Striking While the Iron is Hot: Federal Period Rural Blacksmithing in Somerset County, New Jersey

Michael J. Gall

Abstract

Blacksmith shops and the items they produced were once vital components of rural communities prior to the introduction of mass-produced merchandise during the late 19th century. This article focuses on the archaeology of an undocumented 1780s–1790s shop operated by Garret Voorhees, Jr., on his Middlebush Village farmstead in Franklin Township, Somerset County, New Jersey. Garret had earlier worked in his father’s shop, 1/2 mi. from his home, prior to and during the American Revolution. In 1777, Garret lost his home and farm buildings to British arson. Following the war’s end, circumstances suggest the 33-year old blacksmith relied upon trade skills and improvisational tactics to construct his own shop on his war-ravaged farmstead. Sale of shop products was likely aimed toward supplying hardware for and financing the reconstruction of his new home nearby in 1793. By employing his family’s trade skills and post-medieval, earthfast architectural techniques, Garret “made do” with local and traditional knowledge in the construction of his blacksmith shop. The data also provide important insight into the diversity of items produced and architectural methods employed in rural blacksmith shops in the Northeast region during the early Federal period.

Recommended Citation

Gall, Michael J. (2016) “Striking While the Iron is Hot: Federal Period Rural Blacksmithing in Somerset County, New Jersey,” Northeast Historical Archaeology: Vol. 45, Article 4. Available at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol45/iss1/4