

## Camillus name a giant among cutlery collectors

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Though the doors at Camillus Cutlery have been closed for nearly two years and the final inventory was auctioned off last fall, the love for what was one of America's oldest knife makers is alive and well in the collections of blade enthusiasts around the world.

Jim Clark, who grew up in Syracuse and moved his family out of the area in the early 1990s, remembers Camillus knives being ever-present in his youth.

"As a young man I worked at some of the farms and businesses in the area, and always had a Camillus knife in my pocket from an early age," Clark said. "It never crossed my mind to collect them for the elegance of design, or with the historic nature of 'the cutlery' in mind. I could always get more when I needed them. The cutlery was right there."

The relatively small manufacturing plant is now overgrown with weeds and dotted with For Sale signs. During public talks among village officials, residents and business owners this summer, there was hope that the building could be developed into residential or commercial space. But for now, the building stands as a silent reminder of how the Camillus name came to be known worldwide.

### **The collector community**

Clark shares his hobby with like-minded collectors through online forum communities, like [bladeforums.com](http://bladeforums.com). At [bladeforums.com](http://bladeforums.com), Camillus is one of three manufacturers with dedicated collecting communities.

Why the love for Camillus?

It's about the quality of the product, collectors say.

"All of the knives I have collected whether old or new have the same well-made finish. They are so well made that the pocket knife I now carry much of the time is about 60 years old and will outlive me," said Malcolm Smith, of South London, England. When Smith started collecting knives a few years ago, like many collectors he decided to focus exclusively on Camillus.

Not to mention the history. Camillus Cutlery Inc. was established in 1873, and in 133 years manufactured blades for the US, Canadian and British militaries, Boy Scouts and individual companies. But some of the most impressive clients the Camillus Cutlery had were other knife makers.

Many collectors point out that Camillus was known as the "knifemaker's knifemaker," for the numerous times the company was commissioned by other famous brands to produce their knives.

"If they were good enough for another knife company that is a pretty good endorsement.

Some of their contract knives are highly sought after collectibles," posted one forum member, popcornpicker.

As one of the oldest knife manufacturers in American history, some collectors choose knives that illustrate the history of both the Camillus name and knife making in general. "When I hold a Camillus in my hand, I am holding a piece of American cutlery history," said forum member Dale, of Oregon. He was issued a TL-29, a military electrician's knife, when he entered the Marine Corps. "I carried it through a tour in Vietnam, on the med-evac flight home and still have that knife to this day."

### **Behind every great knife**

Beyond the inherent quality of the Camillus products, the result of superior materials, design and functionality say collectors, are the people.

"It has been my great privilege to get to know some of the people who worked at Camillus through the technological marvels of the Internet and even telephone," wrote Dale. "I can tell you from personal experience that the people who worked at Camillus had a great deal of pride in their company and in the products they produced. In the long run this high caliber of people produce a better product and better customer service than can ever be imported from an overseas company."

The last inventory auction at the Camillus plant was held in the fall of 2007, which means there are not only knives available on the market but documents, like knife patterns, as well.

A quick search of "Camillus" on E-bay brings hundreds of results, and unsurprisingly it is rare to find a product without any bids.

Though the empty plant is now an opportunity for a new phase in the village, Camillus has not forgotten where it came from. Signs welcoming visitors to Camillus and many village vehicles still display the cutlery logo.

Of the village, English collector Smith had this to say:

"Although I've never been there I would imagine that the village of Camillus will never be the same."