

BLACKSMITHING IN THE BRIGHTON AREA

The first settlers in this area lived in a primitive manner. Any tools they used were brought with them. When axes became dull, plows would break or a horse had thrown a shoe, the need for a blacksmith was acutely obvious.

As one early settler, Mr. Gardner Bird (1833) recalled, after the land was sufficiently cleared to admit of being broken, the plow became a necessity. To have the irons sharpened and repaired as necessary, Bird had to travel 22 miles to Dexter.

The earliest blacksmith in the area was Abram Fralick, who came from Plymouth in 1838. His shop was on the west side of the Grand River Trail between Main and St. Paul's Streets. The shop was built by William Balch as part of a hotel called the Balch House. By 1845 Morris DuBois was smithing in that shop.

Erastus A. Pratt came from Lapeer County in 1844, and followed the vocation of blacksmith in the Village of Brighton for 22 years, during which time he made most of the plow irons used in the surrounding country. His first shop was located on the present day site of the Presbyterian Church. David Thomson came to Brighton in 1843 and shortly after built a foundry on the site. In 1856 he built a brick foundry on the corner of Grand River Trail and North Street.

Many blacksmiths operated in Brighton over the years; too many to list here. At one time there were ten shops in the village. Most of them made wagons, carts, buggies and sleighs. Wheelbarrows, landrollers, "grasshopper" cultivators, spike toothed drags, scythes and grain cradles were built and repaired in addition to shoeing horses and oxen.

Many farmers did their own metal work. Iron was often brought with them since it was not readily available in the wilderness. A crude forge could be devised and tools and equipment made by hand.

Even though living in a dirt floored log cabin the homemaker had need for an oven for baking; andirons to hold the burning logs in the fireplace; iron hooks for holding cooking kettles; skillets, spiders, knives and other cooking utensils.

The corners of a log house were joined in such a manner as to not need nails but hinges, latches, shutter dogs, etc., were made of iron. The farmer needed scythes, sickles, ox yokes, harness fittings, horseshoes and other tools. Construction and logging called for axes, links, peavys, drawknives, crow bars, etc. (To be continued. Compiled and edited by Marieanna Bair from writings of Wm. Pless, Seth B. Jacobs, 1880 History of Livingston County and Foxfire 5)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 481
Brighton, Mi. 48116