

History of Buck Cutlery

The first knives made by a member of the family, Hoyt Heath Buck, a blacksmith's apprentice, made Buck Knives in about 1900.

Young Buck had developed an effective method of tempering and had used it in his work of rebuilding worn out grub hoes used by local farmers and gardeners.

Those for whom he had worked recognized that the rebuilt hoes were superior to new ones. Because of this, one of his customers asked Buck to forge a knife.

Using the same type of worn farriers files that he used to rebuild the cutting edge of hoes, Buck made his first knife, and personal recommendations led to his making others.

As the reputation of his knife spread, he began to custom make knives on a regular but part time basis.

During the years from 1908 until 1930, Hoyt Buck earned the family's livelihood by working in the logging industry, but supplemented his income by making knives in his spare time.

A son, Alfred Charles Buck, was born to Hoyt and Daisy Buck in October 20, 1910.

After his discharge from the U.S. Coast Guard in 1940, Al Buck settled in San Diego, California.

Meanwhile, Hoyt Buck had been ordained a minister and had moved to Mountain Home, Idaho, to pastor a small church.

His forge was set up in the church basement and he continued to make knives for local customers.

With our nation's involvement in World War II, a growing number of the area's young men would leave for military service with their own knife made by Buck.

For the first time, knives made at the Buck forge would gain more than a local reputation for quality as the few fortunate servicemen proudly showed their knives to their comrades-in-arms.

In 1943, Hoyt and Daisy Buck moved to San Diego to join their son.

Hoyt began to make knives full-time and Al made knives part-time, whenever he was not as his regular job as a bus driver.

The Bucks has reasoned that their knives could be sold by mail order via advertisements in outdoor magazines, since some of their readers could well have been former servicemen who had already learned of the knives made by H. H. Buck.

Continuing in the four-decade tradition, most of the early Buck knives were made from old files or power hacksaw blades.

They were usually handled in Lucite plastic of various colors, South American *lignum vitae*, or local desert ironwood.

Their reasoning had been sound and business during the 1945-1949 period was good.

Hoyt Buck died in 1949, but his son, Al continued to make knives in the San Diego shop at 1272 San Morena Avenue, San Diego.

In 1959, his own son, Charles T. Buck, joined him in the business. Alfred Charles Buck passed away March 31, 1991.

In 1961, incorporation of the business and sale of stock allowed for expansion of the knife business by moving to a large workshop at 3220 Congress Street, San Diego and employing three knife makers.

Buck's line was still limited to fixed blade hunting and filet knives made from files and saw blade steel.

Soon, however, a nearby commercial forging company made the blades, which were finished into knives and stamped "Buck" at his company shop.

Models produced at this time (1964) included #102 Woodman, #103 Skinner, #105 Pathfinder, #116 Caper, #118 Personal, #119 Special, #120 General and #121 Fisherman.

Noting tang style may make some general determination of a fixed blade Buck knife's age.

The earliest production knives followed the system of their hand made predecessors in that their tangs were threaded and a barrel nut was used to hold on the handle and butt cap.

Knives produced after 1962 had a flat tang with the butt pressed on and held with a pin.

The knife that would bring fame and fortune to Buck knives was the Model 110.

Although it has become synonymous with the term "folding hunter" and is undoubtedly the most copied knife made today, the basic locking design was not new when Al Buck designed it in 1963.

But the phenomenal demand for knives of this type was created through the qualities of the Buck 110 and it remains today as the market leader.

Introduced in 1964, the company's success with the 110 led to production, in 1971, of the slightly smaller version Model 112.

Knives by Buck with special channel inlay on handles blending turquoise and other stones, wood, and metals.

Navajo artisan David Yellowhorse individually hand-tooled bolsters and decorative work, no two knives are exactly alike.

Today, David's sons Brian and Ron work with him in his shop at Lupton, Arizona, Navajo Land, USA.

The first Yellowhorse decorated Bucks were produced in about 1980. Yellowhorse has also collaborated on knives with United Cutlery and Spyderco.

In 1966, the company expanded its line of folding knives by introducing the 300 series pocketknives, first produced by Schrade but switched to Camillus in 1968.

In 1975, the 500 series models were introduced and were also made for Buck by Camillus. Production of Buck pocketknives was moved to the company's own factory in 1979.

Buck moved to El Cajon, California in 1980, and more recently to a new facility in Post Falls, Idaho in 2005.

The company still manufactures many of its products at the Idaho plant, though portions of its line are manufactured overseas as well.

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Buck Knife Stampings

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The evolution of Buck Knives from church basement enterprise to high-tech cutlery manufactures is reflected in the markings found on the company's products.

The earliest marked knives are called "four strikes" by collectors, because each of the letters in BUCK were struck with individual letter stamps of the type found at any hardware store back in the days when real hardware stores still existed.

One a related note, the general availability of such stamps and the current value of early Buck knives means that the inexperienced collector should use caution before taking a chance on one.

There are many variations among the early, pre-factory Buck markings, with or without dots on either side of the name, four or one strike stamps, stamps location, etc.

In 1961, the marking was standardized as a one-strike BUCK stamp on the left side of the blade.

Buck began marketing knives in Canada in 1967, and the stamping became BUCK U.S.A. or BUCK MADE IN U.S.A.

The company mark was again changed in about 1971, adding the knife's model number to create a three-line stamp.

* BUCK * 1946-1961

BUCK 1961-1967

BUCK U.S.A 1967-1971

BUCK 119 U.S.A 1971-1986

Acknowledging collectors interest in the company's line, Buck decided to add an additional symbol to their mark in 1986.

This symbol allows collectors to determine when any Buck knife after 1986 was produced.

Alternative symbols were used in 2002 (an anvil) and 2005 (the outline of Idaho, signaling that year's move to that state).

Older Buck fixed blade knives and Model 100 folding hunters have become very popular with collectors, as have several recently marketed limited editions, such as the David Yellowhorse line.

In recent years the Buck Collectors Club has done much to promote collector interest in the brand, with a good company interface and a very active membership.

Those with an interest in the company's products would do well to join, if only to receive the club's fact filled newsletter.

There is a great book out on Buck Knives called The Story of Buck Knives, a Family Business by Tom Ables. Search eBay and Amazon and see if you can find this out-of-print book.

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Sources

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The Story of Buck Knives, A Family Business by Tom Ables

Official Price Guide to Collector Knives, 15th Edition by Houston Price and Mark Zalesky

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