

# Local blacksmith's hammer still rings off the anvil

BY SHEILA MILLER

GRANTVILLE — After 22 years of working under horses, George Winters, R1 Palmyra, says he considers himself to be a lucky man.

At 86 years old (he'll be 87 in September he says with a grin), Winters no longer nails the steel shoes on to cantankerous horses and mules but has memories of the days when he bent over the forge and pounded the red hot metal.

"I consider myself to be a lucky man because in all that time of working with the horses, I was never hurt. Yes, I had some nail scratches — but that's all," Winters recalls.

Dipping back into his memories, Winters told how he was born and raised on a farm north of Annville, near Waterworks in Lebanon County.

"I stayed on the farm until I was 19 years old and then I went to learn the blacksmith trade," Winters said.

The man who started him in the trade was Harvy Albert from Ono. Winters apprenticed under Albert's watchful eye for three years.

During his time of training, Winters met a young farm girl named Mary Gerberich. The young couple first set eyes on each other at an ice cream social at Walmer's Church. Since her home wasn't far from the church, (which is located near Indiantown Gap, Winters said) he gave her a lift home with his horse and buggy.

Now, this was at a time when Winters' apprenticeship was drawing to a close. He was ready to take on a job with Saylor, the coachsmith in Annville. So, just before he started the new job, George Winters and Mary Gerberich were wed.

Winters explained that while at Saylor's Carriage Works his job was to put new tires on the farm wagons and

buggies. These were not tires as we think of them today, but were steel tires.

"The steel tires stretched when they wore so I'd have to shrink and reset them," he said pointing to his tire stretcher. "I'd make them hot at one spot and then squeeze them. Before my time, they had to cut a piece out of the steel and weld it back together. Then they'd have to heat the steel tire and stretch it over the wooden wheel."

Resting against an old saw horse, Winters told how his career at Saylor's lasted only 6 months. He said that the reason he was hired by Saylor's was because the old blacksmith they had working for them wanted an apprentice.

When the horses came in to have new shoes, I had to trim their feet and set the shoes on. The old blacksmith would make all the shoes as fast as I could put them on. I guess you could say I was what you would call a floorman."

Then one day, a blacksmith from Palmyra came to visit Winters at the carriage shop and offered him a job.

The man's name was Ed Fausnacht. When he asked what I could do, the only thing I could recommend was trimming feet and nailing shoes.

"Fausnacht asked me, 'Can you weld?' I said 'yes' and he said 'You make your shoes and shoe your own horses, and I'll shoe mine.'"

Winters left the Annville carriage shop to shoe draft horses in a small blacksmith shop on Railroad Street in Palmyra.

Winters recalled his partnership with Fausnacht lasted only 6 months, from Spring to Fall. "But, in those



Winters hammers a kettle ring, used for holding the butcher kettles out of the fire. "When the customer brought a broken ring to me and asked me if I could make one just like it, I told him I never made a one-legged kettle ring before," chuckled the 86 year old blacksmith.

6 months, I learned more about the blacksmith trade, besides shoeing horses, than I'd learned in 3 years from Albert.

"When I went to work for him, I told Ed to tell me if the shoeing didn't suit him the way I was doing it.

"One day he came over and picked up the horses feet. I was working on and said 'That's exactly as good as mine' —that made me feel good.

"I told him I would weld the toes on the shoes but they were always crooked for me, and he told me he'd show me how to do it right."

That Fall, Winters said, he learned Fausnacht was just getting him ready to turn the business over to him. And for the next score of years, he was on his own.

Farmers with work horses made up most of his customers, Winters said. By 1936, when farmers were beginning to get tractors and were getting away from using horses, business began to fall off.

So, with his wife and his youngest child, Clarence, (who was 16 years old at the time), Winters moved to his 24 acre farm near Grantville.

When the Winters first moved to the farm, they worked the fields with horses. "I couldn't afford to buy equipment for such a little place, so when the time came that I didn't use the horses any more, I rented the fields. With the cash rent, I was better off than farming it myself.

"That's when I started to G O (goof off) in here," he

they won't let me. So, I'm tired — not retired."

Looking around his shop, Winters points to a display of shoes hanging up on the wooden shed wall. He quickly says the three shoes on the bottom row were some he never worked on — some customer just gave them to him to add to his collection.

All of the other shoes were made by himself, Winters explains. Several of them, he said, were made to "throw a different gait on a horse." He pointed to each one and names them: "That's a balance shoe, a toe-weight bar shoe, a heel-weight shoe, a regular track shoe, and a side weight shoe."

Three of the shoes on display are mule shoes made for traction on ice. Winters explains that the one was the first sharp shoe he ever made — the bottom of the shoe has razor-sharp looking plates bent down to dig into the ice and keep the horse from slipping. "The sharp shoe took a lot of work on the anvil to get the edges bent and sharpened just right."

With ingenuity and modernization, the other two shoes were designed for easier walking. On one, the cogs were just driven into the shoe, and on the other, they could be screwed in.

"Then there was a dull edged summer cog for those farmers who didn't want to change their horses' shoes — the sharp cogs were taken out and the dull ones punched in. But, these weren't

used too much," Winters adds.

Pulling on his ear, Winters said the hardest thing about shoeing horses was when he had to shoe a horse that would not stand. He grinned as he told about his worst encounter with a mule.

"A guy brought me a mule to shoe. He had just bought the dumb thing and he said the sellers told him he might have some trouble shoeing the back feet.

"Well, all I had to do was look at his hind feet to know there was going to be trouble — the hooves were twice as long in back as in front.

"I got started and the old mule shook his head and threw himself flat on the floor. So, we put a rope around his legs and tied his feet, and that's how we put the shoes on him.

After we finished, the guy raised his finger to me and said 'You won't have to shoe that mule again for me if that's the kind of treatment he likes — he won't get it from me'.

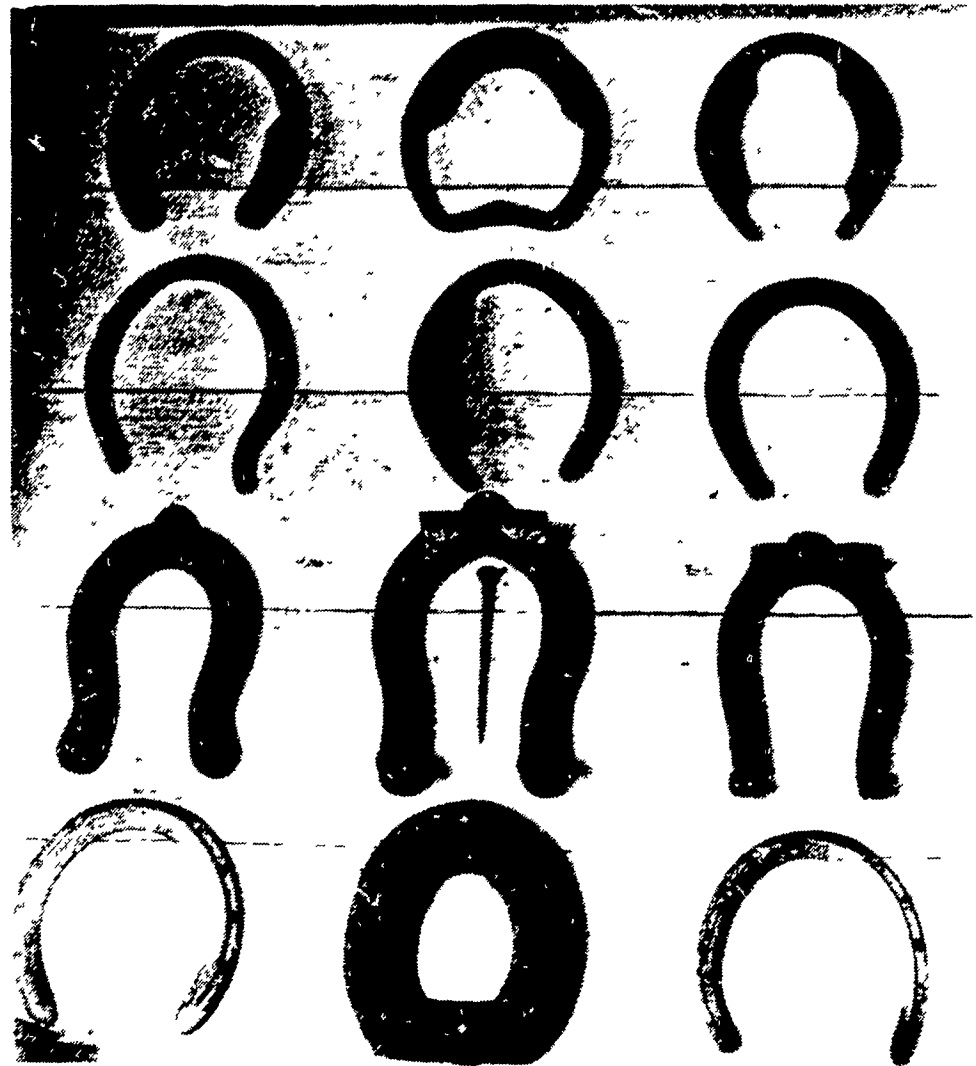
"I never saw that mule again."

Winters said thoughtfully the majority of horses and mules he shod did best when they were handled nicely. "Some don't want to be handled rough."

"Horses and people are a lot alike — and I've had to deal with both in my business. Everyone of them is different. Some you have to whack, but most of them want to be treated gently."



Winters points to the sharp cogs driven in the bottom of the shoe to help the mule with its traction and footing on ice.



Different shoes made by Winters are, from top to bottom, left to right: heel weight shoe, toe weight bar shoe, balance shoe; track shoe (outside heel turned out for back foot), side weight, track shoe (front); screw cog mule shoe, drive cog mule shoe, sharp shoe. The bottom row of shoes are commercial samples given to Winters by a customer.