

## [Frank Burns]

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Conn. [1938-9?] Burns.

Frank Burns, janitor of the Thomaston high school formerly employed by the Thomaston Knife Company:

“There isn't much I can tell you about the mechanical end of it. I never worked at knifemaking myself. I was in charge of the office for a couple of years, that's all.

“I say ‘in charge,’ but the fact is that I was about the only one there, most of the time. Gus Klocker, he used to be on the road half the time, trying to sell, and you wouldn't see Frost sometimes, for weeks on end.

“They couldn't stand the gaff, that's all, couldn't compete with the new school of knifemaking—I mean the big manufacturers that turned 'em out in carload lots at cheap prices. Klocker got tirea tired of tryin' to sell the trade 75 cent and dollar knives when they could buy 'em from importers for fifteen cents and up and sell 'em for a quarter, or thirty five cents, or whatever they thought they could get.

“They weren't knives—they were just cheap imitations, but what does the average man know about good knives. You go up here to the ten cent store and you see a counter full of them at twenty-five cents a piece. You walk into the hardware store next door and they've got 'em for a dollar and up. Which one will you buy? Nine guys out of ten will buy the quarter knife.

“Common sense ought to tell 'em it isn't any good. Won't last a year, where the more expensive one will hold out for a lifetime. But the price gets 'em. They say, ‘What the 2

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hell's the difference—a knife is a knife.' That's just where the buyer is wrong. A knife can be a piece of junk—like anything else that's slapped together in big quantities.

“Now you talk to any of the old fellas—I's no good on the mechanical end of it, I used to do the bookkeepin' and the timekeepin'—but you talk to any of the old knifemakers and it won't take you long to see what pride they took in their work. Everything had to be just so, and they could make you think that the manufacture of knives was the most important thing that had happened since the discovery of America.

“Each one was careful as hell at his particular job. The grinders wanted to put over the idea that grindin' was the most important part of the business, and the forgers and the finishers and the cutlers, they had the same thought in mind. What was the result? A damn good knife. They talk about clockmakin'—why those knifemakers were the proudest damn workers I ever saw, and the most independent.

“Have you seen any of 'em yet? You have, hey. Well, you ought to get plenty stuff from them. I can't tell you much, because, like I say, I was just on the business end of it. Jimmy Truelove be a good man for you to see. He's right from Sheffield. He oughta be able to tell you about it from away back.”