



Heritage NL

***Living History Meets
Social Enterprise:
The Green Family Forge***

Living Heritage Economy

CASE STUDY 006 • HERITAGE NL • AUGUST 2020

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When the last of the Green family approached the Trinity Historical Society in the 1990s about opening her family's shuttered forge, closed for 40 years, as a museum exhibit, she didn't imagine that it would be a working forge once again. Today, the Green Family Forge is a designated Registered Heritage Structure which operates both as a living history museum and a fully-operational forge.

The Green family were blacksmiths in Trinity, Trinity Bay, since the 1700s. John James Green of Trinity west erected the current building around the turn of the twentieth century to replace an older forge. It is unusual because of its size, large enough to have two fires. Though people often associate forges with agricultural tools, the Green Family Forge also supplied metal parts, including anchors, for the fishing industry in Trinity. When it closed its doors in 1955, all the blacksmith's tools, some of them homemade, were left inside and remained untouched until the forge reopened as a museum in 1991.

Ada (Green) Nemeč approached the Historical Society in the early 90s. The building has been closed up since 1955 when her father passed away. She was a dedicated member of our Historical Society so she approached and said about possibly turning it into a blacksmith museum. All the tools of the trade had been left there from the generations of the Greens as blacksmiths. That's when it took off, basically. They decided to apply and get some funding to have the building restored, to open its doors just as a museum first and foremost. - Jim Miller, Trinity Historical Society.

The decision to operate the forge as a living history museum meant finding a blacksmith to work out of the forge during the tourism season. Being able to employ a blacksmith meant the forge had to offer blacksmith training.

Someone brought it up around the table about possibly bringing it back to life, to operate as a living history museum. So, we found a blacksmith in St. John's, Glen Parnell, and he came out and did a basic 6 week blacksmithing course. And then it just took off from that. The guy that did it first as our blacksmith, Gilbert Hiscock, he'd done that program and he stayed with us for the first couple of years and was just doing basic letter openers and a couple of different coat hooks. And then he found another job year round, and he left us, but he offered the basic blacksmithing course, and that's when Wade Ivany took that course in 2001. Wade became our blacksmith and has been with us ever since. And Wade took it and ran with it. - Jim Miller

Current blacksmith Wade Ivany and the Society transformed the forge from a static exhibit into a

living history museum based on a social enterprise model. The forge was able to hire an apprentice blacksmith, Devin Hookey. Together, the two smiths create objects to sell in their gift shop and give tours through the season.

16 years ago, I was a student in high school here. I spent two summers here, just talking to the people, and when Wade would skip off to lunch I would sneak on the fire and I'd turn out a couple small pieces. Nothing fancy. Me? I got the bug then. I loved what I did then, and I didn't do a whole lot. I got all my training from Wade, here. Every lick. I had ideas and such, but I was pretty green when I came here. And I'm still being taught. Every day I'm learning something new. - Devin Hookey, apprentice blacksmith

Today, as a member of the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Green Family Forge makes and sells letter openers, candle holders, fireplace pokers and more with the help of apprentice blacksmith Devin Hookey. These sales help to keep the forge operational.



In the last ten years, it has fallen into the Historical Society as the social enterprise arm of our organization. When we first started, the season would be pretty much from June until September, shortly after Labour Day, with demonstrations and sales. We became a member of the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador and the first craft fair that I went to was in 2005 or 2006 with some of our product which was very limited at that point: letter openers and coat hooks. We were the only game in town that was doing blacksmithing. We had a fantastic craft fair. I think that's when our board realised that there was potential for more.

- JIM MILLER

For the group, keeping the fires going is not about the money. It is about passing on valuable traditional skills which have been in decline for half a century.

Those living history skills of the trades are very important to us overall for our operations and will be, I think, going into the future. That seems to be the market now where visitors are wanting to see those things demonstrated and, even more so, wanting to take part. – Jim Miller

Using the forge as a model, the Historical Society expanded to include a cooperage, training a heritage carpenter to work out of a building which includes a craft shop, selling both items from the cooperage and from the forge. They also hope one day to expand and safeguard and practice other heritage skills.

Our mandate in the 60s was basically preservation of built heritage and has since expanded to preservation of those traditional skills which has really become important to us, especially since the blacksmith shop opened. And then we identified the cooperage. We actually have a collection of shoe cobbler tools that, in a long term plan that was put in place, was identified as a possibility of the next step to go into, was identifying a spot to do shoe cobbling. And another thing that was identified was tinsmithing. That was another trade in Trinity that has since gone, but we do have some tinsmithing items at the forge. – Jim Miller

The Green Family Forge is open from April to November and is one of the must-see tourist attractions in the Trinity area. Visitors are encouraged to stop by and watch a demonstration by the blacksmiths working to keep this tradition alive.

Every year we get more and more people, especially young people saying “Oh jeez, I’d like to get into this.” There’s a lot of people making their own backyard forges and just starting to set up things. They want to be taught. There’s always someone wanting some teaching or information on how to do this or how to make tools. So, it is becoming more popular.

– DEVIN HOOKEY, Apprentice Blacksmith



How to find the Green Family Forge:

41 West Street, Trinity, NL, A0C 2S0 www.trinityhistoricalsociety.com/green_family_forge.html

View or purchase handcrafted Green Family Forge products online: www.trinityhistoricalsociety.com/store/index.php



[/pages/category/Nonprofit-Organization/Green-Family-Forge-332813906740743/](https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Nonprofit-Organization/Green-Family-Forge-332813906740743/)



Prepared by Katie Crane and Dale Gilbert Jarvis of Heritage NL, as part of a series of case studies examining the links between living heritage, traditionality, entrepreneurship, and community economic development in Newfoundland and Labrador.

For more information, email ich@heritagenl.ca or phone 1-888-739-1892.

All photos courtesy of Heritage NL/Dale Jarvis except the archival image courtesy of Green Family Forge and the Trinity Historical Society.

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