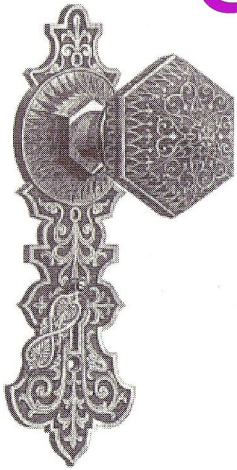


The Doorknob Collector

Number 132

July-August 2005

A Publication of The Antique Doorknob Collectors of America



DOOR HARDWARE OF PRE-CIVIL WAR AMERICA

By Maud Eastwood

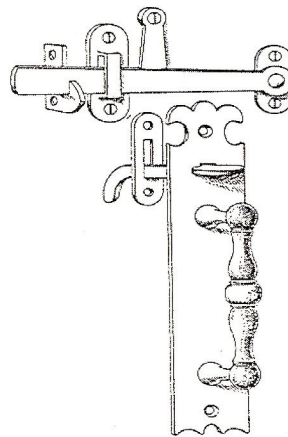
While much attention is directed to Victorian ornamental hardware, the less spec-
Victorian hardware have generally been neglected. Questions are being raised by res-
toration and preservation forces, historians and private persons concerning pre-Civil War hardware. A con-
stantly recurring question from the public is “what hardware is appropriate for my pre-Civil War house?”
As will be shown, there is no simple answer. It depends where you live, the age of the house, and its style.
Hardware for a log cabin in Jonesboro, Tennessee from 1820 won’t fit on a New York town house built
1840 and vice-versa. There were striking regional differences (New Orleans is not Philadelphia), and hard-
ware evolved over time, from hand-made wrought iron to the cast iron which became more popular in the
mid-19th century.

To start with sources, Albert H. Sonn’s Early American Wrought Iron is invaluable. First
published in 1928, it was reprinted in 1979 in a “Three Volumes in One” format. This trea-
tise provides detailed coverage and 320 plates of illustrations drawn by the author. It starts
with the wooden forerunners, covers the wrought iron field, and includes sections on
doors with appropriate hardware in place.

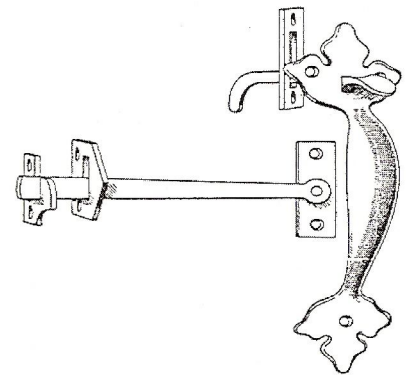
Another invaluable source of information is the Historic American Building Survey

(HABS) in the Library of Congress, Divi-
sion of Prints and Photographs. Its Archives

include thousands of drawings and photographs from all types of structures nationwide, from the door of the
1726 Giddings Tavern of Exeter, NH with its “whittled latch of wood”, to the 1807 house of Capt. Lonard at
Agawa, MA with a Suffolk latch on its front door. To get to the website, Google it. Many local libraries,
agencies and historical societies also have regional material from HABS.



Norfolk Latch



Suffolk Latch

Newsletter Deadline – August 15, 2005

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Variations in local hardware were due to the economic sophistication of the region, its resources and the ethnic background of its inhabitants – English, Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Italian, and more. For example, the English in the New England colonies used ironwork less in the 18th century than the Germans in Pennsylvania and the French in Louisiana.

However, most of the hardware used in the colonies, and continuing after Independence, was imported, primarily from England (with obvious interruptions such as the war of 1812). In 1791 Anthony Ackley, an importer in New York, offered a wide variety of goods, including brass knobs and thumb latches, presumably from England. It was only in the late 1840s that the enormous iron deposits of the Northern Michigan peninsula were discovered, and the foundations of the large-scale American iron and steel industries were created. The American hardware industry grew, including the expansion of the glass industry in the second quarter of the 19th century producing cut or pressed glass doorknobs.

But to go back to the beginning, in the beginning there was wood, and then the village blacksmith. Sonn illustrates the wooden latch worked by a thong threaded through the door, a wooden Norfolk-type latch, a swivel latch, wooden bolts and hinges. Even the pegs and cotter pins were whittled from wood. Sonn identifies the locations in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Pennsylvania where these pieces were sketched and dates the houses in the early 1700s.

IRON

The use of wrought iron latches spread, overlapping its wooden forerunners. If your house dates from the 18th century, it probably would have had wrought iron hardware. By the early 19th century, plate and boxed latches and locks were appearing as well as the first cast iron hardware for rim application. Mortised latches and locks were well established by the middle of the century.

The wrought-iron latch, in its many forms and types, makes up the first section of Sonn's work, as it should, since the latch was the main door-operating device of early America for nearly a century. As the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines it, a latch is a "Door fastening made of a small bar falling into a catch and lifted by a lever outside".

Sonn divides the types of early wrought iron latches into four types – knocker, escutcheon lift, Suffolk and Norfolk. An abbreviated description would be:

- **Knocker latch:** a latch combined with a door knocker; twisting the knocker releases the latch.
- **Escutcheon lift:** while the handle is firmly fixed to the door, the escutcheon plate can be moved, and upon being pushed up, releases the inside bar.
- **Suffolk latch:** two plates or "cusps", upper and lower, are joined by a central grasp or handle with the thumb push thrust through the upper cusp. Arrowhead, Ball and Spear, Bean, Swordfish, and the Tulip and Heart were the most popular cusp patterns of the day.
- **Norfolk latch:** characterized by the handle or grasp being fixed to a back plate of rolled sheet iron, usually very simple in design. Often a small "fillet" of pewter was applied to the grasp. The thumb press was initially rounded-flat in shape. Later, in 1800-1810, it was slightly dished or flared. The Norfolk latch practically superseded all other forms of latches until William Blake's cast-iron latch of 1840 was patented.

Latches can also be categorized as thumb press, lift or knob latches. The Suffolk and Norfolk latches are thumb press.

The first stage of the transition from a latch to a lock was attaching the bar and staple to an escutcheon; in the second stage, a spring arrangement was attached to the bar with the cam. The name of an Englishman, William Bratt, appeared on imported latch-locks of this type. Sonn shows two c. 1825 wrought iron box rim locks and two wooden stock locks dated 1638 and 1694.

The Doorknob Collector®



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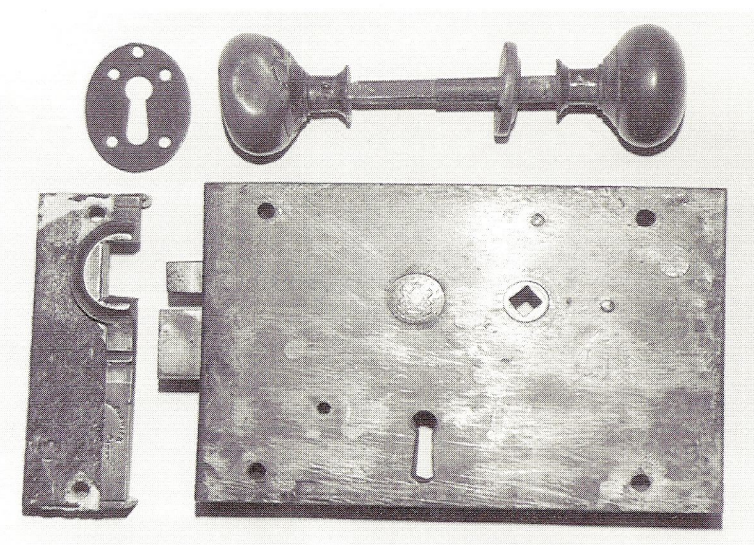
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The use of wrought iron hardware overlapped hand-fashioned wooden hardware, as early blacksmiths set up shop and imported ware began to arrive. Like wooden hardware, however, each example of wrought iron hardware is unique because each was individually hand-made.

The perpendicular Suffolk and Norfolk latches gradually progressed to the horizontal latches and locks. The Blake Bros. Co. are credited with inventing the first American mortise lock through their 1833 patent for an escutcheon latch and bolt with bore-in cylindrically enclosed works. The next 30-35 years would see the introduction of new hardware types bridging the transition from wrought iron to cast iron to the ornamental bronze era.

EARLY MANUFACTURERS



Carpenter Latch

placement lock; as Schiffer's [Early Pennsylvania Hardware](#) notes, they are often found on doors which are almost 100 years prior to the lock's invention.

By the 1840s, exterior doors often had separate silvered, brass or bronze knobs and keyholes, arranged horizontally rather than, as they were later, vertically with an escutcheon uniting them. Interior knobs were bronze, silvered glass or rosewood. Porcelain knobs were used on the exterior of houses of lesser importance.

By the early 1850s, cast iron rim latches, locks and hinges had replaced the individually worked wrought iron. Early latches were patented by the Blake Brothers (Philo, Eli Whitney and John) in 1833 and by Enoch Robinson and Wm. Hall in 1841. Coley & Smith of New Haven, CT advertised the Blake Escutcheon Latch in several varieties in an advertisement dated March 2, 1834. Knobs uniquely formed for use with the Blake 1833 latch had short metal shanks with the body variously made of different wood, glass or metal patterns. Rim locks were infrequently decorated, such as the Emigrant lock patented in 1858



Emigrant Lock

POTTERY AND PORCELAIN

Pottery knobs produced by Christopher W. Fenton in Bennington, VT would be appropriate for houses built between 1844 and 1858, when the factory closed. Those knobs were formed of cream-colored clay, and did not have a metal shank. The flow lines of the glaze run outward and down to the foot.

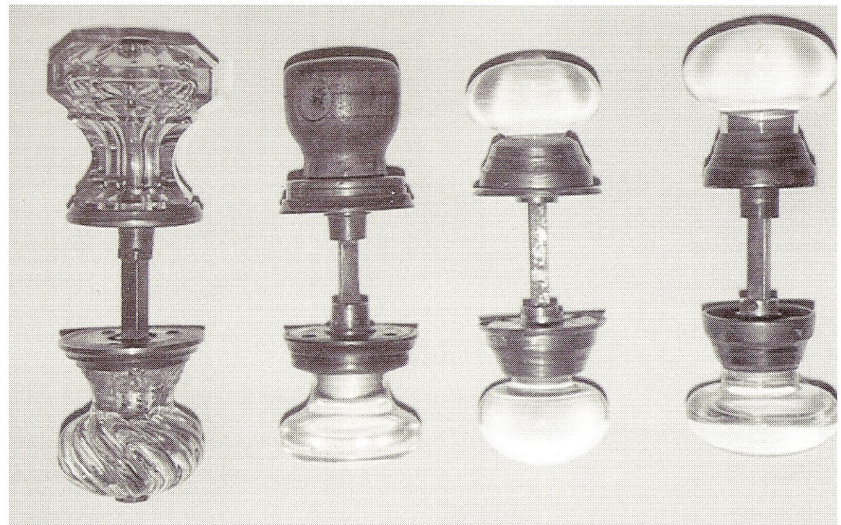
The dates of appearance of the three types of clay knobs – white, brown mottled and black – has been a matter of some discussion. A patent dispute in the 1840s throws light upon the subject. In 1841 Hotchkiss, Davenport & Quincy received patent No. 2,197 on an invention consisting of use of a pottery or porcelain knob which is attached to

a metal shank. The cavity in the knob in which the shank is to be inserted is largest at the bottom of its depth and the metal is poured in to fill the cavity, creating a dovetail. Hotchkiss brought suit in Ohio in 1845 for infringement, lost at trial, and the case ended up in the Supreme Court, *Hotchkiss v. Greenwood*, 11 How. 248 (1851). It was conceded that clay and porcelain had been previously used to make knobs (at least as early as 1831), and that the method of attaching the shank had also been previously used for attaching metal knobs. The supposed patentable invention was using that method to attach shanks to clay or porcelain knobs. The Supreme Court held that did not rise to the level of patentability, that it was not enough to apply a commonly known material to a new use by a well known technique. So from this we can conclude clay and porcelain knobs go back at least as far as the 1830s, but that such a knob with a metal shank dates to the early 1840s or later.

GLASS KNOBS

Prior to 1800, glass knobs were used only for furniture, where they were not turned but only pulled. Pre-1800 glass knobs were free blown; molded glass appeared in the 1820s and pressed glass in the late 1820s. The challenge was to attach glass knob bodies to metal shanks which could be used to operate latches. There were various patented methods of doing so, which would be appropriate for houses dated from 1831 and the next few decades. In 1836-37 attaching knobs to sockets and ferrules was first used. See patent No. 65. In 1845-49 the practice of imbedding metal shanks in the knob body was developed. In 1855-1870 silvered glass knobs were patented. Illustrated on the right are several glass knobs from the 1830s and 1840s.

The little-known imitation agate glass Argillo Stone knob was patented in December, 1851 by John Paige Pepper and, most importantly, was supplied through Enoch Robinson for the 1864 Treasury Building. The formative material was clay with additives, but unlike clay bodies which were baked, Argillo was fired like glass. (See TDC 63, Jan.-Feb. 1994). One example surfaced a number of years ago on a beach in California.



SOURCES

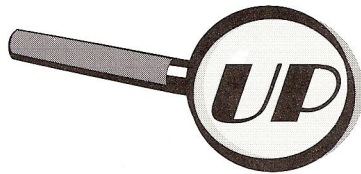
So how does one determine what hardware is appropriate for an 1800-1865 house? Of course, hardware covered by patents issued in that period would qualify, although the patents generally addressed technical issues – such as attaching a non-metallic knob to a spindle – rather than design of the knob. Another valuable source is Sonn’s illustrations of doors of different types from different localities and dates, with the appropriate hardware in place.

Perhaps the best source of research is other houses in your area of a similar age, and gumshoe is the preferred method of research. If you are in New York, walk the streets of Greenwich Village or the upper East/West side to try to identify hardware on houses that look the age of your house. The hardware should fit the house – a simple house would not have pretentious hardware, and vice-versa. Museums and historic houses are also excellent sources. Unfortunately, the hardware catalogues available to collectors of post-Civil War hardware (through the ADCA) are not generally available for the ante bellum era.

Then the issue is where to acquire the hardware appropriate to your house. If your hardware would have been the 18th century wrought iron type, consider working with a local blacksmith after determining the style and type you want. The chances of purchasing genuine 18th century hardware are not good. Supposedly early hardware (18th century) was often faked, probably in one of the periodic “colonial revivals”. In 1966 Schiffer – a noted dealer in early American antiques – complained that he had often been fooled, and suggested that the purchaser look out for “sharp edges; little play or wear on hinges; very even rusting; evenly spaced hammer indentation; thicker metal than known old examples.” Hardware from the mid-19th century is sometimes available on eBay, and is not as highly sought after as post-Civil War hardware. Contact the businesses listed on the “Business References” page of our website,

www.antiquedoorknobs.org. And look at the advertisements in The Old House Journal, a bible for the owner of an old house.

Suggestions for Further Reading: In addition to Sonn, see
Maud Eastwood, *Antique Builders Hardware, Knobs & Accessories*, (Eastwood, 1982). Pages:2-14 and 22-29
Henry J. Kauffman, *Early American Iron Ware* (1965)
Herbert Schiffer, *Early Pennsylvania Hardware* (Whitford Press, 1966)
H. Weber Wilson, *Antique Hardware* (Krause Publications, 1999)



CLOSE #3 – “The “Buffalo”

By Win Applegate

In Web Wilson’s book, *Antique Hardware*, on page 28 the “Buffalo” makes his modern appearance. To me, one of the most outstanding features is that Web’s photo is able to show so much of the fine detail of the knob. Although it is an unfinished sample that still has its ‘tab’, that alone, has allowed it to retain all of its fine detail because it was never ‘used’.

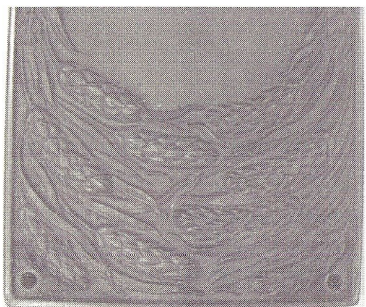
My bronze “Buffalo” is a salesman’s sample. Admittedly a few ‘steps’ better than Web’s it has a few other things going for it. In my role as a minor researcher, I have defined an axiom: *“On a salesman’s sample, the knob and the plate are intended to be a set.”* I realize that this may not go over well with all of my fellow collectors, but!

Carefully disassembling the sample, we find that the backplate proudly announces its heritage as “Sargent.” Now, let’s attempt to zero in on the question of “what was the hardware intended to represent?” Certainly, an early guess would be a ‘Buffalo’ hotel in some locale, perhaps New York State or Midwest. Well, as you will note, the top of the backplate dispels the idea of a hotel as we have the ‘Scales of Justice’ indicating that it was intended for an important court house. This would not, in itself, cancel out Buffalo, New York.



The bottom of the plate, in my mind, narrows down the region as we now have **wheat**. We are certainly now in the Midwest and not in New York State. Putting the Buffalo as the State animal together with the wheat (belt), I can now draw my conclusions.

For a number of years we have seen in print and read on the internet, suppositions about ornamental hardware that are so stated that they are taken as absolute facts that are not to be challenged. Sorry, a number of collectors, including myself, take umbrage to this. So, before I state my conclusions, let me preface it with:



Best Guess, but not the Gospel: The bronze “Buffalo” knob and plate were produced by Sargent for the State Supreme Court House in Topeka, Kansas.



ADCA Membership – What's It's All About

By Faye Kennedy, keeper of the records

1. **The Doorknob Collector:** Your basic membership is \$25 per year that entitles you to six issues each year of the newsletter. They are issued in January, March, May, July, September, and November. This is really how our members keep in touch.
1. Have you had a show of your collection locally? Send your news, interesting articles, or questions about your collection to Antiquedoorknobs@comcast.net or call 973-783-9411 or fax to 973-783-8503.
2. **The Doorknob Exchange:** There is a column in the newsletter to buy or sell your hardware items. For best results with this it is suggested that you send a digital photo to the editor at Antiquedoorknobs@comcast.net for inclusion. This can be done with a digital camera or a scan of an existing photo. Those without computers may be able to get a friend to help with all of this. A clear photo can also be used by the editor.
3. **ADCA Archives:** These are antique hardware catalogs that help you identify your collection. Currently they are housed with Steve Menchhofer and an order form goes out in the newsletter once a year. Copies are made only once a year in order to limit the handling of the brittle catalogs.
4. **Annual Convention:** A convention is held annually. The club tries to locate them in different areas of the country. The host of the convention is a volunteer from the club and chooses the location, usually near their home. To volunteer just call the president of the club, currently Steve Rowe, or email to antiquedoorknobs@comcast.net.

The convention is a time to meet with old friends and make new ones. This is the only time of the year when we actually meet face to face. Many of our members have never attended one, but I urge you to give it a try. You will see an array of hardware that will inspire you. Tours are organized to local homes with period significance where we uh and ah over the hardware and general architecture. Give it a try!
5. **Web Listing:** You may choose your membership level to include a web listing of your business on our website, AntiqueDoorknobs.org in addition to the newsletter. The total cost of this membership option is \$50 which includes your basic membership as well.
6. **Business Membership:** This option includes the regular membership with a web primary listing on our website and a display of your business at the annual convention. The total cost of this membership option is \$100 which includes your basic membership as well.

We also have many members who support the club by giving extra amount each year. Those choosing one of the options below will have their names printed in the newsletter (unless you choose to remain anonymous) and receive a letter for tax purposes for the amount you give over the \$25 per year. Your options for increased support of the ADCA are as follows:

Supporter	\$50	Patron	\$250
Sustaining Member	\$100	Benefactor	\$500

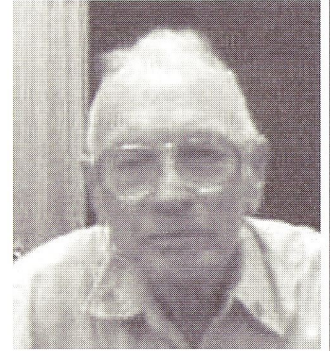
Membership due? Unlike commercial magazines, we send out **ONLY a single notice** when your membership is due. A return envelope is included; just add a stamp. Don't put it aside and forget. Your membership will be extended from your current due date. You will find your membership due date printed on your address label. Dues are \$25 per year for basic membership. I have indicated the other options above. We welcome multi-year memberships as well.

Phone area codes continue to change as well as email addresses and home addresses. Let us know as your personal information changes so we can update the database and the roster. Send information to:

ADCA
PO Box 31
Chatham, NJ 07928-0031

In Memoriam

Larry Bolen (#113), of Atlanta died May 27, 2005 at the age of 88. His wife, Frances Sutton Bolen, preceded him in death. Mr. Bolen was an active member of Antique Doorknob Collectors since 1987, and an Army Veteran of WW II. He is survived by his children Patsy (Skip) Moody, Larry Bolen, Judy (Dennis) Wright, Bob (Bonnie) Bolen; his 16 grandchildren, and 9 great grandchildren. Contributions may be made in memory of his wife Frances to The American Cancer Society, 2200 Lake Boulevard, NE, Atlanta, GA 30319.



Larry was a well-know face at the annual Antique Doorknob Collectors' conventions. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him. According to his daughter, Judy, he was still actively collecting doorknobs right up to his death.

Judy wanted us to know that the club was very dear to his heart and our name was right on top of the "to-be-notified-pile". Our condolences go out to his entire family.



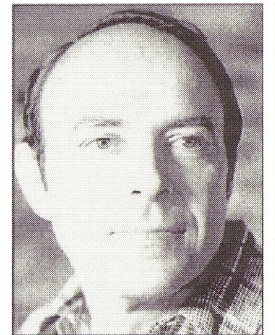
Joe Mueller (#91) of St. Louis, MO passed away on June 14, 2005; beloved husband of the late Martha Mueller; father of three daughters and two sons, grandfather to 13 and great-grandfather to 3. Contributions may be made to the American Heart Assn.

Joe retired from the phone company where he was a lineman. He has been an active member of the ADCA for 20 years. Martha accompanied him to conventions. He always had a ready-smile and shared his knowledge with those who wanted to learn.

At the conventions you could always find Joe with his buddies Carlos Ruiz and Steve Arnold. The three would leave from St. Louis each year and head for the convention wherever it was picking up hardware along the way. Carlos says they laughed a lot and just had a good time. It is probably safe to say that if you attended a convention you probably bought a knob or two from Joe. He was a friend to all and warmed our hearts with his smile. We want Joe's family to know that the ADCA has lost another dear friend. Our thoughts and prayers go out to them.

David Smeltzer, husband of Linda (#136) passed away suddenly at the age of 74 on October 15, 2004. David was a quadriplegic from a swimming pool accident at the age of 15. However, he persevered against adversity and enjoyed an enormously esteemed career as professor at Portland State College in Portland, OR where he was teaching until a week before his death.

He and Linda were married in 1966 and were inseparable. Linda has been a member since 1988 and is planning to attend the convention in Charleston this year. David attended many ADCA conventions with Linda. Many of our members will remember meeting David and engaging in some lively conversations. Win Applegate remembers his as a "very fine man with an excellent and exceptionally interesting mind". David had many interests, he was a voracious reader, loved college football, and was an expert in flora and fauna (he could name almost any tree he could see and any bird he could hear).



Our condolences go out to Linda, their daughter, Holly and her husband, Bill, and their children, Rose and Nicholas.

FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2004

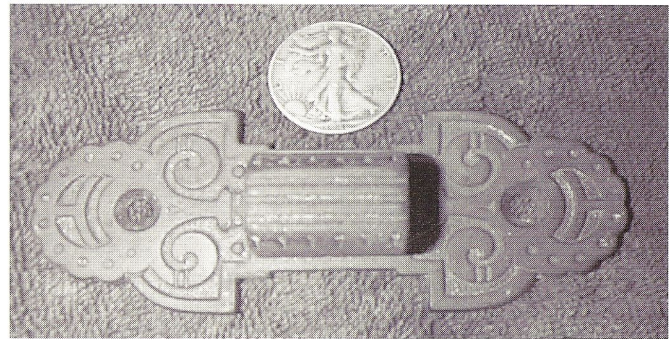
Convention		VDA2d	
Receipts	\$9299	Sales	\$140
Expenses	\$8113	Expenses	\$900
Net	\$1186	Net	(\$760)
Club Activities			
Receipts	\$7773		
Expenses	\$9194	Total Funds	\$62,313
Net	(\$1421)	Allocation of Funds	
Auction Commissions	\$ 203	Bosco-Milligan Donation	\$4000
Archives Net	\$ 321	2005 Convention	\$5500
Donations	\$7175	For VDA2nd Supplement	\$9722
		For VDA3rd	\$21000
		Auction	\$986
		Donations	\$10059
		Archives	\$6295
		Operating	\$4751

Respectfully Submitted
Allen S. Joslyn, Treasurer

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.

Wanted: One Russell and Erwin Oil Lamp Bracket, 2" x 5 1/4", Cast Iron: Marked RE Co in Diamond on back. David Sherk (#538), PO Box 214, Angelica, NY 14709, 585-466-3099, gadaidasa@yahoo.com



Exhibition Notice

The Montclair Historical Society at 110 Orange Road in Montclair, NJ 07042 is hosting an exhibit of Antique Hardware through July 31, 2005. Call 973-744-1796 for times.

Lock Museum of America Show

The Lock Museum of America will be having a collectors show at the Terryville High School gym in Terryville, CT on October 8, 2005. For directions contact the museum at 860-589-6359.

Membership	Newsletter and Other Questions	Web Site
ADCA Box 31 Chatham, NJ 07928-0031 Knobnews@aol.com Phone: 973-635-6338	Antiquedoorknobs@comcast.net Phone: 973-783-9411 Fax: 973-783-8503	www.Antiquedoorknobs.org