



## The Blacksmith Shop

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, perhaps no other occupation in Centre County had the importance of the blacksmith. The local ironmasters had to staff their operations with experienced furnace workers, of course, but they also needed skilled blacksmiths. These valuable tradesmen kept the machinery and tools in working order and also kept the horses shod and ready to transport people and goods. The blacksmith was also at the heart of every country village and would usually hold important offices in the village such as magistrate or Church warden. He would be the obvious choice for these positions as his job demanded a certain level of intellect, numeracy skills and business sense.

*Philadelphia area ironmasters needing skilled workers could usually hire experienced immigrants from the iron districts of England and Wales. Some even recruited such artisans directly in those countries. Once in America, however, these workers were in such demand that, attracted by higher wages, they frequently moved from one ironworks to another. In time many made their way to furnaces and forges in the interior of Pennsylvania.*

— Gerald Eggert, PSU History Dept.  
“Medieval Technology and American History Project”

With his anvil, tongs, pokers, sledges, chisels and hammers, the blacksmith was also the only occupation that actually created his own tools. Blacksmiths of the 18th and 19th centuries worked with “charcoal iron” named for the type of furnace that produced the iron. Much of the iron produced in the furnaces would have imperfections that would need to be worked by the blacksmith. By heating the iron and hammering on his anvil, a skilled blacksmith could remove the impurities from the piece and make a stronger and more desirable piece of iron.