



## Knife Shop Memories...as told to Marcus Millspaugh

The following article is based on interviews conducted by Marcus ("Mickey") H. Millspaugh, Jr. in the mid-1980's.

The interviewee, Mr. Fred Fox, shared some of his memories of the knife companies. Mr. Fox's father and grandfather were both cutlers employed in the various shops in Walden. As a boy, Mr. Fox helped his father after school and summers in the lower shop.

The work week for a cutler started on Monday morning. He would draw the necessary materials for the week's work from the supply room. When Fred helped, he was in the "white elephant" which we know today as the buildings of the Thruway Market. The knife shop where the cutlers worked was in back of these buildings.

The cutler was responsible for building the knives of the specified pattern from the material which had been issued. This material would include:

- rough blades which had been forged to shape;
- knife springs;
- knife scales (outside covering of pearl, horn, or wood, etc.)

Rough blades had to be made to fit the spring of the knife and be drilled so it could be "nailed in." The blades had to then be tempered and polished.

The springs that made up the back of the knife were also rough shaped and had to be cropped to size, drilled and tempered by the cutler.

The knife scales were also in a rectangular form and had to be fitted and cut to size.

The drilling process was a chore that could be delegated to a 10 or 11 year old boy. The tang of the blade was marked by use of a jig which took the shaped tang and with a hammer blow would receive a

punch mark that would indicate the location of the necessary hole. The grinding operations were not allowed to be performed by boys unless they were 15-16.

Tools for working on the knives were largely hand made by the cutlers and were designed to do some task in a way that fit that particular man's way of working. The individuality of the tools can be seen in the many different patterns of hammers. The hammer was a very important tool to the cutler since the joining of parts was largely done by riveting. The delicate nature of the scale material particularly mother of pearl, made it necessary for a very skilled application of force. A broken scale had to be replaced at the cutler's own expense (at least this was so in earlier times.)

*(In reference to pearl handled knives, I had been told that it was necessary to work the pearl under water because it gave off toxic fumes when drilled or ground. I checked with George Rossman who had been working with this material at the Schrade Cutlery Co. for many years. His answer was that he hadn't heard that but if you didn't drill it under water or shape it after a soaking of several weeks, it would chip or split.)*



Many of the maintenance jobs in the cutlers shop were the responsibility of the cutlers. Grinding wheels were given an abrasive coating of emery. This was done by coating the wheel with very hot glue and then rolling the wheel in a trough containing the emery powder. Emery was available in fine, medium or coarse powder and the coating process would continue until the necessary thickness was built up.

The equipment was all belt-driven--that would be leather belts connecting overhead shafting with the various grinding wheels, drills, and other equipment.