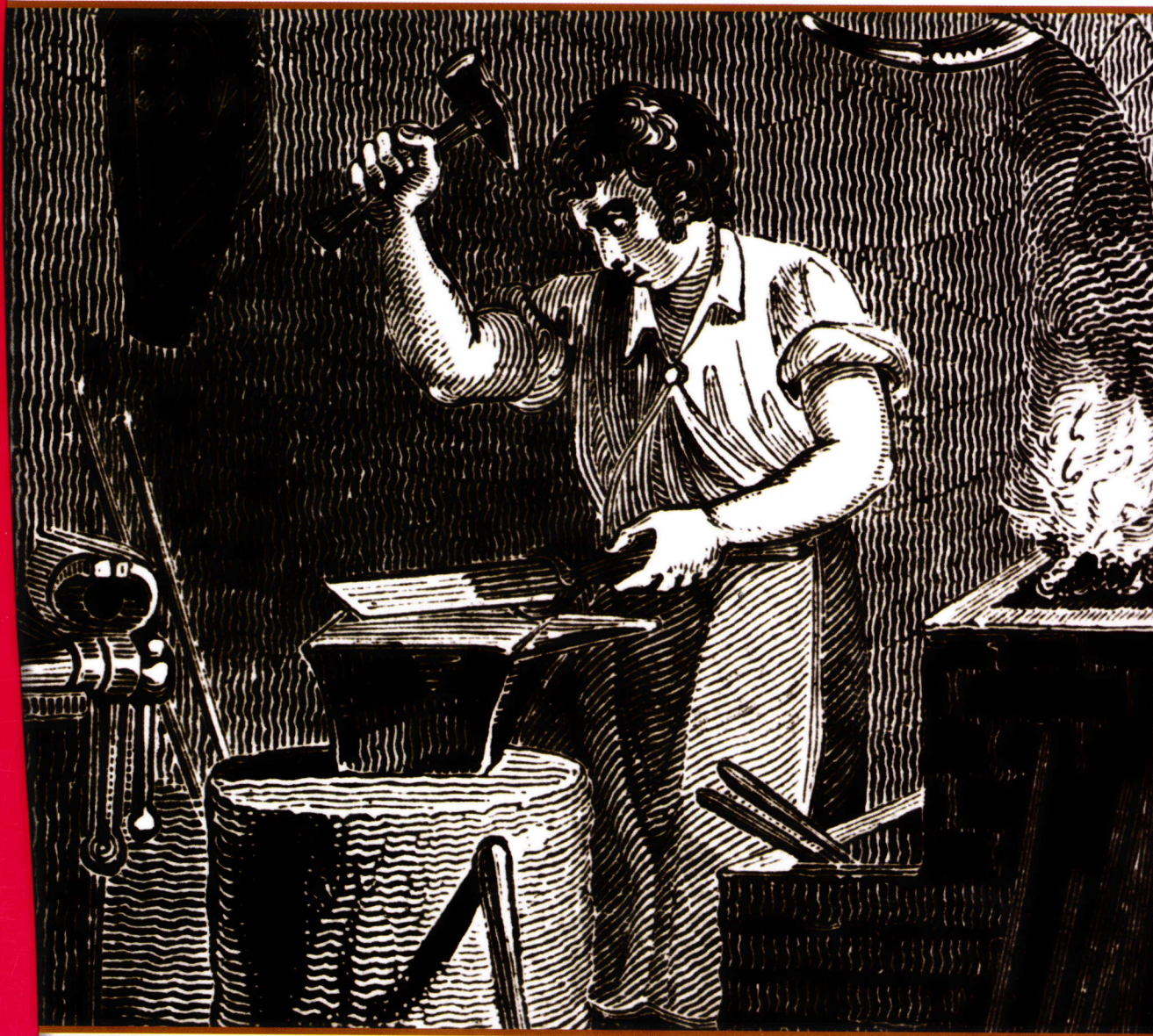


BLACKSMITHING: *Past and Present*

by Dean Titas

Red 1c
Power Builder
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¹ What do you think of when you hear the word *blacksmith*? Do you imagine someone who lived during colonial times? If so, you would be partially correct. Blacksmithing was a very important job in early America.

However, blacksmithing goes back much further than that. People were working with iron in ancient times, even as early as 900 B.C. Some people are still working as blacksmiths today.

- 2 When you think of a blacksmith, do you imagine someone pounding out a horseshoe? If so, you would be partially correct again. However, making horseshoes was only a small part of what a blacksmith did in the past. Today shoeing horses is an entirely different trade.
- 3 *Blacksmith* is a very old word. A smith is a worker or craftsman. The metal that a blacksmith worked with, mainly iron, was black. Originally, a blacksmith was someone who made things out of iron. In the past, the basic tools of a blacksmith included a forge, anvil, hammer, tongs, vise, and file.
- 4 Blacksmithing has always been challenging work and it still is today. Iron must be heated in a forge to a very high temperature. This makes a smith's working environment very hot. Handling and shaping the extremely hot iron without getting burned requires close attention to the task. There is also a risk that the building will catch on fire. That makes the smith's job dangerous as well.
- 5 A smith must be very strong, patient, and watchful. The hammer used to pound the hot metal may weigh as much as twelve pounds. It would be tough to swing that hammer day in and day out to craft ironwork. And think of the poor smith's ears! Pounding on iron makes a lot of noise. Waiting for the iron to heat to just the right temperature takes patience. The smith must learn to tell when the metal is ready by when it turns from yellow to red. As soon as the smith sees the right color, he or she must shape the iron swiftly and surely.
- 6 As with any trade, learning to work with iron takes practice. In ancient times, when people were just beginning to work with iron, a project took a long time. In the past, blacksmiths heated and pounded iron to make tools and weapons. Sometimes the metal was too soft to hold a sharp edge. Other times it was too brittle and broke easily. But sometimes it was perfect. Early blacksmiths worked and worked with the metal and the fire. Eventually, they became more skilled. Improvements were made through trial and error. Because most people of that time could neither read nor write, the blacksmith's knowledge was passed on orally. Most of what each blacksmith learned was secret and was shared with only a few people.
- 7 Blacksmithing continued to develop and grow in importance. During medieval times, young people could learn to be a blacksmith by working with a smith. A young person who worked with and learned from a blacksmith was called an apprentice. It took many years to learn to do this. People knew that if they did a good job, people would come back to them time after time and they would have steady business.
- 8 In colonial America, a blacksmith was a very important and respected member of any settlement. As settlers moved west to begin new communities, they could hardly do without a blacksmith. A smith was able to help in numerous ways. Blacksmiths made and repaired tools used to cut down trees and build homes. They made locks, latches, hooks, and hinges to be used in homes. They made the nails to hold things together. To help settlers clear the land and plant their crops, blacksmiths made scythes, fashioned plow blades, and produced metal rims for wagon wheels. They also made shoes for horses and oxen.
- 9 Blacksmiths made basic items to be used daily in the home as well. They created candlesticks, knives, forks, pots, pans, and racks to be used in the fireplace for cooking. For the settlers who could afford it, blacksmiths made decorative wrought iron for fences, gates, railings, and weather vanes.
- 10 Today the role of the blacksmith has changed. Smiths no longer work with just iron. Many work with aluminum, stainless steel, brass, and bronze as well. While some smiths may still repair farm equipment, that is no longer their main business. Most blacksmiths today are artists. Many make decorative railings, gates, objects for gardens, and sculptures.
- 11 Some smiths now work in historical settings, reproducing products like those from the past. This helps us stay connected to the culture that came before us. As in days gone by, a blacksmith's reputation depends on the quality of his or her work, and smiths take pride in the work they do. While not many people are making a living as blacksmiths today, it is still a valuable trade. A blacksmith's trade is one that will hopefully live on for many years to come.

COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 This story was primarily written to show
 - a what a blacksmith did in ancient times.
 - b the many aspects of blacksmithing.
 - c that people make a living as blacksmiths.
- 2 The word *blacksmith*
 - a describes the kind of work a blacksmith does.
 - b comes from a family name.
 - c describes how dirty one gets doing the job.
- 3 A blacksmith forms objects out of iron by using
 - a his or her tools and hands.
 - b machines.
 - c technology.

- 4 During colonial times a person learned to be a blacksmith by
 - a studying under a blacksmith.
 - b reading a book.
 - c going to school.
- 5 According to the selection, today blacksmithing has become
 - a an easy way to make a living.
 - b a popular job.
 - c a form of art.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 in part; somewhat (1)
- 2 times long past (1)
- 3 difficult but rewarding (4)
- 4 likely to break (6)
- 5 someone who studies a trade under a master (7)
- 6 used to decorate (10)
- 7 a position of favorable regard (11)

C A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning will depend on how it is used.

The *fly* buzzed around the room.
The bird will *fly* to its nest.

Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there? Write *a* or *b*.

8 iron (3)

- a to press wrinkles out of fabric
- b a kind of metal

9 shape (5)

- a to give a form to
- b an object defined by its outer edges, such as a circle

10 trade (6)

- a a type of skilled labor
- b to exchange one thing for another

THINK ABOUT IT

- D** In old ancient times, people learned to work with metal.

In ancient times, people learned to work with metal.

When writers or speakers are careless, they sometimes use an unnecessary word and say the same thing twice.

Read each sentence. Which word in **bold type** is not needed because the same idea is expressed elsewhere in the sentence? Write the word.

- 1 Blacksmithing **first** got started when **people** discovered iron ore in rocks.
- 2 **Young** children learned the trade by **working** for a blacksmith.
- 3 A **heavy** 12-pound hammer can be **difficult** to lift.
- 4 A blacksmith today is **currently** an **artist**.
- 5 Many **British** blacksmiths came to **America** from Great Britain.

- E** A pronoun can take the place of many kinds of words.

Read the sentences. Which pronoun in parentheses () makes sense in each sentence? Write the pronoun.

- 6 The nails the blacksmith made weighed about 20 pounds. (They, She) were worth a great deal of money.
- 7 Mr. Callahan's wagon wheel broke last Thursday. (It, He) talked to the blacksmith about forging a new rim.
- 8 Apprentices were usually young people. Their parents often arranged for (them, us) to go into service.
- 9 Sally was an old horse with new iron shoes. (He, She) seemed to like them.
- 10 Our teacher will tell us about other trades this school year. We think learning about (her, them) is fun.

- F** A sentence with just one subject and one verb is called a simple sentence. A sentence that is made from two simple sentences is called a compound sentence.

Simple: Jacob studied under a master blacksmith.

Simple: He works as a barber now.

Compound: Jacob studied under a master blacksmith, *but* he works as a barber now.

You can join two simple sentences with a comma followed by the word *and*, *or*, or *but*.

Read each sentence. If it is a simple sentence, write *Simple*. If it is a compound sentence, write *Compound*.

- 11 The blacksmith repaired a plow this morning.
- 12 A blacksmith used to make horseshoes, but a farrier does it now.
- 13 In colonial times, a blacksmith was a valuable part of any village.
- 14 Metal must be heated to just the right temperature, or the blacksmith will have trouble pounding it.
- 15 The hammer rested on the anvil, and the iron heated in the forge.