The Mysteries of Blade Stamping

By Vern Taylor

The basics of collecting really starts with the marks we find on the blades don't they? Yes, we look at different shapes and sizes and handle materials, but we start with the blade stamping, or lack of it. Have you ever spotted a knife at a show, in a store or at a flea market and picked it up only to discover that it wasn't a Buck at all? I sure have and I'll bet most of you have had the same experience. It has happened to me so many times that I started a collection of Folding Hunter look-a-likes that I plan to exhibit at the next BLADE Show.

Well, what about all of those different stampings that Buck has used over the years? This is not intended to be a complete compendium of blade stampings but rather a primer on them. Some of the stamps have an interesting story behind them and the information here may help you to sort out some knives or look for variations.

Locations and Directions

First let's get some real basic terms defined. Knives have a "pile" side and a "mark" side. Very simply, the mark side on a Buck knife, is the side where we find the name BUCK; the pile side is the other side. Since the mark side is not always the same, we must also identify right and left. If you hold a knife in a normal grip, with the point away from your body and the sharp edge down, the side to your right is the right side.

Then we have two or three possible directions. If you turn that knife in your hand with the mark side up and the letters a number are right side up to you (that is they are correct when the point is away from you) they are said to be right side up. If they are upside down when you are holding the point away from your body, they are upside down. Another, and less confusing, set of terms are "handle oriented" (for right side up) and "point oriented" (for upside down). The third possible position is longitudinally on the blade. That is when the letters are printed on the same axis as the blade, lengthwise along the blade. Again, we have right side up and upside down. If they read correctly when the edge is toward you they are right side up; if they read correctly when the edge is away from you they are upside down.

Styles and Sizes

Several different styles of lettering have been used over the years (today we might call them fonts) and the sizes have varied greatly, even on the same models. The basic style has always been block letters. Script lettering has been employed on certain types of knives at times. Etching was used on the model #110 Folding Hunter for a very short time in the early 1960's because of difficulties in putting the stamp on...
From the Club Director's Office

Congratulations to the display award winners at this year's Greater Cincinnati Knife Show! We had approximately 26 members represented at the show which was held at the Shriners lodge in Ohio. This is a good sized show with 280 dealer tables and 21 club displays. Of the 21 displaying their collections, 11 were Buck collectors. Five of these went home with an award from the show for their display. And the winners are:
- Zach Foresman - Youth award
- Michael Lacy - Youth award
- John Foresman - Buck Custom
- Paul Lentz - Judges award
- Larry Oden - Judges award

Congratulations to everybody for a great job!

1998 Club Knife

The original delivery date for the 1998 club knife and the ten-year anniversary knife was the first week of November. I am sorry to report that the knives will be late. The good news is that the club knife will be better! We could have shipped on time but recently tried a different type of Damascus for the bolsters. The samples looked stunning! Better always seems to cost more and Buck will cover the cost. The new Damascus should be in house by the beginning of December so we should be shipping by mid-December. I sincerely apologize for this inconvenience and hope you will be pleasantly surprised with your knives.

Special Projects

MODEL 192DT - Deer Tracks Pennsylvania Wildlife. This Vanguard will have a laser cutout of a deer track on the blade. Blade will also have laser print of "Pennsylvania Whitetail-98" and be numbered xox of 250. Crown horn stag handle will have pewter deer head inserted on the end similar to the Tracks knives. Standard leather sheath and limited edition box. This is planned to be the first in a five-year series. Targeted ship date is 10/1/98.

Attention All Members: VOTE VOTE VOTE!!!

21 members attended the membership meeting that was held at the show on Saturday. This was a rather important meeting as the main topic of discussion was the progress being made in turning the club into a non-profit organization, and whether or not to incorporate the club. As has been discussed at previous meetings, it has been long the goal of the club to become a self sufficient, separate entity from Buck Knives Inc. It was decided that the time was at hand to make this change and the Advisory board members have been busy hammering out all the details. You will find attached the new bylaws that are in accordance with a non-profit corporation. Please let us know, via your vote, if you approve or disapprove of the bylaws. Also attached is a proposed slate of officers and their terms. This slate is to be voted on by the full membership and requires a majority from the ballots returned to be approved. Write in candidates will be accepted and must receive a majority to win the position. Please take a few moments to cast your vote.

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<th>Candidate</th>
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<td>Murray Andrews</td>
<td>President</td>
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<td>Paul Lentz</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
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<td>Ernie Logan</td>
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<td>Gordon McCoy</td>
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<td>John Miner</td>
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<td>Joe Houser</td>
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☐ Check here to approve the slate as listed.
Your vote is very important. Please take a few moments to make your choice known via one of the methods shown below:
Phone: (619) 449-1100 ext. 235 for Joe Houser or ext. 261 for Jane Davey.
Fax: (619) 562-5774
E-mail: jhouser@buckknives.com
Letter: Buck Knives Inc.
1900 Weld Blvd.
El Cajon, CA 92020  Attn: Joe Houser

Deadline to respond is December 15th.
Results will be posted in our next issue.

How does this proposed change affect your membership? It is possible that if this change takes place, the money you spend on the club; club knives, membership dues, or donations, will be tax deductible. (It would be wise to check with your accountant to be sure). Other than this, everything else will stay the same; the quarterly newsletter, membership directory, special offers on Buck products, and the latest Buck catalogue will still be sent each year.

OOPS! Did I forget to mention that Paul Lentz also won the category for Harley knives at the 1998 Blade Show? Well he did! I am sure it is because he is so soft spoken that I hardly noticed him. Congratulations Paul! Sorry for the oversight.
The Mysteries of Blade Stamping

(Continued from front page)

the tang. The name (and model) were etched onto the blades of the Modernes’ kitchen knives also. A very different style of lettering was used on the Bicentennial; it is best described as being similar to very fancy engravers block style. The tank stamps used on the 401 Kalinga and 402 Akonua are also unique; I don’t even know what to call that style of letters!

Early Handmade Knives

The earliest handmade knives were stamped with machinist’s letter dies. These are individual steel stamps; the four letters in BUCK were individually stamped into the softer tang area, of what was once a file, one at a time. Alignment was usually not perfect and the letters have crossbars, or tails, on them (BUCK) like upper case Courier or Times fonts. Some one with an experienced eye can easily identify these knives. It is interesting to note that the same stamps were used to put BUCK on the sheaths that originally accompanied these very early knives.

Later handmade knives were marked with a stamp that was custom made for that purpose. The letters are smaller and, of course, the four letters are in perfect alignment. On both types of knives the stamp can be found on the right or left side of the blade and either handle oriented or point oriented. I believe that the placement was a matter of opportunity or convenience, although most of them appear to be marked on the right side with the mark oriented to the handle.

The larger knives, like kitchen knives or big Bowie knives were not marked with the stamps. There are several different ways that these were marked but I do not want to reveal them. There are a couple of unscrupulous people out there in the world that have tried to counterfeit this type of knife because of their very high value and I do not want them to know the details. If you find a knife of this type please send it, or good photos of it, to me for authentication. There is no charge for this service.

Early Production Knives

The very first production knives were marked with the same stamps that had been used on the later hand made knives but by the end of the first year these stamps had been replaced with a single new stamp. It was very similar but the letters were a little bit thicker and it could be stamped more deeply without distorting. The letters are also a little bit wider than those in the first production stamp. During this era the stamp was point oriented because that was the easiest and a decision was made to always put it on the right side of the blade. That decision had nothing to do with ease. It was done simply so that the name showed when the knife was put into the dealer display.

The notable exceptions were some of the early 110’s and the 121 Fisherman model. They both went through a period when they were stamped longitudinally. In both cases that was because they had a blade that was much thinner than the other knives and the horizontal tang stamp caused some of them to experience stress fractures in the tang area. Both of these knives went through a transition process that resulted in blades almost double the thickness of the original versions. The 121 is known today as the Guide and true fillet knives replaced it as a fisherman’s knife. In more recent years the lengthwise stamp was revived, first in the 531 BuckLock. Today if you pick up a CrossLock or a Zipper the lengthwise stamp doesn’t seem at all unusual, like it once was. In fact, if you look closely at page 16 of the 1996 catalog you will see that the 692 has a lengthwise stamp and the 192 has a handle oriented horizontal stamp.

Script Letters

The first use of script letters in the tang stamp was on the model 501, originally called the Esquire. The 501 was a big step for Buck and the script stamping on the blade and the nickel silver bolsters set it apart from the rest of the line. It was also the first drop point folder that Buck ever made. Script letters were also used on the Empress Trio, Buck’s first kitchen knives, and on the steak knives made in the late 1970’s. The smallest knife of the Empress Trio was used to make the steak knives and it was also made into a sheath knife called the 107 Scout. The 107 originally had script letters in the stamp but these were changed to block letters later on to conform to the rest of the sheath knives. The first custom knives were marked with all block letters but the Buck was changed to script later on. I have seen quite a few standard production knives with the script Buck in the custom stamp. There are several reasons for that; some were mistakes and some were done because it was expedient to use the blades on hand and the blades on hand happened to have a custom stamp on them.

Conclusion

There are lots of things to look for in the various blade stampings and it would be almost impossible to catalog all of the differences. One of the real noticeable differences is the pile side model number stamps on the 500 series made in the early 1970’s. The 501, 503, 505, 509, 311, 315, 317, and 318 were all made in this configuration; the mark side carries the BUCK and the U.S.A. and the model number only appears on the other (pile) side of the blade. Another interesting thing to look for is the three distinctly different sizes of the U.S.A. mark on 110’s and 112’s. This is something that had totally escaped my notice until it was brought to my attention by Charles Toot (member # 172) of Lincoln, California. When he first mentioned it I found that hard to believe but, by golly, there it was. Once it was pointed out to me it was so obvious that I don’t know how I could have missed it all those years. Charles called the three most prevalent sizes “small” “mini” and “micro” U.S.A. I think that those are good definitions because they certainly are at least two larger sizes of the U.S.A. used on fixed blade knives. Knives like the 124 and BuckMaster use an even larger stamp.

I do not consider that a slight difference in the stamp creates a type or model in the 110’s, they are certainly variations however, and a good collection will include them. Again, identifying the difference with near labels is very important if you display your collection. It is my opinion that a collection could be put together simply for the purpose of showing the many different types of blade stamps and it would be very interesting. A collection of this type could include pocket knives, folding lock blades and fixed blade knives. It would not need to have every variation to be quite complete looking and you could add to it as you find other variations or other knives to add to it. Good hunting!
CONTINUING SERIES

Tenth in a Series

Tenth in a series is continued from our August newsletter.

It was personal satisfaction, not money, that stimulated Dave to start making jewelry. He is simply an artist, heart and soul. An artist and opportunity, he had broken the wood handle on his own model 112 and set out to repair it in an artistic way. A direct result of that first effort is the hundreds of Yellowhorse knives that are now sold every year to knife aficionados and collectors around the world. Dave has always favored the #112 but has used other models, mostly the model 110 and the Kalinga. He has put handles on knives other than Buck but they are a rarity. He now makes knives exclusively for Buck Knives, Inc.

Yellowhorse knives have always been signed; first with an electric pen and later with a custom stamp. Currently they are signed using a pantograph (engraving machine), that inscribes a replication of Dave’s signature. Each knife that comes out of the Yellowhorse shop is still done by hand, just as they were made when Dave did every knife by himself. Only a few skilled workers are employed at Yellowhorse Indian Jewelry. Dave still does part of the work on just about every knife that bears the Yellowhorse trademark. During our tour of the operation, Dave demonstrated every step in the process by doing it himself on a knife. Yellowhorse Indian Jewelry is just what you would assume it to be, a small custom shop with a few highly skilled workers, located in Arizona.

Dave is married with four children ranging in age from four to seventeen. His wife, Linda, is also active in the business. Linda’s brother, Bill Tatro, joined Dave’s enterprise in 1974, long before it became the thriving company it now is. Bill sees to the everyday matters of business so that Dave can utilize his artistic talents to the fullest and spend maximum time in the shop.

The future looks good for this company and for this area of knife collecting. Yellowhorse knives are sought after by people who appreciate the craftsmanship that is so apparent in them, as well as by knife collectors. This makes it more difficult to assemble a complete set but it is reassuring to know that your collection has value outside of the knife collecting fraternity. Now is a good time to start on a Yellowhorse collection if you haven’t already done so!

Tidbits

The model 535 MiniTool will undergo a change shortly. The tweezers have been redesigned to produce a more durable product. This change comes after approximately 17,000 of the tools had been shipped.

Model 181 and 182 will undergo a stamp change. Instead of having the “ATS-34” laser marked, it will now be stamped right under the “U.S.A.” This change is in process now.

The Model 103 and 103BR have recently gone on a diet! The new knives will be approximately .060 thinner. At our ten-year anniversary celebration in July we passed one of them around and only one person was able to tell the difference, so we gave them the knife!

***CLASSIFIEDS***

Unique opportunity: Membership for sale! Club membership number 30 is for sale. This is a rare opportunity to own one of the founder numbers - #1 to 100. This is a package deal which includes club knives from 1990 through 1996, plus the sterling silver belt buckle and pin given only to founding members. Please call Marilyn or Robert Bishop at (203) 272-0046

Model 937 Subhilt Hunter - This is a 50 year service award knife with gold engraving on the blade! The blade is Damascus and the guard, sub-hilt, and pommel are nickel silver. The handle is layered Mastodon ivory! Call Greg at (619) 449-1100 ext. 278

Remember to call Buck for a complete list of knives available from Buck and other members. Call (619) 449-1100 ext., 253 for Joe Houser or ext. 261 for Jane Davey.