



The Drake Oil Well Commemorative Barlow: Queen Cutlery's First Intentional Collector Knife:

Dan Lago and Fred Fisher, 11-24, 2020

We gratefully acknowledge suggestions for improvement in this article by Fred R. Sampson and David Krauss.



Figure 1, the Drake Well Barlow Knife. This knife had four features that made it special. It had a blade etch devoted to a unique historical event of great interest in Titusville, Pa., It had a unique tang stamp used for only one year, 1972, on both the tang and the large bolster. It had a unique model number (#139), and it was offered only one time in limited numbers compared to the regular production barlow knife. It used sawcut bone handles rather than current knives' delrin. In addition to commemorating the 113 year of the actual well, it was also the 50th anniversary of the founding of Queen City in 1922.

In other ways, the knife was not all that unusual – it was essentially like the regular two-blade clip barlow with small spear, (model #22), that the company had offered consistently since its first catalog in 1947, with the same brown sawcut bone scales from the early days, and with the same hardware store six-pack blue box – no special box (for those interested you can refer to our article on Queen boxes from 1947-1971, on this website).



Figure 2. Box for The Drake Well Barlow, showing price of \$34.00. Not a "collector box" for each individual knife (and beyond the wholesale price announced in the press release – Figure 4). These boxes are very rare.

Since this knife was developed in the very early years of Servotronics ownership of Queen Cutlery, there has been some thought that the new owners had wanted to move into the increasing interest and market for collector knives. That does not seem to be the case. They sold off almost all their completed knives in the vault, so completing orders in a timely way became a persistent problem for the company. They also sold parts for knives throughout the 70s, so others could complete knives that look like Queen knives, but didn't carry the warranty – eventually they stopped this practice when it caused problems for the company's own products.

However, one thing they started to do was to give salesmen more freedom to explore opportunities for Special factory orders (SFO). One salesman, whose name has been lost over the last 50 years, had the local western Pennsylvania region to cover, and was active in his home community in planning for the annual Titusville, Pennsylvania Oil Days Festival held each August. It celebrates the success of the first commercial Oil well in the United States.

Drilled by hand in 1859, along the banks of [Oil Creek](#), it is the first commercial oil well in the United States. Drake Well was listed on [National Register of Historic Places](#) and designated a [National Historic Landmark](#) in 1966. It was designated a [Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark](#) in 1979. The well was designated a [National Historic Chemical Landmark](#) in 2009, on the [sesquicentennial](#) of the strike. Titusville and the region benefitted greatly from the first oil boom and the riches that led to the name for the town as "The Queen City."

So, just as the community has persisted in keeping the first oil well in the national memory, they also urged Queen Cutlery to develop a special commemorative knife for sale locally during Titusville's annual August "Oil Days" Festival. The salesman convinced Robert Mathews, Vice President of the company at that time, to get behind the project (Fred R. Sampson, personal communication, 2020). Mathews was a lifetime resident of Titusville, and no doubt knew many of the Oil Days planners and sponsors. He agreed and helped to broaden interest in the Servotronics management (In Franklinville, NY) and by working with Dewey Ferguson. author of "*The Romance of Knife Collecting*". Ferguson's book, a landmark book for knife collectors, covered four knife companies, including Queen Cutlery.

Robert Mathews, it seems, had been successful in gaining Servotronics support and increasing the size of the edition beyond what

could reasonably be expected from just local sales associated with the Oil Days festival. Note the distinction between Mathews letters to Ferguson with Titusville address, and the press release from Servotronics management announcing the features of the knife and that Queen had contracted with the Ischua Valley Outfitters to manage the marketing of the knife nationally (Figures 3, 4, And 5).



SUBSIDIARY OF SERVOTRONICS, INC.
TITUSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA — TELEPHONE: Area Code 814 825-9531

August 30, 1972

Dewey P. Ferguson
Box 929
Fairborn, Ohio 45324

Dear Mr. Ferguson:

Thank you very much for your book I received the other day. Sorry to be so long in acknowledging it, but I just returned from vacation and am just now "catching-up" on my correspondence.

In answer to your question regarding the number of knives we stamped with the 1922-1972 stamp - it would be impossible to give you this figure as I would be revealing highly confidential information. May I just say that all our knives this year are stamped with this special stamp.


I might also add that last year when we went back to our "Crown and Q" stamp we discovered that some of the blades were stamped with 3 or 4 different ones of our old style stamps - some were quite old and quite rare. These stamps may be found on knives that are presently on the market as we did not catch this mistake until they were done.

I have enclosed a photo and news release regarding our commemorative Barlow knife which might be of interest to you. The production run as you see should result in approximately 3600 knives.

Again thank you for your book and for your interest in Queen products.

Sincerely,

QUEEN CUTLERY COMPANY


Robert E. Mathews
Vice President

REM:ci
Enclosure

SALES OFFICE: P. O. Box 500, Franklinville, N. Y. 14737

Figure 3. Letter from Robert Mathews to Dewey Ferguson, 8-30-1972.



Queen Cutlery Company

SUBSIDIARY OF SERVOTRONICS, INC.

P.O. BOX 500 - FRANKLINVILLE, NEW YORK 14737

PHONE: 716 - 578 - 5540

July 31, 1972

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Ischua Valley Outfitters has contracted with the Queen Cutlery Company of Titusville, Pennsylvania, for their entire production run of the Queen commemorative Barlow, marking their 50th Anniversary.

This fine example of the knife makers' art boasts a bone handle, bolster of forged iron, the blades and springs are of original rustproof "Queen" steel. There is an etching of the Drake Well on the master blade, to symbolize Queen's close ties with Titusville, Pennsylvania, the birthplace of the petroleum industry. The special Queen 50th Anniversary imprint will not only appear on the tang of the master blade, but also on the iron bolster. The pen blade has the Model No. 139 stamped on the tang.

A small quantity of the approximate 3600 production run will be reserved for catalog sale by Ischua Valley Outfitters at a later date, and at a higher price. However, this firm, to introduce their new service, is offering the Drake Well Barlow, postage paid and insured, at a net cost of \$15.00, each, or 3 for \$40.00. Check or

Figure 4. Queen Press Release with Ischua Valley Outfitters on Selling the Drake Well Barlow, (page 1.)



SUBSIDIARY OF SERVOTRONICS, INC.

P.O. Box 500 - FRANKLINVILLE, NEW YORK 14737

PHONE: 716 - 870 - 8540

money order must accompany each order, and there is a limit of three knives per order. Ischua Valley Outfitters' address is P.O. Box 2, Ischua, New York, 14746.

Figure 5. Queen Press Release with Ischua Valley Outfitters on the Drake Well Barlow, (page 2.)

This press release clears up the total number of Drake Well barlows that may have been produced – approximately 3,600. Since Franklinville NY, where Queen's business operations were handled, was in the Ischua Valley in NY, less than 10 miles from Ischua Valley Outfitters offices, there is little doubt that Servotronics, through their other cutlery company, Ontario Knife Company, held the reins for the marketing effort. While Robert Mathews, from his own office, contacted an influential collector with news, not only about the knife, but about the limited use of the 50th anniversary tang stamp, as well as other news about very limited tang stamps they had produced after resuming tang stamps. He clearly was supportive of this knife and the project.

DEWEY P. FERGUSON, Publisher

PAGE	PATTERN NUMBER	PRICE	PAGE	PATTERN NUMBER	PRICE
204	1166.....	\$200.00	210	3072.....	\$ 75.00
204	4146 1/2.....	150.00	210	3076.....	75.00
204	4126 1/2.....	160.00	211	4286 1/2.....	80.00
205	1215 1/4.....	50.00	211	4286 1/4.....	80.00
205	095.....	50.00	211	4106.....	100.00
205	1195 1/4.....	50.00	211	4196.....	100.00
205	1215.....	50.00	211	4286.....	80.00
206	206 1/4.....	80.00	212	1146 1/4.....	150.00
206	346.....	80.00	212	156 1/2.....	175.00
206	57.....	90.00	212	1096 1/4.....	165.00
206	346 1/4.....	80.00	212	2706 1/4.....	175.00
206	206.....	80.00	212	1146.....	150.00
207	1396.....	80.00	213	107.....	225.00
207	2036.....	80.00	213	109.....	225.00
207	2156.....	90.00	213	106.....	225.00
207	1016.....	140.00	213	116.....	225.00
207	396.....	125.00	214	2216 1/4.....	160.00
208	2700.....	75.00	214	2216.....	160.00
208	370.....	75.00	214	2336.....	160.00
208	1170.....	80.00	214	2316.....	150.00
208	370 1/4.....	75.00	214	2316 1/4.....	150.00
208	2700 1/4.....	75.00	215	34291.....	225.00
209	4192.....	65.00	215	34261.....	250.00
209	4142 1/4.....	75.00	215	35201.....	250.00
209	4142 1/2.....	75.00	215	35191.....	250.00
209	452.....	125.00	215	34171.....	250.00
209	4152 1/4.....	85.00	216	24221.....	250.00
210	212.....	65.00	216	24211.....	200.00
210	215.....	75.00	216	24141.....	225.00
210	3106.....	75.00	216	24241.....	250.00
210	3346.....	75.00	216	24231.....	250.00
			217	2214.....	45.00
			217	2238.....	200.00
			217	1010.....	65.00
			217	088.....	65.00

**Drake Well Barlow
Introduced 1972
Commemorating Queens'
50th Anniversary**

This example of the knife makers art, boast a bone handle, bolsters of forged iron, blades and springs of Queen Steel, liners are brass. There is an etching of the Drake Well on the master blade, to symbolize Queen's close ties with the birthplace of the petroleum industry. The special Queen 50th Anniversary imprint will not only appear on the tang of the master blade, but also on the iron bolster. The pen blade had the model number 139 stamped on the tang. Quantity made 3,600. 3-1/2 inches long when closed.



Original Price \$15.00
Collectors Price \$50.00

219

219
220 Blank

Figure 6. An original "mock-up" board for Dewey Ferguson's *Romance of Knife Collecting* (2nd edition), p. 219, showing he responded completely to Robert Mathews letter promoting the Drake Well Barlow. (Collection of Fred Fisher).

The knife as sold by Ischua Valley Outfitters did not immediately sell-out (even though the price seems very nice to us). Though the announcement was made in later summer of 1972, the knife was still offered on Queen's own price lists in 1977 and 1978, (see price lists on our website) as well as in the large 1981 catalog – nine years after the deal. This suggests that Ischua Valley Outfitters connection did not go all that well.

This knife is still often seen on the Internet sites and is often in pretty good condition, despite being a very practical knife. It is the first of several Drake well commemoratives Queen offered and its tang stamp and bolster marks are well recognized as a 50th year one-time use. It used sawcut bone rather than the more common delrin used in the regular production #22 barlow.

The blade etch on this knife was used in every subsequent Drake well commemorative the company released. Most collectors of traditional Queen knives feel this is an important knife because of its role in opening the door to collector knives – the first.

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drake_Well

Fred R. Sampson Personal Communication 2020 on the Drake Well Barlow project

Correspondence from the collection of Dan Lago based on files purchased at the Queen Cutlery bankruptcy auction, 7-1-2018.