

[Linford Buckingham]

W15001

[Conn.?] 1938-9 [?]

Linford Buckingham, whose father and grandfather were knifemakers at Northfield and Reynolds Bridge, has been described as a collector of data on the defunct industry, but an interview with Mr. Buckingham this afternoon is comparatively disappointing. Employed on the night shift of a Waterbury factory, the young man has not been out of bed at the time of my visit, and is preparing to do some work around the newly built home into which he and his wife have recently moved.

"I had some stuff that might have been some good to you," he says. "But I went lookin' for it about the time we moved and I couldn't find it. Maybe my mother has dug it up since then, I don't know. You might go and see her some time. She used to work in the knife shop herself, when she was young.

"And there's an uncle of mine down in Bridgeport who took a lot of that stuff with him. Scrapbooks, and knives my father had made, and all. He works in a knifeshop down there—there's still a few of them around, you know. He's got a knife there—one my father made—that no one can open. There's a little story you might be interested in.

"My father worked on that knife in his spare time. He was always interested in these push button knives—you know—the kind that the blade opens when you press a button. He used to fiddle around with those things every chance he got, in his spare time, after workin' hours, nights—it was a mania with him. He told my mother and my uncle that he was workin' 2 on this special job. He was goin' to make a knife that nobody could open but himself, he said. And he did. He never showed anybody how to work it, and when he died he took the secret with him.

Library of Congress

“Well, my uncle is a knifemaker, of course, and he said he'd find out how to work that knife, if it was the last thing he did, but the only thing he ever got out of it was a sore finger. He was foolin' around with it one day, and a little needle came out and stuck him in the finger. He hasn't found out how to open the blades yet, far as I know. I told my wife about it one time and she said prob'ly the damn thing never would open, but my mother said she saw my father with it open.

“I don't remember much about him. I was just a small kid when he died. He wasn't English born, either. You hear some of those old fellas talk you'd think the only people in the world that could make a knife was the English, but I'll tell you there wasn't much in the line of manufacturin' that a Yankee couldn't do. All he had to do was see somethin' done a few times and he could do it better'n the man that showed him. My grandfather? I couldn't tell you much about him. I know he worked in Northfield for quite a while.

“One thing I know my mother often talked about, that is is how [tough?] those old Englishmen used to be about showing anybody the trade. A Yankee comin' in the knife shop wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance of learnin' the job if he depended upon the Englishmen. But there was a few Yankees workin' at 3 it, and they'd show others so by the time the business was at its peak around here, the limeys didn't have a monopoly like they did at first.

“My father wasn't like that. He'd show anybody that wanted to learn. That trick knife of his was somethin' else again. He never showed anybody how to open that, because he wanted the satisfaction of havin' a joke on 'em after he was gone, the way I look at it.

“You been to see old John Davis? His father was one of the limey knifemakers. Only one I can think of down here at the Bridge is old man Dunbar. He isn't an Englishman, either, he's a Yankee. Over eighty years, but still goin' strong. He goes down to Florida in the winter time and comes back here in the spring, so he must be well heeled. He's always

Library of Congress

doin' somethin'. Last summer he made himself some kind of a boat, and took it up to Bantam lake. Great old man. He'd oughta be able to tell you plenty.”