



A catalogue of Napanoch knives published by collector Rhett Stidham some 30 years ago listed over 80 designs, praised by Stidham as “The Napanoch knives were and still are recognized as the best that can be made...” John Cushner was killed on Route 209 in 1938. His wife, daughters, and loyal workmen continued the company until all orders were filled. The factory was then discontinued and the machinery and stock sold.

During this same time period, *Ulster Knife Company* was smoothly running under the management of the Divine sons. Major Divine died in 1933 and, in 1941, the sons sold to Albert M. Baer, an experienced cutlery man, who continued the *Ulster Knife* name (plant on Canal St, below, as festooned during WWII). His older brother, Henry, joined him the next year, and in 1946, they purchased the *Schrade Cutlery Company* of Walden, renaming it *Schrade Walden Cutlery Corp.*, a division of *Imperial Knife*. *Imperial Knife* had been organized in Providence, RI, in 1916 and had united with *Ulster Knife* in 1942 to become *Imperial Knife Associated Companies*.



The *Schrade Walden* division moved from Walden to Ellenville in 1958. The company operated its own buses for a period of time, providing free transportation for its Walden area employees through the adjustment.

Albert Baer purchased all the stock of the *Imperial Knife Associated Companies* in 1983 and adopted the name *Imperial Schrade Corp.* The purchase of the recently vacated *Channel Master* factory on Rte. 209 in Ellenville in 1985 made it possible for *Imperial Schrade* to consolidate all domestic manufacturing and distribution on this site. It earned in excess of \$5 million in low-interest bonds from Ulster County’s Industrial Development Agency (IDA) for improvements and expansion, adding almost 80 new jobs. At the time, *Schrade* President David A. Swinden said that the company was looking first to hire as many former *Channel Master* employees as possible.

In 1991, *Imperial Schrade* implemented a major effort with Wal-Mart Stores in 1991. The company earned

Wal-Mart’s Vendor of the Year Award for outstanding performance.

County officials in the mid-1990s referred to *Imperial Schrade* as “the largest private employer in Ulster County.” These were the glory years, nationally known as the oldest company in the United States continually engaged in the manufacture of pocket knives, with products distributed world-wide.

Major long-term layoffs began in 2002 and, on July 29, 2004, *Imperial Schrade* announced it was closing the Ellenville plant.

When one talks about the making of knives in the Town of Wawarsing, there are several phrases that immediately come to mind: “high quality,” “community service,” and “good neighbors” lead the list. Whatever the company name, be it *Ulster Knife*, *Napanoch Knife*, *Honk Falls*, or *Schrade*, knives produced in this area have had the reputation of being excellent, high-quality knives.

The companies and their employees have always been involved in the communities, with participation of volunteers and donations of funds, products, and services. Free production of commemorative knives for community anniversaries, local celebrations and, always, fundraisers with long-term commitments, such as the annual knives for the *Fourth of July Committee* and the *Holiday Lighting Committee*. The list of community groups which have been able to complete civic projects because of the knife company’s generosity and civic sense is entirely too long to even try to compile.



Since collectible values are based, in part, on availability, the assumption that *Schrade* will produce no more knives will undoubtedly increase the value of those knives, which were limited editions in the first place. However, the value of many of the limited edition knives may lie more in their historical or sentimental importance than in their monetary value. For example, the *Ellenville Public Library Museum* has several knives that are very special to them: a commemorative knife that Major Dwight Divine distributed to those veterans who had served with him in the Civil War (see composite photo of both sides, below), and, a much more recent *Schrade* knife commemorating the 1985 reunion of *Clayton’s Military Band*. ➔

