

# Blacksmiths provided essential services for local farmers

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A photograph taken after 1903 shows the blacksmith shop of Frank W. Donohue as it appeared on Mechanic Street in Holley, just south of Public Square. This building and the billiards room showing to the left were situated south of the block currently occupied by Holley Falls Bar & Grill. Frank "Duff" Donohue, pictured right, stands in front of his business with George Jenks (left) and Joseph Haight (middle). The horse is the centerpiece of this photo, demonstrating the work primarily carried out by blacksmith shops; the sign reads "F. W. Donohue, Horse Shoeing and Repairing."

At the time this photograph was taken, all three men were well versed in the work of the blacksmith. Originally a native of Albion, Joseph Haight worked as a stableman before entering the blacksmith trade. He eventually relocated to Sandy Creek where he opened a blacksmith shop on Rt. 237 just north of Rt. 104 adjacent to the present site of the Murray Superette. An 1894 newspaper article indicates that George Jenks commenced working out of this shop after William Wetherwax relocated to East Gaines. Jenks and Haight operated a business partnership for a short period of time, dissolving the venture that same year.

According to a business directory from 1911, Haight worked as a blacksmith out



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**This is the blacksmith shop of Frank W. Donohue as it appeared on Mechanic Street in Holley, just south of Public Square.**

of a shop on Mechanic Street, which suggests that the photograph was likely taken between 1903 and 1911. Although the three appear to be regular, hardworking men, Jenks appears to have been more of the rough and tumble type. In 1883, he was arrested for stealing a collection of pennies from C. H. Frisbie of Holley and accused of selling the lot in Rochester for approximately \$30. The following year a brief note in the Holley Standard notes that he accidentally shot himself with a revolver. Then in 1893, prior to commencing work with Haight, Jenks married Alta May Downey at the age of 15 (not necessarily uncommon for the time); the two lived together for a short period of time, then living separately until finalizing their divorce in 1904.

The men are pictured with the typical leather apron, used to protect their cloth-

ing from burning embers and heated metal. Pictured to the right of the front entryway are wooden wheels leaning against the sidewall. Blacksmiths were often able to true wooden wheels and install the metal tread that covered them; various sizes indicate that work was performed on both wagon wheels (the thicker) and buggy wheels (the narrower). Prior to the widespread ownership of automobiles, the neighborhood blacksmith shop was the equivalent of the car repair shop where horses were shod and buggies repaired. In the years leading up to this photograph, blacksmiths would produce nails and tools in addition to the services provided by Donohue and his colleagues.

It is worth noting that this building was constructed of fieldstones of varying sizes and shapes. The utilitarian nature of the building did

not warrant stones of similar size or for the stones to be "dressed" to provide a decorative or uniformed appearance. The building is also lacking in windows, which provided a darkened environment inside allowing the blacksmith to monitor the temperature of the forge based on the color of the flame.

Located down the alleyway, which still exists today, was a shed with a cupola and a dwelling with a high foundation. Both were situated along the bank of the old Erie Canal bed that looped through the Village of Holley. The house still stands today.

As a final side note, before relocating to Sandy Creek Joseph Haight raised his family at Albion where his eldest daughter Martha married William Howard. The couple's son, Charlie, was well known locally for his portrayal of Santa Claus.