

# Why Collect Queen?

by Bob Welch

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Like most of you, I'm asked from time to time why I collect pocketknives. Having already reconciled this behavior I have a ready supply of answers. "They represent an important piece of our history and culture", "they are fun to search out and haggle over", "I meet some interesting people with the hobby" and so on.

Another critical reason, for me, is the tremendous amount of variety available to the pocketknife collector. Variations in pattern, materials, blade type and function and, of course the huge number of knife brands all work together to present limitless potential acquisitions to the serious collector. This variety also has a downside. Without focus, the collector can go nuts accumulating a pretty big stockpile of knives. For me, focus is discipline against getting carried away with the hobby. For me, this discipline is Queen. The decision made a few years ago to focus on Queen was based on what I convinced myself was sound reasoning.

Noted Queen collector John Lussier has been quoted as saying he likes Queen because of their extensive use of Winterbottom bone and because they were a pioneer in the use of stainless steel. I certainly agree on both points.

## Handle Material

Winterbottom bone is very distinctive. How many times have you scanned roll after roll of knives at a show and plenty of similar looking knives from various makers, only to be disappointed when what you thought was one thing turned out, on examination, to be something else? There is no mistaking a Queen with Winterbottom handles. And there are enough variations in Winterbottom bone color, texture and finish to offer sub-focus possibilities.

While Queen knives are noted for Winterbottom bone, they are also famous for beautiful pearl handles. Especially noteworthy are the very scarce smoked pearl knives. Smoked pearl is to be found



Fig. 1 Winterbottom bone on Q Steel #49

on only six patterns: numbers 4, 6, 14, 54, 57 and 59. They are truly beautiful. Depending upon the light, they take on hues such as smoky gray, salmon, blue and silver and the workmanship is first rate. In 2000, when this article originally appeared, I had two of these knives in my collection and was curious about them. Howard Drake (fellow QCC member) was kind enough to ask former Queen Master Cutler Fred Samson about them. To the best of Fred's recollection they were made from the late 1950's until the late 60's. He said several thousand of each pattern were produced. Production stopped when the man who made them died and no one else was able to reproduce them.



*Fig. 2 Smoked Pearls #6 and #57*

As noted above, the production period and volume estimates were based upon Fred's recollection. More recent research has revealed that the only reference to these special knives appears in the 1968 Queen price list. All of the smoked pearls in my collection have etched blades and none have a tang stamp. According to the QCC tang stamp guide Queen did not use a tang stamp from 1961 to 1971. It's possible the production period was more limited. Judging by how difficult it is to find these knives, it's also possible production volumes were quite low. This is yet another mystery to be solved by Queen knife collectors.

Another exclusive Queen handle material is "burnt orange". This is actually imitation Winterbottom bone (Delrin) that was dipped, attached to the knife, in red dye. It is very distinctive and hard to find. Queen only made these knives in 1959 and 1960. It is said production ceased due to wide process and color variations - the very reason these knives are coveted today.

In addition to these signature Queen handles the collector can find Rogers bone, wood, stag, white pearl (abalone), celluloid, micarta, imitation Winterbottom bone and other materials.

### **Blade Steel**

Queen's introduction of stainless steel in the mid 1940's makes it possible to find an older knife in better shape than may be had with carbon steel. All the same, I consider it a treat to come across a nice older Queen City with the carbon steel blades intact.

## Tang Stamps

A glance at the current QCC tang stamp card confirms Queen used at least 25<sup>1</sup> tang stamps over it's 90-plus<sup>2</sup> year history. The lack of a stamp in the 60's makes that 26<sup>3</sup> but the numbered year stamps of the late '70's, early '80's and again in the early '90's bring the total higher still. It's thus possible to more closely determine the age of a Queen, relative to a number of other knife brands. The Queen collector who has acquired all the tang stamps has made quite an achievement.

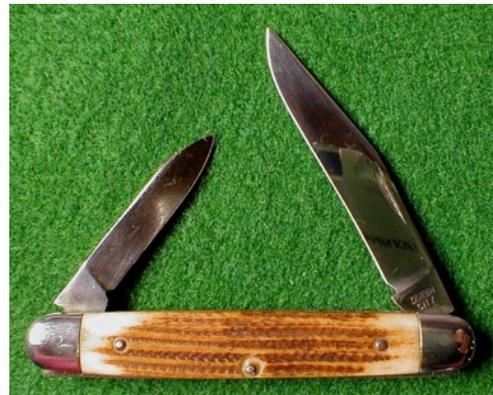
## Patterns

Case, Remington, Robeson and many other makers offered substantially more patterns than Queen. I don't know how many patterns of pocketknives Queen has offered through the years but suspect the figure must approach three hundred (including handle variations).

The Queen pattern numbering system is very simple. It's just a basic number. The number usually has one or two, but sometimes four digits. The Queen collector must mentally match the pattern number and the knife because very often the number will not appear anywhere on the knife. This was rectified somewhat during the 1950's when the factory acquired a blade etching process. Often, but not always, the pattern number was etched onto the master blade. Some knives made after the '50's have no etch at all.

Jim Sergeant has done Queen collectors a huge service by including extensive information and photos in his books.

There are still some nice surprises to be had. I recently found a lightly used, two-bladed, 3 3/8" equal end jack. The master blade is a clip stamped "Queen City" and the second blade is a pen. At first glance the handles look like tan Winterbottom bone but are actually bone with long, narrow parallel jigging. I've sent this knife to Howard, who's graciously agreed to do some detective work. His preliminary report says it is a very early Queen, made with some Schadt & Morgan parts. We still don't know the pattern number. Maybe it doesn't have one.



*Fig. 3 Queen City, pattern # unknown*

For all these reasons, plus a few more, Queen is my knife of choice. Each of you no doubt has your own good reasons for collecting Queen knives. They may not be the most fancy and they are (thankfully) not the most expensive of collectible knives. But they most certainly are collectable.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> In the original 2000 article this number was 22

<sup>2</sup> In 2000 Queen was 15 years younger and this was reflected in the original article

<sup>3</sup> In the 2000 article, this number was 25