

The Doorknob Collector

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FRANCIS KEIL & SON

The late 1800's was a time of great industrial growth in the United States. A great many hardware companies came into being, made door hardware and died leaving door knobs and few records. This lack brings much dismay to those seeking to identify the maker of one of those knobs. Francis Keil & Son is an example of a company formed in 1876, made some door hardware, adapted and survived. But still leaves us wishing for more information.

Leslie's History of Greater New York Vol. III 1898, page 661-662 provides a brief overview. "Francis Keil, head of the firm Francis Keil & Son, Borough of The Bronx, manufacturers in brass, bronze and composition hardware was born in Prague, Bohemia, in June, 1840, and received his education in the public schools of that city. From 1852 to 1867 he perfected himself as a machinist, toolmaker and engraver, while in the latter year he came to the United States. In 1876 the firm of Day & Keil was organized for the manufacture of keys and locksmith supplies, the business being established at the corner of Third Avenue and Fifty-third Street. Upon the death of Mr. Day, two years later, Mr. Keil acquired the entire business. He conducted it alone until 1894, when his son, Henry F. Keil, was

received into partnership under the present style. In 1885 the property in the Twenty-third Ward where the manufactory now stands, was acquired, the foundry built. In 1890 the main building was added. Mr. Keil has resided in the Twenty-third Ward since the removal of his business there. He was married in 1865. His son, now is partner, has previously assisted his father for thirteen years, working in every branch of the business. He also traveled extensively in Europe, as well as in all sections of the United States, including the Pacific Coast."

According to information from Ancestor.com Francis Keil was born Florian Franz Keil and his son Henry Francis was born Heimrich Franz Keil December 9, 1866 Vienna, Austria. This was a time a great upheaval in the Austrian Empire this and the opportunities here lead to many of Czech decent leaving and settling in New York City.

Francis became a locksmith and business man. Both Francis and his son were very inventive obtaining several patents for lock construction and gate and ice-box hinges. The 1889 catalog is labeled as a "Catalogue of Bellhangers' and Locksmiths' supplies" however in the introduction

Francis said "I also manufacture Patent Spring Hinges and a complete line of Regular and Fine Builders' Hardware, as also Refrigerator and Ice Box Trimmings." By 1916 the catalog described the company as manufacturers of hardware, key blanks electrical goods and specialties, indicating a move away from fine builders' hardware. The company obtained patents for key construction as well as key cutting apparatus. In the 1920's the company advertised their "Keil" burglar-proof surface lock to the hardware trade and their push button switch to the electrical and model train trade. A 1943 newspaper reported the sale of the New York facility and the 1950 catalog listed the company as Keil Lock located in Charlestown, New Hampshire. The company closed in 1972. Henry Francis Keil must have had health issues moved to Riverside, California and died December 8, 1946. Francis Keil lived to be 102.



There are two knob/escutcheon designs that have been identified as made by Francis Keil. The first D-13700, far left, identified by US design patent D14929, April 4, 1884 by Francis Keil. The second identified by the other plate marked FR Keil. The 1889 Keil catalog has pictures of bell pulls and door bells in each of these designs. The catalog shows bell pulls of these designs so additional Keil door knobs may be found.



2026 CONVENTION TOUR



Thursday, August 6, 2026

We start the day with our Complimentary Made-To-Order Breakfast at the Embassy Suites Philadelphia Airport. At 8:15 AM we load the bus for an 8:30 departure for Hagley Museum, 200 Hagley Creek Road, Wilmington, DE 19807, arriving at 9:15 AM. Our 3-hour tour includes the Nation of Inventors where we will be shown some especially selected patent models from there very large collection models submitted to the U.S. Patent Office as part of applications for patents. In the Hagley Library we will get to look

at some selected hardware catalogs. And finally, a tour of the Eleutherian Mills Residence House.

We will have boxed lunches at the Hagley Picnic Area before our 1:00 PM departure for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 118-128 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA, where we will receive an Architectural Tour of the Frank Furness Building. Furness was one of the most highly respected architects of his era.

The Pennsylvania Academy building was completed in 1876 in

time for the Centennial Exhibition. Departing at 4:00 PM we arrive back at the hotel at 4:30 in time for the complimentary evening reception.

Some members have asked about receiving issues of The Doorknob Collector by email. The printer creates a proof PDF. Even when the issue is printed in black and white many of the pictures are in color. Currently US Mail costs \$1.71. If you would like to receive issues of the Doorknob Collector as a PDF by email instead of US mail send your name to adcaoffice@aol.com

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