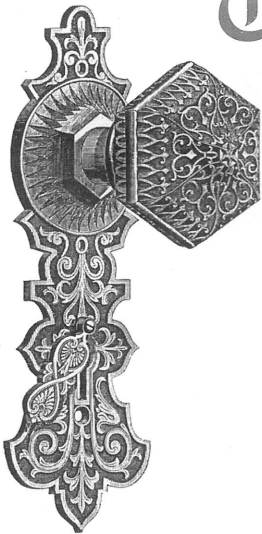


The Doorknob Collector



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

The 1876 Centennial: Who Didn't Come To The Party? And What Kind Of Party Was It?

By Allen S. Joslyn

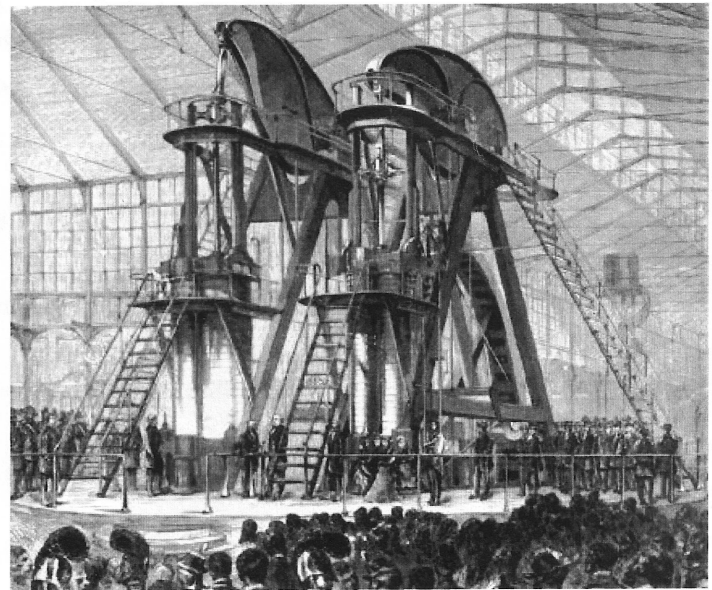
The Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia was a huge party, much grander than even the first World's Fair in the United States which opened in 1853 at the Crystal Palace in what is today Bryant Park in New York, now just behind the Public Library. Between the two, of course, the country had gone through a Civil War, rapid industrialization, and transportation and communications revolutions.

It has been described as follows:

“The Centennial was, as one journalist wrote, ‘the most stupendous and successful competitive exhibition the world ever saw’.

“Our own government in Washington, as well as, dozens of foreign nations, most of our 37 states and several of the western territories, and hundreds of citizens, industrialists and farmers, artists and educators, scientists and inventors – all dispatched products of their labor and symbols of their accomplishments to Philadelphia to display at the Centennial.

“The Centennial introduced ten million visitors to exotic peoples and their culture – and impressed on every one of the visitors an indelible image of the United States as a nation come of age. Nothing else so gloriously captured the American Spirit of '76 as 1876! We were a proud people as we celebrated our one-hundredth birthday.”¹

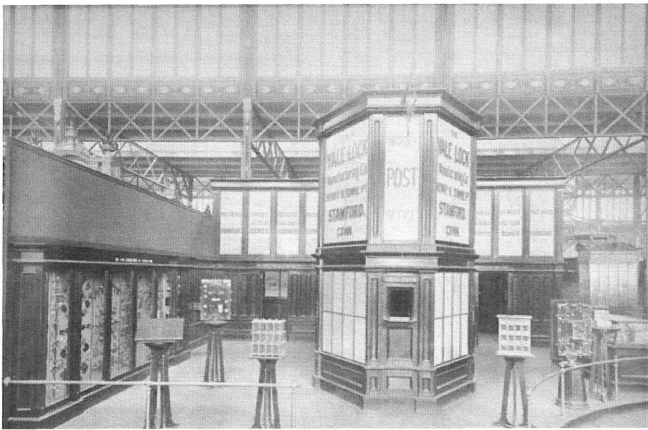


The Corliss Engine

The star of the Exposition was the Corliss Centennial Engine. It was the age of steam, and this was the largest steam engine in the world, 45 feet tall. It turned relatively slowly (32 rpm) but produced a massive amount of power for the time (1400 hp). It was in the 14 acre Machinery Hall (1402 feet long by 360 feet wide). Twice a day the Corliss Engine was started and turned all the rows of machinery in the Hall through miles of shafts.

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¹ S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, Forward in Robert C. Post, Ed, 1876, A Centennial Exhibition, (Smithsonian Institution, 1976). Highly recommended.



Yale Lock Co. - Model Post-Office

The subjects of the Exposition ranged from fine art to applied art, agriculture, education, fisheries, mining, history, manufacture, mining, machinery, science and so forth.² As one might expect, many, if not most, serious manufacturers exhibited. (In fact, there were some 31,000 exhibitors in total). And the Centennial gave out prize after prize. One would not be too cynical to suppose that any manufacturer who went to the trouble to dispatch its wares to the Exposition, and paid to have its exhibition manned for months at a time, would have a good chance to get an award.

Given that decorative hardware had started to appear in the late 1860s, that MCCC/R&E had produced a magnificent line of hardware in 1870, and that other builders'

hardware manufacturers shortly followed suit, one would have expected a decorative hardware blow-out at the Centennial in 1876. Not so, as will be seen.

The exhibitors connected with our beloved hardware who received awards included:

Group XV. Builders' Hardware, Tools, Cutlery, Etc.

The Branford Lock Works, Branford, Conn., Rim and Mortise Locks, Latches, Door Knobs, etc.

Mallory Wheeler and Co., New Haven, Conn. Rim and Mortise Locks, Latches, Padlocks, etc. Another list of awards adds "and Door Knobs"

Union Manufacturing Co., New Britain, Conn. Butt Hinges

P. and F. Corbin, New Britain, Conn., Rim and Mortise Locks, Brass and Iron Hinges, etc.

Norwalk Lock So., South Norwalk, Conn., Locks, Bolts Knobs, Window and Door Fittings, etc.

Trenton Lock and Hardware Co., Trenton, N.J. Rim, Mortise, Pad, Till Car and Safe Locks

Gong Bell Manufacturing Co., East Hampton, Conn., Hand Call, Sleigh and Gong Bells

A.G. Newman, New York, Buckman's Patent Spring Bolts, Automatic Window Locks, etc.

J. B. Shannon, Philadelphia Pa. Door and Window Trimmings, Gongs, etc.

Eagle Lock Co., Terryville, Conn. Till, Cupboard and other Locks

Yale Lock Manufacturing Co., Stamford, Conn., Time, Safe, Door and other Locks.

Sargent and Greenleaf, New York, Combination, Time and other Locks.

Another listing commends the Metallic Art Works of Boston for "Bronze Castings, Name Plates, etc."

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² The full extent of the coverage can be gleaned from the "System of Classification Into Departments, Groups and Classes" in Kidder, ed., Burley's U. S. Centennial Gazetteer and Guide (The National Publishing Co. 1876), pp. 855 et seq.

Group XX VII: Plastic and Graphic Art

Corbin and Co., New Britain, Conn. Ornamental Hardware ³

In short, only Corbin won a prize for decorative hardware, but it put on quite a show. As Comstock recounted in the History of the House of P. & F. Corbin (1904, p. 59):

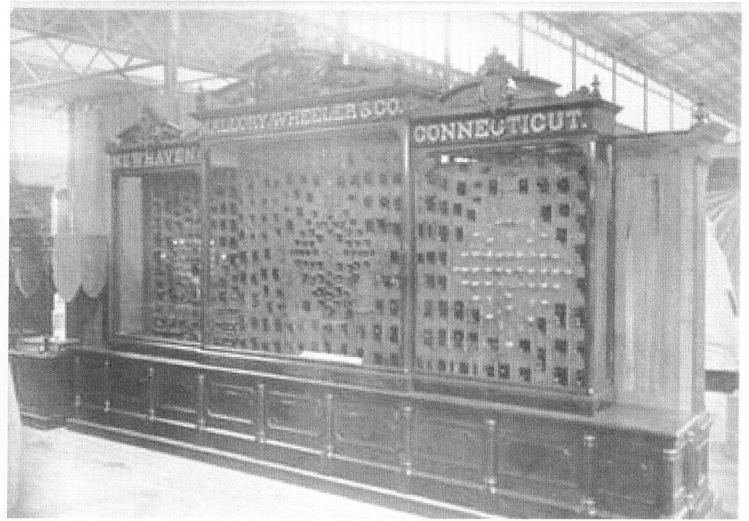
“In 1876 it was thought advisable to make a public display of builders’ hardware, and an exhibit was sent to the Centennial Exposition, where a gold medal was awarded for the superior excellence of the goods. Some fifteen hundred different articles were mounted upon twelve French walnut boards, seven feet by four, which were placed in a case forth-six feet long, surmounted by ebony and black walnut fronts and surrounded by a heavy bronze railing with an elaborately-ornamental bronze post at one end. All the metal work was done by P. & F. Corbin, including a bronze metal mantel costing about seven hundred dollars.”

Yale Lock Manufacturing Co. was listed as displaying “ornamental bronze hardware” but apparently did not win a prize for it.⁴

It was also noted that “A. G. Newman, of New York, exhibited an ingenious indicator for French apartment houses. It was intended to be placed alongside the street door and contained a bell-pull and speaking tube, communicating with each floor, and also a letter box for each floor.”⁵

Thus, most of the “builders’ hardware” displayed, except for that of Corbin and Yale, appears to have been primarily utilitarian and strongly tilted towards locks, etc. Even though in 1876 American manufacturers were producing highly decorative hardware, not much of it appears to have found its way to the Exhibition or perhaps, the descriptions of the items exhibited were inadequate, although in only two instances was hardware described as “ornamental”.

Unfortunately there are only a limited number of illustrations of what was actually exhibited, which is understandable given the massive size of the Exhibition. No illustrations have been found of the builders’ hardware exhibited.



Mallory Wheeler Exhibit

When the Exposition was over, 42 freight cars filled with a variety of objects were shipped to Washington. They became the foundation for a new museum, the National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, which opened in 1881. The remaining items exhibited at the Exposition were either returned to the exhibitors, sold on the spot, or discarded. There were no takers for the Corliss Engine (too big & powerful), so it was dismantled and shipped back to the factory. In 1880, however, George Pullman bought it for use in his new car works, where it continued to operate until 1910 when the plant was converted to electric energy. No one else wanted the Corliss Engine and it was sold as scrap.

While Grecian and Roman styles predominated at the Centennial, its lasting artistic influence was its introduction of Japanese design, which soon began appearing on decorative builders’ hardware.

³ List of the Awards Made by the United States Centennial Commission to the American Exhibitors, International Exhibition, 1876 (S. T. Souder & Company, 1876); United States Centennial Commission, Reports and Awards, Vol VI, Groups XV-XX, pp 46-54 (1880)

⁴ U.S. Centennial Commission, International Exhibition, 1876, Official Catalogue (John R. Nagle, 1876) p. 140.

⁵ Ingram, The Centennial Exposition, Described and Illustrated (Hubbard Bros, Philadelphia, 1876), p. 232. A “French apartment house” was what we would now simply call an apartment house, as distinct from a multi-story detached house. It also represented a different style of life, where a nuclear family might live, as opposed to a family house where several generations lived together.

But now a question – where was Russell & Erwin in 1876? Not at the Centennial. There is no listing of it in any account that I have found of the Exhibition. In 1882 R&E proudly listed awards it had received in Paris in 1878, Sydney in 1879, and Melbourne in 1880, but no mention was made of the Philadelphia Centennial. It didn't even bother to attend the party.

Other Sources About the Exposition:

Scientific American, Supplement, Vol. 1 (1876)

Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition (1876)

Walter Smith, Industrial Art, Volume 2 of the Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition (Gebbie & Barrie, 1876)

Photographs by courtesy of the Philadelphia Free Library. Thanks to Bo Sullivan for suggestions.

**Come to Portland, Oregon for the
2011 ADCA Convention!
August 21st to 24th, 2011**

A Postcard from Portland Inviting You to Join Us



This 1907 folded postcard from Portland opens to show 24 small fold-out scenes (as seen in picture on the right). The card is done in red and black, with a light green background. It says Place Stamp Here - Domestic One Cent - Foreign two cents.

Rich Kennedy found this card at an antique show.

It looks to me like the ADCA is enjoying the tour of Portland. Don't miss it!

See you in Portland in August. **Mark your calendar NOW!** Convention Packets will be mailed soon.

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: A-101 Classic Doggie knob. In excellent condition. The back says, MNFD. By Metallic Compress. Casting Co. Boston.

Call to discuss price. Norman and Cheryl Blam 516-295-5511 or nycblam@aol.com



A-101
For Sale

For Sale: A-107 Mallory Wheeler?, c.1880 small lion in excellent condition. Leaf around edges, eyes open. Leaf pattern on back. Best Offer.

Call Norman or Cheryl Blam at 516-295-5511 or nycblam@aol.com



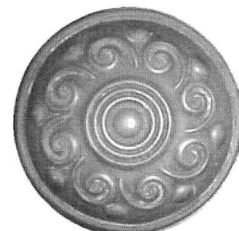
A-107
For Sale

For Sale: A-122 Bearish Lion, Mfg: Unknown, c.1870's. Has a very sad face, but excellent condition with slight wear on the back side of knob. Leaves around the knob and back. Best Offer: Norman and Cheryl Blam, 516-295-5511 or nycblam@aol.com



A-122
For Sale

Wanted: Six pairs of K-304, and three 20 lb sash-weights. Contact Vicky Berol, Gofer #1, sfgofer@yahoo.com



K-304
Wanted

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These are paid advertisements. The ADCA assumes no responsibility. For further information about these businesses see the Resource section on our website: www.AntiqueDoorknobs.org.

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<p>Discovery Architectural Antiques Owner: Suzane Kittel 409 St. Francis Gonzales, TX 78629 Phone: 830-672-2428 Fax: 830-672-3701 Web Site: www.Discoverys.net Email: swk@discoverys.net</p>	<p>House of Antique Hardware Owner: Roy Prange 3439 NE Sandy Blvd./PMB 106 Portland, OR 97214 Phone: 888-223-2545 Fax: 503-231-1312 Web Site: www.HouseofAntiqueHardware.com Email: Sales@HouseofAntiqueHardware.com</p>	<p>Aurora Mills Architectural Salvage Owner: Mike Byrnes 14971 First St NE Aurora, OR 97002 Phone: 503-678-6083 Fax: 503-678-3299 Email: auroramills@centurytel.net Website: http://www.auroramills.com/</p>	
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