

Imagine this conversation with a Blacksmith working on the Conservancy property.

Good morning younguns. Welcome to the Mount Pleasant blacksmith shop.

Imagine that you have stepped back in time to the year 1750. Let me begin.

My mother back in England (God rest her soul) gave me the name, Alan, and most folks call me Al for short. I work for Mr. Brown who owns this, here, farm and lives in that cabin on the hill. You have to use your imagination but, be assured, there is a log cabin hidden inside that white house.

Now, you may have noticed that I'm wearing a wig. This may be an object of your amusement but I must tell you wearing a wig is the fashion of the day for both men and women. And just b'tween you, me and the gate post, wearing a wig helps me to keep them pesky lice in retreat. Now, this here shirt I'm wearing serves me both day and night. And, if your nose is a'twitch with the redolence of sweat and toil, well, you see, we colonists work very hard and we don't fancy a bath all that much.

But, that's enough about me.

Mr. Thomas Browne (my master's father) came here 58 years ago (in 1692) carrying the title of Patuxent Ranger. He was sent here by Anne Arundel County to survey the land and keep a sharp eye on the Susquehannock Indians that lived here. The Susquehannock were farmers, hunters and fisherman and were mostly civilized in their own right but they had no guns nor iron tools 'cept what they had got from the colonists.

When Capt. John Smith first encountered the Susquehannock on his voyage of discovery up the Chesapeake in 1608, he numbered them at about 7000. The Indians, well, so many of them died from white man's diseases like smallpox, against which they had no resistance nor remedy. On top of that, in 1642, the province of Maryland declared war on them. They had a battle in 1644 and the Susquehannocks won but later on they formed an alliance with Maryland to fight against the Iroquois. It's all very complicated. The few Susquehannock that survived all that moved to New York as the settlers took their lands. I doubt whether any survive to this day.

Getting back to Thomas Browne the Patuxent Ranger, I guess he liked what he saw here in 1692 'cause he bought the land. This is one of several tracts of land the Ranger owned here in Maryland.

It's a fair parcel of land, this. With a clear view in any direction, good soil and water, Mount Pleasant is as fine as any farm in the county, 'cept maybe for the Charles Carroll's Doughoregan (doe-RAE-gun) Manor a few miles down the road. Doughoregan counts for more than 10,000 acres, but that's another story.

Now, this here farm we call Mount Pleasant (did I say that?), it's a might hilly, but the soil is good and Mr. Brown fairly prospers. By the way, you know that this here land is part of Anne Arundel County (you folks know that Howard County didn't come about until 1851).

Here at Mt. Pleasant we tends our gardens and some farm animals but we mostly grow tobacco because it brings such a pretty price at the ElkrIDGE Landing. We harvest the tobacco and hang it on poles in the barn to

dry before we pack it in them big, round barrels we call hogsheads. Then we roll them hogsheads down to the landing where they are loaded on ships bound for England.

But, you know, we colonists are mighty fond of tobacco ourselves. We smokes our pipes and takes our snuff or a chew now and then. You know, Christopher Columbus acquired tobacco on his voyages of discovery in the Caribbean and brought it back to Spain, where Europeans took up the tobacco habits. A colonist named John Rolfe smuggled some tobacco seed to Jamestown where it quickly became a valuable cash crop in the new world.

Now, growing tobacco takes a toll on the land. It fairly wears out the soil, and also causes much of our soil to wash into the Patapsco River when it rains. Because of this, many farmers are switching over to growing other crops, like wheat, which ain't so hard on the soil.

Now, a blacksmith's work is never done here on the farm. I construct all manner of useful things, like nails, door hinges, door handles, pots, pans, plows, wagon and carriage parts, horse shoes, harnesses, hoes, scythes, sickles, barrel hoops, knives, axes, tools and countless other ordinary and useful items. If this ain't enough, you could say that when something breaks here on the farm, I fix it. These iron items are pretty penny to buy if you could find them but you mostly can't, and even if you could the price would be too dear. Iron items mostly have to be brought here from England, and that's a powerful, long way.

One very special tool we make is trade axes. These axes are made special for trading with the Indians, as they have no iron axes of their own but only stone tools.

Now, one blacksmith can't possibly do it all these jobs so we have to specialize. Some blacksmiths are gunsmiths 'cause all they do is make and repair guns. Some are called farriers and they just mostly shoe horses. Some are swordsmiths or armorers who make and repair armor for the soldiers. And some blacksmiths work as shipwrights because they work at the docks making all manner of iron fittings, chains and such for ships.

Some days I have an apprentice or striker to help me here at the forge. His job is to stoke the fire, pump the bellows and help me with the smithing by holding tools or hammering iron and holding some things that are too heavy for me to handle on my own.

I direct your attention to the large, wooden and leather contraption yonder. Some of you may know that that is called a bellows. It is a mechanical device for pumping air into the forge. The air is necessary to make the fire burn hotter. It needs be hot enough to make the iron red hot in order that it can be worked with the hammer and anvil.

That there pot with water is called a slack tub. We need water to cool down the iron or the fire when it gets too hot.

This here big piece of iron is called an anvil, and the square hole is called a hardy hole because a tool called a hardy fits into it. The hardy is used for cutting and shaping pieces of iron.

Now, back in England a man needs apprentice for 7 years before he calls himself a journeyman. Then he goes

off and works a few more years with some other blacksmiths, learning even more about his trade. After all that, he might dare call himself a master blacksmith like myself.

Here in the colonies it ain't so difficult. There are so many jobs for blacksmiths that many men come here just to have a better chance to get ahead and not have to apprentice so long as they would in England.

We're lucky here in Maryland to have all it is we need to make our own iron. There's a fair parcel of iron ore right here and lots of trees to make charcoal. Making charcoal from wood is the Collier's job. We use the charcoal to smelt the iron and to stoke the forge. Charcoal burns hotter than wood and it don't smoke near so much.

What we have here in the forge is mineral coal from the ground. It can be used instead of charcoal and is better in some ways. There ain't many coal mines here in the colonies in 1750, so, we may or may not have access to it. The coal needs to be burned for a time in the forge before it turns to coke, which is pretty near pure carbon. Coke burns hotter than coal, and it is coke that we use to forge the iron.

When we heat the iron the color changes from black (when it's cold) to red to orange to yellow to white. When it gets to white hot its actually burning and that's too hot.

Now, in 1719 Maryland passed a law in order to foster the industry of iron making. If a man agreed to build a furnace he would be granted 100 acres of forest land along a stream for that purpose and his workers are exempt from working on the roads. After this, many iron furnaces sprang up in Maryland, mostly around the Patapsco River near Baltimore but also in other parts of the state. Elkridge Furnace is one such established this year (in 1750). These furnaces produce tons of bar iron and pig iron for our own use and much of it is shipped to England and Scotland. Maryland iron is high quality and is keenly sought after.

Bar iron or wrought iron can be worked to a fair-thee-well and it does not rust too badly. The money thus obtained from the iron and tobacco we produce allows us Colonists to purchase goods we need from England. Still, we would rather make our own finished iron goods here when we can.

Now, I hear that Parliament (back in England) this year passed the Iron Act. It seems they want to have the iron from the colonies but they don't want us to use our own iron to make our own goods. I dare say this will not go over well here in the colonies.

The barn you see 'cross the way is not here in my time. It were built at a later time, about 1790 on another farm in the county, and later moved here in your time.

With that I'll bid you good day and leave you with some bits of sage, blacksmith advice. Always strike while the iron is hot, and, don't keep too many irons in the fire. Don't just forge a bargain, strike a deal.

~ *Written by Al Burgoon*