

# The Victorinox® Blade

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Official Newsletter of the Victorinox® Swiss Army™ Knife Collectors Society

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## *The Victorinox Story Part Two*

The hat shop was housed in the family home on the Ochsenplatz in Schwyz. The cutlery workshop was moved and installed on the ground floor of this same house, which was a large four story building. The upper floors contained several apartments. As the business grew, the packing and mailing departments were also set up on the first floor. The living room in the first floor apartment, served also as an office until 1934.

Because of the excellent quality of Master Karl Elsener's workmanship, the business grew from year to year. From the start, he was able to employ a helper, and added employees as they were needed. In 1884, Karl and one employee used 50 square meters of area for manufacturing, stock inventory and offices. By 1909, there were twenty-two employees requiring 300 square meters of area, or 3,240 square feet. By 1934, there were eighty-five employees requiring 2,600 square meters, or 27,864 square feet.

In 1911, Karl moved a large part of the workshop into a nearby house and work-

shop complex purchased for him by his brother Dominik. It had been a tannery and leather shop, and again the Tobelbach River was used to furnish power for the machines. Since electric power was not available, water powered the grindstones and polishing wheels, and petrol lamps furnished meager lighting as required to complete a normal eleven hour work day.

Back in 1890, Karl Elsener had taken the lead in organizing the Association of Swiss Master Cutlers, which was actually founded in 1891, and is commemorated with one of the Anniversary Knives. The main priority of the organization, was to develop co-operatively between all the members, the design of a pocketknife to be used by the Swiss army in Switzerland. Up to this time, Swiss army knives were made in Solingen Germany, the center of the German cutlery industry.

In October 1891, Karl Elsener delivered the first knives made in Switzerland, for the Swiss army. The resulting contract made it necessary to increase factory capacity, and the number of employees.





In the following years, Karl designed other types of pocket knives which he designated by names rather than model numbers. Some of these were: the School-boy's knife; the Cadet; the Farmer's knife; and the Officer's knife. This new model had only two springs for six blades, and was patented June 12, 1897. It very soon became the most popular model, and created a large number of export orders.

Components for pocket knives were fashioned from rough stamped castings purchased from other firms. They were then precision filed to match and fit each other exactly, so to allow the knife to function smoothly. The parts were then tempered, honed, polished and mounted.

At the turn of the century, a working day consisted of eleven hours. Each manufacturing process was done by hand. The only machinery used was grindstones and polishing wheels driven by water power. There was no electricity, so petrol lamps were used when no daylight was available.

With the success of the Officer's knife, German knife makers began flooding the market with imitations. To hold out against this competition, Karl Elsener placed a large emphasis on quality and functionality. He

added a woodsaw blade and a sissors to enhance their versatility and attractiveness.

In 1909 he put into the design, the inlaid Swiss emblem on the red fibre handles, which readily identified it as a Swiss product, and distinguished it from the German imitations. This also marked the 25th anniversary of the firm. In this same year, Karl's mother Victoria, died at age 73. In her honor, Karl chose her name, Victoria, to be the company trademark. It soon became synonymous with precision and quality of knife manufacturing, and the knives won many awards in international exhibitions.

The war years of 1914-1918 caused serious difficulties in obtaining raw material to use in manufacturing. Along with this shortage, came a decline in import availability, but there was also an increased domestic demand for the company's products. With a substantial effort, they were able to sustain sales, and when stainless steel was discovered in 1921, the company immediately adopted the new material. This boosted the business into a decisive recovery. The internationally known designation for stainless steel INOX was added and became the present day trademark VICTORINOX. To be continued.....



## COLLECTORS' BITS & PIECES

1.] To identify Victorinox SAK current models, note [4] printed lines on main blade:

VICTORINOX  
SWITZERLAND  
STAINLESS  
ROSTFREI

Opposite side: William Tell crossbow

And words OFFICIER SUISSE or blank on small knives

2.] Variations on older knives:  
Printed on main blade –

1884 – ELSENER SCHWYZ

1923 & Older – no crossbow

+ARMEE SUISSE – 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, early 30's

1943 – VICTORIA – VICTORINOX – INOXYD all with crossbow imposed over the name

1952 – VICTORIA INOX with crossbow aside

1957 – ELINOX ROSTFREI and ELINOX STAINLESS SWITZERLAND with crossbow aside.

3.] Victorinox and Wenger both use INOX with their name

4.] HOFFRITZ – some Victorinox knives special marked – with and without Victorinox on main blade

5.] Not all handles are red –  
Cellidor – 16 colors currently  
Wood – mostly Rosewood, some hardwood

Granite – from Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, Russia, Canada and Sardinia

Mother of Pearl – both real and imitation

Tortoise Shell – both real and imitation

Horn – called buffalo horn, actually cow horn from Italy

Stag Horn – both real and imitation [real costs 5 times more than imitation]

Metal – aluminum, stainless steel and sterling silver [imported from the USA]

6.] Most knives are 58, 74, 84, 91, 108, or 111 mm long when closed, and not all have keyrings, toothpicks or tweezers

To be continued....

### OOPS NOTE!

Introduced to you in our Premier Issue, Doug Dillman was a past VICE President of the Forschner Group. Also, he is employed as the OWNER of Freeport Knife Co.



## FROM THE PREZ

We made it to issue number 2! We're on a roll. I am hoping it's onward and upward. Our membership is growing – slowly, but to be expected. We are now in eleven states, Switzerland and Australia. I think there are a lot more potential members out there, and we want to reach them. You can help by spreading the word. One of the prime reasons for the club is to spread information and knowledge about the Victorinox Swiss Army Knives. Word of mouth is a great way for that to happen, and it's a great way to meet new friends that share a common subject of interest. So, pass the word.

We also would appreciate your input and ideas. There are countless items of interest regarding these knives, not all of them pertinent to collecting. Tell us stories about how you've used yours to do a special project, or even to solve a special problem. We will print any and all that have merit and can benefit our members.

We also would like to hear from members that have special collector notes pertaining to these knives. From the little I've been exposed to them, there seems to be endless items of past history and

events to learn about them. I have one that has been around the world more than once, and another that has been into space with an astronaut. Have you got a story to tell? We'd like to hear it. And you will get a mention in the newsletter – no charge. We look forward to hearing from you, and will try to answer all of your correspondence as best we can.

Cut Clean,  
Dan Jacquart

## WORDS OF WISDOM

The difference between men and boys is the price of their toys. [Being a sound minded man, I'm spending my money as fast as I can, buying expensive knives.]

This is a non-profit organization. We didn't intend it to be, but that's the way it is working out.

What we need is a new idea that has been thoroughly tested.

## CLASSIFIED

Buying, selling, trading all brands of kitchen, hunting and pocket knives – Doug Dillman, Freeport Knife Co., 148 Main St., Freeport, ME 04032