The Doorknob Collector

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Doorknob Attachment Solutions: A means of Identifying Makers

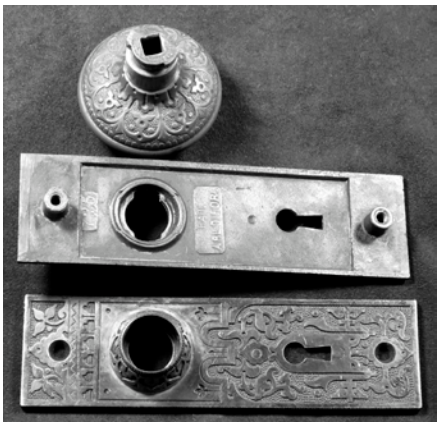
By Steve Hannum

When a person turns a doorknob and it seems to rattle or come off, that person is annoyed or angry. From the earliest doorknobs the makers have tried to prevent this from happening. From 1850 to 1900 more than 100 patents were issued for different ways to attach a doorknob to its spindle. However, very few of them made it into wide use. This article offers a review of those doorknobs which can be shown to have been produced and can be associated with a particular maker, thus providing a way to identify doorknobs by the means of attachment.

Maud Eastwood in *Antique Builders' Hardware* devoted several pages to the subject of doorknob attachment. Her article "Hold That Knob" in *The Antique Doorknob Collector* Number 102 also identified makers but it concentrated on wooden knobs.

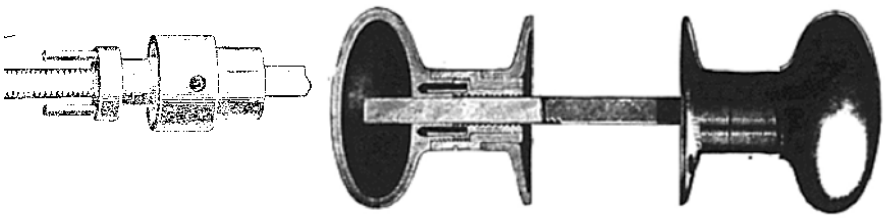
The great majority of knobs made in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used the simple screw to hold a square spindle with tapped holes. Washers were used to fill any the gap left between the end of the stem of the doorknob and the face of the escutcheon. The biggest makers of builders' hardware followed this path but did offer alternatives.

The most commonly seen alternative is the Yale & Towne "Triplex" spindle. As the name suggests the spindle is made of three pieces. The corresponding knob has a threaded hole. The screw is used to force the upper piece down so as to spread the spindle and so hold the knob in place. The triplex spindle is held in the exterior knob by a steel pin. The square hole in the knob that receives the triplex spindle will have a small ridge matching the end of the spindle as noted in the picture above.

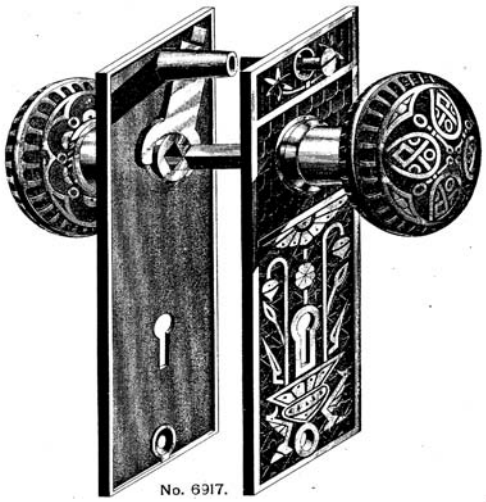


Russell & Erwin in their 1887 catalog offered "Screwless Door Knobs and Escutcheons Combined" (left). These knobs can be recognized by the pair of tabs on the end of the stem. These tabs passed through corresponding holes in the escutcheons. When the knob was turned the tabs prevented the knob from being removed. When installed the lock prevented turning enough to return the tabs to the removal position. The escutcheons were designed with long screws to pass

Inside

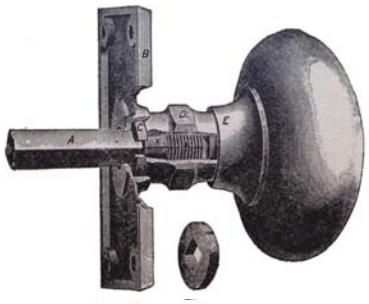


through the door to tapped holes in the outer escutcheon. The escutcheon shown is the one most widely used. This design was based on an 1885 patent by H.E. Russell, Jr. The 1897 Russell & Erwin catalog showed a different screwless doorknob. There are three components to the system, the knob with threaded stem, an inner sleeve with pins and an outer sleeve. The inner sleeve is threaded on to the spindle and holds the two sleeves against the rose. When the pins are lined up with the sides of the spindle the knob is slid on. The outer sleeve is used to draw the knob tight.

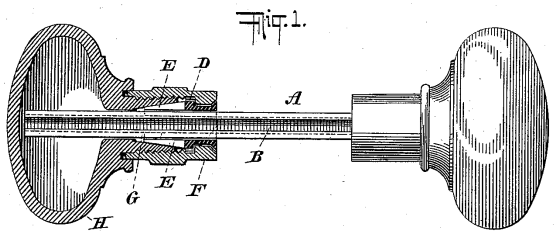


The 1890 Norwalk Lock catalog also offered a screwless doorknob. The design was based on the 1886 patent by B.F. Libby. The knob is held in place by a securing fork (left) behind the rose or escutcheon. The knobs can be recognized by the annular groove near the end of the stem. The escutcheons used would not have a bearing surface inside the sleeve receiving the stem of the knob.

The 1893 Yale & Towne catalog offered the "Yale Screwless Clamp" attachment for their cast knobs. The shank of the knob was split and tapered.(below) An external nut was tightened to clamp the knob to the spindle.



In their 1895 catalog Corbin offered knobs with a similar external nut. It was based on patent No. 533839 as shown in figure 1 below.



In this case an inner sleeve, tapered and split at one end, is slid over a spindle with longitudinal slots on each face. The tightening outer nut or thimble *F* (above) forces the split ends of the inner sleeve into the channels of the spindle holding the knob in place.

Sargent followed with patent No. 539639 for its version. In this case the shank had a slot to hold a small tapered dog (E', Fig. 2). When the external sleeve was tightened the dog would bite into the spindle holding the knob in place.

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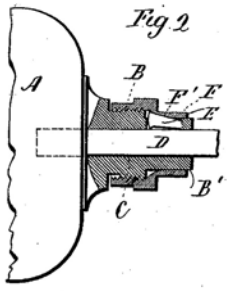


A later Sargent screwless knob was based on the J.H. Shaw patent of 1898. In this case the stem from the knob and held in place by an outer sleeve. The adjustment was made by an inter nut screwed on a square spindle. In use the outer knob with attached spindle was put through the door and the knob stem and outer nut slid on to it. The inner nut was used to draw the stem up to the rose. The knob with it square hole was slid on and the outer nut screwed to it. Sargent made the knob in two styles, B and C. Both were shown as late as 1910 and model C offered as late as 1926.

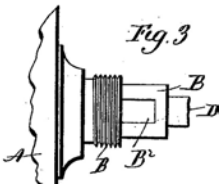
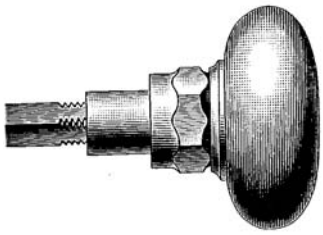
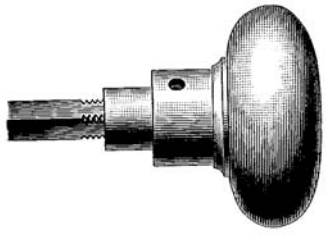


Fig.3 is an illustration of the inside of Models B and C on right

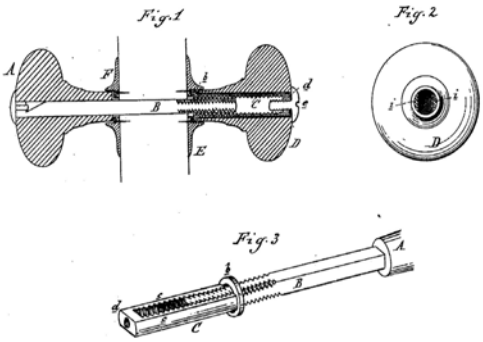


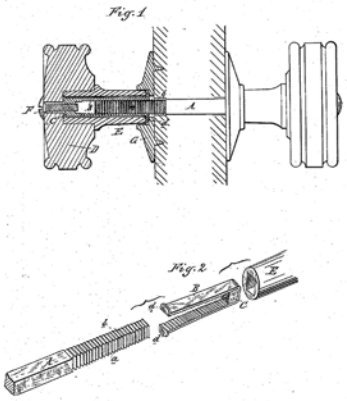
Model B. Inside Knob



Model C. Inside Knob

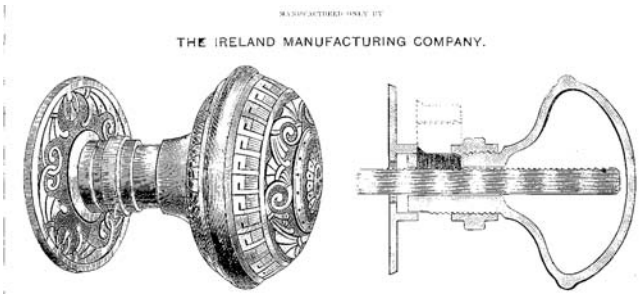
Another approach taken by some was to make adjustment by means of a screw through the end of the knob. The patent of W.H. Gonne is an example. This approach used a square spindle, fixed in one knob and threads cut into the corners of the other end. A thimble like piece (Fig. 3, right) was screwed to the other end. In use this piece was screwed on the spindle extending through the door and drawing the outer knob into position. The inner knob was slid over and held in place by a screw though the face of the knob. A knob of this style is pictured on page 64 of *The Antique Doorknob*; possibly made by the Union Doorknob Company.



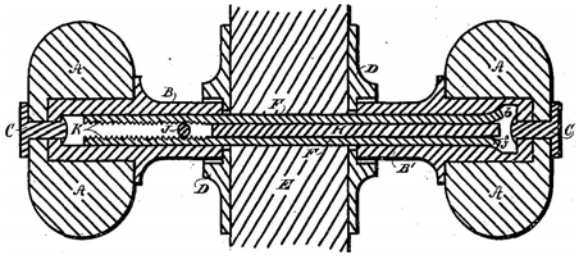


O.E. Hidden was assigned part of the above Gonne patent. He later patented what might be considered a variation of the Gonne idea. (see pictures on left) The thimble became a serrated yoke and the spindle also serrated. The stem of the knob is made rectangular to receive the yoke and spindle. Once again, in use the yoke is slid over the spindle to make adjustment and the inside knob slid over the yoke pinching it against the spindle. The whole system held in place by a screw in the face of the knob. Doorknobs with this style were advertised as being made by the Union Doorknob Company of Detroit, Michigan. Ireland Manufacturing Company of Cincinnati, OH offered wooden knobs using this attachment in their 1888 catalog as "Union Patent" doorknobs.

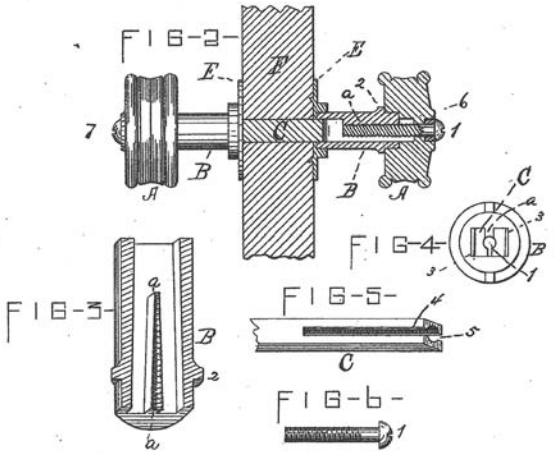
In the same catalog, Ireland also offered the Morris Patent doorknob. The knob had a threaded stem and a slot into which was placed a gib with a serrated bottom. A nut held the gib against the serrated spindle so the knob could not be removed.



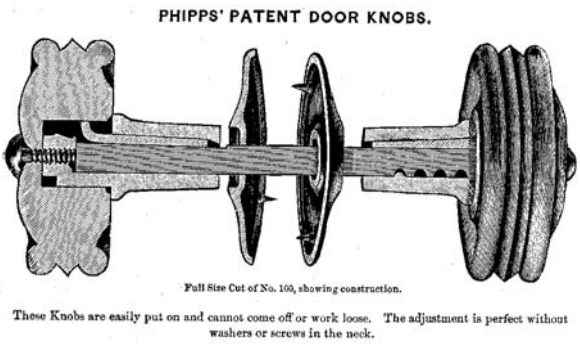
W.H. Gonne in 1884 patented another knob attachment system. The spindle was made of two flat plates bent on one end. These were held fast in one knob with third piece. The adjustment end was serrated. A metal pin was used to spread the plates and firmly hold the knob. A cross section of this knob is shown on the top of page 4. The Climax Door Knob Company of Detroit sold these knobs..



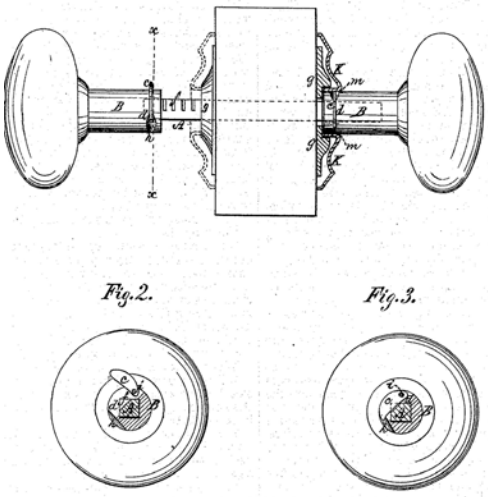
Another spindle through the knob system was sold by the Hollenbeck Doorknob Company (see TDC No. 165). In this case the end of the spindle was split and threaded. The inside of the stem of the knob had a ridge that slid into the spindle groove. (see fig. 2-5 on right) Once the knob was slid to the proper depth the screw was inserted which spread the spindle holding it tight.



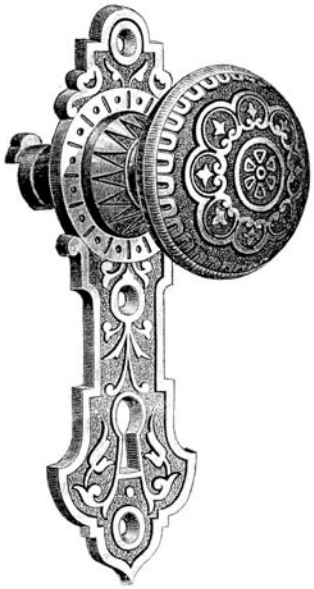
E.L. Phipps was associated with the Milford Door Knob Company of Milford, Michigan. Two Detroit hardware companies, T.W. Root Hardware and Buhl, Sons & Company sold Phipps Patent Doorknobs. In this system the major adjustment was made in the outer knob by sliding the spindle over the inner bump in the stem. The spindle was locked place with a wedge. The stem of the inner knob was brought into place and locked with another wedge and the knob held by a screw.



Two companies produced doorknobs using slotted spindles. Clark Manufacturing Company of Buffalo, New York sold knobs based on the patent of E.M. Mix and J.E. Mix. The knob has a latch hinged in a transverse slot near the end of the shank, which, when closed enters one of a series of slots cut into the corner of the spindle.(see figures below) To complete the system a two-part rose is used. The knob is seated against the inter rose and the outer rose covers the latch to prevent it opening.

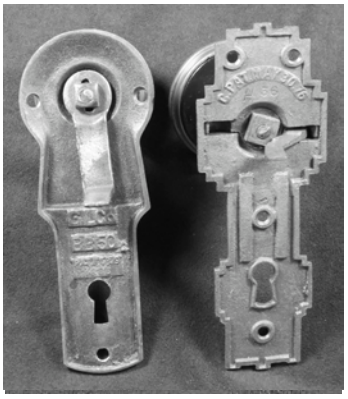


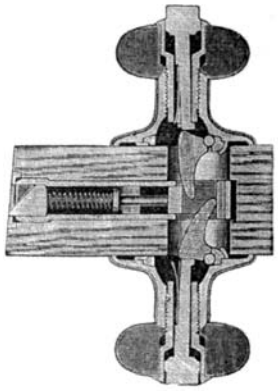
The Schroder Lock Company of Cincinnati also made knobs with attachments using a spindle with slots. In this case the slots were cut into the sides of the spindle. A "U" shaped piece was pushed through a slot in the stem of the knob and around the spindle. In the picture below left the locking U piece has been raised in the stem of the knob and the slots in the spindle are shown.



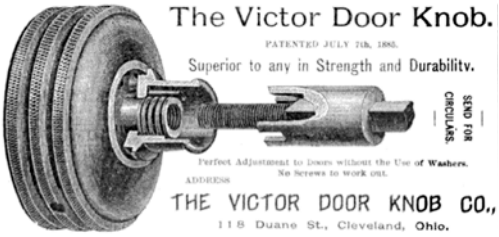
Milton and Sidney Niles took a completely different approach to the attachment issue. The history of their knobs and of the Chicago Hardware Manufacturing Company can be found in several earlier *Doorknob Collector* articles by Art Paholke and Ray Nemec (see TDC Nos. 54, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, & 74). For our purposes the two pictures illustrate both the beauty of the hardware and the unique knob stem. The stem of the knob extends through the escutcheon and into the lock itself. The lock holds the knob in place and any adjustment due to door thickness is accomplished by sliding the escutcheon along the stem of the knob.

Another completely different approach was Prouty's Rigid Door Knob made by the New England Butt Company, Providence, RI. As the name implies the knob did not turn. The latch was operated by pushing a button at the center of the knob face. The figure (far right) shows a cross section of the knobs and lock as installed. The lower button being pushed has caused a finger to retract the latch bolt to be retracted. Knobs made by the Gilbert Lock Company, Newark, NJ were attached to their escutcheon (shown near right). Most commonly the knob did not turn but actuated the lock by means of a trigger at the side of the stem. The end of the trigger is seen on the right hand knob. However, Gilbert also made a turn-able knob for use with their locks. In that case an L shaped bracket was attached to the end of the knob. The end of the bracket was inserted into the lock to retract the latch bolt.





The Victor Door Knob Company of Cleveland, OH offered doorknobs and roses that could be installed without screws. The rose had prongs which held it in place. The spindle was fixed to the knob on one end and threaded on the other. The stem of the other knob had a sleeve providing the connection between the knob and the stem. A spring held the sleeve against the knob. When the sleeve was pushed away from the knob it was free to move on the threads of the spindle making for a fine adjustment. The patent date referred to in the ad, right, was that of a patent by Henry J. P. Whipple of Cleveland, Ohio.



Frank Hollenbeck produced a similar type of attachment (shown at left). In this case the nut is held in place by a spring and is exposed. It is based on patent No. 407661.

Given the many patents issued, there are probably other knobs out there with other attachments styles. But these are the ones I have found in catalogs, advertisements or by example. All of the patents are available on Google Patents or at the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

Patents referred to in this article:

H.E. Russell, Jr., No. 326920, September 22, 1885 Knob Attachment
B.F. Libby, No. 333,490, April 6, 1886 Knob Attachment
C.O. Case, No. 533,839, February 5, 1895 Knob Attachment
A.A. Page, No. 539,639, May 21, 1895 Knob Attachment
J.H. Shaw, No. 599,363, February 22, 1898 Knob Attachment
W.H. Gonne, No. 241,967, May 24, 1881 Knob Attachment
O.M. Hidden, No. 255,858, April 4, 1882 Knob Attachment
J.B. Morris, No. 283,718, August 21, 1883 Knob Attachment
W.H. Gonne, No. 291,712, January 8,1884 Knob Attachment
F.A. Hollenbeck, No. 348,494, August 31, 1886 Knob Attachment
E.L. Phipps, No. 273,763, March 13, 1883 Knob Attachment
E.M. Mix & J.E. Mix, No. 127,089, May 21, 1872 Improvement in Attaching Knobs to their Spindles
O.H. Gilbert, No. 177,933, May 30, 1876 Door-Latch
O.H. Gilbert, No. 335,914, February 9, 1886 Latch Operating Device
H.J.P. Whipple, No. 321,927, July 7, 1865 Knob Attachment
J.H. Shaw, No. 599,363, February 22, 1898 Knob Attachment
F.A. Hollenbeck, No. 407,661, July 23, 1889 Knob Attachment

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"Emblematics Identified"

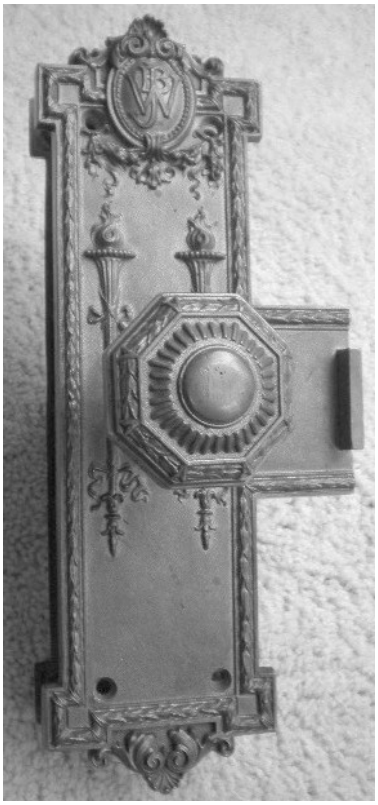
By Rich Kennedy

The Wilson Building

Looking in local antique shops I came across this fantastic piece of hardware. My curiosity got me doing some research on it. Our emblematic expert, Paul Woodfin, led me to Dallas, TX and the Wilson Building. The building was designed by Sanguinet & Staats for Fort Worth and was built by a Canadian, **J.B. Wilson**.

The building was completed in 1904 and remained the tallest building in Dallas until 1909. The Wilson Building was in the shape of an "E" with rounded corners. "The building contained nine elevators: two for the department store and seven for office tenants. Among its many luxuries, it was connected to a 1500 foot deep artesian well and contained two telegraph offices." [Wikipedia] In 1911 a 12-story addition was completed and used as a retail store by Titche-Goettinger where they were the prime tenant until 1929. This addition to the building and its success changed the retail center of the city. Because of the draw at this location Neiman Marcus built their flagship store across the street.

When Titche-Goettinger moved to a different location, W.A. Green Department Store moved into that tower space and H.L. Green Variety Store moved into the lower floors of the original building. The department store moved and the H.L. Green Variety Store expanded to fill the space. It was here that their lunch counter became the first to be integrated in Dallas in the 1960s.



In 1979 the Wilson Building was added to the Nation Register of Historic Places. Other interesting facts are that the building was owned by actress, Pia Zadora for several years. Eventually the City of Dallas bought the building for $3.4 million in 1999. Since then it has be converted into 143 loft apartments complete with hardwood floors and rooftop terraces. Today the building is owned by Forest City Enterprises and has become part of the Mercantile Place on Main development.

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The Doorknob Collector
Co-editors: Allen Joslyn,
Phone (973) 783-9411
Email: ajoslyn@comcast.net
Faye Kennedy
Email: adcaoffice@aol.com
Web Site: AntiqueDoorknobs.org

Membership Office: Faye Kennedy
ADCA
PO Box 803
Hackettstown, NJ 07840
Email: adcaoffice@aol.com
Phone: 908-684-5253
General Questions
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Officers	**Email Addresses:**
President: Allen Joslyn	ajoslyn@comcast.net
Vice President: Steve Rowe	4narowe@sbcglobal.net
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