

# 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*

**RUSSELL & ERWIN**

**A CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNT**

**(PART 4) CONTINUED FROM TDC 174**

**FROM THE COMMERCIAL PATHFINDER, NOVEMBER, 1869**

**THE NEW YORK WAREHOUSE**

“[The] sub-basement is mainly devoted to storage; one half for packing boxes; the other half for heavy merchandise, such as Rails, Horse Shoes, Wire, Chains, etc. Here is also the engine room, constantly attended by the engineer, and containing a 30-horse engine and two boilers, supplying steam heat throughout the building and hoisting goods by dummy to every floor. Another 30-horse engine near the center of the floor is used for lowering goods for the City Trade and for conveying customers, etc., to any floor. The coal room has a capacity for 50 tons of coal. The wash room and water closets are also here located and are fitted up in a style worthy of a first-class hotel.

“The basement is on a level with Reade Street, and comprises the Receiving, Packing and Shipping departments. All goods are received from the east door, thus securing order and freedom from blockage in the movement of merchandise. The firm employ their own car men, 4 one horse teams and 1 two horse. A most complete and original system is observed in the reception, packing and shipment of goods. Extending along the center of the floor we noticed a long line of desks used for filing orders by a large number of order clerks, each having a separate desk, and also closets, used for heir clothing. Rows of shelves extend along both sides of the floor, filled with heavy shelf hardware, such as Bolts, Screws, Butts, Furniture Castors, Shovels and Tongs, Strap and T Hinges, Barn Door Hangers, Rollers, etc.

“The First Floor, fronting on Chambers street, is entirely occupied as the Sales and Sample Rooms of the house and the Business Offices of the firm, the latter occupying about one-third of the floor. This is the most elegantly fitted sample room we have ever seen in this or any other city. The entire floor is fitted up with polished French and American black walnut, inclusive of show cases, desks, doors, panels, partitions, offices, etc., much of the wood being richly carved. Samples of every article made and sold by the company are tastefully and conveniently arranged in simple glass and black walnut show cases, which extend entirely along two sides of the floor, each case being a single glass pane, 40 by 60 inches in measurement.

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The Business Offices are eight in number and elegantly furnished; two for the Finance department, one for the Book-keeper and his Assistant, one for the Entry Clerks, one for Salesmen, one for the Purchaser, one for the California department and one for the private office of the Principals of the concern. In the last we noticed a Sanborn's Patent Safe, made by Steam Patent Fire-proof Safe Co., and weighing about 7 tons, and above were arranged the books of the house, containing the commercial records of the establishment for over a quarter of a century. A large number of salesmen and clerks were busily engaged on this floor, all of whom are under the charge of the general director." (To Be Continued)

## Now That's a Drawer Pull

Submitted by Allen Joslyn



## NY Times Article of Interest

By Faye Kennedy

“Getting a Handle” is the title of an article in *The New York Times*, Thursday October 25, 2012. A New York architect talks about finding the perfect doorknob. There are various knobs shown from several companies, but the one that we all know is E.R. Butler which just happens to be in the same neighborhood as the architect.

Architects are still interested in not only the function, but also the beauty of the hardware they are using in their buildings. This is an interesting article, try to look it up in your local library.

## Roster

If your name does not appear in the enclosed roster, it indicates that your membership is past due. You can renew on our website, [AntiqueDoorknobs.org](http://AntiqueDoorknobs.org), or by sending a check (made payable to ADCA) to: ADCA PO Box 803 Hackettstown, NJ 07840

## 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.

There are still posters available for \$100. See the picture in TDC 175. These would make a very nice holiday gift.

### The Doorknob Collector©



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# Woodfin's Finds

Paul Woodfin joined in 2008 and attended his first convention this year in Buffalo and brought along a wealth of information. He has done extensive research on his collection of emblematic knobs. Paul is sharing his knowledge with the rest of us in this new column “Woodfin's Finds”. A few are in the VDA but are unknown, but most are not in the VDA and have not been in TDC over the years as best I can tell.

## Security Mutual Life Insurance Company, Binghamton, New York

Designed by architects T.I. Lacey and Son in 1904 and completed in 1905, this grand beaux arts style building has marble, wood, and bronze fixtures throughout. The building remains as the headquarters of Security Mutual, which has modernized the building to 21st century standards while maintaining and preserving the architectural character.



I bought my first Security knob from a dealer in Chicago who told me it was from an “east coast bank”. After many Google searches I found the building listed as a New York State Landmark and their listing even includes a photo of the doorknob.



Reference: <http://nyslandmarks.com/sml/sml5.htm>

## Municipal Building, New York, New York



Designed by architects McKim, Mead and White in 1911 and completed in 1914, this skyscraper provided the needed space for city offices after the consolidation of separate cities as boroughs of the City of New York in 1898.

This building was designed to complement and augment the historic City Hall across Centre Street, with finishes typical of the time of construction. While the building has been modernized, the building continues to serve the needs for the citizens of New York.

I bought several of these knobs a few years ago, assuming that it came from a municipal building probably on the east coast, since that was where the seller was located. The below link was found by a friend of mine on Flickr, showing one of the building doorknobs from a tour of WNYC radio studios located in the Municipal Building.



Reference:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/triborough/700146243/in/set-72157600614019317/>

## New York Produce Exchange, New York, New York



Designed by architect George B. Post in 1881 and completed in 1884, the Produce Exchange was home to one of the world's largest commodity exchanges and had a trading floor of almost 32,000 square feet. The building was prominently located at #2 Broadway at the southern tip of Manhattan. After serving the needs of the exchange for 67 years, the Produce Exchange building was demolished in 1957, replaced by a glass and steel skyscraper.

The first NYPE doorknob I bought was one of my first doorknob purchases on eBay, and the seller identified it as coming from the Produce Exchange. I also bought one from Steve Hannum in 2010, and the e-mails we traded plus a phone call discussion made me want to get more involved in the ADCA. Later on I found on Flickr a photo of a NYPE doorknob

enclosed in plastic as a souvenir by the demolition contractor.



Reference: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/klutzz/4232856932/>

## 1882 Article on Doorknobs

The following article was submitted by Steve Hannum and appeared on page 2 of the New York City Paper *The Sun* on Sunday December 10, 1882. The author was not identified but gives an interesting prospective on the early development of doorknobs. It was later reprinted in the Rome (NY) *Daily Sentinel*, The Monticello (NY) *Republican Watchman* and the *Carpentry and Building*.

### Door Knobs

#### Interesting and Novel Things That an Expert Finds to Say About Them

“There is hardly any object that everybody handles so frequently, finds so necessary, and yet thinks so little about, as the door knob. The time when they, as it were, glue themselves on to attention and compel earnest attention is when they pull off their spindle - or least come off so easily that it seems as they did it themselves - and in hurried attempts to jam them on again the spindle accidentally punched through the lock, out of reach, and a considerate, sympathetic wife looking on says, “How stupid!” or, still more exasperating, “What are you going to do now?” But so long as the doorknob sticks in place it is inoffensive, never dodges out of the way as keyholes sometimes will, never barks one's shins like a rocking-chair, never howls when touched as bedsteads are wont to, is in brief unobtrusive handy, and like most simple useful things, is likely to be little thought of. But there is a good deal to be said about door knobs. A gentleman who has all

his life kept up an intimate business acquaintance with doorknobs said recently concerning them:

“All the door knobs in England formerly were made of wood or cast iron, big, solid, heavy things, and for a time the American ones were the same. But that could not last in this country, where taste and inventive art are active in the combination of the useful and the beautiful for every use in life. We soon commenced to make our own door knobs, upon the old English plan at first, but ere long with other materials, and with an eye to improvement in form and color, beginning a progressive course of improvement that already puts us in this specialty, as in many others, ahead of the world in the production of goods that are at once beautiful, durable and cheap enough to be popular. It was about 1842 or popular 1843 that the manufacture of doorknobs from clay was commenced in this country.

Clays that would change their colors in baking were selected and mixed together after being very finely ground, pressed into molds, baked to what is technically known as biscuit, then coated with a fusible compound called "glaze" and rebaked at sufficient heat to melt the glaze and give them a glassy surface. They had a dark, mottled appearance, were known as "mineral door knobs" and sold for as high as \$18 a dozen pairs. They still have a place in the market, but they are now worth only 80 cents a dozen pairs - the cheapest made. Doorknobs, by the way, are always sold in pairs and when we speak of a dozen it will be understood that we mean a dozen pairs. Porcelain door knobs - white ones - came next. They are made of porcelain clay, to which ground bone is added, baked and treated like those already spoken of, and are only a little more expensive.

"Thirty years ago the "Agillo" knob came out. It was a very pretty thing, of bright, contrasting colors, compounded of clay, sand, feldspar, siliceous, red lead and some other metallic substances that we do not now remember. One may occasionally come across them yet in some exceptionally fine buildings out West, but they are very scarce. Indeed very few of them were ever made. There was too much uncertainty about them for successful manufacture. It was never possible to tell in advance how they come out of the kiln. We know one gentleman who burned a very large kiln full of them and when they came out there one exceedingly handsome, while all others, made in exactly the same way black, rough and valueless. Holding up perfect one he remarked "That knob cost \$1600," and straightway gave up the business. The next step in this line of manufacture was in the production of what were known as lava knobs. They are mainly composed of sawdust and glue - the same materials that the old fashioned daguerreotype cases were made of - and were of a beautiful dark brown color often very charmingly molded. The hematite knobs, made of sawdust and blood, "and a Boston Back Bay mud thrown in" as they say in the trade, were very much like the lava kind. Both are pretty durable under favorable conditions, and are worth \$4 to \$5 a dozen.

"The greatest stride in the progress of doorknob manufacture was taken in 1873 or 1874 by a metallic compression casting company. The material employed is bronze, composed of nine parts of copper one of tin. The molds prepared for it made with such extreme nicety and fidelity to their pattern that they reproduce as delicate as the veinings of a tiny leaflet, and the molten metal is forced into by screw pressure while they are

enclosed in the vacuum box. The articles in this way are known as compression bronze goods and a variety of claims to over other bronze goods are made for them, the principal of which, so far as the public is concerned is their beauty. Some of them are plated with nickel and gold, nickel and silver, or silver and gold in various combinations. The most expensive are those with combined decorations of enamel and gold, which mount up to \$15 or \$16 a pair. Japanese fancies, Etruscan novelties, *bas-relief* Cupids, animals heads in *alto-relievo*, aesthetic things with sun flowers and lilies on them, and non-aesthetic ones with much prettier flowers, monograms and seals and thousands of other ornamentations on forms that are round, square, hexagonal, flat, convex, concave, oval, and the makers only know what all else are very plenty.

"A pretty novelty lately introduced is the highly polished, sometimes fire-gilt, smooth brass door knob in the shape of an egg. Monograms and seals are put on to order, and they make the knobs cost only a mere - merely the expense of changing center of a pattern, which is nothing on large contract. Some clubs and companies have their knobs thus ornamented. The Treasury seal is cast on all the of the Treasury building in Washington, and on those of the post office buildings of New York and Boston. The War and Naval Departments at Washington also have their ornamented with their respective seals. But the most beautiful door knobs in Washington are in the East Room of the White House. When it was re-decorated seven or eight years ago under Architect Mullet's new knobs were provided for doors, window fastenings, and shutters all exquisitely enameled. The dominant in the enameling is blue and harmonizes with the other beautiful adornments of apartment.

"Not a great while ago a rich banker Portland, Oregon, sent all the way here to York for the door-knobs for a mansion he was building. He wanted dozens of knobs, but the highest number of any one kind of the same size was three. In each room, however, the design selected for it was carried through large, and small sizes, whenever a knob was used. He also had the taste to select the three shades of bronze which fine knobs are made, so as to harmonize with the prevailing hue of the woods or decorations of the different apartments for which they were severally designed.

"In some old European castles and palaces one sees door knobs of silver inlaid with gold, but such things are rarely if ever made now, never in this country."

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