

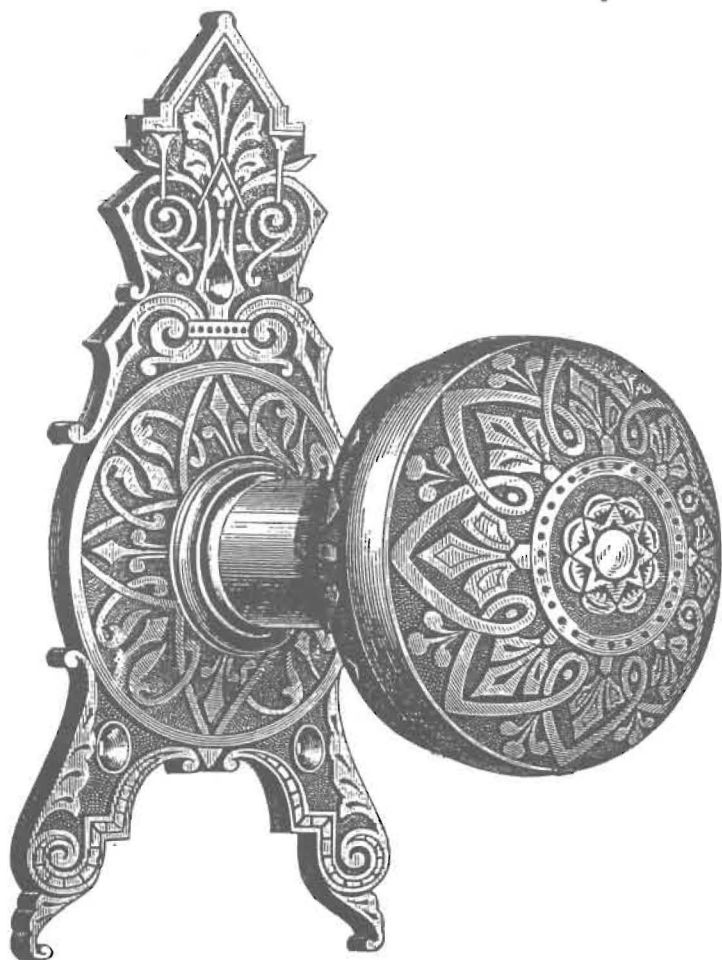


# The Doorknob Collector

Number 31

September-October 1988

Excitement of Indianapolis rapidly approaching



Many of you are preparing for your trip to Indianapolis for what will be another outstanding ADCA convention.

For some, this will be their first visit to this fine Indiana City and are looking forward to the tours as well as the convention.

Many of our members use vacation time to travel to the convention each year so it is really nice to be able to have some time to spend sightseeing. The real excitement comes, of course, with the renewing of friendships, meeting new members and the trading, buying and selling of knobs. Each year we hear, "the convention was too short."

## Historical sketch of Russell & Erwin<sup>©</sup>

by Vincent Noe

(Editors note: The following feature is an excerpt from Vincent Noe's upcoming book on the history of lock and related hardware companies. Mr. Noe is currently doing additional research and writing the text. A target date for publication has not been announced, but **THE DOORKNOB COLLECTOR** will advise readers when a date has been set.

Mr. Noe will appreciate hearing from anyone who is willing to share information about lock and hardware companies. He is particularly interested in dates when companies began, merged and ceased operation.)

**F. T. STANLEY COMPANY**  
**NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT**  
1831 - 1835

Frederick T. Stanley, in 1831, bought out a machine shop where he was working, and formed the **F. T. Stanley Company**. This was the first lock manufacturing company in New Britain, Connecticut. He operated the company on a small scale until 1834, when he decided to expand.

His brother, William Stanley, had worked with him until 1832, when he left to form a partnership with Seth North



**Vincent Noe**

and Henry Stanley. This company was named **North and Stanley**.

Frederick Stanley erected a new factory building in 1834, and took his brother back into the business. In search of more funds, he also took into the business three more partners, and they reorganized the company.

**STANLEY, WOODRUFF COMPANY  
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT  
1835 - 1838**

The new partnership Frederick Stanley formed with his new partners was called Stanley, Woodruff Company. The new members were Emanuel Russell, Truman Woodruff and Norman Woodruff. This new plant became known as the **New Britain Lock Factory**.

One of the locks made by this company was known as a plate lock, and was made by using a large block of wood instead of the usual cast iron for the case.

In 1837 New Britain, Connecticut, was hit by a big depression and panic. This depression was responsible for many changes in the lock making industry. The company survived, but at the end of 1838 the Woodruff brothers and William Stanley all withdrew their interests in the firm. Mr. Russell retired, and turned his interests over to his son, Henry Russell. Mr. Stanley had also invited another young man, Cornelius Erwin, to join the firm. The new partnership he formed took the name of **Stanley, Russell & Company**.

**STANLEY, RUSSELL & COMPANY  
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT  
1839 - 1841**

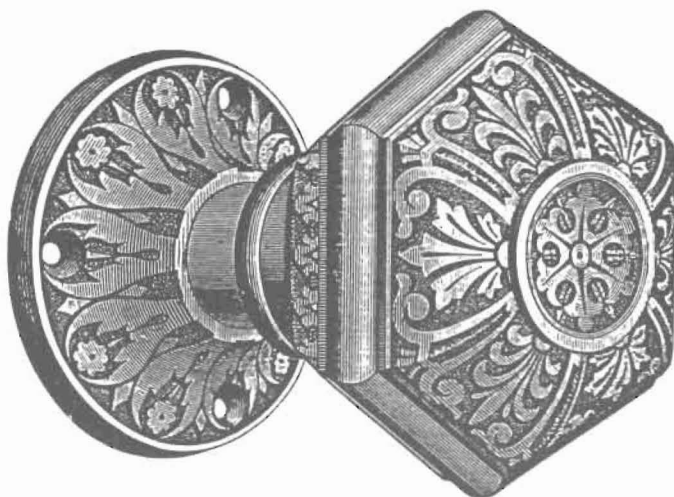
In 1839 Stanley, Russell & Company introduced a new name into the lock manufacturing business, Henry Russell. This name was to become one of the longest lasting in the industry.

Mr. Stanley would stay in the business only a short time longer, and in 1841 he decided to leave the company. His share of the business was purchased by Mr. Smith Matteson.

**MATTESON, RUSSELL & COMPANY  
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT  
1841 - 1845**

When Mr. Matteson bought out the interests of Mr. Stanley, the factory name was changed to **Matteson, Russell & Company**.

The company continued its successful operation, but Mr. Matteson died in 1845, and the company again had to



Patented June 7, 1870.

**The Doorknob Collector**

Published six times a year by Antique Doorknob Collectors of America, Inc.  
P. O. Box 126, Eola, IL 60519-0126.  
Raymond and Loretta Nemeec, Editors.  
Phone: 1-312-357-2381  
Annual Membership in USA: \$20.00.  
Printed by Sun Printing, Naperville, IL.

reorganize.

**RUSSELL & ERWIN COMPANY  
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT  
1846 - 1851**

The new company, organized after the death of Mr. Matteson, was named Russell & Erwin Company. This brought together the team of Henry E. Russell and Cornelius B. Erwin, names that would become famous in the industry. It proved to be a historical move in lock manufacturing in the United States, as it is now the oldest name in continuous use in the builders hardware industry in America.

**RUSSELL & ERWIN MANUFACTURING COMPANY  
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT  
1851 - 1902**

In 1851 a change was made in the name of the company, adding the word "manufacturing", and the company was then known as the **Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company**.

At about this time, a man by the name of John Pepper received a patent for a mineral door knob, and with the help of Mr. Erwin, he formed the Mineral Door Knob Company. This company supplied many of the area factories with this new brown marbled door knob. Mr. Erwin eventually succeeded in learning the secret process for making these knobs. Prior to that time, knobs were of white porcelain or were a red brick material with a jet black glaze. More on Mr. Pepper will be included in another chapter of this book.

In 1853 Russell & Erwin introduced the famous diamond trade mark. It was used for many years on all of their locks. With an expanded line of builders hardware, the firm of Russell & Erwin began one of the largest manufacturers of this type of product in the United States.

During the Civil War, with the shortage of iron, the old wooden plate locks were again made. Large contracts were received from the government for this type of lock, and the contractor Horace Brown, who made the locks for

Russell & Erwin, became independently wealthy.

The invention of a railroad rim lock with what was called the "Pullman Latch" was another major development for the company. This lock was the invention of Emory Parker, and was patented in 1873.

In 1872 Russell & Erwin had introduced ornate designs into their hardware lines, through a process known as Compression Bronze. This process was developed by the **Metallic Compression Casting Company**. Russell & Erwin took a lead in producing the ornate designs by obtaining the services of two of the leading men in the field, George Barkentin and Rudolph Christensen. These men were the recipients of many design patents. Ernest J. Forrest also invented the two-piece sheet metal door knob during this same period.

In 1882 Henry G. Voight went to work for the company. He would eventually become one of the most prolific inventors of locks and builders hardware that ever lived. He had several hundred patents issued in his name during his years with the company.

**AMERICAN HARDWARE CORPORATION  
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT  
1902 - 1964**

The Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company merged with the P. & F. Corbin Company in 1902. The new company was called the **American Hardware Corporation**, and was only a holding corporation, with both of the original companies retaining their respective officers and board of directors. They would continue to operate under their own names.

In 1908 a copyright was taken out on the "RUSSWIN" trade mark, the name which was originally coined back in 1875.

Russell & Erwin became a division of the **American Hardware Corporation** in 1911, continuing their operation under the **R&E** name.

Feeling the need for younger and more energetic men to lead the company, they selected a man by the name of Howard Hart as president of the company. Immediately he started a modernization  
(Continued on page 7)

## ORNAMENTAL DESIGN IN ANTIQUE DOORKNOBS

by Len Blumin

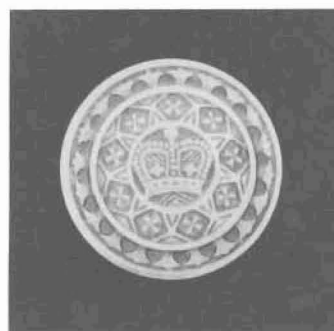
### TWOFOLD SYMMETRY

- F-103a This steel version is significantly different from F-103.  
F-125 Vernacular, handsome work, circa 1885.  
F-126 Sargent, circa 1890. Large, high quality knob.  
F-237 "Crown." circa 1920.  
F-238 Featured Fiends, by Guerin, gold plated, circa 1920.  
F-239 Iron with brass shank. Two-fold border.

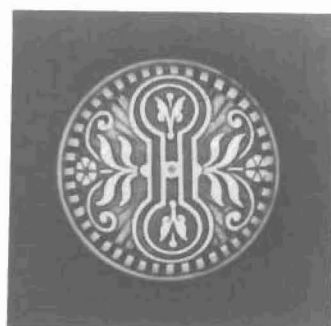
F-103a



F-237



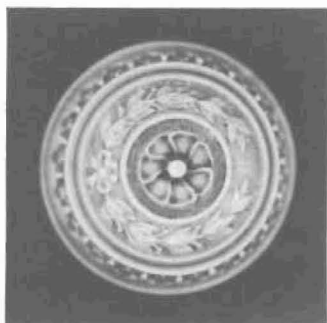
F-125



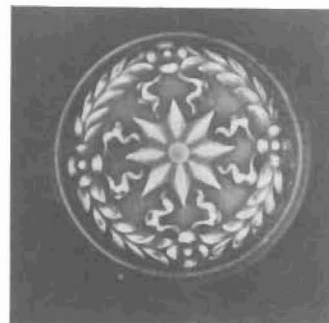
F-238



F-126



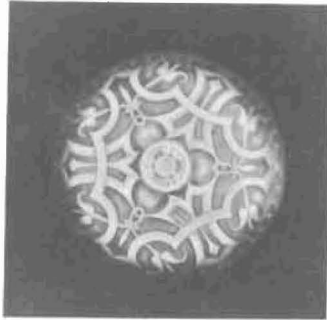
F-239



### THREEFOLD SYMMETRY

- G-125 MCCC/R&E Design patent #4133. JCC Smith. They don't come much better.  
G-126 MCCC/R&E Design patent #4137. JCC Smith.  
G-127 MCCC/R&E Design patent #4136. JCC Smith. Less successful than above.  
G-128 It really is threefold, I think, circa 1885.  
G-129 Norwalk, 1890 catalog, iron.  
G-130 Circa 1900.

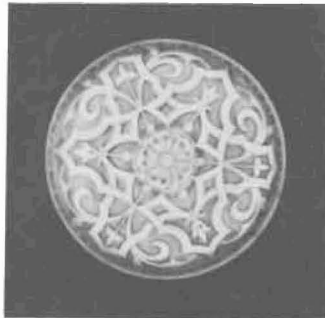
G-125



G-128



G-126



G-129



G-127



G-130



## School doorknobs lead to hobby

by Junella Leach

**T**hrough the years of our marriage I had occasionally said to Glenn, "I think doorknobs would be an interesting thing to collect." One day in the late '70's we were riding along in the car and I was telling Glenn about the shiny, brass knobs on the doors of the old school rooms where I taught. "Just imagine," I said, "the hundreds of little hands that have kept those shiny. I wonder where they all are now and what they're doing. Imagine the teachers, parents, principals and visitors who have been there and touched that very knob." I then repeated my assumption that doorknob collecting would be fun. Instead of his usual "uum" he surprised me by saying, "Why don't you stop talking about it and do it?" I said, "Okay, I am now a doorknob collector". The very next week he surprised me with a set of mineral knobs he had picked up at a roadside sale. We were off!

I didn't tell very many people. The ones I did said things like, "Oh, you mean those old white things. I remember my grandmother kept those in the hens' nest to fool them into laying." One friend who is a collector of other things saw a small ad in the fall of 1981 in an antique magazine about ADCA and clipped it for me. I wrote to inquire and got the warmest of letters from Marjorie Wiemer. She said we could be charter

members so we promptly joined and ordered Maude Eastwood's book. I then collected a little more earnestly.

In 1983, Glenn and I attended the Convention in Naperville and BAM---now he was hooked. I felt like I had died and gone to heaven that weekend. A whole new world was opened up to me. All this and Len Blumin's book, too! What a fascinating group of people. They were friendly, dedicated and helpful. No one was too busy or too important to answer my "dumb" questions. I bought a bag of doorknobs at the auction (I think they conspired for me to win the bid.) and rode home with them in my lap. No longer would I hang my head when I said, "I collect doorknobs."

In spite of busy lives we have continued to collect, to catalog some and to research a little. We have given some talks on our knobs. It was a big thrill to display knobs at the Illinois State Museum Collectors' Day and see the interest by people of all ages. The kids wanted to lift them and the old



folks wanted to reminisce. The next day the local TV station called me. They came out and taped about 30 minutes and showed a minute and a half as a special feature on the Saturday evening news. By the time they left the newsman and the photographer were converted to the beauty and excitement of doorknobs.

Our collection is small (around 200) and our knowledge limited but our love of knobs is undeniable. Glenn's favorite knob is a Greek Head (A-310) made of "carved" wood. My favorite seems to be the one I'm holding at the moment. However, some are a greater thrill to discover. When I need to (Continued on page 7)



Historical Sketch continued ---

program, tearing down several of the old buildings and replacing them with larger facilities. He also made a survey of the entire product line, and proceeded to drop many of the less profitable items. Liquid door closers were developed and added a new line of pin tumbler locks.

In 1930 R&E furnished the hardware for the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. All of the door knobs, escutcheons and other builders hardware were gold plated. The job was a classic in design and craftsmanship, and has probably never been equaled in this field.

Among other items manufactured during the World War II era was a line of marine hardware for the vast number of ships built during those years. Although many of the lock companies were phasing out the old popular mortise locks in favor of simpler installations, R&E chose this time to develop and made a completely new line of these locks. This lock was called the "Ten Strike", and proved to be immensely popular, especially for store doors and entrances. One of the features of the lock was that parts were interchangeable so that the same lock could be used for any number of functions.

**EMHART CORPORATION**  
**NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT**  
**1964 - PRESENT**

In 1964 the controlling interest in the American Hardware Corporation was purchased by the Emhart Manufacturing Company of Bloomfield, Connecticut. The name was then changed to **Emhart Corporation.**

A new plant was built in Berlin, Connecticut, and all products of the P. & F. Corbin Hardware Division, Corbin Cabinet Lock Division, and the Russell & Erwin Division are all being manufactured in this plant.

Although the Russwin Company did not start operating under the Russell & Erwin name until 1839, the original start of this empire dates back to 1831 and the name of the F. T. Stanley Company.

The P. & F. Corbin Company dates back almost as far with the advent of Doen, Corbin & Company coming into existence in 1849, and the Corbin Cabinet Lock Company beginning as a separate department of P. & F. Corbin in 1879.

Leach's continued ---

relax I stare at the design in a large glass sphere-shaped knob. It's more relaxing than flowing sand or quiet music.

One of our "mystery" knobs is a 2-1/8 inch bronze knob with a delicate design that looks like fine jewelry --- elaborate curls and a vase of flowers. Another is a heavy brass one with a crown topped by a cross surrounded by a circle with nine small Maltese Crosses which are divided by nine man-like symbols. (See F-237 p.4)

Schools and educational knobs are a special interest of mine. I try to get one whenever a school is torn down. The most precious knob of all is the one on the door of the classroom in which I have taught for 15 years. There is no way I will ever retire without it.

**An open-and-shut case**

Police in Boston, Massachusetts, are puzzled by a thief who has been stealing the doorknobs from the offices at police headquarters.

A police spokesman said the doorknobs bear the city seal and are apparently valuable souvenirs. In early June, six doorknobs were stolen from doors on the middle floors.

The spokesman said detectives are investigating the disappearance of the doorknobs, "but naturally, it doesn't rank high on their priority list."

**ADCA Convention in Indianapolis, September 21-25**

