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Published by the Historic Manheim Preservation Foundation, Inc.

January 2016

The Village Blacksmith

The following information, while not directly related to a blacksmith shop in the Manheim area, does provide information typical of blacksmith shops in the Manheim area and Lancaster County. The information by Weaver (ca?) is therefore worthy of publishing here.

The Union Grove Blacksmith Shop

School students of today know nothing of the county blacksmith or his shop. Longfellow's "Village Blacksmith" is not relevant to them but, to those of us who grew up and went to school during the years 1907 to 1916, it had meaning.

The blacksmith shop which Barton Z. Taylor of Union Grove operated did not stand "under a spreading chestnut tree" but under a spreading catalpa tree. The shop and tree are still standing. The shop and contents are typical of 100 years ago.

Samuel Taylor, the father of Barton Taylor, sold his shop to my father, John W. Weaver and he moved to a place located between Terre Hill and Martindale. My uncle, David W. Weaver, operated the shop for a while. Later Samuel Taylor and his son Barton bought it back from my father and from then until it closed it was operated by the Taylors.

The specialty of their shop was horse shoeing. No one would have dreamed that the tractor would replace the horse. Blacksmithing then was a thriving business because of the wide use of the horse as was the harness business which my father operated across the street. Generally, when the farmers and others patronized one they would also do business with the other at the same time.

Electric welding was unknown in those days. If a piece of machinery needed repairing, the blacksmith

would heat the two pieces of metal to be joined and then hammer the white hot metal until the pieces fused into one or by plating, that is, by drilling holes and using a piece of iron which was bolted to the pieces being joined. It was when this welding was done that "burning sparks would fly like chaff from the threshing floor." In those days there were no cast iron plow shares but steel shares which were sharpened by welding a piece of steel to share. Both share and plate were heated to a white heat. To do this, the metal pieces were placed in the fire and the forge would be turned to blow air into the fire and thus increase the heat. Then both pieces were hammered together to form one piece, making the share as good as new.

Employees of the nearby stone quarry as well as those of the township who repaired the roads and the farmers of the community brought their tools to be sharpened and repaired. These included picks, grubbing hoes, digging irons, and drills. These drills were used to make holes in rocks which were filled with dynamite in order to break into smaller pieces when the blast was set off. This drilling was done by one person holding the drill against the rock and another using a heavy hammer to drive the tool into the rock. These drills needed to be sharpened often. The blacksmith would heat tools to be sharpened to white heat in the forge and then use the hammer and the anvil on which the tool to be sharpened rested, to create a sharp edge.

But there were always horses needing to be shod; that is, pieces of iron were fitted to the horses hooves and nailed to the outside of the hooves which were not sensitive. The busiest day was the day of freezing rain which made the roads sheets of ice. A horse with smooth iron shoes could not travel. All

transportation was horse-drawn including businesses such as the mailman, feed and flour mills, and farmers. Medical doctors also needed transportation in those days so the blacksmith was extremely busy fitting horses with shoes sharp enough to travel on ice.

In slack seasons, the blacksmith would sharpen horse shoes for future needs. The toe and heel of each shoe was sharpened by heating and hammering to the proper shape. Some horse shoes had never-slips which were studs screwed into the shoes. When these became dull they were replaced by new ones.

Wheel repairing was another skill of the blacksmith. Wooden wheels were held together by iron "tires." When the wooden parts dried out the iron tires had to be reset. The iron was heated in the forge, a small piece cut out, and the remaining pieces were welded together by heating and hammering. The whole tire was then heated and placed around the wheel. Cold water was used to cool the iron and cause it to shrink, thus making it fit the wheel perfectly and securely.

To repair large wheels the blacksmith would build a wood fire around the iron tire and, when heated to white heat, would use hooks to remove it from the fire and place it on the wheel which had been placed on a frame to support it properly. Then the tire was cooled quickly with cold water, thus fitting it tightly to the wheel. As a boy, I often watched this operation. Samuel Hoover, a retired farmer, spent a lot of time at the blacksmith shop and would help Mr. Taylor when needed.

Another thing I remember was the blacksmith's way of producing a sound like the crack of a gun. If too many children had gathered in the shop at one time, he would spit on the anvil and quickly put a piece of hot iron on it and hammer it. This sharp crack would clear the shop of spectators quickly—the children not knowing its cause. I mentioned this to him while visiting him in his later years and suggested it was done purposely. He did not comment but merely chuckled about it. Mr. Taylor also said that during his active years he knew the names of all the horses he shod and even remembered many of them in his retirement.

The building in which Mr. Taylor worked is

preserved today as it appeared then. One part of this is now used as a garage but the part where Mr. Taylor worked still contains the forge and the anvil which he used. He also used a barrel cut to three quarters length to hold water used to cool hot metal. Many incidents of these years could be related but here are the words of Longfellow concerning the "Village Blacksmith":

**Thanks, thanks to thee my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught;
Thus at the flaming forge of life,
Our fortunes must be wrought,
And on its burning anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.**



4½" W x 36" L

Pictured is Samuel W. Taylor and a three-tine fork made in the Taylor blacksmith shop by his son Barton Taylor. Barton's daughter, Fanny Taylor, said that her father did not have a stamp with his name and that he signed items that he forged using the S. W. Taylor stamp. The picture and the fork were purchased at a sale held for Sarah Smith, New Holland. Sarah was one of Barton's daughters.



Dorothy Ruhl, on her annual visit to her hometown of Manheim, presented the pictured gift to HMPF. The apothecary scale was used in Ruhl's Drug Store by her grandfather Harry F. Ruhl, Sr. and Dorothy's father, Harry F. Ruhl, Jr. The drug store, which opened under the Ruhl name in 1891, had been in the Ruhl family for 69 years.