



# Balcones Forge Dispatch

President's Corner

May 2017



Greetings!

I recently received an email from Joann Andrea who at the Institute of Texan Cultures where the Texas Folklife Festival is held every year, thanking all the volunteers and demonstrators who come to entertain and show folks how it was in the old days. The San Antonio Area Blacksmiths have been participating since 1982 and came from all over Texas and were for the most part the founding smiths of TABA, the Texas Artist/Blacksmiths Association. Their goal was to keep the art of Blacksmithing alive by providing information to anyone who showed any interest at all in pounding hot metal on a hot August day. This will be our 36th year at Folklife and our goal is the same (except they moved it to mid June about ten years ago). Folklife will be June 9th-11th this year and we still have a few openings for blacksmiths. Please contact me at: [treefarm@swbell.net](mailto:treefarm@swbell.net) or call 210-942-3049 if you would like to help out. More information at: [texasfolklifefestival.org](http://texasfolklifefestival.org)

Thanks to all who came out to help celebrate Founders Day in Hye, Texas last month. We have a nice turnout and quite a few visitors. Ranch owner Patrick Watson sliced a large oak tree branch to make a nice bench for us to sit on. We helped to decorate it by adding several local and historic cattle brands which made it fit right in with the décor. We also made a small copper plaque with all the decorative punches that was dated to presented to Patrick who will mount it near the bandstand. It was a fun day.

## Meeting Date is May 20

*President's Message continued on page 3.*



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## SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Balcones Forge meeting was held April 29 in Hye, Texas at the second annual Hye Heritage Festival. This small Texas town is located on highway 20 near the Gillespie County line

10 miles west of Johnson City in western Blanco County. The history I am writing about is from the Texas Historical Society Handbook where it indicates that the area was settled in the 1860s by farming & ranching families at Rocky Creek (3 mi from Hye) and by 1870 there was an influx of German & Anglo settlers.

In 1880 Hiram G. Brown (aka Hye) built a store and house on the Pedernales River on the Austin to Fredericksburg road at present day Hye. He established a post office in his general store and soon a gristmill, blacksmith shop, and cotton gin were in operation. The original structure was rebuilt in 1904 and is recorded in the Texas Historical Land Mark and is still standing today. Hye gained particular attention in 1965 when President LBJ used the front porch to appoint L.F. O'Brien as US Postmaster General. Population in the 20's & 30's was estimated at 200 but dropped to 50 during WWII. Current population is 105 according to the 2000 census.

One of Hye's daughters married J.P. Watson & had two sons, Porter & Thomas. They and their wives are still alive & well and run the family ranch - The 4 B - where the festival was held and hosted by Patrick Watson.

Balcones Forge was given privilege to fire up our forges under some beautiful oak trees which provided the group with ample shade. The only inclement weather was strong, gusty winds from the south, so much so that the helicopter arriving to offer tours (and bring Gary Hilton coffee), had difficulty landing and I had to forgo my straw hat for a baseball cap. Jerry Achterberg called a meeting to order which identified future events and to remind members of the very next workshop at John & Carolyn's ranch in Marble Falls where William Bastas will demo and instruct participants how to make 'monkey finger' tongs. This workshop is free to Balcones Forge members and will be held May 20, 2017.

The show & tell item for today was a decorative punch and there were several types displayed and we stamped each one into a copper plate that Jerry brought (see photo). We also took along branding irons we had forged and branded a tree trunk which had been turned into a nifty bench (see photo). The early crowd turnout was slow, but picked up by the afternoon and I even picked up a couple orders for branding irons, also. There were about 10 other vendors which included jewelry, food, trinkets as well as a few country singers plucking guitars. We had 3 coal forges going and the interest from the public was great and especially fun watching them examine the items we had on display. Hwy 290 is frequented by a lot of motorcycle enthusiasts, so quite a few of our onlookers were of that genre.

As the day went on, we fellow blacksmiths exchanged tricks of the trade as well as a few funny incidents, like when I was telling Wayne Byrd about the time I caught my leather gloves on fire at the Buggy Barn in Blanco a few years ago and had to put them out in my water bucket, but Wayne was one-up on me, because when this happened to him, he extinguished the burning glove problem in a bucket of quench oil - aah, blacksmith humor!

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We closed shop around 3pm and want to thank everyone that showed up and also to express appreciation in seeing everyone pitching in to help unload and reload each others blacksmith equipment.

Tim Tellander  
Balcones Forge Secretary



Photos by Tim Tellander



*President's Message CONTINUED*

John Crouchet has enlisted William Bastas to put on another demo at the Ranch for our May (20th) meeting. William always puts on a good show and for this event he will demo monkey-paw tongs. See John's notice on page 4 for more info. If you want to learn how to make this well designed pair of tongs.....do not miss this meeting!

May trade item is: something from a railroad spike. We have seen many things made from spikes. Make an old favorite or come up with something new. Warning! It is not legal to trespass onto rr property and pick up spikes! They are still rr property. They are readily available at salvage yards and junk shops.

See ya'll at the ranch!

Jerry Achterberg  
Balcones Forge President

*Coming Soon to a Shop Near You.....*

# **Hammering, Pounding, Forging Red Hot Iron... Tong Building!!!!**

Of course you want a pair of those fancy Will Bastas monkey-paw tongs! We all do! Unfortunately, they always sell for way too much money when Will donates them to our auctions. Well, friends, your luck has changed!

Will Bastas has offered to lead a Balcones Forge meeting to make everyone a pair of those handy little grippers! Naturally, we took him up on that offer, and we will all be building tongs with Professor Bastas at the May 20th meeting of Balcones Forge.

The meeting will be held in the blacksmith shop at Sycamore Creek Ranch, a familiar destination to everyone who has been to the annual Bluebonnet Demo. The meeting will begin at 9:30 am. Please notice that the meeting has been moved to May 20th to avoid conflicting with everyone's Memorial Day plans!

Monkey-paw tongs have unique split ends at the gripping tip of the tongs. This allows the blacksmith to securely hold a wide variety of shapes from a number of different angles. These tongs may quickly become your all time favorites.

We will be forging these tongs from #5 rebar which makes a sturdy, resilient pair of tongs, with properties very close to chrome-molybdenum steel. We will learn how to work with this steel at the meeting.

There is no charge for participating in this meeting, but you must be a member of Balcones Forge so that you will be on our insurance. Bring safety glasses and your favorite hammer. Wear cotton clothing (No synthetics) and sturdy, closed toe shoes.

Our special thanks to Will Bastas for his generous offer to teach us all the finer points of tong forging.

***A little blacksmithing history: Many of us know Will Bastas from his popular blacksmithing classes at Austin Community College. However, Mr. Bastas was also the very first Forge Master of the Texas Artist Blacksmith Association (TABA), which was the predecessor organization to Balcones Forge.***

*John Crouchet*



# Lost and Found

As usual, we wound up with a few abandoned, forgotten, or misplaced items following our annual Bluebonnet Demo. In the past, we have managed to acquire some pretty colorful and unusual items, but this year's harvest was fairly mundane.

We have a lovely little triangle file with an orange handle. Somebody is going to want that back. We also have a slightly burned twelve foot tape measure in a lovely shade of green.

If you are eyeing that nice hardy tool bolster, you are already too late. Doug Eichert has already claimed it. If it is actually yours, then you and Doug will need to have a conversation.

We have a well-loved folding chair, complete with a side table to hold your beer or guacamole dip. Surely someone is missing this orphan chair!

Last, but not least, someone is missing their very personalized insulated stainless steel YETI coffee mug. It has grown a nice layer of coffee mold by now, but I expect its owner wants it back anyway.

To claim any (or all) of these lovely items, text John Crouchet at 830-798-3710 and arrange to pick them up either at the ranch or at one of the next two Balcones meetings. You will be glad to know that items not claimed will be donated to one of our local Marble Falls charities.

*John Crouchet*



# **BREAKING NEWS**

Tom Leining has agreed to host the June meeting and demo his D-handled Bowie.

Competition trade item is a spoon. Prize for the best.

June 24th, 9:30a, Wimberly, TX

## **SAVE THE DATE**

The Bluebonnet Demo for 2018 will be on April 7.

The demonstrator is

??????????????

Stay tuned for the answer!



ABANA is excited that our 2018 Conference will offer new concepts, excellent demonstrators, and quality programs at the birthplace of Secretariat, the Meadow Event Park in Doswell, VA, just north of Richmond. The grounds are gorgeous with plenty of parking, camping, ATM's, and shower facilities with a 63,000 sf air-conditioned main building.

Hope to see you in June 2018!



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