



# Balcones Forge Dispatch

President's Corner

August 2015



## Attention! No meeting in August!

Just as we thought..... it's too hot to forge! We all knew it would be like this. It's August in Texas and there is nothing we can do about it except find a cool place to hang out and wait

for cooler weather.

And if you do get in the fire be sure to stay well hydrated and take a few breaks to cool off. Heat exhaustion and heat strokes are very serious and have lasting effects.

Thanks to all who came out to John's for the July meeting. The Lee Brothers put on a good show and turned out a beautiful cross with step-by-step instructions which inspired some of the new folks to get in the fire and try their hand at a cross. I believe this was one of the best open forge events we have seen in a while and looking forward to having a few more.

September will take us to Bulverde for the Bulverde Fair. John Meyers will host another demo/open forge event. Bring your show-n-tell items and your hammer as we are hoping to have several forges and anvils available.

William Bastas will host the October meeting at a vintage blacksmith shop in Austin where much of the shop will be auctioned off. More details to follow, but this is advanced notice to start saving up a few bucks for this event.

November will take us to Blanco Buggy Barn Museum for their fall fair hosted by Dennis Moore. Dennis has several restored vintage wagons, buggies and coaches on display and he has a great line-up of Western swing bands playing throughout the weekend. They are looking for a few smiths to demo for the school kids on Friday. Please let me know if you are interested.

*President's message continued on page 2.*



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*President's message continued.*

December will take us back to Jerry Whitley's shop in Devine. Jerry and Marsha have been putting on this event for a few years now. You won't want to miss it!

See ya'll in September. Stay cool till then.

Jerry Achterberg  
President Balcones Forge

## **THE BALCONES FORGE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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## **BALCONES FORGE FUTURE**

August - NO MEETING

September 19th - The Bulverde Jamboree

October- special meeting and auction

November - Denis Moore, Blanco, TX

December - Whitley's

## **SECRETARY'S REPORT**

The July 25, 2015 Balcones Forge meeting occurred in Marble Falls at the Sycamore Ranch hosted by John & Carolyn Crouchet.

President Jerry Achterberg called a board member meeting to order. An important topic included Balcones Forge efforts in supporting the upcoming 2016 ABANA four-day conference to be held in Salt Lake City.

Discussion regarding financial assistance from Balcones Forge was raised and board members were unanimous in agreeing that the 5013 C status or our group not be jeopardized. Jerry was reassuring by indicating he would consult Andy Quitner to clarify and fully define our status and follow appropriate protocols. In addition, a proposal to initiate monetary contributions whereby any Texas blacksmith may contribute individually and separate from any group or organization, be initiated. Therefore, it was decided that the money from today's Iron In The Hat be set aside for the ABANA conference and before starting the auction it was clearly stated as such. There were no objections and the ITHat was a successful event netting \$1,242 for ABANA. Just a little FYI here - the job done by auctioneer Vince Herod is outstanding and his witty comments are great. Needless to say, it couldn't get done without the help of his assistants and one always present, is Jerry Whitley. Great job, guys. Jerry also emphasized the importance of other blacksmith groups to contribute as well, and he would personally consult key members and inform and encourage similar donations.

William Bastas took the floor and discussed a proposal for our October meeting. He explained that he had been contacted by Natalie Morgan, wife of the late Donald Morgan (former blacksmith in

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the Austin area), to donate blacksmithing equipment from the Donald Morgan estate to ACC. William's personal tour of Donald's shop revealed numerous pieces of equipment, tools, memorabilia, magazines, as well as several forged pieces. He indicated that ACC did not need all of the generously donated items and suggested to Mrs. Morgan that an auction be held to disperse the remaining pieces and proceeds returned to her. Being considerate and understanding, William outlined an Iron Fest to fire up Donald's forge in honor and memory of him as well as conduct an anvil ring from blacksmiths attending this event. There will also be an hour-long demonstration of traditional blacksmithing - William didn't say by whom, but we are hoping it will be him. The board meeting was concluded.

Before the Iron in The Hat auction to benefit the ABANA conference was started, Jerry recognized Smokey Thompson as the first place winner of the June, colonial spatula competition and presented him with a nail header. It was also announced that surveys regarding future blacksmith demos are still being received and Jerry encouraged the group to submit ideas, comments, or concerns. A show-and-tell item of delicate and intricate design was presented by Sue Murray. Admitting that I am relatively new to blacksmithing, I am not a novice to Kentucky Blue Grass music (ie. Alison Krauss & Union Station - my favorite) and you guessed it, old enough to have enjoyed stomping my foot along with the sounds of HEE HAW - but I have never heard of a cigar box guitar. Sue's cigar box guitar will be fully functional and the 59 hours of work she put into it are amazing and inspiring. Her masterpiece will be on display in Georgia along with 30 others.

Another item for show & tell was a 3 foot tall Fredrick cross made by Jerry Achterberg, a true mentor for so many aspiring smiths. He indicated that Jeff & Alan Lee will be demonstrating the blacksmithing skills by making another similar cross out of 1 inch square stock at today's forge demo. Alan described the technique by explaining he & Jeff would be splitting the cross with a hot cut chisel. He also indicated that the 5:1 ratio in achieving the

correct diameter opening in the middle of the cross which would allow the original sized 1 inch square stock to pass through the opening. The duos work during the project was seamless and the resulting object was absolutely beautiful and the pride of those two sweat-soaked blacksmiths was clearly evident and appreciated by everyone. Because of the informality of these meetings, a blacksmith soloist named Jose Sandoval was off to the side, hand sawing a 3/4 inch piece of square stock. He declined to use the electric blade saw located a short distance from his chosen work station which did not interfere with the hot demo being conducted. Jose showed me the Fredrick cross he hand cut and then forged to the fully open form. Great job Jose and a great example of how to maximize on such an opportunity.

Ken McElroy described a class he recently attended at the Goliad Forge by president Otto Bluntzer. The class consisted of casting a 4 inch anvil out of aluminum. Ken indicated to me that the process may sound easy, but the complex steps in creating the anvil were numerous but carefully designed by Mr. Bluntzer for his students. Ken said the class lasted all day but he was well pleased with the result. If any of you get a chance to visit with Otto, please ask him to show you some of the photos of Goliad Forge, as well as some of the forged items produced by him & other participants.

The group broke for lunch and several forges were fired for interested in an opportunity to get some hot iron hammered out.

After the meeting was concluded and the crowd started to leave, a few special individuals stayed around to help John Crouchet reorganize and clean up his shop.

Tim Tellander  
Balcones Forge Secretary

AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
**METALSMITHING 1401**  
WITH WILL BASTAS

By Daniel Harrington

After a year of entertaining the idea of being a hobbyist blacksmith, I thought I was ready. I had an anvil, a post vise, a propane forge, assorted hammers and tongs, a small swage block and a cone mandrel. During that year, I'd made some hooks, nails, crosses, curtain rod holders, a few punches and drifts, even a hatchet forged from a farrier's rasp. Not to mention producing hundreds of pitiful pieces of nameless twisted metal for my scrap bucket. I had taken Art Metals with Dan Smith, where I learned the basics of building volume and form using sheet metal and oxy-fuel welding. And on top of all of that, heck, I'd been the Balcones Forge librarian for most of that year – which meant that I'd read through dozens of books on metalwork... Surely I was ready for Will Bastas' Metalsmithing class... Yeah, right!

To say that I had no idea what I was in for would be an understatement. (I know Alan, you tried to warn me!) Not only was I unprepared for the massive amount of information that would be disseminated, I was even less prepared for the lessons than the 18 year olds who'd never swung a hammer in their lives. I had spent a year "learning" how to be a blacksmith, and during that year had picked up bits of knowledge here and there – thanks to Rudy, John, Jerry A, Smokey and others. I could draw a decent taper, and make some simple things that didn't look horrendous – except to me. I thought that I had a pretty good grasp on the basics – in theory, if not execution. What I didn't realize going into the class was how much I was going to have to unlearn.

How do you hold your hammer? What shape and thickness is the handle? Why? Is it the most ergonomic way to hold it? If you held it differently would you get more power in your strike? Or less wear and tear on your body? Are you capitalizing on all four pivot points? Or do you only use three? Are you pounding on the steel? Or guiding the hammer to where you want it to strike...? I don't recall if this was the first day or the second day, but it was definitely the first conversation about hammers. What I ultimately found out was that all of my callouses were in the wrong place! I'm correcting that little problem on a daily basis... Ouch!

Now, I'm not saying that anything I learned in that last year was bad, or wrong, or inadequate. In fact, I feel blessed to have been able to learn from some most

excellent smiths. But, Will made me think about every motion, every blow, and every step in the process. Things which had been working just fine for a year were now turned completely on their heads. Sometimes I shook my fist and silently cursed at him! But I paid close attention to every word he said – to do otherwise would have been plain foolish.

And so it continued – deep probing questions and mounds of information on every aspect of blacksmithing throughout each class. What are the advantages of a continental pattern anvil over a London pattern? Why are the tongs shaped in such an odd way? Can you see how they combine the strengths of several standard tong varieties? And what about the hammer? What are the advantages of the design? Do any of your other hammers have straight peens, ball peens and cross peens? Each session was its own chapter on metalworking, written by Will Bastas. Now, don't get me wrong, the classes were not all just a download of information. Once 8 or 9 rookies began running around with hot metal in their hands, things became barely-controlled chaos. But that's where the fun began! We were each allowed to make our own mistakes, be they hot tongs ruined by getting dropped into the slack tub, bad twists, really bad scrolls and, of course, the burns. I will say that, as far as I know, everyone in my class only burned themselves, and not any of their classmates. That's a small miracle unto itself.

Along with the wealth of information, we also began to acquire a collection of items which each student created themselves. As Will indicated on the first day, "every hammer blow in this class is for a purpose." That purpose being to create something from steel. The list of objects is significant – a bracelet, several tong clips, a multi-tool (pry bar/screwdriver + bottle opener,) a pair of monkey paw pickup tongs, the Holy Grail of hammers and most of a three-sided accent lamp. *If only we hadn't been cheated out of a class because of that tropical storm!* The hammer and tongs alone are worth the cost of the class. Everything else, including all of the knowledge which has, hopefully, taken root in our minds, is a bonus.

While I can't say that this was my favorite ACC class ever... wait a minute... what am I saying? This was TOTALLY my favorite ACC class ever!!! Not only were we provided access to a ridiculous amount of excellent machinery and tools, we had access to Will Bastas! I mean, really, what else could you ask for? This guy (Wait, is that instructor? Or professor? Or... ah, hell, just call him Will,) is so incredibly passionate and knowledgeable about the craft that it still kinda hurts my head. If you haven't figured it out yet, what impressed me the most about my experience was Will himself. The information that he relayed to his students, through both words and demonstrations, was offered up without reserve. His

knowledge is so clearly born from unbridled enthusiasm about the art, that the students couldn't help but absorb and channel his passion. It occurs to me as I write this – the only thing Will may love more than blacksmithing, is teaching blacksmithing. What more could you possibly ask for in an instructor?

A phrase which I picked up since discovering Balcones Forge comes to mind, (and it's always in Rudy's voice for some reason.) *There's only one reason a blacksmith won't tell you something... because he's about to show you.* Without a doubt, Will Bastas exemplifies this saying. If I had to describe Will Bastas in one word it would be *incredibly generous*. I guess that's two words... no matter, it fits.

Will, ~~if you're reading this article~~, since you already proofread and HEAVILY EDITED this article (*Do you really think generous is a better word than torturous? I guess you're right...*) – THANK YOU for everything! See you in Power Hammer class in the fall!!

And as for everyone else... TAKE THIS CLASS!!!

Or any of these other great ACC Metalworking Classes:

Art Metals

Architectural Hardware

Coppersmithing

Functional and Sculptural Forging

Layout and Fabrication: Furniture

Power Hammer

Toolmaking

Welding, Welding, Welding (you pick it, they teach it!)

Please check them out. If you didn't know, this is one of the best places in the whole country to learn metalworking... You have noticed how many blacksmiths there are around Central Texas, haven't you? I'm not saying that Will Bastas and the program at ACC are responsible for all of them, but it's not out of bounds to say that this program has played a major role in developing the local metalworking culture... as Balcones Forge members should well know!

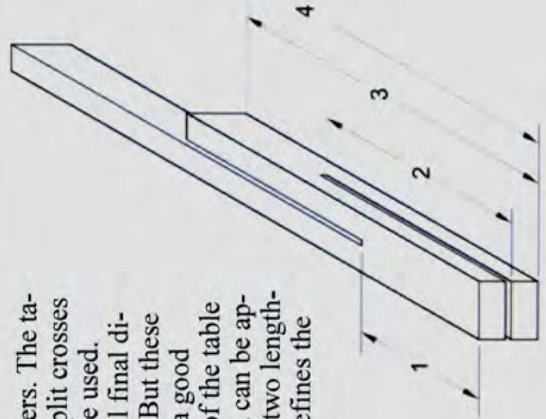
Everyone seems to be doing split crosses these days, but a lot of us cut the blanks with a lick and a prayer. Here's some hard figures for cutting your blanks. Or you could just use this material as the basis for making your own aesthetic judgements and modifications.

*(Reprinted from the newsletter of the Saltfork Craftsmen Artist Blacksmith Association (Oklahoma), March 2015.)*

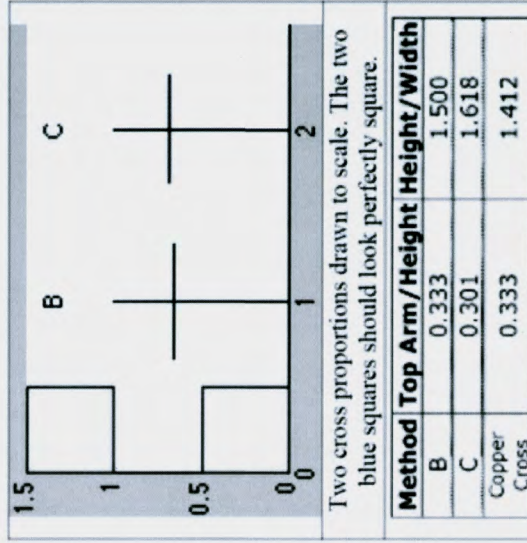
### Split Cross - Quick Dimensions

| Width Dimension of Stock |        |         |        |         |        |        |         |        |        |             |
|--------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Dim                      | 1/4    | 5/16    | 3/8    | 1/2     | 9/16   | 5/8    | 3/4     | 1      | 1 1/4  | Any Size    |
| 1                        | 9/16   | 3/4     | 7/8    | 1-1/8   | 1-5/16 | 1-7/16 | 1-3/4   | 2-5/16 | 2-7/8  | 2.30 x Size |
| 2                        | 15/16  | 1-1/8   | 1-3/8  | 1-13/16 | 2-1/16 | 2-1/4  | 2-3/4   | 3-5/8  | 4-9/16 | 3.63 x Size |
| 3                        | 1-7/16 | 1-13/16 | 2-3/16 | 2-7/8   | 3-1/4  | 3-5/8  | 4-5/16  | 5-3/4  | 7-3/16 | 5.75 x Size |
| 4                        | 2-5/16 | 2-7/8   | 3-7/16 | 4-5/8   | 5-3/16 | 5-3/4  | 6-15/16 | 9-3/16 | 11-1/2 | 9.21 x Size |

This information was provided by Jim Carothers. The table gives quick approximate dimensions for split crosses to get good proportions based on the stock size used. These dimensions are not really critical and all final dimensions are really subject to personal taste. But these dimensions would be a good guideline to get a good "look" to the final product. The last column of the table provides the basic ratios that were used which can be applied to any size of stock. The overlap of the two lengthwise cuts (dimension 2 minus dimension 1) defines the size of the opening in the center of the cross.



A final word about the overall proportions for a cross: throughout history you can find examples of many different cross proportions (ratio of height to width and ratio of the length of the top arm to the height), and you can still see all manner of cross proportions in use today. The one for you to use is the one you think looks better. Several examples of overall cross proportions that I think look good are given in the illustration below.



Two cross proportions drawn to scale. The two blue squares should look perfectly square.

Proportions for the two cross designs and for the copper cross pictured at left. The top arm is the vertical portion above the crosspiece. Method C uses the Golden Ratio (ratio of height to width is 1.618) while method B uses round numbers like 1/3 and 3/2. The top, left, and right arms are the same length in methods B and C.

Donald W. Morgan

Donald W. Morgan was born in Dallas, Texas, but grew up in the family's hometown of Paris, Texas, where they had returned because of the Great Depression. He graduated from Paris High School and Paris Junior College and entered the University of Texas, but his education was interrupted, as is was for so many of his generation, by World War II.

He served in the U. S. Army 441st Counter Intelligence, General Headquarters, Far East Command. He helped occupy Japan, living in the south of Japan for just over a year. He returned to the University of Texas and earned a degree in Government, graduating in 1948, and continued in Graduate Studies until 1950, planning to go into diplomatic service.

This plan was interrupted when he spotted the cute, curly-headed kid sister of his favorite hunting buddy in church in Austin, who had grown up while he was in the Army and was now also a student at U.T. Their two families knew each other in Paris, and he was friends with her older sister and brother; besides, she played the violin which he loved. The two were married in 1951. During the next ten years, four daughters arrived to enrich their lives.

Don worked for the Texas Highway Department for 35 years, retiring in 1986. He was raised in and served as a Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church. He and his wife joined St. David's Episcopal Church in 1976, where both sang in the choir for 15 years and he served as an usher.

He was active in the Sons of the American Revolution, Patrick Henry Chapter, Austin, serving as Registrar/Genealogist, Vice-President, and Officer of the Color Guard. He was also a member of the Fleur-de-Lis Chapter, Huguenot Society of Texas since 1994. He was interested in family histories and historical events all his life.

He and his wife, Natalie, developed an intense interest in early music on early instruments and were the founders of the Austin Chapter of the American Recorder Society in 1959, which he served as President for several terms. In addition to learning the recorder, he also taught himself to play the viola da gamba and studied lute with a professional teacher in England, who supplied him with detailed written lute lessons by mail.

He began his habit of collecting as a very young boy, beginning with muzzle loading guns. As years went by, he collected coins, books, antique furniture, musical instruments, and blacksmith tools. He was noted for being a "tale spinner." His knowledge concerning these collections was encyclopedic.

His interest in blacksmithing tools began in the late 1970's and he spent every weekend driving the rural roads around Austin, meeting and getting to know many



of the old blacksmiths who still had shops. Many of them were approaching retirement and he was able to purchase tools, both large and small. The most notable items in the collection are the forge and the anvil, both from Mr. Nunn's shop, which was originally in Littig, Texas, but later moved to Manor. Mr. Nunn is well known and revered in the African-American community and there is a bust of him in the Carver Museum in Austin. He was a third generation blacksmith and his grandfather may have been a freed slave. Don also revered him and several other smiths and tried to learn as much as he could from these "originals."

Don gradually became ill, both physically and mentally and by 2008, was almost completely bedridden. He passed away in December 2014 at age 90 and is buried at Austin Memorial Park





# Aspery, in Glen Rose, Texas

## Oct. 11-13, 2015

Information and reservations:

Ron Stafford 209-610-3448

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This will be the second year in a row we will have one of the most respected and capable blacksmith educators in North America, for a hands on clinic with you. Mark is editor of ABANA's **Hammer's Blow** magazine. Also he has authored three volumes of **Mastering the Fundamentals of Blacksmithing**. Mark was 2014 recipient of the prestigious BEALER award. It is our pleasure to have you with us for three days in October to experience even more growth in your smithing skills.



### “Fussy Projects” - training for the developing smith. . .

This clinic will cover a number of techniques, many associated with aspects of ABANA's **National Grill**. As always Mark will start with calculations, techniques and a demonstration. After which you will reproduce the tool or forged item.

## Prepare to Learn

Mark Aspery will conduct a full participation hands on clinic. Come prepared to work at the anvil and learn. You will bring your own set -up, anvil, fire, water bucket, basic hand tools, etc. Bring your shade "Easy Up", big hat, etc.

We will have some set ups available however they must be reserved early to guarantee availability.



## Accommodations:

This clinic is being conducted on a pecan covered property in Somervell County near Glen Rose, Texas. Numerous motels are located just 5 miles away. Camping your thing? There is lots of room for you to park your camper or pitch your tent. Dry camping at no charge. Helps to keep your cost low. We try to accommodate your needs where possible, so if you have any questions please ask.

## Cost and Information:

The fee for the three day clinic will be \$375. (*Discounts for early entry apply. Pay by August 11th \$330, a savings of 45.00. Pay by September 11th \$345, a savings of 30.00.*)

For reservations or information please contact Ron Stafford:

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*photos from July meeting by Gerald Pollard*



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