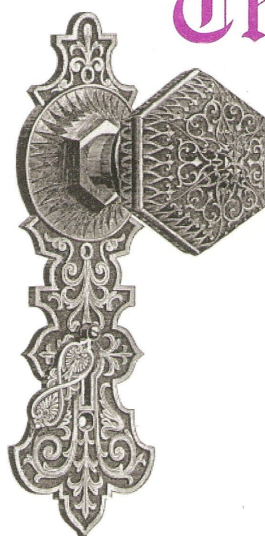


The Doorknob Collector



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LAVA KNOBS

By Allen S. Joslyn

What is reported to be the first design patent of a doorknob is No. 3732, issued on November 2, 1869 to William Gorman and assigned by him to Russell & Erwin Mfg. Co. The design appears in R&E's 1875 Catalogue, p. 396, entitled a "Lava" knob. Another "Lava" knob is illustrated in the 1874-75 Corbin Catalogue (p. 495). These knobs are today usually described – erroneously - as being made of Gutta Percha. What were they actually made of and who produced them?



Recently a patent model crossed EBay; what was particularly interesting about it is that it illustrated not a design patent but a utility patent, No. 95,899 issued to William Hall on October 19, 1869 (about two weeks before the Gorman patent was issued). That model used is the "Lava" knob that appears in the Corbin catalogue (see picture left). The Hall patent covered an improved rose for door-knobs, where a metallic washer was molded into a composition rose, so that the knob shank turns on a metallic surface. Hall reports while the molded part may be composed of various substances, "the composition, patented by John Gardner dated January 7, 1868, is the substance I now use."

Even though there is a several year interval between the Hall patent and these catalogues, there is a strong inference that the "Lava" knobs promoted in the Corbin catalogue (and the R&E catalogue) were made of the Gardner composition.

The Gardner patent, No. 73,088, is for an invention of "a picture or curtain-knob, or a knob for bureaux, drawers, and other like purposes [can doorknobs be far behind?], the ingredients entering into the composition of which are taken in the following proportions:"

Newsletter Deadline – February 18, 2007

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“It will be understood, of course, that the proportions of the substances above named as entering into the composition of the knobs may be considerably varied. More or less saw-dust, or its equivalent, may be added, so as to impart the proper toughness and tenacity to the material, and the quantity of coloring matter may be varied at the will of the workman.”

It is likely that “Lava” knobs were made by a third company to the designs desired by the big hardware suppliers. “Lava” knobs – so designated by name, but each with a different design – were offered by Corbin in 1874-75, R & E in 1875, Nashua in its 1872 Catalogue, p.194 and Branford (1879 catalogue, p.106). One normally would expect rival manufacturers to invent different names for their products, even if

So who was the manufacturer? Both the Gardner and the Hall patents were assigned to Samuel Peck and Company of New Haven, Connecticut. Samuel H. Peck of New Haven was a noted daguerrian, and was active from 1844 through 1877. From his studio for taking daguerreotypes, he expanded into producing cases to enclose the pictures. Before him such cases had been made of leather, paper mache, etc. He is credited with inventing the “Union” case composed of thermoplastic, covered by Patent No. 14,202, issued February 5, 1856. He originally entered into a partnership with Scovill Manufacturing Co.

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to manufacture such cases, which was dissolved in 1857. From 1857-1860 he continued his business as Samuel Peck & Co. Incidentally, he was the brother-in-law of Halvor Halvorsen.

Towards the beginning of the 1860s, the miniature case industry declined as tintypes, paper prints and carte-de-visits became more popular and paper albums spread. By the 1870s, cased photographs were rare.

Thus, those who had made Union cases devoted their efforts to other uses. Highly detailed hand mirrors were a favorite. As noted, in 1869 Gardner proposed curtain and picture-knobs, and assigned the patent to a well-known name, Samuel Peck & Co. Hall submitted models of a doorknob to illustrate his patent and assigned it to the same company. But Nashua in 1872 referred to "Hall's Lava Knobs" and after the patent assignments the name Samuel Peck & Company does not seem to appear.

So did Samuel Peck & Co. actually produce the knobs, or did others simply resurrect, perhaps only temporarily, a well-known name? Another candidate is William Hall, who refers to the compound which "I now use". Born in Rhode Island, he moved to Boston and started a business as a locksmith in 1843 at 27 Dock Street until his death in 1875; thereafter his business was operated by his sons. He was more than simply a locksmith, but a prolific inventor (and of more than just locks). He was a co-inventor, together with Enoch Robinson, of two patents in the 1840s, Nos. 1995 and 2248, one for a lock, and the other for a window closure. He also patented a six-lever lock in 1848 that won a medal at the Great Exhibition of 1851 as a gunpowder-proof lock; it is pictured in Erroll & Erroll, American Genius, pp. 60-61 cited below. Eventually William Hall and Co. was acquired and became a predecessor (together with Enoch Robinson & Co.) of E. R. Butler & Co.. (our own Rhett Butler). Certainly William Hall also had the ability to produce the knobs.

Clearly further research is required.

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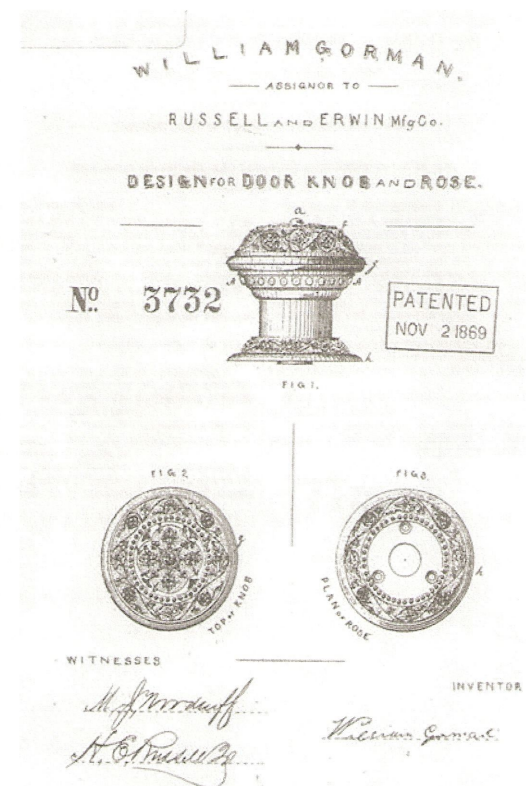
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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK:

Three cheers for another fine convention! Buffalo, New York in September was a fabulous place to visit although I am certainly glad ADCA did not plan an October convention this year! We enjoyed delightful weather (with only one day's rain) and we were happy to have missed autumn's first snow storm a few weeks later! Dale Sponaugle was once again, a wonderful host. I had the misfortune to miss his first hosting in Maryland, but more than made up for it in time spent browsing his collection so beautifully displayed in his basement. In my estimation, the time spent in Dale's basement was well worth the trip to Buffalo.

This year's attendance was good, however ADCA missed several members who are annual attendees such as the Nemec's, Byington's, Maud Eastwood, Jackie Rode and Betty Madison, Cathy Galbraith, Phillip Austin, the Delange's and Steve and Courtney Takes (congrats on your new baby girl!) and others we have all enjoy visiting and trading with throughout the years. To all of you ADCA missed this year, you are in our thoughts and ADCA looks forward to seeing you next year in Portland, Oregon.

The ADCA board meeting, led by Brad Kittel, President, was quite productive this year.

The board and membership present approved **two new board members** (Don Pearson and Jessie Brooks) and unanimously appointed Len Blumin honorary ADCA board member for life. This prestigious position is held by only two ADCA members, Maud Eastwood and now Len. The board also authorized the purchase of an updated computer system for the improvement of the TDC. Both the editor, Allen Joslyn, and the Kennedy's are pleased to have this updated equipment for the TDC. Approval was also gained for the improvement of ADCA's website along with the proposed virtual museum. In the last year, ADCA's (antiquedoorknobs.org) website generated 16 new members thus justifying the need for updating the current site as maintained by website master, Brad Kittel.

Other ADCA business includes the resignation of Steve Menchhoffer from position of Archivist, and the acceptance of Rhett Butler as the new ADCA archivist. I'd like to personally thank Steve for his many years of service along with welcoming Rhett into the position. The transition will be a smooth one with the experience that Rhett brings to the club along with the space and facilities for proper document storage. The only logistics to work out is getting the pieces from Indianapolis to New York.

At the membership meeting, I was elected President, Brad Kittel was elected Vice-President, Rich Kennedy as Secretary and Allen Joslyn as Treasurer.

As I can testify, serving in ADCA is a rewarding task. Not only does one get to be more involved, but the camaraderie amongst those volunteering their time in the club reaps rewards that are lifelong, both in friendship and in satisfaction of the preservation of our fine architectural hardware for future generations. As always, there are plenty of opportunities within the club for all to help and currently ADCA needs assistance with the annual auction computer system. Win Applegate currently operates the system and will be stepping down from this task. With his years of experience, wisdom and a good software program, he is looking forward to training the one who steps forward for this task. Please contact Steve Rowe, Faye Kennedy or Win Applegate to learn more about this wonderful opportunity to work within ADCA. Most importantly, it's a great way to learn more about the hardware, interact with club members and generally have fun!

On a sorrowful note, I received a phone call from David Appling notifying me of the passing of one of our fine members, and his friend for over 60 years, Joe Souza (#527). I had the pleasure of meeting Joe for the first time at ADCA's San Francisco, California convention whereupon I learned that it was Joe's first convention, one that he enjoyed immensely by adding many items at auction to his already fine collection. I had the privilege to see Joe numerous times at the Alameda Flea Market

and always enjoyed talking hardware with him. Joe always had a friend or two in tow exemplifying his outgoing and warm, friendly nature that will be sorely missed by all.

With the passing of Joe and others ADCA members this past year, I find it important to re-member each other and our friendships as we share a common passion in ADCA. I look forward to seeing you all next year in Portland, Oregon and encourage one and all to keep in touch throughout the year.

Stephen Rowe, ADCA President

In Memoriam

Joseph R. Souza, Jr. (#527)

December 28, 1937 - September 25, 2006

Mr. Joseph R. Souza, Jr, an ADCA member since 1998, passed away this fall. He was a familiar face at the conventions and always willing to help other members with questions. The following is a portion of the obituary posted by his loved ones.

"Mr. Souza moved to Le Grand, California at the age of five. He worked in construction for 50 years. He was a member of the Le Grand Elementary School Board, Le Grand Lions Club, Le Grand Community Day Committee, past Le Grand Volunteer Fireman and lifetime member of [the] National Riflemen's Association. He was also a member of Antique Doorknob Collectors of America and [the] 50 Plus Club.

Joe never met a stranger and was always willing to help anyone in need. Joe was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed collecting unique items. His most treasured collection was his antique doorknobs.

He is survived by his sons, Joe Souza III of Mariposa, and Anthony Souza of Maple Grove, Minnesota; daughters Debbie Esquivel of Le Grand, Mary Anne Souza of Merced and Stacy Souza of Merced." He is also survived by a brother and three sisters along with ten grandchildren.

Services were held in Le Grand on October 2, 2006."

Our sympathies are extended to Joe's family and friends in this time of sorrow.

DECODING THE MYSTERY MARKINGS

By John Roberts (jcr621@earthlink.net)

In the book "Antique Builders Hardware" by Maud Eastwood, page 211, are examples of British Registry Markings found on some Corbin and Russell & Erwin hardware pieces, but the key to deciphering these markings seemed to have gone missing. This information can be found in the "Online Encyclopedia of Silver Marks, Hallmarks & Maker's Marks" at www.925-1000.com > British Registry Dates. If you have interests other than hardware, there is much more on this website.

Patent date searches that I've run on several of these dates produce no results, so I assume that they are manufacturing or casting dates. I'd like to hear from anyone who has more information.

Notes From The Editor

The Library of Congress has put on line digitized and searchable issues of Scientific American from 1846 to 1869. Google "American Memory" and go to the first link. You are at the Library's home page. Browse "technology and industry", then go to "The 19th Century in Print" and then to "Individual Periodicals", then "Scientific American". It appears in two versions, an uncorrected but searchable OCR version and corresponding digitized pages. If you search for a name – say Samuel Peck – it will tell you how many the two words appear together, how many times both words appear in an issue but not together, how many times one appears without the other. You can go to the OCR version and scroll through the issue until you find the search terms in boldface. To get a digitized copy of that

page, scroll back up to get to the page number and click on it. The problem with this source is that the OCR is uncorrected and contains misspellings. For example, "Wm. Hall" appears at one point as "Wm. Halj". The on-line archive of the New York Times is better, since it searches the digitized copies themselves. Nevertheless searching Scientific American turned up both of the patents cited above which were assigned to Samuel Peck of New Haven.

The book cited above, American Genius, is wonderful, even to a non-lock person. It is an illustrated catalogue of the John Mossman collection of Bank Locks and Time Locks, housed at the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, East 44th Street in New York City. That Society has a fascinating history, tracing back to its founding in 1780. The book is composed of fabulous color photographs of the locks, together with a history of each lock. While I make no pretense to understanding locks, the Nineteenth Century produced highly decorated and very elegant machinery, of which these locks are prime examples.

New Additions to Archives

The club wants to thank Win Applegate for his donation of five antique hardware catalogues to the ADCA Archive collection. Copies from these new additions will become available when we open the archives for orders.

A Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I have enjoyed the newsletter since joining the ADCA a few years ago. The article about Buffalo and the last convention was enjoyable. We are going to try to make the Portland convention. I have some friends in the area and thought it would be fun to see them and enjoy and ADCA event.

The city of Saginaw hasn't been very good to it's historical homes over the years. My antique hardware addiction started because my dad liked to junk in this fair city many years ago. Along with his junking he would drag me through old buildings to look for the "good stuff", When he died two years ago and I was able to hold on to the hardware along with his 1000+ postcard collection he had of Saginaw when it was a flourishing lumber town back in the late 1800s and beyond. He loved history and had an amazing memory. Collecting the hardware with him will always have a special place with me.

Mark Oberschmidt

Doorknob Display

Loretta Nemec (#8) will have her 200+ knobs on view at the Naper Settlement Museum from the beginning of February through the end of April. There will be the full array of doorknob materials on display: wooden, brass, glass, iron, composite, and any others that she has in her collection. If you live somewhere in the area be sure to get to the museum to see this display. It is sure to be worth the trip. You may contact Loretta directly at dornoblady@aol.com or call the

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