

The Victorinox® Blade

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Premier Issue

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The Victorinox Story

Switzerland is a mountain country that used to be inhabited by the Helvetii, a Galic tribe subjected by Caesar. It has always been reputed for its craftsmanship. From as far back in time as when people lived in settlements of pile dwellings, artifacts dating back to the bronze and iron ages have been found there.

There were no traces of actual cutlery manufacture before the 17th century. The first reference dates in December 1627, the town of Aarau mentions a municipal regulation regarding the cutler's of that town. Archives contain the articles of the local cutler's guide, issued November 29, 1756. At the time there were 140 workers and apprentices which were the basis of the regulations described. There was also a cutler's guild in Basle in the 18th century.

Late in the 19th century, a number of workers were engaged in the cutlery industry. In Berne, Vaud, Schwyz, and Schaffhausen they produced open razors. In Basle, Zurich, and Berne they produced table cutlery, pocket knives, butcher knives, and veterinary instruments. Scissors production took place in Glarus and Schaffhausen. Soldiers' kit knives were made in Schwyz and Zug.

The soldiers' knives are regulation and every soldier has to show them on recruitment and at every inspection afterward. Their attachments are a main blade, a screwdriver, a can opener, and a reamer. Handles were first made from horn, palmyra, or fibre. Multi-bladed knives had at this time, replaced conventional pocket knives for most Swiss citizens.

The city of Geneva had no cutlery factories, but had large cutlery shops which did employ cutler's like those in the major cutlery centers. Foremost was "Forestier et Cie," at the Tour-De-I'lle,

one of Switzerland's oldest and largest cutlery and silverware firms.

In Dele' mont, the factory of "P. Boe'chat et Cie," was set up to mechanically produce pocket knives. It employed 25 workers, and was founded a few miles away in Courtelle in 1893. Granted a subsidy by the Councillor of Delé mont, the factory was moved into town. It later changed ownership and was renamed WENGER S.A., DELE MONT. They are "the other" "Swiss Army knife maker, and though genuine, they are not the original.

In Ibach near Schwyz, a knife factory had been set up by Karl Elsener, in 1884. At the turn of the century, it employed some thirty workers. The trade mark used was Victoria, which was later changed to Victorinox. They are the original Swiss Army knife maker.

An association of Swiss Cutler's was formed in 1891. The first article, adopted by the Geneva Assembly of August 9, 1896, stated: The Association of Swiss Master Cutler's hereby constitutes an association in the meaning of the Swiss law of contract with the objects of:

A) Protecting the common interests of the trade;

B) Laying down common rules for the management of workshops and the recruitment and severance of workers;

C) Looking to the good training of apprentices;

D) Preserving relations of friendship between colleagues.

Until the early 19th century, American cutlery requirements were supplied by European knife manufacturers. Around 1830 cutlery factories began to become established, principally in the New



England States. By 1890, the American cutlery industry showed 124 firms manufacturing knives, employing over 3,000 people, with approximately \$4,000,000 invested in capital equipment. During 1896 American cutlery exports amounted to 187,805 pieces.

Although the American cutlery industry was well established at this time, a considerable amount of cutlery was still imported: a total of \$1,935,000, of which \$1,256,400 was pocket knives. The number of pieces is not recorded.

The largest concentration of American cutlery in 1896, was in the east coast states, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey. A single company was located in Wisconsin, the Hatch Cutlery Co., which was located in South Milwaukee.

An interesting comparison shown in 1899, an American worker in New York earned \$714 per year. Workers in Italy earned \$157; in France \$307; in Sheffield England \$404; in Germany \$383; in Austria \$250; and in Russia \$146.

In Sept. 1834, John Russell, the oldest son of a successful and prominent jeweller in Greenland, Mass., started a knife manufacturing company. He made simple butcher and carving knives, which were produced using high quality materials. In 1840 when the westward movement began, he started manufacturing an American hunting knife. This knife became in fame and fable, the Green River Knife, the best knife in the West. The business prospered, and in 1870, moved to Turners Falls, Mass., where they built a new factory. The factory was the largest single cutlery factory in the world at that time, and could comfortably accommodate 1200 men. At the end of the first year in Turners Falls, there were approx. 600 men employed.

In Switzerland, the Elsener Family

Tree can be traced through nine generations to the 16th century. the founder's Grandfather Peter Oswald Elsener, moved from the family home in Zug, to Schwyz, in 1816, and set up a hat factory there next to a Capuchin Monastery. There he met and married Anna Marie Wiget. Between 1838 and 1849 Oswald Elsner built two houses on the Ochsenplatz and set up his hatter's shop there.

In 1884 Schwyz was a member of the Confederation formed from the New Federal Constitution. The main occupation in the area was agriculture. Late in 1883, there were 26 firms employing 1,706 workers. The area was very much in need of development of industry and tourism, and efforts to secure bearable existence for land and people led to all kinds of enterprises. One was to recover and export ice from Lake Lauerz when it froze in the winter. In 1884, fifteen to twenty trucks loads were shipped each day.

Karl Elsener, the founder, was the fourth son of Balthasar and Victoria Elsener-Ott. He was born on Oct. 9, 1860 He learned the craft of knife making in Zug, the town of his forefathers, and served his apprenticeship in Paris and the German town of Tuttingen, where he specialized in the making of razor knives and surgical instruments. A letter from him to a friend dated Christmas Day 1884, indicated his thoughts about starting an independant cutlery in Schwyz. He did so on Jan. 1, 1884, opening a shop in the former Koller Mill on the Tobelbach River, in Ibach.

The Tobelbach provided power which drove a water wheel to which were coupled grinding and polishing machines. The business was advertised in the local newspapers, and in addition to the knives, included repair work and a daily honing service. His mother, Victoria, sold his

products in her hat shop. *To be continued...*

FROM THE PREZ.

Well here we are. The first issue of our quarterly newsletter. Little did I guess this might ever happen, but none the less, it's reality.

So let me start by introducing our very able staff.

FRED PICKLER- from Wilmington, North Carolina - is a salesmen representing a German Pyrotechnic company. He spends time traveling all over the world, and is known personally by the Elsener family. He is no stranger to the Victorinox factory, which he has visited on numerous occasions. He has reduced his once extensive collection to a select collection of "Special", small volume or unique models, not usually found. His background and knowledge spans more than 20 years of serious involvement with Victorinox Swiss Army Knives.

KATHRYN KANE -from Oracle, Arizona- along with husband Joe, own and operate "Birdworks Publications", a small publishing company (among many other things). In 1988, she published "The Swiss Army Knife Handbook, "The Official History and Owner's Guide", together with Fred Pickler and Rick Wall, in 1988 she was involved with organizing a Swiss Army Knife convention, held in San Diego, California. With her knowledge and background, she is currently a contributing writer to Blade Magazine. She is also formulating plans to write a follow-up book on collecting Victorinox Swiss Army Knives.

RICK WALL -from San Diego, California- along with wife Jan, is a teacher. He is President of the Swiss Army Knife Society, which is an International group, having members in all the United States, and

more than a dozen Foreign countries. He also authored a book, "The Swiss Army Knife Companion, The Improbable History of the World's Handiest Knife." Although it portrays the knife in a humorous vein, it testifies to the knife's versatility. His background, wit and humor will be a huge asset to us.

XAVER EHRLER - from the Victorinox factory in Switzerland- is the senior Export Sales Manager, and has been with the company for more than 47 years. He will serve as our consultant to provide information regarding history, model information, etc., for knives not currently cataloged. He will be a tremendous help, and personally knows Fred Pickler and Doug Dillman.

DOUG DILLMAN - from Freeport, Maine- is a key member of the staff. He has a long time association with Victorinox, having been a past President of The Forschner Group, the Swiss Army Brand Distributor in the U.S. Now "retired", he is employed by Freeport Knife Co. as their Victorinox Swiss Army Brand Sales Manager. Besides knowing Xaver Ehrler at Victorinox, he is also well known to Charles Elsener, Jr., the next President of Victorinox. His past and present capacities and numerous contacts will do much to add the club's opportunity to serve it's members, with current and special items.

DAN JACQUART -the Prez, from Buffalo City, WI - along with wife Marlene, retired mechanical product design engineer. A novice of only 7 years of involvement with Victorinox, I acquired the first knife of my collection as a 10 year service award. Buying, selling and trading has resulted in perhaps the largest collection outside the factory. Hopefully, it will be the basis of a book to help Victorinox Knife collectors answer questions about the knives that probably relate more to Swiss

and Switzerland than cheese. Having the opportunity to work with such an illustrious staff, I have high hopes for success. But to succeed, we need to hear from you, the members.

Working with you will expand our knowledge about the knives and the huge variety of them. So drop us a line. We will respond as best we can, to each and every contact. Hopefully, we will soon have a website too.

We look forward to hearing from you,
and always.....

Cut Clean,
Dan Jacquart

Words of Wisdom,

If you want your
dreams to come true,
don't oversleep.

There are three kinds of
members in any
organization...those who
"watch" things happen...
those who "make" things
happen...and those who
didn't even know anything
did happen!

If you find any mistakes,
please consider that they
appear for the benefit of
those who always look for
them...we will try to print
something for everybody.

Classified:

T.B.D.! We're open for business!