

Miracle in New Hampshire

Dedicated activists did much more than just repeal New Hampshire's knife laws that banned switchblades, daggers, dirks and stilettos

By Evan F. Nappen, Attorney at Law

Imagine a state in America where any knife, regardless of blade length, design or operation, can be freely bought and sold, without sales tax, owned, possessed, carried open or concealed, transported, displayed, collected, made, manufactured, given, loaned, acquired, transferred, bequeathed or inherited under state law, with the only exception being possession in a courthouse and possession by felons.

Imagine further that such a state accomplished this feat by repealing its knife laws that had been on the books for over 50 years, and that had banned switchblades, daggers, dirks and stilettos. Now consider that not one of its 425 politicians in the state's democrat-controlled government (400 house members with democrat majority, 24 senators with democrat majority and one democrat governor) opposed the repeal. Then imagine that same government unanimously voting again to prohibit all local towns and municipalities from passing or enforcing any knife laws.

Believe it or not, on May 18, 2010, a unanimously passed bill (HB1665) was signed into law that repealed New Hampshire's knife laws, and on June 9, 2011, a unanimously passed bill (HB544) was signed into law which preempts New Hampshire cities, towns or political subdivisions from passing or enforcing any knife laws. This is the story of how a few dedicated activists helped make it happen, and how you can do the same in your state.

The above may sound politically impossible. When do 425 people agree on anything, no less agree twice? However, the above is 100 percent true, and it shows that reforming archaic knife laws can be done anywhere, and party affiliation is irrelevant. Now is the window of opportunity for knife rights. There is



The author used his Al Mar Havana Clipper automatic knife/cigar cutter to cut the tip off a cigar he smoked in celebration of the passage of the New Hampshire knife rights bills. The knife is shown resting on a postal "First Day Cover" for the New Hampshire stamp.



An out-the-front automatic, the Microtech Combat Troodon rests on a New Hampshire state quarter display.



This is the beautiful New Hampshire Capitol where the knife rights bills passed.



no major national anti-knife movement or anti-knife groups in America. Although in the United Kingdom there is such a movement, it has not yet crossed the pond. I am sure it eventually will, because that is exactly what happened in Great Britain with their anti-gun push after World War I. There are important parallels between gun and knife rights issues. Knife owners must learn from the mistakes of gun owners so as not to repeat them.

The first national gun laws in the United States took place in the 1930s with the passage of the 1934 National Firearms Act (NFA). The NFA was passed largely due to media hype about gangland violence (Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, Bonnie and Clyde, etc.) The NFA was the only federal gun law until the passage of the 1968 Gun Control Act (68 GCA). During the 1950s America was extremely gun cultured and guns were no big deal. Having recently come out of World War II, most fathers were experienced and trained in the use of guns, including machine guns. Many schools had rifle teams and bringing your gun to school for hunting afterward was commonplace. This was the lost window of opportunity to repeal the 1934 NFA.

However, during the 1950s a new media hype arose making the switchblade its symbol, in the same way the sub-machine gun was the symbol of society's menace in the 1930s.

Rebel Without a Cause, *West Side Story* and similar movies and news stories constantly portrayed violent youths with switchblades. This helped lead to the passage of the federal 1958 Switchblade Act and many states passing their own knife bans as well.

Regain Lost Knife Rights

Now is our chance to regain lost knife rights. America is generally not anti-knife. Many of our returning soldiers have direct positive experience with knives including automatic folders. Although the public schools have a "zero tolerance" policy (I prefer to call it a "zero intelligence policy") for knives, just about every household has a knife. What the 1950s were to guns, the 2010s are to knives. Switchblades are no longer the symbol of youth violence that they were made out to be in the 1950s. As Second Amendment activist Jeff Knox, Director of Operations for The Firearms Coalition, said in support of the New Hampshire knife rights effort: "I think that the people of New Hampshire can safely lower their guard now that the youngest members of the Sharks and the Jets are in their 80s."

At the 2009 Gun Rights Policy Conference in St. Louis, Jeff Knox submitted Resolution 6 which stated:

Whereas: The banning of any personal tool or weapon has never resulted in increased public safety. Now therefore be it resolved by the delegates assembled at the Gun Rights Policy Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, this 27th day of September, 2009 that: We support the repeal of the Federal Switchblade Act and any other federal, state or local laws and regulations banning tools and weapons rather than addressing behavior.

Resolution adopted without discussion.

This was really a benchmark moment; it was the first time the repeal of all switchblade laws was

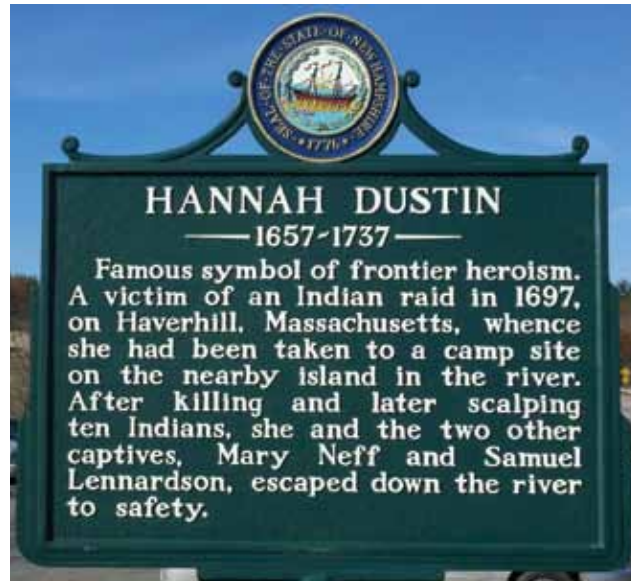
unanimously supported by a national group of Second Amendment activists. Realizing that attitudes have changed from the 1950s regarding knives, I got together with a great New Hampshire legislator to fight for change in New Hampshire. That person was and is my dear friend Representative Jennifer Coffey. She is an EMT and a wonderful advocate for liberty. She has written a book about her legislative experiences titled *Knives, Lipstick and Liberty*. The book is an autobiography of Jenn. My purpose here is not to rehash the great story told by Jenn, but rather to focus on the mechanics of how the “Miracle in New Hampshire” occurred, and how you can make Resolution 6 a reality in your state.

Here are the steps to success:

1. Find a dedicated legislator who believes in the cause of knife rights to sponsor a bill. That person has to be committed and educated on the issue. New Hampshire was very fortunate to have Rep. Jennifer Coffey take on the issue.

2. Get groups and individuals to support it. Be aware that gun groups do not always support knives. In the past, knives have been banned to politically save guns from being banned. In New Hampshire we were able to get support from: Knife Rights, Inc.; Second Amendment Sisters; Abe Foote of Abe’s Awesome Armaments; *BLADE® Magazine*; American Knife and Tool Institute; Benchmade Knives; Ralph Demicco of Riley’s Sport Shop; Ed Fowler; Suzanna Hupp; Sandra Froman; Citizens Committee for the Right To Keep and Bear Arms; Jews for the Preservation Of Firearms Ownership; Pro-Gun NH; New Hampshire Wildlife Federation; Sword Forum; Firearms Coalition; Bikerbits; Cam and Company; Bloomfield Press; Americans for Tax Reform; NH Liberty Alliance; NH Arms Collectors Association; NH Firearms Dealers Association; *The New Gun Week*; *Guns Magazine*; *American Handgunner Magazine*; *BLADE Blog*; *Women & Guns Magazine*; *Knife World*; *Cutlery News*; Hannah Dustin League; USMilitaryKnives.com; Al Kulas; Smith & Wesson; Ethan Becker of Becker Knife and Tool Co.; Classic Cutlery; Capital Copy; House Republican Alliance; NH Chiefs of Police Assoc.; Dr. Katherine Albrecht; Brian “Bulldog” Tilton; Alisha Lekas; NH 912; and SurvivalTopics.com.

3. Create a dedicated website for the bill where you can publicize supporters, promote the bill and give news updates. This can be done very inexpensively. Buy your domain name for as little as \$10



Hannah Dustin was a pioneer woman kidnapped by Indians and had her baby killed by them. She fought, killed and scalped her captors using edged weapons—a tomahawk and a knife. The Hannah Dustin Defense League, dedicated to women defending themselves, supported the knife rights bills. It’s the first statue ever built in the United States honoring a woman, and it is located on the spot on a small river island in Boscawen, N.H., where she defeated her kidnappers.

The monument honors Gen. John Stark who said the immortal words that are New Hampshire’s state motto, “Live Free or Die.”



from GoDaddy.com or a similar provider, and then get a free website from Weebly.com. This is exactly what we did. Our website was www.knifelawonline.com. The page headings on the website included the following, which anyone is free to copy:

- a. Home: (This page gives an introduction to website)
 - b. News Updates New as of June 9, 2011:
 - c. What People Are Saying: (This page contains endorsements from famous supporters.)
 - d. Articles, Blogs and Radio
 - e. People to Know: (Information about Rep. Coffey and yours truly)
 - f. Resolution 6.
 - g. Contact: (Very important page so supporters can get involved)
 - h. 125 Honest Citizens Who Use A “Switchblade, Dirk, Dagger or Stiletto”
 - i. Knife Rights Raffle: (Our fund raiser that helped pay for our expenses)
 - j. The NEW LAW! (A celebration page after passage.)
4. Hire a lobbyist. Working with Knife Rights,

Inc., we were able to get a lobbyist to help with the bill’s passage. Our lobbyist was former State Senator Bob Clegg, who was indispensable. We would not have succeeded without Bob’s guidance and skill.

5. Prepare for the legislative committee hearings. This is a great chance to educate the public about knives. Bring in law-abiding folks who have suffered under the knife ban. For example, we had one gun dealer testify that he was arrested and all his knives seized because he sold a switchblade to a law enforcement officer, who he knew was a law enforcement officer, and he specifically sold him the knife because he was a law enforcement officer! Another dealer did a great job of showing the committee members the differences between various knives and how outdated and absurd the ban was.

6. Try to get law enforcement on your side. The New Hampshire Chief’s of Police Association supported the New Hampshire Knife Rights Bill. The modern automatic knife is a valuable tool for law enforcement, EMT’s, firefighters and honest citizens who have a job that needs a knife. Because of New Hampshire’s knife ban, a dealer could not sell a prohibited knife even to a cop!

7. Be ready to challenge and deal with any opposition. It may come from unexpected sources. It may be based on emotion stemming from an anti-knife bias. It might come from personality issues. One person was so driven by envy of Rep. Coffey that this person tried to kill the New Hampshire Knife Rights Bill.

8. Get supporters to send letters, email and call their legislators. This can be done inexpensively by email blasts from the supporting groups to their members. Flyers at gun shows and shops are also effective. Grassroots support really helps make a difference.

New Hampshire leads the U.S. by having the first presidential primary in the nation. New Hampshire also leads the U.S. by being the first state to repeal all of its anti-knife laws. It is a wonderful experience to have total knife freedom. I love knowing that I can enjoy my knives without worrying about being turned into a criminal due to some outdated foolish law that makes an inanimate object a crime. The more states that reform their knife laws and have their own “miracles,” the more protected our knives will be from an anti-knife push in the future. Total knife freedom is possible. The “Miracle in New Hampshire” proves it beyond any doubt.