

# BUFFALO

America's  
Greatest Scout

# BILL

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GROUP OF MEXICAN VAQUEROS LAMENAT EXPERTS IN MARVELOUS FEATS, SPORTS AND PASTIMES.



If you were the manufacturer of a product, you would want a famous person to endorse your product to increase demand. So it was that New York Knife Company paired with William F. Cody. It was then that this scout knife collector (me) entered the world of the great American scout, "Buffalo Bill."

Most of us, if not all of us, have heard the tales about Buffalo Bill. He is an American hero who has not been forgotten. During his lifetime of 71 years, he experienced many an adventure that made him famous. What an honor for those youngsters and oldsters alike that were a witness to the Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows.

Buffalo Bill's given name was William Frederick Cody. He was born in 1846, died in 1917, and was an instrumental figure in the taming of the West. Cody was an Indian fighter and a scout for the Army during its westward movement. Because he could track and hunt buffalo better than anyone else, he earned the name Buffalo Bill. It was his job to supply food for the Army and, at times, the railroad companies. Buffalo meat was the food of the West during this time.

In addition to his talents as a scout and hunter, William Cody was an actor, an excellent rifle shot, a promoter, an entrepreneur and a humanitarian. He made money, and he lost money. During his travels in this country and abroad, he met presidents and royalty. He introduced the world to Annie Oakley. In a computer search of available books on him, I uncovered 18 titles which, I am sure, are far short of all the books written about William Cody. Each book seems to supply its own version of some of his feats.

It was many years ago that I got my first Buffalo Bill scout/utility knife. I didn't know much about this knife other than it had four blades, a portrait of Buffalo Bill on the shield, and the blade was etched AMERICA'S GREAT SCOUT - BUFFALO BILL. New York Knife Company manufactured this quality knife. The knife was also marked HAMMER BRAND, and was particularly interesting since it didn't have the standard utility spear main blade but instead had a clip blade. The can opener and the cap lifter were on a single blade, and the screwdriver blade had a wire scraper associated with it. The fourth blade was a



*America's Great Scout - "Buffalo Bill" is stamped into the waterfall celluloid handle of this 5" closed New York Knife Co. utility knife. This specimen is pristine-as-new mint. There is not even any trace of off-gassing. I suspect that the yellow bonding agent might be the reason.*



**The Buffalo Bill knives were offered in two sizes. One was the standard utility size, and the other was the junior size; both had clip point blades. The regular BSA Official Knives had a spear point main blade.**

leather punch. A few years later, I picked up another knife that I purchased as a good buy. It was, I thought, an exact duplicate to the one at home. As I typically do, I put the two knives side by side for comparison; and it was soon apparent that they were indeed different. I now had a junior version of the same knife. The larger knife measures 3<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" and the junior size measures 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>".

In addition to these two knives, New

York Knife Company (NYKCo) made a large hunter pattern folding knife that was 5" long. This style and size of knife was popular from about 1914 until 1930. The shield is plain so the only identification is the etching on the main blade that verifies it as a Buffalo Bill pattern. All the Buffalo Bill knives that I have seen were manufactured by New York Knife Company.

The why and how of the Buffalo Bill



**William Frederick Cody aka "Buffalo Bill" with Sitting Bull, circa 1897. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.**

knives is a mystery, but I can speculate and maybe come close. The mystery started to unravel when I contacted the curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming. Along with several photographs of knives, there was a letter from William Cody to New York Knife Company in 1914. It reads:

*New York Knife Company Walden N.Y.*

*Dear Sir,*

*You certainly make the best all around camp or hunting knife I ever used. I want another one for one of the greatest hunters in the world who is stuck on mine.*

*Yours truly*

*W.F. Cody "Buffalo Bill"*

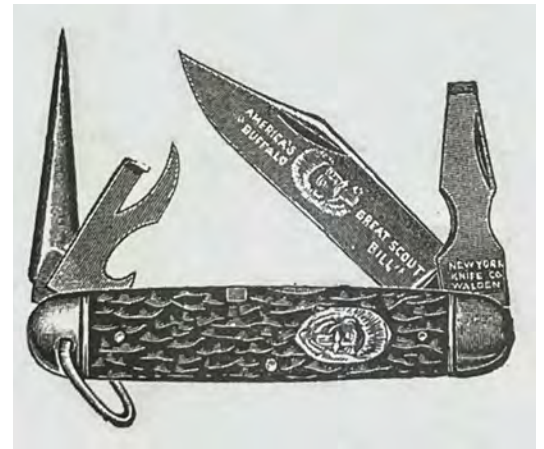
This letter, dated May 2, 1914, was used later by New York Knife Company as an endorsement of their product. If nothing else, this helps us to date the manufacturing of these knives. Marshall Wells Hardware catalogs picture these knives in 1918 and in 1923; and because NYKC went out of business in 1931, we now have a window to the history of this product. Because of the 1914 starting date and his death in 1917, I doubt these were sold in conjunction with the Wild West Shows that were held 1883-1916. My guess is that the bulk of these knives were sold after he had died. These knives were often listed along with the official Boy Scout knives in hardware company catalogs.

One unusual item I found was a counter display tin that was used for selling these knives. A picture of Buffalo Bill and a quote from his 1914 letter links the endorsement idea presented earlier. The handwriting on the tin compares quite favorably with the letter. The tin has a spot for the Buffalo Bill knife which points to the various features of each of the blades.

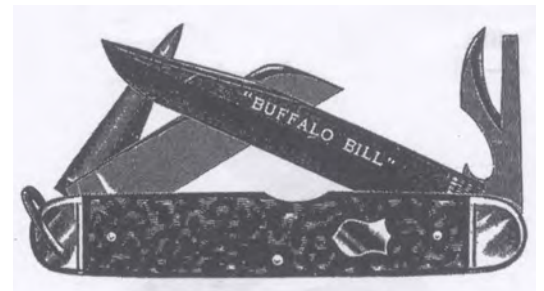
Yet another interesting knife that was called to my attention was a knife in the Buffalo Bill Museum. This knife is the large hunter pattern I described earlier. The Buf-



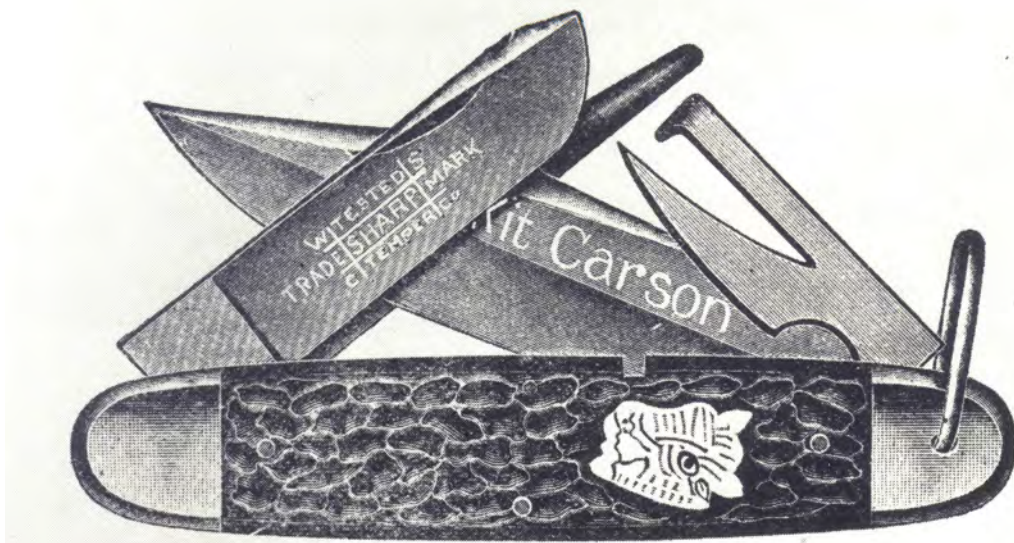
*In addition to the yellow celluloid handled knife, New York Knife Company offered three variations of the Buffalo Bill knife. All with clip blades and bone handles.*



*3/8 size Buffalo Bill "Camping, Radio and Auto" knife by New York Knife Co., as illustrated in a c.1920 hardware catalog.*



*4 1/4" size Buffalo Bill large utility knife by New York Knife Co., from the same c.1920 catalog.*



*Similar to the large Buffalo Bill knife, this 4 3/4" Western States knife is etched "Kit Carson" and features a buffalo shield. From the company's 1921 catalog.*

falo Bill shield on this knife is oversized with an image of William Cody similar to the smaller versions. It is my thought that New York Knife Company may have made

this special knife for William Cody. If this is correct, then this knife has earned the special place it now has in the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming.

It was surprising to me there were so many different types of Buffalo Bill knives. Of course there is always that one knife that pops up that defines rare. The knife I refer



*Show poster for Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, circa 1895. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

to is a waterfall handled NYKCo. Stamped into the lovely handles of this pristine knife is the familiar logo "America's Great Scout - Buffalo Bill." Including this knife, I now have a total of four collectable knives that are associated with William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill).

I was always curious to learn if the waterfall Buffalo Bill knife had celluloid handles. There is no off gassing of these handles that I could detect. With maturity comes sensitivity. When off gassing of celluloid is present, my fingers burn when I touch the handles. Earlier I did not have a sensitivity to these particular waterfall



*The 1920s Buffalo Bill hunter size camp knife was a popular sale item. The handle measured 5 inches, and it was marketed at the same time as the large Remington Bullets and the Utica Kit Carson knives.*

handles. Now, my handling of this knife produced that old burning sensation on my finger tips. Yes, these handles are celluloid. The bonding agent in the waterfall handles has retarded the violent off gassing seen on many celluloid knives.

There are several other knives that are commonly mistaken for Buffalo Bill knives.

These knives have a picture of a buffalo for the shield. I believe these knives are associated with Kit Carson. The shield is common to the large hunter utility patterns manufactured by Western States and Utica. I have also seen these on the standard sized scouts. It is possible that they were

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*This view shows the etch on the main clip point blade as well as the portrait shield of Buffalo Bill. Lined bolsters usually suggest a top line quality knife.*

offered at the same time as the Buffalo Bill knives, so these companies could catch some of the sales that were advertised by New York Knife Company.

These 5 inch folding hunter knives with the Buffalo head shields were quite popular in the 1920s. Bridge Cutlery, Droeshers, Remington, Utica Cutlery Co., Utica Knife and Razor and Western States are names that can be found on these knives. The curiosity is the Pal Brand which has

the spelling as "Kit Karson" on the tang stamp. This is a German spelling which makes me think that many of these style knives were produced in Germany. Those others I suspect to be made by Utica. The celluloid handles were offered in a splash of colors. Of course the other options were bone and horn.

These large hunters are sought after by collectors and especially the Remington which has a bullet shield.



*A circa 1920s counter display tin for the Buffalo Bill knife. The knife is mounted on the tin and showed the features of this knife. It also sports the letter written by Buffalo Bill and sent to the New York Knife Company.*



*Portrait of Buffalo Bill in his later years. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

I would highly recommend the reading of any or all the books you find in your local library or internet about William F. Cody and this time in history. I am sure they will give many hours of enjoyment. For the travelers, may I suggest that you visit Cody, Wyoming, the home of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. This famous museum will certainly capture your imagination and enhance your cultural levels. A must place to visit. □