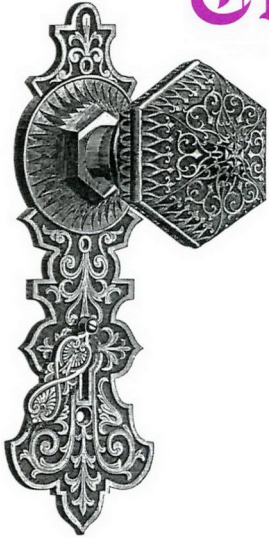


The Doorknob Collector



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

BURNHAM & ROOT The Birth of Architects using Custom Hardware

By PAUL WOODFIN

Following the Great Chicago Fire of October 1871, much of the city required total reconstruction from the ground up, leading to a massive building boom unseen before in the United States. Many young architects moved to the City and began to work in the offices of established architects, including Carter,

Drake & Wight, Loring & Jenney, William Boyington, John Van Osdel, and Burling & Adler.

John Wellborn Root (at right) was born in Georgia in 1850. By 1855 the family lived in Atlanta, where his New England-born father was a blockade-running merchant. After the fall of Atlanta in 1864, John Root was sent by his father to England, where he furthered his studies and was admitted to Oxford in 1866. Root instead returned to America, enrolling at NYU and earning a Civil Engineering degree in 1869. Root first went to work for James Renwick Jr., and then for J. B. Snook as Superintendent of Construction on the original Grand Central Station. He then approached architect Peter Wight for a position, and in January 1872 was summoned to Chicago to begin work for Wight.

Daniel Burnham (at left) was born in New York in 1846. His family moved to Chicago in 1855 as his father's pharmaceutical business grew. Burnham was an athlete, artist, and very social, but less academically focused than Root. Failing to get into Harvard or Yale, Burnham developed a love of architecture and went to work for Loring & Jenney. In late 1872 Burnham began work at Carter, Drake & Wight, and met John Wellborn Root.



By the summer of 1873 Burnham & Root became the newest architecture firm in Chicago. The Panic of 1873 slowed construction for a while, but in 1874 they work began on their first significant commis-

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sion, the John B. Sherman house on Prairie Avenue, for a founder of the Union Stockyards. During construction, Burnham married Sherman's daughter Margaret. Many more residential and commercial buildings would follow in Chicago and across the country.



In the article *Late Advances in Builders' Hardware* (TDC #188), the writer cited that "in the latter part of 1886...the late John W. Root conceived the idea that the hardware for a building ought to be made of special designs to harmonize with the character of the building on which it was to be used." Acting on this idea, he designed the hardware for the Phoenix Insurance building (at left) not only with the object of

having something special and in perfect harmony with the character of the building, but with a view to obtaining as nearly as possible a reproduction of old statuary bronze. The hardware was executed by Yale & Towne Manufacturing Company, and Tim Samuelson quotes a friend's description as having "a very elaborate interlocked monogram". Perhaps one of the many unknown emblems in the P-400s.



“The following year another departure was decided on in the hardware for the Rookery office building (above), when for the first time the now widely used Bower-Barff black iron builders' hardware was used in a design also made by the late John W. Root (at left), and was certainly original, entirely unlike anything ever before attempted, and excited considerable comment”.

Other Chicago buildings by Burnham & Root were cited as having in special hardware designs, including:

- ◆ the Monadnock building (TDC #192)
- ◆ the Chicago Herald building
- ◆ the Woman's Temple
- ◆ the Ashland Block
- ◆ the Masonic Temple, for which Tim Samuelson has "found documentation of the Masonic Temple knob, with a boxy outline of a "plus" sign at the center. It may have later become a "stock" catalog item".

As Burnham & Root became nationally-recognized architects, they



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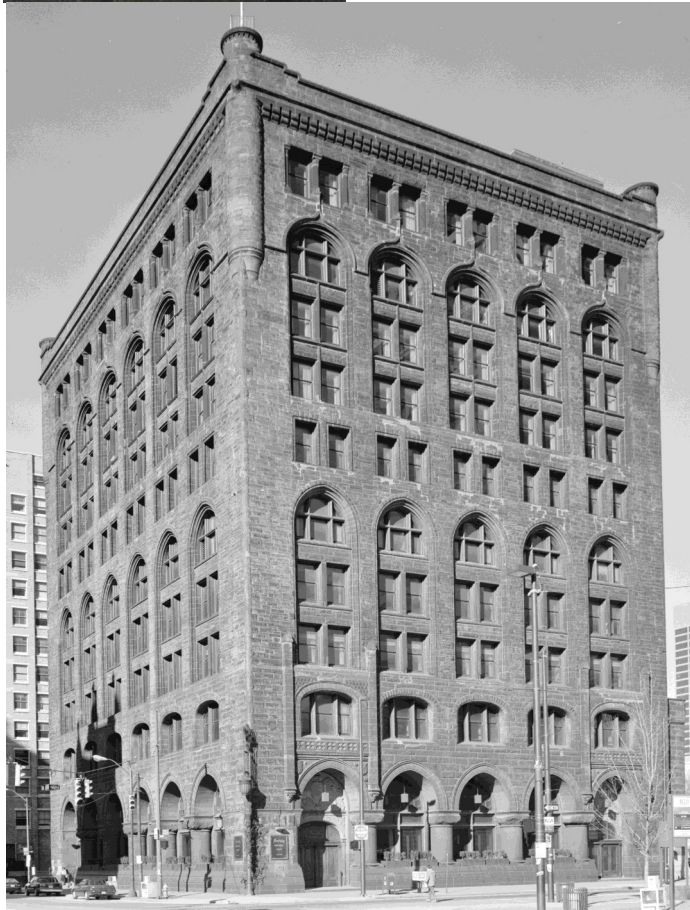
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began to receive commissions outside of Chicago. In 1886 they received a commissions for a hotel in Kansas City, followed by an office building, and the Kansas City Board of Trade (at right). Six months following the opening of the Rookery in early 1888, the Kansas City Board of Trade Building opened, and also featured Bower-Barff black iron builders' hardware (at left). Fortunately when the Board of Trade Building was demolished in the 1960s as part of urban renewal, the building was photographed and many of the elaborate decorative elements from the building were salvaged. Interestingly, the number cast onto Board of Trade door plates by Yale & Towne are 1604, while those for the Rookery are marked 1620. So perhaps Root designed the Board of Trade plates before those for the Rookery.



In late 1887 planning began on the Society for Savings building in Cleveland. Completed in late 1889, the Society for Savings building has a granite base and red sandstone above and remains a striking edifice for what is now Key Bank on Public Square, although now in the shadow of the modern skyscraper built a century later. The bank continues to use the fully modernized and restored 1889 building for banking. The iron hardware at right was featured in the 1893



Yale catalog as the Albi pattern.

In January 1891, John Wellborn Root died of pneumonia at the age of 40. He had hosted the visiting eastern architects for dinner at his home as they planned for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1892/1893, and caught a cold while escorting them to their carriages. Burnham lost his friend and partner, and was faced with (1) making certain that the work of the Columbian Exposition was successfully completed, and (2) making sure that the numerous buildings that Root had designed or started to design were completed. D. H. Burnham & Co. was formed and Charles Atwood was named chief designer.

One project had been a personal passion for Root, the Equitable Building in Atlanta (below). Having lived much of his childhood in Atlanta, designing a building in your home town was a desired commission. When completed in early 1892, the building was the tallest and largest building in Atlanta. In 1893 the building was occupied (and later purchased by) the Trust Company of Georgia.



The bank used the building until 1971, when it was demolished to build a new, modern Equitable Building. Once again, many items from the building were salvaged, including three stone columns which decorate the plaza in front of the new building. As seen above at right, doorknobs by Yale & Towne in the Albi pattern (this time with an EB monogram) were also saved from the building. No

doubt Atwood used the same pattern of doorknobs for the Atlanta building that Root had most recently used in Cleveland as a means of paying homage to his predecessor.

The Trust Company of Georgia actually enclosed some doorknobs in plastic as paperweight, with the identifying information shown in the photo at left.

DOORKNOB FROM
TRUST CO. OF GEORGIA BUILDING
FORMERLY
EQUITABLE BUILDING
BUILT 1891
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

The last Burnham & Root-linked doorknob originates from Pearson's Hall of Science in Beloit, WI. Constructed in 1892, Burnham stated that the "plans were in the hands of John Root at the time of his death". The hardware is by Chicago Hardware, not Yale & Towne, owing to the College's Building Committee having a relationship with the President of Chicago Hardware.



Hopefully a second article on Burnham & Root will be needed, once we identify hardware from other buildings.

References:

- ◆ Monroe, Harriet, *John Wellborn Root, Architect*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1896.
- ◆ Moore, Charles, *Daniel H. Burnham, Architect*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921.
- ◆ Hoffman, Donald, *The Architecture of John Wellborn Root*, John Hopkins Press, 1973.
- ◆ Mr. Tim Samuelson, Chicago Cultural Historian, for providing hardware descriptions as noted.
- ◆ Mr. Eric Nordstrom, for finding and selling me hardware from Chicago buildings over the years, and maintaining an excellent blog on architecture at www.urbanremainschicago.com/news-and-events.

Where Am I From?

There are a great many unidentified emblematic doorknobs in the P category of www.antiquedoorknobs.us. The various hardware companies custom made these doorknobs and plates for specific building(s) as ordered by architects, builders, or owners. Hopefully we can help identify the origins of these doorknobs so that the buildings and the hardware can be featured on pages like the one in this issue. Please contact your co-editor, Paul Woodfin, at paul.woodfin@sbcglobal.net if you have any knowledge to help identify these. If anyone happens to know where the records for special order hardware for any of the hardware companies wound up, please let Paul know!



P-46830 TNB

P-43240 HB

P-48570 SP

Old Colony Building Chicago, Illinois

Built by Boston investors (Plymouth, MA being the “Old Colony”), the Old Colony Building was designed by Holabird & Roche with a stone base and roman brick above. Oriel windows are prominent at each corner, and Yale & Towne hardware bearing the OCB monogram was found on every door.

Located just a block south of the Federal building, the Old Colony remained a viable office building for attorneys and professionals from completion in 1894 until recently, when the building was converted to housing. Most of the original fixtures and features of the building remained in place, so that a historically accurate restoration was possible. Located just south of the Fisher and southeast of the Monadnock buildings, Dearborn at Van Buren is a great street corner to see historic Chicago architecture.



Sources: <https://chicagology.com/goldenage/goldenage137/>

Visit the ADCA on Facebook

Over the past year, the activity on the club's Facebook page has increased significantly. Club members and the general public are asking questions about hardware items, and usually getting answers. A number from the general public have asked questions about hardware they have found or inherited, and often want to sell their items for a fair price. Recent highlights include:

- Pete Sabine continues to post links to items he finds for sale and items he needs for his Branford collection.
- Christine Steinkuehler asked about info on the A-13600 Swan knob, and Steve Rowe identified it as Hopkins & Dickenson.
- Christopher Wilson has a bunch of hardware from the current Waldorf-Astoria in New York City.
- Cara Rule was looking for specific hardware to finish her house.

If you have a Facebook account, use the link below to access our page and join the fun!

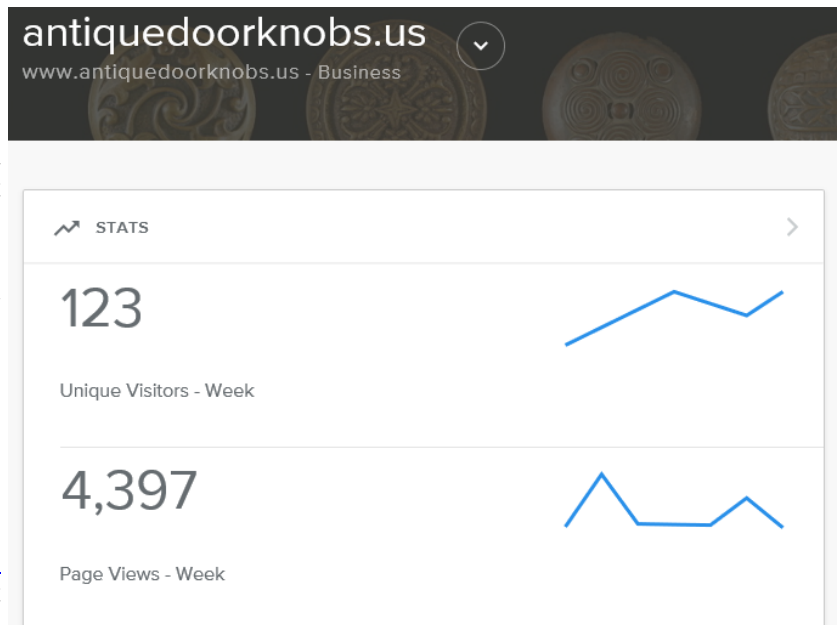
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/412087788964066/>

How Much is the VDA website being used?

For the week of July 8-14 we had 123 unique visitors, who looked at 4,397 different pages. Search engine hits came from Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Facebook (after the link was posted on our Facebook page).

As of June 30, 2017 we have 2,310 doorknobs included on the VDA website. The last printed version (VDA3) had 1,115 although a number of the knobs were not pictured in VDA3.

Go to www.antiquedoorknobs.us and visit the Updates page to see what has been added.



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