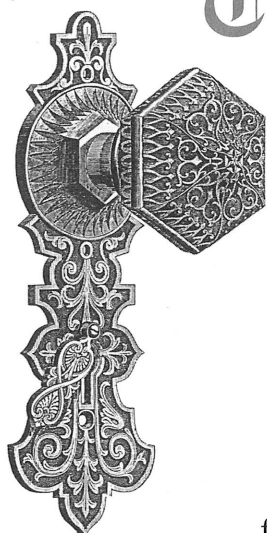


# The Doorknob Collector



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

## **THE OLD EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING AND ITS DOORKNOBS**

*By Allen S. Joslyn*

The Old Executive Office Building (now named the Eisenhower Executive Office Building) in Washington is certainly one of the most magnificent Victorian buildings in the country, and perhaps the largest in the United States at that time. It had two miles of corridors and 553 rooms. Its construction commenced in 1871 and was completed in 1888. Fortunately it escaped the “War on Victorian Architecture” and the Modernism campaign in the decades which followed, but only by the skin of its teeth.

The story begins in 1790 when the District of Columbia was designated as the federal capital, and people set about to build it. It had to be ready by 1800. Needless to say, the next decade was busy. Construction of the White House began in 1792, but in addition the Capital needed offices for the executive departments (War, Navy, State and Treasury). George Washington stipulated that they should be built close to the White House, but several years later President John Adams directed that they be built nearer to the Capital. Washington protested to Adams that the President should have them nearby as he would be consulting them daily. Adams relented. So they were built near the White House, and as the duties of Washington grew, they were replaced.



Old Executive Office Building

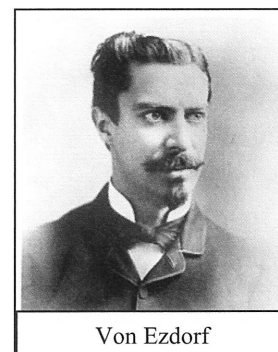
After the end of the Civil War it became obvious that new buildings were required to house the increased needs of governing the country. Among the players was General William Tecumseh Sherman, who lobbied for one building housing the War, State and Navy Departments, on the theory that they should work together. In 1871 Congress authorized the construction of a building to house the three Departments, approving the plans of Alfred Mullett, Supervising Architect of the Treasury. He had already been responsible for the design and construction of a host of new Federal buildings – Post Offices, Courthouses, office buildings – which followed the expansion and development of the Continental United States - and was reluctant

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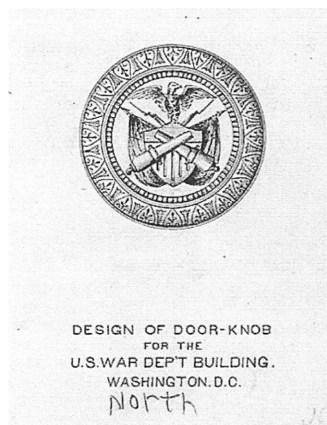
to take on this additional task, but eventually the Secretary of State (Hamilton Fish) persuaded him to do so.

Mullett was an outstanding proponent of the French Second Empire style of architecture, which briefly flowered in the 1870s and 1880s. Unlike the restrained classic Federal and Greek design of public buildings which proceeded, and the Greek revival style which succeeded it, the Second Empire style was raucous and elaborate. It featured mansard roofs, circular windows, and sharply protruding pavilions between the floors. Mullett built many Government offices in this style, including the massive New York County Courthouse and Post Office which stood where City Hall Park now is in Manhattan. Only two of these buildings survive - the Old Executive Office Building and the St. Louis Courthouse and Post Office.

Construction began in June, 1871, starting with the south and east wings (to house the State Department). By 1877 Mullett had been replaced, and Richard Von Ezdorf was appointed to design the remaining interiors. Von Ezdorf was from an aristocratic family in the Austro-Hungarian Empire who studied architecture in Germany and Austria and immigrated to the United States, becoming a junior draftsman under Mullett in 1873.



Von Ezdorf



With particular relevance to this article, he designed the doorknobs for the War Department and the Navy Department.

(The design of the War Department knob differs somewhat from the final version, crossed cannons being replaced by crossed swords). They were produced by Hopkins & Dickinson. How do we know? Because they are on the doors with H&D escutcheons illustrated its 1879 Catalogue (No. 1776, p. 224). That catalogue

also shows "bronze balusters and newel posts made by us for the East Wing of the State, War and Navy Building, Washington D.C.". (p. 406). Finally, the perimeter design is on another H&D knob, as shown in its 1879 Catalogue (Knob No. 417, p. 202), but not on the production version.

So what about the State Department knob? Although published references claim that Von Ezdorf designed all three knobs, the National Archives does not have any design for that knob. Nothing! Moreover, the sequence is out of order. While Von Ezdorf was a junior draftsman under Mullett, he was not in charge of interior design until 1877, while construction of the State Department south wing was completed in 1875.

Pictures of the State Department knob on doors in the building show a Corbin escutcheon, and the



War Department Knob

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knob does not have the perimeter of the Von Ezdorf knobs. Rather it has the perimeter of a locomotive knob, both of which have been identified as Corbin in VDA 2d (A-108 and A-210). While the State Department knob does not show up in any known Corbin catalogue, neither does the locomotive knob. It may have been one of a high-end line offered only to selected customers, or it could have been fabricated especially for the State Department wing.



State Department Knob

There are several possible explanations for the switch from Corbin to H&D: Von Ezdorf wanted to make his mark with new designs, and/or Corbin did not have any designs for knobs that would be particularly appropriate for the War and Navy Department, and/or those Departments wanted to distinguish themselves from the State Department wing.

Be that as it may, the building is spectacular and the knobs are gorgeous. But only two of them were designed by Von Ezdorf.



Navy Department Knob

However, there is a further complication – the building also has non-representational knobs, but they are Mallory Wheeler (K-114) mounted on another H&D escutcheon, and a non-representational H&D knob, shown in the 1879 Catalogue, No. 450, p. 204. How Mallory Wheeler managed to get into the act is a mystery.

Of course, the various Departments, or their successors, got larger and moved to bigger – but far less interesting – digs. The building still contains offices of the White House, and the Ceremonial Reception Room of the Vice-President in the old War Department wing.

Tours can be arranged on Saturday mornings with advanced registration. To make the reservations, call 202-395-5895 between 9 am and noon on Tuesdays or Wednesdays.

#### Thanks To:

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Andrew Dolkart, The Old Executive Office Building, a Victorian Masterpiece, Executive Office of the President, Office of Administration, 1984

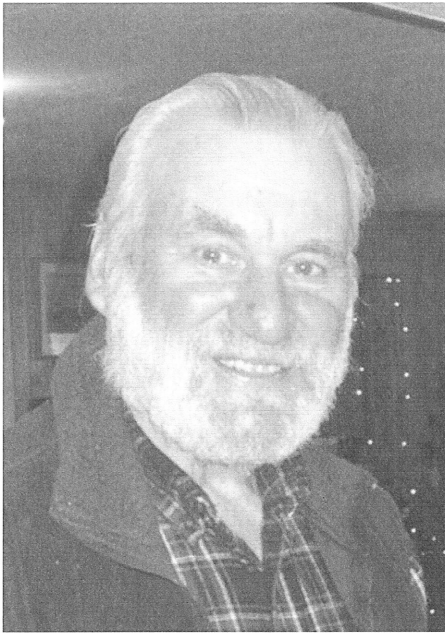
Elsa M. Santoyo, Ed., Creating an American Masterpiece, Architectural Drawings of the Old Executive Office Building, 1871-1888, American Institute of Architects Press, 1988

# MEET YOUR ADCA BOARD

*By Vicky Berol*

**LEN BLUMIN (#3)**, Lblumin@aol.com

It all began with a fabulous Heart knob and escutcheon (C-111). Drawn by its beauty and fine workmanship, Len and Patti were hooked. In 1975 they thus began collecting ornamental hardware. Shortly thereafter Len and Patti were introduced to Maud Eastwood and what developed was a doorknob collecting club – and the rest is history. Over years of collecting, the Blumins had amassed a collection of over 3,000 knobs.



A physician by vocation, by avocation an author, photographer, publisher, collector extraordinaire, an authority on vintage hardware and a very important person to the ADCA. Always a leader, Len first joined the Board in 1981. He served as President in 1983-84 and 1989-1991. In 1987 he was honored with lifetime membership on the Board, in recognition of his tireless work and generous contributions to the Club. In 2002, at the Convention in St. Louis, he received the Arnie Fredrick Award to honor his outstanding efforts.

His activity and interest did not stop there. Together with Maud Eastwood and Loretta Nemec, he revised the Club's By-Laws. Beginning in 1986 and for many years thereafter he was the Chair of the Nominating Committee, and often Vice-President. Len started the first auction, which over the years has become a major fundraiser for the Club and a delight to those who attend. In 1982 Len and his wife Patti (#500) hosted the second ADCA Convention in San Francisco, and 22 years later, in 2004, joined by the Berols, successfully hosted the 24<sup>th</sup> Convention, also held in San Francisco.

Over the years Len has been a tireless supporter of historic preservation. He lent portions of his extensive collection to the City Museum in St. Louis for its 2002 Exhibition, he has written numerous articles for *The Doorknob Collector*, and has given speeches at several ADCA Conventions and other venues.

Impressed? You should be. But there is more. In 1983 Victorian Decorative Art, the "Bible" for hardware collectors, was published. For it Len – a latter day Linnaeus, to be sure - developed a classification and numbering system to organize knobs by design. For the first edition 595 knobs were photographed, organized, and often identified by Patent number, manufacturer and catalogue. In 1999 a vastly increased second edition of Len's work was published by ADCA, edited by another former President, Win Applegate. In 2011, VDA III (a supplement to VDA II) was published. We all look forward to VDA IV.

Not only generous with sharing his knowledge, at the 1984 Annual Meeting, then-President Blumin presented 3 books to start the Emil Miller Memorial Library, which blended into the Archives, a collection which has grown greatly over the years. He also donated his only copy of Babcock and Stowells 1884 Catalogue. Three years later he generously donated 260 copies of VDA, so that the Club would receive all the proceeds of its sale.



Sadly for the ADCA, Len and Patti are now focusing their energies on the Audubon Canyon Ranch, a system of nature preserves in Northern California. For over 30 years they have served it in a variety of capacities: Patti as a docent and teacher, mentoring children in appreciating the environment, Len as Treasurer and President of the organization. Len has turned his talents from the beauty of Victorian Hardware to that of birds, wildlife and nature.

Thank you, Len and Patti, for your many years of dedication to ADCA. We are so grateful. But please, don't become strangers.

## CONVENTION, CONVENTION!!

### *Get Out Your Calendar Now and Save the Date*

The 2012 Convention will be held in Buffalo, New York, September 12-15. There will be two tour days, September 12-13, and members are free to do one day, two days or none. The Convention itself will be September 14 (buying, selling, trading) and September 15 (buying, etc., auction, banquet and membership meeting). We will stay at the same hotel as we did in 2006, the Holiday Inn Buffalo Amherst in Amherst, New York. Further details will follow.

## 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.

**For Sale:** Screws for your antique doorknobs. Our slotted head 1/4" set screws will fit -no re-tapping needed, and they are sized perfectly to fit an antique doorknob spindle thread. Plain steel or brass plated a dozen for only \$4.75 (larger quantities available) and free shipping!

Sarah Chilcote (754), American Antique Hardware, at  
2983 D Street NE, Salem. OR 97301 or email [sarahandkeith@msn.com](mailto:sarahandkeith@msn.com)



**Wanted:** Doorknobs with company names or initials; especially oil and mining companies, but any company will suffice.

Jim Williams, [jcw@magnoliatrust.net](mailto:jcw@magnoliatrust.net)

303-628-5586

## Share Your Favorite Knob

*By Faye Kennedy*



Each of us has a favorite knob, mine is the parasol lady. Send me a picture of you and your favorite and we will publish them. There are many out there and it would be interesting to see what you have. It doesn't have to be spectacular to be a favorite. Maybe it has a story behind it, like it was the knob I used to touch when I went to Grandma's house. Just let us know and we may start a new column each issue. Send pictures and stories to Faye Kennedy (see mailing address on page 6) or email [adcaoffice@aol.com](mailto:adcaoffice@aol.com). This should be fun.

## 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).

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