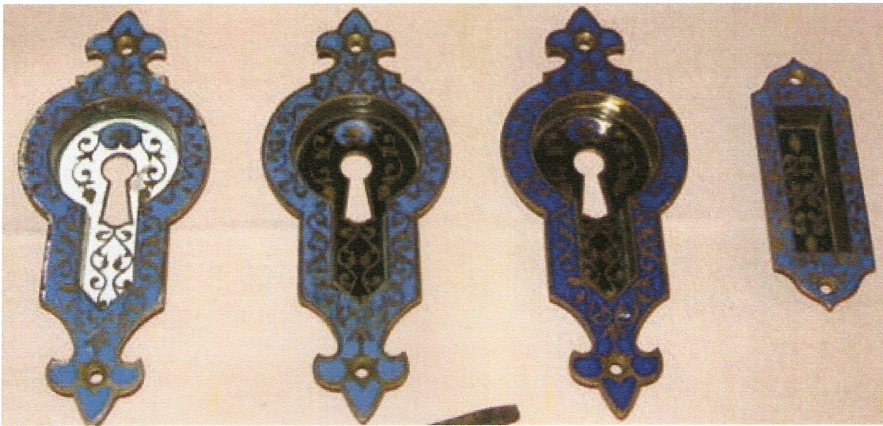
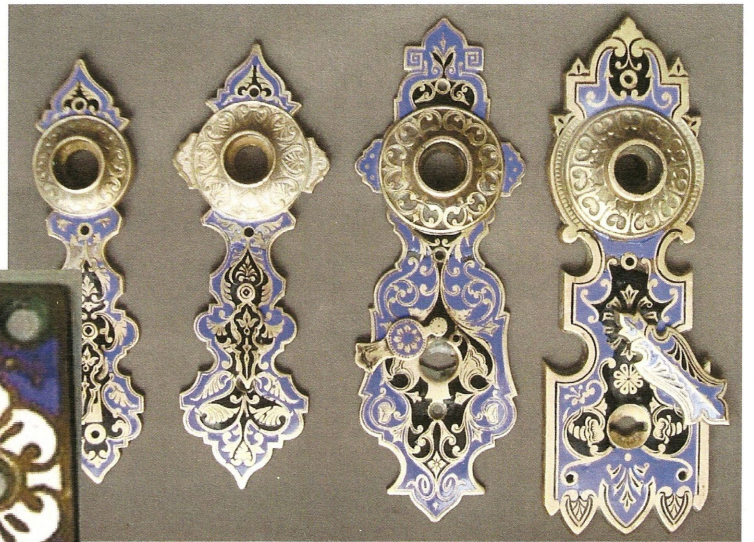
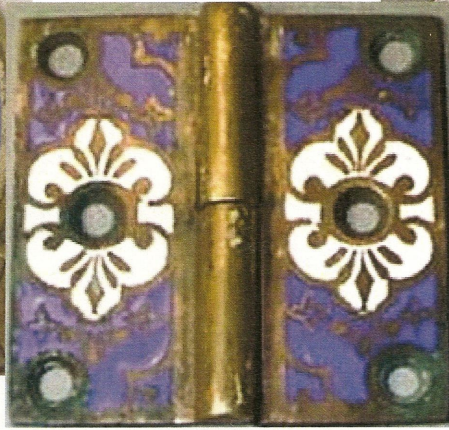
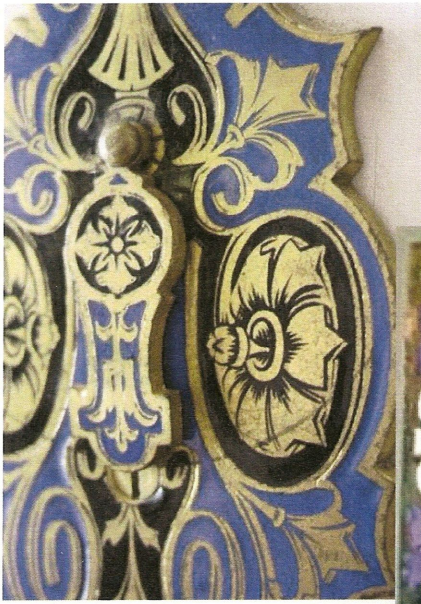
Where is the hardware you ask? There are not many publicly accessible buildings in Washington. One worth noting is the **Christian Heurich house**. Also known as the Brewmaster's Castle, 1307 New Hampshire Avenue, NW. It was built in 1892-94 of poured concrete and reinforced steel by a German immigrant and very successful local brewer. The house had all of the modern technology of the day as well as decorations and hardware expected of a house of a person of wealth of the day. It still has many of the original furniture. You can find more information at [www.heurichhouse.org/](http://www.heurichhouse.org/)

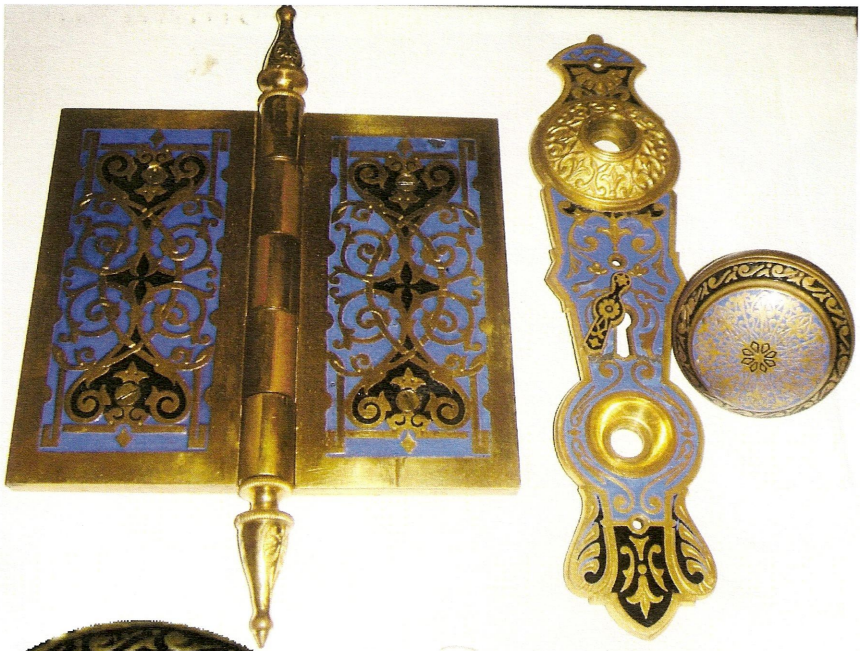
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Members are reminded that your dues entitle you to advertise items for sale, trade, or wanted at no charge. ADCA is not responsible for any transaction or the condition of the items advertised.

**Wanted:** A pair of colored glass doorknobs. Amethyst, or amber, or green, just as long as they are in good condition. No chips, etc. Please contact, with price:

Vicky Berol, Gofer Unlimited, 415-771-9899 or email [sfgofer@yahoo.com](mailto:sfgofer@yahoo.com).







# Presidential Knobs

Below are a number of Presidential knobs, from Washington to Jefferson to William McKinley. Also included is a knob picturing Ben Franklin, who although not a President, certainly was in the ranks of Washington & Jefferson. The person shown in the final knob can be debated. A case can be made that it is either William Howard Taft (who parted his hair in the middle) or, as Steve Menchhofer believes, Theodore Roosevelt (who parted it on the side) or any of a number of other notables. There were a number of high schools named after Taft and Roosevelt, so either is certainly a possibility. (Your Editor thinks the knob is not nearly aggressive or militaristic enough to commemorate the Conqueror of San Juan Hill; at the least, Teddy should have been shown with a "Rough Rider" hat).



Top Row:  
Three portraits of George Washington

Row Two:  
George Washington (wooden knob), Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson

Row Three:  
William McKinley and  
Either William Howard Taft or  
Theodore Roosevelt



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