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 Frielick, 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; and irons 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 Marieann Bair from writings of Wm. Pless, Seth B. Jacobs, 1890 History of Livingston County and Foxfire 5)

Brighton Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 481
Brighton, MI 48116

Brighton Area Preservation News

The members of the Brighton Area Historical Society are to preserve, advance and disseminate knowledge of the history of the Brighton Area.

The membership is composed of people who feel this purpose is worthwhile and should be promoted.

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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General Meeting

The next general meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 16 at Lindsboro Elementary school. The potluck begins at 6:30. Bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Decaf coffee is furnished and there is hot water for tea. Dress is casual. Everyone is welcome.

The meeting begins at 7:30 followed by a program. The program for the May meeting has not been set as yet.

A Stroll in the Past

The year is 1885. Now I love the sound of the church bells. I know Aunt Josephine will soon be here. She promised me that she would teach me needlepoin tomorrow. Maybe she will bake fresh bread and let me help churn butter. I pray that morning will arrive soon.

These are a few of the memories that might be stirred up as you stroll in the past at the second annual historical home tour on Saturday, May 13, from 10:00 until 4:00.

You can just imagine: swinging on the swing in the cool of the shade on the Szczeczewski’s wraparound porch; elegantly dressed ladies gathering for tea in the Lerner’s front parlor; quiet Sunday supper in the Schillinger’s dining room; lemonade and croquet in the side yard at the qull’s; a pleasant rent in the warming room at the old Leith home (being restored by the Caramore); or a Hartman family reunion all gathered at the home on Main Street (which is restored by the Sittaro family).

We hope you will come away from the home tour with a sense of the past and an appreciation for what our forefathers left for us to enjoy.

Please help support the Historical Society home tour on Saturday, May 13. Visit the homes and get out and enjoy the day.

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Grand River Trail