

## Forward, into the Past

### Schrade... and Before: a 130-year Legacy of Knife Making in Wawarsing

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Memories of “the knife shop” linger in more homes in the Town of Wawarsing than those of any other business. This is not strange, since knives have been made here for more than 130 years. The recent closing of the **Imperial Schrade Corporation** stirs recollections within many families whose members have worked in the local industry for as much as three or four generations.

In a 1979 program at the **Ellenville Public Library & Museum**, Katharine T. Terwilliger, the Town of Wawarsing’s revered Historian, began her talk by reminiscing, “In my childhood, family routine was governed by the knife shop whistle – at seven in the morning, it set you to hurrying, and at noon it is safe to say that every housewife checked her own clock by the whistle.” At that time, the knife shop was operated by **Dwight Divine & Sons**, manufacturing *Ulster Knives*.

Back to the beginning...

The **Ellenville Co-operative Cutlery Company** began manufacturing knives in December 1871. At that time, there were about 2,500 residents in Ellenville and approximately 8,000 in the Town of Wawarsing. Ellenville had grown steadily ever since 1829 when the **D&H Canal** came into operation. The glass factory located here shortly after, and Ellenville’s major growth spurt began. By 1871, there were two banks; stores lined both sides of **Canal Street**; the paving of sidewalks had begun; water was being piped in from the new reservoir. Nearby Napanoch was a busy manufacturing community.

However, the years after the Civil War were uneasy. Railroads were challenging the waterways as major conduits of transportation. The glass factory was shaky; local residents were moving away to seek employment. The business community was worried.

Some men from Walden’s cooperative knife factory visited Ellenville to talk about the possibility of moving



Presentation knife for **Schrade Cutlery Co.**’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its Walden founding in 1904, from a 1979 ad.

here, but the talks failed. Somehow, word of this tentative exploration reached Connecticut, where there were several cooperative knife factories. Men from the one in Naugatuck, Connecticut, wrote to local officials and a public meeting was held in July 1871. Village leaders were enthusiastic about the possibilities and a committee was appointed to find a site and work out details. One of the committee members was Dwight Divine.

The local committee’s job was to find a site and buy it. Local residents formed a stock company (see *stock certificate, below*), naming it the **Ellenville Knife Building Company**. This committee purchased eight acres of land on **Canal Street**, with good waterpower from the stream behind it and occupied by the *Bloomer Foundry* buildings. That was August 1871; the Connecticut men arrived in November; the **Ellenville Co-operative Cutlery Company** began operations in December 1871.

The officers were the Connecticut men – all skilled craftsmen, many from Sheffield, England – who had served their apprenticeships in the best knife factories in the world at that time.

Within six months, the cooperative plan was dropped and the business was reorganized as a stock company. Ellenville men, chiefly those involved in the original planning, were the new officers and trustees of the

