

## A BLACKSMITH'S LEDGERS, 1861-1883

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**I**N Cameron County, Pennsylvania, from 1861 until 1883, a blacksmith by the name of Josiah Fink kept an accounting of his economic activities, specifically a record of that which was due him and that for which he owed. To say the least, these ledgers were kept in a prosaic manner; little of the man himself shows through. For that reason, a simple survey of the types of activity involved and of the amounts of goods and money described was considered to be the proper first step.

In the two volumes which constitute the record,<sup>1</sup> entries for the five-year period 1879-1883 are few in number, amounting to \$257.45 out of a grand income total for the whole time of \$32,751.09. His liabilities for the five years amounted to \$272.48 out of a total of \$29,441.45 in the entire period. As can be noted, Fink cleared—at least on his books — the sum of \$3309.64 in slightly over two decades. Therefore, his average yearly net income was approximately \$143.89. This figure, however, should be viewed with some reservation, for Fink was apparently quite inactive during the years 1868-1869, or at the least, he neglected to enter pertinent items during that two-year period. The greater part of the ledgers covers about sixteen years. There is internal evidence to show that an earlier ledger was in existence, but at the present time it cannot be located.

The blacksmith's income was derived from some thirteen sources: cash, including commercial paper; sale of land; services which he rendered; labor which he performed; food and the following items which he sold; clothing and personal effects; livestock and farm products; medicine; tools and implements; household items; raw or semi-worked materials; miscellaneous items; and unknown items. This last-named category had its origin in a penmanship that was difficult at times, to put it mildly. Forty-one per cent of his total

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<sup>1</sup> These ledgers are now in the possession of the author.

income came in the form of cash, while he listed various forms of labor as being responsible for twenty-nine per cent. Tools provided fifteen per cent. All the other categories made up fifteen per cent.

Fink's liabilities fell into fewer divisions: cash; services rendered for him; labor performed for him; food which he bought; also purchased were livestock and farm products; materials; tools and implements; miscellaneous items; and unknown items. Of the total, sixty-five per cent was paid out in the form of cash, fourteen per cent in materials, and nine per cent in labor charges. Twelve per cent came from all the other categories.

This blacksmith was involved apparently in a money economy; at least, money was used as a scale by which various economic activities were measured. In both the areas of credits and debits, such terms as "bills" and "orders" were used. These may or may not indicate that cash actually changed hands; it may as easily indicate that notes were kept to an agreed-upon scale and that payments were made in other ways. In reality, Fink paid out \$4171.80 identified as cash, while he accepted \$10,404.08. This would tend to show that a skilled worker in an agricultural community was in a quite favorable position considering the proposition that much of the United States in an economic sense was operating on a cash basis. Fink was in a business which would require others to come to him, and it would be surprising if he did not take advantage of it. A word of caution might be uttered here. There is some reason to believe that Fink was not consistent in the way he entered his transactions. For instance, he may have mentioned that horseshoes changed hands and then put down a money amount opposite the entry. This sort of thing may or may not have been a cash sale; there is no good way of determining just what did happen in many cases.

### *Income Particulars*

As has been seen, Fink's labor directly accounted for twenty-nine per cent of his income. A most interesting aspect of his work activity, however, was its range, falling into at least these categories: smith work; hauling work; agricultural work; transportation work, *i.e.*, on equipment associated with it; shoe and boot repair; and miscellaneous labor. Of these, the first, labor done as a smith, loomed largest.

Identifiable operations specified in the accounts make the point

that a nineteenth century blacksmith had many demands placed upon him. He was far more than a farrier, being involved in the repair, creation, or modification of the items used in the agricultural and lumbering industries of the area. These activities are listed in Appendix A.<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of the total labor income, it is apparent that making tools, etc., was only a small part of the whole. Of a labor income of \$9632.36, just \$210.12 was listed as being gained from making things. (See Appendix B.) However, it is possible that many of the tools, implements, and other articles which were listed only as being sold by Fink were also made by him. (See Appendix C for a list of these tools.) Many of the articles, for example, wagon tires, corn cutters, and crowbars, could have been made easily by any competent smith, while that is not the case with others in the list. Cotton lap robes probably would be outside the province of this man. Similarly, it is doubtful that Fink did much harness-making. Probably it would be accurate to say that Fink's establishment served as a regional center, a place where a great many items could be obtained. For instance, Fink sold meat and other food products, as well as clothing, household goods, and medicines. (See Appendices D, E and F.) From the terms in which the accounts were written, it is impossible to determine whether Fink made most of the items, or whether he served as a middleman, picking up and then selling those articles which he thought might find some acceptance in the community market. He may well have utilized the services of those in his family or in his employ. As an example, he charged for making a shirt, pants, and possibly a suit. All in all, it is difficult to say exactly how much labor expenditure is covered in those income categories not directly definable as involving personal, creative work.

Some clue to the above might be found in a consideration of Fink's debts, for they often closely parallel his credits. For instance, he received food, clothing, agricultural products, tools, household goods, clothing, and miscellaneous items. There is no appreciable difference between his credits and debts, at least in the major categories. About the most that can be said about Fink's income was that he took in more than he paid out or was obligated for. He, for instance, both bought and sold food, but his debts in this respect

<sup>2</sup> In an effort to keep the body of the paper from becoming cluttered, I have put various lists which tend to show the variety of Fink's operations into appendices.

were only \$563.59, while his credits amounted to \$1751.82.

Throughout the two volumes which make up the account, Fink entered several items which are of interest in themselves. In 1866, he charged five dollars for "Drawing one Load of men to the poals." Political life has remained consistent in some respects at least. In another case or two, Fink indicated terms of labor which might well raise a question. In 1862, the following statement was written:

Jacob H Carr  
Commence Work one  
the 24 Day of  
September 1862  
Fore the term of  
three years at five  
Dollars per month per  
two years and the third  
year Eight Dollars per month

This occurred at a time when the blacksmith was charging five or six dollars for shoeing a team. Nothing shows the labor which Carr was to perform, but on the face of it, it is not surprising to find that he quit in August, 1863. Was this a general condition of labor in north-central Pennsylvania at the time?

In summation, perhaps these few statements may be made about Fink's account. The material is presented prosaically, *e.g.*, no hint is ever given that the Civil War was in progress; comparative work should prove to be fruitful; there is a suggestion here of a transitional case wherein a skilled worker turned entrepreneur. A study of this phenomenon in Pennsylvania should prove instructive and rewarding.

## APPENDIX A

### SMITH WORK PERFORMED BY FINK

Making	Laying and steeling	Straightening
Repairing	Drilling	Turning
Welding	Dressing	Shoeing
Riveting	Heading	Setting shoes
Splicing	Threading	Setting and toeing
Ironing	Punching	Sharpening and setting
Banding	Setting (other than shoes)	Finding and setting shoes
Binding	Cutting (other than shoes)	Finding shoes
Plating	Sharpening (other than shoes)	Tightening shoes
Ringing	Tempering	Toeing shoes
Strapping	Breaking	Sharpening shoes
Steeling		Pointing
Laying		
Laying and sharpening		

## APPENDIX B

### ARTICLES MADE BY FINK

**AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS**

Corn cutters	Plow shovel	Drag teeth
Hilling hoes	Plow clevis	

**LUMBERING AND CARPENTRY TOOLS**

Lever	Drill bit	Spear
Canthook	Wedges	Dogs
Drawknife	Punch	Saw irons
Shingle knife	Cold chisel	Shingle rack irons
Frow	Oar stems	Shingle mill rods
Drill	Lever maul	

**MASON'S TOOLS**

Stone wedge	Stone hook
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**TRANSPORTATION ITEMS**

Sled irons	Buggy brace	Spring leaf
Whiffletree	Wagon tires	
Whiffletree irons	Spreaders	

**MISCELLANEOUS ARTICLES**

Post digger	Hooks and links	Rough lock
Pick end	Bolts	Trap grabs
Engine scraper	Eye bolts	Forged grabs
Swages	King bolts	Hinges
Ice breakers	Washers	Barn door straps
Chain	Rods	Trailing bars
Butt chain	Machine rods	Angle iron
Bunk chain	Spikes	Suit [?]
Wrapper chain	Slide spikes	Pants
Spread chain	Boiler irons	Shirt
Hook	Brace	Wrench
Claw hooks	Band	

## APPENDIX C

### TOOLS AND IMPLEMENTS SOLD BY FINK

**AGRICULTURAL TOOLS**

Hoe	Grubbers	Drag glibs [sic]
Corn cutter	Plow shoe	
Straw steel	Dung fork	

**LUMBERING, CARPENTRY TOOLS**

Frow	Saw handle	Feathers and wedges
Spuds	Saw set	Plugs and feathers
Levers	Brace bit	Chisels
Canthooks	Reamer and Countersink	Screwdrivers
Pikes	Planes	Knife
Pikes, poles, rings	Crowbar	Knife blade
Rafting auger and crank	Lash poles	File
Handspike	Oar blades	Hammer
Axes	Lining and timber lines	Punch
Broadaxe	Log rule	Drill
Ax handle	Canthook steel	Wedges
Crosscut saw	Spoon	Shingle saw rake

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS**

Gun	Wheelbarrow
Winder	Grindstone
Wrench	Clinch cutter
Scraper	Pick
Scraper bale	Pickiron

Barrel lifter  
Bell  
Whetstone

**BLACKSMITH TOOLS**

Bellows  
Horse rasp

Ox shoes  
Horse shoes

**TRANSPORTATION ITEMS**

Fly nets	Bridle bit
Horse blankets	Reach
Yoke	Rubirons
Neck yoke	Martingales
Sled	Wagon axletree
Sled shoes	Wagon step
Sled runner	Wagon box
Sled tongue gribe [sic]	Wagon guard
Sled tompkin [sic]	Wagon brake
Buggy post	Wagon lock
Buggy Knee	Wagon whip
Holdback	

Wagon tire  
Cock eye  
Curry comb and brush  
Cotton lap robe  
Neck lines  
Stirrups  
Spokes  
Whiffletree  
Spreaders  
Double harness  
Harness buckle

**TOOL AND IMPLEMENT PARTS**

Bolts	Swivels
Links	Washers
Hooks	Braces
Clips	Gang tees
Nails	Tees, rings, links
Rivets	Swivels and hooks
Hasp	Hooks and links
Clasp	Clips and stocks
Bands	Cogs
Hoops	Sockets
Straps	Keys
Rings	Handles
Pins	Crank
Plates	Chains
Cold shuts	Stocks
Shackles	Rope
Wood screws	Cable
Staples	Grabs
Clevis	Dog
Hinges	Corks
Spikes	Cork sets

Rod  
Bar  
Bur  
Tong  
Shear  
Blocks  
Tackle block wheels  
Spring  
Leaf  
Irons  
Steelyards  
Gun cylinder  
Toes  
Water pipe  
Mill liners  
Bell clappers  
Pipe box  
Sidestrap eye  
Bail  
Pail ear

**APPENDIX D****FOOD PRODUCTS**

Potatoes	Syrup
Flour	Molasses
Cornmeal	Apples
Pork	Dried apples
Beef	Raisins
Mutton	Sauerkraut
Fish	Pickles
Venison	Onions
Pepper	Beans
Salt	Squash
Butter	Whiskey

Rutabagas [agricultural  
feed?]  
Turnips [agricultural  
feed?]  
Radishes  
Candy  
Crackers  
Saleratus  
Cabbage  
Coffee  
Tea

APPENDIX E  
HOUSEHOLD GOODS

Stove	Easy chair	Globe
Stovepipe	Clock	Candles
Pipe damper	Bedstead	Candlewick
Stove lid holder	Table	Candlestick
Stove poker	Haps	Matches
Iron stove step	Ticks	Broom
Iron spinning wheel	Bolster	Dishes
Sewing machine	Sheets	Soap
Chairs	Lamp	

APPENDIX F  
CLOTHING, PERSONAL EFFECTS

Pants	Undershirts	Mittens
Vest	Drawers	Hats
Overalls	Skirt	Cologne
Coat	Suspenders	"Perfumery"
Overcoat	Shirts	Shaving soap
Suit	Collars	Brush
Shoes	Collar buttons	Razor
Boots	Necktie	Razor strop
Slippers	Sleeveholders	Watch and chain
Gum shoes	Handkerchiefs	Trunk
Socks	Night shirts	Cloth or material
Gaiters	Night coat	Thread
Boot taps	Gloves	Yarn