



The Doorknob Collector

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A Publication of The Antique Doorknob Collectors of America

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

“THE SECOND LARGEST HARDWARE CENTER OF THE U.S.” – READING, PA.

PART TWO

BY ALLEN JOSLYN

Two other well-known firms made decorative builders' hardware in Reading.

Keystone Hardware

Keystone grew out of Jones, Oakes & Co. and predecessor partnerships. In January, 1876, the Reading Times reported an “Important Business Change”, that the Jones Oakes & Co. had transferred all its land, machinery, fixtures, stock, etc. to a new partnership, the Keystone Hardware Manufacturing Company, which it was expected would employ 125 workers and run at full capacity for the next several months, and that the demand for hardware would increase. This was not as much a change as might appear. Under classic partnership law, a partnership itself had hardly any independent existence but was simply several persons doing business under a partnership name. If a partner withdrew, the partnership disappeared and the remaining partners formed a new one. In this case, one of the partners withdrew and the new partnership was Keystone. At the same time, “one of Philadelphia's most successful businessmen”, one Clement M. Biddle, joined the firm, doubtlessly bringing with him new capital. A fair inference was that he was instrumental in Keystone expanding into builders' hardware.

Keystone exhibited at Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition in 1876, and it was estimated that over 300 people from Reading and Berks County visited it daily. By April 1877, “house building and house furnishing hardware are being turned out at present [at Keystone] in larger quantities than any other kind of goods.”

In May, 1877, William Oakes, superintendent of Keystone, withdrew to become superintendent of the Indiana State Penitentiary. This was not as radical change of careers as it sounds, since he was becoming a member of another hardware company, The Terin Gaff Manufacturing Company of Cincinnati, which had leased, in effect,



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Look for your Convention packet in your mailbox around April 1.



the labor of the convicts, numbering five hundred, for five years. The penitentiary housed a large manufacturing facility where the convicts could labor. All in all, a neat way to avoid having to deal with a pesky labor force (it may be recalled 1877 was the year of a nationwide strike movement and that 2 months after Mr. Oakes headed West, there was the massacre at a bridge in Reading).

Meanwhile, at Keystone matters were not going well. At the end of 1877 and beginning of 1878, its hardware manufacturing facilities were idle, and in February, 1878 they were leased to Reading Hardware. Reading Hardware put up a new warehouse and other improvements and operated the works. In 1883, however, Reading Hardware had moved to new

facilities and Keystone put its old factory up for sale. (It is not known whether Keystone was itself owned by Reading Hardware by that point or was still independent, if a shell).

Was this the end of Keystone? Well, not of its name. As discussed in the last TDC, in 1903 Reading Hardware tried to establish a "Pennsylvania Hardware", but was dissuaded from doing so by the possibility of "confusion" with Penn Hardware (which, presumably, was exactly the point). So it named the new company "Keystone Hardware Company", but it was under common ownership. The plan was to erect new buildings with modern machinery, which would result in Reading Hardware having "one of the largest plants in the country, employing over 2,200 people." Reading Hardware was "sending its products throughout America, but it has decided to invade the foreign markets." A holding company, the Consolidated Hardware Mfg. Company, was organized as a holding company for Reading and Keystone in 1908. In 1910 a reorganization of Reading Hardware was announced as a great step forward (the accounts do not explain why), which eventually led to a tax decision in 1927, Reading Hardware Company v. Commissioner, 7 B.T.A. 337, to which anyone sufficiently curious (if any there be) is referred. In 1918 Keystone was dissolved.

So the first Keystone Hardware barely lasted two years as an independent producer. It issued one catalogue (available from the Archives). It did not offer a broad line of decorative hardware, but it did offer some handsome store door handles, a few door knobs and some drawer pulls.

The Reading Hardware Company

This was the best-known of the Reading manufacturers of builders' hardware. It started as a blacksmith shop in 1851, and in 1852 reportedly began producing builders' hardware, "locks, bolts, fasteners, latches, etc." – utilitarian stuff, not ornate. In 1872 the name of the enterprise was changed to Reading Hardware Company and it charged into decorative hardware. It produced nine catalogues (avail-

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able from the Archives) of beautiful hardware. By 1895 its facilities covered five acres and it had nearly 1,000 employees. Eventually it had 1,500 employees, branch offices in the biggest cities and abroad, and was featured in all important expositions. Its plants occupied a large part of Reading by the Schuylkill river, where many still stand.

In 1886 the greater part of its plant was destroyed by fire but rapidly rebuilt. It purchased the defunct Manhattan Hardware Company of Reading, in order to have somewhere to temporarily locate, according to the local newspaper. The Nomination for the National Register of Historic Buildings says that purchase greatly increased its line of builders' hardware. Be that as it may, in 1920s it added buildings of reinforced concrete. One was a 150,000 square foot, seven story building with a curious configuration. The National Register Nomination reports that:

“the brass foundry was on the sky-lit seventh floor, the iron foundries were the sixth and fifth floors, machine shops were on the fourth and third floors (with a clum room on the fourth floor), stock in process was stored on the second floor, and coal, coke and sand was stored on the first floor. This provided for a unique vertical production process. The raw materials, sand, pig iron, coke, limestone and brass ingots were brought into the first floor by railroad car and lifted to the top floor by elevator, where they found their way down throughout the manufacturing process again to the first floor where they were shipped out by railroad car as beautiful, finished hardware products.”

Lock making was a big part of Reading's production, but it was not done on any production line. The required parts were delivered to each lock-maker, who made the complete lock, start to finish. As an article in 1961 of old-timers' recollections recounted,

“Polishers took on the ornamental work after the grinders left off, and nursed the refractory metal until it shined and sparkled. No pits or sandholes, or imperfections of the most minor sort were allowed; polished brass went out from “The Hardware” without blemish or without flaw. If it would not ‘polish out’ it was thrown back into the pot and remelted.”

“The workmen produced goods of beauty, strength and longevity. A standard mortise lock, for instance, was expected to last not a man's lifetime, but the lifetime of the house, and to cause no trouble during all that time.”

“The price of this sturdiness was that the intricate and involved parts of the locks did not come together in perfect, or even close, fit. No two lock ‘hubs’ would be alike out of a day's run of many thousand hub castings. That is where the lockmaker took over with his skill, experience and quick judgment. He stood at the bench with trays of hundreds of parts around him. Into each cast iron case he would set the cast iron parts, trying each for size and fit as he worked. He would file a little on one, grind a little on another – fuss and file and fit. But his eyes recognized with sureness, and his fingers flew with deftness, as part by part fell into place and the lock swiftly took on shape and form. Suddenly the cover was snapped on; a few screws spun in, and a knob inserted to try the ‘action’.”

“At ‘the Hardware’ [Reading Hardware's nickname] there were scores of these lockmakers.



D-12400 Elaine



B-21400 Columbian

They spent years learning their trade. There were no ‘inspectors’. The lockmakers inspected their own work.”

“The buildings they worked in reflected the nature of their work. The benches were in front of windows, to take advantage of natural light. Component parts were brought to them on push-carts, in racks of trays. What the efficiency experts call ‘work flow’ did not have to be horizontal. Vertical was just as good, so the buildings were built up and down.”

“The buildings they worked in reflected the nature of their work. The benches were in front of windows, to take advantage of natural light. Component parts were brought to them on push-carts, in ranks of trays, or in castored barrels. Each man made his locks complete, so there were no assembly lines or conveyors. What the efficiency experts call ‘work flow’ did not have to be horizontal. Vertical was just as good, so the buildings were built up and down.”

As might be expected this method of manufacture of cast brass or iron locks proved too expensive and the locks too expensive to install. and was eventually replaced by production lines.

So the years went by and Reading continued to produce outstanding hardware, But styles changed and the lovely designs we cherish morphed into plain designs. There are no reports specifically on how the Depression treated Reading Hardware, but assuredly not kindly. WWII came and it switched into wartime production. As the National Register Nomination recounts:

“During World War II, the manufacture of hardware was ceased, and the company went full-time into the manufacture of ordinance materials such as armor plate, shells, helmets, bomb fuses and metal skins for aircraft as protection against anti-aircraft fire. After World War II, the Reading Hardware Company resumed production of hardware and lawn mowers. During this period, management did not foresee changes occurring within the industry and suffered financially due to inventory and labor problems. Plastic hardware design was a concept pursued but produced no results. Tubular locksets were a revolutionary idea in the hardware business and the Reading Hardware Company was late to pursue this engineering. When operations ceased entirely in 1950 they sold all their machinery and leased the entire complex to the Army Air Corps for use as a distribution warehouse to ship parts all over the world.”

Some of Reading Hardware’s buildings were torn down, but the remainder were preserved, are listed on the National Register, and have been redeveloped as industrial space or apartments. One of the buildings houses the Canal Street Pub, a popular local establishment which would undoubtedly have been equally popular with the lockmakers and other workers in Reading Hardware’s heyday.

The designs of Reading Hardware are far too numerous to begin to illustrate; check the catalogues in the Archives. Shown are several of its famous knobs, and a “complimentary” example of its fine work.

Sources

In addition to those listed in the prior installment, see “Redevelopment of Reading Hardware Site Sirs Memories of Local Lockmakers”, The Reading Eagle (March 28, 1961), p. 41; thanks to Steve Rowe for pictures of the Keystone knobs.



Grand Lodge, Knights of Pythias Indianapolis, Indiana

Several fraternal organizations in Indianapolis built their lodges in office buildings, providing rental income to help support the charitable efforts of the club. The Knights of Pythias built a 11 story clubhouse in 1907 on a flatiron-shaped piece of land, with offices for insurance companies, attorneys (since the federal building was across the street), real estate firms, and lumber companies, along with a café in the basement. All of these tenants can be seen on the windows in the full-size version of the photo below.

Architects J. F. Alexander & Son designed the building, and Yale & Towne provided the decorative bronze hardware for the building. The knob is labeled "Grand Lodge Knights of Pythias Indiana" around the border, with the Pythian knight and FCB on the left side of the center shield, and a portion of the Indiana state seal on the right.

The building remained in use until 1967, when Indiana National Bank planned a new office tower. Zebrowski and Associates demolished the building, but with an interesting bit of architectural salvage, made presentation souvenirs using marble and hardware from the building.



Architect: J. F. Alexander & Son
210 Massachusetts Ave, Indianapolis, IN
Standing: 1907-1967
Yale and Towne Manufacturing, Stamford, CT



Indianapolis Board of Trade Indianapolis, Indiana

The Indianapolis Board of Trade was founded in 1853 to facilitate the sale of agricultural products and promote business interests in Indiana. By 1905 just north of Christ Church Cathedral a new building was constructed with offices for members and local businesses. The Bower-Barff iron hardware for the building features a IBT monogram, so is likely Yale & Towne.

The building continued as an office building for a few years after the Board of Trade ceased operations in 1977. In 1982 this building, along with the Hume Mansur building (where the houses as located, at left) and Newton Claypool building (at far left) were demolished for the construction of what is now the Chase Tower, the tallest building in Indiana.



Sources:

<http://www.startribune.com/they-paved-paradise/135285333/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPnqCNaTPN4>

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/mn0056/>

Northwestern Guaranty/Metropolitan Building Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Northwestern Guaranty Loan Building was completed in early 1890, and would be renamed the Metropolitan Building after the life insurance company which became the building's owner in 1905. Milwaukee architect E. Townsend Mix designed his greatest and last building with 12 story light court topped with a skylight, featuring glass floor walkways around the perimeter with elaborate cast iron railings, which gave access to the offices around the perimeter. This open, airy art nouveau interior contrasted strikingly with the rustic Romanesque exterior of granite and sandstone blocks.

Yale and Towne provided the cast iron door hardware in a Bower-Barff finish, a fanciful Romanesque design that was first included in the 1889 catalog. Difficult to tell if the hardware was designed for the building.

By the late 1950s Minneapolis, like many cities across the country, wished to modernize themselves through urban renewal projects funded by the federal government. Forty percent of downtown Minneapolis was cleared for new construction and parking lots. Unfortunately the Metropolitan was located in this area, and despite being 98% occupied and owners who refused to sell, the city used eminent domain to take the building, and another parking lot was born.



Sources: <http://www.startribune.com/they-paved-paradise/135285333/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPnqCNaTPN4>
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/mn0056/>

Convention Update

Indianapolis was originally called “the crossroads of the nation” because of the many rail lines through the city. Today it is that and more. Make your plans to be at the convention July 19-21, 2017. Everyone knows of the Indianapolis 500, which is having it’s 101st running this year. The convention will be a couple of miles from the track. Come early and visit the museum and see the track.

Indianapolis is also called the “Circle City” because of the Solders & Sailors Civil War Monument in a circle in the center of downtown. Like other cities, downtown Indy is alive with restaurants, cafes and bars. NBA basketball and NFL football stadiums, the Indiana State Capitol, and Circle Center mall are all within walking distance of each other. A section of an old canal has been converted into White River State Park with a wide walk along the canal. Adjacent to the canal are the Eiteljorg Museum of Native American and Western Art, the Indiana State Museum and the NCAA Hall of Champions.

Remember to make your hotel reservations at our convention hotel soon!	Clarion Hotel 2930 Waterfront Pkwy West Indianapolis, IN 46214 (317) 299-8400	Rate: \$80.00 per night plus tax, and includes a daily continental breakfast Mention <u>Antique Doorknob Collectors</u> for group rate
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On Wednesday, our **tour day** will include, along with others, visits to:

- The James Whitcomb Riley Museum Home, a late Victorian home with the original furnishings. The house features a doorknob pictured on www.antiquetodoorknobs.us, so come see if you can find it!
- The Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site, an Italianate style house where he lived most of his life. The “beastie” on the fireplace mantel is not to be missed. The “beastie” is not just on hardware.

Thursday and Friday morning will be our opportunity to **buy, sell, and trade** with each other, ask questions of those with lots of experience and knowledge, and get to know each other. We will be “open to the public” for a few scheduled hours when our neighbors can come see the artistry and skill shown by the craftsmen at America’s hardware companies a century or more ago. You never know what people will bring in the door during the **open house**, or what your peers will bring to show, sell, or trade.

Friday afternoon will be the **hardware auction**, and Friday evening will be the banquet, awards, and business meeting.

A few area highlights include:

- If you have any interest in modern and historic architecture you should be sure to visit **Columbus, Indiana** (an hour south of the hotel on I-65) where you can find buildings by almost every great modern architect, courtesy of the generosity of local manufacturer Cummins. An Italianate courthouse and Romanesque city hall are nestled among modernist buildings by both Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Harry Weese, I. M. Pei and Cesar Pelli. And if you want a taste of the past go to Zaharakos for ice cream and to see a restored 1870’s orchestrion and a large collection of pre-1900 soda fountains.
- For those who are more interested in going around in circles, just to the north of Indy is Carmel with more than 100 round about intersections!

There will be the usual July Indiana weather (highs in the mid-80s and lows in the mid-60s).

Some websites to visit for more information:

www.visitindy.com

www.IndyRacingMuseum.org

www.whiteriverstatepark.org

www.rileykids.org/about/riley-museum-home

www.presidentbenjaminharrison.org

www.columbus.in.us/art-architecture/guide-to-the-architecture/

www.zaharakos.com

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:

Lil Balasa (#71) wants to sell her complete collection of *The Doorknob Collector* from Issue #1 in 4 secure binders. She's in Elgin, IL, where she and husband Dick hosted the 12th ADCA Convention in 1992. Would prefer a area buyer to avoid shipping, but we can get them to the convention for delivery if needed. Contact Lil at (847) 695-4254 or by email at balasa630@comcast.net.

Where Am I From?

There are a great many unidentified emblematic doorknobs in the P category of antiquedoorknobs.us. The various hardware companies custom made these doorknobs and plates for specific building(s) as ordered by architects, builders, or owners. Hopefully we can help identify the origins or these doorknobs so that the buildings and the hardware can be featured on pages like the three in this issue. Please contact your co-editor, Paul Woodfin, at his e-mail below if you have any knowledge.

This will be a recurring section in the newsletter. If anyone happens to know where the records for special order hardware for any of the hardware companies wound up, please let Paul know!



P-49010 Who knows!



P-43200 HA or AH



P-48900 S S S

Antique Doorknob Collectors of America

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Co-editors: Allen Joslyn,

Phone (973) 783-9411

Email: ajoslyn100@gmail.com

Paul Woodfin

Email: paul.woodfin@sbcglobal.net

ADCA Website: www.antiquedoorknobs.org

VDA Website: www.antiquedoorknobs.us

Officers

President: Allen Joslyn

Vice President: Steve Rowe

Secretary: Paul Woodfin

Treasurer: Allen Joslyn

Email Addresses:

ajoslyn100@gmail.com

4narowe@sbcglobal.net

paul.woodfin@sbcglobal.net

ajoslyn100@gmail.com

Membership Office: Faye Kennedy

ADCA

PO Box 803

Hackettstown, NJ 07840

Email: adcaoffice@aol.com

Phone: 908-684-5253

General Questions

ajoslyn100@gmail.com

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.

Materials Unlimited

Owner: Reynold Lowe
2 W. Michigan Ave.
Ypsalanti, MI 49197
Phone: 800-299-9462
Web Site: MaterialsUnlimited.com
Email: Materials@MaterialsUnlimited.com



Aurora Mills Architectural Salvage

Owner: Mike Byrnes
14971 First St NE
Aurora, OR 97002
Phone: 503-678-6083
Fax: 503-678-3299
Web Site: auroramills.com
Email: auroramills@centurytel.net



American Antique Hardware

Owner Keith and Sarah Chilcote
Phone: 503-399-8009
Web Site: americanantiquehardware.com
Email: contact@americanantiquehardware.com



Liz's Antique Hardware

Owner: Liz Gordon
453 South La Brea
Los Angeles, CA 90036
Phone: 323-939-4403
Fax: 323-939-4387
Web Site: lahardware.com/
Email: Shop@LAHardware.com



Albion Doors & Windows

Owner: Larry Sawyer
PO Box 220
Albion, CA 95410
Phone: 707-937-0078
Fax: (call first): 707-937-0078
Web Site: knobsession.com
Email: bysawyer@mcn.org



Antique Door Hardware Collector

Owner: Thomas Iannucci
16624 Frederick Rd.
Mount Airy, MD 21771
Phone: 240-595-1115



Website: antiquedoorhardwarecollector.com/index.html

Bill's Key & Lock Shop

Owner: Andy Streenz
127 E. Beaufort St. Normal, IL 61761 or
402 N. Main St. Bloomington, IL 61701
Phone: 309-827-5522 or 309.454.1713
Web Site: billskeyandlockshop.com
Email: locksmith@billskeyandlockshop.com



House of Antique Hardware

Owner: Roy Prange
3439 NE Sandy Blvd./PMB 106
Portland, OR 97214



Phone: 888-223-2545 Fax: 503-231-1312
Web Site: HouseofAntiqueHardware.com
Email: Sales@HouseofAntiqueHardware.com

The Brass Knob

Owners: Donetta George
2311 18th St. N.W. Washington, DC
Phone: 202-332-3370
Fax: 202-332-5594
Web Site: theBrassKnob.com
Email: BK@theBrassKnob.com



The Door Store

Owner: Sam Mirshak
1260 Castlefield Avenue
Toronto, ON, Canada M6B 1G3
Phone: 416-863-1590



Website: thedorstore.ca

Email: info@thedorstore.ca

Webwilson.com

Owner: H. Weber Wilsor
PO Box 506
Portsmouth, RI 02871
Phone: 240-595-1115



WEB WILSON'S
ANTIQU
HARDWARE AUCTIONS

Ohmega Salvage

Owner: Katherine Davis
2407 San Pablo Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94702
Phone: 510-204-0767



Website: ohmegasalvage.com

Email: info@ohmegasalvage.com