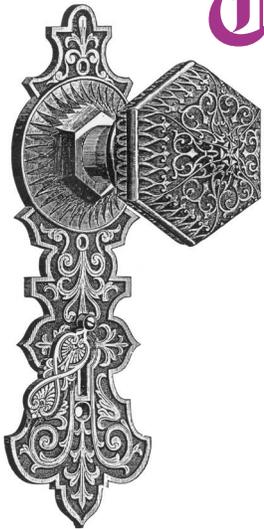


# The Doorknob Collector



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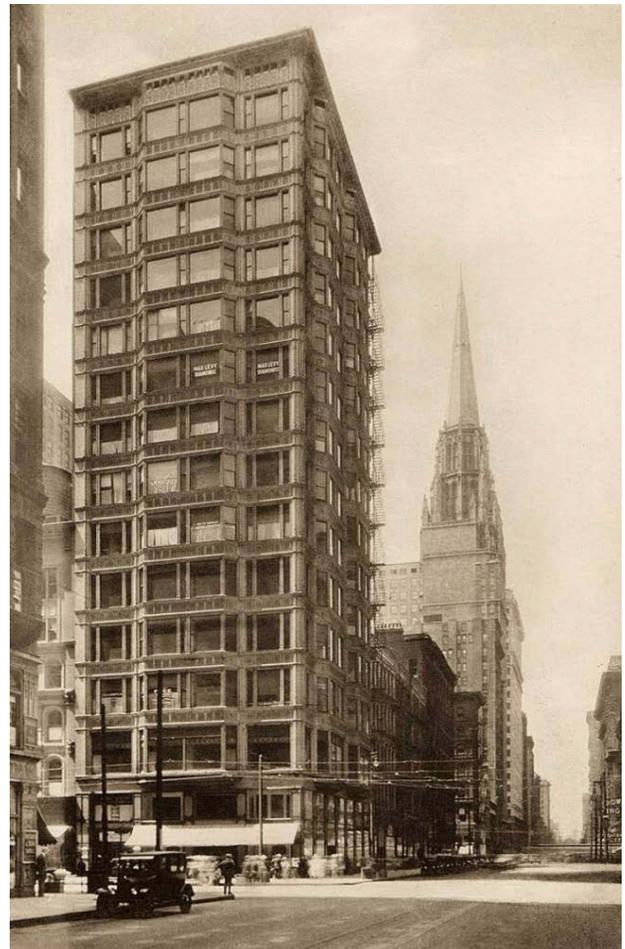
## ROOM 809 OR NOT?

Reprinted below is a fascinating article about the Reliance Building, discussed in the last TDC, which was designed by Burnham & Root, probably the preeminent architectural firm in Chicago in

the late 1890-2010s. Architecture, serious history and all that have their place, but once we have bought into a doorknob design, we are inevitably caught up with the building's and the builders' history – or certainly should be.

We left the Reliance Building (shortly after its construction) as a respectable office building, and, more recently, it has become the Burnham Hotel (a very nice place). But between? Ah, there are many stories to be told about Chicago . . .

We thank Erick Nordstrom of Urban Remains in Chicago for this story. He is a dedicated historic preservationist in Chicago, who has established his own museum of historic architectural artifacts, Building 51. Check out his website and blog.



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## THE DEATH OF AL CAPONE'S DENTIST AND A RELIANCE BUILDING ENGINEER'S KEY RING

By Eric Nordstrom

It never ceases to surprise that the smallest artifacts can hold the most expansive histories. This week a simple object --a brass key ring from the reliance building-- unveiled an iconic narrative from an era when Chicago served as territory to some of the most notorious gangsters.



Even Hotel Burnham, in the historic Reliance Building, acknowledges that it houses a strange history of homicide in room 809. What is now a guest room in the boutique hotel used to be the office of Al Capone's dentist, where "Dr. Frank" Brady kept his practice and eventually met untimely death at the

hands of his associates. Guests who stay in the room can opt for a package deal that partakes in several Capone-themed activities.

The circular key ring is delicately incised "reliance building" and "8th floor", and curiously features several punched out key holes as well as at least one crudely mis-stamped room number. The nicely aged brass ring, belonging to the 8th floor, represents a section of the building where office spaces were slotted specifically for physicians, dentists and health professionals. The building itself was one of the first skyscrapers to offer electricity and phone service in all of its offices. It also set design precedent by using large plate glass windows on its major surface areas, an aspect that provided natural lighting on all floors. This undoubtedly benefited the practices of healthcare professionals who took up residence there, as the light allowed for better visibility during medical exams, and the white terra cotta doubly projected a hygienic image to tenants and their patients.

As it happens, in the late 1920's and 1930's prohibition-era, physicians and other professionals served as reputable front-men to hide the business activities of organized crime. Doctors

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were prime connections for gangs to have in that they could access narcotics and knew a great deal about the chemistry of explosives.

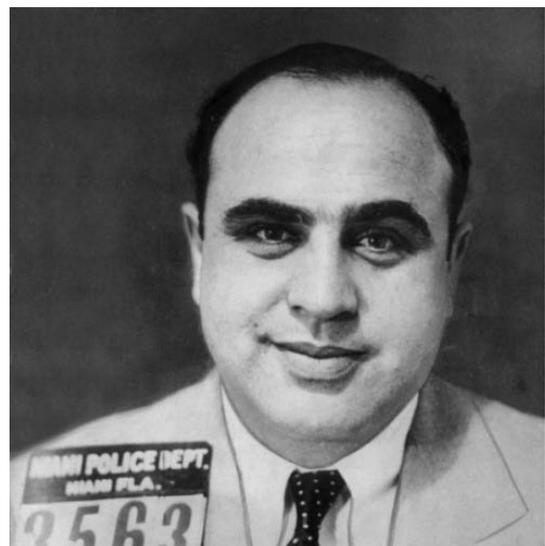
By the mid-1920's Al Capone controlled speak-easies, bookie joints, gambling houses, brothels, horse and race tracks, nightclubs, distilleries, breweries and more; he was a veritable head of industry during this period. He not only maintained a network of spies in the city to foil any

plots against him, but skillfully assassinated his enemies. A typical Capone murder consisted of men renting an apartment across the street from the victim's residence and gunning him down as he stepped outside. Capone headquartered in Chicago at the four deuces, at 2222 S. Wabash and at the Metropole Hotel at 2300 S. Michigan Avenue. He additionally maintained headquarters in the suburbs, where he pretended to be an antique dealer and a doctor as a front.

On April 29th, 1929 a headline in the Milwaukee journal broke the news, "Al Capone dentist is slain by two gangsters in his own office". The article states, "in an atmosphere of the respected profession which allegedly masked an alliance with the underworld, Dr. Frank L. Brady, 32-year old dentist, was killed Wednesday night, presumably for a gangland betrayal. Dr. Brady's connection with "Scarface" Al Capone, a client, and his band of beer runners and vice promoters was revealed Thursday by Capt. William Shoemaker, former chief of detectives."

Brady had apparently been questioned by police prior to his death, regarding the infamous St. Valentine's Day massacre, in which seven mobsters associated with Bugs Moran were killed at 2122 north Clark Street, in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. According to investigators, Brady was unquestionably the professional man serving as a "cover-up" to some of Capone's enterprises, and was also likely used for his professional services.

The dramatic killing of Capone's dentist was described by a patient in the next room, "Mrs. Edna



Walsh, whose tooth the dentist had extracted a few minutes before the two gunmen strode into his office, said the man who shot the dentist was "pasty faced," the drug addict type. A man with a jumping toothache was in the dentist's chair in an adjacent room. Mrs. Walsh and Dr. R.B. Best, a professional associate, stood by in Dr. Brady's private office while the dentist was killed."

The news story elaborates, "within two hours after the murder detectives claimed they had uncovered an amazing story of the dual life of a reputable dentist whose criminal associations led back through nearly 10 years' dealings with safe blowers, dope peddlers and gangsters. Dr. Brady, they said, had compounded an acid which erased characters on stolen securities; he was the son of Mrs. Anna Beauchamp, an alleged decoy of a notorious bank robber, Henry J. (midget)

Fernekes, and had dealt with Fernekes after his mother had committed suicide when her associations with the robber were revealed at his trial. At the bureau of criminal identification it was said that Dr. Brady, as Dr. Frank Black, was arrested for automobile theft in 1918 but was released on probation because he was a student. Further records revealed that he had been arrested in the roundup of Fernekes' gang and accused of disposing of thousands of dollars of securities obtained in robberies by the gangsters. He was released, but for years his telephone wires were tapped by police. Police had two theories for the slaying. One was that the dentist was slain for betraying his associates in disposing of quantities of bonds or because he refused to aid Fernekes in an attempt to escape from Joliet prison, where the "midget" now is confined. The other was that he was slain by addicts whom he had supplied with drugs."

On its own this metal ring is a small artifact of a nineteenth century architectural gem. However, the city's material history can always be doubled by events contained in its storied structures. A key ring can straightforwardly unlock a single building, or on closer inspection, become a portal to a time when Chicago was a smoky city with horse drawn carts, or to a "lawless" prohibition-era with a violent and thriving vice industry.



### In Gangster Fashion

The theory of betrayal was supported by the typical gangster fashion in which he was killed.

"I've got you now," the first gunman shouted as he pressed a revolver against Dr. Brady.

"Oh, don't, don't," the dentist pleaded. For a moment he struggled with his opponent. His fingers clutched the barrel of the revolver pressed to the breast of his white dental jacket.

With an oath the gunman fired. Dr. Brady crumpled to the floor. The gunman leaned over and fired a second bullet into the dentist's body. Then he shouted, "There, you \_\_\_\_\_, you'll never try that stunt again." The two fled through the dentist's outer office, past several waiting patients and escaped.

## 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:** Looking for this knob and plate. Have traders for it. Let me know and we will talk.

Steve Rowe (#287) 4narowe@sbcglobal.net or (559) 299-8863

## CATHY GALBRAITH

### Member 494

After spearheading architectural preservation in the Pacific Northwest, especially Portland, OR, Cathy Galbraith has retired as Executive Director of the Architectural Heritage Center and the Bosco-Milligan Foundation. She first became interested in architectural preservation when the “war on Victoriana” was raging in the 1960s (and the white hats were losing badly), and met Ben Milligan and Jerry Bosco, and she was eventually appointed Executive Director of the Bosco-Milligan Foundation when it was created. From that beginning, she built the AHC to the eminently successful functioning organization it is today. Please look up TDC 128 for a full exposition of the opening of the AHC and the Bosco-Milligan Foundation that was written by Cathy. In 2010 she received the McMath award as “an outstanding individual whose contributions in Oregon have raised awareness and advocacy through his or her commitment to historic preservation.” (TDC 162)

She will remain closely involved with those two institutions. In the next issue of TDC, we hope to have an interview with her.



# ADCA 2016 Convention

## July 16-24

### BOSTON, BOSTON, BOSTON ! ! !

We will be convening in Boston (or reasonably near to it) in July of 2016. Rhett will be the host and, as you might expect, it will be a **blowout**. Lots of goodies to see! We will be in the Dedham Hilton Hotel, not that far from downtown. The schedule is:

Monday, July 18, self-guided tours (and there are heaps of interesting sites around Boston)

Tuesday & Wednesday, July 19-20th, Tour days, Board meeting on Wednesday night

Thursday, July 21, Buy, Sell, Trade and general conviviality. Open to the public in the evening.

Friday, July 22: Display, haggling and conspiracies continue until noon, auction in the afternoon, then cocktails, dinner, and the convention meeting.

Boston was a center of the development in the mid 1800s of mass produced pressed glass – glass that was pressed while molten by mechanical means that could be repeated identically a number of times. It was this possibility of repeated, identical movements that was an early part of the industrial revolution in glass making. Enoch Robinson was a leader and a co-inventor of the dominant patent for making pressed glass knobs.

On Thursday night, we will hear from Kirk J. Nelson, the President and Executive Director of the New Bedford Museum of Glass and author of many works on the history of glass manufacture in New England. New Bedford was one of most industrious cities in the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a whaling center, a very thriving industry which made New Bedford prosperous. In 1870 the Mount Washington glass company moved there from Boston, and in 1880 the Pairpont Manufacturing company opened. Glass from those manufacturers forms a major part of the Museum's over 7,000 examples of glass, but there is a lot more. For an excellent introduction to the collection, see Mr. Kirk's "Rarities From The New Bedford Museum Of Glass" in Journal of Antiques and Collectibles, April 2013.

So that is the theme of the Convention, early glass. But bring whatever you love and display it proudly

But back to the Hotel. Its telephone number is 781-329-7900, Reference either the booking code, ANT, or the Antique Doorknob Collectors. The cut-off date for reservations is June 17, 2016. Reservations can be cancelled up to 24 hours in advance. If you are arriving late, notify the hotel. The nightly cost is \$ 139.

If you are flying into Logan Airport in Boston, a taxi to the hotel runs about \$ 65 (gulp!) The Hotel does not have a shuttle to Logan. **BUT**, the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority has a trip planner which should be considerably cheaper and it will (we are told) deliver you within 2 blocks of the Hotel. If that is too far to walk, the hotel can send their shuttle. Also useful might be a free state highway map from MassDot which includes a greater Boston map and a Boston public transportation map.

## RHETT BUTLER ON DOORKNOBS

On a different note, the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen in Manhattan was founded in 1785, and has trained generation upon generation of skilled tradesmen to do useful but demanding things, from blacksmithing in olden days to designing plumbing and air conditioning systems today. It has recently commissioned a series of lectures by outstanding designers/artisans in various fields of specialized artistic activities. (It also has a vast collection of architectural publications and a great collection of bank locks.) Rhett Butler will be speaking there on April 12<sup>th</sup>, and it will certainly be worth a night in New York for anyone even remotely near. 20 West 44<sup>th</sup> Street, probably beginning at 6:30.

The Newsletter from the Society advises that “during his lecture we will learn why a doorknob is not just a doorknob, and why a hinge is not just a hinge. Mr. Butler has designed thousands of different pieces of unique hardware for client’s homes. For Bill Gates’ mansion in Washington State, he created door handles with the grip of an antique French dagger (designed by Thierry Despont). For Oracle’s chief, Larry Ellison’s 16<sup>th</sup>-century feudal Japanese estate, he invented shoji handles with invisible latching mechanisms. He has supplied hardware to former presidents, Nobel-prize winning novelists and Oscar-winning actors. He has designed door handles in coral, most semiprecious stones, pearls and every kind of wood and metal. The E. R. Butler & Co. archives include basically every catalogue from every company in the world that’s ever produced hardware – 50,000 volumes which hold the history of the industry.”

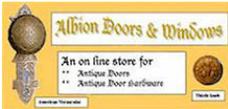
His talk will be recorded and should be available on YOUTUBE, with a link to it on the Society’s website within a few weeks. Going in through the Society’s link may be simpler – otherwise you may have to watch 10,365 clips from “Gone With The Wind” before getting to the doorknobs.



Tweed Courthouse, New York City, Knob and Rose

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### Antique Doorknob Collectors of America

**The Doorknob Collector**

**Co-editors: Allen Joslyn,**

Phone (973) 783-9411

Email: [ajoslyn@comcast.net](mailto:ajoslyn@comcast.net)

**Faye Kennedy**

Email: [adcaoffice@aol.com](mailto:adcaoffice@aol.com)

**Web Site:** [AntiqueDoorknobs.org](http://AntiqueDoorknobs.org)

**Officers**

President: Allen Joslyn

Vice President: Steve Rowe

Secretary: Paul Woodfin

Treasurer: Allen Joslyn

**Membership Office:** Faye Kennedy

**ADCA**

**PO Box 803**

**Hackettstown, NJ 07840**

Email: [adcaoffice@aol.com](mailto:adcaoffice@aol.com)

Phone: 908-684-5253

**General Questions**

[Antiquedoorknobs@comcast.net](mailto:Antiquedoorknobs@comcast.net)

**Email Addresses:**

[ajoslyn@comcast.net](mailto:ajoslyn@comcast.net)

[4narowe@sbcglobal.net](mailto:4narowe@sbcglobal.net)

[paul.woodfin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:paul.woodfin@sbcglobal.net)

[ajoslyn@comcast.net](mailto:ajoslyn@comcast.net)