

Making Hardware

Tools were not the only objects that blacksmiths were asked to make. Hardware such as nails, latches, chains and door handles were also common items made by the community smithy. Most large towns had many blacksmiths who would specialize in different types of hardware. Smaller places like Sackville would have had blacksmiths who received orders from the community for the items they required.

Nails were one of the most common pieces of hardware that a smithy would make. Most people in the community required nails to build houses, outhouses, and wagons. Nails were commonly made by hammering the four sides of a rod into a square tip and then placing it in a nail header. Many nail headers were just a small hole in the anvil used to hold the nail in place while the head was heated and welded on. While in the nail holder, the rest of the nail was broken off and the head put on. The blacksmith tended to make many nails from one rod.

Hinges were another common item that a smithy could be spotted creating at their forge. A hinge was made by shaping a metal plate around a rod. This would be done twice for each hinge and part of the hinge would be cut so the matching hinge could fit inside. Once fitted, the hinges were then cleaned to remove any stray piece of metal inside. Nail holes were also punched in the hinge and a pin was made from the original rod.



A few items made in the Fultz House Museum blacksmith shop.



A.J. Smeltzer, one of Sackville's local blacksmiths years ago, is working at his anvil.

Making Home Utensils

All of the metalwork in a house would have been done by a smithy. Many of the utensils used in the home would have required the skills of the local metalworker. Andirons were decorative pieces that were used to hold wood in the fireplace. Originally, these would have been made out of iron but were later made of brass. They were typically formed by heating a piece of metal until they reached an orange-red colour, and then one end was bent down at a right angle. The other end was also bent down and split down the center to create legs.

Often, blacksmiths would even have made the eating utensils. Knives could be made like a long chisel. The bladed edge would be hammered into a taper until thin enough to cut. Spoons required either a swage or the rounded edge of the anvil to make. The head would be placed over a round hole and repeatedly hit until it was shaped into the round shape. Forks were made from a short piece of a metal rod. The handle was formed and then chiseled on one end to separate the rod into two, three or four prongs.

Please stop in to see the Fultz House Museum blacksmith shop and the tools used by an old-fashioned smithy.

THE OLD-FASHIONED SMITHY



The Fultz House Museum blacksmith shop forge operating during a Tuesday Tea.

FULTZ HOUSE MUSEUM



The blacksmith sign outside of the Fultz House blacksmith shop.

An Introduction to Blacksmiths

The community smithy was a centerpiece in many towns in the late 1800's and early 1900's. They were essential to nearly every area because of their importance to the local shops that were almost always located in close proximity to the blacksmith. While they focused on their own work of making tools and other utensils, local businesses, such as carriage makers and wheelwrights also depended on their skills for any ironwork they required.

The local smithy undertook many tasks, some of which were seasonal in nature. Wintertime was a busy time for the blacksmith in the community. For instance, the logging industry was in full swing and required long hours to make and sharpen the worker's axes and saws. This required a very particular set of skills and techniques to get every tool perfect.



Anvil and hammer located in the Fultz House Museum blacksmith shop.

Common Blacksmith Tools

Including the forge, bellows and anvil, working with metal required many different tools. Each tool used by blacksmiths had their own purpose. Some instruments such as pokers and tongs were used to tend to the raging fire and retrieve the hot metal from the forge. Other tools such as a hammer, swage and chisel were used to form the metal into the required shape.

The hammer was the most common tool and was used to hit the metal to either shape or "pack" it. Packing the metal was required to make the tool more durable. This was to ensure the tool would not break when it was used. The swage was commonly used to shape a tool into a form that was too difficult for the blacksmith to simply use an anvil. Swages were typically a block of metal with a series of complex holes in it. The metal would be placed on the swage and hit repeatedly until it was formed into the desired shape.

Techniques for Making Tools

One of the many jobs of a blacksmith was to make tools for the community as well as for them to use. A few common tools that would have been seen in the forge of the blacksmith were hammers, punches and chisels. Hammers were one of the most common tools made by the blacksmith and the method of how they were made was fairly simple.

1. A blacksmith would punch a hole in the metal big enough for a wooden handle to sit in.
2. The ends of the hammer would then be formed into the face and the back end (typically a claw or a ball-peen) by the use of the anvil or a swage.
3. A steel end piece would often be welded to the face of the hammer by heating the steel and the hammer face before repeatedly hitting the tool until the metal fibers were packed tightly together.
4. The metal around the hole would be tightened to lock the handle in place.

Chisels and punches would follow a similar technique. The ends of these two tools were often the only difference between each other. The chisel was formed by hitting two sides of the metal until a thin strip on the end was created. A punch was made by repeatedly hitting the metal while it rotated to create a round spike on the end. Both of these tools were incredibly narrow, which made packing the metal correctly one of the most important steps.



A.J. Smeltzer in front of his blacksmith shop in the early 1900s



The present day blacksmith shop is a replica of A.J. Smeltzer's shop.