

Quality at your feet



Buster Brown

and things that go **CUT!**

By Dennis Ellingsen



School-going feet need the only Buster Brown Shoe

Children's feet grow so fast that they can't keep up with the shoes they wear. Like the way Buster Brown shoes can't keep up with the feet they share this quality and feel. Quality and durability make Buster Browns the Buster Brown Shoe Company's 6-Point Fit, too. Priced according to the 6-Point Fit, 5.99 to 7.99, Higher Quality. Best. Buster Brown Division, Brown Shoe Company, St. Louis.

The period for this Marble's knife was 1925 to 1930.



BUSTER BROWN SHOES

BROWNSHOC
ST. LOUIS, USA

BUSTER BROWN

BOYS AND GIRLS WEAR BUSTER BROWN SHOES THAN ANY OTHER BRAND

There are certain knives in our collection that are especially fascinating and surpass all others. The reasons vary. High on our list are the knives that are associated with the Brown Shoe Company. The knives themselves are special, but the history and the nostalgic appeal are even of greater interest.

When I was a child, the shoes of choice were Buster Brown shoes. Not only did we kids like them but our parents did, too, because of their quality – tough shoes for tough-on-shoes kids.

The Brown Shoe Company was started by George Warren Brown in St. Louis in 1878. Many people think that the Buster Brown brand name occurred at the onset of the start of the company, but it was almost 25 years later before this brand name became a reality. In 1902 there was a newspaper cartoon series about a mischievous boy named Buster Brown. Buster Brown and his dog, Tige, along with his girl friend, Mary Jane, delighted youngsters with their antics. In 1904, the Brown Shoe Company purchased the licensing rights and began to use the character Buster Brown on their shoes. After many gyrations, the Brown Shoe Company still exists today, though the Buster Brown line is apparently no longer in production.

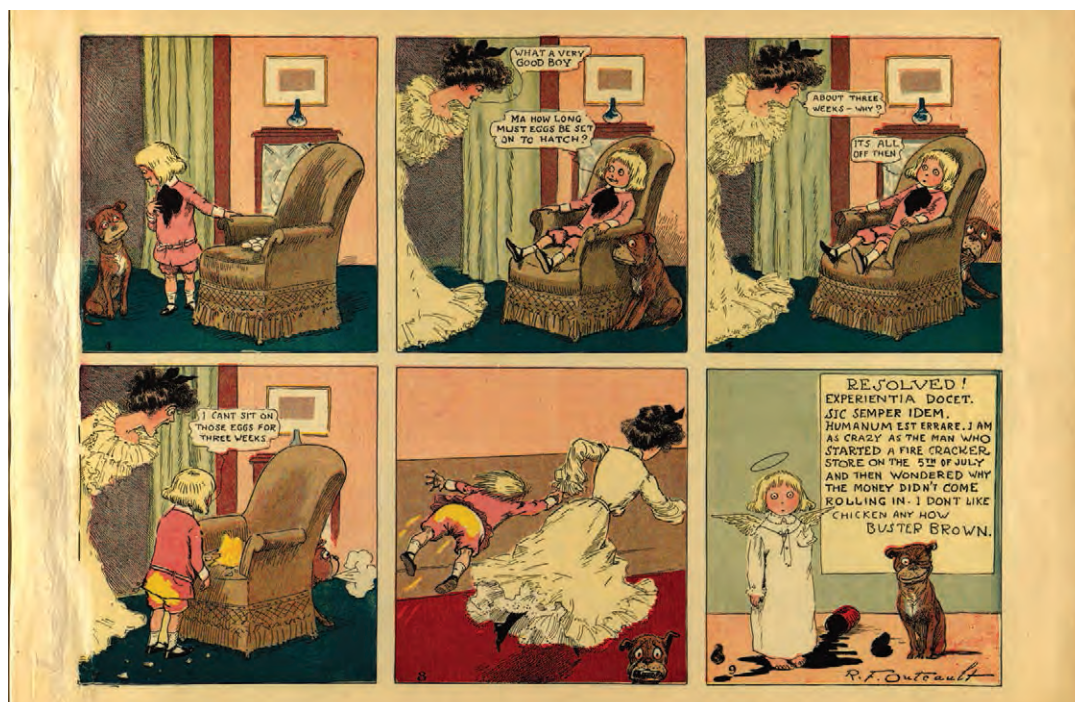
The Buster Brown radio program started in 1943 and moved to television in 1951. My fascination for Buster Brown was sparked when I was a youngster, and I would listen to Smilin' Ed and the Buster Brown gang on the radio. With the advent of television, Buster Brown, Tige, Smilin' Ed, Froggy the gremlin, Midnight the cat and, of course, Squeekie the mouse now took on a real form. From time to time I still recite the famous line by Buster Brown in his response to his barking dog, Tige: "That's my dog, Tige. He lives in a shoe. I'm Buster Brown. Look for me in there, too." Dear elayne sez that this recitation and my "I'm a little tea pot" make me the hit at most parties. (Meaning the person to be hit.)

I can still remember my first discovery of the Buster Brown knives while adding to my collection of utility knives. On a trip to a knife show in Knoxville, Tennessee, I found my first four blade utility pattern Buster Brown knife. My return trip to Oregon took me through Chicago where I shared my newfound knife treasure with a disinterested family. A spark of revived memory occurred when one member said that they remembered this type knife when they were a kid. Barefoot was the fashion of the time in the 1930s, and mothers had to think of ways to get the kids to wear shoes. What better way than to coax a boy into some high top shoes that had a pouch in the side to carry a pocketknife. The story sounded good, but I wanted documentation to make this story real. For years I searched, not only for paper proof, but also for the boots that could prove the pouch story. Many letters to shoe companies produced blank responses, and the boots have been elusive.

With the encouragement of Editor Mark Zalesky, I started once again to



"Buster Brown, His Dog Tige, and Their Troubles"; a book of comic strips by Richard F. Outcault, creator of Buster Brown, published in 1904.



A typical Buster Brown comic strip from the above book. Photos courtesy of The Internet Archive.

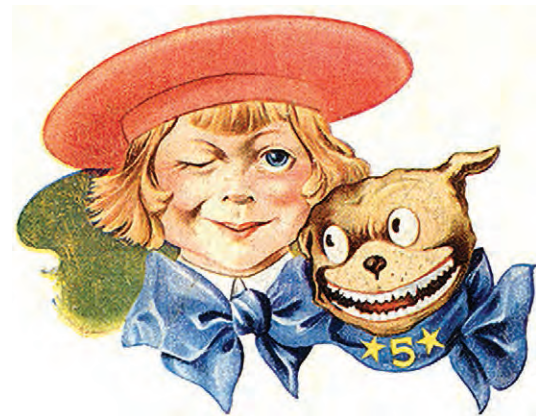


The Buster Brown axe has a deeply struck image of Buster Brown and his dog, Tige.

track down the knife and the pouch. This time I hit pay dirt. The historian at the Brown Shoe Company was very helpful; and with some tips I gave them as to the dates I thought the shoes were made, they were able to locate some marketing literature and advertisements.

The names that are associated with the

marketing lines are Brown Shoe Company, Buster Brown Shoes and Buster Brown Health Shoes. I can confirm that these knives were made by Colonial (C.K. Co), IKCO (Imperial Knife Company), Imperial, Schrade Cutlery and Utica. I have also identified knives stamped Diamond Edge and Shapleigh Hardware that are also



This was the official logo for Buster Brown shoes.

marked Buster Brown knives.

The promotion of giveaway knives by the Brown Shoe Company dates back to the pre-1900s. The knives of that time were usually figural pattern knives which had celluloid handles. If a figural knife is marked Buster Brown, then it is after 1904. If it is marked Brown Shoe Company, it could be a pre-1904 knife. This is not always a sure thing, as marketing and sales promotions were dictated by the times.

Promotional items were very popular with the Brown Shoe Company and were marked with Brown Shoe to advertise the company. Although there were numerous and various items, my interest is in the knives and other objects that fall under the umbrella of cutlery. These items were given out by the retail stores as promotions, souvenirs, on special sale days, or even on a point system reflected by shoe sales. In the mid-1920s a single blade knife was of-



Pin-back buttons were popular in the 1920s.



Four makes of Buster Brown utility pattern knives were made between the late 1920s and the early 1930s.

ferred as a premium for special days. This knife had a spear blade, cocobolo handles and Buster Brown Shoes stamped on the blade. I have never seen an example of this knife, and I consider it a rarity. It might be noted that there were several figural and single blade knives given out prior to the 1920s, but these could initiate a collecting field of their own.

In 1928 and 1929, there were a variety of pocketknives offered. There was the four-blade utility, a single-blade figural leg knife and a two-blade easy opener jack knife with a screwdriver, caplifter blade. In 1926, the Brown Shoe Company introduced the Buster Brown Health Shoe brand. In 1930, this name was replaced by the Buster Brown Tread Straight. Other names that followed were Blue Ribbon,

Golden Year, Mustang and a few other names that would call attention to the company.

Of special interest would be the Health Shoes name. Although the name was dropped in 1930, there were still sales of the items up to 1935. On some pocketknives, the Buster Brown Health Shoe name can be found on the shields. In the case of the Marble's Woodcraft sheath knife, the name has a deep stamp into the blade and can be found with either the "Health Shoes" or "Shoes" marking. The Health Shoes marking means that this Buster Brown Woodcraft knife was made between 1926 and 1930. It might be a good guess that the start of the Depression in 1929 curtailed the production of these

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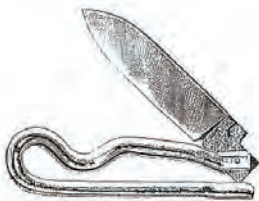


13-inch
Miller Sole

O234—"Blue Ribbon"

Boys' black so-soft 13-inch moccasin blucher with knife, mustard backstay and buckle strap, hooks and eyelets, 17-iron composition sole, white storm welt, rubber heel, clinch nailed, Munson last, E, 2½-5½.
Youths' same, 12-inch blucher, E, 12½-2.

This pair of boots with the knife included in the pocket was from 1928.



Wirejack Knife

A novelty knife at a price you can afford to give with a pair of boys' shoes. Has good steel blade, 2¾ inches long. Packed one-half dozen to box. (One hundred or more etched with retailer's name at 16c each.)
15c Each

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The 1928 Buster Brown premium catalog includes this single-blade George Schrade wirejack which, it suggests, "you can afford to give with a pair of boys' shoes."



Campers' Knives

Finest quality steel and finish throughout. Blades include wood or leather punch, can opener, screw driver, cap lifter and main blade. Has special appeal to the Boy Scouts, but will also be highly valued by any boy or man who is interested in the great outdoors.
75c Each

The 1928 catalog shows a four blade utility knife with shield reading "Buster Brown Shoes."



Campers' Knife

Every boy and girl scout wants one and they are handy for camper, tourist and around home. PACKED SIX TO THE BOX. In stock at St. Louis.
70c Each

In 1929, the four blade utility knife advertised "Buster Brown Health Shoes".



Shield variations occurred as seen on these Buster Brown knives. I have yet to see a Buster Brown pocketknife without its telltale shield.



Several different companies made the easy opener pattern for the Brown Shoe Company.

knives, and that a huge stockpile of these knives existed but was depleted by 1935. The Marble's knife is extremely popular and these knives go for respectable prices. One reason lies in the unique, extremely heavy stamp on the blade; and the other reason is that it is a "Marble's" made knife.

The four blade utility pattern knife with the "Health Shoe" shield may have been made by Utica. There is no manufacturer stamp, but it has a tang mark of Brown Shoe Company. It has all the characteristics of a quality knife from the late 1920s. In fact all the four-blade utility Buster Brown knives are quality knives. They usually have French (long pull) nail marks, quality bone handles and grooved bolsters. As the expression goes, "Quality is as Quality does." I also have a speci-

men of a three-blade utility knife, junior size, which has black celluloid handles. It was made by CKCO (Colonial Knife Company). It is a 1930s knife as indicated by the half-moon can opener which made its first appearance at that time. Most Buster Brown knives which I have found have the Brown Shoe tang stamp. The knife companies would stamp the tangs with a specially marked die when the orders were large enough.

There is also one other tang mark that is interesting. This is the Shapleigh Hardware tang stamp. The front tang is marked BROWN SHOE COMPANY - ST. LOUIS USA while the rear main blade tang stamp is DIAMOND EDGE. The screwdriver blade is marked for Shapleigh Hardware (a St. Louis firm), but the knife



The three distinctive types of knives used by the Brown Shoe Company were the Marble's sheath knife, the four-blade utility knife and the two-blade easy opener pattern. The latter two were made by several manufacturers. There were also several single blade knives used in the early days.



The Buster Brown Shoes etching on this blade is a rarity.

was made by Schrade Cutlery. Go figure.

The two-blade Buster Brown knife first appeared in the mid to late 1920s. All the specimens I have found were manufactured by Imperial and stamped IKCO. The knife is an easy opener pattern with a spear blade and a screwdriver/cap lifter second blade. The handles are almost always celluloid in various colors and textures. The two-blade knife was first introduced in 1928 with the "Blue Ribbon" line of "Hi-Cuts" boots that had a knife pouch in the boot for the knife. However, the earliest documentation of the Buster Brown High Top boots with a knife pouch dates to 1929, but all advertising makes special note that the shoes did not come with the knife. From that date on, the knife was a separate purchase. The last offering of the high top boots with the knife pouch by Brown Shoe Company was 1940. There are some historical points to be noted – 1929 was the stock market crash (a free knife with the boots was discontinued), and 1940 was the start of World War II. Global events can and do have a bearing on marketing strategies.

The premium program offered by Brown Shoes in 1930 was a point system. For each dollar's worth of shoes purchased, a point was given. These also included referrals that were sent in. How the points were assigned to the products was apparently decided by each of the retail stores. The premiums offered varied and included an aeroplane pull toy, axe with



This ad for the single blade Buster Brown knife was from the early 1920s. sheath, fl slight, four-blade utility knife, roller skates and wagons. The axe had a deeply-stamped picture of Buster Brown and his dog, Tige, and the handle had burned lettering with the Buster Brown Shoes stamp.

I thank the Brown Shoe Company for the historical information that was the basis of this article.

Let me finish by saying, "That's my dog, Tige. He lives in a shoe. I'm Buster Brown. Look for me in there, too." □