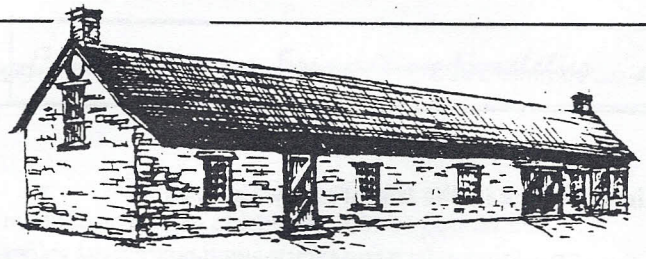


Newsletter
Summer 2003
Vol 3, No 1

Cobourg Museum Foundation

Announcing our Second Annual Open House September 27th at the Barracks

10:00 am to 3:00 pm at the corner of Orr and Durham Sts on the theme of
"The blacksmith in early Upper Canada"

- **See nail making on a working forge by blacksmith Michalos Deak**
- **Speak to soldiers of the British 49th Regiment of Foot**
- **Experience tours of the building by guides in period costume**
- **Taste fresh pressed apple cider made on an antique press**
- **Inspect our new authentic windows and other improvements**

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to welcome you to our Second Annual Open House at the partially restored Barracks, Cobourg's oldest building.

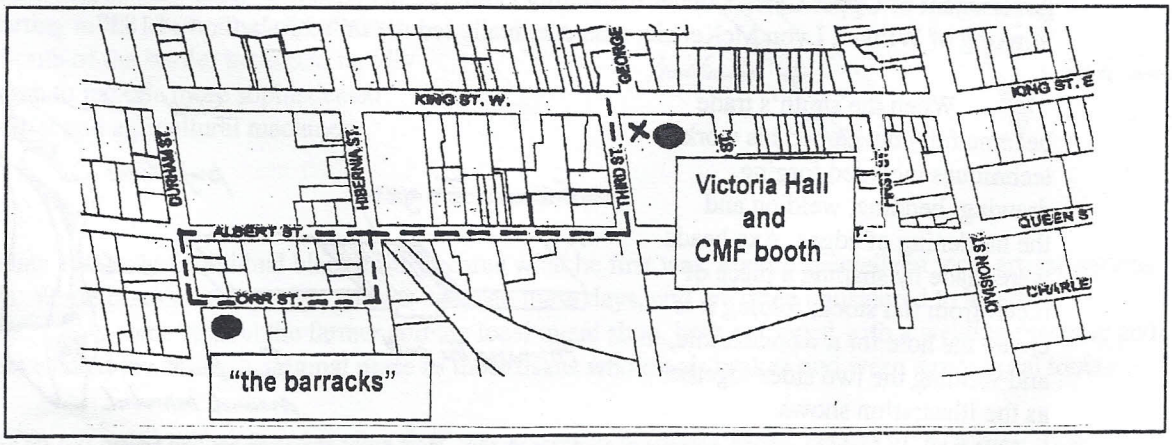
Evidence uncovered in the earth floor indicates that the East end of the building once housed a working forge and a blacksmith. To celebrate this connection between the building and an important artisan in the life of early Upper Canada, Michalos Deak, a Cobourg resident and accomplished blacksmith, carpenter and millwright, will demonstrate the art of nail making on a working forge and anvil.

Since our last Open House, we have made considerable progress in restoring "the barracks" to its original state. By the end of this year, and under the advice of Peter Stokes and Gerald Sproule, we will have completed the hand-split cedar shingle roof, installed replicas of the original windows and doors, (thanks to a generous grant from the Cobourg Chapter of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario), and built a wooden fence around the property.

As we move closer to our goal of creating our the first museum of local history for the Cobourg area, more and more opportunities within the Foundation are being made available for interested individuals to join us in the development and construction of our first museum. Researching and developing appropriate themes, considering the best display techniques, creating policies and procedures for the collection and preservation of artifacts, considering the use of audio-visual means of presentation, developing a relationship with the Ontario Ministry of Culture are all activities that we have begun. The fact that 350 people visited us last year is testimony to the interest our community has in this most important undertaking.

Please join us!

Joan Chalovich, President and Chair of the Cobourg Museum Foundation Board



The blacksmith and his importance in the life of early Canada:

The discovery of iron the Caucasus Mountains of Russia around 1500 BC, set the path for the next stage in the evolution of human civilization. 2000 years later, by 500 AD, iron had taken the place of bronze, and the production techniques and crafting skills of one metal had been modified and transferred to the other. You cannot build an industrial loom, or an inexpensive frying pan, or an automobile engine, or reinforced concrete, out of bronze. Along with iron came the individual with the skills to turn wrought iron, and later steel, into useful products. Before the industrialization of their trade, and when working as individuals, these artisans were referred to as "blacksmiths".

As work began to be diversified into specific trades, so too did blacksmiths become more specialized. Eventually there were blacksmiths whose skills were specific to ship building, the fur trade, the military, the construction and operation of canals and locks, logging, quarrying and specific industries. The vast majority and most diversified of the smiths provided their services to rural areas in support of agriculture.

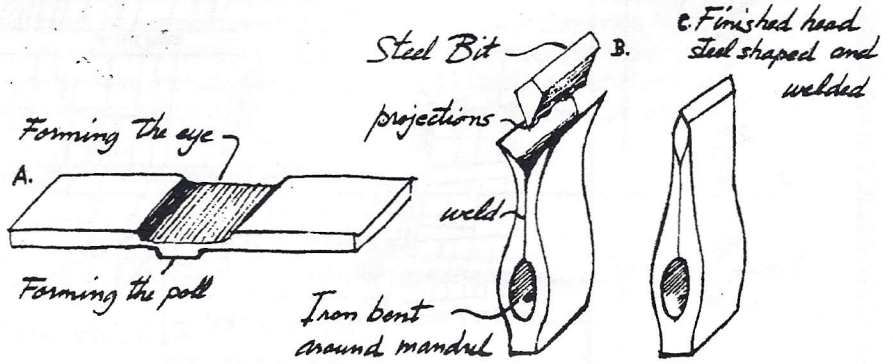
In 1851 the first Ontario census revealed that less than 10% of the population lived in urban centers. In rural agricultural areas it was common for there to be one blacksmith for every two hundred people. In the early stages of settlement, and before there was sufficient demand for his services, the smith was often a farmer as well. Before the establishment of a cash economy in Ontario, beginning in 1840, the smith often accepted goods, or labour on his farm, as in-kind payment for his services.

According to William Wylie our modern perception of the blacksmith at his anvil, is often more romantic than historically accurate. This is the result of exaggerating the extent to which the blacksmith was involved in the creation of specialized finished products such as lamp holders, or cutlery, or locks, or even hinges. At the time of early settlement, and before transportation systems were established that could transport the heavy wrought iron stock inexpensively, his work was primarily concerned with repairing broken and worn out iron parts and agricultural tools. The shoeing of oxen, and later horses, did not happen until roads had been improved with harder and more dependable surfaces. In the meantime many smiths also functioned as the local large animal veterinarian.

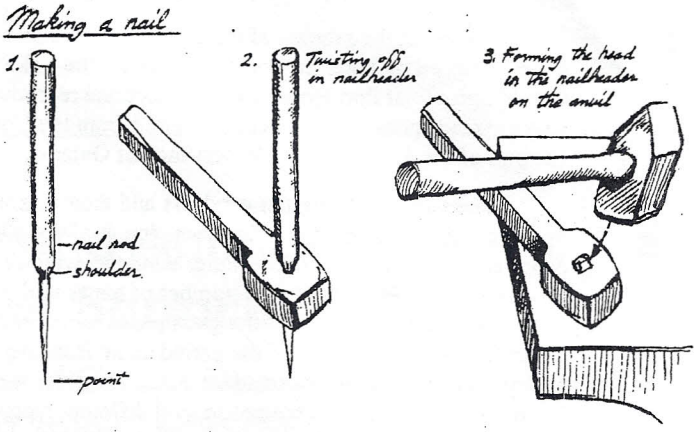
Wylie reports that the smith, along with other essential artisans, were more highly regarded by local rural society than "professionals", such as lawyers, bankers and government officials. The smith epitomized pride-of-craft and productive "useful" labour. Like other artisans, and because he had to keep accounts and occasionally written agreements, artisans such as the smith, with a rudimentary knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic, were often better educated than most.

As the population and economy of an area grew, the blacksmith was able to leave the farm and establish a shop in nearby villages. The open nature of his shop, necessary to dispel heat, the ringing sounds of the hammer, the sight of sparks and the glowing forge, made the smith's shop one of the most popular gathering spots in the community. His skills were highly sought after and his presence in a community often created a base for further economic development. Wylie believes that the important role of artisans, such as the smith, and their lack of political influence on the early government of Upper Canada under the Family Compact, is believed to have encouraged the critical, more egalitarian thinking of William Lyon McKenzie, who eventually led the failed Rebellion of 1837.

When the smith's trade became fully developed his work techniques included forging, drawing, bending, welding and the hardening of edges. Axe heads were made by shaping a piece of metal from flat stock, folding it to create the hole for a wood handle, and welding the two sides together as the illustration shows.



With the prevalence of caste iron products made from a form of iron that can be poured into molds to produce items such as pots, the smith developed the skill of repairing this brittle metal using wrought iron. In the case of harnesses for work animals, he often knew how to work with leather. In settlement times, and because of the scarcity of wrought iron stock, he often possessed the skills of a foundry worker who could reprocess broken or discarded caste iron and steel products such as nails. Burned wood building were often swept with magnets to recover the damaged nails.

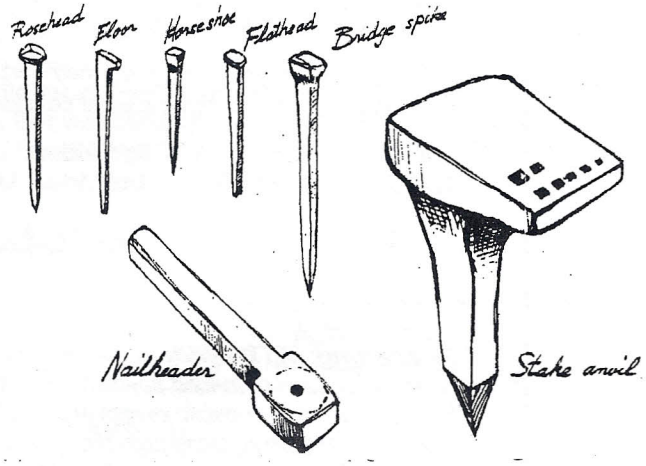


Sources of iron in early Upper Canada.

The source of iron during the settlement of Upper Canada, and before 1820, was primarily the foundries of Britain, and for the most part arrived in the form of finished products. Wrought iron, the basic stock of the blacksmith, when available, came in the form of bars, carried as ballast in ships. One successful Lower Canada foundry was established by a French Royal Commission in 1730, at St Maurice, half way between Montreal and Quebec City, and continued in operation until 1883. Transportation costs restricted the availability of its wrought iron as a feedstock for the blacksmith in Upper Canada.

The first foundry in Upper Canada was the Lansdowne Iron works on the Gananoque River, which operated fitfully from 1801 to 1811 when it closed. Reliable and affordable sources of wrought iron were not established in Upper Canada until after 1820. The Marmora iron works on the Trent River opened in 1822, showed every sign of success and then closed in 1826 because of out-of-date technology and a lack of cheap fuel. More successful foundries were located West of Niagara Falls at Normandale (1820), Port Dover and Tillsonburg (1823-24), and Amherstburgh (1832), but their products were not available until after the opening of the Welland Canal in the 1830s. In 1828 the highly successful Dutcher and Shepard foundries opened at York, but local demand consumed all of their production.

While the census of 1851 recorded a total of ninety-four foundries in thirty-four different counties, it also began to describe the decline of the individual blacksmith as it recorded the rapid industrialization of the manufacture of metal products. Another challenge to the existence of the individual blacksmith, despite the reduction in the reliance on products made in Britain, was the high quality and lower cost of metal products made in the Northern American States. Following the War of 1812, and starting in the 1820s, the importation of goods from South of the border increased rapidly and by 1830 began to include more sophisticated American industrial and agricultural machinery.



The blacksmith today.

By the late 1800s the individual blacksmith became what he first was, a more specialized local artisan serving individual needs. While blacksmiths are few and far between these days, and are often considered to be artists as opposed to craftsmen, in some respect the farmer and the local metal shop, both equipped with a welding machine and a small forge, have taken the smithy's original place as the artisans who repair broken and worn agricultural tools.

Information for this article and the drawings taken from "The Blacksmith in Upper Canada, 1784-1850" by William Wylie, and, "The Village Blacksmith" by Aldren A. Watson, a description of the blacksmith in New England during the late 1800s.

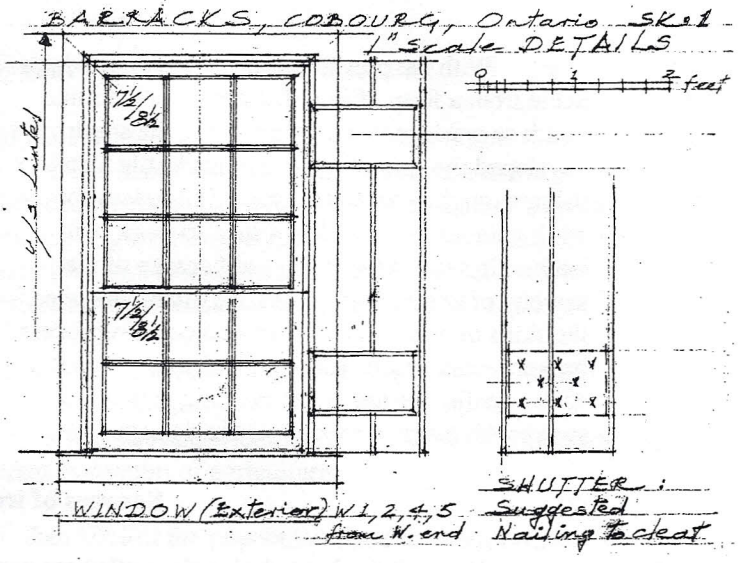
Our new reproduction windows

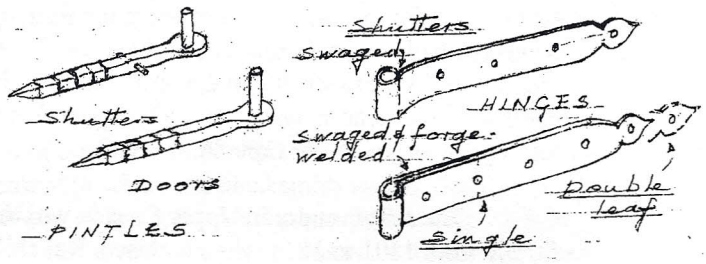
We are in the process of installing new windows and doors designed by Peter Stokes of Niagara-on-the-Lake and Gerald Sproule of Port Hope. They are accurate reproductions and are made possible by a generous grant from the Cobourg Chapter of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

The size of the original windows and their masonry openings were determined by the arrangement of the glass panes and their size. The four smaller windows would have been referred to as 9 over 6 (the number of panes in the upper and lower sash) by the size of the glass panes which are 7.5 by 8.5 inches. All of the glass of the period came from Britain and were available only in standard sizes. The glass we found is 130 to 150 years and represent several different types. Heavy wood shutters will protect the windows and we hope to use hardware produced by local artisans if possible.

The boards that make up the doors and shutters are held together by Rosehead Clinch nails bought from the Tremont Nail Company of Wareham, Mass, who have produced these and other steel cut nails every year since 1819, the year "the barracks" property was sold by the British.

By the end of this year we will have installed a new plank fence around the property and look forward to rebuilding the chimneys and repointing the walls next year. We are planning a heavy plank wood floor with removable panels to facilitate ongoing an on-going archeological investigation.





Membership in the Cobourg Museum Foundation

The Cobourg Museum Foundation relies on its members, and the membership fees they pay, to cover the mortgage costs of acquiring "the barracks" property. While the Foundation conducts a number of fund raising projects each year, membership fees are valued because they are the most predictable and dependable source of revenue, and indicate the extent of our support in the community.

Whether renewing your membership, changing your membership category, or becoming a member for the first time, please consider the following categories.

Student	**$5.00**	**Individual**	**$15.00**	**Family**	**$25.00**
Sustaining	**$100.00**	**Individual Life Member**	**$500.00**	**Corporate Member**	**$1,000.00**

The Cobourg Museum Foundation

Victoria Hall, 55 King St, West, Cobourg, ON, K9A-2M2

***Please note**: An **Individual Life Membership** is a one-time-only payment. A **Corporate Membership** may be made by cash or in-kind payment and must be renewed every 5 years. The names of Corporate Members will be publicized during public events and in all our publications during the time their membership is active. The title **Founding Member** recognizes those who became members during our first year and is a special and ongoing category. If joining or renewing by mail, please complete the form below and write "Membership" on the envelope.*

print name _____ *street address* _____

town/city/postal code/ phone number _____

Check one of the following ... ( ) new, ( ) renewal, ( ) renewal but changed to a different category.

Please do not write below the dotted line... this is for office use only.

Date received _____ *By* _____ *Receipt #* _____ *Date issued* _____ *Member Year* _____