



19TH CENTURY BLACKSMITHING

- The 19th century Blacksmith Shop is the cornerstone of the village. The blacksmith played a vital role in history, from creating hardware for homes and businesses, repairing wagons for travel and creating necessary items for livestock and farming.
- Most blacksmiths' shops in early America, like most buildings at the time, were made of wood. This shop was originally built next to a stone quarry owned by cousins of its owner's wife. The Blacksmith's house was made of stone. We know that the smith was called upon to maintain the stone-cutters' tools, so perhaps he received part of his payment in the form of stone and stonework, or perhaps he made use of free, waste stone.
- Today at the park, the local Baldwin County Blacksmith Group meets at the shop on the third Sunday of each month to practice their craft. The blacksmiths offer educational demonstrations to the public as they make their nails, horseshoes and other items.

General Information about Blacksmith's

There were no trade schools in early America. Young men learned to be blacksmiths by working with an experienced smith. Those learning a trade were called apprentices. Some apprentices had formal contracts with their masters, while others simply learned by working with their father (if he was a smith, of course!). Traditionally an apprentice lived with the master and became a part of his family, trading his labor for food, clothing, shelter, and an education. This system was breaking down by the 1830s, however, as some masters no longer took apprentices into their homes, but instead paid them a small wage. The length of an apprenticeship was not regulated, although they ended when a boy reached his maturity at the age of 21.

There was very little cash in circulation in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Therefore, most people gave a "dollars and cents" value to goods sold and services rendered that were recorded as debits and credits in an account book. Over time debts between neighbors often cancelled each other out, although small amounts of cash were sometimes needed to settle accounts. Immediate swapping of items of equal value, what we think of today as "bartering," was usually impractical, however, and therefore rare.

A blacksmith might earn \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day, when there was work to be done. Blacksmith Emerson Bixby of Barre, Massachusetts, charged as little as \$0.02 to make a simple small item such as an axe wedge; \$0.12 to "mend" (repair) a hoe; an average of \$0.75 to mend an axe; \$0.79 to shoe an ox; between \$1.00 and \$1.50 to "new lay" (repair and reshape) a plow; and as much as \$5.50 to make and apply all the ironwork on a new wagon.

Today many very talented blacksmiths are female, but almost all blacksmiths in early New England were male. In the 19th century, some trades were seen as "men's work" and others as "women's work", while some jobs (such as bookbinding) were not seen as the exclusive domain of either sex.