

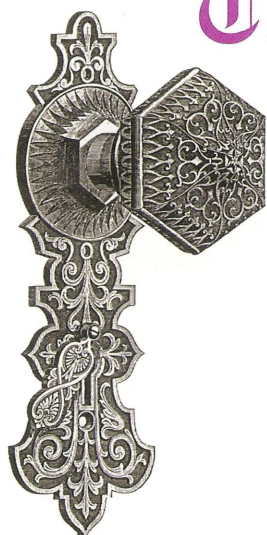
The Doorknob Collector

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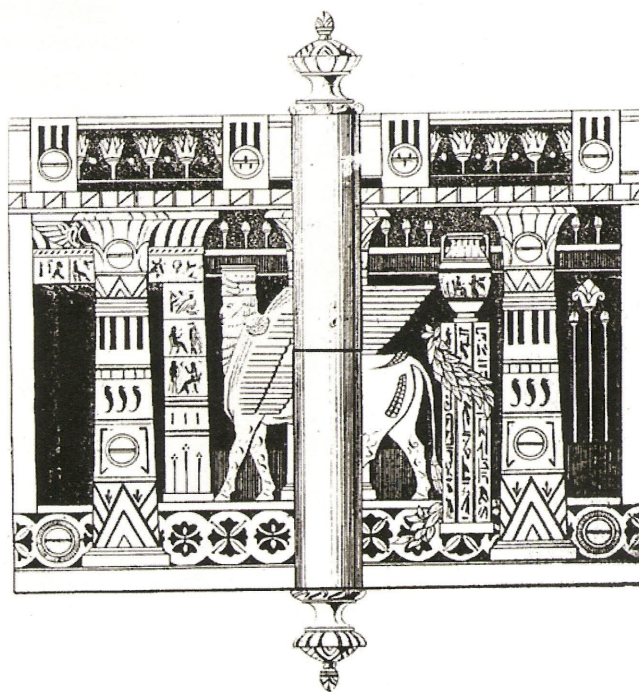


IN PRAISE OF THE DESIGNER: RUDOLPHE CHRISTESEN

By Allen S. Joslyn

The people whose hardware designs we cherish are largely unknown. They were not regarded as real artists - those who painted pictures, produced sculptures and the most famous of whom generally had studied in France or Italy. They were not architects whose buildings can be identified, nor designers of hand-crafted furniture. And they arrived on the scene long before industrial designers - Raymond Loewy, as a prime example - had become icons. Rather they were generally anonymous designers who tried to add some taste to machine produced articles of all sorts.

Very little information survives about them. Design artisans were not prominent local capitalists or influential persons likely to be memorialized in local or county histories. To the extent much of anything remains identifying them, it is their design patents, if they were lucky enough to have an employer who would pay for them. Very little hardware had design patents. They cost money, and probably did not provide much protection. An interesting comparison is between design patents ("DP") 11,213, 11,266 and 11,267 issued in May and June, 1879, to George S. Barkentin and assigned to P. & F. Corbin, and DP 11,620 patented by Christesen on February 3, 1880 and assigned to Russell & Erwin ("R & E"). Christesen's design for a store-door handle has only slight variations from Barkentin's earlier designs, yet R&E apparently got away with the knock-off.



Inside		
Business Members 8	"Green" Cloth Bag 6	New Members in 2008 7
Christesen..... 1-4	In Memoriam - Fellenz 5	Personal Suggestion..... 4
Doorknob Exchange 5	Meet Your Board 7	Website Improvements 6

In the interests of keeping this issue down to a manageable size, we will not reproduce all the design patents cited; they are available at www.uspto.gov. The Google patent site does not have many of the illustrations

Another indication of the reluctance to seek patent designs is the fact that Henry E. Russell, Jr., who patented the justly famous “geisha girl” design (DP 11,191, 1879) and was a principal in Russell & Erwin, actually patented only two other designs, a knob (DP 15,754, 1885) and another knob and escutcheon (DP 22,755 and DP 22,756, 1893, featured in R&E’s 1897 catalogue, p. 27 as the “Dedham-Colonial” design). Except for those three patents and Christesen’s patents, R&E did not patent any builders’ hardware between 1874 up to 1902

This brings us to the great Rudolphe Christesen, who designed the rest of R&E’s “Japanese Hardware” suite. His obituary says that he was born in Denmark in 1845. Where in Denmark? Based on the fact that he removed to “Germany” for a year or two in the 1880s, I think it was in Schleswig-Holstein when it was part of Denmark. That area was inhabited both by ethnic Danes and Germans, and until 1864 those two provinces were part of Denmark. Thereafter most of the territory was acquired by a unifying Germany. So by the time he returned for a period, probably to visit his family, Germany had acquired Schleswig-Holstein. Given that the largest town in that province was Lubeck, and that he appears to have had a good academic education, I suspect he grew up there. But none of this can be proved

on the presently available records. It is clear, however, that he was certainly adventuresome.

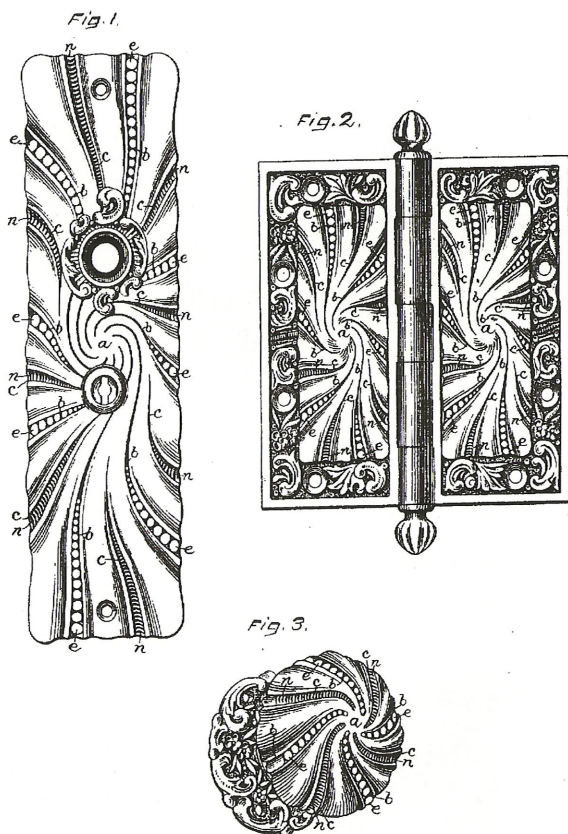
DESIGN.

R. W. E. CHRISTESEN.
ORNAMENTATION OF BUILDERS' HARDWARE.

No. 20,895.

Patented June 30, 1891

895.—ORNAMENTATION OF BUILDERS' HARDWARE.—Rudolphe W. E. Christesen, New Britain, Conn., assignor to The Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company, same place. Application filed June 5, 1891. Serial No. 395,271. Term of patent 14 years.



If there are immigration records for him, they are not easily findable, but he first surfaces in Attenborough, Massachusetts New Haven in the 1870 census, reportedly 23 years old and with a 22 year old wife, Margaret, and with the occupation “designer”. From 1874 through 1877 he was living in West Meriden, CT. In 1876, he obtained his first design patent, not for door hardware but for a “statuette”, (DP 9,188). No assignee is recited. Under the patent laws, only individual inventors can obtain patents; if they are employed to invent or design, they would assign the patent to their employer. Conclusion – Christesen was not yet working full time as a designer for an employer.

But he soon ended up working for Russell & Erwin in New Britain, when he took out his second design patent (DP 11,226) in 1879 for the two bluebird door knob. He is listed as living in Hartford, but later he moved to New Britain. In the same period, he unleashed a number of other design patent applications with Japaneseque

designs: the crane knob (DP 11,227), two lock faces (DP 11,228 and 11,239), the B-109 knob (DP 11,229), a rim lock (DP 11,240), two handles for fire-irons (DP 11,257 and DP 11,322), a padlock (DP 11,305) and the man-and woman hinge (DP 11,606). (See my article in TDC 120, July-August, 2003, where many of his Japanesque designs are illustrated).

It is important to note that a number of designs that properly fall within the Japanesque suite illustrated in that article were not patented, such as escutcheons and plates for door pulls, the pocket door plates, the crane or bird hinges, the other rim lock, the window pull, or the key holes. They are undoubtedly by Christesen. Most of these designs appear in the 1883 R&E catalogue, but for whatever reasons, had largely disappeared from its 1887 catalogue. They apparently were not a success.

Christesen patented more designs in 1880-81, including a magnificent "Egyptian"-themed hinge (DP 11,758, illustrated), which may never been actually manufactured, some chandelier hooks (DP 11,808, 11,809), a stand for fire-irons (DP 12,041), a push-plate, two letter slots and a bell-pull carrying on some themes of the Japanesque set (DP 12,376, 12,377 illustrated, 12,378 and 12,279) and a rather mundane knob (DP 12,550).



His next design patent, a hinge, was applied for in January, 1886 and issued in September of that year (DP 16,906). There are only a few design patents thereafter, the best one being the psychedelic DP 20,895 (illustrated). Except for 1884-86 when he was in "Germany", he is listed as "designer, R & E Mfg" in the New Britain Directories from 1882 through 1898. After that he is simply listed as a "designer". His last two design patents (DP 30,429 and DP 30,430), applied for in February, 1899, do not list an assignee, indicating that he was no longer employed by R&E. By the late 1890s, R&E was in dire straights, having been surpassed by Corbin, Yale & Towne and Sargent, and "its management was new and inept", which may have been why Christesen's relationship was terminated. See Eastwood, "The American Hardware Company and It's Predecessors", TDC 135, January-February, 2006

There can be, however, no doubt that Christesen was the chief, perhaps only designer for R&E, over an extended period, whether or not it chose to patent his designs. His hand can be seen in many R&E designs. His high stature within R&E is attested to by the fact that a very elaborate design was named after him (and undoubtedly created by him) in the mid 1890s (illustrated).

So what about his personal life? He left Meriden in 1877, leaving behind Margaret for a year. By the 1880 census, Margaret had disappeared and he is listed as living in New Britain with a wife named Jennie, aged 24, together with a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law. The underlying records of the 1890 census, with a few exceptions, disappeared in a fire. In the 1900 census, Christesen is listed as living with wife Lizzie, 36 years old, with four daughters and a son. In 1902 he returned to Copenhagen "for his health" (that climate being not notably better than Connecticut). He died in that city in December, 1905, survived by Lizzie, daughters Beatrice, Louise, and Olivia, and a brother and sister in Copenhagen. His obituary in The Hartford Courant states that he "was for twenty-five years designer at the Russell & Erwin's plant" and that he "had a good many friends here."

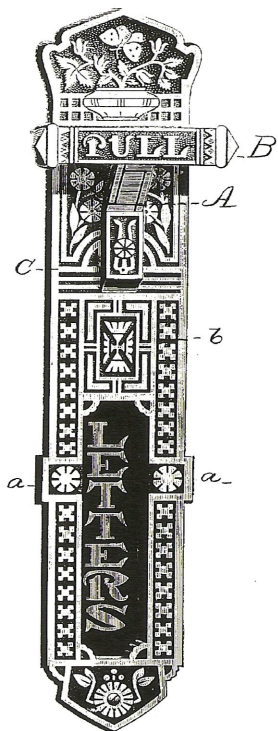
Things did not go well for his widow, Lizzie, at least initially. Later in 1906, two creditors brought suit against her for damages by reason of judgments they had obtained in 1904 against her and Rudolphe.

Lizzie did stay in New Britain for a number of years, and then moved to Massachusetts with her oldest daughter. Lizzie was still alive in 1937.

There are, to be sure, some discrepancies in the records, such as Rudolphe's birth date (the 1900 census states that he was 51 years old, while his obituary states he died in 1905 at the age of 60). In his first patent, he is simply "Rudolph", but soon he has an "e" at the end of his first name and later adds the middle-name initials "W. E." But, as they say, "whatever". He was a great designer.

References:

Research provided by Patricia C. Watson of the New Britain Library, Janis L. Franco of the Meriden Public Library, and Judith Ellen Johnson of the Connecticut Historical Society, also Patent Office Annual Yearbooks, 1875-1902, and the Index of Patents 1790-1873, at the Science, Industry and Business Library of the New York City Public Library.



A Personal Suggestion From Your Editor

The fact is that we know virtually nothing about Rudolphe Christesen as a person, and the reason is clear – except for a very few prolific letter-writers whose letters were saved, or prominent persons who made or bought their way into local histories, very little about other people was preserved, because it couldn't be. We have no idea how jolly or morose he was, whether he cooked Danish specialties, what he looked like, or his personal history and adventures. When and how did he come here? Three wives? That is not the problem today. Of course, your emails will have long since disappeared, but we do have ways to preserve a memory of ourselves for future generations – video recorders, and whatever other media they may be converted into in the future.

The problem, I have noticed, is that many of us record the wrong events. The young couple with great babies and children devotes hours after hours to recording them (and probably never watching the recordings again). Their children probably won't be much interested in watching themselves at an early age, and their grandchildren even less so. They will be interested in their parents' lives, or their grandparents', etc. But those persons, in the rush to record their young children, may never get around to telling their own stories. So your descendants – if they are lucky – may only know about as much about you as we know about Rudolphe.

The solution, I respectfully propose, is as follows. Make an outline of all you would like your grandchildren, and generations thereafter, to know about you: your parents, your childhood, your history, your interests, etc. Remember your purpose is to make an impression, to be remembered, perhaps a hundred or more years hence. Maybe practice once. Then get before a video recorder and deliver your speech. You should also record family gatherings, favorite pets, etc.

Make copies for each of your children and anyone else you care to give it to. Then it's up to them to preserve it.

In Memoriam

Dolores Fellenz, (#30) long time ADCA member has passed away. She was 88 and a resident of Beauvais Manor nursing facility in St. Louis for over two years. She attended many of the early conventions and helped host the one held in St. Charles Mo. She will be fondly remembered as donning an apron and helping her daughter Debbie collect money from hardware sales at the conventions. She was active in the family's architectural antiques business for many years. She and Debbie, her daughter, were invited to attend the very first ADCA convention held in Waverly, Iowa by Lee and Jim Kaiser and Dorothy and Emil Miller. Instead they went to the second convention held at that location. At first she thought it was a bit odd that people would actually collect doorknobs, but was quickly convinced both by the beauty of the knobs and the camaraderie of the fellow members. She liked all of the ADCA members and considered the "doorknob people" as her friends. She is survived by fellow members, daughter Debbie Fellenz (#31) and son William R. Fellenz (#263).

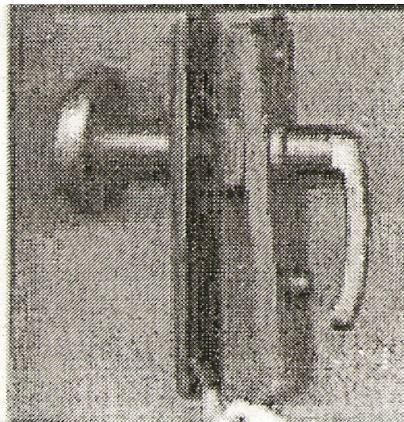


The Doorknob Exchange

Members are reminded that their membership entitles them to advertise items for sale, trade, or wanted at no charge. Please send your ads and pictures (preferably in jpg form) to Faye Kennedy at the Membership Office (see address and email on last page of newsletter). I would like them by the first week of odd months of the year for inclusion in the next newsletter. Thanks.

WANTED BY GOFER #1 (Vicky Berol, sfgofer@yahoo.com)

Brass set of screen knobs. The back plates are 1 1/2 by 4 1/2 inches. There is a knob on the front with a handle on the back. The rear plate has a locking mechanism.



Think "Green"; Use a Cloth Bag for Shopping

By Faye Kennedy

This year at the Convention in Lisle, IL, black cloth bags were offered with Antique Doorknob Collectors of America printed in white. The bags measure 14 x 15 inches. I use mine to carry curriculum to a class I teach. They are great to keep in your car for simple shopping and you can go "green" with this black bag as well. Cost is \$3.00 each.

Send orders along with your check in US\$ to ADCA, PO Box 31, Chatham, NJ 07928-0031



Improvements to the ADCA Website

By Faye Kennedy

Take a look at the club's website at www.AntiqueDoorknobs.org and see what is new. We have added the possibility to download past newsletters by going to Newsletter Archives. There you can view all the newsletters from December 1981 through December 2003. I have put in a listing that is a combination of an Index and a Table of Contents. Often the title of the article did not really inform the reader as to its contents, hence the combination.

We hope to soon be able to use PayPal on our website. With PayPal you will be able to renew your membership using PayPal or a credit card and also to purchase books and archive items directly from the website. Watch for this improvement.

ADCA Convention 2009

Hartford, Connecticut

July 14-17, 2009

Save the date

Start planning your trip to the Nutmeg State

Meet Your ADCA Board Members

This is the third in a series. We would like all our members to know a little about who is on the ADCA board so we asked them a couple of silly questions like "What is your favorite knob?" We all know that you really can't answer that because we love them all.



Rich Kennedy (#238)
Chatham, NJ



I began collecting doorknobs in the early 1970s and discovered Maud Eastwood and her book, *The Antique Doorknob*. That started the idea of a newsletter to unite collectors. *The Doorknob Collector* was born. The first 10 newsletters were written between 1977 and 1981.

My collection has grown over the decades, and I continue to have a diverse collection of knobs and escutcheon plates.

Currently I serve as secretary of the club.

Email: knobnews@optonline.net

Do you have a favorite knob? It's hard to pick a single knob as my favorite, but I do like the MCCC lion.

New Members in 2008

This past year we have had 15 new members join the ADCA. They come from twelve states and one province. Miriam DeLange has long been involved in the club, but became a voting member at the last convention. We welcome all.

Sven Kraumanis	Cobourg Ontario
Jim Brewer	Cincinnati OH
Filip Musat	Scranton PA
Dennis Miles	Haines AK
Elaine Britz	Fresno CA
Jeffrey Larry	Baltimore MD
Don Senne	Salem OH
Thomas Johnson	Auburn ME
Douglas Cox	Paris TX
John Carr	Western Springs IL
Vincent Castro	Chicago IL
Miriam De Lange	Grand Rapids MI
Kristen Orr	Spring Creek NV
Braxton Dixon	Hendersonville TN
Paul Woodfin	Waco TX

Our Business Members

Al Bar Wilmette Platers Owner: Greg Bettenhausen 127 Green Bay Road Wilmette IL 60091 Phone: 866-823-8404 Web Site: albarwilmette.com email: info@albarwilmette.com	Albion Doors & Windows Owner: Larry Sawyer PO Box 220 Albion, CA 95410 Phone: 707-937-0078 Fax: 707-937-0078 (call first) Website: www.knobsession.com Email: bysawyer@mcn.org	Antique Door Hardware Collector Owner: Tom Iannucci 2611 Silverdale Drive Silver Spring, MD 20906 Phone: 240-595-1115 Web Site: www.antiquedoorhardwarecollector.com/ email: rebecca.iannucci@comcast.net	Architectural Salvage, Inc. Owner: Elizabeth Werhane 5001 N. Colorado Blvd. Denver, CO 80216 Phone: (303) 321-0200 Website: salvagelady.com/
Back Door Warehouse 2329 Champlain St. Washington, DC 20009	Discovery Architectural Antiques Owner: Brad Kittel 409 St. Francis Gonzales, TX 78629 Phone: 830-672-2428 or 888-686-2966 Fax: 830-672-3701 Web Site: www.Discoverys.net Email: bwk@discoverys.net	House of Antique Hardware Owner: Roy Prange 3439 NE Sandy Blvd./PMB 106 Portland, OR 97214 Phone: 888-223-2545 Fax: 503-231-1312 Web Site: www.HouseofAntiqueHardware.com Email: Sales@HouseofAntiqueHardware.com	Liz's Antique Hardware Owner: Liz Gordon 453 South La Brea Los Angeles, CA 90036 Phone: 323-939-4403 Fax: 323-939-4387 Email: Shop@LAHardware.com Web Site: www.lahardware.com/
The Brass Knob and Back Door Warehouse Owners: Donetta George and Ron Allen The Brass Knob 2311 18th St. N.W. Washing- ton, DC Phone: 202-332-3370 Fax: 202-332-5594 Email: BK@theBrassKnob.com Web Site: www.theBrassKnob.com	Webwilson.com Owner: H. Weber Wilson PO Box 506 Portsmouth, RI 02871 Phone: 800-508-0022 Web Site: www.webwilson.com Email: Hww@webwilson.com		

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