

Punchy Over Punches

By Dennis
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An article on pocketknife punch blades lends itself to a host of puns. Something pointed like, "Let's get straight to the point," or "This is an article with some punch to it," or how about, "Isn't this just awl-ful." There are a lot more; however the element of humor was given a backseat when I discovered just how involved the history of the leather punch or awl was in relation to the pocketknife. It soon became evident that there are several areas concerning leather punches that were common knowledge in days of yore but are topics of mystery today. The notion that a punch blade is just a hunk of pointed steel that poked holes in your belt due to an obsession with food is a very short-sighted notion. The use of the punch blade in early days was widespread by campers, carpenters, electricians, farmers, gardeners, mechanics, prospectors, ranchers, scouts, sportsmen, tourists, trappers, and on and on and on. It not only pokes holes but bores holes, drills holes, punches holes, reams holes, scrapes wires and cleans pipes and spark plugs. Not only is it used on leather but also on belting, plastic, rubber and wood. If you are not fully awed by this versatility, think about the descriptive names of belt punch, leather punch, spiral punch, hole borer, reamer blade, punch blade, scraper blade and PATENT leather punch. Whew!! Help!! Whew!!

Notwithstanding all else, the pointed sticker of utility/scout knife fame has nu-



The Cattaraugus WHITT-L-KRAFT knife is a very desirable and rare knife. It has a blade which resembles a leather punch; however, the true use is for carving with wood. This knife evolved in the 1930s and was an official Boy Scout knife. There were several spin-offs of this design pattern by Cattaraugus and are easily identified by the punch blade.



Standard punches on two Cattaraugus utility knives.



The Cattaraugus standard made utility knives have a very unassuming punch blade. The general quality construction of their utility pattern knives make these knives easily identifiable.



Above: This punch blade marked with the Challenge Cutlery tang stamp carries patent No. 833,146, which was given to S.L. Alvord of Empire Knife Company. Was it Challenge made or Empire made? Who's on first? A real who-dunnit! At right: Three Challenge utility knives.





New York Knife Company made the top pictured jumbo utility pattern knife. To get away from the breakage often seen on these patterns, NYKCO used a shortened version with the patent date of 6-10-02. There were a plethora of jumbo utility patterns marked Kit Carson either by name or by the buffalo head shield. By comparing the punch blades, it does not appear that these came out of the same factory. Bridge Cutlery, Droesher's, Pal Brand, Utica and Western States are some of the tang marks. I suspect a few of these were made in Germany. Note the match striker pull on the bottom knife.

merous patents pertaining to its use and manufacture, which does not include design patents or pat. pending (those patents that haven't quite made it). At this point it would be difficult for me to believe that I have found all the patents attributed to punches, and no apparent surprise will be expressed when Bernard Levine adds a few more punch patents on this growing heap. Considerable information can be obtained from patent searches, which are very helpful for historical studies. For example, the punch patents that I have found date from 1902 to 1924, which indicates the importance of the leather punch as a tool during this time frame. It wasn't just the utility knife that depended on the punch blade, but the harness knife pattern revolved around the punch blade. This was an apt name for a tool that was vital for the farmer in the field who had to repair a broken harness strap.

The granddaddy of punch patents was the 6/10/02 patent by O.L. Harrison. It is the only leather punch that carried the inventor's name in advertisements. "The Harrison patent leather punch." The inventor assigned this patent to the New York Knife Co. (NYKCO). I cannot find that any other manufacturer used this patent, therefore all punch blades that were stamped 6/10/02 or 701,878 were made by NYKCO. If the NYKCO stamp is not evident and another tang stamp exists, it was a contract knife made by NYKCO. The 6/10/02 Harrison patent suggested that the folding punch blade was a new idea and had features

such as an ability to be sharpened as well as to bore holes up to 1/2 inch in diameter. In addition, the blade was bent 90 degrees to provide strength and a convenient method of opening.

While on the subject of the NYKCO, a patent was given to T.E. Fuller on 2/15/16 which was also assigned to the NYKCO. This patent appears to modify the Harrison design by the use of a spiral pattern on the backside of the blade. It is assumed that this concept was to gain ease in "punchability," like that evidenced with a drill bit. If this stamp of 2/15/16 or 1,171,422 appears on a blade, chances are that it was made by NYKCO. This will help to tip a person to modern day blade changing in a suspect knife.

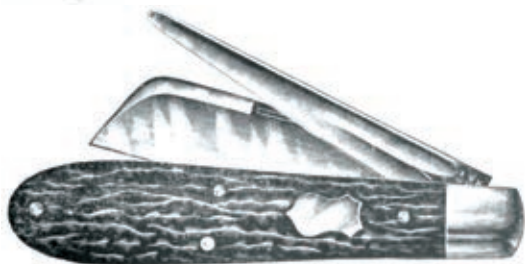
On 4/25/05 a punch blade patent was granted to the Robeson Cutlery Company. This punch blade was designed with a curved shape on the upper portion of the blade, a groove near the cutting edge and a nail nick. Any knife made in this way can be easily identified as a Robeson, even if it was a contract knife.

On 10/16/06 a folding knife punch patent was granted to a S.L. Alvord of Winsted, Conn. This patent was issued to the Empire Knife Co. and was given the patent number 833,146. Here again, if one can find this number stamped on a punch blade, it can identify this as the Empire Knife Co. At this time I am hard pressed to decide for what reason a patent was granted; however its design is such that identification is fairly easy.

On 4/17/08, folding knife punch patent number 884,350 was issued to William Carman of the Napanoch Knife Co. This

"Napanoch" Punch Knife

U. J. Ulery Co., 25 Warren street, New York, are placing on the market the "Napanoch" Punch Knife, No. 0272, illustrated. With the knife-like edge on one side of the punch, small round holes can be easily cut in the leather and it is also often useful when used as a reamer or a gimlet for cutting holes in wood. The Knife will be found useful in cutting and repairing belts, harness, etc., by farmers, horsemen, machinists, etc. The Knife is made of high grade material throughout.



"NAPANOCH" PUNCH KNIFE



Above: The rarest punch design of all has to be given to Napanoch for their two groove patented punch. It's the grooviest of them all. Winchester knives that have this style blade are transition knives. At Right: Three Winchester utility knives.



Unique style typifies this Kutmaster punch. For descriptive purposes, it is referred to as the lightning design. Kutmaster marked knives are after 1937.

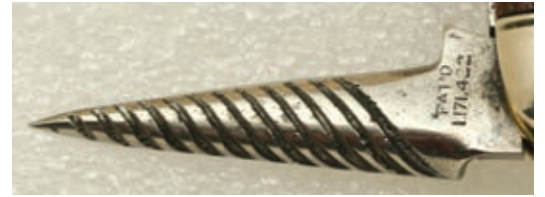


LF&C (Universal) utility knife punches are easily identifiable. The ground out sharp point version or the ground out full punch blade have a unique blackened finish to them. These knives are almost always a product of the 1930s.





The spiral design punch was first patented in 1916 and was used exclusively by the New York Knife Company. The spiral idea was first introduced by the NYKCO and was copied by several other manufacturers after the patent expired.



This is the first punch blade to be granted a patent. It was made by the New York Knife Company and is constructed of two pieces of metal. This blade will have either the 6-10-02 stamp or the stamping "PAT.NO. 701,878."

distinctive and unusual design was characterized by two grooves cut into the flat side of the pointed punch blade. Further definition states that these grooves are separated by a rib that lies between the main groove and the auxiliary groove. Now isn't that just groovy? Or maybe I should say, it was groovy for me.

The patent information stamp on this blade is marked very low and is extremely difficult to read. Several years ago I was offered a "presumed" Winchester utility knife with this strange punch blade. I was suspicious of the knife, as the main blade was of poor fit and the main blade nail nick was not located on the shield side. (Note, almost all pocketknives with shields align the nail nick to the shield side.) The price was high, and the owner was also suspicious of its authenticity. I was in a gambling mood; so, when the price got down to an affordable amount, I bit. It was a long time, after considerable research, that I determined this was a Napanoch made knife which had been made into a Winchester at the time that Winchester purchased Napanoch. Better said: a 1919 vintage transition knife (Napanoch/Winchester) signed, sealed, delivered and a treasure to behold. Historical knowledge most certainly can pay off.

An overview analysis of folding knife punch patents would appear to be straight

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Left: This article describes the history found on Remington knives with an acorn shield.



Stout, strong and a simple design typify the Schrade Cutlery Co. punch blade. The vertical grind lines that end near the tang provide clues to identify punch blades made by this company. This is an oval shape left by the grind.

Remington Pocketknife Patterns

that have a punch blade but do not have the acorn shield



R3335	R4373	R4835
R3593	R4384	R4853
R3843	R4679	R4855
R4235	R4713	R1008
R4243	R4833	R1058

Punch Blade Patent Dates and Numbers

06/10/1902	#0,701,878	NYKCO
04/25/1902	#0,788,022	Robeson
10/16/1906	#0,833,146	Empire Knife
10/22/1907	#0,869,063	Warwick Knife Co.
04/07/1908	#0,884,350	Napanoch
06/09/1908	#0,890,457	Schatt & Morgan
08/11/1908	#0,895,778	Schatt & Morgan
09/06/1910	#0,969,303	Shephard
07/25/1911	#0,999,060	George Schrade
12/26/1911	#1,012,838	Fuller
04/06/1915	#1,134,539	Thomaston Knife Co.
02/15/1916	#1,171,422	NYKCO
04/30/1918	#1,264,625	NYKCO
06/17/1924	#1,498,517	Remington



The Remington Bullet knives are coveted by the collector. In the 1920s and '30s this was a heavy duty utility pattern knife. It was a well used knife in the field during its day, so finding a specimen in good condition is difficult. When one finds the best one out, it takes a heavy toll on the wallet. The most common breakage is the punch blade. This punch is long and slender and will not take much abuse. The other damage is to the bone which is often cracked or broken.



Robeson Cutlery had a patent on a punch which was distinctive due to its long groove and its large nail nick. (Robeson also made contract knives that sport this style punch.)

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forward (pun intended); however the manufacturer of the punch blade had to concern himself with structural strength, sharpness, length, hardness and uniqueness. Structural strength can be evidenced, for example, in the angular longitudinal bend of the blade or in the use of grooves to increase surface area. If a tool is used often, it must have the ability to be sharpened to restore it to its original effectiveness. While some punch blades could be easily sharpened, others could not. The length of the punch blade was also a consideration in design, and most designs had a slender quick tapering point. This concept certainly made it easy to punch but also made it easier to break. Punch knife specimens that have full, correct length blades are becoming a rarity. Consider this with large hunter style designs: i.e., the Remington

Bullet No. 4243 and fragility increases. This makes a Remington Bullet with a full punch an extremely RARE knife.

The hardness of the punch blade was a serious consideration, as a soft blade would bend, while a punch that was too brittle would snap and break. One way of controlling this was by tempering. The tempering of the punch blade gave it a hardness quality that made the blade very serviceable; however, it also made it costly to manufacture due to the extra steps that were required. It is worth noting that the leather punch was an often used tool in the pre-'30s era; and, in order to gain acceptance, top quality was essential. What we today as collectors consider top quality collectable knives, the users of yesterday purchased as functional useable tools. It is for this reason that New York Knife Co. and Remington are well known and are

the only companies that used a tempered punch blade.

Tempering, while functional, also served one other purpose, uniqueness. The NYKCO punch blades are straw colored on the inner surface while the Remington blades are a blue color. Different tempering techniques would account for this coloration. Only the inner sides of the blade retain the color, whereas the rounded or top part is polished. This one fact can certainly be used to authenticate a mint knife from one that has been worked over. Likewise, any light cleaning will remove this color, which is a word to the wise. It can therefore be seen that these two companies used function to the point of uniqueness. Other companies utilized uniqueness also as can be seen by Kutmaster with their lightning like punch pattern; Napanoch with their two parallel grooves; Robeson with their groove and a nail nick; and Schrade Cutlery with their flat grind blade. Distinction and uniqueness are valuable recognition tools in the marketing of any product and can be seen best in the punch blade.

The punch blade had other curiosities as evidenced by the Remington pattern R3593 which used a slide lock on the side of the handle in order to keep the punch blade locked open. NYKCO also had a lock punch blade; however the method of release was extremely clever. Release was accomplished by depressing the main blade which in turn would allow the punch blade

to unlock. Likewise the Cub Scout knives use a lock which is released by pushing a brass stop to the side which lets the blade slide past to a closed position.

The pocketknife punch blade pointed to numerous interesting revelations, and in all my research I never once found it to be boring. I was trying to shield everyone from my puns, but is difficult to suppress my finding on the Remington acorn shield. It is commonly known that if an acorn shaped shield is found on a Remington pocketknife, that knife is always equipped with a leather punch blade. The reverse is not true, as there are numerous Remington knives that have punch blades but do not have acorn shields. Pocketknives that have all metal handle designs or no shield can have a punch blade without an acorn. Remington Official Boy Scout knives which have a punch blade use a round style Official BSA shield. (This was not always the case though, as pre-1927 knives that were official had the acorn shape with the Official BSA emblem stamped within the shield.) This is extremely interesting but presented me with a rather perplexing question as to the significance of the acorn. "Why the acorn?" The search was on, and in this search many a corny explanation was given, many of which I had to "leaf" behind. In some instances, I even found myself barking up the wrong tree.

First off, in any search, one should consult the encyclopedia and dictionary. With my Funk & Wagnall in hand, I found that the acorn is the seed to the oak tree. In addition, the acorn is oft times used as a symbol of royalty as is the oak leaf. Reference symbolism also aimed at the oak as being strong, tough and beautiful. I even found "from little acorns, mighty oaks grow." All of the above may be applicable in one way or another to the Remington punch blade; however, I was not satisfied with these answers. So, after my Funk flunked, I proceeded to ask anyone and everyone who might know about the significance of this shield design. No suitable answer was found until I posed the question to a leather repair company when I was visiting Seattle. With an air of arrogance, I was told it should be obvious what all this meant. Well, for him but not me.

In the pre-1930 years leather played a more important role to people; since many people worked with it and modified it. If top grade leather was required for a particular job, the only choice was leather which was tanned from the bark of the oak tree. This explanation made a lot of sense to me. After all, if you are going to use the best in leather, why not use the best made tool for the job: i.e. a Remington punch blade. I'm certain that this concept was common or assumed knowledge in those days.

As can be seen from this article, the simplest of ideas is not always as we seem to think. It can also be seen that a research project such as this can really make one punchy. If you get my point.

Ed. Note: This is an updated version of the original article published in the January 1984 edition of Knife World, with new information and photographs by Mr. Ellingsen. □