

# The Doorknob Collector

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

## Silvered Mercury Glass

*By Allen S. Joslyn*

“Silvered mercury glass” is the accepted compromise to refer to glass objects with a hollow area inside which is coated with silver nitrate, producing a mirror-like exterior. Early makers in Europe did use a formula containing mercury but it proved unsatisfactory, and producers switched to silver nitrate mixed with glucose - but the term somehow stuck.

Silvered glass doorknobs were, of course, a miniscule portion of silvered glass products. Doorknobs were, moreover, relatively simple compared with other products, such as goblets and bowls. While a doorknob need only be hollow, a goblet required both an inside and outside surface, with a hollow cavity in between. They were blown by hand, in a complicated process which required two glass blowers. The process produced a hole into the cavity, through which the silvering medium was poured, circulated over the interior surfaces and the remainder poured out. The hole was then sealed, sometimes cheaply by a cork, or a metal or glass disk, which was cemented in.

The piece could then be engraved or etched with a pattern. A few pieces were covered with opaque glass (called “cased”), and then cut to the clear glass, revealing the silvering underneath. Sometimes the object’s interior was coated with a gold-colored substance, producing a particularly rich appearance.

Silvered glass was first produced in the 1840s in Bohemia, now a part of the Czech Republic, which was famous for its glass. It quickly spread to German States, England and the United States. There was, however, a difference in the glass used. In Bohemia, the glass used contained silica and an alkali, which generally could not endure the pressure of the cutting wheel, so other methods of decoration developed. In England and the United States, lead or “flint” glass was used, which replaced the alkali with lead oxide. The resulting glass was heavier, stronger, softer (and thus more easily cut) and could be worked longer at a lower temperature. It also has a high refractive index, which makes it sparkle. At a very high lead-content (35%), the glass is called lead crystal, seen today in products from, for example, Baccarat and Swarovski.

Silvered glass began to be produced in England about 1850, and was shown at the Great Crystal Palace Exposition in London in 1851. It became hugely popular in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, both because of its beauty and because it was cheaper than silver itself. Its production generally ceased as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century approached, although some beautiful pieces appear to have been produced later.

An indication of the varieties of silvered glass objects which were produced can be gleaned from the table of contents of Diane C. Lytwyn’s Silvered Mercury Glass (Collector Books, 2006): Vases, Beakers, Goblets, Mugs, Pokals, Compotes, Chalicees, Creamers, Pitchers, Sugar Bowls, Salts, Candlesticks,

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Gazing Globes, Figures, Match Holders, Paperweights and Specialty Items. Among the last group is illustrated a pair of cased blue lead glass cut to silvered curtain tie-backs, produced in the United States, circa 1860-1880, and a pair of cased cranberry lead glass cut to silvered knobs, possibly made in the United States, maker unknown, with "Made in France" on the brass area. Most of the examples shown in the book are Bohemian. The Catalogue for an exhibition in 2001 at the Museum of American Glass at Wheaton Village (NJ) on Silvered Glass shows as American knob from the period 1850-1870 with a green overlay, cut to clear.

An early manufacturer of silvered glass in the United States was the pioneering New England Glass Company of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Founded by Deming Jarvis in 1819, it revolutionized glass production by developing a glass pressing machine, patented by Enoch Robinson and Henry Whitney in the late 1820s. (See TDC 161). The first patent for a silvered door knob was issued in 1855 and assigned to the company (No. 12,265). New England Glass exhibited 200 silvered doorknobs at the New York Crystal Palace Exposition in 1853, together with silvered vases, a silvered bowl, silvered goblets, etc. It is generally impossible to identify the maker of a silvered piece, due to the lack of catalogues, but some New England Glass pieces have "NEG Co." on the metal disk covered with a glass disk sealing the hole on the bottom.

In the mid-1860s a new formula for glass was developed, which eliminated lead, and which was cheaper, thinner, harder and cooled faster. Most companies switched to it, but New England Glass refused to do so and suffered from the competition. It became best known in the 1870s for its brilliant cut and engraved glass. But a variety of factors led to its decline – cheaper glass, mismanagement, loss of skilled workers, etc. Its facilities were leased to William Libby, who had been an agent of the company. A series of strikes and other misfortunes led to the plant being closed, and the operation moved to Toledo, Ohio, which developed into a center of glass-making. The Company was renamed Libby Glass Inc, and eventually was bought by Owens-Illinois, Inc. After undergoing a leveraged buy-out and then an IPO, Libby is now independent again.

Other producers of silvered glass included the Boston Silver Glass Company of Cambridge, which produced chiefly silvered glass from 1857 to 1871, and the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company of Sandwich, Massachusetts, which produced circa 1860-1880.

Plain silvered knobs were offered by most purveyors of builders' hardware, but who manufactured them? One suspects that, as a sideline, they were purchased from glass manufacturers rather than made in-house; just as "lava" knobs appear to have been. (TDC 141). Sometimes they could be pricey - Parker & Whipple offered silvered glass knobs with silver plated mountings for \$30, compared to \$2 for ordinary knobs and \$9 for porcelain knobs with silver plated mountings (ABH, p. 177).

England produced cut colored overlay pieces, with the inside silvered. American silvered glass pieces, however, were generally clear heavy lead glass, sometimes etched or engraved. Cased cut pieces are rare, whether cut to silver or cut to a different colored glass. I have included pictures of several of them and of a newel post. The cut clear silvered knobs are, unfortunately, very difficult to photograph because they are so reflective – one may end up taking a picture of the photographer, as reflected. There is also, of course, the Nashua "snowdrop" knob.

The website [www.antiquemercuryglass.com](http://www.antiquemercuryglass.com) a wonderful place to see the great variety and beauty of silvered glass.





Newel post, silvered, cobalt overlay cut to clear, United States, possibly New England Glass Co., Cambridge, Mass., c. 1860. Collection of the Museum of American Glass, Millville, NJ, Gift of Dorothy-Lee Jones.



Door knob, silvered, green overlay cut to clear, probably New England Glass Co., Cambridge, Mass., 1855-19870s. Collection of the Museum of American Glass, Millville, NJ, Gift of Dorothy-Lee Jones.





## References

Gay LeCleire Taylor, Mirrored Images: American Silvered Glass (Museum of American Glass at Wheaton Village, 2001.) The text of this catalogue is available at the Museum's website.

Diane Lytwyn, Pictorial Guide to Silvered Mercury Glass (Collector Books, 2006). She hosts the website mentioned above.

Lorie Johnson, The New England Glass Company, <http://www.patternglass.com/Factory?NewEngland/NewEng.htm>

Thanks to the Museum of American Glass at Wheaton Village, Wheaton, NJ

# **A LEGEND AMONG DOORKNOB AFICIONADOS**

*By Vicky Berol*

## **Maud Eastwood. Member #2**



Researcher, educator, author, collector, hardware expert and a founding member of The Antique Doorknob Collectors of America.

Maud's interest in collecting hardware began in 1955, attracted by the beauty of antique doorknobs. But collecting soon took a backseat to research and education. To quote Maud, "besides the attraction to the design and workmanship of the hardware, was the unbelief that their fate, as waste material from demolition sites, was to be dumped in land fill or melted down for scrap".

Since the inception of the Association in 1981, Maud has been a regular contributor to The Doorknob Collector Newsletter, writing articles on porcelain knobs, colored glass knobs, glass bubble knobs (Pairpoint), how to care for plastic knobs, wooden knobs, Wedgewood Jasper knobs, oriental design, and Iron Age builders' hardware. ...just to name a few! She has also authored books on antique builders' hardware - "The Antique Doorknob", published 1976, accepted by the American Library Association for review in Books in Print. ; "Antique Door Hardware, Knobs and Accessories" published 1982. The supplements were copy written in 1985 and 1992 for the revised. "150 Years of Builders Hardware" published 1994. Recognized as an authority on hardware, she has been a contributor to "Old House Journal" magazine and has appeared on Public Television. She has also served as Research Consultant for "The Builders Hardware Industry 1830's to 1990's", edited by Walter H. McAninch, DAHC, 1996 published by The Ballard Locks Publishing Co.

Writing has not been Maud's only contribution to ADCA. She has served on the Board as Vice President and President and in 1983 elected as a permanent member emeritus of the ADCA Board of Directors. At the 2000 Convention, Maud was the first recipient of the Arnie Frederick Memorial Award, established in 1999. Fredrick, along with Maud, was a founder of ADCA.



Over the years Maud has unselfishly shared her expertise. Using her invaluable knowledge, she was instrumental in assisting Cathy Gailbraith in identifying, organizing and cataloging the vast hardware collection for Portland's Architectural Heritage Center (Bosco-Milligan Foundation).

ADCA is fortunate to have Maud as an active member as well as a mentor to those who want to learn more about antique builders' hardware. She willingly and generously will share her knowledge to all those who ask.

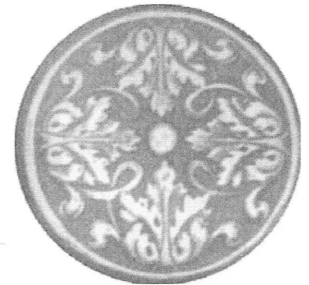
## One of Our Own

The New York Times recently ran an article entitled "Where to Find Treasure in Trash", recounting the favorite hunting places of Amy Hughes, who writes the "Salvage Style" column in Old House Magazine. "My absolute favorite salvaging trip was to a place called Discovery Architectural Antiques in this really small town [Gonzales, Texas] about an hour's drive from Austin. It's a huge warehouse packed with hundreds of thousands of feet of flooring and old doors, plus a mill, workshop and retail store." She goes on to recommend a nearby "awesome barbecue place" and a hotel in Austin. Congratulations to Suzanne Kittel, the proprietor of Discovery!

## 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:** Six (6) doorknobs in the Mantua pattern made by Reading Hardware.  
Donald Friedman (#115)  
660 W. Grand Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60654  
312-226-4741  
Dfried4142@sbcglobal.net



## A Wisp of Smoke

*By Faye Kennedy*

Recently I was at our daughter's home and she and I went to the basement to get some supplies. Upon returning to the first floor, I saw a thin wisp of smoke coming from behind the door which was ajar. I asked, "What is the smoke?" thinking it might be a candle or something like that.

As we came around the door the smoke was coming from behind the doorknob, a solid clear glass globe. The sun was shining through the window and had set the rubber bands that were around the knob to smoldering. Remember when you were a kid and tried to start a fire with a magnifying glass, well, Walla! A nice clear glass doorknob worked just as well.

The windows had just been cleaned the day before and the sun was bright that day. The window shade is now being pulled down just a bit so the low winter sun doesn't hit the doorknob. The rubber bands have a new home.

## Our Business Members

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).

<b>Materials Unlimited</b> Owner: Reynold Lowe 2 W. Michigan Ave. Ypsalanti, MI 49197 Phone: 800-299-9462 Web Site: <a href="http://MaterialsUnlimited.com">MaterialsUnlimited.com</a> Email: <a href="mailto:Materi-als@MaterialsUnlimited.com">Materi-als@MaterialsUnlimited.com</a>	<b>Antique Door Hardware Collector</b> Owner: Tom Iannucci 16624 Frederick Rd. Mount Airy, MD 21771 Phone: 240-595-1115 Web Site: <a href="http://antiquedoorhardwarecollector.com">antiquedoorhardwarecollector.com</a> Email: <a href="mailto:antiquehardware@verizon.net">antiquehardware@verizon.net</a>	<b>Architectural Salvage, Inc.</b> Owner: Elizabeth Werhane 5001 N. Colorado Blvd. Denver, CO 80216 Phone: (303) 321-0200 Website: <a href="http://savagelady.com/">savagelady.com/</a>
<b>Discovery Architectural Antiques</b> Owner: Suzanne Kittel 409 St. Francis Gonzales, TX 78629 Phone: 830-672-2428 Fax: 830-672-3701 Web Site: <a href="http://Discovery.net">Discovery.net</a> Email: <a href="mailto:swk@discovery.net">swk@discovery.net</a>	<b>The Brass Knob</b> Owners: Donetta George 2311 18th St. N.W. Washington, DC Phone: 202-332-3370 Fax: 202-332-5594 Email: <a href="mailto:BK@theBrassKnob.com">BK@theBrassKnob.com</a> Web Site: <a href="http://theBrassKnob.com">theBrassKnob.com</a>	<b>Aurora Mills Architectural Salvage</b> Owner: Mike Byrnes 14971 First St NE Aurora, OR 97002 Phone: 503-678-6083 Fax: 503-678-3299 Email: <a href="mailto:auroramills@centurytel.net">auroramills@centurytel.net</a> Website: <a href="http://auroramills.com">auroramills.com</a>
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