

WHUT IZZIT?

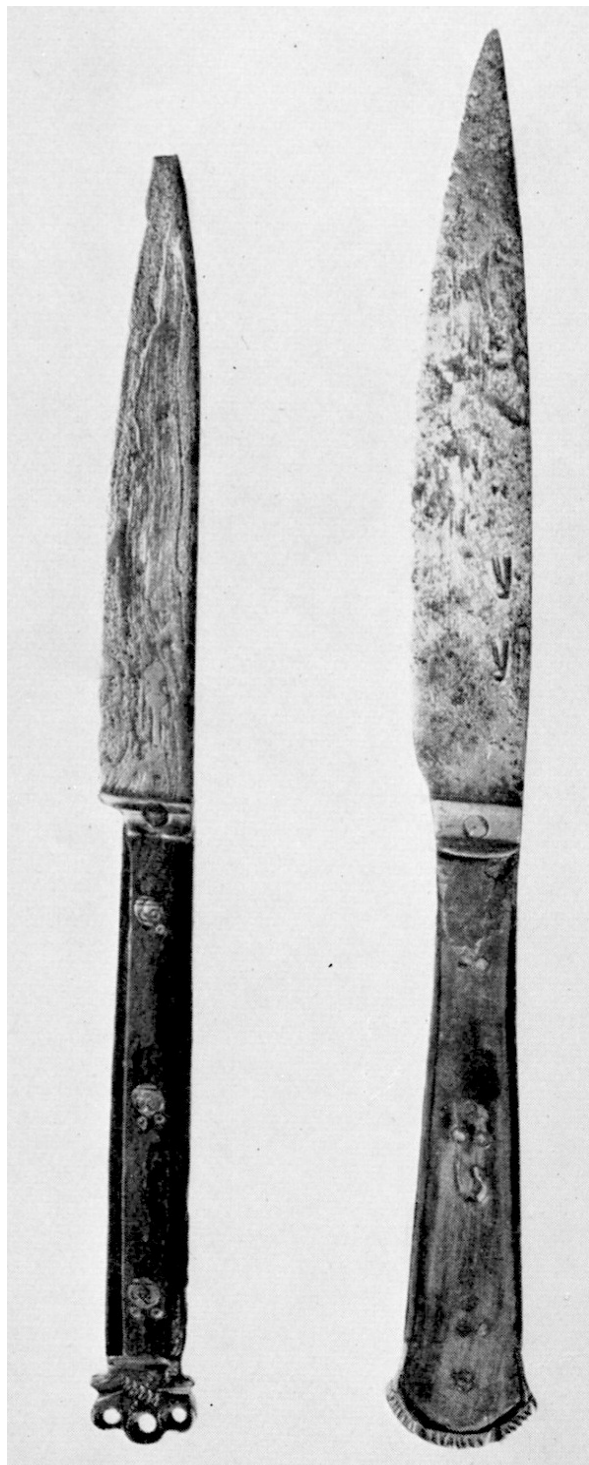
by Bernard Levine www.knife-expert.com

Recently I read the book *Elizabethan Life in Town and Country*, by Muriel St. Clare Byrne (1895-1983), first published in 1925, and updated several times thereafter. In it she recounts this snippet of childhood lore of the 16th century, along with a verse that gently mocks it.

“He remembered how when his little brother was born last year the midwife had hung a knife from the canopy of the cradle, to keep away fairies and witches.”

Let the superstitious wife
Near the child's heart lay a knife,
Point be up and haft be down
(While she gossips in the town)
This 'mongst other mystic charms
Keeps the sleeping child from harms.

What sort of knife this might have been, in late 16th century Britain, Byrne does not say. Here are a couple of examples from about that time, somewhat the worse for having been recovered from archaeological excavations. The



blades are shear steel, whose grain has been revealed by oxidation in the ground. [Victoria and Albert Museum]

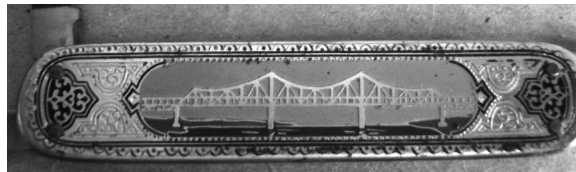
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Assigning an exact date of manufacture to an old knife is often a challenge. One notable exception is presentation knives with the date of presentation incorporated into the design -- usually of the handle, occasionally of the blade. Another exception is anniversary knives, commemorating a landmark date in the history of a company.



Here is an unusual example, made in 1956. It marked the 100th anniversary of Stupp Brothers Bridge and Iron Company of St. Louis, founded in 1856 -- and going strong today. According to its website <http://www.stupp.com/>

“Stupp Bros., Inc., is a privately-owned company focused on providing infrastructure development in the United States as well as serving the St. Louis market through a progressive community bank... Our state-of-the-art facilities in St. Louis, Missouri; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Bowling Green, Kentucky; and South Bend, Indiana produce the essential materials to build pipelines, bridges, high-rise buildings, and sports facilities...”



The knife is a lobster pen knife with “simulated Toledo scales.” Real Toledo metalwork, often called damascening, is gold and silver engraved and inlaid into a black background, such as oxidized iron. The only “real” Toledo-type pocketknife scales I recall seeing were made in Japan in the mid 20th century; Japan has its own similar artistic tradition, called *Iroye*.

What we usually see on pen knives is simulated Toledo work -- embossed and gold-plated brass, tricked out with black, white, and red enamel. Nearly all were made in Germany, in or near Solingen. Typically the designs are generic scrollwork, but sometimes they incorporate simple advertising text, or a logo.



This knife is different. The large custom text block on the front handle has a white enamel background. STUPP is filled in red, while the rest of the company name is in black on gold bands. The commemorative text and dates are in gold.

Flip it over and gets even better. The center panel on the back shows a steel truss bridge in gold, with a light blue sky, and dark blue water.

The knife has a spear blade, a manicure blade, and a scissors, plus a brown leather slip that has protected the enamel well. The blade is tang stamped STAINLESS/ STEEL, and DRESEN/ GERMANY.

Dresen is a brand I have not encountered before. Its story is recounted in Anthony Carter's fine book, *The Sword and Knife Makers of Germany, 1850-2000, A-L*, on page 120.

Gebruder Dresen, Damaszieranst (Dresen Brothers, Damasceners), of Solingen was founded in 1913. A “1922 advertisement describes the firm as workshops for applied arts, for decorating metal promotional items, letter openers, etc., with a galvanizing plant for nickel, gold, and silver plating.”

I don't know when or if Dresen closed, but it was still active in 1956. I suspect that the reason I have not seen the brand is that they did most of their fancy handle work on contract for knife companies. And I suspect that the knife skeleton inside these custom Stupp Bros. handles was contract made by a knife company for Dresen Bros.

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Here is another German made pen knife depicting a bridge in color -- but on the front handle. The back is plain. The knife was sold as a souvenir of Bonn. The bridge is the Bonn Rheinbrücke (Rhine bridge). The photo is from German eBay.



The liners are thin sheet brass, crimped to form a frame or bezel for the celluloid handles. The colors are soft pastels, reminiscent of the picture postcards of the early 1900s. Indeed Wikipedia has a 1915 color postcard depicting a different view of this bridge.

The knife's master blade is tang stamped GEBR. HIEF/ SOLINGEN. Hief Bros. was listed as a cutlery manufacturer in Solingen in the 1915 edition of Kelly's Directory of world manufacturers (compiled in 1914). Carter's book includes the firm on page 210. He could not find its start date, but it was active as a cutlery fac-

tory in 1900, and through 1914 when it became a steel-ware factory. In 1928 it became a steel wholesaler, and closed in 1939. Its trademark of an envelope and anchor was later acquired by Picard & Wielputz.

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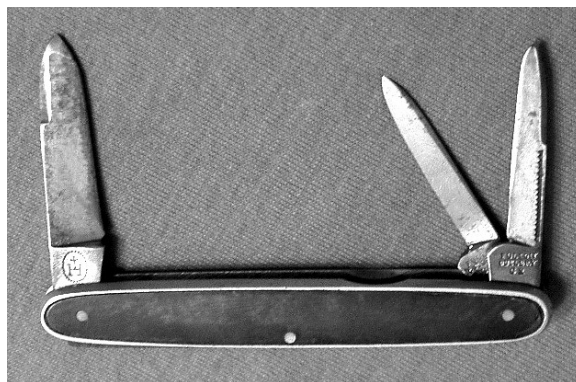
And here is another German made pen knife with metal-framed handles, and artwork on the front. But it is a generation or two older than the Hief knife, and it was made for sale in the USA, not in Germany.



This deluxe knife is an equal-end whittler with sunk joints. The frame is solid nickel silver. A tapered brass wedge divides the springs.



The front handle is ivory, decorated by a stencil process (using heat, or dye, or acid -- or some combination thereof), yielding light drawing on a darkened background. The central motif incorporates an anchor and an American federal shield.



The back handle is plain and dark, and seems heat damaged. It might have been made plain, or it might be an old repair.

There are two tang stamps on the blades. One reads FULTON/ CUTLERY/ Co. in a mid 19th century serif-style typeface. The other is a logo: an H topped by a flower, surrounded by a dentate (toothed) oval. I have seen that logo on



Hilger & Sons scissors. Carter doesn't show it, but he does state that one of the many marks owned by Hilger & Sohne Werkzeugfabrik (tool factory) of Remscheid was "H and a flower within an oval" registered in 1895, but used before that.

Hilger & Sons had representation in New York City. I suspect that this Fulton Cutlery Co. (there were several others) was a Hilger brand. In a merger, the New York Hilger office became Wiebusch & Hilger, one of the largest cutlery importers and manufacturers (it owned Challenge Cutlery Co.) in the US. It lasted until 1928.

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Since we are doing German frame handle pen knives, here is another. It is a slim equal-end pen knife with a fancy frame and sunk joints. The handle covers look like ivory -- until you look close, and see that the "grain" lines were printed on, and are wearing off. Also this celluloid is shrinking, which ivory does not do. The front handle is nicely inscribed *Lady's Knife*.



The front tang stamp on both blades is ATLANTIC/ CUTLERY/ Co., while GERMANY is on the reverse tang of the master blade. Atlantic Cutlery was one of many brands used by Wiebusch & Hilger. This knife was made between 1890 and 1915, I suspect in the 1890s.



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If you have a metal handled pen knife with an applied three-dimensional shield in the form of a logo, please send in clear sharp pictures of the whole knife.

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As always I am happy to be corrected when I am wrong. Otherwise I would never learn anything. If you catch me in an error, please do me the favor of letting me know. Please send me an email to

brlevine@ix.netcom.com

or mail paper correspondence to Whut Izzit, c/o *Knife World*, Box 3395, Knoxville TN 37927. Be sure to enclose either an email address, or a long self-addressed stamped envelope with your letter, and also a flatbed scan, photocopy, or photograph (taken on plain LIGHT GRAY or WHITE background please) of your knife. Do not write directly on the picture. Indicate the knife's handle material and its length (length CLOSED if it is a folder). Make enlarged images of all markings and indicate where they appear. □