


Blacksmith at Alamance Battleground

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A reenactor demonstrates and explains the work of a colonial blacksmith and his role in the community.

Video:  Alamance Battleground
Blacksmith

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Learn NC. *Alamance Battleground Blacksmith*. 2008; Alamance: Learn NC/YouTube, 2009. Digital Film.

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Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jop12Mdumbw>

Read the related article: Primary Source: An Authentick Relation of the Battle of Alamance
Transcript:

Video Transcript

(00:00)

Well, I'm the blacksmith. Blacksmith is an iron worker. Means I work in iron, I don't work in anything else. I don't work in gold, silver, brass, bronze, wood, stone, anything of that nature. Everything I do is entirely in iron, or a derivative of iron, which is steel. Make all kinds of household goods, make tools for other craftsman, make tools for farmers, and of course make tools for myself.

(00:29)

Blacksmith was an extremely important individual to people, historically speaking, because everybody depended on the blacksmith — simply because they couldn't do without iron tools, iron implements, things like iron hinges, cooking utensils, tools to use in their own jobs such as a carpenter that need hammers. Stone masons would need trowels and chisels. Goldsmiths, for instance, would need gravers for engraving, and those were made of steel and they come from the blacksmith. So quite literally, everybody needed the blacksmith.

(01:05)

Blacksmith's most important tool is his forge. A forge is a place to have a fire. Have a fire pit on the front here, that contains the coal which I use for fuel which was the most common coal in America after the middle of the 1700s. A forge also has a method for pumping air through the fire, and that's what this device back here does, it's called a bellows. And when I pull the lever — it's actually just an air pump — and it pumps air up through the fire, which will get it very very hot. This fire with coal is capable of attaining heat somewhere in the range of about 3800 degrees. Most of blacksmith work is done around 1400 to 1800 degrees, so you can see that the fire is quite capable of bringing heat up to the material that we need it to.

(01:51)

The work is very simple — one of the most simple processes used by any craftsman — but it takes years to develop the skill that's needed to make the tools and the things that are on the table here even though the process is very simple. The process simply involves putting the iron in the fire, bringing it to heat, bring it to the anvil, and by using the hammer and other tools, forcing the iron into the shape that you want it to have. And that process is always the same, never changes, no matter how complicated the piece or how simple the piece, the process is always the same. The only real skill involved for the blacksmith is to learn how to use the hammer and the other tools to move the iron. Takes a great deal of skill to deliver the hammer blow, to move the iron in the direction you want it to go.

(02:41)

Simple process again, illustrated. You put this in the fire, and I'll bring it up to a bright orange heat, which will be about 1600 degrees and then we'll come to the anvil and form it the way we want it to be.

(03:12)

As it cools off we'll go back to the heat, because the iron is always worked hot. It's not allowed to get cool.

(03:39)

And that's all there is to it.

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