The Doorknob Collector

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

WHEN YOU SEE A UC DOORPLATE FROM CINCINNATI, WHERE IS IT FROM?

By PAUL WOODFIN

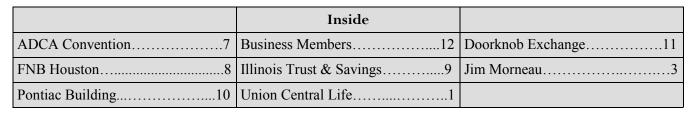
Many years ago the first of several Yale & Towne bronze doorplates were listed on eBay, bearing Grecian urns, leaves, and ropes as a border, with a shield bearing the letters UC surrounded by ribbons at the top (at right). Over the last decade or more probably more than a hundred of these plates have been listed for sale on eBay. The sellers have usually been from the Cincinnati area, and soon an attribution in the listings had these plates originating from the University of Cincinnati.

The University of Cincinnati was originally founded as Cincinnati College in 1819. The college struggled financially, closing at times and reopening once additional funds were gifted, until 1858, when the City was given a large bequest by a local businessman. The Ohio legislature chartered the University of Cincinnati in 1870, and the university operated as a thriving, municipal university since that time, although becoming a state university in 1977. When searching on-line at their graduation programs from 1900 to 1920, the seal reflected the "Juncta Juvant" seal of the City rather than a UC monogram, brining the stated attribution into question. So these plates clearly did not originate from the University.

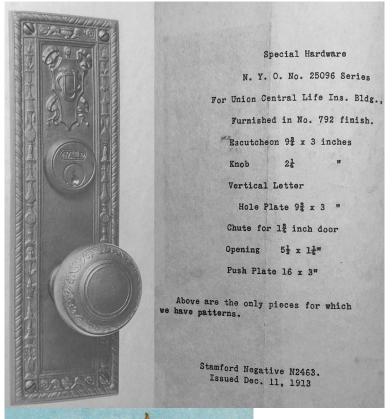
So what was the actual origin for this plate? A visit last summer to the Lock Museum in Connecticut provided an opportunity to look through several Yale & Towne factory books would provide a possible answer to the origin of these plates. Fortunately, the UC plates were among the Yale & Towne hardware which was identified.

The Union Central Life Insurance Company was founded in 1867 in Cincinnati, providing mutual life insurance products to customers in the area. The company remained successful and grew significantly over the ensuing decades. By 1911 the company was in need of additional office space, and

decades. By 1911 the company was in need of additional office space, and sought to mark Cincinnati and Union Central Life as a leading life insurance company for the Midwest. The company purchased the site on which H. H. Richardson's Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce stood







tallest building in world, with the taller four buildings all being in New York. The Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce was one of the first tenants.

the

The hardware for the building includes the M-18040 knob as shown above. This building stands today, topped by a PNC Bank sign, and remains the third tallest in Cincinnati.

References:

Barbara S. Christen. "Patronage, Politics and Civic Identity: The Development of Cincinnati's Union Central Life Insurance Company Building." Ohio Valley History 9 no. 2

(Summer 2009): pages 54-77.

https://www.cassgilbertsociety.org/works/union-central-lifebldg/

until a massive fire in January 1911 destroyed the building, leaving only parts of the stone walls standing. New York architect Cass Gilbert, whose West Street Building had brought significant notice in the press and whose Woolworth Building was under construction, was announced to be the architect.

Gilbert's design for the Union Central Life building was "inspired in part by St. Mark's bell tower in Venice, the fourthcentury B.C. Mausoleum at Helicarnassus, and the Bankers Trust Company Building (1910-1912) in New York, designed by Trowbridge and Livingston" (Christen, 2009). Many of the same contractors who were working to build the Woolworth Building were used for the construction in Cincinnati. The 31 story tower was completed in 1913

The Doorknob and was Collector © fifth



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JIM MORNEAU, CANTON, CONNECTICUT

BY FRANK DONEGAN

People get into the antiques business in all sorts of ways and for all sorts of reasons. Take Jim Morneau for example. When he was 23 years old, a house fire incinerated his furniture, and he discovered it was a lot cheaper to buy replacements at the local auction than to shop at a furniture store.

Today, in addition to being one of the most prolific designers of Colonial-style houses in Connecticut, he also runs his other business, Classic Home Hardware, from his condo in Canton. He stocks thousands upon thousands of period doorknobs, locks, backplates, hinges, doorbells, door knockers, newel post knobs, and a zillion other categories of house hardware dating from the 18th century into the 20th.

Morneau recalled his initial experience with antiques. He had bought a vacation home in Dennis on Cape Cod. He said, "I bought it furnished. It was a Boston family who had furnished it with antiques. I liked them [the antiques, that is], but I lost them all in the fire." He noted that, being young, he got hosed by the insurance company and didn't have enough money to refurnish at new furniture prices.



Jim Morneau with a piece of his hardware. It looks as if he's about to commit mayhem with a knife, but he's actually holding an early hand-forged spike-top door handle.

He said, "Somebody told me I could buy stuff at auction. You could get like, Jacobean [style] tables for two dollars." So that's what he did. He went to the local weekly auction and stocked up.

But his auction experience also taught him another lesson—one that has seduced numberless naïve auction-goers before and since: you might be able to make some money at this game.

He remembered, "I'd buy a box lot; get what I wanted—maybe a tool—and put the remains back in the auction next week." It was fun getting desirable things for nothing and maybe making a profit on the rest.

A bit later—this was in the mid-1970s—Morneau moved to Plainfield, Connecticut, and just happened to live next door to an antiques dealer. "He took me to Brimfield. He said, 'They'll be running around throwing money at us." Which was the case. That's how exciting the antiques business was in those years.

Morneau had a system for acquiring inventory when he would travel to meet the renters of his Cape Cod house. He said, "I used to camp out in my VW bus on Friday night on the other side of the [Sagamore] bridge and, Saturday morning, I'd hit ten tag sales in those old houses on Route 6A," on his way to Dennis. Adding to the fun, he said, "You could pick the dumps on the Cape in those days. There was always old stuff. There was wicker everywhere."

Morneau discovered that he had a good eye for architectural antiques, not surprising for a guy who would build a career based on drawing house plans. It started with stained glass. He said, "I

saw a guy walking with a stained-glass window, and I said, 'You want to sell that?'"

Architectural antiques became valued collectibles in the 1970s and 1980s. They were in demand as decorative accents but also fed the boom for restoring homes in gentrifying neighborhoods. And then there was the restaurant business. Entire Victorian bars and tons of Victorian lighting fixtures were shipped around the country to be installed in chic new "fern bars," where they complemented the brick walls and hanging plants that epitomized the style. Any town with pretensions to coolness had to have at least one fern bar. And thousands of sit-down restaurants—often with cute, phony Irish names (e.g., Rosie O'Grady's)—pushed the trend into America's malls and suburbs.

"It was huge," Morneau said. Large distributors and auctioneers, such as Red Baron in Georgia, developed national networks of suppliers. "I picked for some of the biggest architectural dealers. I traveled from Maine to New York," Morneau said.

The fact that Morneau's day job was designing homes aided his antiques business. All over Connecticut, early buildings were being taken down as developers transformed the landscape with condos and McMansions. He said, "I may have designed more homes in Connecticut than anyone else. I worked for different developers and saw old houses coming down. I knew who would buy the old parts, the stone, the timbers." Morneau doesn't claim to be a hero of the preservation movement, but, given that Connecticut was going to be ravaged by developers anyway, he at least salvaged a lot of good stuff.

During his "pre-hardware period," Morneau didn't pick only architectural material. "I picked paintings and stuff for other type dealers," he said. "If you're at an auction, you might not get what you want, but you'd pick up something else. I was known as a good picker."

His interest in period hardware arose from his acquaintance with Web Wilson, a Rhode Island pioneer in the field. "Web Wilson and I were friends," Morneau said. "He was into stained glass too, and one day he came by and asked me, 'You got any hardware?' He made people aware."

It didn't take Morneau long to recognize the advantages of dealing in house hardware over

other types of architectural material: "It's easier to carry small things than big heavy things, and you can make the same amount of money."

Although individual pieces of house hardware may be small, when you have thousands upon thousands of pieces, they can take up a lot of room. Morneau's stock fills two rooms in his basement, part of his garage, and an upstairs room in his condo. "You have to accumulate a lot because nothing comes



Neo-Grec handles for a set of pocket doors. Their centers are sunken and are

complete," he said. You may have a great door handle, but you can't sell it until you find the latch that was missing when you bought it.

His customers—collectors, home restorers, and decorators—are rarely interested in parts of old hardware. They want it to work and look great.

Today, given the breadth of his inventory, Morneau said that large salvage companies from as far away as Portland, Maine, and Los Angeles come to him.

Morneau entered the hardware market at an auspicious time. Not only was demand increasing, but supply was exploding as well. It wasn't a matter of taste so much as it was a matter of law. He explained, "In the 1970s, fire code laws were passed that caused a lot of buildings being rehabbed to change their hardware." Suddenly, commercial and residential rental properties were having their beautiful old hardware ripped out and replaced with stuff that met the new codes. Subsequent laws requiring more accessibility (for example, mandating lever door handles rather than round knobs) have only increased the likelihood that old hardware will be replaced when buildings are rehabilitated.

While timing and circumstances helped his hardware business prosper, Morneau said his success in more recent times can be traced to a man named Joe Tino, a retired machinist in New Britain. "My money was made because of Joe," he said. "He cleaned and buffed for me for fifteen years. He just loved to work at the bench. People would look at stuff I had and say, 'Is this new?' And I'd say, 'No, it was Joe.' He's so good at buffing. No one wants to put a rusty knob on their door."

Unfortunately for Morneau, Tino recently decided to call it quits. He's 88. "You can't find those guys anymore," Morneau said, adding as he spoke with us, "When you write your article, put in that I'm looking for someone to do cleaning and buffing."

Antique hardware is rarely clean when it first hits the market. "You might have something that you can get a hundred bucks for and it's only five dollars but it's covered with paint," Morneau said, adding that until he finds a replacement for Tino, "I'm trying to buy stuff that's clean." That has cut down on his buying, but, to be honest, it appears that even if he buys nothing in the foreseeable future, Morneau has enough to last for many years, or even decades, to come.

Morneau said, "I cover everything from period hand-forged to mid-[20th-]century stuff," but he has a particular interest in early industrial hardware. Connecticut was a leader in the hard-



A selection of specialized pocket-door keys. Many have tops that fold over, so they can be left in the lock and not protrude when the doors slide into the wall.

ware field, as it was in so many areas of the developing industrial age before the Civil War. New Haven was a particularly important center. Eli Whitney Blake, nephew and one-time employee of the famous Eli Whitney, produced huge amounts of the material. "His hardware came all the way to California in the Gold Rush," Morneau said. Blake was known for developing the mortise lock that fits inside a door, replacing the old-fashioned box locks that were attached to the outside of doors. He also happened to be in charge of macadamizing streets in New Haven and invented a machine for crushing the stone used on roads, which revolutionized the business.

Philadelphia was another major production area. The reach of these 19th-century makers is impressive. "By the 1850s, the doorknob industry took off," Morneau said. Mass-produced hardware showed up all over the country. For example, he said, "Portland [Maine] is full of early industrial hardware. I just got a big load from there."

Price in the field of house hardware depends almost entirely on rarity. Pieces may be strikingly ornate but if they are not rare, they will not bring serious money. "Emblematic" and "figural," or "representative," knobs are the aristocrats of the field. Emblematics are custom pieces featuring monograms that were used in specific buildings, such as hotels, fraternal organization lodges, government

buildings, and corporate headquarters. Figurals, as the name implies, have objects or animals depicted on them. "The big hardware companies also custom-made stuff," as well as mass-produced items, Morneau said.

How much can a rare doorknob cost? "They've gone over five thousand [dollars] for a dog doorknob," he noted. "Government doorknobs, say from the War Department, can go fifteen hundred [dollars]. If rare stuff comes out, there are a couple of guys who'll fight over it." (It should be pointed out that not all enthusiasts in the field are "guys." Morneau said the "second-biggest collector in the country is a woman.")

And how does he know if something is rare? "If I haven't seen it before, then I know that's what collectors want," he said.

Morneau noted that the market for early hand-forged hardware is not robust: "Not as many people are interested in the earlier stuff," he said.

Mid-20th-century hardware, on the other hand, has become desirable. Morneau said, "They throw that stuff away here, but I get calls for it from dealers in Los Angeles." Which only makes sense: if you're restoring a Modernist ranch house in Palm Springs, you're going to want original hardware.

Morneau recently launched a new website. He said, "Google didn't like my old one. The payment options were outdated. I was dreading it because I have over a thousand photos on it. Then I found this guy in Indianapolis who had an algorithm and did the whole thing for a thousand dollars."

The site works nicely. Not only does it offer many categories based on type of object and man-

ufacturer, but it also has a quick and accurate search function. If, for example, you are looking for a backplate made by a particular company, you can enter the company's name "backplate" and it will search the site and present you only with germane results. (In our experience, lots of websites feature a search box, but the



Two different lock sets complete with doorknobs and backplates. The backplate on the right has images of birds at the top.

results, all too often, are worthless.)

Enthusiasts in this field support an active collectors' organization, appropriately named the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America (ADCA), which publishes the (equally appropriately named) Doorknob Collector newsletter. Morneau said the organization is working to identify every doorknob ever made and to give each design a unique code.

He noted that the sort of historical research encouraged by ADCA has benefited enormously from Google's creation of its "Patent" site, which provides access to original patent databases not only from the United States but from several other countries as well.

The organization runs a convention each year in a different city. "Two years back it was in Bos-

ton; last year it was Indianapolis. The next one is in New Jersey. It's usually in the summer," Morneau said.

Morneau grew up in the nearby towns of Farmington and Avon. His father was a house painter and, he said, neither parent had an interest in collecting. He decided to become a civil engineer and went to Hartford State Technical College. But civil engineers spend lots of time outdoors, and he discovered that the work could be dangerous. On road projects, he said, he came close to serious injury from a falling telephone pole and a truck with rebar dangling off its side.

"I said, 'I'm going inside,'" he recalled. Working at a drawing board was a lot safer, and it led to his career as a designer of Connecticut's homes during the region's biggest housing boom ever. Morneau noted that one-story homes are the coming thing, as baby boomers seek to downsize, often to single-floor homes that are just about as large as their former houses. In any case, they don't want to climb stairs anymore.

"First-floor living is huge," Morneau said.

And, who knows, maybe before long people will be collecting doorknobs from all those abandoned McMansions.

For more information, contact Jim Morneau, Classic Home Hardware, P.O. Box 1102, Canton, CT 01019. Phone (860) 693-4451. Website (www.classichomehardware.com). By appointment.

2019 ADCA Convention Update

A few quick reminders about the convention, as deadlines are fast approaching:

- The **CONVENTION PACKET** is included in the envelope with this newsletter.
- Call and make your hotel reservations by July 2, 2018 to insure that the convention hotel has a room for your stay.
- Mike and Carolyn have added an additional, informal tour day for Tuesday, July 23rd. Please indicate on page 10 if you plan to participate and if you have a vehicle to help with transportation for those that do not.
- You can register and pay on-line using Paypal at https://www.memberplanet.com/Login.aspx, using your membership login for those that set one up a year ago or who have joined on-line recently.
- For those members who wish to set up their table and display BEFORE they start dealing, please put page 8 out on your table and our members will respect your wishes.
- Remember that the registration fee is higher this year, but our hotel rooms are cheaper, and soft drinks, coffee, tea and snacks will be provided on Thursday and Friday, along with lunch on Friday at Benihana.
- Bring a display to show some great hardware from your collection, and compete for the Awards:
 - 1. Best in Show, which is the best overall display.
 - 2. Best Theme Display. This year the theme is "The Big Boys", aka knobs larger than 3 inches in diameter (Mike will have his measuring tape).
 - 3. Most Creative Display. For members who spend extra time and do more than just attach knobs to a board.
 - 4. "The Ugly". Which obviously is in the eye of each convention attendee.

SEE YOU IN NORTH LITTLE ROCK, JULY 23-26, 2019!!!!

First National Bank Houston, Texas

After the Civil War the era of private banking in Texas began to end. State and National banks began to be organized, with the First National Bank of Houston being established in 1866. First National quickly prospered due to strong leadership from pioneering bankers making wise loans and investments.

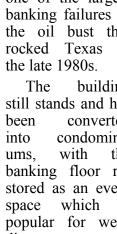
After the Spindletop oil boom began near Beaumont in 1900, and the Hurricane of 1900 devastated the Port at Galveston, Houston became the early center of shipping the and oil business in Texas. In the early 1900s First National had outgrown their existing office space, and so hired the Fort Worth architectural firm of Sanguinet & Staats to design a new banking and office facility. The beaux arts building featured a two story marble banking hall. In succeeding decades the building would be doubled in size, extending at left from Main to Prairie streets.

Sanguinet & Staats would use emblematic hardware in several of their later buildings, but this bank was the first. The knob and plate shown at right are listed in the Corbin S catalog as S3030 and S3031, with the plate featuring a lion's head at the top.



The First National Bank remained in their expanded office building until they merged in the 1950s with City National Bank First City bank was one of the largest banking failures in the oil bust that rocked Texas in the late 1980s.

The building still stands and has been converted into condominiums. with the banking floor restored as an event which space popular for weddings.





https://www.heritagesociety.org/ba-shepherd



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Illinois Trust & Savings Bank Chicago, Illinois

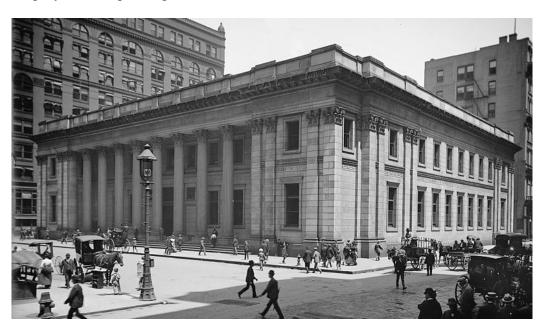
The Illinois Trust & Savings Bank was organized in 1873 and by 1895 had survived the Panic of 1893 and the resulting bank runs to become one of Chicago's largest financial institutions. The storied Grand Pacific Hotel, covering the entire block just northeast of the Board of Trade, had been one of the first large hotels built after the 1871 fire, but in April 1895 the hotel closed due to "old fashioned" accommodations, the high costs for renovating a masonry structure, and slower business still lingering from the Panic of 1893.

The bank purchased a lease for the western half of the block to construct a new bank headquarters in 1896. D. H. Burnham &Co. was selected to design a two story

white granite edifice, with interior finishes of marble, bronze and mahogany, which was completed in 1897. The main lobby was surrounded by large marble and steel columns which supported second floor offices around the perimeter and topped by a large skylight seventy feet above the main floor. The hardware was provided by Corbin (with the same border as the Land Title knob from TDC 212), featuring a shield divided by the Chicago Y (symbolizing the Chicago River downtown) with "IT" in the top left section, "AND" at the bottom, and "SB" in the top right, forming the bank's monogram surrounded by a vine pattern (P-20030). The knob is pictured in the Corbin S catalog as S 282 and the bank's name is listed in the Corbin factory ledger for the knob.

In 1919 the building suffered one of the worst aviation accidents of the time. A Goodyear blimp was ferrying passengers from Grant Park to the Windy City amusement park and caught fire over downtown. The blimp crashed into the skylight of the bank building, sending flaming debris into the bank lobby below. Ten bank employees, two passengers and one crew member were killed.

While the building was soon repaired and reopened, the 1923 merger of Illinois Trust & Savings Bank with Merchants Loan & Trust resulted in the need for additional office space for the new institution. The bank decided to demolish their 26 year old building to construct a new 20 story building, which stands on the site today and is still in use as a bank.



References: https://chicagology.com/goldenage/goldenage109/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wingfoot_Air_Express_crash http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/det/item/2016799517/

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Pontiac Building Chicago, Illinois

William Holabird and Martin Roche met while working in the office of pioneer Chicago architect William LeBaron Jenney in the late 1870s. Holabird was born in New York state, attended West Point for two years and then moved to Chicago to be an architect. Roche was raised in Chicago and attended the Armour Institute. They established their firm in 1881 and practiced together as Holabird & Roche until their deaths in the mid-1920s.

Plans for a building by Holabird & Roche at the corner of Dearborn and Harrison streets to be owned by the Brooks estate of Boston (who financed many early buildings) were announced in June 1889. The fourteen story Pontiac Building was



completed in 1891, and was outfitted with iron elevator cars and stair railings like many of their office later buildings, but the Pontiac lacked the finer finishes found further north in the Loop.

The hard-ware for the Pontiac is an early emblem -atic knob by P&F Corbin, which is found in the S catalog as S137. The

hardware has a japanned copper finish.

The Pontiac is the oldest surviving Holabird & Roche building in Chicago and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1976. Surprisingly, the building remains occupied by office tenants almost 130 years after opening.

References:

- https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/76000702
- https://42floors.com/us/il/chicago/542-s-dearborn-st

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The Doorknob Exchange

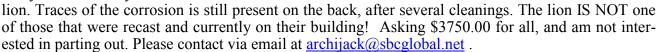
Members are reminded that your dues entitle you to advertise items for sale, trade, or wanted at no charge. ADCA is not responsible for any transaction or the condition of the items advertised.

For Sale: Bronze and iron hardware and artifacts from the Guaranty Building in Buffalo, NY. Includes a complete Guaranty door set and lion water spout. Retiring after 40 years in the antique business, so it's time for things to have new caretakers. In 1977, United Founders Ins. Co. an Oklahoma company, acquired the Guaranty after foreclosure, and owned the building until 1981. In the early 80's, a gentleman came in my store inquiring if I knew who Louis Sullivan was & if I was interested in buying some hardware from the Guaranty Bldg. Answering yes to both questions, he produced a cardboard box, containing the hardware. He answered the "Where did you get it?" quite simply, since he was a VP of United Founders & the building had been put in his portfolio. I was impressed, except for the asking price that I couldn't afford. When he passed away several years later his son came to

my store, & asked the same questions. As soon as I saw it, I asked about his Dad. We were able to make a deal. The set includes:

- 1. Escutcheon & knob set w/ the original mortise lock, strike plate & screws (outside escutcheon is bronze, interior is cast iron with Bower-barff finish)
- 2. Three "Beehive" iron hinges
- 3. Inner & outer mail slot, with original screws
- 4. One of the lion down spouts
- 5. Paper ephemera, Buffalo Guaranty Bldg. newspaper supplement, & Louis Sullivan books

When I first saw the hardware in the early 1980's, the lion was heavily corroded with the anchor screws so badly corroded they were "welded" to the back of the



Please inspect the full-size color photos of the items at: https://www.antiquedoorknobs.us/temp.html



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Webwilson.com



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Settlers Hardware

SETTLERS HARDWARE

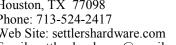
Owner: Susan Neptune 1901 West Alabama Houston, TX 77098 Phone: 713-524-2417

Web Site: settlershardware.com Email: settlershardware@gmail.com

Village Salvage

Owner: Rick Lepley SALVAGE 85 S. Main Street Waynesville, OH 45068

Phone: 513-914-4177 Web Site: villagesalvage.com Email: villagesalvage@gmail.com



Tim & Julie's Another Fine Mess

Owners: Tim Harmon and Julie Crow

2901 East 10th Street Indianapolis, IN 46201 Phone: 503-399-8009

Web Site: indysalvage.com Email: timandjuliestore@gmail.com

REQUIEM SALVAGE CO

5035 Penn Street Philadelphia, PA 19124 Phone: 215-645-2691

Owner: Amy Larrimore

Website: requiemsalvage.co Email: hello@requiemsalvage.co

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