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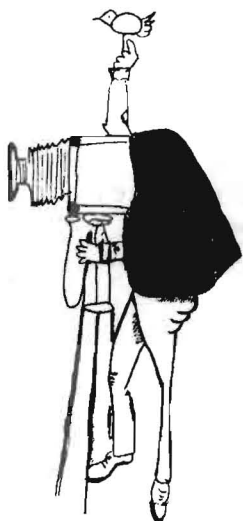
# The Doorknob Collector

NUMBER 5



"HUMMINGBIRD"

RUSSELL & ERWIN  
CIRCA 1880



THE AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE IS A D C A VICE PRESIDENT, LEN BLUMIN. ALL PHOTOGRAPHY FEATUED IN THE DOORKNOB COLLECTOR THUS FAR IS COURTESY OF LEN.

## DOORKNOB PHOTOGRAPHY

It has been my experience that few doorknob collectors have made the effort to learn how to take good pictures of their collection. True, it does take some time, effort and money, but it is really worth it in the end. I hope in this article to get you thinking about making the attempt.

Why bother? I think that photography is a great hobby, and one that ties in well with antique collecting. Some of the many advantages are: (1) documentation for insurance purposes, (2) trading with other collectors, (3) creating an album to carry for reference purposes, (4) exchanging information with other collectors, (5) giving slide shows to groups, and (6) making each issue of the "Doorknob Collector a little more interesting.

### EQUIPMENT

Many of you have a camera. You've tried to take pictures of knobs, and have probably given up because of dissatisfaction with the results. This may be due to improper technique (more on this later), but is more likely due to a lack of proper equipment to start with. I'll discuss the way I solve these problems, and provide alternatives in a longer article at a later time.

Camera - A Single Lens Reflex (SLR) 35 mm camera, with interchangeable lens capability, is almost a necessity. Good brands are: Minolta, Cannon, Nikon, Olympus, and Pentax. Lens - A true "macro" lens (usually about 50 mm focal length) is ideal. It allows close focusing on a single knob without using any other gadgets. A nice bonus is that this same macro lens can be used for general purpose picture taking without any modification. The macro lens is not cheap (about \$150), but fine tools never are. (continued)

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An alternative, if you already have a SLR with a "normal" lens is to buy cheap (\$10) "close-up" lenses that screw onto the front of your lens. I started out that way, but quickly gave it up for its many limitations. Film - Kodack Tri-X, black and white is the obvious choice, unless you want to make color slides. In addition to the above you need other items such as a cable release, tripod or copy stand, and lighting equipment.



#### TECHNIQUE

Proper knob preparation is very helpful. If you want to create a sharp contrast between the highlights of the design and the background. Some gentle polishing, followed by rubbing black paint into the background, does nicely. A matte spray as a finish will help reduce reflections and preserve the appearance from tarnish. Lighting of the knob is most critical. The key here is "indirect". Never photograph in direct sunlight. Indoor lighting should also be indirect, either by bouncing the light off white walls or sheets, or diffusing the light by surrounding the knob with a "light tent". Getting the proper set-up takes some experimentation, but once you are done you can photograph a large number of knobs in a relatively short period of time. Learn to "see" the knob before snapping the picture. Is there good contrast? Is the lighting even and uniform? Are there undesirable bright spots or reflections? Is your focus perfect? Learn to analyze your picture critically and each roll will get better.

#### PRINTING

You'll get the best results (and have the most fun) if you print the picture in your own or a rented darkroom, but acceptable results can be obtained from commercial processors if you supply a "test print" of what you expect the results to look like.

I'm preparing a detailed explanation of all the above points in a special article that will be available upon request. I'll also be happy to give individual advise and hints to anyone serious about pursuing doorknob photography.

Len Blumin  
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Reserve the date September 9 through 11 for the third annual convention of the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America, which will be held in Naperville, Illinois. Naperville, a city of 43,000, is located 30 minutes from downtown Chicago. Complete details will be sent to all members of A D C A this Spring.

Loretta Nemec, Convention Chairperson

A SELECTION OF FRATERNAL EMBLEMATIC KNOBS FROM THE EDITOR'S COLLECTION



Scottish Rite



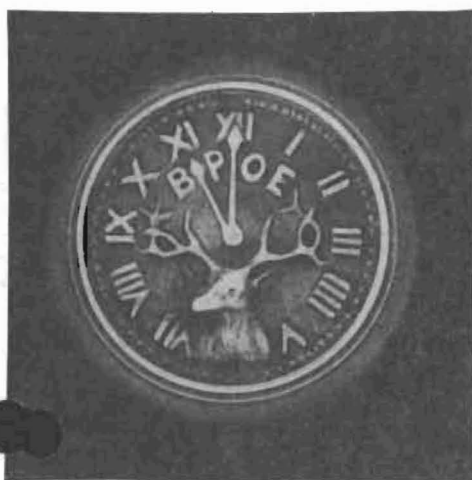
Masonic



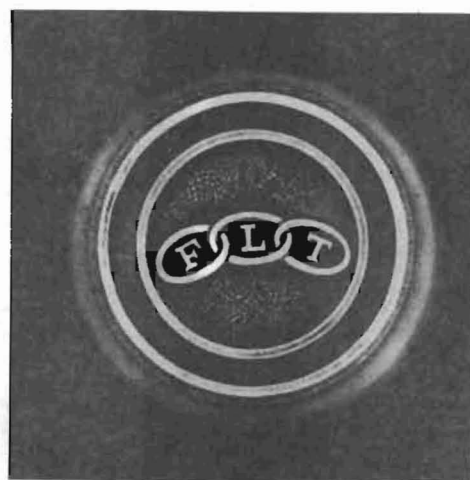
Knights of Columbus



Knights of Pythias



Benevolent & Protective  
Order of Elks



Odd Fellows



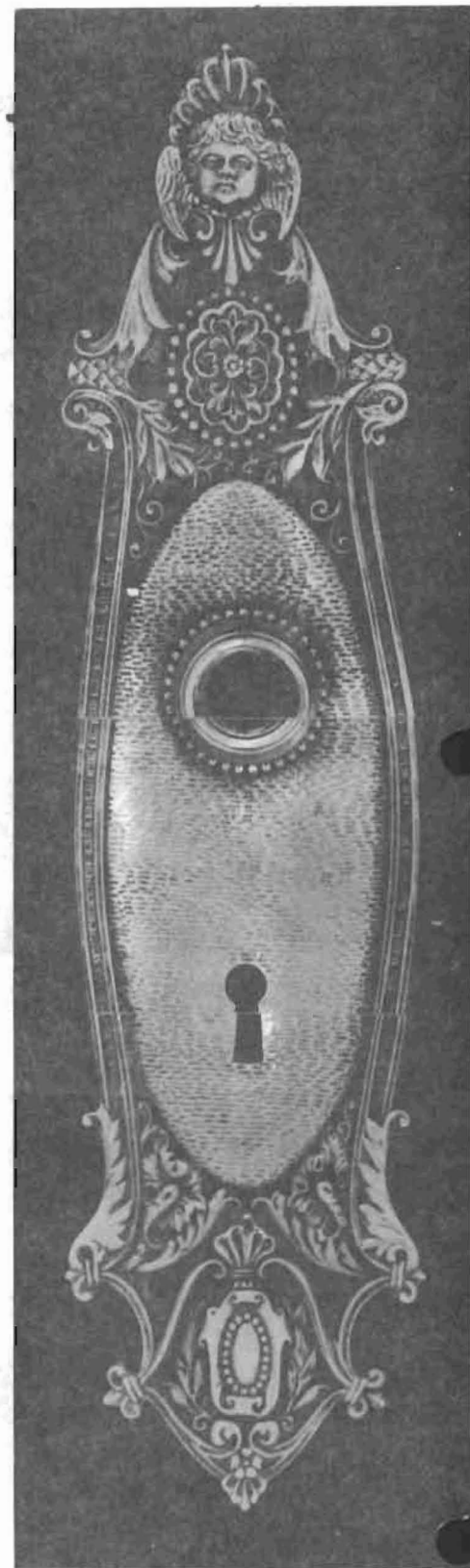
Loyal Order Of Moose

# THIS AND THAT

Everyone assumes when they see the "Blatz" knob that it came from a brewery. Not so, it is from the Blatz Hotel, Milwaukee. The building was demolished about 15 years ago.

The unusual rose/escutcheon was used with the knob.

Thanks to Dustin Lunde  
Milwaukee, Wisc.



Door handle on Zino Davidoff's tobacco store in Geneva, Switzerland.

Thanks to Faye & Rich Kennedy, Chatham, N.J.



Rare patterned octagonal knob from the Blumin collection.

## HARDWARE DECORATION AND IT'S ROOTS IN ART HISTORY

Entering a museum can be an intimidating experience and the larger the museum, the more confusing. Gallery after gallery presents a bewildering and sometimes inconsistent array of items that are unrelated to anything within our experience. We cannot understand or appreciate the beauty and vitality of crafted objects unless we understand and appreciate the long tradition that has brought them to this present form.

Man could draw long before he could write. We have no record of how he spoke 20,000 years ago, but we do know how he used drawing to communicate ideas. The mysteries of life and death, weather changes, and animal habits were depicted on cave walls and stone implements probably as a ritual in which, the hunter or food gatherer felt, he gained power or control over the animal or weather by depicting it. The idea that power over an effigy gives one power over the subject depicted has persisted to this day in witchcraft and superstition.

As society changed from one of hunters and food gatherers to one of nomadic herdsmen and food planters, different kinds of knowledge was required. Man needed to count, measure time, to have an idea of quantity, and to communicate these abstract ideas. Learning to communicate through symbols, and ultimately through the written word was a long and slow evolutionary process.

Among the first manifestations of the changes from naturalism to symbolism are the crude incised lines on early pottery. A zigzag line may be a representation of mountains or sea. Finger-made stripes may represent a rainbow. Modern society is dominated by symbols and abstract signs and we compress and communicate worlds of information in these symbols. From road signs, trademarks, national flags and radiator ornaments, among others, we understand location, time, ownership, direction and our proper behavior.

All through the ages, man's natural environment was the principal source of his design motifs. Flowers, foliage, fruit, animals, drifting clouds, rippling water and hanging fabrics gave him patterns to emulate and, to this day, artists are faithfully copying the oldest designs to delight us all. There is nothing more pleasing than the Master's creation.

Natural forms are used in ornament in two different ways: realistic or stylized. It is not always possible to copy nature accurately and create a successful pattern. Adaptation and elaboration to some degree is used in creating the most successful designs. A good designer is able to conventionalize, and it is important to be familiar with historic design.

The acanthus leaf is a classic example of ornament taken from nature and was introduced into design and beautifully stylized by the Greeks. It has since been used continuously in decoration. The rose, the lily, the pomegranate, the thistle, the oak leaf, the dolphin, the lion and eagle and the dove are also natural forms popular throughout the ages and are today incorporated in successful design.

Styles and periods in history produced different artistic expressions and we still benefit and enjoy the works of the past centuries. We divide art into styles and periods, just as we divide history into social groups and political movements, but the transitions are piecemeal and imperceptible. The present grows from the past as organically as any vital process in nature.

continued

## HARDWARE DECORATION AND IT'S ROOTS IN ART HISTORY -Continued

The word "school", as used in describing decoration style, is not used in the academic sense but refers to a number of artists working in the same geographical region and whose works reveal a similarity in outlook and style. At various times each main European country has had such groups of artists whose works was distinctly regional in character and important enough to exert a discernible influence on other regional groups.

The Flemish school, for example, was influential from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Italy, which has by far the longest history as the leader in western artistic development, had a whole series of schools that grew up in the various city-states into which the country was divided.

These formal and highly developed styles of Europe influenced American design, and the young hardware industry of the early nineteenth century borrowed and adapted the styles for its own product. There were, of course, many conceptions of what rendering was proper on such small articles as doorknobs, lock plates, and hinges. Often times many "schools" were intermixed, thus creating a design that was entirely new. To some critics this mixing of schools was incongruous and absurd.

It was in 1872 that Russell and Erwin Company employed a trained designer to rationalize and "to decorate the forms which had, in the first place, been distorted, and in the second defaced with no more national and artistic purpose than to produce something fancy."

The Yale and Towne Company in 1904 had 250 designs in stock to choose from and any number of proprietary designs for special order. With the other manufacturers (Russell & Erwin, Reading, Corbin, Sargent, Norwalk, Nashua, Mallory-Wheeler, Lockwood and others) one could purchase a thousand designs in all schools of decoration.

Nineteenth century hardware decoration was also reflecting the youth and vitality of a young nation. Reminders of classical and colonial ties were being rejected and a new style of decoration developed. The population was mainly engaged in some facet of agriculture and both secular and religious life was severe and no pretense was tolerated. Architects favored the European styles but the small home builder wanted something to which he could relate. Geometric patterns, the star, the sunburst, the cross and the wheel were incorporated in decoration as there was no mystery to their meaning. Many designs of the day were simply a variation in arrangements of devices of decoration that had been used for other purposes, for thousands of years.

This vernacular decoration, indigenous to America, was fitting for the frontier as well as the town cottage. All manufacturers supplied it and the builder could be proud of American designed and produced hardware for the first time ever. Vernacular designs were produced, along with the formal styles, for over a half a century and are as refreshing today as they were to their original owner.

Artistry in hardware is in the mind of the individual and, as in all art, in the eye of the beholder. Tastes change constantly and the relative importance of any style could be debated eternally but the charm and historic value of vernacular hardware remains a priceless remnant of Americana.

Charles Wardell



Consultant

Maudie Eastwood

## The Antique Doorknob

Re: The new publication, ANTIQUE BUILDERS' HARDWARE,  
Knobs and Accessories

Note from author: SORRY, but this book is not for you, IF---

You--never looked twice at an old doorknob--are not interested to learn the points of difference between a mineral and a Bennington knob---couldn't care less which knobs are currently the most sought--have never seen Penn's 60-plus, Floral design, hardware set in print and aren't even just a little bit curious--find dull, the fact that a component of hemacite knobs is actually blood.

If, however, you admit to the following---

You-want to know what all the fuss about old doorknobs is--are interested in comparing the number of patterned metal Yale & Towne 1899 doorknobs as compared to their offering for 1910, complete with illustrations--are wondering what types of doors the first American Colonists had (none)--would like to see what type of hardware was dug on the site of a California Mission--would be curious to know what a saloon door lock would look like--would like to be able to tell the difference between an original and a reproduction piece--YOU WILL WANT TO ORDER--

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