

The Doorknob Collector

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

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR KNOB

By Allen S. Joslyn

There are occasionally wonderful coincidences in life, and here is one. Since I answer emails to antiquedoorknobs@comcast.net, I frequently get inquiries along the lines of "can you identify this", as I did from Mark & June Brown of Why Not Antiques of Middletown, VA. Attached was the second photograph in this article. I recalled having seen it before, and found it again in TDC # 67 from 1994. But no identification was available. At almost the same time, however, Patty Ramey sent me another picture of the knob, this time with its escutcheon (shown on the right) and an identification.

This Buffalo knob is from the Department of the Interior Building at 18th and C Streets, Washington NW, D.C. The buffalo doorknobs were designed for the Executive Suite of the Secretary of the Interior, the former Art Gallery and the Library. The current Department of the Interior was the first building in Washington, D.C. authorized, designed and built by the Roosevelt Administration. Construction began in April of 1935 and was completed in December of 1936 - a record time for the building of a federal structure of its size and complexity. This makes it one of the last great knobs.



Although the designers placed considerable emphasis on the functionalism of the building, the architectural and decorative details were not overlooked. Like most buildings designed for a specific purpose or organization, the details often included symbols of the Department in their design, such as the door hardware featuring the Buffalo motif.

The Buffalo theme is found throughout the building, including the Departmental Seal and on the doorknobs. The Buffalo-head on the doorknob is a full frontal view of the head with an Indian ornament hanging from the horns. A row of beads encircles the head. Above the doorknob the escutcheon consists of lightening bolts and a stylized eagle with spread wings and tail. Patty suggests that since the escutcheon is by Russwin, the knob undoubtedly is also.

The photograph with the escutcheon was taken by Brooks Photographers of Bethesda, MD in 1976. The text of this article was largely taken from the Department of Interior Website.

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MEET YOUR FELLOW DOORKNOBBERS

By Vicky Berol

STEVE ROWE #287 (4narowe@sbcglobal.net) joined the ADCA in February, 1992. His first Convention was 1994 in Milwaukee, and he has attended every Convention since then.

Early as a member, Steve's leadership talents became apparent. In 1995, just three years after he joined ADCA, Steve was asked to become a member of the Board. He served as Vice President from 1997 - 2000, elected President from 2001 - 2004, and again from 2007 - 2012, continuing on the Board as the current Vice President. Aside from Board responsibilities, in 2001 he assumed chairmanship of "The Arnie Fredrick Memorial" Committee.

An avid collector of hardware since 1981, his first purchase was a plain domed iron knob with the original green paint. On the underside of the knob, "The Doorknob Pullers Club - 1927" He sold it to the late Charlie Bednar, ADCA Member #6. When asked why he collected hardware, Steve responded, "I simply liked it. I appreciate the beauty and workmanship. Also preservation and the retention of history". Collecting for Steve is an understatement. He is a frequent attendee of local flea markets, antique and architectural shops in areas near and around the annual conventions. Over the years, through education, Steve has become an authority on antique builder's hardware, and willingly shares his knowledge through the many informative articles submitted to the Doorknob Collectors Newsletter. His stunning displays have been voted "Best of Show" at several conventions.

Although Steve gives unselfishly of his time to ADCA, he does have another life. He is married to Tracy, an ICU nurse. Together they have two sons and two Ragdoll cats. They have been fortunate to travel to exotic places, taking pictures of whatever and, of course, doorknobs!

Steve's devotion to ADCA is constant, always ready to fill a need or mentor a new member. To ADCA, Steve is one in a million leader who is accessible. Thanks to his leadership skills, ADCA has been kept on a steady path. To us, he stands tall among the many other notables named Steve (Stephen): Stephen King, Famous fiction author; Stephen Colbert, TV Host; Stephen Foster, Father of American Music; Steve Jobs, Inventor - Apple Computer; Stephen Austin, The impresario who named Texas ; and Stephen Crane, American novelist.

Two Comments About Steve

By Allen S. Joslyn

Steve is endlessly persuasive and indefatigable when it comes to hardware, as he undoubtedly is in his other pursuits. An example is a fabulous enameled doorknob and backplate which was shown in an early edition of TDC (July-August, 1979) owned by two early members, Greg and Pam Kareofelas. Based on that back issue, Steve eventually tracked them down in San Francisco and talked them into transferring it to him. The knob's history was that Pam's mother was taking her cat to a breeder in San Francisco and spotted it, encrusted by paint, on a shack that served as the breeder's "cat house". She exchanged it for a new knob, cleaned it and gave it to her daughter. It probably was left over from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Needless to say, this was not an easy object to pry loose, but Steve did so very effectively. It is a pride of his collection. A color photograph of the Corbin white and blue knob and escutcheon is in TDC # 159, p. 8, lower right.

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The other example I will offer about his persuasive abilities was the one time they didn't work. I appeared at my first Convention, in Winnipeg with a very tasty, old-new stock Geisha doorbell. Needless to say, Steve tried to talk it away from me, over the course of several evenings in the hospitality room. Finally I explained that it didn't want to give it up except for something that would change my life, which at that point would be a silver Porsche Boxster, red leather interior, if you please. That finally worked, but it was the only time I managed to not be persuaded. Fourteen years later I got a used Boxster, red this time. Offer now withdrawn, sorry Steve!

Another "Arabic" Knob

By Steve Hannum



Len Blumin noted in *Victorian Decorative Arts* that the design of knob B-108 was copied from a plate in Racinet's *L'ornement Polychrome* published in 1873, shown on the left. Looking at the knob we see how closely the design was copied. I rediscovered this during my search for my previous article. For the sake of completeness here is a picture taken from the 1873rd edition. The plate is given the description:



B-108

"This plate represents the binding of the large Koran belonging to M. Ambroise Firmin Didot, rose and borders from which fill the two succeeding plate."

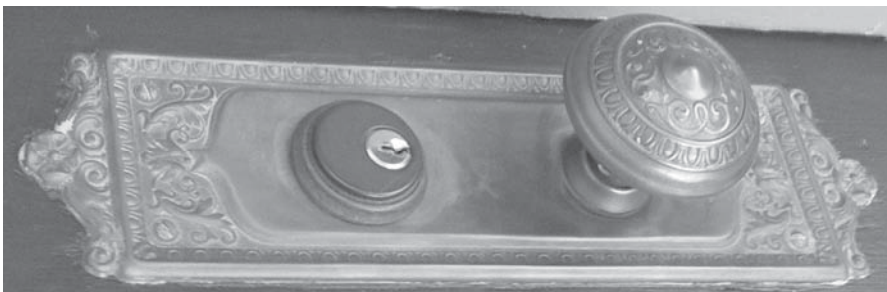
This Koran is of very large dimensions, measuring no less than 3 ft. 5 inches in length and 1 ft. 8 ½ inches in breadth."

GETTING TO THE CONVENTION IN PITTSBURGH

For those of you who are going to arrive by Air to Pittsburgh, there are three alternative methods to get to the Holiday Inn University Center, other than renting a car. One is a Taxi, estimated cost \$50. Or you can go to the Super-shuttle counter by the luggage pick-up area and catch one of their shuttles for \$ 27 per passenger. There is also, we are told, a city bus, 28X, which runs every ½ hour and which will drop you 1 ½ blocks from the Hotel. We will be waiting for your arrival!

The Doorknob Exchange

Members are reminded that your dues entitle you to advertise items for sale, trade, or wanted at no charge. Business owners who would like a permanent ad and link to their business website should become business members and the ad would be on the last page of the newsletter.



Wanted: Looking for both the backplate and knob, interior and exterior. Knob pattern: F-230. Mantua.

Vicky Berol (#450)
sfgofer@yahoo.com or (415) 771-9899

2013 ADCA Convention Tour Day

By Jeff Orman

The Civil War and the industrial revolution caused an enormous growth in the iron and steel industries. In Pittsburgh, Andrew Carnegie gained control of nearly all of the steel business in Western Pennsylvania. As the steel industry expanded, so did the need for coal to fuel Carnegie's furnaces. Henry Clay Frick started from humble beginnings and eventually gained control of the richest coal fields in the Pittsburgh area. He eventually became a partner with Carnegie and by the time he was 30 was a multi-millionaire in his own right.

On Thursday, July 25, we will tour **CLAYTON**, Henry Clay Frick's Pittsburgh residence from 1882 to 1905. When Helen Clay Frick (Henry's daughter) died in 1984, she bequeathed the house and all of its furnishings to the public as a museum. The house was opened to the public in 1990 and sits on five acres in Pittsburgh's East End, approximately three miles from the Wyndham University Hotel where the convention will be held. The grounds include the house itself, a car and carriage museum, an art museum, and a café. The house tour lasts about 1 ½ hours. The mansion itself was purchased in 1883 and then remodeled into its present 23 room condition. The Frick family left Pittsburgh for New York City, but the house remained in the family until Helen's death. Nearly all of the artifacts in the house are original including many priceless works of art.

After the house tour, we will car pool a short distance to **STATION SQUARE** for lunch (on your own). Station Square consists of numerous buildings from the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie (P&LE) Railroad days as well as several new buildings. The crown jewel of the complex is the Grand Concourse restaurant in the restored main waiting room of the passenger terminal. The train shed has been converted into the Freight House Shops, an indoor shopping mall. On the grounds of the complex are numerous restaurants, including the Grand Concourse, the Gandy Dance Saloon, Joe's Crab Shack, a Hard Rock Café, and numerous others.

Time permitting, it is possible to enjoy an incline ride on one of Pittsburgh's two remaining inclines which travel from the bottom of Mt. Washington to the top where there are numerous restaurants and residences with outstanding views. Pittsburgh once had over a dozen of these inclines.

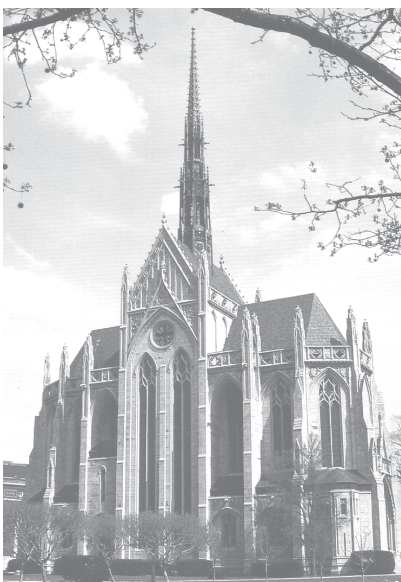


German Nationality Room

After lunch we will travel back to our hotel where we will disembark and walk one block to the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning. There we will have a guided tour of the **NATIONALITY ROOMS**. These classrooms are individually designed and executed in the ethnic styles of 27 nations. The rooms are richly decorated and are located on the perimeter of the Commons Room with its soaring gothic arches and elaborate ironwork created by Samuel Yellin, the famous iron worker from Philadelphia.

Time permitting, we will then walk a very short distance to **HEINZ MEMORIAL CHAPEL** with its 23 magnificent stained glass windows, some of which are 73 feet tall. The iron work in the chapel was also created by Yellin.

I hope you will take advantage of these tour day visits to sample just a little of what Pittsburgh has to offer to its residents and visitors.



Heinz Memorial Chapel

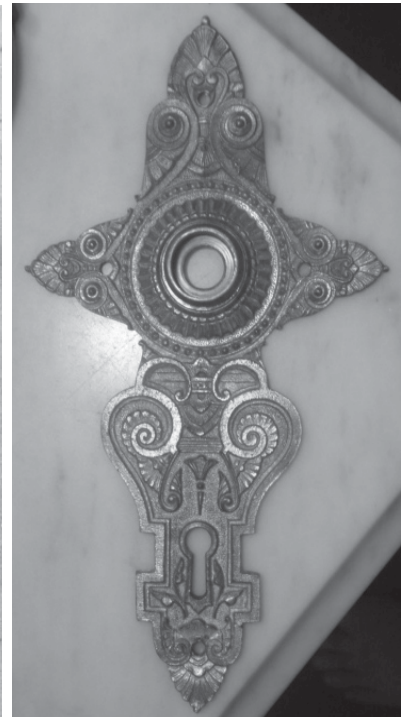
Is the Hardware Worth Saving?

by Stephen P. Rowe

There are many schools of thought regarding the cleaning and restoration of antique door hardware. One thought suggests hardware should never be cleaned, but rather left in the antiqued condition. Yet another believes that as a personal possession, the item can be refinished if a new or “restored” look is desired regardless of the effect on the value of the hardware. Yet throughout my collecting experience, I have learned that original patina preserved allows a piece of hardware to retain more of its value both as an antique, and as a preserved piece of architectural art. Succinctly stated: if you over clean or polish your hardware, you are washing away its desirability and value.

After years of experimentation, I have found there are methods to restore that piece of hardware that has been over polished, altered, or exposed to natural elements such as water or fire. My experience has allowed me to restore or at the very least, greatly improve, the beauty of hardware that falls to the question, *is it worth saving?* The time and effort to salvage or restore a piece of hardware should be considered when asking yourself this question. Hours can be spent on cleaning and restoration. If the piece in question is rare then it is certainly worth the endeavor, but if more common, the time needed may not be worthy of the piece. Of course, even the most common, ordinary item can be worth salvaging or restoring when it is either a loved collectors piece or being utilized to restore a home.

So what would be an excellent method of cleaning the desired hardware? A superior technique utilizing a common household product is the surprising answer. **Arm and Hammer** (c) *Super Washing Soda* makes the best cleaning product for cleaning and restoring antique hardware. This simple laundry booster can be found easily in the marketplace, and is amazing at removing grime, sludge and paint from the most intricate piece of hardware, to the simple, pleasing porcelain knob. It comes in powder form and is the strongest, yet safest chemical product that will effectively work on 95% of all hardware items. It is effective not only for brass or bronze, but also for cast iron. Benefits include being inexpensive, minimal to no smell, tolerated by most skin types (those with skin conditions are always advised to wear gloves) and non-toxic allowing the used solution to be washed down the household drain. Furthermore, unlike other stripping solutions or methods, using the product indoors is safe. It is always advised to use any product in a ventilated space, particularly for those with breathing conditions. The final and best reason to use the *Washing Soda* is that it allows the hardware’s patina to be preserved.



Utilizing this cleaning product is simple and straightforward. A stainless steel pot (the common household kind), *Washing Soda*, a toothbrush-sized brass bristle brush and hot tap water is all you need. If cleaning cast iron, a toothbrush-sized steel bristle brush can be utilized, but be aware; if used on the bronze or brass it will thoroughly scar the piece undergoing cleaning. To begin, add 1-2 cups of washing soda to the pot (depending upon amount of hardware to clean) and fill pot with **hot** water, stirring to dissolve the powder while filling (I use one of the brushes to stir). When filled and thoroughly mixed, gently place the piece(s) of hardware to be cleaned into the hot solution and allow to cool before cleaning. If the item(s) is greatly soiled and certainly for painted items, allow to sit overnight before cleaning. It is suggested that you practice the time needed to soak on a few pieces of lesser hardware to gain experience on this method. If the hardware item has an original blackened background intact, it is recommended to soak for a shorter period of time to retain this original finishing feature. My experience allows me to clean 50+ items at a time by leaving the pieces in the solution overnight, saving the items with light soiling or

those with the original blackened background to be soaked at a different time for a shorter period, sometimes only 30 seconds-3 minutes.

I begin the cleaning process by lightly scrubbing with a brush under warm running water. Now and then, a little more scrubbing is in order: however, if the hardware piece is greatly soiled, you may need to soak for a second or even a third time. Once cleaned, it is very important to rinse all the solution from the item. Plates are simply washed off with fresh hot water, but knobs will require a rinsing that includes filling them with fresh hot water 5-6 times and drained thoroughly to ensure that all the solution is removed from the inside as well as the outside of the knob. Once drained, the knob should be dried with a towel. Once completely dried, spraying the clean and dried items with WD-40(c) aids in the patination process and restores luster and ensures the complete drying of the hardware. Since it is an oil based product, a second wiping with a dry, clean cloth or rag will bring out the original color and show the details in crisp, clear relief. This is the method I have used on the majority of my hardware items. The Mallory-Wheeler grapes knob along with the Illinois State Capitol door plate pictured here were both cleaned and restored this method.

A second method to clean hardware is saved for the worst case piece: the item that is so severe that a harsher chemical is required. The Russell & Erwin *Christesen* doorplate pictured here was purchased at an ADCA convention from Steve Hannum. It originally came from Richard Hubbard's collection that had sadly gone through a house fire. The doorplate was charred and covered with the melted plastic from the tub in which it was stored. The first method was attempted three different times but with little success. The plate being a rare and seldom available piece met the time criteria of "worth saving".



I began the cleaning and restoration process by first working on the removal of melted plastic from the face of the plate. This alone required several painstaking hours of methodical debris removal using a mechanic's pick with the utmost care to ensure the plate was not scratched. Once free of the plastic residue, the plate was soaked for 24 hours in another useful household product, *sudsy ammonia*. Using this cleaning method does require cleaning outside in an open, well ventilated area as the ammonia fumes can be toxic. It is best to use with gloves and a mask, even in a ventilated area. Although clearly more toxic, this product for cleaning can save an item that otherwise would be lost. I only utilize this method when there is no other choice.

After soaking the badly damaged plate for 24 hours, I soaked the now cleaned plate in clean water for a few minutes to remove any and all remaining ammonia residue. Then, using the small brass brush, I did a final cleaning using clean, warm running water. This product not only removed the remaining debris, it also removed the patina leaving me with a bright, gleaming plate. My next goal was to restore the plate's patina. To accomplish this, I used a patinating product that I bought years ago which allowed me to dip the plate into a solution thereby restoring the color to be closer to the original lost in the fire and subsequent cleaning process. A variety of such products are offered today by Metalliferous (search for "patina") and Jax Chemicals (search "jax patina"). Although using this method and aiding the aging process utilizing chemicals is less than ideal to me, I have found that using sudsy ammonia seems to alter the metal's ability to react and naturally age to the rich, antique patina

prized in an undamaged piece. Natural patination is always to be desired unless no other options are available to save a rare and valuable item. Natural patination is the final topic for cleaning hardware to address.

When faced with an over-polished, gleaming item of hardware or one that is severely pitted from years of industrial pollution, the challenge becomes *how* to restore the item without causing more loss of the design. There are two different methods to begin this restoration, but both require the right piece to achieve the best results. The first method was written about by Len Blumin in the TDC no. 69. In the article entitled "Sandpapering of Doorknobs???", Blumin discusses how severe pitting or even the small ding can be sanded away. This is the most likely method used by early factory workers in the finishing stages of hardware production. This is effective on flat domed knobs or plates, but when evaluating an over-polished piece so severe that the polish is evident on the background of the design, sandpapering will not work. You will recognize this type of polishing because it will

appear as if water is sitting in the background of the design. The only way I have found to improve the appearance of the item with the least amount of damage is to glass bead the entire piece of hardware. In utilizing glass beading, the polishing will be effectively removed from the design with very minor pitting to the metal during the process. Once this is complete, the foreground can then be sandpapered using fine wet/dry sandpaper to smooth the pitting caused by beading. The end result will leave the piece with a rough finish to the background and the foreground design will appear as new. Both the sanding and beading methods should only be used as a last resort for a badly damaged item, but be aware that the original patina will be entirely removed.



The remedy to the stripping of patina during the sanding or beading process is to re-tone the metal. In the restoration of the “*Christesen*” plate it was discussed how the toning or patination process was accomplished using a chemical product. The alternative to a chemical processing is to consider a more natural process. Patina is formed over time from the natural corrosion that occurs based upon the metal composition that happens with use of the item. Imagine a doorknob: every hand that touches to open or close it provides a transference of natural oils and

moisture that aids in the patination or aging of the metals appearance. The process is similar to the tarnishing of silver, or the verde found on the copper. The process unfortunately takes time; lots of time. To hasten the natural process of patination, there is a simple trick of using water and a clean paper towel to bring about the onset of patina. Place the clean piece of hardware on a flat surface and cover with a dampened paper towel. The moisture in the towel will transfer onto the item and begin the patination process. Make sure the paper towel is just dampened, not wet. Allow the towel to completely dry and then repeat the process. This will take considerable time, 1-4 weeks, but the results are remarkable and the patina restored will be natural. With patience you will have beautiful results, and since a job worth doing is a job worth doing well, the effort put into proper restoration of the hardware is worth doing well.

Although all collectors strive to pick the perfect, new-old, never used antique hardware piece, we know that the reality is quite different. Most of the treasures we find are in fact, greatly in need of cleaning and or restoration. The best approach is the least invasive approach when possible and when more is required, it is hoped that the various methods described here will assist in providing the collector the best possible ways to clean and restore hardware to preserve not only the value, but the beauty of an art long past.

2013 ADCA Convention

This Year's Theme: Iron and Glass

July 25, 26, and 27, 2013.

Wyndham University Center

Pittsburgh, PA

For reservations call 412-682-6200

You will be receiving a Convention Packet in the mail soon.

Our Business Members

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