



***Walden  
Knife  
Industry***

## **Knife Industries in Walden... excerpts from *Old Walden* by String Cooper**

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At noon all was in readiness. The cat was placed on one side of the canal and the strong boy on the other. A rope was tied to the cat, carried across the canal, and tied around the body of the victim on the other side. What the victim did not know was that when they fastened the rope to the cat there was quite a bit left over and it was thrown down the bank behind the cat where four or five husky chaps were waiting out of sight. The general procedure was for the challenger to take a crouching position with his back to the canal. The signal was given and the contest was underway. The men under the bank would go along with him for a few seconds allowing him to gain a few feet and leaving him with a short taste of victory. Then all at once - splash- he would be in the canal with kitty still sitting on the bank. The cat had won again. This was hard for some of the victims to understand and it is said that some were so sure they could do it that they tried a second time.

This was only one of the many extra-curricular activities at the plant. Others included sending a boy for the "laying on board" or down to Horace Melliush for a bucket of steam. There were many activities that were of a more serious nature such as the numerous walking matches on the bridge, foot races along Water Street, excellent baseball and football teams. It is understood that at one time they played soccer and even had a cricket team among the English boys.

The plant had its social side too. The dances held by "The Lower Shop Girls" were a yearly affair and were looked forward to by all the young and old folk of the village.

All these activities were suspended with the end of knife-making in Walden. No longer will the old shop bell peal out calling the men to their labor at seven a.m., back from lunch at one o'clock, and at quitting time at six o'clock) and from then on until nine o'clock at night. So ends the saga of a wonderful part of Walden's history.

...The Steel Era which gave Walden its start as the "Sheffield of America" began in 1856. A group of civic minded citizens heard that the New York Knife Company of Matteawan, New York was looking for a new place to locate. Since the woolen business was on the decline it was apparent to the business men of the growing community that something had to be done. They sent a delegation to Mattawan to interest the company in moving to Walden. In those days there was no Chamber of Commerce to laud the virtues of our Village just plain everyday citizens with a dream but what a dream!

We can imagine the sales talk they must have given "Water power the best in the state" - "a factory already built" "Plenty of room to expand" a source of honest labor" - "Taxes not even mentioned" - and to wrap it all "We will move you to Walden." This must have turned the trick for the company accepted Walden's offer. Teams from the Village and surrounding farms volunteered their services and moved the entire establishment from Mattawan to Walden. It is hard to imagine such a gesture, of civic pride being attempted in our age.

According to John C. Holbrow in his article "Fifty Eventful Years" published in the 1904 issue of "The Historic Wallkill and Hudson River Valleys" the following is a complete list (with the exception of a few apprentices) of those who moved to Walden from Mattawan: Joseph Rowland Sr. Thomas J. Bradley, James Roberts, George Mathews, George Kilner, Alfred Donnelly, Alfred Simpson, George Barker, James Ward, Thomas Waley, George Robinson, Sr., Isaac Newton, Dennis Handy, Martin Marshall, Edward Lawton, Robert Sutcliff, Jacob Bradwell, Samuel Trickett, Harvey Trickett, and John Lindley, stockholders; and Joseph Brown, Joseph Kilner, Lewis Lockwood, and Alfred Lockwood, non stockholders.,

The New York Knife Company, turning out a superior grade of pocket knife, prospered from the beginning and soon became the foremost pocket knife company in the country. This success story did not happen overnight, however, for they had their ups and downs just as any new firm does.

Thomas W. Bradley, son of Thomas J. Bradley, was a lad of about thirteen when they moved. Who could have known that one day this same lad would be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for Heroism at Chancellorsville and later serve as our Representative in the United States Congress.

He worked in the factory and was a thorough knife man. Apparently the two Bradleys had several different ideas on how the business should be run. The following account, taken from a clipping of the "*Walden Citizen*" and written around 1895 by James T. Young will explain.

***New York Knife Buildings.***

*Old cotton mill from 1856 to 1879. In 1879 the building was raised a story and a half and extended to the roadway. Thomas J. Bradley, Pres. was not in favor of this venture but as he was in poor health, his son prevailed upon him to make a visit to England to regain his health. During his absence the work was completed. To celebrate the completion of this new addition a monster ball was arranged for its opening.*

*The invitations printed on pink glazed paper were very fancy. They read as follows:  
Wallkill River Works. Employees Social  
Dance on the opening of the new  
factory extension: Thursday evening  
Dec. 4th 1879. Dancing at 8 o'clock.  
Music by Terwilliger. Yourself and  
ladies are respectfully invited to attend.*

On the cover of the elegantly printed, tinted folders were the names of the Managers. On the inside were the dances named after the different variety of knives made in the factory at the time. But the dance was never held, for Mr. Thomas J. Bradley, who had been ailing for some time, died at his home on Ulster Avenue

and the dance was called off. This was the first step in Building. Since that time extensions and new buildings have been added from time to time until now all of their available land is occupied. The shop, under the management of Col. Thomas W. Bradley, who succeeded his father as President, is without question the largest cutlery works in the country.

Because the fine quality of their knives and the outstanding ability of Thomas W. Bradley, Walden became internationally known for pocket knives. As the knife factory grew so did our Village. There are many stories about the knife shop. The most famous is the one told of the acute business ability of Bradley during the 90's. We quote from Ruth O'Reilly's biography of the life of Thomas W. Bradley, printed in the Walden Citizen Herald of March 3 1960:

By the 1890's Col. Bradley had amassed a good size fortune for those years and is said to have had \$250,000 tied up in the Knife Factory. President Cleveland then lowered the tariff and a large number of German knives were imported which threatened to ruin Bradley and the Knife Works. He decided keep the business going as long as he could. He lost \$250,000 but still kept the employees working on a four day week.

He borrowed \$100,000 and proceeded to store the huge number of unsold knives in every available barn in Orange County. When Bradley's friend William McKinley, was elected President in 1898, McKinley offered Bradley a job as Commissioner of Pensions. Col. Bradley explained his plight with the factory and declined the position at the time. Whereupon President McKinley asked if there was anything he could do for him and Bradley replied, "Yes, raise the tariff. It was not long before the tariff was raised and Bradley again put the men back on a full work week. Bradley, being about the only factory having stock on hand, (with barns loaded)' soon had his \$350,000 back and made \$200,000 more.

In 1903 Mr. Bradley sold his interest in the factory to the Fuller Brothers of New York and devoted his time to politics.

Those who never saw the New York Knife Factory in its prime would find it difficult to believe that it took up the entire space, from the "High Bridge" (Route 52) to what is now Sharp's Blacksmith Shop. The end of the building near the bridge was seven stories high reaching from the river bank in the gorge to the street level. The layout was so unusual that Robert Ripley, in his book "Believe It or Not," at one time mentioned it as the only seven story building that you entered from the top.

In 1906 the officers of the New York Knife Company were: J.E. Fuller, President; C. B. Fuller, Treasurer; J. D. Adams, Secretary; W. W. Mathies Manager; and J.W. Rowland, General Superintendent. The Fuller brothers ran the plant under superintendents Frank Benedict and Thomas Brookfield until 1931 when the business was discontinued. The factory was abandoned until 1940 when the buildings were torn down. Thus we come to the end of our first and largest knife factory.

The chief rival of the New York Knife Company, the Walden Knife Company, might never have been formed had it not been for a baseball game played in 1870. According to old stories, a group of men from the New York Knife Factory wanted to play a game of ball. (It may have been an inter-room game for it was the custom for the men of one room to play the men of another room.) There was quite an argument which ended in an ultimatum by Mr. Bradley that if they played ball they would be through working for him. They played ball. Undoubtedly there had been some dissatisfaction in the plant before this group together with their friends, started their own knife shop in rented rooms in the Rider Engine Company's plant, near the railroad. W. E. Gowdy was their first President. It was a success from the start as each one of the original workers was a knife man from bolster to spring and turned out only the best possible cutlery. This company called itself The Walden Cooperative Knife Company

By 1874 they had grown so large that they were incorporated under the name of The Walden Knife Company with a capital stock of \$20 000. The officers were: Edward Whitehead, President; George Weller, Jr., Vice President; Edward Whitehead, Secretary, and Treasurer, The board of directors were: E. Whitehead, G.

Weller .Jr., S. Andrews, J. S. Taylor, and J.M. Walker. At this time they purchased the Giles Andrews Satinet Factory on Water Street now the site of the Thruway Market.

From an article published by the Mercantile Publishing Company in 1893 we quote:

*The premise utilized, comprise one building four stories and a half, 128 x 20 feet in dimension are used. An "L" 25 x 70 feet in size and three stories high, besides a forging shop, saw room, etc. Both water and steam power, with an engine of 75 horsepower; also a 75 horsepower "Hercules wheel." The factory is fitted with improved machinery throughout and employment is given to 225 operatives.*

From this meager from beginning the Walden Knife Company prospered and more buildings were added from time to time, E. D. Simmons of St. Louis, one of the largest hardware dealers in the Middle West, began buying knives from the Walden Knife Company. Finding them to be the finest they could buy, they not only bought knives but stock in the company. When George Weller, a principal stockholder retired the Simmons Company purchased his stock and thus obtained virtual control of the company. Simmons made it the home of the "Keen Kutter Knife," a trademark which became famous throughout the world.

After Simmons assumed the management of the plant, a number of the original employees, particularly office workers, were laid off and replaced by men from the St. Louis office. The business continued to grow and about 1914 three new buildings of modern design were constructed and equipped with the latest machinery. These buildings were commonly referred to as "The White Elephants."

During World War I government contracts kept the factory operating to full capacity. One of the major items produced were large knives for the Navy. After the armistice there was a sharp decline in the demand for pocket cutlery. E. C. Simmons Company, being in a precarious financial situation merged with the Winchester Arms Company who were as bad off with their large munitions factories standing empty, and started making knives in their Bridgeport, Connecticut factory. The Walden plant started down hill. They continued working in a small way until 1927 when they closed their doors for the last times.

The third phase of the steel era began in the early 1900's when George Schrade, the inventor of the press button knife, and his brother, William, left the Walden Knife Company and with another brother, J. Louis, and the help and cooperation of local businessmen organized the Schrade Cutlery Company. This company was incorporated April 19, 1904 with the following officers: George Schrade, President; Philip Hasbrouck, Vice President, J. Louis Schrade, Treasurer; I. H. Loughran, Secretary.

Their first plant was a two story building on East Main Street thirty feet wide by seventy feet long (now occupied by the Pierce Industries). In 1911 this building was extended thirty feet and a three story portion was added. A number of out buildings were also constructed. In 1915 it was again necessary to enlarge the plant. The resulting building gave the Schrade Company a modern three story building. About this time the company purchased the plant occupied by the Walden Cutlery Handle Company. This was a company formed by all three of the knife factories to manufacture imitation "Stag" handles. These "Stag" handles were made of bone and sold to other knife factories. The company was commonly called the "Stag Shop". For some reason or other it did not achieve the success expected of it.

At this time there was a reorganization of the company and the following officers were elected: J. Louis Schrade, President, Philip Hasbrouck, Vice President, William Schrade, Treasurer, Sanford Abrams, Secretary; Alfred V. Schrade, Director,

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## ..... STEADY GROWTH

"Mighty oaks from little acorns grow" or so the songsters say, and it must be true for, from a little grist mill tucked under the Falls of the Wallkill to our modern factories, Walden has followed that pattern,

After Mr. Walden started his dream of a manufacturing town by building the wooden building for the Franklin Company to use for a woolen mill, we have had a steady, if not spectacular, growth. Other mills were

built along the river, the cotton factory, the Satinet factory of Giles Andrews, the grist and saw mills of Galatian (and afterwards Embler) which, according to Mr. Holbrow, sometimes ran day and night, These mills were the life blood of our Village prior to the Civil War and it is stated that the woolen mill made blankets for the soldiers in the Civil War Period,

In 1856 the New York Knife Company moved here from Mattawan, Dutchess County, New York. Previous to 1870 the Rider Engine Works were built through the efforts of Levi Gowdy

.... In 1870 a number of men from the New York Knife Company organized a cooperative company and started making knives in rooms rented in the. Rider Ericsson Building. This proved to be a successful venture and shortly afterwards they purchased the Giles Andrews Satinet factory on Lower Water Street which is the property now owned by the Thruway Market. This company prospered from the first under the able direction of Mr. Edward Whitehead, President and Samuel Andrews, Superintendent. It became one of our larger industries making the famous "Keen Kutter" pocket knives.

.... In 1904 the Schrade Cutlery Company was organized by George and J. Louis Schrade and local businessmen. The original factory was under the direct management of George Schrade, the inventor of the famous "Press button Knife" and his brother, J. Louis Schrade, Mr. J. Louis Schrade retained active leadership until April 7, 1949 when he turned over his interests to the Imperial Knife Association. They ran the plant until it moved to Ellenville, thus ending the knife industry in Walden.

...1933 saw a flurry of activity at the old Walden Knife plant when Pellisier-Jones and Rivet purchased the plant for a fur cutting plant. This plant was a welcome addition to our Village but it did not last for the bottom soon fell out of the fur market and they closed the plant. It was vacant for a few years and then was purchased by Meyer Jacobowitz for a super market and today is the Thruway Market.

....Walden has always been noted for its parades. We could organize a parade at the drop of-a hat - and furnish the hat. Fire parades, political parades, Memorial Day parades, Dedications of almost anything. But the one parade that the kids all enjoyed the most was when they "drummed the kids out of school after a Republican victory. It was generally started at the Upper Shop (we cannot say that Mr. Bradley started it but he never stopped it). A couple of Drum Corp. boys would get a drum or two and start banging away. In no time others would join in and the first thing you knew the whole shop was out and a parade was in the making. Up to the school - all the kids out - down to the Lower Shop - all out - Schrades -Rider Ericsson - all over town, Everyone joined in to celebrate.

A while back we mentioned the dedication of anything, which reminds us of monuments. Walden is famous for its monuments. There is hardly a village in Orange County which has as many monuments as Walden. It started as far back as October 8 1890 when the beautiful Soldiers Monument honoring 1861 - 1815 was dedicated in our municipal square. The Fireman's monument that was for years in front of our Savings Bank is now, beside Richburg's gas station on the West Side. This monument not only honors our Fire Department but was a watering trough for our horses. The McKinley Monument on McKinley Square near the post office, erect-d by the working men of Walden through the cooperation of Col. Bradley was dedicated May 30, 1924,

In our Cemetery we have the Soldiers Monument erected by Fairchild Post #674 D. A. R., The "Volunteer" erected by Col. Bradley in honor of the 124th New York State Volunteers, and in another section new Route 52 is a monument honoring the veterans of all wars, There is also a monument erected by Wm. Deakin Post #158 in 1958 on the site of our former band stand honoring all those who served in the Armed Forces of our Country.

....Although this High School team was good, they sometimes scheduled a team that was a little out of their class. When this happened, Eli Ellis (who had just graduated from Fanwood Institute) would register for one or two "subjects" in school so that he could play in the game. So that Eli would know what the play was to be certain signals or numbers were inked on the center's derriere. When Eli was to run the quarterback would point to the appropriate series of numbers and Eli would be off. Needless to say this confused the other team.

When the boys in the Knife Shop saw what fun the High School lads were having they formed teams in both the Upper (N. Y, Knife Company) and Lower (Walden Knife Company) shops, This was to grow into the greatest athletic rivalry in the Village.

On the day of the championship game there was a parade down to the ball field below the Lower Shop led by the Walden Drum Corp. Both teams had symbols painted on the back of their canvas jackets. The symbols included skulls and crossbones, ominous tombstones, and dripping daggers. The entire town turned out to this game. Our informant does not remember who won or just who were on the teams but we have a picture which shows the N. Y. Knife Company team of 1901: Charles Whitmore, Eli Ellis, Howard Bunting, Floyd Terwilliger, Charles Howe, Arthur Ellis, Fred Wilkinson, Chubby Taylor, Harry Lester, Alva Lester, Wes Nichols, Jess Bardsley, Fred Backman, George Serby, Bill Allen, Lew Sammons and Dennison Morris, Manager. In 1902 they had practically the same team but included Tip Westerman and Mel Hunt with Thomas Brookfield as manager.

As nearly as we have been able to find out the Lower Shop team consisted of the following men: Mel Hunt, Harry Slater, Levi Van Kuren, Bill Symington, Roll Fairchild, Harry Athorn, Fred Howard, Charles Walker, Pete Andrews, Leggy Mellush, Clarence Wilson, Squirrley Tompkins, Joe Eade.

.... In 1904 they had a composite team under the name of Walden which met all comers. This team included: Charlie Whitmore Alva Lester, Dan Van Amburgh, Harry Lester, Penny Taylor, Prank Parker, Arthur Ellis, Frank Westerman, Howard Bunton, Bill Cooper, H ipe Brundage, Joe Eade, Bobby Brewster, with Harry Athorn as manager.

The next team we have record of is the 1906 High School team with such stalwarts as: Perce Brown, Ted Peters, Rodger Williams, George Schrade, Arch Rollett, Bill Alcock, Lewis Peters, Paul Stewart, Willard Sinsabaugh, C. E. Cooper, George Kelley and Les Ward (both from Pine Bush) with Prof. Courtney, Principal as coach.

In 1907 a group of young men put a Village team called the Trojans on the field. The members of this team were: Biz Scott, Tom Collins, Morris Hultslander, Harold Hawk, Ed Oliva Perc Brown, Frank Winfield, Harry Rosencrans, Jack Fuller, Paddy, Cosgrove, Bill Sarine, Dick Decker, Ed Fox, Fred Mason, with Coon Pillings as manager. The only thing we can gather from members of this team now is that they played a game in Highland Falls where the stones on the field were as big as footballs.

The earliest football fields were located at the old Race Track (Wait Street) and behind the lower shop. These were replaced by the new field at Bradley Park. This field was given to the Village by former Congressman Thomas W. Bradley and developed as a Public works project.

... Perhaps the foremost of Walden's outstanding citizens was Thomas Wilson Bradley. He was a member of the New York State Assembly in 1875 and a delegate to the Republican National Conventions in 1892, 1896, and 1900. He was elected Congressman to the Fifty-eighth Congress in 1903. He served as our representative until 1913. He was not a candidate for re-election then. Mr. Bradley was not only a statesman but also a soldier, enlisting as a private in Company H 124th New York State Volunteers at the age of 18 in 1862; he served until the end of the War, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor and was discharged as a brevetted Major. Upon his return to our Village he went back to the knife business and in time became the president.

From String Cooper's *Old Walden*