

## **The Working World of the Smiths** From the Collections at [Historic Bethlehem](#) [PA]

To become a blacksmith, locksmith, or nailsmith required apprenticing to a master smith for four to six years. In Bethlehem, as in the rest of the world, it was not uncommon for the son of a master smith to apprentice with his father. Smiths Georg Huber, Marcus Fetter, Anton Schmidt, and Daniel Kliest, Jr. all learned the trade in this manner. In Bethlehem, boys were assigned to learn specific trades under the direction of a master artisan. With the changeover from the General Economy to semi-privatization in 1761-62, rules and regulations were devised "Concerning Masters and Trades" that stated that among other things:

No Master, he may be married or single, is allowed to engage an unconverted person, to teach him the profession and lodge him in his house and let him sleep there, because through that the Congr. and Choir Plan will be ruined. In case of a daily workman who works outside and goes home every evening, one may if one wishes, in case there are no other reasons existing because one should not have any civic association with such a person in the congregation, engage such person for all kinds of work.

The Moravian leadership also included regulations "Concerning Journeymen and Boys:

These may work out in congregation with a married or in the House with a single Brethren, so they entirely will be under their Choir Worker in their affairs.

If journey men or boys work for a married Master, their workshop as a rule will be in the Choir House, for instance in Herrnhut the cobbler and tailor apprentices who have married Masters, have their workshop in the Choir House, to which the Master must bring them their work. If, now, a married Master had boys as apprentices, one of the journeymen is assigned to them to supervise and instruct them in the profession, for which in one way or another the Master shows his apprentice, and makes good his delay in work.

But all, journeymen as well as boys, eat and sleep in the Choir House. The journeymen receive the proper wages from their masters, and the master has to pay for the boys' upkeep in the Choir House. But there are also journeymen and boys who work with the married masters in the congregation, and several, for example the bakers, also eat with their masters, but all sleep in the Choir House....

But neither any journeyman nor any boy may be put into a profession without the previous knowledge and consent of the Choir worker, not removed, and in fact if there is to be a change of indenture, the Brother's and Boy's circumstances and inclination should always be taken into consideration.

As soon as the boys in Boarding School are old enough for a profession this is properly decided, and if circumstances are such, that the boy can enter a profession, he is placed under care of the single Brethren and his Choir worker.

It is not known how much input the boys had in the decision, but it is clear that if they showed little aptitude for their work, they were reassigned to learn another trade. For example, George Henry Neisser, the son of Germantown clockmaker Augustine Neisser, was first apprenticed to a hatmaker in 1784, but soon got into trouble and ran away. He later returned and was assigned to learn the trade of nailsmithing. This trade apparently didn't suit his taste either, for he ran away again in 1784, never again to live in Bethlehem.

Another interesting reference to an apprentice was recorded by John Arbo on February 11, 1765:

Concerning the boy Stephan Bruce. After the boy Stephan Bruce, apprenticed to learn locksmith trade, could no longer stay there suffering from a discharging sore on his right leg, but Br. Kliest also unable to support said boy, if he could not work for him, I [Arbo, administrator of the Single Brethren's Choir] was requested at the end of May, 1763, to take this boy into care of Brethren's House. Because said boy had to spend most of his time in sickroom, one could not think of any further trade for him; but because his health became much improved during the past summer, and there was hope for his complete recovery, gave him a tryout to Br. Tommerop [bell founder], but he was not able to work for him and he therefore, could not stay there, I wanted to put him into tailor's shop, but he had no leaning for this work, wanted to get into apothecary.

Because I was unable to place the boy anywhere, already 16 years old, and in the Apothecary belonging to Diacony, they would only accept him on a year's trial, not considering that the boy is bound to Nathanael [Seidel], and therefore the Brethren's Choir had no obligation to look after him, I therefore resolved, because I could find no oversight nor work for him, during the day, from 2 evils to choose the better one, and today under following stipulations, because he can neither read nor write, into the Apothecary.

In February, 1773, the Single Brethren's Diary recorded this information about apprentices and journeymen:

In Master's Conference certain rules laid down:

1. No more extra pay for overtime work to apprentices, might endanger their health, and influence them to miss services.
2. Make them money-mad.
3. Harm their souls. Masters must set apprentices a good example. If apprentices are disobedient punish them with love and reason, if this is

not enough, get help of Choir workers; if still unsuccessful, have them called before Overseers' Board and punished openly-this best method to straighten out boys. Masters should take care of boys money, so that they will not use it in improper ways.

Likewise, Masters in regard to their journeymen should see that:

1. They do not lack work, and if they can see beforehand that there will not be enough work, announce it to the Elder's Conference.
2. That apprentices go straight home from work, and not carry on in all sorts of improper ways.

Most boys successfully finished their apprenticeships. After a period of working in their master's shop as paid journeymen, they typically were assigned a position in another Moravian community. Smiths trained in Bethlehem went on to work not only in the local Moravian communities of Lititz, Nazareth, Christiansbrunn, and Hope, NJ, but also as far away as North Carolina and Ohio.

Working as a smith in a Moravian community also meant taking part in other activities, some associated with work, others not. Some of the early smiths were involved in missionary work, such as Anton Schmidt and John Leonard Gattermeyer. Several smiths were also accomplished musicians. Apart from their social and religious duties in the community, the smiths also acted as teamsters, hauling iron and steel from regional suppliers back to Bethlehem. At least until the 1760s, most of the wrought iron used by the smiths was obtained from forges in New Jersey. Steel was obtained from Philadelphia. Ledgers record that Bethlehem's smiths purchased and hauled tons of rod and bar iron and cast work such as pots and iron plates from Durham Furnace (upper Bucks County), Pott's Iron Works (possibly the Mount Pleasant Furnace on the Perkiomen Creek in Berks County, established in 1737 by Thomas Potts, Jr. & Co.), and the Oxford Iron Works (a New Jersey furnace north of New Hope). In 1750, Bethlehem smiths traveled to Philadelphia to pick up iron goods and tools shipped to them from London by a Captain Budden and stored by a businessman in the city.

Another task of the smiths was producing charcoal to fuel the fires in their hearths. Charcoal was made by carefully tending a smoldering stack of cut wood covered with soil and leaves, with the object of driving out all the moisture in the wood and creating a pure fuel that was easily ignitable. Original Moravian documents contain many references to the smiths typically chopping down trees and making their charcoal north of Bethlehem near the Blue Mountain or at Gnadenthal and Nazareth, referred to as the "Upper Places."

Because they lived in a pious community, the smiths were subject to strict moral standards. And because they were only human, some failed to meet these standards. Blacksmith Georg Schmidt was prone to excessive drinking, especially after he was transferred to North Carolina. Nailsmith Carl Kunkler was expelled from the community for having an affair with Magdalena Huber. Others rebelled against the strict economic controls over their trade. After the dissolution of the General Economy in 1762,

blacksmith Stephanus Blum apparently still did not feel that he was receiving his fair share of the shop's profits and left the community altogether. Although there were problems with some smiths, as a group the smiths were some of the most important and productive artisans in the community.