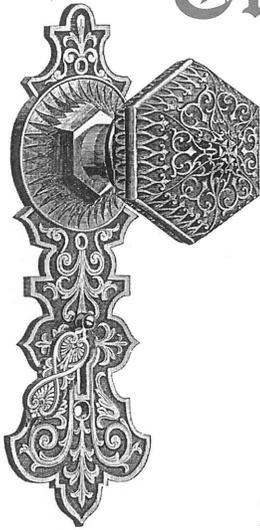


# The Doorknob Collector



Number 164

November December 2010

**A Publication of The Antique Doorknob Collectors of America**

*A Nonprofit Organization Devoted to the Study and Preservation of Ornamental Hardware*

## SMITH & BUTLER UNVEILED THE FATHERS OF DECORATIVE BRONZE HARDWARE?

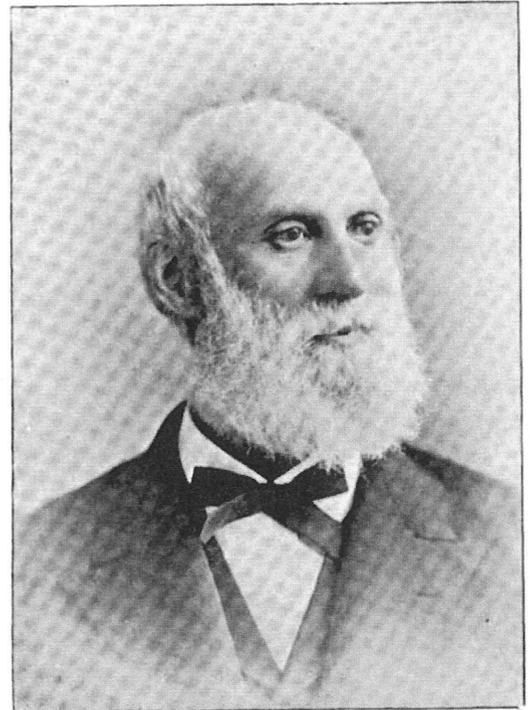
*By Bo Sullivan*

The last TDC reprinted an article entitled “Bronze Door-Knobs” from the *Architectural Review* of May, 1869. The piece promoted “Copper-Bronze Electrotype Door Furniture” with an outline of its manufacturing method and key features, and was accompanied by full page of engraved examples. For those of us keen on hardware research, the text contained three tantalizing (and rather oblique clues) to follow up on:

1. “In the United States, copper-bronze furniture ornaments, consisting of medallion heads and grouped figures, caryatides, and rosettes, were introduced into the trade, about five years ago, by an enterprising firm in New York...” [circa 1864]
2. “Copper-bronze, door-lock furniture has won for itself an assured place in public favor. The first set of this furniture applied to a door in this city, was put on, some three and a half years since...” [Philadelphia, approximately late 1865]
3. “During the past year [1868], several thousand sets were manufactured and sold by Messrs. Smith & Butler, whose success has induced several parties to attempt imitating their bronzes...”

These references, along with establishing some important dates, raised a major question – who, precisely, were “Messrs. Smith & Butler”? Well, thanks to the marvels of internet research, and in particular Google Books and OCLC/WorldCat, we have found the answer to this question, and some long-forgotten true pioneers in the hardware trade can now be honored.

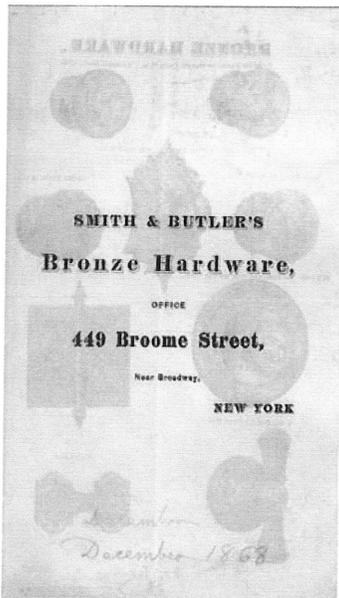
Perhaps the most exciting new information, and the one that has fueled many hours of further research, came from my discovery of a vague online library reference to a book entitled “Bronze Hardware” attributed to a Smith & Butler. A little digging revealed that this was a four-page booklet in the special collections of the University of Delaware – but what was in it and how would we get a look at it? An email to the library itself went nowhere before I remembered that I knew someone on the faculty there. When he learned



REV. EBER ROSE BUTLER.

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that he might be able to help us make a “revolutionary discovery” (he said he’d always wanted to be a part of such an event), Dr. David Black agreed to make a request for scans of the item on our behalf. The resulting scans, which are reprinted here by permission of the Special Collections of the University of Delaware Library, made our hearts race. The booklet, with “December, 1868” on the front page in pencil, was indeed a small catalogue. It told us that Smith & Butler were located at 449 Broome Street and indicated that key copy in the *Architectural Review* article had been lifted almost verbatim from this promo piece. But most importantly, it included a full page of engravings of door and house hardware beautifully overprinted with copper metallic ink, presented in clearly named and organized style families that included Medallion, Scroll, and Gothic (for churches).



Comparing the items shown with those illustrated in the *Architectural Review* of May, 1869, two of the designs are the same, and the background diaper pattern of some other items also appears to match. Some of these designs (one of which is H-411) ended up in Russell &

Erwin’s circa 1870 catalogue and remained in their long-term lineup in cast versions – thus the designs have been attributed to R&E.

Information concerning the period between 1865 and 1870 in builders’ hardware is frustratingly scarce. In the R&E 1865 hardware catalogue, only plain metal and porcelain knobs are shown. In the second half of 1869, William Gorman patented several designs for door plates and hinges which he assigned to R&E. By 1870, especially after Russell & Erwin’s purchase of The Metallic Compression Casting Company’s patents, etc., decorative bronze was off to the races. What happened in between? The unveiling of Smith & Butler reveals a new and important “missing link” (though certainly not the only one).

It seems that our beloved decorative bronze hardware – such as there was – was first produced by electrotyping, not by casting molten metal. This advance of electrotype copper-bronze hardware was revolu-

tionary in its day, but lasted only a few years until metallic compression casting took over the market.

As for the two men themselves, Google has taught us much about them.

Luther Leland Smith (1825-1888) was a brilliant scientist of applied research in fields relating to electro-chemical processes – a hot ticket in mid-1800s. He grew up in Oswego County in New York and graduated in 1849 from the New York State Normal School (a school dedicated to educating future teachers)<sup>1</sup>. As early as 1856 he was living in New York City and won a gold medal from the New York Legislature for “a galvanic battery, very convenient and compact”<sup>2</sup>. In 1857 he was a co-patentee on an improvement for preparation of engraved metal plates for printing (No. 18,668). Interestingly, Smith appears to have been dealing with Henry David Thoreau around 1860 while acquiring plumbago (ground graphite) from the Thoreau family business.

Eber Rose Butler (1827-1901) was a mercantile bookkeeper

by trade, who won academic awards during primary and high school in Boston, but went straight into the ship-broker and then mercantile trades after graduating in 1843. Butler moved from Boston to New York around 1861 or 1862. How they met and why they formed a partnership is unknown, but the firm of Smith & Butler appears in directories

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<sup>1</sup>1894 Hist State Norm College of NY Albany

<sup>2</sup>1856 New York Legislative Medal

and advertisements in *Scientific American* by 1864. This is the shortly before the period cited by the *Architectural Review* article for the introduction of copper-bronze furniture trimmings, and Smith & Butler were likely the “enterprising firm in New York.”

Smith & Butler were electrotypers and electroplaters at a time when the processes were rapidly evolving, particularly in the printing industry, where they probably got their start. Some really rudimentary science might be helpful here. Electroplating and electrotyping are methods of depositing metal by electricity. Electroplating is plating one metal on another; electrotyping is building up a metal deposit on a non-metallic surface. In 1839 an Englishman discovered that copper could be deposited from a solution of sulphate of copper upon a wax previously coated with graphite.<sup>3</sup>



To produce a perfect copy of a model in pure copper, a mould would be produced by pressing the master into wax, coating the wax with graphite (a good conductor of electricity) and immersing it in a solution through which electricity flowed, together with a copper plate. The copper plate would be attached to one terminal of a battery, the graphite-coated mold to the other terminal, and copper would be removed from the plate and deposited on the graphite surface. Eventually the copper deposit would be thick enough for the wax to be melted, and the mold could be strengthened by use of another metal, such as lead.

So, unlike the hardware firms we usually think of – defined by their specific products – Smith & Butler were defined by their processes, applied to all manners of objects. They electroplated very large iron screws

<sup>3</sup> Sperry, “Looking Backward in the Plating Industry”, *Plater’s Guide*, Vol. VII, p. 92 (1911)

to be used in steam frigates<sup>4</sup>, electrotyped “medallions and ornaments in Copper, Brass and Bronze”<sup>5</sup>, were manufacturers of “Furniture Bronzes, French Moldings, Nameplates”<sup>6</sup> and “bronze hardware and car and furniture bronzes”<sup>7</sup>. It would appear that Smith was the genius and Butler handled the business side.

Smith & Butler seemed to have had their high point between 1865 and 1871. But the appearance of metallic compression casting made copper-bronze electrotype hardware obsolete and spelled the beginning of the end. The Smith & Butler partnership was dissolved in 1874<sup>8</sup> and Butler formed a new partnership with a blacksmith named James W. Rutter at the same address. But by 1879, the second partnership also ends.

Smith kept his hands in many metal-oriented enterprises. In 1869, at the same time as the *Architectural Review* article, Smith was operating the first nickel-plating plant in New York (which later became the famous The New York Nickel Plating Co.)<sup>9</sup>. He developed in that shop the first use of a dynamo in the plating industry. In addition, almost by accident, he discovered the electrolytic refining of copper, which became the standard industry process. For amusement, he would electroplate fruits for his friends. A short obituary of Smith published in 1894 states he was “called the best electrotyper in the U.S.; first to make nickel plating an industrial success; employed by telegraph co.’s; invented method of refining copper; a very valuable scientific life.”<sup>10</sup>

Butler returned to Boston in 1880, where he became an influential Unitarian minister active in both spiritual and commercial ventures. In addition to the portrait shown here, we found two brief biographies of Butler. In addition to detailing the man’s family and upbringing, and extolling his spiritual accomplishments, both make specific and revealing comments about his history with hardware. The first, from 1894, describes Smith & Butler as makers of “ornamental electrotypes and the original inventors

<sup>4</sup> *Scientific American*, January 13, 1866, p. 39

<sup>5</sup> *Scientific American*, March 12, 1864, p. 175

<sup>6</sup> *Scientific American*, Sept. 10, 1864, p. 174

<sup>7</sup> “Descriptive Directory of the Hardware, Tools, Cutlery, Gun”, etc. in the *Reference Book and Directory of Book & Job Printers* (J. Arthurs Murphy & Co., 1871-2)

<sup>8</sup> Wilson’s New York City Copartnership Directory, March 1874

<sup>9</sup> Adams, “the Development of the Nickel Plating Industry” in *IX Transactions of the American Electrochemical Society* (1906) 214

<sup>10</sup> 1894 History of the State Normal College of New York Graduates

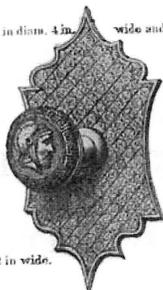
## BRONZE HARDWARE.

Medallion Knobs, for Outside Doors 2 1/2 in.; for Inside Doors, 2 1/4 in.



Bell Pulls, 4 in diam., 4 in. wide and 2 in wide.

Scroll Knobs, 2 1/2 in. and 2 1/4 in.



Gothic Knobs 2 1/2 in.



Bell Pulls, 4 in diam., 4 in. wide and 2 in wide.

Bronze Butts.



T Handles for Front Door.



Shutter-Bar.



## BRONZE HARDWARE

Is now offered at lower prices than hand-plated silver House Trimmings. It is especially tasteful on Black-Walnut, Oak, or other hardwood finish. Its superiority consists in requiring no cleaning. It is always elegant; and the material, Copper Bronze, cannot wear out.

In keeping silver door-knobs bright much labor is necessary, and often the door itself is rubbed and discolored.

Every piece is warranted perfect. The article receives the unqualified approbation of all our architects.

Three styles are offered, at a uniform price: The Medallion Style, The Scroll Style, The Gothic Style, for churches.

### PRICE-LIST.

Inside Knobs and Escutcheons and Spindle, complete	\$4.00 per pair
Outside, " " " "	6.00 " "
Bell-Pull, Concave Round Plate	5.00 each
" Flat Plate, 2 sizes	\$3.00 and 4.00 " "
Shutter-Knob	50 " "
" Bar	50 " "
Flush Sash-Lifts	50 " "
" Sliding-Door Handle Cups	2.00 " "
T Handles for Front Doors	3.00 " "
Bronze Butts, with Caps and Tips, superior quality, made	1/6 x 7 .. 16.00 per pair
	1/6 x 6 .. 15.00 " "
	1/4 x 5 1/2 .. 14.00 " "
only to order	1/6 x 5 .. 13.00 " "
	1/4 x 4 1/2 .. 12.00 " "

BUTTS, LOCK-FACES, &c., BRONZED TO MATCH OUR TRIMMINGS.

Brass Butts, handsomely bronzed	\$1.50 per pair
Small Brass Hinges, " " "	1.50 doz " "

Low 25/1

in the United States of bronze knobs and locks for doors.”<sup>11</sup> The second, in 1908, states “He engaged in the manufacture of medallions and other bronze goods, having invented the first bronze door knobs and locks used in America.”<sup>12</sup>

Is this assertion true? Were Smith & Butler the inventors of decorative copper/bronze door hardware in the United States? Rhett Butler is skeptical and cites examples of Robinson work which he believes are earlier. But it may be safe to say that the way Smith & Butler brought copper-bronze electrotype hardware to the public between 1865 and 1870 set the stage for the success of Metallic Compression Casting Co. and Russell & Erwin.

This research offers lots of new facts, and it also invites some intriguing speculation. For instance, we can pretty safely assume that most of the hardware

shown in the *Architectural Review* is in fact Smith & Butler’s – the copy points match and the same designs are shown with the same style names. We can speculate that Russell & Erwin might have been hedging their bets by distributing Smith & Butler hardware (using the same item numbers as in the *Architectural Review* images, by the way – items in the article that are not called out by specific item numbers are not Smith & Butler) while negotiating with the Metallic Compression Casting Company for their competing technology and designs. Then when the MCCC deal emerged, R&E dropped Smith & Butler’s products, but continued to use some of their designs, as they were free to do, since the designs had not been patented. Whether any cash changed hands is unknown, but it is worth noting that Butler bought himself a nice house in Manhattan for \$10,000 in 1871, when in the 1870 census he is listed as having only \$1,200 of personal estate. Certainly makes me wonder.

<sup>11</sup> Brayley, *Schools and Schoolboys of Old Boston* (Hager, 1894)

<sup>12</sup> Fillebrown, *The Family of Rev. John Butler*, (1908), p.10.

Why did metallic compression casting make electrotyping obsolete? In 1873, J.J.C. Smith appeared in England and explained the difference between electrotyping and metallic compression casting:

“A process, which has lately been in successful operation in the United States has been introduced into this country by the patentee, Mr. J. J. C. Smith, and from its practical simplicity and general adaptability ... appears calculated to supersede, from its simplicity and economy, the ordinary processes at present in use for moulding, casting and electrotyping...”

“The electrotype process has many disadvantages, being limited to certain metals, the moulds for fine work are expensive, the deposition slow, and every step demands skilled labor, so that it cannot be produced cheaply. In the present ordinary process of moulding, too, the copy is always greatly inferior to the pattern... By this new process of casting under compression, most of the articles in metal which are now produced by the skill of the engraver can be produced in quality and with a perfection of finish surpassing that obtained by skilled manual labor, and at an infinitely less cost. The class of articles that can be made by this process...includes such objects as ornamented door-knobs and escutcheons...”<sup>13</sup>

One can certainly appreciate the difference, at least in manufacturing hardware, between casting molten metal and waiting for the much slower process of electrotyping.

There is a final intriguing reference. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Trustee's Report acknowledges the gift of a collection of approximately 100 industrial art objects in metal which Butler & Rutter donated in 1880, together with plaques from the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. No record of the Butler & Rutter exhibit, however, is found in the Centennial catalogues, and a large part of the collection was auctioned off in 1956. The items remaining

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<sup>13</sup> “Metallic Compression Casting”, *Journal of the Society of Arts*, May 30, 1873. A digression – what was J.J.C. Smith doing in England trying to promote compression casting in 1873 when MCCC had been bought out by R&E in 1870? R&E bought only the American patents; the European rights were assigned to Jesse A. Locke and he and J.J.C. Smith promoted the invention in Europe. *Smith v. Moore*, 129 Mass. 222 (Sup. Ct. Mass. 1880)

with the Met are 10 medallions and the three Centennial plaques, identified as possibly European or American from the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> These pieces could have been produced by Butler & Rutter, collected by them, served as models for them, or bought by them at the end of the Exposition when many of the exhibits were sold. Unfortunately the 1956 auction catalogue contains only the briefest of descriptions of 10 lots, and the Met has not photographed its collection.

*Note:* thanks to Allen Joslyn & Rhett Butler for their additional research.

## 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:

A pair of old store door pulls made by Yale with a Dolphin design (see photo).

Tom Iannucci Please call 240-595-1115 or email me at [hardware@closecall.com](mailto:hardware@closecall.com)

### Wanted:

My true love is old hooks – especially figural, dragons & mythical characters. Seeking antique & vintage hooks (prefer bronze &/or brass). Pictures are greatly appreciated.

Please contact me via e-mail, phone or postal mail. e-mail: [erica@gerlicher.com](mailto:erica@gerlicher.com) or phone: (808) 826-1178 or (206) 484-7035

Erica Gerlicher

3772 Punahale Road

Princeville, HI 96722



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<sup>14</sup> Communication from Thomas F. Foster of the Metropolitan's Central Catalogue, 11/17/2010

# McMENAMINS EDGEFIELD



## ADCA Convention 2011 Portland, Oregon August 21-24, 2011

Hosted by Bo Sullivan

*"And now for something completely different..."*

### Monty Python's Flying Circus

I'm excited to invite you all to McMenamins Edgefield in Portland, Oregon, on August 21-24 for the 2011 ADCA Convention – an experience that I personally promise will be unlike anything you've ever experienced before. Many of you enjoyed visits to Portland for the 1999 and 2007 conventions, and for 2011, I felt we needed to offer something entirely new to entice you back, something memorable and different. And this is what I plan to give you.

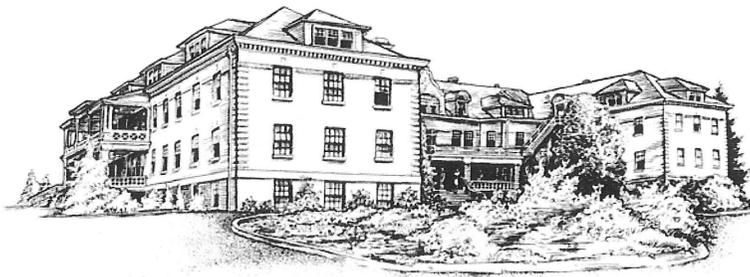
The 2011 convention will be held at McMenamins Edgefield in Troutdale, Oregon. Located about 15 minutes east of Portland International Airport at the mouth of the Columbia River Gorge Scenic Area, Edgefield is the most unusual and fascinating destination resort in the Pacific Northwest.

A designated National Historic Landmark sited on 74 acres of farmland, Edgefield was originally built in 1911 as the Multnomah County Poor Farm. After

more than 70 years in operation, the doors to Edgefield were closed and locked in 1982, and the overgrown estate was left to transients and vandals. No one had the money to fix it, or the imagination to figure out what to do with it. Enter the McMenamins brothers, Mike and Brian, local brewers with a string of quirky Portland pubs in funky old buildings born from just such circumstances.

Beginning in 1990, the brothers slowly restored and rebuilt Edgefield. First came a winery, then a brewery, then a pub and movie theater in the former power station (the brothers pioneered the idea of lounging in old sofas eating pizza and drinking beer

while watching second-run movies). The Edgefield complex now includes 100 European-style lodging rooms, a fine dining restaurant, a classic pub, numerous small bars, a ballroom, a distillery, a soaking pool, extensive gardens, and even two par-3 golf





Mt. Hood, Mt. St. Helens, and the Columbia River Gorge.

So mark your calendars – I hope you, your friends and your families can join me in Portland for a fun and memorable convention at Edgefield August 21-24, 2011.

Learn more about Edgefield, and explore the unique buildings and grounds at: <http://www.mcmenamins.com/54-edgefield-home>.

**Next Newsletter:**

2011 Theme (prepare to get funky), Tour Day & Other Sightseeing Destinations

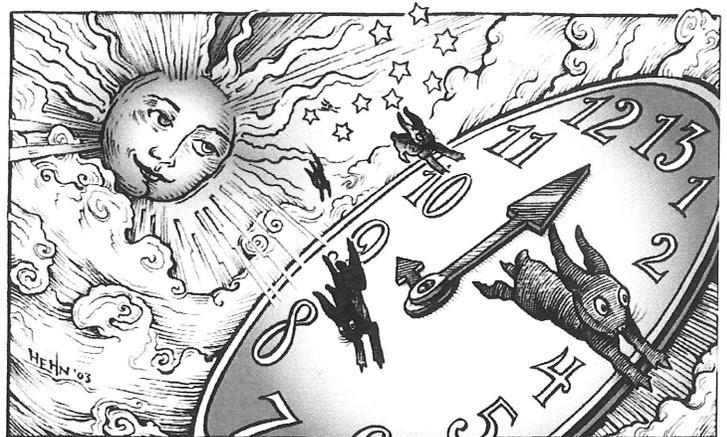
courses. It hosts countless festivals, weddings, business meetings and live music events each year.

But an inventory of features and attractions only begins to tell the full story of the Edgefield experience, for at the heart of any McMenamins destination (and there are now more than 50 of them) are history and art. Meticulously restored and furnished with eclectic antiques, vintage lighting fixtures, architectural salvage, and unusual items from around the world, McMenamins properties are canvases themselves for the work of a stable of in-house artists, who paint stunning murals and pictures throughout the buildings, decorating walls, ceilings, pipes and machinery with fantastic images, stencils, and creations in wood, tile and found objects.

After 20 years, Edgefield remains the largest and most exciting location in the McMenamins brothers' empire of re-imagined historic pubs, hotels and music venues across the Northwest, and I can't wait to share it with you. August is an absolutely beautiful time to visit Oregon.

This distinctive setting is just the beginning of many new twists and surprises I am working on for next year's event. The last few years have been hard ones for many of us, and for the club. The 2011 Portland convention will be a chance not only for us to get together and celebrate our passion for hardware and our appreciation of each other, but also for each of us to reach out and invite other members who may not have attended in recent years (or perhaps have never come at all). This will also be a great venue for our members with children, as there is so much to see and do, both on site and at nearby scenic destinations like

**Special Note:** We have missed a number of our long-time members at conventions recently, often due to health or travel issues. In particular, many of us have felt the absence of our fearless founder and irrepressible researcher, Maud Eastwood. The Portland convention is being held in Maud's own backyard this year with her enthusiastic support, and I can tell you that she is already busy planning several personal contributions that you won't want to miss.



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These are paid advertisements. The ADCA assumes no responsibility. For further information about these businesses see the Resource section on our website: [www.AntiqueDoorknobs.org](http://www.AntiqueDoorknobs.org).

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