The Doorknob Collector

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

Uplifting Hardware

A Story of Custom-Designed Window Sash Lifts

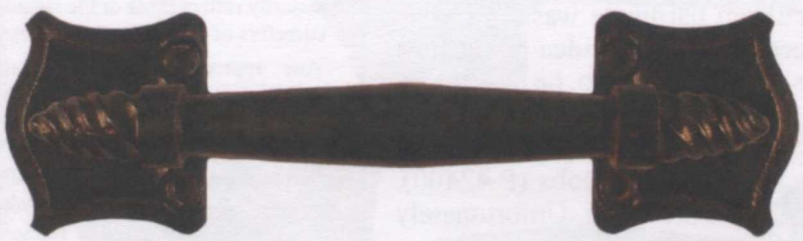
By Paul Woodfin

While our club tends to focus more on door hardware, windows have often had hardware as ornamental as the doors. As with door hardware, by the mid-1880s custom hardware was being produced by hardware companies for specific structures. Thankfully there is evidence that speaks to the designs of custom hardware in the 1880s to the 1920s. Note that most sash lifts discussed in this article are shown on page 3.

The first examples are sash lifts by Yale & Towne in a Bower-Barff iron finish. While the same twist finials are shown on a hinge in their Yale's 1889 catalog, the design likely originated with the Chicago architect John Wellborn Root, as noted in TDC #10. Henry Towne in his 1904 book also specifically identifies Root as a pioneer of special hardware designs, along with Louis Sullivan and William Mundie (more on them in the next pages).

The earliest of the three (at right) is from Burnham & Root's Rookery building in Chicago, as well as the Midland Hotel in Kansas City. Both were completed in early 1888. As the Rookery was completed earlier (the Midland had a construction accident which delayed the hotel's completion), press at the time talked about both the "rustproof" iron finish and the unusual hardware design (C-15000) by the architects.

The lift below is from the Board of Trade building in Kansas City, with a different base design that matches the backplates for this building. The Board of Trade was also a B&R design and was completed a few months later in 1888. See TDC #204 for the description and photos of the door hardware for the Rookery and the Board of Trade.



The building which used the third sash lift (top of page 3) is by a different Chicago architect, known for designing Pullman Palace Car's factory

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and office buildings in Chicago. Solon Spencer Beman's Pioneer Press building, completed in 1889, has iron monogram plates (PP at the top) with a matching curl at the bottom as shown on the sash lift bases. I suspect Beman learned about the ability to have matching bases from Root or Orr & Lockett, who were Yale &Towne's primary dealer in Chicago through the mid-1890s.

Another Beman-designed building also featured Bower-Barff iron hardware, this time by Chicago Hardware and featuring their Niles patent shank. The hardware for the Pabst Building in Milwaukee, as noted in TDC #231, was listed in the 1895 Chicago Hardware catalog as the Orleans pattern, a stock pattern that possibly evolved from this custom design,

As noted above, Louis Sullivan was cited by Towne as a pioneer with custom hardware. While almost all major Adler & Sullivan buildings had custom hardware, their first custom sash lifts likely were for the Chicago Stock Exchange in 1894, in Bower-Barff cast iron with a unique design that matches the doorknobs and backplates. See TDC #129 for more information about the Stock Exchange and it's hardware.

William Mundie was the partner of legendary Chicago architect William LeBaron Jenney, the designer of the Home Insurance Building in Chicago, which was reportedly the first steel framed skyscraper. The hardware for the Daughters of Isabella building is legendary. The Isabella was completed in 1894 and featured a mix of Gothic and French designs, including a fleur de lis on the doorknob (C-11600). The backplate (and sash lift, at left) would be introduced as the Cologne design by Yale in their 1910 catalog, more than a decade and a half after the Isabella was completed, so good design stands the test of time. The Isabella remained standing in Chicago until 2004 when the property was made into another parking lot. Thankfully some hardware, stair and elevator fragments were salvaged.

Architect Daniel Burnham's firm also used custom hardware in most major buildings. The Union Station project for the Pennsylvania Railroad at Pittsburgh, required the best from the design team. By 1900 Corbin had become their primary supplier, and produced the hardware for Union Station. While the doorknob features the USP monogram (P-49930), the plates and the sash lifts feature a star in the crest. The hardware is shown in the Corbin S catalog on page 75 with part number S1404 assigned to the sash lift. The sash lift for Burnham's other major project in Pittsburgh at the time, the Frick Building, was coded S1432.

Another Pittsburgh edifice featuring custom hardware was the Farmers Deposit National Bank by the architectural firm of Alden & Harlow, Completed in 1902, Farmers Bank was designed the to be the tallest structure in Pittsburgh, and held that title until 1910, when the new Oliver Building was completed. Corbin provided the complete suite of matching hardware in brass, with FB monogram doorknobs (P-42400). The sash lift is identified as S1694 in the Corbin S catalog. Unfortunately the Farmers Bank did not live a long life like other significant skyscrapers in Pittsburgh, and was imploded in 1997 after being renovated and reskinned in the 1960s by new owner Rockwell.

Architects Holabird & Roche were one of the 3 major Chicago architecture firms in the 1890s and later. One of their early tall buildings, the 1891 Pontiac Building, featured monogram doorknobs (P-47700) and

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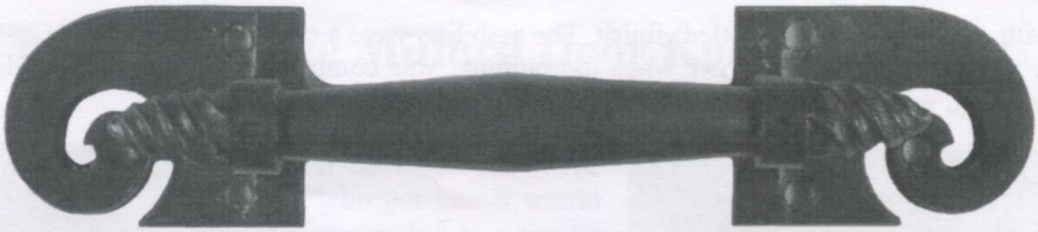
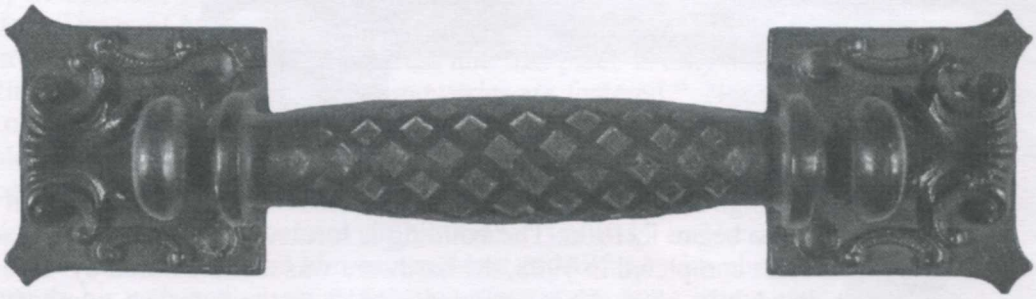
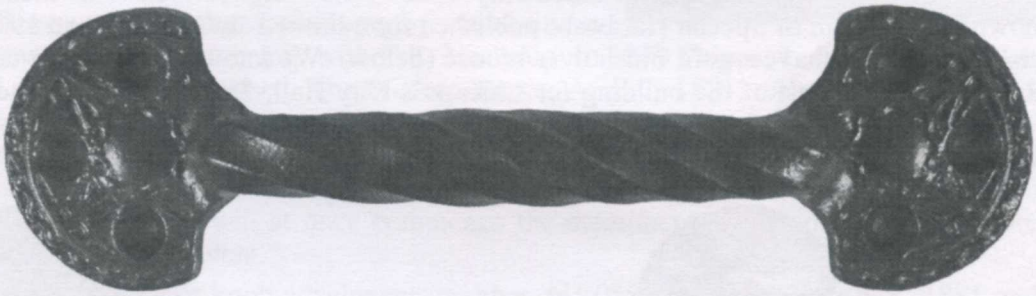
Pioneer Press Building

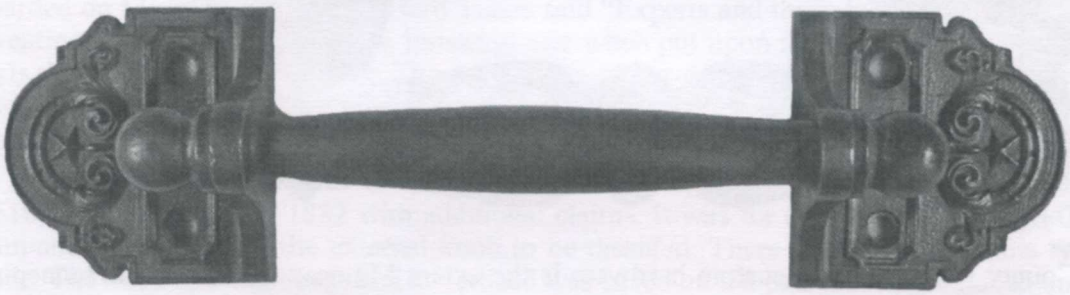




Pabst Building

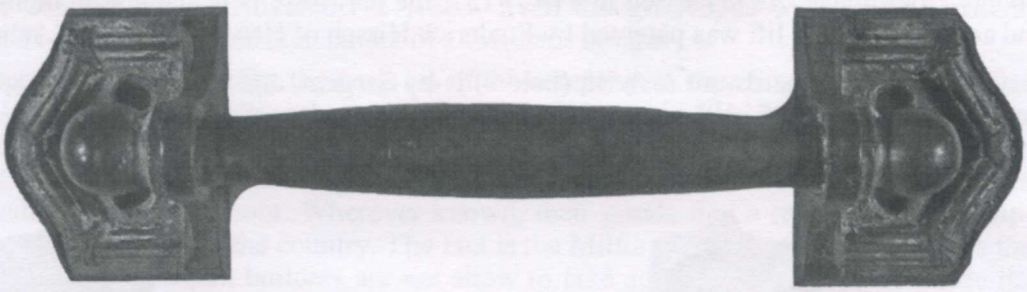
Chicago Stock Exchange

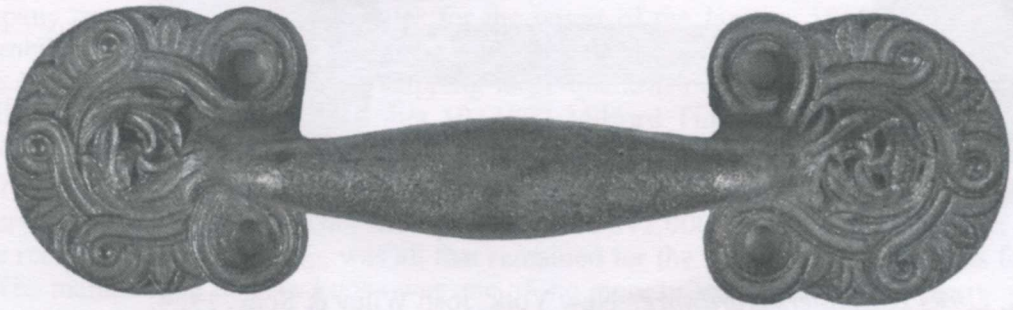




Union Station Pittsburgh

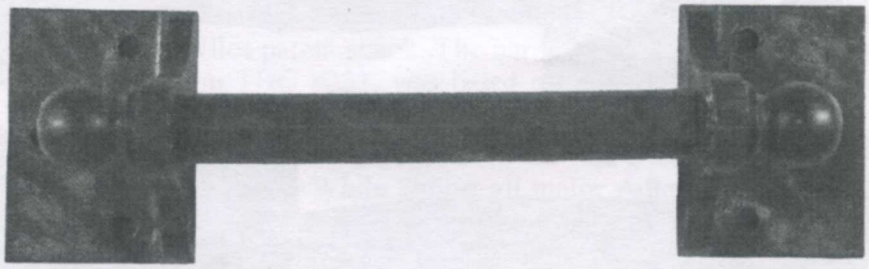
Farmers Deposit Bank Pittsburgh



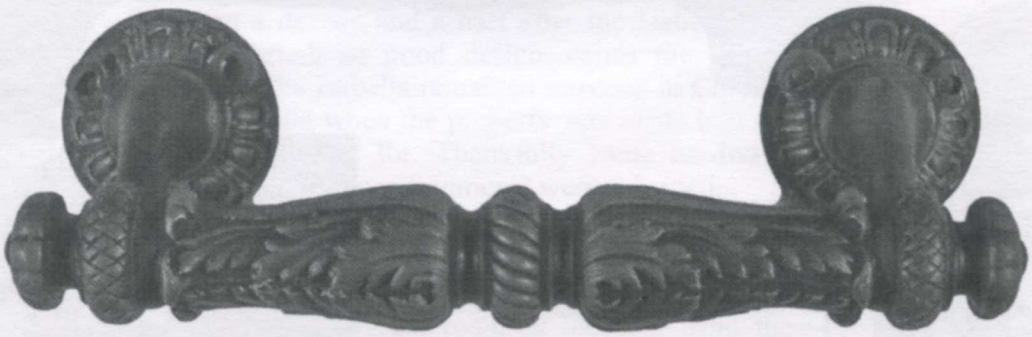


City Hall & Courthouse Minneapolis

with Antique Copper (mottled) finish. The sash lifts were a stock item in Corbin's 1895 catalog, and likely were a stock item in 1891 when the building was completed. The Pontiac stands today as an office building, with all new windows and updated interior.

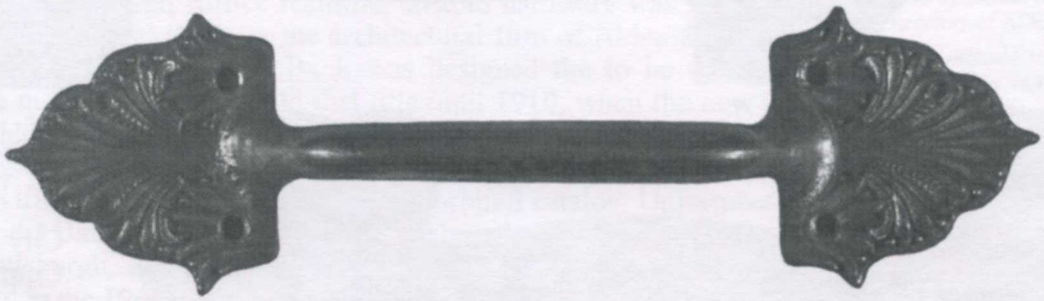


Holabird & Roche were selected to design the new Cook County Courthouse and Chicago City Hall in 1904, and construction on the county side began in 1906. The building is located on an entire city black in the Loop, When the county portion was completed in 1908, the hardware was manufactured by Yale & Towne to designs by the architect dated July 1906. Yale assigned N1410 as their project number, as shown in an Album of Special Hardware published for a limited audience around 1915. The sash lifts are large (8 3/4") and have a gold finish over bronze (below). We know the architects controlled the design, as for the second half of the building for Chicago's City Hall, Sargent supplied the hardware changing only the seal to be the city's. Holabird & Roche (and other architects) often did controlled hardware designs in order to save funds in a later uses of the hardware.



Another City/County building using custom hardware is the extant Minneapolis City Hall/Hennepin County Courthouse. As discussed in TDC #182, the hardware is Romanesque in style like the building, and actually the sash lift was patented by Frederick Hirsch of New York in 1895, number D24,782.

Our last custom hardware sash lift (below) is by Sargent, and is bronze with a gold finish. The lift is marked Sargent and 2533Ph on the back. The Ph code is how Sargent distinguished their custom hardware beginning around 1900, and would date to around 1925.



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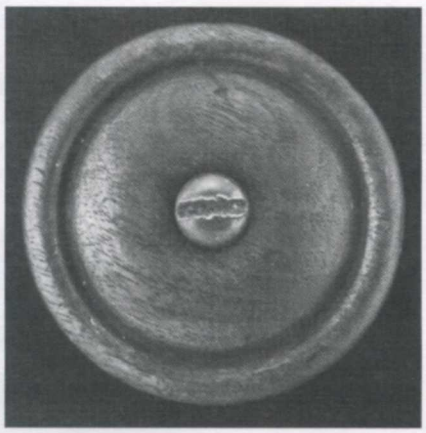
- Towne, Henry B. *Locks & Builders Hardware*. New York, Josh Wiley & Sone, 1904.

Edward L. Phipps and the Milford Door Knob Company

by Steven Hannum



The 1880's was a time of great industrial development in the United States. And it was thought that those who got into it would prosper. Milford, Michigan was a town of that mind. To quote the Milford Times of March 26, 1881. "The manufacturing interests of a town determine its wealth and progress and that place is only assured continued prosperity, where varied industries are fostered." Not to be left out the article goes on to say the Milford Door Knob Company would soon organize and produce door knobs based on the Edward L. Phipps patent.

Edward L. Phipps was born on November 16, 1835 in Vermont. The 1870 US Census listed him as a resident of Milford with photographer as his occupation. Over the next several years his name appears in the Milford Times as operating a photography studio and a hardware dealer by himself and in partnership with C.L. Northrup. In 1879 Phipps, Lowell & Co. maker of spring buggies and carriages is advertised. The Milford Times, April 2, 1881, reported "The Milford, Michigan, Door Knob Company was fully organized on Thursday evening by the election of the following Board of Directors: Dr. Robert Johnson, E. L. Phipps, C. L. Northrup, S. H. Wilhelm and Edward Thornhill, with Phipps as President and Northrup as Vice President. The company will at once proceed to purchase the required machinery and will at once commence the manufacture of Door Knob and Door Knob attachments, under the Phipps patent."

The first Phipps patent for a door knob attachment, number 241,059, was filed January 8, 1881 and awarded on May 3, 1881. The Milford Times said "Experts and those best qualified to judge, indorse the invention as one that will have an immense sale when put upon the market." In spite of the glowing reports things did not go smoothly. There were equipment delays, there was a fire in the company making equipment causing a loss of all of the patterns and manufacturing. Finally, in February, 1882 manufacturing began and in April the Milford Times reported the production could not keep up with the orders.

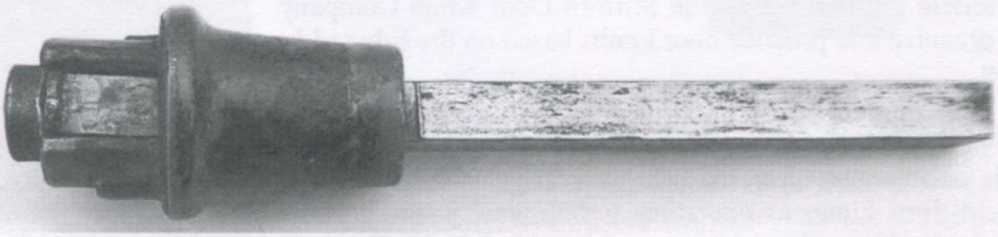
There is some question as to what knobs were being produced. The original patent was reissued, RE10,066, on March 28, 1882 with additional claims. It was for an attachment design that had a sliding component that allowed the external knob to be disabled. There is no record of this type of knob ever made. The knob that was made and advertised was based on US patent 273,763 issued on March 13, 1883 and on patent number 269,305 issued November 27,1883. Even though Phipps was issued a patent, 284,893, on September 11, 1883 for a knob attachment of a different design.

The Milford Times continued to describe the progress of the company. A traveling representative was hired, the knobs were being used in new construction in Grand Rapids and in Cleveland, Ohio. However, the July 12, 1884 article was more temperate. "Notwithstanding, the depression in all kinds of business owing to stringency of the money market, the business of the Milford Door Knob Company was never in a more prosperous condition than at present. Wherever known, their goods find a ready sale, and shipments are constantly made to all parts of the country. The fact is the Milford Door Knob Company has the best knob in the market, a fact of which builders are not show to take advantage." However, inside the company there must have been issues for the report of the January 1885 annual meeting listed Edward Thornhill as president. There was nothing in print about the departure of Edward Phipps. In May and in June 1885 the company reported shipping large quantities of window screens. There are no additional published reports until the September 10, 1892 Milford Times report of the sale of the Milford Door Knob Company's factory and property.

The January 14, 1893 Milford Times report of the final directors meeting gave a brief summary of the history of the Milford Door Knob Company. "Of the $12,000 put into the venture ten years ago, the $350 were received for the building, was all that remained for the stockholders - 62 cents for every $25 invested. The manufacture of door knobs was one of the more or less profitable enterprises. The company was organized in May 1882 with 500 shares of stock, about half of it having been held by E. L. Phipps, S.H.

Wilhelm and A. D. Webb, and the balance by Milford citizens, who went into it not only as an investment, but to promote and encourage the building up of home industries. From a variety of causes the business did prove as profitable as its projectors hoped, and the manufactures of knobs was discontinued in 1888."

Edward Phipps received patents for four different knob attachment designs. There are records of only the last one number 284,893, issued September 11, 1883, being sold. It is W-30120 at the www.antiquedoorknobs.us site. The stem of the knob has an opening designed to receive a curved flanged key which when inserted acts as a wedge binding the stem to the spindle. A screw through the center of the knob is used to hold knob to the stem. Pictured below are the stem and spindle with key inserted to bind them together.



The external end of the spindle has an inwardly-leaning inclined cut. Once the knob was installed any effort to pull the knob off would cause it to blind more tightly.

The upper part of the stem has two longitudinal flanges which mated with opening in the sides of round opening in the rear of the knob receiving the spindle.

In use the outer knob is assembled as described and inserted into the door. Then the stem of the inside knob is slid on the spindle tight against the door, the key inserted to lock it in place, the knob place on the stem and the screw add to hold it all together.

Edward Phipps continued to be an active member of the Milford community. In 1886 he making and selling a "baker's cabinet" of his design. Around 1890 he began to work for the Global Manufacturing Company as an installer of church furniture. In the 1900 census he is listed as a woodwork and in 1910 as pattern maker in a blower factory. He died on August 19, 1922 in Milford.

Phipps continued to be an active inventor his whole live. He received for patents for a wide range of inventions from designs of rail freight car doors, a valve for building sprinkler system to a belt fastener. The last patent was received at age 82. Phipps's patents are listed below:

Mar. 28, 1882	RE10,066	Reissue of 241,059
Mar. 13, 1883	273,763	knob attachment
Sept. 11, 1883	284,893	knob attachment
Nov. 27, 1883	289,305	knob attachment
July 29, 1890	433,256	Rail car door
Nov. 10, 1891	463,127	Freight car door
Jan. 23, 1894	513,414	Rail car door
Feb. 20, 1894	515,248	Rail car door
July 21, 1896	564,534	System for protecting buildings from fire
Dec. 8, 1896	572,822	Refrigerator
June 23, 1903	731,946	Corner fastening for vehicle boxes
June 17, 1913	1,065,078	Street letter box
Feb. 11, 1918	1,293,907	Belt & fastening means therefor

Special thanks to the people at the Milford Public Library. The Milford Times was accessed through the Digital Michigan Newspapers data base at Central Michigan University https://digmichnews.cmich.edu.

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