

The Doorknob Collector

Number 198

July-August 2016

A Publication of The Antique Doorknob Collectors of America

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

HAMILTON! AND NOT THE BROADWAY PLAY

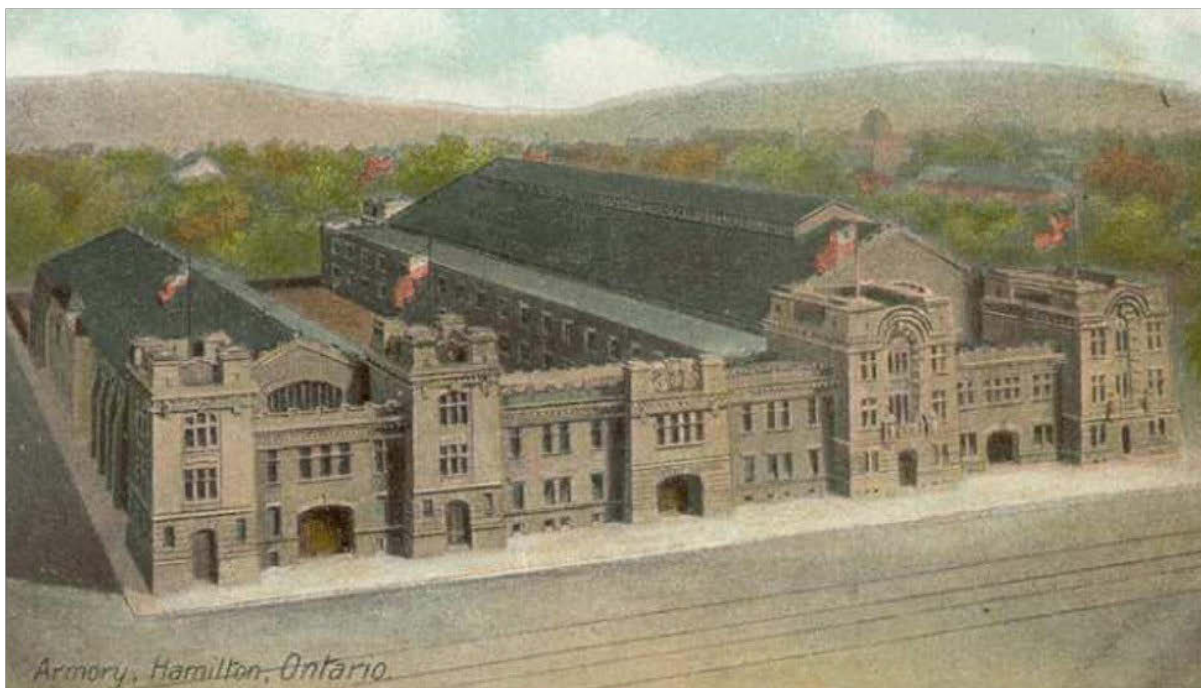
BY PAUL WOODFIN

On Memorial Day I discovered that an antique hardware store in Toronto had started posting photos of some of their hardware on Flickr. I looked up their website (www.thedoorstore.ca) and sent an e-mail asking if they might have any emblematic doorknobs for sale. The owner, Sam Mirshak, responded to say that he was out of town but would let me know once he got back to the shop. A few days later I received an e-mail with photos of knobs from the King Edward Hotel (Toronto) and Hotel Jefferson (St. Louis), the ID for the latter one he did not know. He asked how I knew where it was from and so I sent an e-mail about the club and how I enjoy identifying from where emblematic doorknobs originally came. The next day I received another e-mail with two photos of knobs which were new discoveries for me.

His daughters did not want him to sell them, but I had a new challenge. I Googled “maple leaf 13” and came up with nothing. I forwarded the left knob to ADCA member Robert McNutt up in Vancouver, thinking that a Canadian might have seen it before, and he had not. But he thought it might be military in origin. Again I Googled “13 armory” trying to come up with a possible building and came up empty. I discovered



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that Canadians spell the word “armoury” and found a few lists of historic armouries in Canada, but the information on the units was names like the “Royal Hamilton Light Infantry” and not numbers.

I then did a search on eBay to maybe find a pin from the unit, and I found a listing for a pin with the maple leaf and XIII just like the door-knob listed as the “13th Regiment”. After more searches I discovered I should be looking for the “13th Battalion” which is now called the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry. That led me to the James Street Armoury in Hamilton, Ontario where the RHLI are still based. Sure enough, I found a photo on Flickr of the maple leaf and XIII in stone on the building’s exterior, so I knew this was the origin. The northern part of the Armoury was built in 1888 to designs by Henry James of the Department of Militia & Defence, with a larger addition completed in 1908, designed by Hamilton architects Steward & Whitton.

When I looked at the Flickr Album which contained the maple leaf and XIII in stone, I found the absolute answer for both knobs. During an Open House a photographer documented basically everything about this armoury, including photos of both of these knobs which are still used in this building.

The other knob turns out to be for the 91st Regiment which is now known as the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. There is also a stone tablet of the crown, lion, and 91 on the armoury’s exterior. The 1908 building was built to serve both groups and the doorknob designs are featured even in the iron stair railings. The Armoury (shown above, in a postcard) continues in use today by the modern versions of these units as part of Canada’s Reserve Forces, and is a Federal Heritage Building and National Historic Site.

The Doorknob Collector ©



Published six times a year by
**Antique Doorknob Collectors of America,
Inc**

P.O. Box 803,
Hackettstown, NJ
07840

Annual Membership in US \$25.00
age 18 or younger US\$10.00
Foreign rates on request.

Founded Sept 1981, the **Antique Doorknob Collectors of America** is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization devoted to the study and preservation of ornamental hardware.

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Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/-jm/albums/72157630053916090>

The Nashua Lock Company and Its Designer, William E. Sparks

By Allen S. Joslyn

Nashua began in 1834, and for many years it produced functional, but uninteresting, hardware, mostly locks. It issued a catalogue in 1866 and gradually added other hardware. By 1869 it was said to produce 50 styles of knobs. Its 1872 catalogue included very little in the way of designs. It put out a catalogue in 1879 with a few nice designs and dew-drop glass knobs. It issued another catalogue in 1882, of uncertain size.

Fast forward to 1884 when William E. Sparks of New Britain took out Design Patent 15,012 for a highly decorated hinge, assigned to the Nashua Lock Company. It is illustrated here. He did not claim a patent on the design, but on the angular knuckle. It is the only design patent ever assigned to Nashua. In 1886 Nashua issued a 497 page catalogue full of highly decorated aesthetic hardware, and it is for that hardware Nashua is remembered.

What we know about Sparks is that he was born in 1840 and is listed in the 1860 census as a “lock maker”. He served in the Civil War, and lived in New Haven from 1866 through 1876, working for Sargent most of the time.

From 1877-1883 Sparks lived in New Britain, taking out patents mostly assigned to Corbin, but not all. After Sparks had obtained a patent in January, 1883 which had been assigned to Corbin, in March, 1883 he received a patent which he had assigned to R & E, followed in June 1883 with a patent assigned to Corbin. In 1884 he also obtained a patent, assigned to Nashua, for a name and drop-letter plate, as well as the hinge design patent. This pattern suggests that Sparks was an independent artisan, rather than a full time employee of Corbin. At that time, manufacturers in New Britain tended to sub-contract work out to independent artisans or groups of workers; later they would hire them as employees.. And the Nashua patents of 1884 describe him as a resident of New Britain, so he did not move there.

He moved back to New Haven by 1885 and obtained patents assigned to Sargent.

The 1880 New Britain Directory (and the census of that year) describe him as a “pattern maker”. They made masters of objects from which, eventually the final products were cast. If you wanted designs on your cast products, those were the guys would carve it. He did obtain some other patents showing designs (D5345, D5346, D5495, 123,301, and 242568). So why would Nashua hire an extra designer when the “pattern maker” it had hired could produce such exquisite designs as are illustrated on the Nashua hinge? Obviously, he spent a lot of time thinking about locks, and sash

locks, which most of his useful inventions relate to. By 1910 census he was still in New Haven and the census describes him as an “inventor”, which he surely was. He died in 1929.

So that is all we know about Mr. Sparks but – in my view - he was undoubtedly responsible for Nashua’s outstanding line of aesthetic hardware, as well – though he got patents primarily on locks and fasteners – and some designs of other New Britain manufacturers, Corbin and R&E, and of Sargent. OK, a single design patent may not be the strongest support for the attribution, but it fits.

So what became of Nashua? It By 1886 it was closely aligned with (probably dependent on) Lockwood Manufacturing Co. – indeed its magnificent catalogue of that year was issued under its name and Lockwood’s. Lockwood issued its own separate catalogue in that year (also listing Nashua as a proprietor) which featured its “broken leaf” pattern but not Nashua’s designs. In 1889 Lockwood purchased Nashua (except for its foundry), and it continued on into the end of the next century. But clearly in the mid-1880s someone thought that a fancy line of aesthetic hardware could turn Nashua around, but whether it was Nashua’s management (in a downward spiral) or Lockwood’s, will remain unknown..

Thanks To:

Pat Watson of the New Britain Public Library; Karen Winslow Hudkins of the New Britain Industrial Museum; Marita Klements of the Nashua Public Library; John Roberts of the ADCA

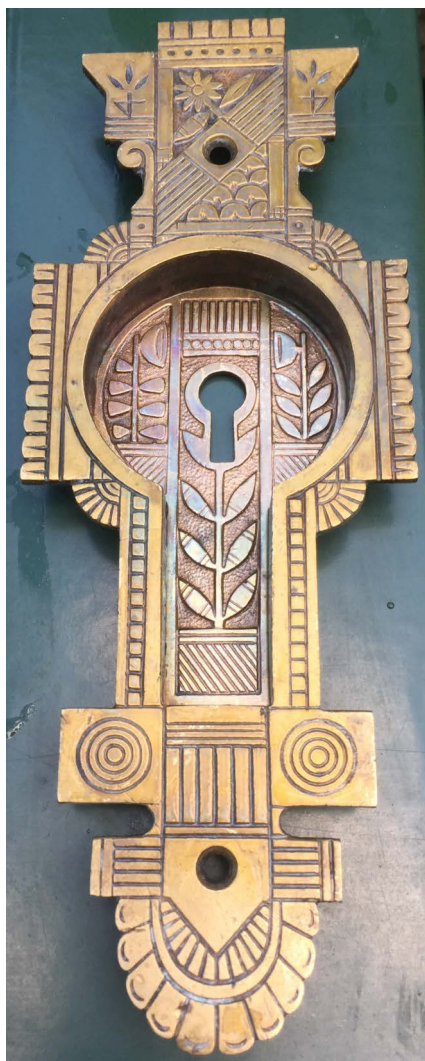
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Examples of Nashua Hardware.
Note the owl on the right plate
and on the key



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