



N.J.B.A. Newsletter

NJBA Volume 11, Issue 2 08/01/06

Editors Soapbox

Hot. I don't know about you but I've been hot. I installed 120 feet of railing the other day when it was 100 degrees and it was hot! I'm looking forward to fall already. A good break would be to stop working or running around and come out to a meet. Some of our recent events have lacked for attendance, a lot of work goes into some of these events so carpool or whatever to cut expenses, bring some stuff for the iron in the hat and your self to the next meet. The next meet is at the Red Mill Museum in Clinton, NJ with a picnic and tool sale/swap and there are some great looking events coming up after that. So mark your calendars and come out and learn some new techniques, ideas and have some fun.

Upcoming events for 2006

Get you calendars out and mark these events down. Please bookmark our web site and check for meet information. Remember most of our meets have an "Iron in the Hat" drawing, so be sure to bring something.

August 20th, 10 AM—4 PM

NJBA meet/ picnic at the Red Mill more information on this page and on page 3.

September 15—17

Old Time Engine show at Washington Crossing, Information on page 5.

Oct. 1st , Walnford Day at Walnford Park info on page 5

October 7th Pig Roast at Peters Valley. Information on page 4.

October 14th

Demonstration by Johnathan Nedbor at Marshall Bienstock's Shop. Information in next newsletter.

December 3rd

Holiday Party at Marshalls home in Howell. Information in next newsletter.

Red Mill Museum in Clinton, New Jersey

ANNUAL HAMMER-IN/ TOOL SWAP / NJBA PICNIC

Sunday, August 20, 2005, 10 am till 4 pm

Red Mill Museum Village

56 Main Street

Clinton, NJ 08809

Contact: Bob Bozzay, Eric Cuper, The Museum at (908) 735-4101

See invite letter on page 3!

Activities will include demonstrations, the tailgate tool sale, live music, iron in the hat and the NJBA members picnic! In addition to previous years activities, we are inviting all Smiths who wish to exhibit/sell their work and wares to participate. NJBA members or anyone wishing to tailgate, demonstrate or exhibit, will be provided free admission with pre-registration, general admission of \$8 for the public.

Participants may pre-register by calling the museum at (908) 735-4101 Bring tools, anvils, or any smithing related items and collectibles, bring your checkbooks, bring your appetites!

Directions;

Take exit 15 on I-78 onto old route 22 going North (Routes 513 and 173), make a left onto main street before bridge. Museum straight ahead.



New Jersey Blacksmiths Newsletter

The NJBA Web Site!

The NJBA Web Site is up and running
at:
<http://njba.abana-chapter.com/>

The Newsletter is at:

[http://
members.bellatlantic.net/
~vze25jcc/index.htm](http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze25jcc/index.htm)

Official NJBA Address

**NJBA
P.O. Box 224
Farmingdale, NJ
07727-9998**

Rather than use room in the newsletter,
All correspondence between
ABANA and NJBA is now being posted
on the NJBA web site.
If you cannot access it there, contact me
and I will send you copies

NJBA Board of Directors

Red Mill Museum Village

56 Main Street, Clinton, NJ 08809

PRESS RELEASE

For Information contact:
Elizabeth Cole, Curator of Education
908-735-4101 ext.102

RED MILL MUSEUM TO HOST ANNUAL HAMMER IN AND TOOL SWAP

CLINTON, NJ—The Red Mill Museum Village is pleased to announce its annual Hammer In and Tool Swap on Sunday, August 20th from 10-4pm, rain or shine.

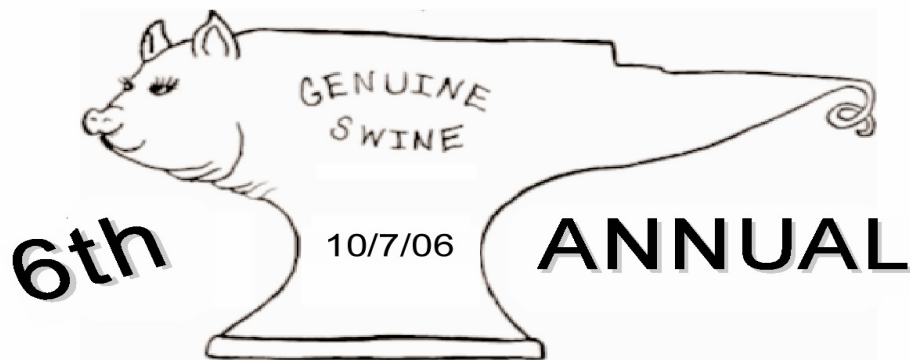
Hosted by the NJ Blacksmith Association and our own resident blacksmith Bob Bozzay, the day's activities will center at the Museum's Blacksmith Shop.

Local Blacksmiths and the New Jersey Blacksmiths Association members will be on hand to demonstrate and sell their work. Tool dealers and collectors are invited to tailgate, sell and swap their smithing tools and accessories. We are currently registering blacksmiths and tool collectors. Among the items to be found will be anvils, blowers, forges, vises, hammers, and tongs. Should anyone have a "what is it" cluttering up the garage, bring it along and we will be glad to identify it for you.

Admission for the day's activities is \$8 for adults, \$6 for seniors, and \$5 for children (6-12). Free for children under 6, museum members and for NJBA members. Included in the price is admission to the Museum's historic buildings and exhibits. The Red Mill Museum Village is located at 56 Main Street in Clinton, NJ. For more information, or to register call the Museum at (908) 735-4101.

Come join the fun Saturday, October 7th 2006!!!

PETERS VALLEY BLACKSMITHING'S



PIG IRON FEST

IRON SMELT: OCT. 7 - 9

(CONTINUES THROUGH THE PIG IRON FEST)

The first 30, PRE-REGISTERED Smelt attendees (at \$250/per person) will participate with the team in building and firing a small, clay bloomery furnace throughout the weekend. Food, campus lodging and admission to the Pig Iron Fest will be provided for these 30 attendees.

The GENERAL PUBLIC is invited to attend the Pig Iron Fest & any Smelt activities (non participatory) for \$30/day per person. Check our website for a complete list of the weekend's activities.

****Please note that the "Iron Smelt" and "Pig Iron Fest" are separate events, overlapping on Saturday.*

Festivities begin at 1:00pm:

Pig Roast, Burgers,
Hot Dogs, Salads,
Sodas, Beer,
Live Music &
Demonstrations!!!

Auction:

Artwork, Tools & More!!

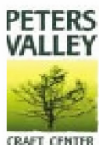
Raffle: 200lb 1890's Trenton
Farriers Anvil

\$30/person

kids under 12 FREE!

Limited housing available.
Preregistration is encouraged.

Rain or shine!



www.petersvalley.org (973)948-5200



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Old Time Engine Show September 15th, 16th, and 17th

NJBA will again be at the Delaware Valley Old Time Power and Equipment Association's "Days of the Past" Engine Show at Washington Crossing State Park, in Titusville, New Jersey. Come on out and bring the family, there are hay rides for the kids, a metal heads flea market, and a lot to see. We will have a couple of forges going so bring a hammer, also if you have some items for sale we will have a table out. Come on out and join the fun. For more information check out their web site <http://daysofthepast.com/>

Directions:

The Engine Show is located in Washington Crossing State Park off of Rt. 29 (River Rd.) South of Lambertville and North of Trenton signs are posted to show the way.

October Meet at Walnford Park

We will be demonstrating and holding a membership meeting at Walnford Park on October 1st. Walnford is also known as Crosswicks Creek Park and is in Upper Freehold, N.J

Set-up starts 8:30-9:00, the event is 10:00 - 5:00. We will have the trailer there, so come down and do a little forging and meet with others in the group while enjoying the park and the day. . Jeff Morelli will be the contact person and coordinator. This will a "bring your own lunch" event. We will pick up coffee and donuts for the morning. There are places nearby if folks want to pick something up for lunch.

The restored gristmill will be running, and there will be other exhibits, too. NJBA's trailer will be there with our fly and forges but feel free to bring your own if you would like. I do not believe we are encouraged to sell our wares but they sure can be on display, so bring some of your work to put on the table (along with your business card.)

Historic Walnford is the 36 acre Historic District at the heart of Crosswick Creek Park. This country estate and former mill village provides a window to view more than a century of social, technological,

and environmental history in Western Monmouth County. The site includes a large home built for the Waln Family in 1774, an 1879 Carriage House, and assorted outbuildings and farm structures. Much of the site's interpretation is connected to the newly restored and operating late 19th century Gristmill.

Directions

NJ Turnpike to Exit 7A, (I-195 east). Follow I-195 to Exit 8 (Allentown, Rt. 524/539). Turn South onto Rt. 539 through Allentown (Rt. 539 requires a left turn where it splits from Rt. 524). Follow Rt. 539 to Holmes Mill Rd. Turn right. Follow to Walnford Rd. Turn right and follow 1 mile to Park.

Rt. 9 to Freehold (West Main Street/Rt. 537 east exit). Northbound, turn left at exit; southbound, turn right at exit. Follow Rt. 537 west to Rt. 539. Turn right onto Rt. 539 west. Follow Rt. 539 west to Burlington Path. Turn left; follow to Holmes Mill Rd. Turn right; follow to Walnford Rd. Turn left and follow 1 mile to park.

Peters Valley Sixth Annual Pig Roast and Fund Raiser

On October 7th Peters Valley will hold its sixth annual Pig roast and fund raiser. Please bring or send pieces to donate to the auction. The cost for the day is \$30 with children under 12 free. For more information please call the main office at (973) 948-5200.

Directions to Peters Valley;
Peters Valley Craft Education Center is located at 19 Kuhn Road. in Layton (Sussex Co.). NJ 07851. (Phone: 201-948-5200).

From Interstate Route 80 West:

Take Exit 34B to NJ Route 15 North. to US Route 206 North. Left onto NJ Route 560 West. Go through the blinking light in the center of Layton. onto NJ Route 640: go about 2 miles and turn right onto NJ Route 615. Go approximately one mile.

From US Route 209 (on the west bank of the Delaware River in Pennsylvania): Take PA Route 739 South across the Dingmans Ferry Bridge. Take the first right at sign to Peters Valley. Go two miles.

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October Meet With Jonathan Nedbor at Marshalls Farm

Marshall Bienstock will be hosting a meet at his shop in Howell NJ. on the 14th of October and it will feature Johnathan Nedbor as Demonstrator. Jonathan is an experienced teacher, demonstrator and Current President of the Northeast Blacksmiths. I have know Jonathan for quite a few years and have seen him demonstrate and he is informative, experienced and answers questions well. He demonstrated a few years ago at Tim Millers Shop in Long Island and it was a great success and learning experience, L. Brown Editor

Tentative schedule

8:30 - 9:30 A.M. Arrive at Marshall's shop

9:30 - 12:00 Demo

12 - 3:00 P.M. Move to Josh Kavett's for lunch, IITH, Museum Tour

3 - 5:00 P.M. Demo/Discussion Session at Marshalls

Mark your calendars and get out for this meet!

Directions to Marshalls Farm;

Take any N-S route to Route I-195 , to Route 9, travel North a few miles to Casino Drive. Marshall's farm is at 663 Casino Dr. Approximately 1/4 mile east of Route 9, on the right. Marshall can be reached at his shop at (732) 780-0871.

NJBA Holiday Party!

The holiday party is to be held on December 3th at Jan and Marshall's house. Many thanks again, to Marshal and Jan for opening their home to us in the holiday season. Members are asked to also bring various trivets, candle holders, or other holiday items they are making to the party. Despite the emphasis on blacksmithing, members are encouraged to bring their families.

More information in the next newsletter!

Directions to Marshalls' Home:

Marshall and Jan's "cabin" is not on Marshall's farm, but about 3 miles east of it on the same road. Casino Drive is just off Rt. 9, about 3.5 miles north of interstate I. 195 (exit 28). and about 4 miles south of Rt. 33. Either of these routes can be easily

reached from the major north-south highways including the Garden State Parkway, the NJ Turnpike. 1-295, Rt. 18 or Rt. 34. From Rt. 9 northbound. make a right onto Casino Dr.; southbound. take the jug handle to make a left onto Casino Dr. Continue past Marshalls' Farm to #301 Casino Dr., Howell, N.J.

(ph# 732-938-6577) jlfmib@optonline.net

Meets outside of NJBA

MASA Meet

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

September 9 and 10, 2006

The Mid-Atlantic Smiths Association annual fall event gets a new name and moves to a new location. The date stays the same - first full weekend after Labor Day.

What used to be called the MASA WROUGHT IRON CONFERENCE held in Dover, Delaware, is now the MASA Metalworking Conference to be held on the grounds of the Tuckahoe Gas and Steam Association, located on Rt 50 just North of Easton MD, on the Eastern Shore.

Glenn Horr and Dan Boone will be the featured demonstrators. Demos start at 9am both days. Simple breakfast fare in the morning and hot dogs, hamburgers, etc will be available for lunch on Saturday and Sunday. Saturday night there will be a catered dinner for \$12.(Rumor has it, these are the same folks that supply the food for the GICHNER Memorial Hammer In.)

Lots of room for TAILGATING!! Iron-In-The-Hat on Saturday!!!

Camping will be available Saturday night. Warning: Don't plan to arrive on Friday night. 8 Sept is the fall Tractor Pull and you will be charged \$15 admission to the Tuckahoe grounds. (But if you do, you get to see the tractor pull.)

Registration is \$35.00 before August 27th, \$45.00 after August 27th. Non-smithing family and children are free. Saturday Catered dinner is \$12.00 extra. Dinner money should be sent with registration to:

JoAnn Bentley,
100 Hillcrest Road,
Camp Hill, PA. 17011.
email - joann@bentoaks.org

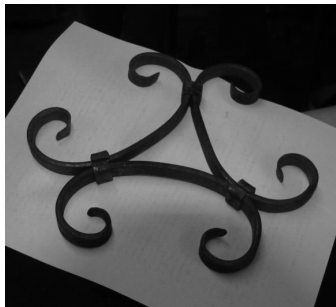
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Report on the Demo-Projects Workshop

by Bruce Freeman

On May 20, a number of us met at the shop of Marshall Bienstock to teach and/or to learn simple forging projects suitable for demonstrating to the public. I aimed to arrive early, but got a call from Marshall when I was about 5 minutes away that he had people there and didn't know what to put them to. It was gratifying to see the enthusiasm, and thanks to John, we soon had adequate coal and two coal fires. Meanwhile, Bill kindly chopped down some stock for my demonstration.

I had been scrambling for a few weeks to come up with a suitable project. My favorite projects involve tap and die work - too much tooling for a public demo - or forge welding - which I had specifically disallowed because it's too hard to do reliable in the daylight. With a week to go I'd hit upon making three C-scrolls and collaring them together to make a simple trivet.



The trivet. (Okay, it's not the world's best trivet or the world's best demo, but it's not bad.)

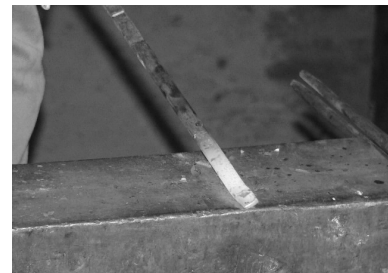


Bruce Freeman at the Forge



Marking the scroll stock with a soapstone stick.

Tapering the width of the scroll stock.



Forming the scroll on the scroll jig.

The half-finished C-scroll on the scroll jig.



Tapering the second end of the scroll. Another classic blacksmith shot.

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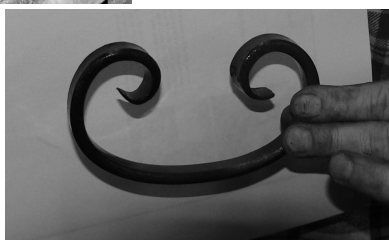


Starting the second scroll over the edge of the anvil. A close-up.



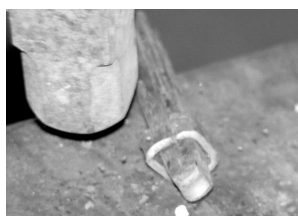
Fitting two C-scrolls in a collar.

The completed C-scroll.



Hot-forming the collar on the mandrel. Note the chalklines on the anvil for measuring the collar length.

The collar on the mandrel, ready for the final legs to be hammered down.



Closing the collar.

The finished collar.



Using a channel-locks to close the collar.)

After getting the process more-or-less mastered, partly by consulting the "COSIRA" book, *Wrought Ironwork*, Rural Development Commimssion, Salisbury, c. 1953, ISBN 0854070-07-9 (available free on the Internet) and other references, I wrote up a one-page sheet of instructions. I also provide copies of some printed references so the attendees would have other opinions to go by besides mine.

Unfortunately, my demo dragged a bit, partly because I was using different sized stock than I'd practiced with. Nonetheless, I was able to demonstrate the basic processes, making C-scrolls and collaring them together, and that was well received by the attendees.



Jeff Morelli then took over, doing a demo of making a Rendezvous style fire-making kit: Flint and steel, charcloth and linen fiber kindling.

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Jeff demonstrating striker.

David Macauley demonstrated making a napkin ring starting with a railroad spike - which he now has in abundant supply, working as a blacksmith in the Pine Creek Railroad shop.



PHOTO 26: Jeff. (He didn't actually knap the flint or ret the linen for us, but he did demonstrate making charcloth.)

Jeff gets two steels from one small (maybe 1/2" x 1/8") *American-made* file. (Some cheap imports aren't the right quality steel.)



After finishing the form, he got it red hot and quenched only the outer edge - the striking surface - in the slack tub.



After cooling the steel on the anvil, he demonstrated fire starting. Dry charcloth is the key, as this catches the spark and soon glows red in that spot. He then put this into a fluffed mass of linen fiber and blew to start the fiber burning. That flame would have been quite sufficient to start small wood kindling.

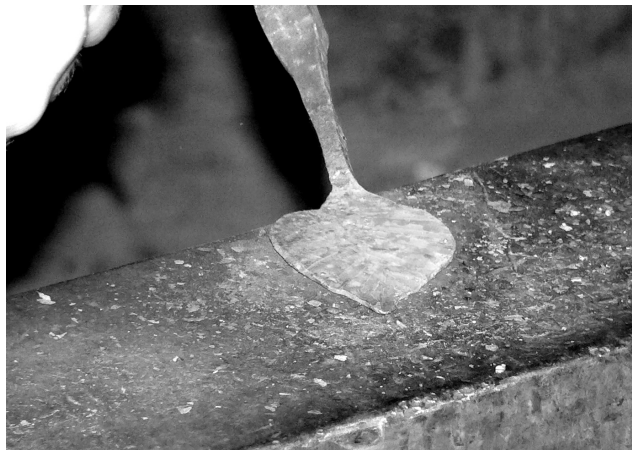


He started by drawing out the spike head to match the rest of the spike, leaving him with about 8" of roughly 3/4" square bar. He put a short,

square point on the end. He then used a 1/2" spring fuller to isolate this mass from the rest of the bar, and drew out the bar behind the end mass.

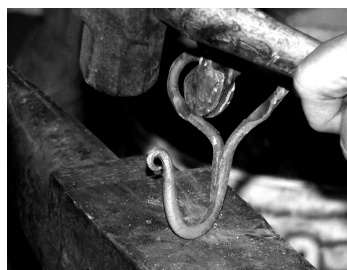


At this point he returned to the end mass and drew it out flat as a leaf shape.



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Before he was done he used the hammer pein and a swage block to put "veins" and waviness into the leaf. The other end he drew out to ~1/4" dia and about 4" long. After pointing and curling the end, he bent this into an open ring.



After the lunch break, Bill Futer demonstrated a couple projects. First he made a leaf key ring, with the usual procedure for the leaf ,

and a square-knot hook



by giving the leaf shape by hammering against a wooden log .



He also demonstrated making a heart hook.,



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Marshall finished up with a demo of a flesh fork.



Finished loop and finished fork



Slitting and Spreading



Examples of finished items



Drawing out bar and bending to draw out tines.



Shaping the handle and starting the loop.

Monmouth County Fair

This year we were uninvited to the Monmouth County Fair by Longstreet Farm.

We will probably try to join with the transportation Museum and get a spot next year. Interested people should talk to David

Cold Spring Village

NJBA Public Demonstration
Historic Old Spring Village,
July 2223, 2006

Submitted by David Macauley

NJBA continued its annual tradition of providing public demonstrations of Blacksmithing to the public at Historic Cold Spring Village (HCSV) in Cape May NJ. Well this year the weather was not too cooperative. When David Macauley arrived at HCSV around 9AM it was raining with thunderstorms in the area. Don Herbert ad showed up with his wife and artistic muse/friend and we all donned rain coats and hung out under the picnic pavilion. Due to the weather we decided not to un load the trailer, instead we started blacksmithing in the vil-lage shop with Jerry Goldman who is the resident smith. By 10AM the weather abated enough for us to unload

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Jerry Goldman and David Macauley

and set up David's transportable equipment in front of the shop. By about 11AM John Scancella, Mike Erdie and his family showed up and we started blacksmithing both in the shop and with the portable equipment. David worked on making leaf shaped napkin holders which he demonstrated at the demonstration workshop. Mike brought a bell that he had been making from the top of oxygen tank. It rings loud and clear. John had made a fire rake for the portable equipment since I forgot to bring any fire tools. Don did some interpretation of what the blacksmiths were making. We had lunch in the Grange which has a new proprietor – the food was pretty good. It was excellent opportunity to socialize. The afternoon's weather improved and we continued to demonstrate. We had some hardy visitors and we invited several to try blacksmithing which they did. The weather continued to be humid but not too hot on Sunday. Bill Futer and Patrick O'Brian came to demonstrate on Sunday. Bill worked with Patrick to make leaf shaped key rings – again a project demonstrated during the demonstration workshop – good job Bruce! David



worked with Jerry to make a pair of box jaw tongs from railroad spikes. We had a few more visitors on Sunday but it continued to be a quiet weekend which did make the drive home less crowded.

Many thanks to Mike, John, Don, Bill and Patrick for coming out to demonstrate. I think everyone had a good time and got to at least enjoy some good ice cream. I would like to extend my personal thanks to Jerry for being so hospitable with his shop. It always a great pleasure to visit HCSV even if the weather does not cooperate.

Pure Iron

Pure iron is back and becoming available from R & B Wagner, Inc. • J.G. Braun Company

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 423

Butler, WI 53007-0423

1-888-243-6914, 1-414-214-0444

Fax: 414-214-0450

info@mailwagner.com

<http://www.wagnercompanies.com>

Call or email for more information.

Search

I am looking for a #250 fisher anvil in good shape. If you have one for sale or run across one, contact me; Larry Brown, NJBA Editor. (718)967-4776

For sale;

3 Hay-Budden anvils various weights, 2 Champion blowers, 1 coal forge (stainless steel cone shaped hood), 1 box-legged vise, 2 GE forge pots, 1 steel lever hand shear (round stock up to 5/8" and flat stock up to 1/4" - call (631) 726-9537. Dave Bird-sall, Water Mill, Long Island, NY

Books

Free Blacksmithing books on line at Louisiana Metalsmiths site,

<http://lametalsmiths.org/news/>

downloadable_blacksmithing_books.htm

Limerick

From the Forge List

Sent by "Grover Richardson"

There once was a blacksmith named Mel,
Whose sins got him sent down to Hell.
He exclaimed, By George!
This whole place is a forge!
And good for heat treating, as well!

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Blacksmithing Workshops and Classes:

Peters Valley Craft Education Center
19 Kuhn Rd., Layton, NJ 07851 (973)948-5200
pv@warwick.net www.pvcrafts.org

Academy of Traditional Arts
Carroll County Farm Museum
500 South Center St. Westminster, MD 21157
(410)848-7775 (410)876-2667

Touchstone Center for Crafts
R.D.#1, Box 60, Farmington, PA 15437
(724)329-1370 Fax: (724)329-1371

John C Campbell Folk School
One Folk School Rd.
Brasstown, NC 28902
1-800-365-5724 www.folkschool.com

Brookfield Craft Center
286 Whisconier Road
P. O. Box 122
Brookfield, CT 06804-0122
203.775.4526

Dick Gambino is involved in a project forming an artisan work community in Rahway, NJ. Interested Metal workers with a juried portfolio can contact him through his web site
<http://www.gambinometal.com>
about this opportunity.

BLACKSMITH TOOLS FOR SALE!

John Chobrda

Has a large selection of tools for sale.
Anvils – Forges - Leg Vices—Blowers
Tongs – Hammers
Will also repair and/or resurface Anvils
Call John for prices and availability
Evening 609-610-3501

Business Members

We would like to thank those who joined with our new Business Membership category
Please show them our support

Marshall Bienstock

663 Casino Dr., Howell, NJ 07731
(732) 938- 6577, (732) 780-0871
John Chobrda, Pine Barrens Forge
231 Morrison Ave., Hightstown, NJ 08520
609-443-3106 JChob@earthlink.net
Eric Cuper Artist Blacksmith
109 Lehman Lane, Neshanic Station, NJ 08853
908 642-6420 ericuper@msn.com
Bruce Hay, Jr.
50 Pine St., Lincroft, NJ 07738
Jayesh Shah Architectural Iron Design
950 S. 2nd St., Plainfield, NJ 07063
jay@archirondesign.com

Open Forges

We are looking for members who are interested in opening their forges up to members as a open forge. This does not have to be a weekly forge as is Marshall's the others can meet once or twice a month. Please contact, Larry Brown, Editor.

Wewanttobernagedtojoinus at:

Monday Night Open Forge in N.J.

Marshall Bienstock is hosting an open forge in his shop at 7 pm almost every Monday night (Please call ahead on holidays to make sure , (732)780-0871)

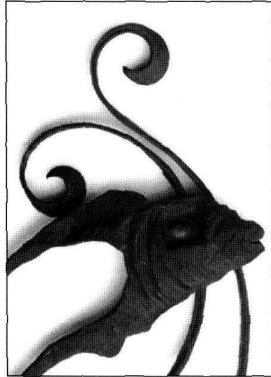
Open Forge in Long Island

Sunday from 10:00 am to 6pm.
Starting the 1st Sunday in November until the end of April. Please call ahead to confirm and get directions.
Ron Grabowski, 110 Burlington Blvd. Smithtown, NY
(631) 265-1564
Ronsforge@aol.com

If any members have a forge at home and work in the evenings or weekends and want to open it up to help a few local guys, let me know, Larry Brown, editor, as we get requests from members who have a hard time traveling to some of the open forge locations.

Some Thoughts About Design

by Mark Aspery, Springville, California



Having taught blacksmithing both privately and for regional organizations for a number of years, I am drawn to the conclusion that we, as blacksmiths, are very good at teaching the actual blacksmith skills, but we are weak in teaching both the elements and principles of good design. It is a fact that well designed but badly made will outsell well made but badly designed.

In an effort to start some productive dialogue on the subject, I am writing this article. It is my hope that other smiths will be motivated to refute or agree with my observations, in part or in whole, offering explanations and examples to support their arguments, in a written format to be published in the various affiliate magazines or newsletters. In this way I think that we can all move forward with the subject. It is not intended to polarize opinions or people, but to provoke thought.

Let me first offer my own qualifications on the subject. Absolutely none! This exercise is a seat-of-the pants dialog containing information that I can glean from various books.

That stated, let me list a few of the books I am citing: Composition in Art, by Henry Rankin Poore, ISBN 0-0486-23358-8.

The Nature of Design, by Peg Faimon & John Weigand, ISBN 1-58180-478-4.

A History of the Modern Movement - Art, Architecture, Design #3, by Kurt Rowland, ISBN 0-442-27175-1.

I am supplying photographs taken from some of the coffee-table blacksmith books, and they will be credited with the photographs.

As a professional smith whose style is commonly called traditional, I used to see the growth of the catalog component part manufacturers as a problem. I now see it as an advantage. I cannot compete with companies that use those parts if I stay within the same style of work. I am pushed to be original in my design and offer something that the client cannot get anywhere else.

If Madame Curie had not discovered radiation, there is a strong chance that someone else would have, but if Monet had not painted his water lily paintings, no one would have. I am told that you cannot design by numbers; there is no step-by-step protocol that will lead you to a good design. That may well be the case.

My own thoughts are that there are considerations that should be given conscious thought before you move on to something else. That said, I might as well lay my head on the chopping block and commit those to paper.

Proportions

The Golden Mean, Golden Section, Divine Proportion, etc., all refer to a ratio of length to height. As far back as pre-Roman times, the ratio of 1:1.618 was found to have ideal proportions. Those are roughly the proportions of a 3" x 5" photograph.

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the human response to the aesthetic of the Golden Mean rectangle. Fechner, 1876, and Lalo, 1908, studies found that about 35% of people found the proportions to be most pleasing, the next closest being 20% regarding a rectangle very similar in proportions to the Golden Mean (Geometry of Design, by K. Elam).

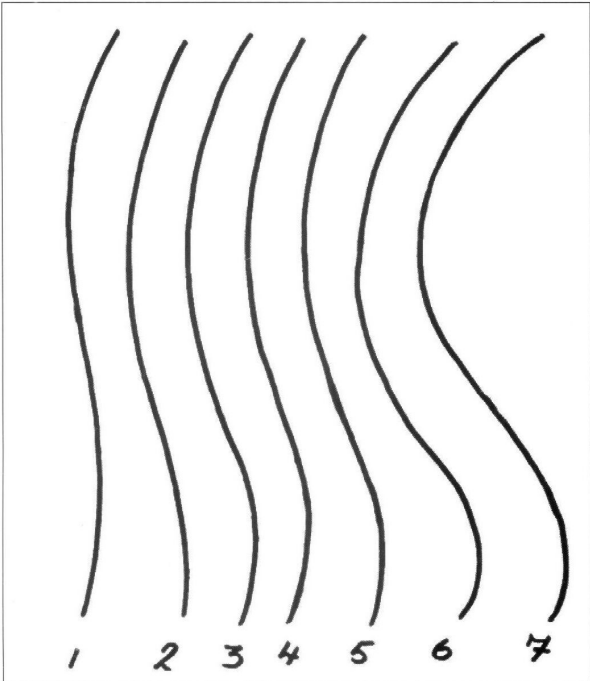
Try it yourself. Draw a line on a piece of paper and then divide the line in two so that you think that the two sides are proportional aesthetically.

What does that mean to the blacksmith? In real terms, if the design for your gate, panel, sculpture, etc. does not fit in a rectangle of Golden Mean proportions, then you are departing from conventional wisdom. Does this mean that everything we build should fit into these dimensions? Absolutely not! But, it is worthy of consideration before you move on.

Line - Organic / Geometric

Strength of line, horizontal vs. vertical, curvilinear are some of the catchwords. William Hogarth gave a series of seven curves in his "Analysis of Beauty," circa 1753. He identified line #4 as being the most aesthetic, the profile of the human back (illustration on next page). These lines can be seen in many master paintings and sculptures. For me as a blacksmith it means that when I make a leaf, flower or flowing sculpture with curves, they had better have "S" shapes and not single curves.

Piet Mondrian, in his 1915 "Pier and Ocean," moved away from traditional representation and depicted the scene through horizontal and vertical lines. These were the essential lines of the forms that his subjects made. This style continues to influence the arts, crafts and architecture and can be seen in such places as Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. I refer to Mondrian when approaching a geometric style commission. I was unable to secure permission to print Piet Mondrian's painting, but strongly encourage you to go to the Internet and search for that and others of his work.



I have never spoken with Mr. Lund and therefore do not know what influenced his design, but I enjoy his exploration with vertical and horizontal lines in the gates pictured here (right). (Guiseppe Lund Gates for the Victoria Plaza is shown in Into the New Iron Age: Modern British Blacksmiths, by Amina Chatwin, ISBN 0-9525105-0-2)

Mondrian also talked of rhythm - not a new thing in the art world. By repeating or varying the spacing of lines (e.g., a railing) we can give a piece of work rhythm or beat. A series of straight pickets for a railing, each not quite 4" apart, give the railing a monotone rhythm. By changing the spacing (as far as code allows, of course!) the rhythm of the railing can be enriched. Mondrian also filled in the spaces between the lines to further emphasize the rhythm. As a blacksmith I can change the bar size in a series of bars to break up a monotone pace.

Let's take it a bit further. While looking at the numerous figures that follow, think about where your eye is going and whether it is at rest or not.



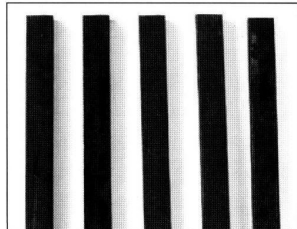
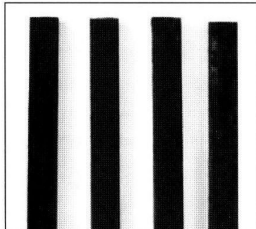
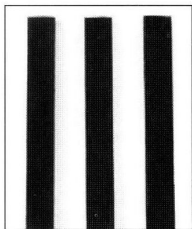
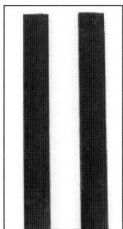
Figure 1. One of something, unless it is a stand-alone art piece, can be a bit boring.

Figure 2. Two of something can irritate the viewer. The human mind likes to divide things in two. With two elements, the eye is forced to go between both pieces. It can only rest in the negative space between the pieces.

Figure 3. By creating three of something, the eye can easily divide the piece, resting on the middle element and then taking in either the left or right hand side before coming back to the middle.

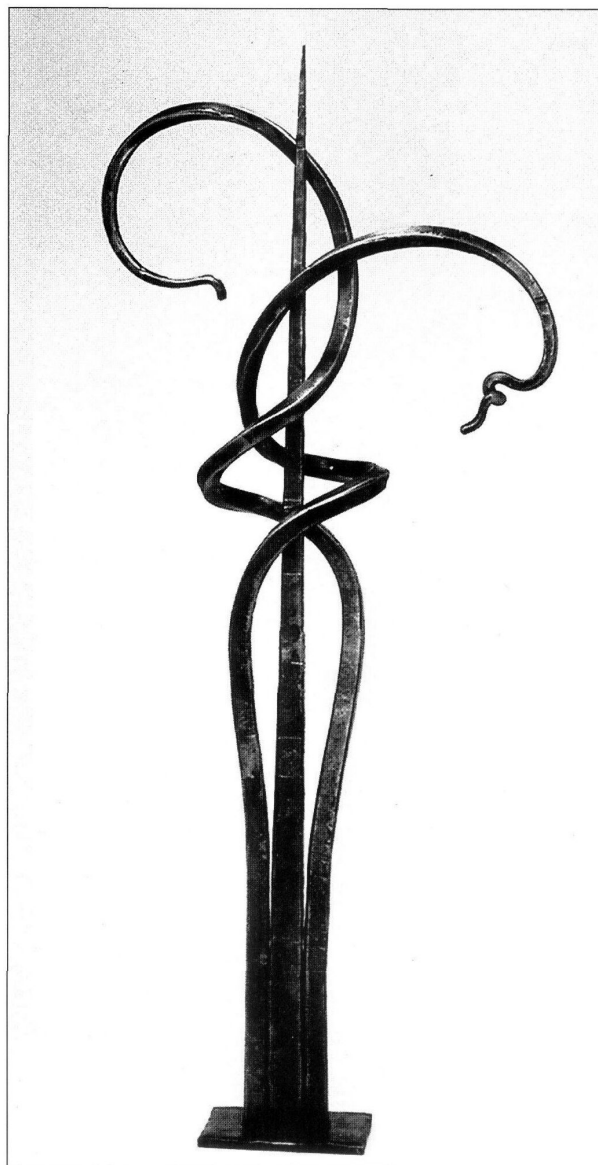
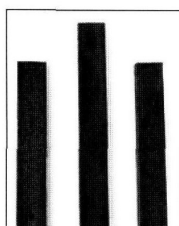
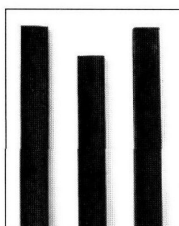
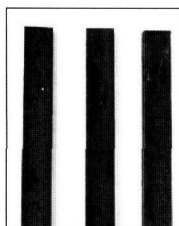
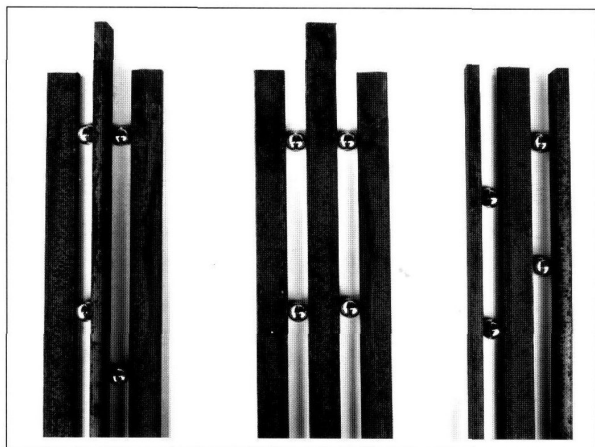
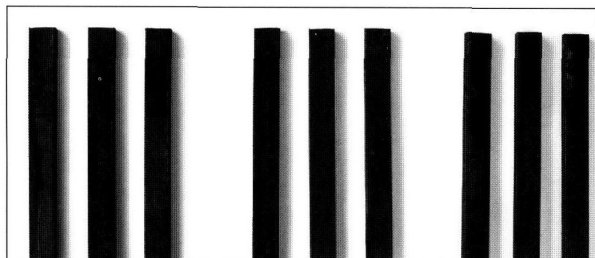
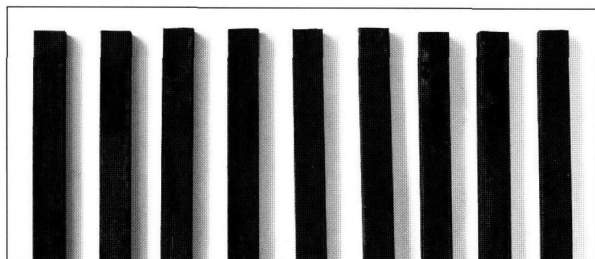
Figure 4. This arrangement is twice as annoying as two, unless you are trying to get the viewer to appreciate the negative space between elements.

Figure 5. Again easy to divide and also restful for the eye to view.



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So it can be seen that odd numbers of elements can produce a pleasing effect when viewed. But on a long railing job, with many pickets, the eye can become confused, as a long railing is not easy to divide. Playing with the arrangement and content of say nine pickets gives me a chance to illustrate the point as seen in the following six figures. Of them all, I think that three is the most powerful number. It is more than the number after two. It is quickly divisible by the eye, especially if the smith has the luxury of adding emphasis on the central piece as Jefferson Mack did in his "Eastern Addition."



*Eastern Addition, Jefferson Mack Metals, Inc.
Photo provided by artist*

Flow

How does the eye move around your sculpture or central/focal element in a railing or gate? What stops your eye from leaving the piece?

Note the return on the tips of the orbits in Jefferson's sculpture as per Hogarth's lines of beauty. My eye starts with the mass at the bottom, travels up the piece to the juncture, takes either the left or right orbit, is returned to the juncture to take in the other orbit again returned to the juncture before ascending the spire to take in the sculpture as a whole.

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Unity

After putting all your design ideas down on paper before you build, ask yourself, does the project have unity? Does it all belong on the same job? In the example of a Paul Margetts panel (below), if the borders contained scroll work, would it fit? The elements that Paul has used, while being different from each other, fit in with the larger theme. There is unity.



As seen in "The Contemporary Blacksmith," by Dora Z. Melech, ISBN-7643-1106. Photo provided by artist Paul Margetts



Abstract fish sculpture by Toby Hickman
Photo by Mark Apsey

Taking one or two of the current coffee table books about blacksmithing around to a client at the start of a commission may well lead to the "top of that one, middle of that and a few of those thrown in" response by the client. Hardly unifying.

Balance

If you look at any large building site, you will see a crane at work. Having a heavy weight near the cab, and therefore near the pivotal point, allows the crane to pick up objects at the end of the boom without tipping over.

The crane, while it is in physical balance, also looks balanced visually. If you look at your design, does it have a concentration of work that needs to be brought into balance by having a larger area adjacent that is less saturated in detail? Does your piece have symmetry or is it asymmetrical?

I think that Toby Hickman's abstract fish design (above) is a nice example of balance, texture, curved line, symmetry and movement, and includes a contemporary use of traditional scroll work. Even though it is an abstract piece, these qualities are still important.

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Texture

Let's say that you are in the market for an 8" length of 1/2" square bar. I have two for sale: a length cut from a 20 foot bar as delivered by my steel supplier and a length that I made from some 3/4" x 3/8" bar that had to be forged to size. Which would you buy? The one that had been through the forge, right? Why? Because it has texture. As blacksmiths we might work in metal, but part of what we sell is how the light plays off the piece. Texture creates shade and light.

Positive and negative space

Sometimes what's not there can be more powerful than what is there. Mark Constable made good use of the negative space to depict the image of a woman in his sculpture (right).

Contrast

Do you have contrast in your design? Contrast can be in opposition, for example, a mirror polished section of an otherwise dark piece or a change in metals. It can also be transitional. For example your bar could slowly fade from square to octagonal and on to round.

Expressive properties

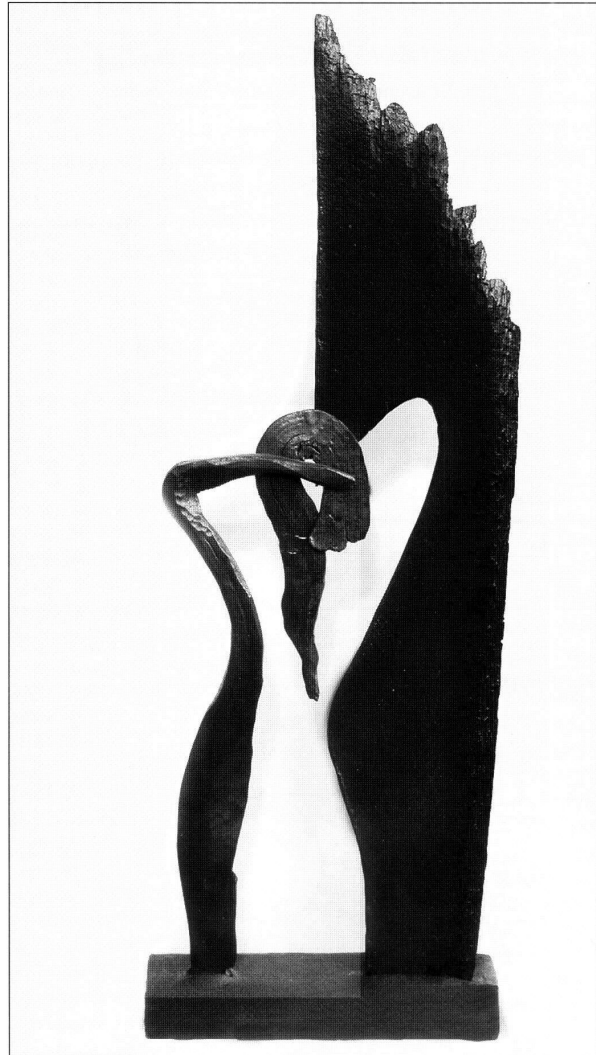
Here we are definitely getting into the art side of blacksmithing. What mood or feelings are you trying to create? Does your piece have a message or symbolism?

Questions to ask yourself

- What is the most important shape in your design?
- What shapes or lines repeat or vary to get rhythm?
- What is the first thing you see in your design, that is, the area of interest?
- What sort of balance does your design have? Asymmetrical or symmetrical?
- What elements produce that balance? Can you remove a piece and still keep the balance?
- What elements are working together to create harmony or unity?
- What keeps your eye from leaving the design?
- What textures are present? Have you captured all the light you want in the piece.
- Would you want it in your house or workplace?

In closing, I quote my friend, Adrian Legge, FWCB, "Good technique is important because it supports and frames our art/craft/design like a well mounted picture. I'll just get off my high horse now...."

Reprinted from the May/June 2005, California Blacksmith



Sculpture by Mark Constable. Photo by Mark Aperi.

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The Ashokan campus is located in
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first weekend in May and in the first
weekend in October every year. The main
demonstration is in the blacksmith shop
and there is a "Hands On" workshop for
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Contact : Tim Neu

to register for hammer-ins

or subscribe to the newsletter;

Tim Neu, Ashokan Field Campus,

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