

BLACKSMITHING IN THE 1830s by Louise Pettus

Nelson Bell of the Belltown community of Lancaster District was a jack-of-all-trades who combined wood-working skills with blacksmithing skills to furnish his neighbors with wagons, coffins, and all sorts of farm implements and tools.

Bell kept a ledger that chronicled his neighbors purchases. The ledger shows that his most frequent sales were wagons and cradles for the cutting of grain. In 1830 the price of a grain cradle was \$2.50; a small wagon was \$50. Both items would have metal fittings and this accounts for his blacksmithing - undoubtedly an extra service for his basic woodworking business.

Samuel Campbell of York District was a master blacksmith who worked from a shop on John Springs' large Fort Mill plantation. Campbell's ledger, with entries from 1823 to 1826 covering 118 neatly written pages, is a fascinating glimpse into the plantation world of that time.

Campbell made new or repaired every iron or steel object to be found. Most often his entries show him shoeing horses and making plow points of every description. With each entry he showed the method he used. "Founded" meant that he made the object by pouring molten metal into a mold. "Laid" meant that he twisted metal strands together and "upset" occur when he improved a metal tool by making it shorter or thicker by hammering on the end.

Campbell mentioned three kinds of iron - "ware iron," Rag iron," and "rold (rolled) iron." He also wrote "Casteel (cast steel)," and "Blistered steel" beside some of the objects worked on.

Fortunately, Campbell wrote in a clear handwriting with each letter carefully formed. His spelling was atrocious, however, sometimes making it impossible, even with a dictionary, to understand what he meant. What was "kee for a forked dog"? "Ottering cranes for bells"? "Gudgers upset"? And, "Elettric iron bradd skeins band hurders"? The last item is mentioned only once, gotten by James Spratt on 18 August 1824.

The variety of items that Campbell worked on is amazing. For William Goodrich, in one year's time, Campbell repaired the big wheel and the tub of his grist mill, shod his horses, and made for him horse shoes, plow points, a spring for a lock, weeding hoes, dressing hoes, iron wedges, harrow teeth, and laid an axe with iron and steel. He mended pot hooks and two bread trays for Goodrich who was a fairly typical customer.

In some cases Campbell traded services. Susan Sembler brought in her hand-woven cloth valued at \$1.50 in exchange for "2 new Clappers put in Bell - .25; Mending tongues (tongs) & fire Shovel - .25; 1 foot put on pot - .25; spout put on tea pot - .75." Sarah Auton also traded weaving for blacksmithing services. Dr. Joseph R. Darnell's medical bill was canceled by Campbell's frequent shoeing of the doctor's horses.

John McCoy was a butcher whose entries showed his trade: "To Fleshing /K nife made - .75; 3 tanner's nives upset - .75", etc.

"House hanging made frison welded" shows that Samuel Campbell could do fancy designs. Did Widow Mary Guyer, or her son Isaac Guyer, happen to see some fancy wrought iron in Yorkville, or perhaps Charleston, that led them to add an ornamental ironwork to their house?

Widow Nancy F. Potts paid Campbell for "Ironing Waggon complete with sand boxes - \$65.00." Campbell in turn paid a "Hammerman" (carpenter?) \$57.50 for doing the "woodwork of waggon banding hubs and boxes" and \$1.25 for making a "feed troft and side box."

Other interesting items made or repaired in the blacksmith shop: plating leather shoes, gate hinges, window hinges, nails, locks, keys, loom collars, harness rings, stilards (steelyards used to weigh bulky items like cotton in the field), and stone augers.

Campbell worked for John Springs in an arrangement in which Springs furnished the shop and equipment but the ledger book does not show what Springs may have paid him for his labor. Campbell died in 1830. His estate papers do show that in 1825 he purchased a lease on 223 acres of Catawba Indian Land from John Springs. Campbell's widow, Elizabeth R. Campbell sold the lease after his death to Samuel K. Pettus.

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