



July 24, 2013

**TOURING SULLIVAN
COUNTY'S MUSEUM
. . . while dusting**

This past Saturday's talk by Justin Haas on the profession of blacksmithing was amazing. His skill was a much needed commodity prior to horseless carriages and as we'd stated before – every town, settlement and sometimes just a crossroads had a blacksmith. One of the major needs of a blacksmith was that of horseshoeing and while

this art form was a necessity, it was also a science. Horseshoers often worked closely with veterinarians in treating conditions in the legs and/or feet of individual horses. So much so that the anatomy and physiology becomes needed when diagnosing, treating and discussing ailments between the blacksmith/horseshoer and the vet. And although obvious: horses have four feet versus our two, and a horse's feet grow and change at a rate need to be cared for of every two months, or less. From Dr. Doug Butler's book *The Principles of Horseshoeing II*, originally printed in 1974 and reprinted with further updates by 1995 he states: "U.S. horse numbers were at an all-time high in 1915 of 21.5 million and at an all-time low in 1960 of 3 million." And prior to motorized vehicles there would have also been oxen, donkeys and mules in need of farrier expertise as well. Dr. Butler shows a statistical listing by states that registers Pennsylvania as 14th with equine population in 1971 of 98,000 and in 1983 197,000.

For a blacksmith's shop to succeed, he must basically be a man of all trades, so to speak. Because of his versatility, the blacksmith worked to hand manufacture any number of metal items. These could be nails, drills, knife blades, hammers, all size hooks and swivels, plowshares, hand tools, wagon pieces, wagon wheels, weights and the list is endless. He was also a year round worker. Irregardless of the weather at any given time of the year, the blacksmith would be either outside or in his shop working over a container of hot coals that were constantly being fired to heat the objects he was forming, swinging his hammer repeatedly onto red hot metal to shape his needed objective. As sparks flew and the sweat ran down him, the blacksmith toiled away at what today would appear an artisan practice. But in its day, blacksmithing was not only a valued way of life but also a means to survival.

For this and more, visit YOUR museum behind the courthouse in Laporte on Meylert Street from 1 to 5 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Or call for an appointment at (570) 946-5020 or email museum@scpahistory.com. Also, visit our web site at scpahistory.com and sign up for Facebook at [sullivancountyhistoricalsociety](https://www.facebook.com/sullivancountyhistoricalsociety) to "friend us".