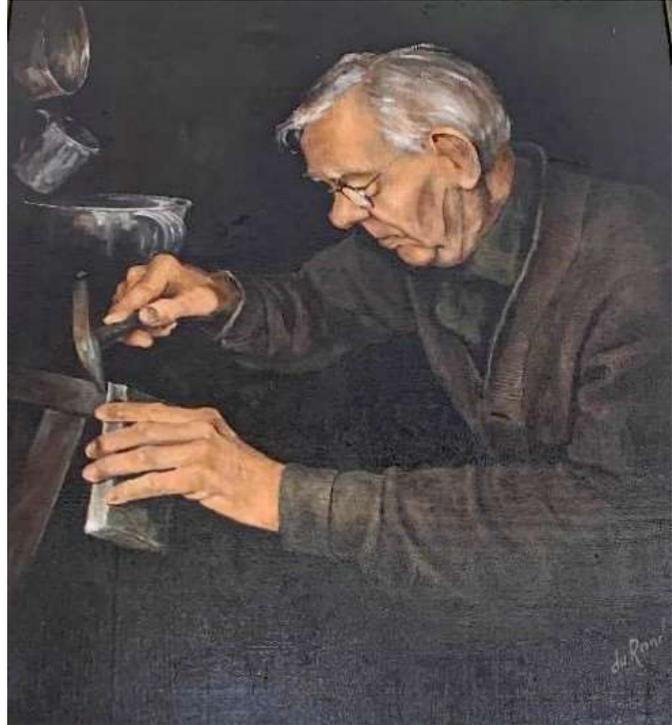


John Forshee

1883 – 1974

John Forshee was most likely the last practicing tinsmith in this region of New York State. Born in 1883 in Willet, he moved to Cincinnatus and lived there most of his life. Most of his early life was spent as a tinsmith. He learned the trade from his father, Walter Forshee, and became well known for his work. He was at least a third generation tinsmith because he was using his own grandfather's patented tinsmithing tools. Interestingly, he stopped working as a tinsmith in his late thirties and picked up the craft again in his mid-eighties. John was known for his candle molds,



drinking cups, cookie and doughnut cutters, pans, pails and maple syrup cans but is known to have dabbled in items as diverse as a candelabra and thimbles. John used his mind to design his wares and his hands to create the items. His pieces are now treated as works of art and highly collectible. After his death in 1974, his shop remained as it was in Cincinnatus. In 1975, John's inherited tin-making tools were moved to Cooperstown and many of them are currently on display in the tinsmithing section of the Main Barn at the Farmer's Museum.



Forshee worked in a dark basement and used tools over a hundred years old to craft tin goods. These crafted tin wares were not only attractive, but they were also quite versatile. In 1973 Jack and Helen Ofield of New Pacific Productions filmed tinsmith John Forshee for a PBS Special-of-the-Week, "Inheritance." The segment on John Forshee can be found on YouTube under the title "Tinker: John Forshee."

When the film was made, Forshee was 89 years old. He passed away a year later. He took his knowledge as a tinsmith with him and with his death came the end of the tinsmith craft in Central New York State. John was a craftsman in the truest sense of the word - his heart, his mind and his hands were dedicated to preserving and perpetuating an ancient craft that has deep roots in the American economy. When the nation was young, tinsmiths like John Forshee were once common in every community. Today, the trade is largely relegated to museums and history books. Forshee served his community as the sole ambassador of a dying art form, and crafted items with his hands that were both artisanal in beauty and utilitarian in function.

Dec.



John Forshee and his father were tinsmiths in Willet long before John moved to Cincinnatus. Representative pieces of John's work, along with his tools, are part of Cooperstown's Farmers' Museum Collection, and CAHS secured his position in the Cortland County Hall of Fame in 2021. The photo of John working was taken by filmmaker Jack O'Field when he was gathering footage for his PBS documentary in the late 1970s.



John's home on Taylor Ave./Rte. 26 is presently owned by Tim and Melanie Campbell.

Credite: Article by Sharon Pesesky, Painting by Earl Durand

Image above will appear in the Cincinnatus Area Historical Society's 2022 Calendar