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 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 farrers, 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 bellow 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, hammer, saws, 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 Marileanna Bair from writings of Wm. Pless, Seth B. Jacobs, 1800 History of Livingston County and Foxfire 5.)

May General Meeting Recap

The last general meeting until fall took place. Following a pot luck dinner and short business meeting, Clara Healy related memories of growing up in Brighton. See the article People Along the Trail to read about some of her enjoyable memories.

People Along the Trail

Clara Healy's parents homesteaded in Northern Wisconsin in 1903. The family moved to Brighton in 1923. They came in at the old depot in town. They lived on the old Burgan Farm on Kellogg Road. It was owned by the city of Detroit and her father ran the farm. As children, they helped out with chores. They helped with the haying, feeding the animals, and weeding the garden, a job Clara said she hated doing. Her mother raised chickens.

In those days, the neighbors were always helping each other with threshing, filling silos and other big farming jobs. She said the men always tried to be at her house at midday because there was always a first class dinner ready for them with ham, potatoes, vegetables, and wonderful homemade pies. Her mother was a wonderful cook.

Some of her special memories included going to the "new" school Scranton. It had central heating, a science lab and a library. Her senior class was the first one to put out an annual in 1930. She also remembers special trips to Howell to see the elephants at the Howell Fair and to Ann Arbor to visit Santa. She finished her wonderful stories by singing a lovely little song that she learned from her father who had sung in a quartet when she was a child. Everyone who listened to her was taken back to a memory of long ago.