



The Doorknob Collector

Number 39

January-February 1990

Corbin, a major force in builders' hardware

by Maude Eastwood

Lock contractors Phillip and Frank Corbin founded the P & F Corbin in New Britain in 1852. Fortune smiled on these industrious brothers. Incorporation in 1854 assured additional capital and an expanded work force. "Corbin" as this company is usually known, successfully aspired to the role of a major force in builders' hardware and so remains.

Corbin's rapid rise and continued success was largely due to Phillip Corbin's brilliant and honest management. Competition was always keen in New Britain where, by 1851, the area was already over abundant with hardware manufacturers. New Britain was aptly named "HARDWARE CITY."

Initially, to avoid competition, Corbin produced items made only abroad. Nevertheless, setbacks in other forms: poor market, fires, rivals deliberate effort to undermine, all took constant vigilance to weather. During one six month, no-order period, Phillip doled out personal funds for employee emergencies. He even fished thru holes in the ice to provide food. Intense loyalty was his reward.

A REPRESENTATION OF CORBIN TRADEMARKS



1881



1900



1903



1907



1920



1960

THE DATING IS RELATIVE,
NOT EXCLUSIVE.

Rivals' under-cutting was either ignored or met head on, beating them at their own game. In 1868, sixteen year after founding, Corbin added locks and knobs to their line. This was the start leading to a complete line of builders hardware. In 1870, 33 knobs were available with a large assortment of locks and latches. The knobs included three white metal and heavy

bronze plated surfaces and two of bronze metal. Twenty-eight were mineral and porcelain.

Corbin's 1871 catalog contained 320 pages. Six catalogs were release from 1870 to 1880. Demands for Corbin hardware grew faster that the company could produce. A permanent building crew was employed to add growing space. Orders were months behind, the small price of success!

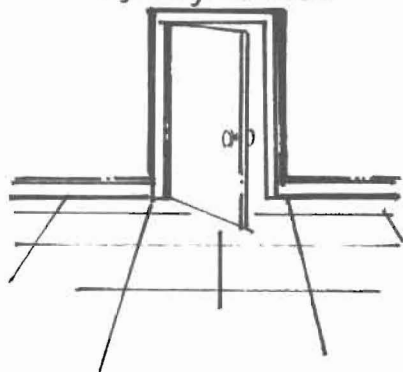
In 1889, Corbin gained an advantage over their competitors by wisely securing control of Phelps' unit lock patent. Innovations in the unit assembly and application led to savings in time for all parties concerned from stock clerk to builders. These locks were popular for both commercial and residential use.

In 1902 the announcement was made that Corbin would be merging with rival Russwin under the management of a holding company: THE AMERICAN HARDWARE CORPORATION. Both companies kept separate identities and operation. This practical measure, aimed at cost-saving for both entities, met with understandable consternation. Rival department see CORBIN...page 6

1990 ADCA Convention in Connecticut

THE OPEN DOOR

by ray nemec



Maurice Onraet writes to tell us about doorknob 0-118. The Sylvania knob is from an old hotel still standing in the historic section of Philadelphia. The building is not used as a hotel any more.

Mr. Onraet also would like to share with fellow ADCA members his new find. He sent us photocopies of two unusual knobs. They are hexagon in shape. One has the word "Pull" inscribed in it and the other "Push." Very unusual. Hopefully Maurice will supply us with a photograph of the two knobs for the next issue of **The Doorknob Collector**.

Fred Magnus is still keeping busy showing his doorknobs. He has two "show and tell" presentations coming up. One for a local High School and the other a P.E.O. local chapter.

Loretta Nemec had about 200 doorknobs on display at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, IL for two months. A display entitled **Selections from Seven Collectors** was featured in the Fermilab Art Gallery. Loretta was one of two employees who had their collections displayed. The

other five collections were from various sources.

Bud Wolski recently related to readers of a daily newspaper how he started collecting doorknobs. Many years ago his father would buy out supplies of old hardware stores. Door hardware fascinated Bud and he got hooked. Bud has recently received a lot of recognition from various national publications, including the September 1989 issue of **HOME** magazine. Bud is in the antique builders hardware business.

Arnie Fredrick reports things are moving along on the club's doorknob. The 'new' doorknob with the club logo is expected to be ready for the convention later this year.

Members, Don Johnson and Connie Swaim (husband & wife) are the new editors of the UHL Collector's Society newsletter. Don and Connie will be publishing the newsletter on UHL's pottery six times a year.

The November issue of the Lock Museum's newsletter contained #27 in their Historical Research Series. Tom Hennessy wrote about the Manipulation proof lock.

Don't forget, if you have not ordered your Doggie Doorknob Coffee mug, they can be ordered from Bill Byington. The price is \$6.00 for each knob and be sure to include \$2.50 for each knob ordered to handle shipping costs. The color of the mug is cream with the design being in brown. An order form is enclosed. ■



Date, place set

The 1990 **ANTIQUA DOORKNOB COLLECTORS OF AMERICA** annual convention will be held August 2nd, 3rd, and 4th at the Ramada Inn in East Windsor, Connecticut. Ed and Flicka Thrall will be hosting this year's event.

This will be the second time the convention has moved from the midwest. In 1982 the ADCA held the convention in San Francisco.

More details will be announced in future issues of **THE DOORKNOB COLLECTOR**.

The Doorknob Collector

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DOORKNOB COLLECTING - A PRIMER - PART II - TYPES OF COLLECTIONS

By Len Blumin

Since there are many reasons for collecting, it is not surprising that every collection is unique in type. This article will explore some of the many variations.

KNOB TYPE

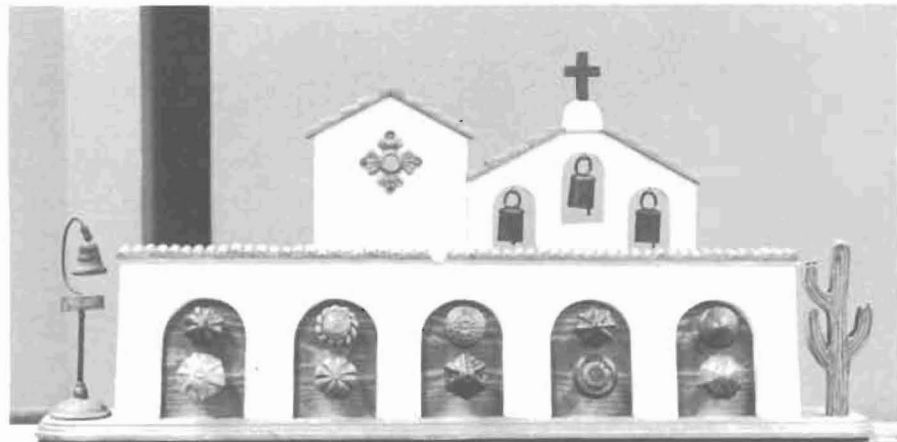
Most collectors start their collections with a great variety of doorknobs and related builder's hardware. Any newly found knob dating before World War II is added to the "pile". Even minor variations on a theme are avidly put away or displayed.

As the collection grows, like any large family, favorites may emerge. A special place is set aside for colored glass knobs. Or painted porcelains may be featured. Some (me, for instance) favor the older knobs, whereas are partial to wood, or whatever!

Thus, the type of knob is one way to specialize or "focus" a collection, and I urge you all to select at least one type to concentrate on, usually the one that pleases you the most.

MANUFACTURER

Another approach in collecting is to concentrate on the products from a particular maker of hardware, such



Marge & Joe Bornino's prize winning display in 1989

as Mallory Wheeler, or Sargent. Our archive catalogs and Maud Eastwood's books provide a wealth of ideas and background material. Often a particular manufacturer has a certain "style", and a group or collection of those knobs make for a harmonious display. One can then get a good feeling for the type of product made by that company, which then helps in identifying "unknown" knobs. Rumor has it that Charlie Wardell is working on a Yale & Towne display that should be a knockout! We hope to continue to feature a different manufacturer as the theme for each convention.

ESTHETICS

Another meaningful way to either group knobs or focus one's collecting efforts is based on the designs themselves. You might pick a particular school of architecture, such as

Gothic, or Louis XV. Or perhaps you like the "vernacular" style. Arnie Fredrick hosted a convention in Waverly, Iowa, at which Art Nouveau was the theme. A design focus allows the collector to expand his or her horizons to related motifs on other objects, such as furniture and buildings, thus getting to appreciate a given style in all its richness.

This discussion of collection types is not meant to be inclusive, but rather to provide examples of the kinds of organizational schemes that different collectors have chosen. Others might include emblematic knobs, pictorial or "story" knobs, patented types, etc. There is no preferred or standardized system, such as seen with coins or stamps. Do what you like best, but keep an open mind to new approaches that may provide an even richer experience. ■

Ornamental design in antique doorknobs

by Len Blumin

REPRESENTATIONAL DOORKNOBS

- A-113 "Pigeon," vernacular, Hopkine & Dickinson, 1879 catalog. Rare.
 A-207 "Vampire," Mallory Wheeler, 1882 catalog. Lady and child on a bat.
 A-208 "Eagle on Shield," Mallory Wheeler, 1882 catalog. Rare.
 A-319 Classic Lady Face. Bronze. Similar design in Neuman catalog.
 A-320 Lady with Headband. Neuman knobs had similar perimeter.
 A-321 Classic man face, on walnut. Hard to photograph.

A-113



A-319



A-207



A-320



A-208



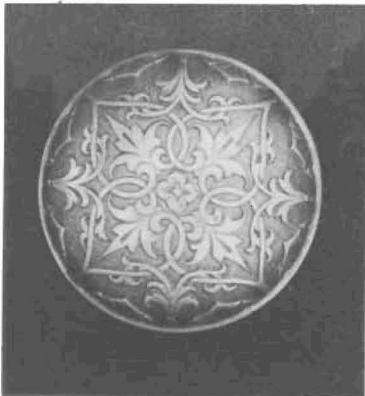
A-321



FOURFOLD SYMMETRY
(continued)

- H-116 Classis MCCC/R&E, design patent 4134, JJC Smith, June 7, 1870.
H-117 Older, possibly pre-1870, cast, short flared shank, not brass or iron.
H-118 L. Howard & Co., Hartford, CT. "Saloon" knob or railroad type.
H-283 Striking vernacular, c. 1880.
H-284 Design elements of H-219 have been rearranged.
H-287 Hopkins & Dickinson, 1878 catalog, #908. Rare.

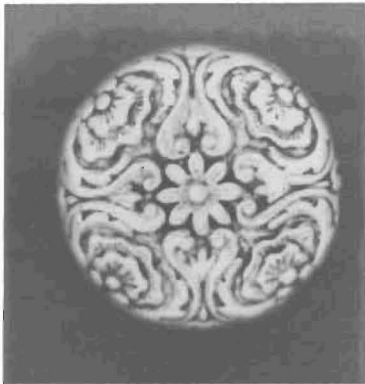
H-116



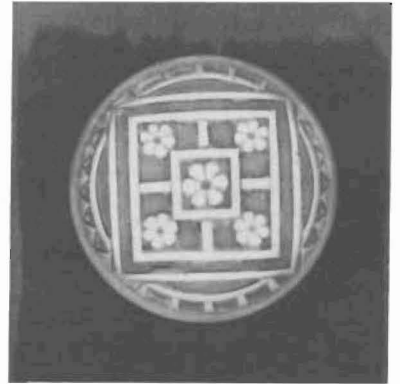
H-283



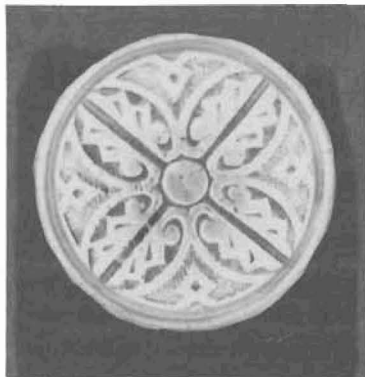
H-117



H-284



H-118



H-287



heads and workers conditioned to competition saw little reason to realign objectives. Time, the healer, proved that the new arrangement was workable and key men from both companies facilitated the melding.

In 1911, the holding company assumed operation of the plants. Not until the 1930's were any mergers of operation undertaken. The press rooms were combined in one building at that time. Another 20 years passed before other significant merging was accomplished and needless duplication reduced. The

Corbin and Russwin Sample Rooms were combined in the 1950's.

A wealth of Corbin history and lore is available thru multiple sources: Corbin's 1904 HISTORY OF THE HOUSE OF CORBIN, Corbin monthlies, early histories of Connecticut and New Britain, Tom Hennessy's EARLY LOCKS AND LOCKMAKERS OF AMERICA, and thru personal testimony from long-lived, retired company personnel. In the last category, the brothers Clarence and Carl Westman have been particularly generous with information

and artifacts of historical significance, Clarence with Corbin Mfg. Co., and Carl with Russwin.

Corbin, with other companies that have become operating units of large corporations, has been the target of take-over attempts, stream-lining, and up-dating. The American Hardware Corporation name was dropped following the 1964 merging with Emhart Corporation. In 1970, Emhart Corporation chose Berlin, Connecticut as the site for a new and efficient plant to continue the production of the Corbin and Russwin lines.■

NEW



A.D.C.A.

This mug was designed and produced for the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America. ADCA was founded in Waverly, Iowa in 1981.

The "Doggie" doorknob, cast in bronze, was designed by Ludwig Kreuzinger, manufactured by Russell & Erwin, and patented June 7, 1870. It is a beautiful representation of Victorian decorative hardware and a big favorite of the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America.

Doggie Doorknob Coffee Mug

By Antique Doorknob Collectors of America

\$6.00 plus \$2.50 shipping

Order Form Enclosed



CORBIN - 1907

This knob can be found illustrated in 1907 Corbin advertising material as a special design and also, with a different plate, in a 1927 catalogue. "Modern Color Treatment Builder's Hardware." Polychrome and Pompeian Finished hardware from Corbin.

If only doorknobs could talk

by Cheryl Blam



Thank goodness the house is finally settled down and everyone is asleep.

This is a good time to reflect on all that has happened to this ol' doorknob lately.

I remember being produced right along side of my brothers and sisters over a hundred years ago in the eastern portion of the United States. We were all so excited because we knew we weren't like all the other knobs of the day. Those knobs were ornate, and beautiful, but we were designed for a lovely Victorian home in Westport, Connecticut. Some of us had wallpaper matching us! We were young and had a vital job to perform. We were special!

I'll never forget the day the builder came and removed us from our home we had known for such a long time. We were no longer young and our mistress had passed away. We had not been used for years, and the majestic Victorian house had since lost its beauty. We all felt as though life was slipping away, and we were no longer needed.

I guess that is why we were surprised when our present owners choose us from a box in an antique store. I've since heard them lamenting that they should have taken all fifteen of us, instead of seven. Hey, we were the first in their collection, what did they know!

When we learned we were going to the 1989 doorknob convention in Iowa we couldn't believe our luck. We were thrilled to think

that there were other collectors from all over the United States trying to save doorknobs. This was a chance to meet new friends and see all the other doorknobs. Why, do you know these wonderful collectors are even trying to convince the United State Postal Service to commemorate us on a stamp? Makes an ol' knob want to turn in joy.

At the convention we lost a sister to a lovely woman from Washington. I know it was difficult for our mistress to trade her. We all felt the new owner liked each one of us, and would treat the chosen knob as unique. That knob would be the only one such as herself in a large collection.

We also knew she valued us, because we acquired a beautiful glass knob in our sister's place. You could tell both women had fun trading, and hopefully at next year's convention we can see our Washington sister again. Who knows, she may even get traded back to us.

Isn't that what conventions are all about? We saw trading and selling, and some knobs being bought for restoration. The auction was exciting too. Our mistress finally got the idea how to bid. Now we have a year to get acquainted with our new additions to the collection before the next auction.

I guess I should be getting some sleep, rather than reminiscing. I rest easier now days, knowing the members of the **ANTIQU**
DOORKNOB COLLECTORS OF

AMERICA at least appreciate the uniqueness of the hardware family. They know the escutcheon plates, the window sashes, the push plates, the hinges, and the knobs have not had an easy time at surviving. It's comforting to know they are preserving the past for the future. Ahhhh, Good Night.■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cheryl Blam has been a member of **ADCA** for one year, but has been collecting doorknobs, with her husband Norman, for three years. Cheryl is a Regional Manager for a nationwide relocation firm. Cheryl and Norman have four children ranging in age from 16 to 27 years. They reside on the south shore of Long Island, New York.

Retiree turns to doorknobs

by Joe Crommett
Gazette Hot Springs Bureau
Arkansas Gazette,
Little Rock, AR

Arthur Paholke doesn't have trouble finding a doorknob to turn. Even if it isn't connected to a door.

The former Chicago Police Officer started collecting ornamental hardware in 1974 after a friend told him about an interesting doorknob he had seen.

Paholke went to the flea market and bought about six doorknob sets for under \$10. Hooked on the hobby, he has more than 2,000 ornamental doorknobs and their plates. "They were just pretty and I was just picking up things that were pretty," he said. "When I started I thought I was the only one in the world collecting them. Since then we've found out there's a whole lot of closet doorknob collectors that are coming out."

Paholke is a founding member of the **Antique Doorknob Collectors of America**, which has about 200 members. He retired to Garland County (Arkansas) two years ago. As a Chicago policeman, he was one of the world's foremost authorities on solving crimes by using comparative tool analysis.

In his library are 1,075 doorknobs and escutcheon plates lined up on a 40-foot strip around the walls of the room. On a display shelf are more than a dozen operational doorknob sets mounted on two-by-eights. Paholke, an expert locksmith, made keys



for all the working locks. Below them are shelves with hundred of books, magazines and catalogs used to help identify the doorknob sets. In the garage are 25 boxes with another 1,000 doorknobs waiting for Paholke's attention.

To Paholke, the doorknob sets are survivors. The demand for bronze and brass has remained steady through two depressions and two world wars. Most ornamental pieces were sold and melted down.

After starting the hobby, Paholke was bothered that people painted over many of the pieces. Then he realized the paint many have been what protected them from scavengers and damage.

"Somehow or another some survived this onslaught," he said. "I would think a lot of them are survivors because sometimes, somewhere, someone was lazy and didn't want to polish them and they were painted and overlooked."

Paholke haunted flea markets where "pickers"

sold their wares. Pickers go into abandoned buildings and take anything of value. They take and sell the discolored doorknob sets for "probably a little more than they could have gotten for brass." He has a glass doorknob from the 1700's. The sparkling brass and bronze ornamental pieces started in the 1830's and ran for a century. The mass manufacturers of ornamental doorknobs practically stopped in the 1930's.

Paholke gets up at 4:30 a.m. and goes down to the room to work on the doorknob sets. He goes through books to try to match doorknobs with the proper escutcheon plates. Or he might polish a set and cover it with a clear plastic coating.

To Paholke, doorknobs and locks are part of history, a look back at the progression of a particular technology and design.

Art, points to a doorknob that came from the old Lexington Hotel, which was Al Capone's Chicago headquarters and where President Gover Cleveland honeymooned. There are doorknobs from the Chicago City Hall and from buildings in several other states.

A pair of Wedgewood porcelain doorknobs cost him \$130. Others cost less than 50 cents.

Since moving to Arkansas, Paholke hasn't found many ornamental doorknobs sets worth collecting. There is a doorknob set on a downtown Hot Springs building he would like to get, but it's not for sale. ■

Editors note: Reprinted with permission of Art Paholke. The story appeared in the Sunday, November 12, 1989, issue of the **Arkansas Gazette**.

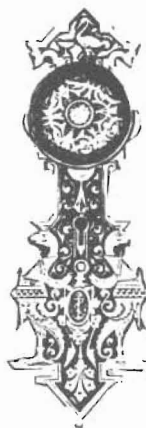
1989 - 1990
ANTIQUE DOORKNOB COLLECTORS OF AMERICA
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Antique Doorknob Collectors of America

SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS & DISBURSEMENTS
 FOR TWELVE MONTHS - 1/1/89-12/31/89



RECEIPTS

310 Membership dues	\$ 3090.00	
312 Sales of ADCA publications	837.90	
313 Sale of ADCA promo. items	342.00	
314 Consignment sales	806.25	
320 Interest on temp. investments	339.93	
330 National convention income	1757.61	
390 Other misc. revenue	0	
		7173.69

DISBURSEMENTS

701 Printing newsletter	\$ 1978.50	
703 Other printing expenses	545.50	
730 Postage expenses	1056.34	
801 Expenses related to publications	101.84	
803 Office supplies/operating expenses	593.36	
805 Archive expenses	0	
813 ADCA promo item expenses	1557.34	
908 National Convention expenses	188.84	
981 Insurance	179.00	
988 Consignment purchases	462.15	
990 Miscellaneous expenses	50.17	
		6713.04
120 Excess of Receipts over Disbursements		460.65
110 Beginning Cash Balance - 1/1/89		6204.63
100 Ending Cash Balance - 12/31/89		6665.28

Respectfully submitted

Raymond J. Nemec
 Raymond J. Nemec,
 ADCA Treasurer
 1/1/90

Archives on the move

CLASSIFIED AD SECTION



**FROM THE ARCHIVES
WITH ARCHIVISTS
Barb & Steve Menchhofer**

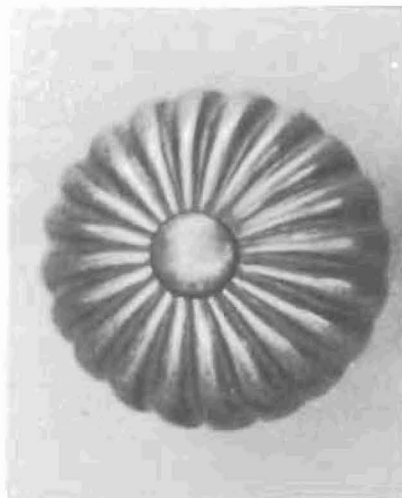
At the 1989 convention new archivists were named and a decision was made to move the Archives from Nebraska to Indiana--the home state of the new archivists. The move has now been completed and we are in the process of arranging the catalogs. The Emil Miller Memorial Library will remain with Dorothy Miller in Nebraska.

A total of seven catalogs have been loaned to us for copying since the convention. We wish to thank Florence Chelin, Charlie Wardell, and Len Blumin for their contributions.

Let us stress the importance of the Archives. To further your knowledge of your doorknob collection, these catalogs can be of tremendous value to you. They contain good drawings of knobs and other related hardware and much information about them. As Dorothy Miller once said, "Our Library represents a very important part of the basis of our organization and its goals. As our members continue to strengthen their interest in researching their

collections, the library continues to grow in importance." We encourage each of you to research your collection as this is a very important facet of it. We will be enclosing an order blank for catalogs in one of the future issues of **The Doorknob Collector**. Please take advantage of this opportunity to order your catalogs then.

Our many thanks to Alice Chadonich and Dorothy Miller, Past Archivists, for their help in this transition period. We hope you will be patient with us in regards to the Archives as we get acquainted with our new responsibilities. We look forward to serving you in the future.■



CHANGES

#135 Mike Maldonado, new address is: 28 Teresa Rd., Manchester, CT 06040.

Members are reminded that your dues entitle you to advertise items for sale, trade or wanted at no charge.

WANTED. Desperately looking for cast iron, round or oval, doorknob number seven, page 87, of **Antique Builders Hardware**. Also french latch key with a long shank. Donald Dion (#177), 176 de la Tourelle 3, Quebec, Que., Canada G1R1C4.

WANTED. Several sets of 4"x4" pattern bronze hinges, sash locks, and sash lifts for house restoration. Jim Huntsman (#54), 416 S. 4th St., Stillwater, MN 55082, Phone 612-439-8294 (evenings).

WANTED. H-287, page five this issue of **THE DOORKNOB COLLECTOR** for house restoration. Jim Huntsman (#54), 416 S. 4th St., Stillwater, MN 55082, Phone 612-439-8294 (evenings).

FOR SALE. Single knob, B215, highly polished, \$20. Single knob, J214, \$20. Single knob, "Board of Education, City of Chicago," fist with torch in center, words all in upper-case letters. \$30. Single knob, "Board of Education, City of Chicago," wording not as sharp, letters in upper and lower case, \$15. Pair of Corbin, Bronze Metal, page 161, lower left. The **Antique Doorknob**. \$25. All postpaid and returnable if purchaser pay return postage. Connie Swain (#200), RR2, Box 380, Knightstown, IN 46168. Phone 317-345-5758.