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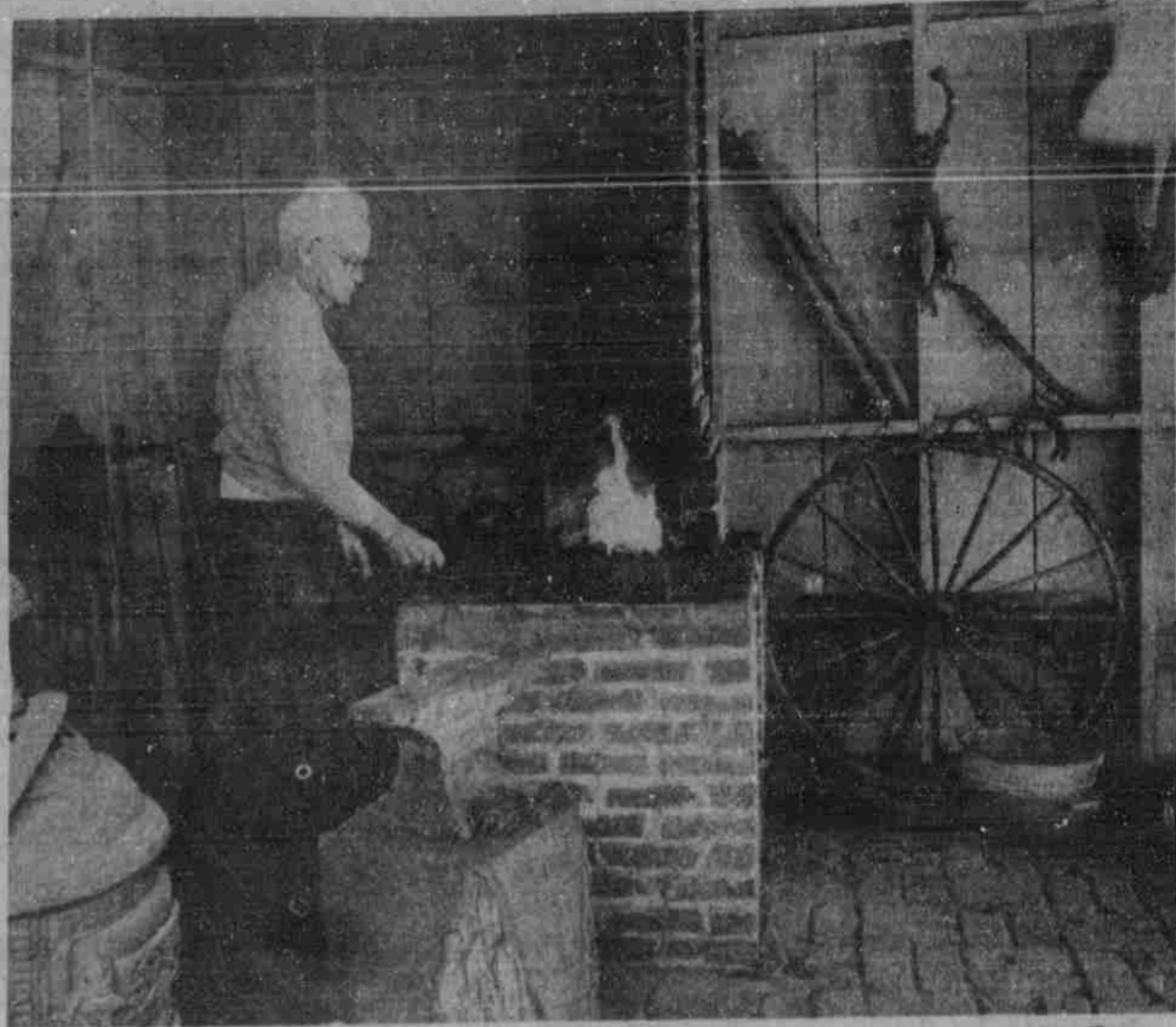
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Al Jorgensen working in the blacksmith shop at the Lincoln Children's Zoo.

**Blacksmithing: still a ring to it**

Under the spreading elm trees stand one of Lincoln's two blacksmith shops in a backyard shed at Al Jorgensen's garage.

The 79-year-old blacksmith said he spends more time at the Children's Zoo blacksmith shop than he does at his home shop.

At the zoo's blacksmith shop, Jorgensen forms children's rings out of horseshoe nails. He said he cannot do much heavy blacksmith work, such as welding, because of his bad back.

Jorgensen, who has several clippings from local newspapers about himself and a birthday card from former President Richard Nixon, said in the age of automobiles some blacksmiths may double as mechanics. He added that rural blacksmiths are mostly employed in rural areas to make metal stands for planters. He said blacksmiths used to sharpen plow lays, but with modern plows blacksmiths are not needed for plow upkeep.

**Rather have been a doctor**

Jorgensen, who has been a blacksmith since 1909, said he would have rather become a doctor. He said he came from a large family, however, and had to go to work at age 14.

His first job was working at a dairy, but he became interested in blacksmithing when he passed the blacksmith shop

on his way to the dairy.

"I went in the blacksmith shop out of curiosity, like many people did in those days when they heard the ringing of the anvil," Jorgensen said. "The owner of the shop saw that I was a big kid and asked me to go to work," he said.

Blacksmiths use many different kinds of tongs to hold objects to be welded, Jorgensen said.

Each job is different, and all sets of tongs are made by the blacksmith because he knows which set is best for a particular job," he said.

**Blacksmith coal**

Even blacksmith coal was different from the kind of coal that was used to heat houses, Jorgensen said. He said blacksmith coal is free of sulphur, which makes welding easier. Coal with sulfur makes iron slippery and hard to work with, Jorgensen said.

Blacksmith coal, like a blacksmith, is hard to find now, he said, but he said he has enough blacksmith coal to last him.

He said there are about 50 blacksmiths in Nebraska who participated in a blacksmith festival last year at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Today's blacksmiths, if they belong to a union, belong to a machinists' union, he said.

There is only one young Brownville man he knows, who has become a blacksmith, Jorgensen said.

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