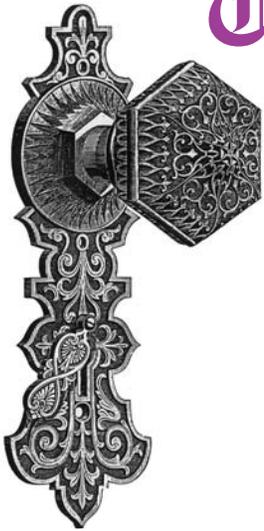


# The Doorknob Collector



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*A Nonprofit Organization Devoted to the Study and Preservation of Ornamental Hardware*

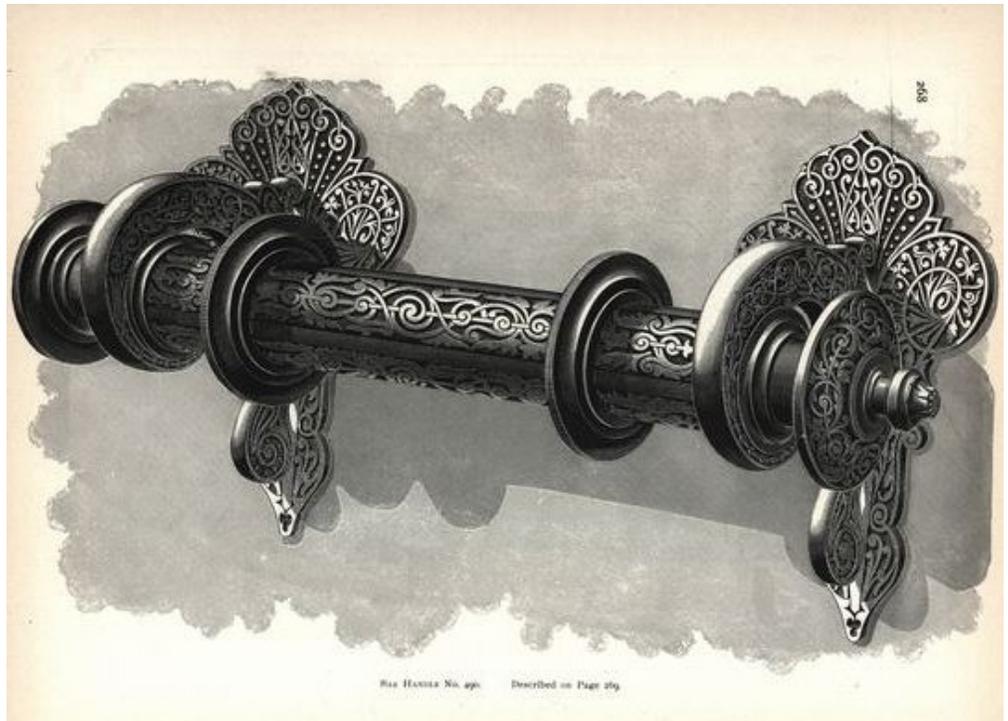
## THE HOPKINS AND DICKINSON MANUFACTURING COMPANY

BY ALLEN S. JOSLYN

**I**t made great decorative hardware, issued three catalogues over a 16 year period, and then it imploded. The documentation is sparse. But it starts with three guys from Vermont.

### Alfred B. Darling

He was a poor Vermont farm boy born in Burke, Vt. in 1821. He did some farm work, but moved to being a bellboy in a hotel in Newport, R.I. , where he was noticed by a leading hotel owner in Boston. Darling was moved around to other hotels, eventually being appointed a chief aide for the Fifth Avenue Hotel on Madison Square in New York. He formed a partnership which took over management of that Hotel, which was then the largest in the world. It was one of the most luxurious in the City and was the first one with elevators. It had offices for the Republican boss at the time (Thomas C. Platt), and a portion of



	Inside	
ADCA on Facebook .....7	The Doorknob Exchange .....7	ADCA Information .....8
Business Partners .....8	Hopkins and Dickinson Manufacturing Co. ....1-6	

the lobby where he granted audiences to people seeking favors (known as the “amen corner”). Darling was a director of several major institutions, and active in political circles. In 1882 he was said to be worth \$2,000,000.

Like a number of wealthy persons at the time, he needed a country estate, and in 1872 bought 516 acres in the Ramapo valley of New Jersey, which he eventually increased to 1,000 acres. The area became known as Darlington. .

It is not known how Darling met the other two guys from Vermont, William A. Hopkins and Frederick Z. Dickinson, but however they met, Darling probably felt a kinship with the other two Vermonters. So he invested in Hopkins and Dickinson Manufacturing Company and in 1873 they built a factory (which with machinery cost \$200,000) and a village on his land. Hopkins supervised the construction. The factory was powered by the nearby Ramapo River. They also built houses for the workmen who were not local residents, creating an apparently comfortable company town. The number employed fluctuated with demand, from as many as 100-125 to considerably less. The workers joined with locals to form a baseball team. There were also local hotels and picnics at which, after some imbibing, fights would break out on occasion. <sup>1</sup>

### **The Early History of H&D**

When or where H&D was founded is lost in the mists of time. It is reported that before it moved to Darlington in 1873, H&D “was producing bronze and iron castings in New York City”, and that Darling was already a major investor before the move to Darlington.<sup>2</sup> In 1870, a patent on an “improvement in combined latches and sliding doors” was assigned to William A. Hopkins and Frederick Z. Dickinson, “of New York”, No. 109,220, showing that at least by that date they were jointly involved in builders’ hardware.

In 1872 Trow’s New York City Directory first listed both Hopkins and Dickinson and Frederick as selling locks at Broadway and 36<sup>th</sup> Street; in 1873 H&D and William are listed as dealing in knobs; by 1874 H&D had moved its offices downtown to Duane Street and was dealing in “hardware”.

It certainly seems likely that Hopkins and Dickinson had an established and successful business before Darlington would have thrown in his lot with them. And, as we will see, the speed at which Hopkins decamped to Paris in 1874 also suggests an already successful businessman.

### **William Alonzo Hopkins**

He was born in Brattleboro, Vt. in 1840 or 1841. At the age of 13, he was employed in a drug store until he was 24 (1865), when he went to New York. All had not been happy in Brattleboro: in 1856 his father published an announcement that he had given William his freedom, and would no longer be responsible for any debts he might incur. It is not clear what he was up to in his early New York days.

William obviously became quite successful. This was, after all, a robust time when a number of fortunes were founded, often in

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relatively short order. Then, in the mid-1870s, he moved to Paris, where he remained for the rest of his life. He was well-connected: reportedly among his friends were President Ulysses Grant, Ferdinand de Lesseps, designer of the Suez Canal and Leland Stanford, the rail-roader and University founder. In 1874 he founded a newspaper in Paris with both English and French versions. In 1887 the English part was bought by James Gordon Bennett, Jr., who also ran the powerful New York Herald, and that part became the International Herald Tribune. Hopkins kept the French edition, which became Le Matin). He also founded a hospital, and was awarded the Legion of Honor for services to France. On his death at 88, in 1928, he was said to be “dean of the American colony in France.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Frederick Z. Darlington**

Frederick was born in Brattleboro in 1842, the son of Zelotes Dickinson, a local merchant who was active in a number of local ventures (and who at some point owned almost all the copper mines

in the Michigan peninsula). Zelotes and his family lived for two years in the early 1850s in New York, but then returned to Brattleboro. Frederick obviously had a different experience in his youth than William Alonzo did, but undoubtedly they knew each other from Brattleboro. Frederick was in business there for a period, but then moved to New York, retaining a summer house in Brattleboro. His New York digs ended up in the Dakota, no less. His wife was the sister-in-law of Jay Gould, which one would assume may have further strengthened his robust finances. His New York Times obituary in 1924 notes that “he was formerly engaged in hardware manufacturing”. His wife died in 1931, leaving a gross estate of some \$2.6 million to, inter alia, children of Jay Gould and her sister.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Demise of the Darlington Works**

In 1881, the factory was moved from Darlington to Newark. Darling sold out his stake in H&D. Obviously the move was catastrophic for Darlington, which until then had been a budding business center. About 100 workers had to move to Newark or lose their jobs. There is no available explanation of why this uprooting took place.



A flyer for a sash lock in June, 1882 (in the New Jersey Historical Society), lists Thomas H. O'Connor as President (presumably having purchased Darling's interest), and Fredrick was named as the Vice-President.

### **The O'Connor Days**

Thomas H. O'Connor was a prominent Catholic and an Old New Yorker. His father established a Latin School, one of the first private schools in New York. Upon the discovery of gold in California, he moved to San Francisco, where, together with two brothers and a cousin, he founded a successful steel and hardware house. (A number of fortunes were made in San Francisco in those days, not from digging gold but by supplying the diggers. Think of Levi's.) In 1858 he married the niece of an important New York politician, and in 1864 they moved back to New York. After the Civil War, he submitted an "Alabama claim" against Great Britain for some \$20,000 of hardware lost as a result of Confederate ships (built Great Britain) burning five ships en route to San Francisco.

O'Connor was active in Catholic charities and the church, a Trustee of the Emigrant Savings Bank and of other New York charities. He interested himself in various real estate transactions in New York. He also appears to have been well known in Brooklyn social circles - the engagement of his daughter was reported as "an engagement of interest to many Brooklyn People", (Brooklyn Life, "BL", 10/18/1898). He died in 1916, leaving an estate of over \$300,000.<sup>5</sup>

The H&D factory stayed in Newark until 1886, when H&D built an "immense establishment" in Brooklyn under O'Connor's direction. (BDE, 3/20/1886). Again, the reason for that move is unknown. But the day-to-day management was in the hands of one Thomas Lincoln, on whose death was described as the "long-serving manager of the former Hopkins & Dickinson Manufacturing Company". (BL 3/14/1914). In 1890 it published its third catalogue, as impressive as its earlier ones.

Then H&D failed, for reasons also unknown to us, a scant few years after moving into its new Brooklyn factory and publishing a large catalogue. In 1892 it published a statement of condition, showing capital of \$100,000 and debts of \$134,000; and that one of its trustees was O'Connor (The Evening Post (New York) "EP". 1/20/1892). In 1895, its remaining molds were auctioned off. (The Iron Age, 2/21/1895)

In 1894 O'Connor sold the Brooklyn property (how it got into his individual hands is unknown). In 1898, he brought suit to foreclose on the property (presumably based on having taken a mortgage and notes from the purchaser as payment). He was the high - or probably only - bidder and acquired the site for \$30,000. (BDE, 12/20/1894; 4/8/1898; 9/29/1898).

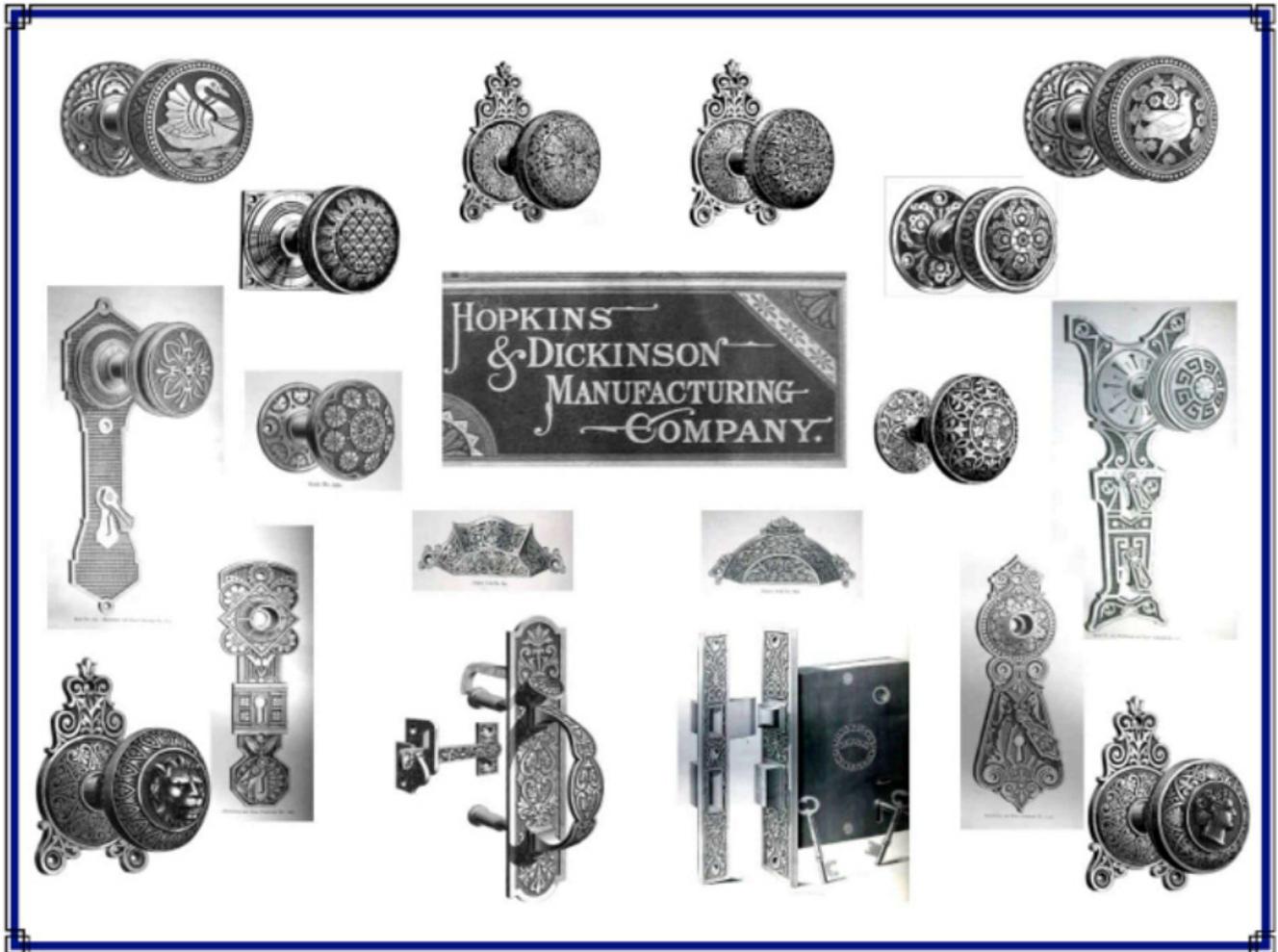
### **The Achievements of Hopkins & Dickinson**

Its first Catalogue appeared in 1874. A second, even larger, catalogue was issued in 1879, to high praise. And the third catalogue was issued in 1890. The first two are available in high-resolution downloads from the ADCA, and the third will be made available in the future. The third catalogue includes hardware made or inspired by Bricard in France. If one were to speculate as to the factors in H&D's demise, they could include the fact that the third catalogue, other than the Bricard pieces, did not include many new designs, at a time other hardware companies were replacing their earlier pieces with the new "schools of design".

But in its day, H&D produced top-of-the line hardware which appeared in many important buildings. It was used in the War and Navy Departments in the Old Executive Office Building, TDC 171,<sup>6</sup> the Royal Palace in Hawaii, the magnificent Tribune building in New York, other Federal Buildings, and the American School in Athens.

Thanks to:

Patricia Ramey for the foundational research for the article and the composite illustration; Tom Dunn of the Mahwah Museum, John Canahan of the Brattleboro Historical Society, and Cathryn Anders of the Westchester Historical Society.



**Footnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> On the Darlington period, see Bischoff and Kahn, From Pioneer Settlement to Suburb: a History of Mahwah, New Jersey, 1700-1976 (A. S. Barnes & Co., 1979), pp. 132-33); Jackson, The Encyclopedia of New York City (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed., Yale University Press, 2010), p. 442 (on the Fifth Avenue Hotel) ; Carol Wehran Greene, The Ramapough Chronicles: A 300-year History of Mahwah, New Jersey and Its Surrounds, (C. W. Greene, 2009) pp. 156-157; an article entitled “Deserved Successes” in The New York Evening Express, 1873-74, collected on the Old Fulton Post Cards site.
- <sup>2</sup> Bischoff & Kahn From Pioneer to Settlement to Suburb, p. 201.
- <sup>3</sup> On Hopkins, see Vermont Phoenix, 9/13/1856; Cabot, Annals of Brattleboro (E.L. Hildreth and Co., 1922), p. 704 New York Times, (“NYT”) 2/29/1928 (Obituary); Robertson, The International Herald Tribune: The First Hundred Years, Columbia University Press, 1987); Wikipedia’s French edition on him.

- <sup>4</sup> On Dickinson, see Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro*, pp. 504-05 ; Obituary files of the Brattleboro Historical Society; NYT, 4/8,1924 (Frederick's Obituaries); NYT 1/7/1931 and 1/30/1932 (wife's);
- <sup>5</sup> On O'Connor, see the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, ("BDE") 12/5/1874; BDE, 3/20/1886; NYT, Obituary, 2/6/1916.
- <sup>6</sup> The contract with the Federal Government for that hardware was entered into on 8/13/1881, see Report of the Construction of the Building for the State, War and Navy Departments (1883), p. 699

From the 1890 Catalogue



WORKS OF THE

Hopkins & Dickinson Manufacturing Company,

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

U. S. A.

## ***Plan Ahead***

*2015 ADCA Convention*

*Monrovia, California*

*August 5-8th,*

## The ADCA is on Facebook!

*By Andy Streenz (#838)*



The ADCA has a new online presence in addition to its website. Members can now check out ADCA's Facebook page. Go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/412087788964066/>

Or, go to Facebook and search for Antique Doorknob Collectors of America. If more than one option comes up, it's the one that is a "public group." Once you are there, you can join the group and begin sharing pictures and commenting. We hope to create an inviting and helpful online community where both ADCA members and non-members with a budding interest in the hobby can exchange ideas and insights. As with any group, it's all about sharing information to help deepen our understanding.

Join us in what we hope will be a popular platform for imparting doorknob collecting knowledge in which all may partake!

## 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.

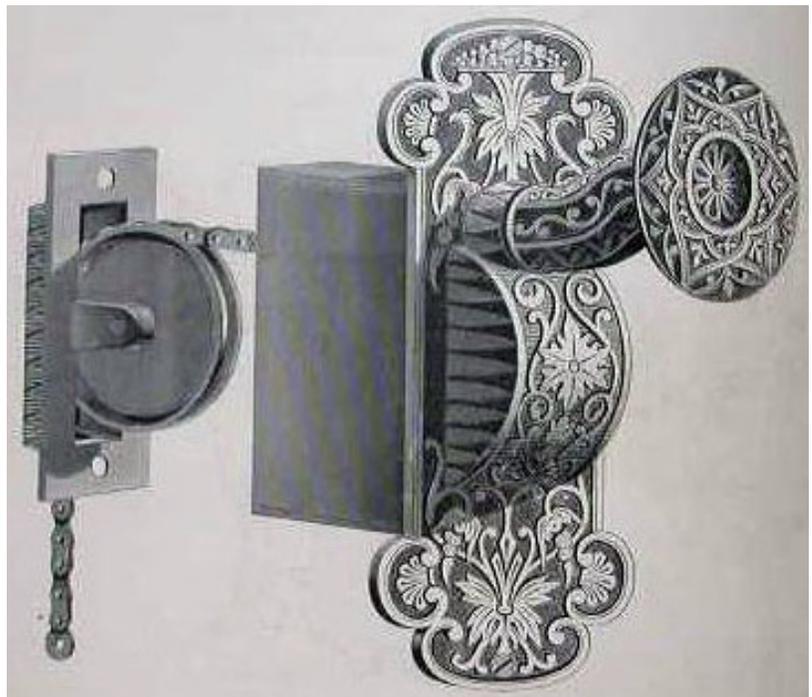
**Wanted:** Seriously trying to locate the back wheel assembly of this Corbin Bell pull for my personal house project. Would purchase the entire bell and pull to get the pieces I am missing. Also interested in enamel hardware or hardware with birds, animals or people in the design. Would appreciate a confidential, no nonsense opportunity to purchase original authentic items. Paying above collector prices and willing to travel.

Also looking for 3 of the bronze R&E Stork 4x4 inch hinges to complete a double door set I am using

Russell Barnes

Box 4695, Lago Vista, TX 78645

512-799-6076 tallcase@flash.net



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