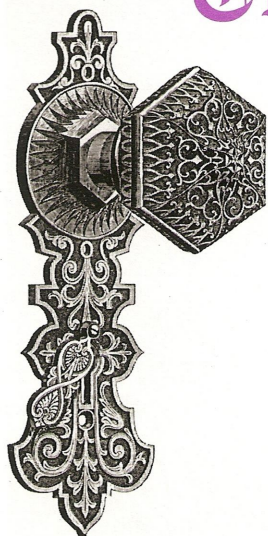


The Doorknob Collector



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GREAT BUILDINGS AND GREAT DOORKNOBS

By Allen S. Joslyn

Of course, we concentrate our attention on door hardware, but they are often part of an overall design of a unique building. In this and following issues, we will highlight a few. We start with:

THE BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This was originally founded as the Long Island Historical Society in 1863, and its building in Brooklyn Heights was completed in 1881. At that time, Brooklyn was an independent city, the third largest in the United States. It was, of course, originally settled by the Dutch, including the "Breuckelen" settlement (hence "Brooklyn").

Towards the end of the 19th century, Brooklyn annexed several neighboring towns. With the Brooklyn Bridge and economic expansion, it also became increasingly integrated with its neighbor across the East River. In 1898 it merged with the County of New York and other areas to become the City of New York, and in a sense lost some of its uniqueness. It is still, however, a place onto its own, not as overwhelming as Manhattan and with a lot of neighborhoods of single or double family houses. Some of its residents even boast that they never bother to go to Manhattan. It also has unique neighborhoods and world-class institutions, such as the Brooklyn Museum of Art. (It also has Rhett Butler's factory and residence in Red Hook.)



As Long Island developed into suburban sprawl after WWII, it became apparent that no one historical society could serve the entire island. And thus in 1985 it became the Brooklyn Historical Society.

The building was designed by George B. Post, who also designed the New York Stock Exchange and lots of other buildings in his long career. It was the first building in New York to make extensive use of unglazed terra cotta on the exterior (cheaper than carved sandstone). The building shows heads of an Indian, a Norseman (the first European to visit the New World), Christopher Columbus, Benjamin Franklin and others, sculpted by Olin Levi Warner. Another innovation was to suspend the ceiling of the library from a truss system. As the photograph shows (see pg. 3), the library is very classy room, with beautiful woodwork, lamps, etc.

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Post was a celebrated architect of the late 19th century. He designed scrumptious houses for the very wealthy, but they have long since gone. He also designed many commercial buildings, a few of which are still standing (if they were lucky enough not to be located in rapidly developing areas), such as the Cotton Exchange Building in Soho New York, now a residential building.



Post is said to have designed the Historical Society's custom-made bronze hardware. The door-knobs bear the initials "LIHS". There are also elaborate hinges, door locks and push plates. The door bolts show the names of two companies, Newman Capron and Tappen Haggart.

We know a fair amount about Newman Capron (or Newman & Capron). Allen George Newman founded A. G. Newman in 1844, and occupied 1180 Broadway since the 1850s. In 1850 he admitted J. W. Onderdonk and Jacob Capron into partnership. The firm was not limited to hardware; it also sold a line of "house furnishings" at 1172 Broadway in the early 1870s, and advertised that they were importers and manufacturers of builders' hardware. It suffered and survived three fires at its factories and depressions.

Onderdonk retired from the firm in March, 1867, Capron presumably in 1873, but as reported in 1885 A. E. Newman "still retains the services of his former partners" and his four sons. The factory was located at 157 and 168 West 29th Street and in 1885 employed three hundred people. The firm supplied all the decorated brass and bronze works for, among other buildings, the Vanderbilt (demolished) and Villard houses (still standing), and produced a great variety of objects, from elevator door fixtures, through burglar and fire alarms to "statue fitting in bronze and brass." By 1885 it employed three hundred people in its factories.

Jacob Capron named one of his sons Allen Newman Capron (b. 1873). He was a prominent Quaker (as was Onderdonk), and somewhat of an inventor, having been granted a patent for an "electric magnetic annunciator" in August, 1871. Newman was a Methodist.

A. G. Newman became the successor to Newman & Capron in 1873 (presumably reflecting Capron's retirement from the firm), and A. G. Newman issued a catalogue in its own name in

1876. But both the old and new names continued to be used. For example, Newman & Capron exhibited builders' hardware at the 1876 Centennial. Jacob Capron was still being identified in the New York Times in 1879 as being of the Newman & Capron firm. As noted, hardware bearing the Newman & Capron name was still being sold when the LIHS was built in 1880-1881. Newman & Capron hardware occasionally surfaces today. (See lot 29 in Web Wilson's auction of 8/22/2002). A. G. Newman died in 1906, and is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. His son, Allen Jr., was and is a noted sculptor.



Tappen & Haggart didn't leave much of a trail. It was a partnership of George Tappen, Jr. (1808-1878) and James Haggart, locksmiths who had premises at 57 ½ Bowery and 63 Elizabeth Streets. They are listed as locksmiths in contemporary directories in the 1860s and the 1870s. George was active in politics at a ward level, and his Uncle became a bank president and more influential politically.

George Post went on to an illustrious career and, more to our interest, reportedly supervised (or perhaps only chose) the design of the hardware for Collis P. Huntington's Mansion built on upper Fifth Avenue in Manhattan in 1892. The style of that hardware, manufactured by Yale & Towne, is described as "School of French Renaissance", and does not look notably different from other Y&T designs of that period. It (and Post's later buildings) are certainly quite distinct from the classic 1870-80 American Victorian designs exemplified by the Brooklyn Historical Society building and its hardware. By the 1890s Post was into massive stonework, French Chateaus and other heavy buildings.

The Brooklyn Historical Society closed in 1999 for much needed renovations and modernization, which ended up costing \$23 million, reopening in 2003. (Yes, we note that they used the wrong screws (see pg 2) on the hinges, Phillips head screws, which were patented in 1936, but they did a fantastic restoration.) It has, as might be expected, the world's best collection of materials related to Brooklyn, and it is said that one of seven American families have some Brooklyn roots. It also has, for example, a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation signed by Lincoln, the Dodgers' 1955 World Series Championship banner, and the diary of a 1679 visit by Jasper Dankaerts to the East Coast, including Breuckelen, in search for a suitable site to establish a religious colony (one of the current exhibits at the Society).

It is well worth a visit. It is at 128 Pierrepont Street in downtown Brooklyn's Historical District. Check for the opening hours. The easiest way to get there from Manhattan is to take the subway a short way from Manhattan (use the A or C to Jay Street, or the 4 or 5 to Borough Hall). Wander



around Brooklyn Heights; there are other magnificent Victorian town houses and other buildings in the area.

References:

Russell Sturgis, a Review of the Work of George B. Post, the Architectural Record, (June, 1898), No. 4 of the Great American Architects Series. In particular, see Sturgis's "The Hardware of Ornament" in that issue. (Reprinted in 1977 by the De Capo Press under the Title "Great American Architects Series".)

Beth Sullebarger, The Long Island Historical Society, A Building History, July 1, 1984 (available at the BHS).

National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Brooklyn Historical Society, 1/10/1991

Illustration from Harpers' Weekly, 1/29/1870.

New York's Great Industries (Historical Publishing Company, 1885)

Thanks to Chela Scott Weber, Archivist of the Brooklyn Historical Society

J.S. Sturdevant, for information on the Tappen family"?

Note on Research: Of course Google and the New York Times are extremely useful sources; another really great research tool is Old Fulton Postcards, www.fultonhistory.com, which indexes 255 New York newspapers, including the New York Tribune and the Brooklyn Eagle. It may actually be better for the New York Times than is the Times' own site, since it indexes the Times' classified advertisements, while the Times' own site does not.



Before these search engines existed, most of the stuff in newspapers was simply not accessible. Now one can find things never before available, but citations present a problem. One could do elaborate footnotes to document newspaper articles, devote many more pages to each article, and no one would much care. Moreover, citing a particular day's edition of a newspaper wouldn't help either, since one would go blind looking for what was relevant, unless one knew the search that identified that issue and the page. So I have decided not to cite newspapers for discrete facts. If there is an important article, it will be cited.

Here is an example how these searches go. We know that a "Capron" was a member of Newman & Capron. Looking on Capron genealogies on Google, we find that a Jacob Capron in 1873 named his son "Allen Newman Capron". Very suggestive. Another search, this one on Old Fulton Postcards, discloses that "Mr. Jacob Capron, of the firm Newman & Capron, says he is not the Mr. Capron who won the dog cart and harness at the Seventh Regiment fair". So Jacob Capron is identified, although not in an article concerning Newman & Capron. And then a reference in New York Great Industries (1885) on Google brings up "Onderdonk and Capron" was having been in partnership with A. G. Newman. So who was Onderdonk? We search Jacob and find an 1857 classified advertisement referring to a Friends Institute accepting members, apply to J. W. Onderdonk or Jacob Capron at the same address, 1024 Broadway. We also find a notice that Onderdonk was retiring from the firm in 1867. So that is our Onderdonk, without any Social Security numbers DNA available. But do our readers really want to know this stuff?

NEXT ISSUE: THE CORN BELT BANK KNOB!

FASHION ALERT FROM 1911

Bo Sullivan has found an important doorknob alert from the January 1911 issue of House & Garden, which may be particularly interesting to those restoring a house from that period.

"Hand-Painted Door Knobs: The newest – or perhaps we should say the oldest – thing in doorknobs, is the hand-painted porcelain knob. In England collectors for some time past have gone quietly from house to house in the old sections, picking up handsome specimens which have survived from the times of Louis XVI, and many of these have been reproduced for distinctive English homes. The American designs are copies of the old English ones, although it would be possible to have any desired design transferred to the porcelain knob, if one is willing to pay the price. Copies of the old English designs can be as low as \$65 a dozen, and as high as \$8 a piece. With wrought or cast brass, or bronze "rose" (the little circular piece which makes the knob stand out from the door) instead of porcelain rose, the price is less. In a period room, the old English pattern should be followed. In a room which belongs to no period, the knobs may be painted any desired design. In a bedroom where the prevailing tone is blue, the doorknobs as well as other smaller knobs which may be necessary for smaller drawers, or shutters or cupboards, might have a blue Delft design. A clever artist who understands working with porcelain can decorate the knobs, or the work may be arranged through a dealer."

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.

Wanted:

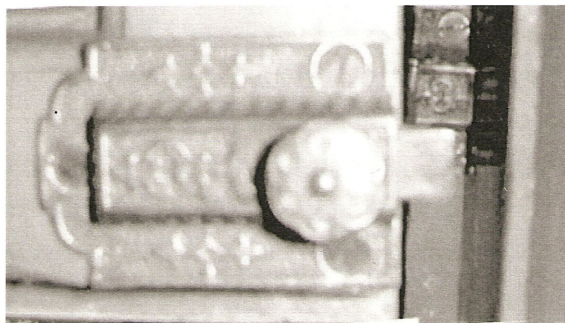
I need ten locks for bi-fold windows to restore my third floor in my house in Historic Pullman. They measure 1 ½ by 2 ¾ inches.

Wilfredo Ortiz (#742)

635 E. 111th St.

Chicago, IL 60628

773-837-1943 or fredol1943@gmail.com .



In Memoriam

By Maud Eastwood

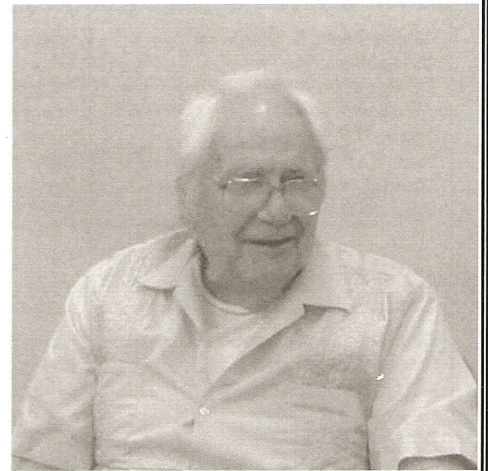
Bud Wolski, (#20), from Los Angeles, CA. passed away Sept. 10. After WWII, Bud went to work for his father at the family business, Manchester Sash & Door Co. On his father's death, Bud and his brother Carl took over that business. Eventually, however, big home improvement stores captured the sash and door business with cheaper products, so Bud and Carl focused their attention on antique hardware, particularly the doorknobs their father had stockpiled in the early years.

The Wolski name appeared among a 200-plus list of names submitted to Arnie Fredrick in 1981 of individuals with an affinity for antique door hardware, who were possibly interested in uniting in an organization. Bud certainly was.

Bud not only cherished vintage door hardware, he also replicated it. From Stickley, to Craftsman, to Mission Revival, his reproductions were in high demand for restoration work.

Bud served the building and restoration trades, but also through his huge stock of salvaged hardware he became a valued source for the movie industry's needs of dated hardware for studio set designers. Frank Lloyd Wright's Storer House is fitted with Bud Wolski locks and door trim.

While most ADCA members are content to happily collect and appreciate the artistry exhibited in their finds, Bud Wolski was industriously reproducing exceptional specimens for current use and future appreciation. You will be missed, Bud.



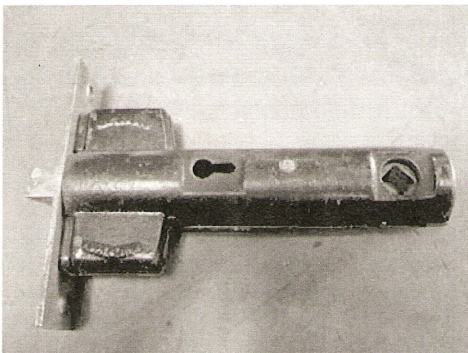
An Early Patent

By Nigel Barnes

Here are a couple of pictures of some very unusual door hardware that we recently acquired. There is no manufacturer's name on it, but the patent date appears to be 1880! Definitely the oldest tube latch that we've ever seen. As you can see, there's a tiny keyhole oriented sideways that enables the locking of the latch.

We've got one latch, and three escutcheons. No knobs were attached – perhaps the standard white or black porcelain knobs were used?

If anyone has seen anything like this before, or has any information, it would be appreciated! Also, if anyone's interested in adding these pieces to your collection, let me know. They will be available for purchase soon.



Our Business Members

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The Brass Knob and Back Door Warehouse Owners: Donetta George and Ron Allen The Brass Knob 2311 18th St. N.W. Washington, DC Phone: 202-332-3370 Fax: 202-332-5594 Email: BK@theBrassKnob.com Web Site: www.theBrassKnob.com Back Door Warehouse 2329 Champlain St. Washington, DC 20009			

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