



# The Doorknob Collector

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A Non-profit Organization Devoted to the Study and Preservation of Ornamental Hardware

## Doorknob Manufacturing Methods in the Early 20th Century

By Paul Woodfin

Then you first pick up a doorknob, what do you notice about it? Have you ever wondered how some doorknobs were manufactured around the turn of the 20th century? While many utility patents exist for attachment methods (see TDC #180), and design patents for the front of several noted doorknobs, there are few patents and little documentation regarding how doorknobs were manufactured by the major companies in the 1880s until the 1930s.

This article focuses fragments of unfinished doorknobs produced by P & F Corbin and Sargent which have been located and photographed in order to provide the information below. Each company used different methods to assemble or apply a design for their "special" hardware knobs. Unfortunately neither company retained or published information about their manufacturing processes, as that likely was a closely-held trade secret. Hopefully the photographs shown in this article provide ample visual information about the knobs. Please note that the photos are grouped by manufacturer on the first two pages, with written descriptions and information following the photographs.

### P & F Corbin

<b>Hotel Bancroft</b> Worcester, Massachusetts	Shield applied to stock Corfu knob 823-22	5025 Coat of arms used on 823-22 Knob. #X5256 7 1/2 in.
	 S 5025 Emblem On 823-22 Knob 2 1/4 in.	P-20100, from 1912 
<b>Copley Plaza Hotel</b> Boston, Massachusetts	Disc applied to stock Quincy knob 776-22	4-15 Mono. P.P. on Knobs for Copley Plaza Hotel.
	 S 4815 Mono., 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 in. on 776-22 Knob, 2 1/4 in.	P-47780, from 1912 

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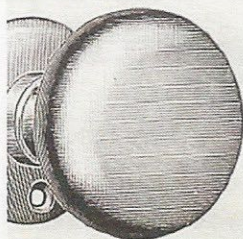


**Park Row Building**  
New York, New York

Disc applied to stock knob  
1519<sup>1/4</sup>

466

2 1/2" Knob Mon. P. R. C. Park Row Constnction Co.



S 466 1 1/2 in. Dia.  
on 2 1/2 in. Knob

P-48370, from 1898

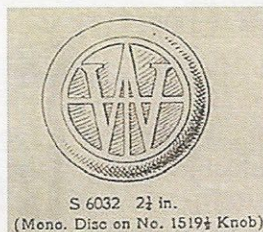
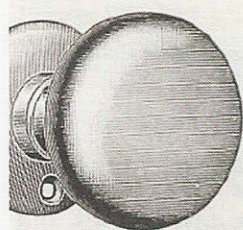


**Woodbury County**  
**Courthouse**  
City, Iowa

Disc applied to stock plain  
Sioux cast knob 1519<sup>1/2</sup>

6032

Mon. Disk W on 1519 1/2 knob to match C2992- S # covers knob  
but mono complete. Order #3699 1/2



S 6032 2 1/2 in.  
(Mono. Disc on No. 1519 1/2 Knob)

P-50300, from 1918



## Sargent

### The Doorknob Collector



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Catalog Drawing

A-32610



Knob Top Front

Shown in Sargent Special Hardware catalog as 1029 Ph. Note pins which attach top to base.



Top Back/Side



Complete Knob



Side View



P-20460



Shown in Sargent Special Hardware catalog as 1534 Ph. Top was soldered to base.



A-21700

Not shown in Sargent catalog, but is labeled 2499 Ph. Top attached to base using a machine screw.



N-12700 Savona



Stock doorknob first introduced by Sargent in 1897. Top was soldered to base.



H-21800 1862 knob



Stock doorknob first introduced by Sargent in 1888.





## P & F Corbin

Corbin first began making emblematic hardware in the early 1880s, and may have used a different method for creating those knobs than the one described below. The four knobs illustrated above show one of Corbin's processes for special knobs used in the late 1890s and afterwards. Basically either a stock or special design knob was used (shown in the first column, with a special design element (disc or emblem), shown in the Corbin S catalog in the second column and alone in the third column, was attached using pins that protruded from the back of the disc or emblem and fit into holes in the knob's face. The fourth and fifth column show front and side views of an actual knob from the building.

For Corbin knobs, the description from the special hardware ledger from the factory gives the information about which knob was the based for the special knob, as well as other information. For example, the Hotel Bancroft knob shows that a "coat of arms" was applied to an "823-22" knob. 823-22 is the Corfu design knob which first appears in Corbin's 1911 catalog supplement. Given that the Hotel Bancroft was completed in 1912, this stock knob was available at that time. For others such as the Park Row Building, the applied element was applied to a generic stock knob which is unidentified in the factory ledger, but clearly was a stock knob available in 1898.

Both the Copley Plaza and Woodbury Courthouse knobs are discs 1/16" of an inch thick at the edge with raised letters and designs cast into the disc. These domed pieces which match the curve of the knobs. Pinned to the top of the knobs and then finished to provide a uniform appearance. Clearly their methods of attaching these discs or emblems to the knobs were effective as I have not seen any examples with lost emblematic elements.

## Sargent

Sargent began making emblematic hardware in the late 1880s, with the earliest know example being for the Texas State Capitol, completed in 1888. The Texas knob (P-13400) is shown and actually listed for sale with it's own part numbers in Sargent's 1888 catalog. After the turn of the 20th century Sargent began actively producing special hardware, and (like Corbin) published a small special hardware catalog.

The five doorknobs shown above are mainly knobs dating from about 1900 to 1920, although the fifth example is a 20th century version of H-21800 doorknob from the 1880s. Unlike Corbin, we lack a factory ledger showing the designs that usually indicating the origins, but given that two of the knobs are stock designs, these examples may indicate the methods by which Sargent manufactured all of their door-knobs. The photos show the catalog cuts for each design, followed by the knob top and either a side or rear view showing the attachment methods discussed below. The last two photos show the face and profile of a complete knob in that design.

Sargent appears to have used several mechanical methods of attachment, and also seems to have soldered the tops to separate cast pieces containing the knob's back and stem. This is shown best with the P-20460 and N-12700 doorknobs, which lack any mechanical methods of attachment inside of the knob tops.

The A-32610 knob featured two bronze pins extending from the knob top (seen in the third photo from left) which likely were inserted into a receiver on the knob base. The A-21700 actually features a screw hole for a machine screw to attach the base to the top through the spindle hole. The screw is actually visible inside this knob (shown at right in the listing).

Hopefully this article and photos provide a bit more information about how manufacturers created the hardware which we all collect in their factories. The great benefit of collecting these unfinished knob tops is being able to see the original unmachined texture of these pieces and the level of detail that is too often worn away from doorknobs after many decades of use by human hands.

These pieces were all obtained from the estates of former manufacturer employees, who saved these pieces from becoming scrap metal melted down for modern uses.



## Doorknob Collecting

By Loretta Nemec

[Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from Issue 15 of *The Doorknob Collector* (June 1985), and was one of the articles written by club founders about their collecting and collections. Mrs. Nemec remains an active ADCA member, and hopefully might attend the 2022 convention in Bloomington, IL.]



Throughout life everyone collects something. Be it rubber bands on the doorknob, or buttons. As a child we start picking up fascinating rocks found in our backyard. When going to the beach we can't resist picking up an interesting shell, from one shell to another until we have our fill. At home we separate our treasure. Do we stop or does our quest continue into the library?

As a twelve year old child I was impressed by a little black jet knob with its rose and escutcheon plate, all the way to the matching hinges on the doors of my mother's house. After getting married and buying our first house in 1955, I realized that no longer was there any craftsmanship put into the "Modern House". Gone was the skeleton key. The key hole was replaced by a doorknob with a little hole in it for the key. We were **MODERNIZING**.

I longed for the little black jet knob. With a little encouragement, I got the knob, rose, plate and hinges from my mother, which satisfied me for a long time. Years passed, my parents were gone, the house in Chicago is decaying with age, but I still have the knob tucked away among my souvenirs. In reminiscing, I brought out the knob and put it on display with a few straw flowers and a little black ribbon on the shank. Gradually, I picked up a few more knobs to decorate and give to friends. Soon, others caught my eyes, from white porcelain to the brown pottery, to glass, to brass. Yes,

the quest was on. Friends started bringing me doorknobs. Soon they were on display on shelves, tables and window sills. It was a conversation piece instantly when anyone entered my house.

I thought I was the only one collecting doorknobs, much to my surprise I ran across an Anita Gold's column that mentioned there had been a book available on antique doorknobs, by Maude Eastwood. I couldn't wait till the book arrived. I will always be thankful to Maude for publishing that first book, and to Arnie Fredrick for all his efforts in getting the first gathering of collectors in 1981 and spearheading the organization of the Antique Doorknob Collector's club.

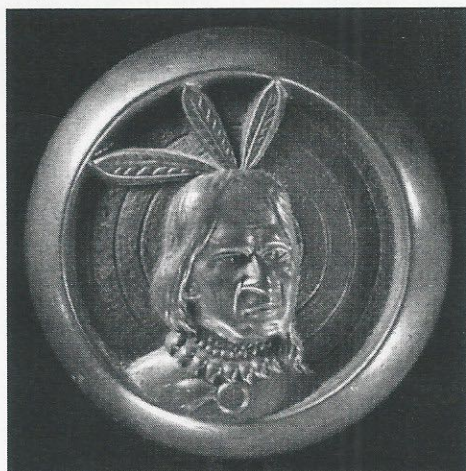
What started out as a retirement hobby seems to have jumped the gun. I presently am doing my retirement dream along with being a full time secretary for Fermi Laboratory, a wife to Ray for 30 years, mother of four grown children and grandmother of one. My husband and children have been helpful in my search, along with fellow workers who have found knobs for me. On one occasion had brought an entire five panel door into the office just so I could have the knob.

My favorite knob is the one I found in a little antique shop in Oswego, Ill. It is a solid 14oz. brass knob with the vermeil bee on it (A-11400, at right). It originally came from Belgium. In researching it, apparently when Napoleon became emperor he picked the bee as his symbol for industry, hard work, dedication and team work, hence the bee was used to decorate practically everything. The bee knob could have come from any one of the palaces Napoleon used in Versailles, Malmaison, Compiègne, St. Cloud, Rambouillet, or Fontainebleau, or anyone of the palaces of his Marshals. My search also took me to the Napoleonic Society



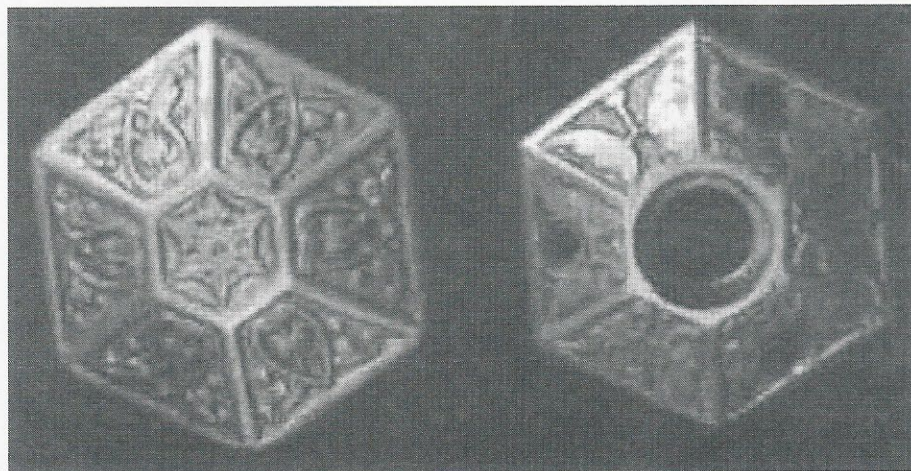
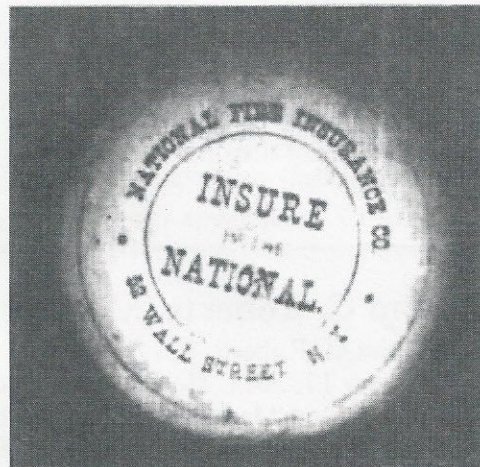


in Florida, and countless books. (Next to Christ, Napoleon has had the most works written about him.) My search will not be complete until I find out where this knob came from.



Another favorite knob is the "Indian" that reportedly came from the Mizpah Hotel. I feel there must be a story behind the Indian (A-31700, at right, since identified as the "Red Men" knob in the 1923 Reading catalog) as there would be for any figural knob. Additional documentation would be most welcome.

This porcelain knob with the National Fire Insurance Company name embossed in it, came from a fireman who collects antique firefighting equipment. This I believe, is a fairly rare type of proprietary knob.



My son picked up this old iron hexagon knob in an antique shop in Carthage, Illinois. Glass knobs also turn my fancy, and I would love to add a Waterford crystal knob to my collection.

What I enjoy most are the wonderful people I have met through collecting and being a member of the club. The club has opened numerous DOORS for me, and as John Holland once said, "doorknob collectors are the Cadillac of collectors."

As for the size of my collection, I would place myself as one of the smaller collectors. I have about 300 knobs. To those who have small collections, it's not the amount of knobs you possess, it's more the knowledge you have acquired from collecting them.

Collecting to me is like hunting: I never quite know what I'll find. The search is satisfying enough. It's not what it's worth in dollars. It's the pride of ownership. . . . . It's priceless.



## In Memorium

### Lee Kaiser (Member #5)

Lee Kaiser, one of the founding members of the ADCA, passed away in January 2021 at her retirement home. Mrs. Kaiser and her late husband Jim, a former ADCA President, attended the first ADCA convention at Waverly, IA in 1981, and served on the Board of Directors for several years. She remained an active club member until her death.

Unfortunately no obituary for Mrs. Kaiser was available.

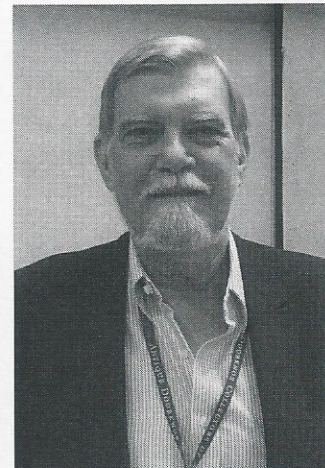
### Violet Raffin (Member #17)

Violet Raffin, one of the early members of the ADCA, passed away in the summer of 2020 at her retirement home. Mrs. Raffin and her late husband Pete, were active ADCA members since 1981 and actually were some of the first subscribers to the Kennedy newsletters (predecessor of this newsletter) in 1977.

Unfortunately no obituary for Mrs. Raffin was available.

### John C. Roberts (Member #734)

John C. Roberts, 73, St. Joseph, Missouri, passed away Wednesday, February 17, 2021. He was born December 17, 1947 in Chicago, Illinois to Glenn and Madalaine (Thulin) Roberts. John was a 1965 graduate of Central High School in St. Joseph, MO, and graduated from the University of Missouri at Rolla, with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Putting his degree aside for a while, John took to the road, traveling around the Midwest as a musician, playing keyboard and managing local groups. After seven years on the road, John put being a professional musician behind him and started a remodeling business, working mostly on historic buildings in his hometown, St. Joseph, Missouri, and thus began his interest in antique builders hardware. During this time, John served six years in the Missouri Air National Guard.



Through eBay, John bought (Lifetime ADCA Board Member) Len Blumin's first book. Shortly thereafter, he contacted Len and through their correspondence, learned about ADCA. John joined the ADCA in early 2004 just before the Convention held in San Francisco, and later joined the Board in 2010. From 2004 until 2019, John attended every Convention. While travel for him was limited, the ADCA conventions and nearby flea markets were dear to his heart.

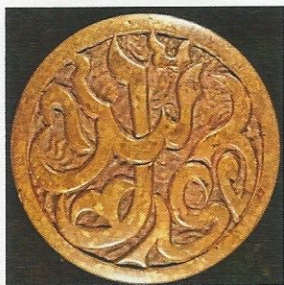
John limited his antique hardware to the 1870's and 1880's ornate brass doorknobs; a large collection of Victorian and Edwardian ornate brass bells and bell pulls; and a small collection of old tools, although not of the Victorian Era. They included a Stanley 45 and 55 (woodworking planes), and many cutters, the forerunners of modern day routers and router bits. At the 2018 convention at Princeton, John proudly purchased an A-10100 Doggie doorknob to add to his collection.

Another interest for John was US Patents, and British Registry Marks, for which he authored an article in issue 218/219 of The Doorknob Collector. He compiled and published a list of hardware patents. Survivors include his sister, Jean, extended family and friends. The family suggested donations to Alzheimer's Association.



## 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.



Cheryl Blam (#204) is a Mallory Wheeler "water" knob (B-as shown at left. If you happen to have an extra one, please contact Cheryl at [blamquilt@gmail.com](mailto:blamquilt@gmail.com) or (516) 666-7002. And a big "Welcome Back" to Cheryl!



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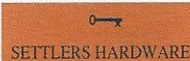


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