



The Doorknob Collector

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Firemen Doorknobs

By Paul Woodfin

Americans have long celebrated the men and women who serve their nation, states and cities, keeping everyone safe and our property protected as much as possible. Firemen, whether volunteer or paid, are one of these groups of public servants, and are featured on two different doorknobs, which are discussed below.

Fireman's Fund Insurance, San Francisco

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company was established in San Francisco in 1863 to provide fire insurance for businesses and homeowners, with 10% of the company's profits paid to widows and orphans of deceased firefighters. From the outset, the company thrived and continued to grow into a national firm, although the Chicago fire of 1871 and the Boston fire of 1872 did cost the company a large portion of their reserves, as did the 1904 Baltimore fire, but they quickly recovered.

The resulting claims from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire were a different story. Losses exceeded the company's available reserves, since much of their funds were invested in San Francisco businesses and real estate. Working with the California Insurance Commissioner and local banks, a creative recovery plan actually resulted in the company giving stock in the company to large claimants, so they were able to pay 100% of the claims over the next several years and regain sound business footing.

In 1914 the Company had recovered sufficiently to build a new home office building on the site of their old pre-fire building at California and Sansone streets in San Francisco. Lewis Hobart was the archi-

2021 ADCA Convention - September 8-11, 2021 - Albany, NY

September is fast approaching, so make your reservations and register for the Convention SOON. As noted in the last newsletter, we are requiring attendees to have a Covid vaccination and provide the date as part of registration. For any new members or those considering attending the convention, you may be wondering why we have requirements this year, so following is the reason.

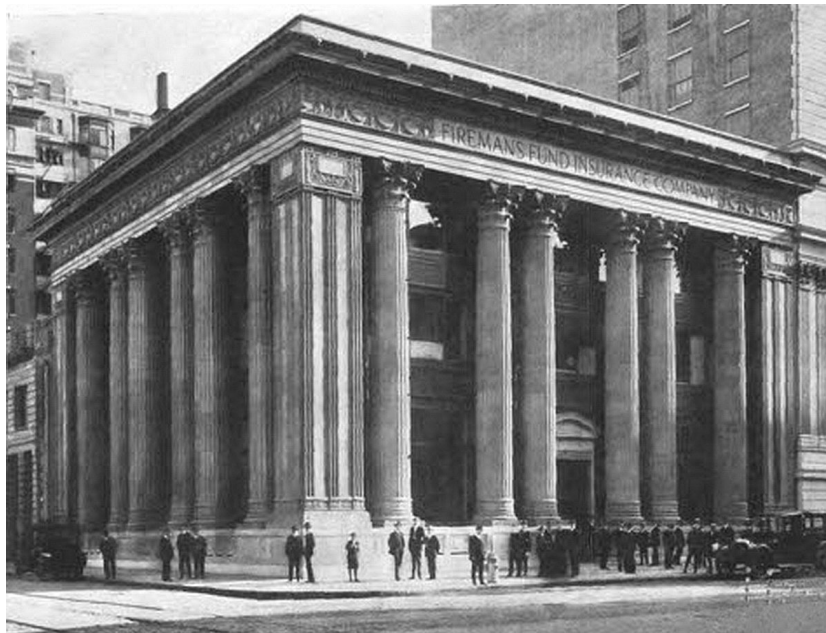
Many of our veteran club members have a variety of health conditions which put them at high risk for adverse outcomes from Covid. Thankfully most members have gotten the safe and effective vaccines and should be protected from the virus. However, for people with certain health conditions, they are still at higher risk from the effects of Covid as a result of their health condition if they get Covid.

Protecting our friends and club members is very important to the ADCA, and especially our long-time members who helped to start the ADCA 40 years ago. We believe that every ADCA member cares about our collector friends and are supportive of vaccine and mask requirements for the 2021 convention. The Board Executive Committee has unanimously confirmed these safety requirements in late June, and any updates will be provided to attendees a week before the convention.

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tect and the cornerstone was laid in October 1914. The four story building plus basement (at right) was designed to complement the still-extant Bank of California building across the street. The company moved into their new offices in June 1915.

At the 2007 Convention in Portland (see TDC #144), a doorknob showing a fireman holding a child, presumably just rescued from certain death, was brought in by a member of the public. “Charlie Wardell said many years ago that it was among his favorite knobs, and Marge Bornino has one as well. She believes that it came from a Firemen’s Fund Insurance Company Building”. The book published by Fireman’s Fund in 1929 about the history of the company notes “of a deeper appeal was the cartouche bearing the figures of the Fireman and Child. This is a pleasing picture of rescue.



It was adopted in the Eighties (1880s)” as a symbol of the company.



The hardware for this building was by P. & F. Corbin, and is shown and listed in the Special Hardware catalog and ledger as S 5855 and order date in March 1915. The hardware is trimmed in the Navarre design with the Fireman and Child symbol featured ([P-22370](#), at left). While the 1915 home office was demolished in 1968, the 1920s era addition to the south remains standing and is

believed to have used the same Corbin hardware.

Firemen’s Insurance Company, Newark, NJ

Across the nation in Newark, NJ, the Firemen’s Insurance Company was established in 1855 by 13 Newark businessmen who were all local volunteer firemen. The company focused at first strictly on providing fire insurance for businesses and homeowners, and steadily grew over the next several decades, building a four story high Victorian-style home office in 1870 and then expanding into neighboring buildings for additional office space due to growth.

By 1909, the need for additional office space had reached an apex, and so the company began construction on New Jersey’s first true skyscraper, a steel framed sixteen story office building on the site of the previous building plus some additional land. The slender building was designed by local architects Marvin, Turtan & Davis, and was clad entirely

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in white glazed terra cotta (at left). The interior finishes included marble, with bronze metalwork. The hardware was provided by Sargent & Company, and is shown in their Special Hardware catalog as 1471 Ph, which dates to 1910. The doorknob features a uniformed fireman ringed by the words "Firemen's Insurance Company" ([P-22360](#), below).

Firemen's Insurance continued to grow over the following decades, building a taller and far larger office building facing Military Park. Their 1910 building became a commercial office building, housing many businesses over the ensuing decades.

While offices on the upper floors currently are vacant, almost all of the neighboring early skyscrapers have been restored and redeveloped in recent years. So the first skyscraper likely will be the last restored.



Antique Doorknob Collectors of America 40th Anniversary 1981 - 2021



Third in a series of remembrances as the ADCA celebrates 40 years of service

Hardware displays have been a part of every convention, and members enjoying their collection from the beginning. See photos from the 1980s conventions at www.antiquedoorknobs.org/previous-conventions



“Japanned” vs. “Old Copper” Finishes on Hardware

By Bo Sullivan, with Paul Woodfin

A recent discussion in our club Facebook group brought to light how vernacular terms can often permeate our collecting language, even though they were not the actual terms used by manufacturers or designers at the time they were popular.

Many collectors and salvage dealers use the term “Japanned” (or “Japanned Copper”) to refer to any of a wide range “tiger stripe” finishes displaying mottled or highlighted relief patterns on patinaed copper-plated hardware. The term “Japanned” was indeed a common finish name used in the hardware trade, but in fact it was for a completely different finish – the heavy, black, enamel-like asphalt-based coating applied to cast iron and steel hardware after the Civil War to improve appearance and prevent rust. This unrelieved and typically glossy black finish – somewhat resembling Japan Lacquer – was not a chemical patina but a baked-on enamel produced under high heat in furnaces. Cast iron shanks for jet/porcelain/mineral doorknobs, as well as most ferrous metal hardware such as lock bodies, door bolts, bin pulls, hinges and the recessed areas of decorative Eastlake-style door escutcheons were commonly finished in Japanned black enamel – it was basically the black powder-coating of its day. Japanned finishes have frequently worn off after a century of use (or they flake off your hardware after it cools down from a couple of hours soaking in a hot crock pot).







Generally the Japanned finish was reserved for less expensive or utilitarian pieces, because that is what cast iron and steel were used for – Japanning was rarely used on brass or bronzed as there was no need to protect against rust. The photos shown below are from a c1920 Stanley Works hardware finish sample set, and include cross-references for “Japanned” finishes from the four largest manufacturers if applicable (Japanned Dead Black is the regular Japanned finish but treated and dulled to a matte surface).



What is frequently referred to today as a “Japanned” finish is a very different beast – or actually many different beasts... Very popular and produced in a wide array of variations, these finishes were applied on brass, bronze, steel or cast iron hardware, typically copper plated and then treated with chemical darkening patina that was mottled in distinctive patterns by either resist or relief methods. Different manufacturers used different names at different times, but the most common ones were Old Copper, Oxidized Copper, Antique Copper, or Mottled Copper. Below are photos of copper finish samples from the same Stanley set (note the cross-references), as well as from Russell & Erwin and Yale & Towne.



(Note: these same finishes were also offered on brass and on silver)

Russell & Erwin 07 ½ - Dark Oxidized, Mottled, Sanded Copper 	Russell & Erwin 7 ½ - Dark Oxidized, Mottled, Buffed Copper 	Russell & Erwin 07 - Dark Oxidized Copper, No Relief 
Y&T CZ18 - Copper-plated, Buffed surface, Old Metal Medium, relieved irregularly 	Y&T CY57 - Copper-plated, Dead Finish, Dark, Center Relieved 	Y&T CX22 - Copper-plated, Sand Finish, Old Metal, Light 

Not all “old copper” finishes even involved actual copper plating. In 1890, Blackall described in his book “Builders Hardware” how cast iron could be treated in such a way as to create the appearance of being bronze or copper plated – “a bath is used composed of linseed oil, and gum-anime or copal, the iron, on being finally fired and polished, presents the appearance of bronze. The tones can be varied to a considerable extent by the addition of color in the shape of powdered alloys of copper and bronze, which are mixed with the oil. The “Tucker bronze,” the “Berlin bronze,” and the so-called “Boston finish” are all substantially of this nature. Only rarely is a thin film of bronze or composition spread on the iron by the aid of electrolysis. All of the bronze-faced iron hardware is treated with the hot-oil finish just described.” This explains why attempts to strip and restore decorative Eastlake hardware so often prove unsatisfactory.

Blackall goes on to note: “The cheapest forms of iron hardware are japanned or even merely coated with ordinary black varnish, the quality of the japanning or varnish depending upon the grade of goods. Japanning is practically indestructible where the iron is not exposed to scratches or rubbing. Hinges and

butts are finished in this way more than any other one form of iron hardware, though of late years the best machine lock makers have taken a great deal of care in japanning the outer casings of locks. Fine grades of pulleys are also sometimes sold with japanned frames.” This reference is a clear example of true “japanning” as the term was used in the hardware industry.

Most of the pieces at right and on the next page are solid bronze hardware from the 1890s, with intact versions of beautiful Corbin “Antique Copper” factory finishes preserved. Corbin lists several Antique Copper finishes in their 1895





catalog, but unfortunately we have not found any Corbin finish sample sets to document precisely those shown above.

Simmons Hardware was one of the country's largest jobbers or distributors, and they offered items from many different companies. As a customer aid, their 1895 catalog included an extensive cross-listing of their finishes with those of other manufacturers, including Corbin:

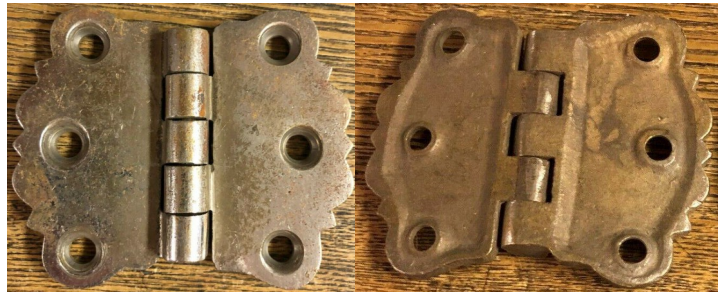
Simmons	Old Copper, Dark Copper Plating on Bronze Metal, wither Plain or Mottled Surfaces
Yale & Towne	CY22, Old Metal, Light Tint, Surface Dead Smooth, not Polished CY24, Old Metal, Dark Tint, Surface Dead Smooth, not Polished CY57, Dead Finish, Dark, Center Relieved CY61, Dead Finish, Mottled CX22, Sand Finish, Old Metal, Light CX24, Sand Finish, Old Metal, Dark CX57, Sand Finish, Dark, Center Relieved CX64, Sand Finish, Mottled
Sargent	Antique Copper, Prefix A. B.
Norwalk	No. O, Old Copper
Penn	Old Copper
Reading	Old Copper
Russell & Erwin	Old Copper, No. 7 Finish. Old Copper, No. 7½ Finish Mottled
Corbin	22 Antique Copper, Dark Finish 22 ¼ Antique Copper, Medium Finish 22 ½ Antique Copper, Light Finish A22 Antique Copper, Sand Blast Finish A22 ½ Antique Copper, Sand Blast Finish Light

Hopefully this article helps anyone who might be interested to see and appreciate the difference between a true Japanned enamel finish and the beautiful decorative “Old Copper” or “Antique Copper” finishes which we all appreciate on our hardware. Understanding these finishes is also especially helpful when considering stripping and/or restoring old hardware, as it can be very easy to mistakenly ruin or polish off an unusual decorative mottled patina treatment on bronze, brass, copper or even silver simply because it looks old, odd or even dirty, when in reality it was something very special that is no longer made today.

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.

Bo Sullivan (#510) is seeking a pair of hinges for his kitchen like those shown at right. 3 1/8" wide x 2 5/8" tall. Contact Bo at bo@arcalus.com or (503) 997-8616



Antique Doorknob Collectors of America

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Co-editors: Allen Joslyn,
Phone (973) 783-9411
Email: ajoslyn@comcast.net
Paul Woodfin
Phone (254) 722-7353
Email: adcaoffice@aol.com

ADCA Website: www.antiquedoorknobs.org
VDA Website: www.antiquedoorknobs.us
Membership Website: www.antiquedoorknobs.org/membership

ADCA Officers

President: Paul Woodfin
Vice President: Steve Rowe
Secretary: Mike Smith
Treasurer: Jeff Orman

Email Addresses:

adcapres@gmail.com
4narowe@sbcglobal.net
arkansaswms@gmail.com
jnorman1944@verizon.net

Membership Office: Mike Smith
ADCA
1608 Osage Drive
North Little Rock, AR 72116
Email: adca.members@gmail.com
Phone: (501) 529-1836

General Questions

Phone (973) 783-9411
Email: ajoslyn@comcast.net

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