

# Time Has Greatly Changed Work For Last of Area's Blacksmiths

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STUARTS DRAFT — "It's not easy to shoe a horse," said 1-year-old blacksmith B. B. Kube when he was asked about problems in his occupation. "But," he added, "it's not as hard for me as going inside and sweeping the floor for my wife."

Mr. Kube, who has operated a blacksmith shop here since 1913, went on to relate that time and its physical effects, both on him and the town, have made his trade somewhat different from what it once was. The biggest change in him, he said, is his speed. "The only real danger in shoeing a horse comes when the horse is skittish and you must always be judging his feet," he said. "It used to be no problem for me to dodge those flying feet, but I'm not quite as agile now as I was then."

Mr. Kube recalled his early days in the village when horses were the only mode of transportation for most people. At that time, he said, there were only a few cars within a six mile radius.

When he first came to Stuarts Draft almost 57 years ago, the community provided enough work for three blacksmiths, he said. About this time, he added, the apple rush began in the area and the additional need for horses and wagons protected the smiths with plenty of work.

"So I was able to make the kind of living I had been seeking when I came here at the age of 25 from Orange County," he went on.

"I had decided to be a blacksmith for two reasons," he said. "The main reason was, of course, that there was plenty of this type of work available and that time, you did whatever you could in the way of work that could earn you a living."

Mr. Kube added that his decision was helped by the fact that, having been reared on a farm, he had become accustomed to horses and enjoyed working with them. "I like horses then and still do," he said.

He began his apprenticeship at the age of 21 in Culpeper County. For two and one-half years he worked under a man who did general farm work, including windmill, water pump and steam engine repair. His sideline was the building of coffins.

Mr. Kube went on to say that he had gone to a number of places before deciding to settle in Stuarts Draft. The growing farm community provided buggies to be fixed, tools to be kept sharpened and repaired and horses to be shod. When he first came here, Mr. Kube said, he put on an average of 4,000 shoes per year.

"I always tried to remember that horses didn't enjoy the chore, and I attempted to make them as comfortable as possible," he noted.

In his early days in the village, mid-winter was the busy season, Mr. Kube said. "Snow and ice came," he related, "but people couldn't let that stop them. The horses had to be kept shod in order for them to keep moving and I stayed pretty busy."

"This year, I've shod one horse since Christmas," he said.

His first work as a blacksmith included not only the shoeing of horses, but also work with harnessings, making and repairing pieces for wagons and the care of tools owned by neighboring residents and farmers.

Neighbors included those who lived not many miles away, but seldom made the trip into Stuarts Draft. He gave as an example one of his first customers, a White Hill storekeeper who usually came into the shop only twice a year. "Then he was in 'The Draft,'" Mr. Kube said, "either to vote or to pay taxes."

Now, in contrast, Mr. Kube said, a number of White Hill residents pass close to Stuarts Draft daily on their way to work in Waynesboro. The small community of White Hill is located about three miles south of Stuarts Draft.

The amount of work available for a blacksmith, he said, decreased as the transportation system experienced a changeover from the horse to the automobile. Since 1940, Mr. Kube has been the only blacksmith in the immediate Stuarts Draft

Workhorses and horses used for transportation were replaced on a fairly even scale, Mr. Kube said. Workhorses were replaced by tractors and trucks, cars took the place of those horses used for transportation.

The changeover was slowed somewhat when the Amish began moving to the area in the early 1940s, Mr. Kube said. At that time, he added, all the Amish used horses and buggies for transportation and horses and wagons for farm work. They continued to use this type of transportation until they began changing to cars a few years ago, he added.

As the number of horses to be shod decreased, Mr. Kube found it necessary to do different types of work. Now his work covers such areas as repair of tools, sharpening of axes, some metal work, including work with antique metal pieces and making andirons, and the preparation of shoes for horses.

Now, as in earlier days, Mr. Kube orders ready-made shoes he uses. "They're much cheaper that way," he said. The shoes he prepares are usually for the Amish—who shoe their horses themselves. Preparation includes the adding of a rough

metal material to the shoes in several places which will prevent the horse from slipping on asphalt pavement.

His facilities, too, have changed with the times. Probably the most major change is the location of the shop. His present shop, which was built in 1930, replaced an earlier shop that had been burned two years earlier. His former working quarters were located on property adjacent to the newer Stuarts Draft Elementary School. The new shop is across and slightly farther up Main Street.

Part of the furnishings in the shop are those he managed to save from the fire in his first shop. The others are the more modern ones he has purchased since that time. The more up-to-date facilities in his shop include an electric welder and emery wheels. Electricity has been added since the opening of the shop.

Mr. Kube's sideline work now includes the aid he and his wife, Lelia, give to the Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Co., the firehouse of which is located just across Main St. from the Kube home and shop.

Since 1955 Mr. and Mrs. Kube have been taking calls for the fire company and sounding the fire alarm. "The job is simpler now," Mr. Kube said, "since a buzzer has been installed so we can sound the alarm from inside our home."

"After all," he added, "it's kind of hard on a man my age to go out in the middle of the night to sound a fire alarm."