

## BLACKSMITHING IN THE BRIGHTON AREA (cont.)

The blacksmith was generally regarded with respect. He often learned his trade at a young (10 years) age from his father or grandfather. Much practice and experience was needed to learn to judge how hot the metal should be in order to be worked properly; or in knowing how long to temper the hot iron in the tub of water to make a tool which wouldn't shatter when used, as when a plow point suddenly hit a submerged rock. Only practical knowledge could tell how to measure (by the use of a "traveler") and then cut the material for a wagon wheel rim before drawing it out; or how to weld two pieces together by hammering the hot metal on the anvil and bending to the desired shape on the horn. It took skill and a good eye to prepare the opening for the handle of the froe in such a manner that the tool would not fly off when in use. The presence of a good blacksmith eased the crude circumstances in which early settlers of the Brighton area found themselves.

Blacksmiths also were expected to be farriers, to know how to trim the hooves of an ox or horse and make shoes that fit properly on these animals. Not only the farmer, lumberman and builder made use of the blacksmith's expertise. An accurate gun barrel was required by the hunter. Much produce was stored and shipped in wooden barrels with metal hoops, made by the smith. In return for making life a little less primitive he was often paid in produce, meat, eggs, etc.

The shop was often a place for local farmers to congregate; a welcome change from plowing, logging or hoeing corn. The floor was usually dirt, fireproof, with the forge and its bellows the center of attraction. Surrounding it were work tables, the anvil with a rounded horn for forming curved pieces and the water tub for cooling the metal to the proper temper. This was determined by the color of the metal. Hanging from wrought iron hooks, one could view an astounding variety of tools: tongs, hammers, cleavers, chisels, punches, files and drills, all of many weights and shapes. A grindstone, hack saws, several vises and mandrels would also be evident. Containers of fuel, charcoal made from the abundant forests in the area, in later years, hard coal brought on the train.

Often he'd make a tool for a particular job. One could take a pattern or just explain what was needed and he'd make the item. Often smiths built wagons, buggies, etc., which involved doing their own woodworking. This would include the nuts, bolts, pins, washers, etc. After the turn of the century you could take the broken axle of your Ford and have him repair it. Today the smith is busy making decorative hinges, handles, fireplace tools and often works as a farrier. (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

