



Balcones Forge Dispatch

President's Corner

Oct/Nov 2016



Greetings forge fans!

Fall is finally here, and fall is for forging.

First, a big "Thank you" to all who helped out at the Wendish Fest in Serbin last month. We made lots of friends, ate lots of German food, and

just had a great time with the locals. Also thanks to Rick and Tom for bring their awnings and canvas flies to save us from the rain. We have already been invited back next year and the next few years after that. Good Job!

We open Fall with the October meeting on the 29th at the auction of the Comal Blacksmith Shop. Donald and Melissa Zipp will host and put the entire contents of the smithy up for grabs to the highest bidders. Tim Tellander has had his Balcones crew have been working for the last five weekends to help get everything ready for the auction. Outstanding job! All we have to do now is show up with a truck and some money. The trade item will "Halloween". Spooks, ghost, goblins, or maybe something to augment your costume. The choice is yours.

Now pay attention, the very next weekend, November 5th, is the big bash at the Blanco Buggie Barn. Dennis Moore has once again asked us to be a part of this cowboy gathering. There will be lots of cowboy music, cowboy poetry, lots of horse drawn contraptions of every shape and size. There will also be lots of blacksmiths and anvils for open forging. Please bring your equipment to help out with this great event. The trade item for this event is something Fall or Thanksgiving themed. Whatever you like, make a turkey leg or a knife to carve or serve it.

October Meeting Date is the 29th

November Meeting Date is the 5th

President's message continued on page 2.



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President's message continued from page 1.

You can also start making your plans to attend the 4th Annual Memorial Rystik Forge demo and dinner in Devine, TX at Jerry and Marsha Whitley's on December 10th. This will be an all girl demo with a big auction to boot. The Whitleys have lots of space for campers and tents for those who feel the need to stay over and sleep it off. Lots more info on this event to follow.

Please submit all board member nominations to me ASAP.

Hope to see ya'll in Comal!

Jerry Achterberg,
President, Balcones Forge



SECRETARY'S REPORT

I have always loved the trip to La Grange, in particular is the winding road that descends and crosses over the Colorado river and takes you right downtown. Rural and comfort-

able atmosphere with mom & pop cafes along the square that take me back to my roots in Goliad. It's always a transcending experience not to feel like a stranger in another town where just about everybody acknowledges your presence with a warm welcome. I love that "ain't no hurry here" feeling when visiting some other town.

The route we followed took us through some of the ever delightful piney woods with a lot of rolling

hills and well kept farm land. As we got close to the less populated (or so I thought) Serbin, the church parking lot was absolutely packed - lots of pickup trucks, of course. Upon arriving and setting up our forge and anvils, there were plenty of old timers interested in our blacksmithing equipment and just about everyone made it a point to inform us about an anvil they had back at the farm, or visits they made after school to some particular blacksmith shop. Because they were so enthusiastic about their little community, I decided to do a little research which turned into a very interesting pursuit. One of the more intense descriptions of the settlement established in 1855 was by Leonard Kubiak, a Texas historian from Rockdale. It is from his writings that I obtained the majority of the following information.

In 1854, settlers numbering 557 left Lusatia, a Wendish community of Prussia and Saxony. The Wendish language was passed down from central European Slavic tribes in the 10th century. These tribes were reduced by conquest and assimilation into other countries and only small numbers remained along the Spree river in Germany. They experienced great hardships, so much so that it was customary for the brides to be married in black wedding dresses symbolizing hardships they were about to suffer. Religious oppression by the Prussians was prevalent and they also insisted that only German be spoken, so this, among other demoralizing situations, motivated the Wendish population led by spiritual leader Reverend Jan Kilian to travel to Liverpool, England. So in 1854, almost 600 boarded the Ben Nevis and headed for Galveston. Over 50 died of cholera and then 13 more perished from yellow fever. After their arrival, they traveled by ox cart to Rhabbs creek near Giddings and purchased a league of land for one dollar an acre. By 1860, there was a post office and 50 families, by 1880 there were two churches, two general stores and three blacksmith shops. After 1909 the post office closed with the rise of popula-

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tion and services available in Giddings. As of today, about 100 people remain.

When the coal smoke snarled it's way through the crowd and hammers started pounding steel, the onlookers began to gather. Our group members laid out numerous displays of hammer forged items. Several smiths were able to sell a few items, and I hope we are fortunate enough to attend next year. I was unable to venture out and see what others had on display, but near our camp there was several dozen of restored vintage tractors and one trailer there was probably 100 old metal tractor seats painted in every color - very nice. I am always amazed how many young kids are attracted to a blacksmithing set up. With parent supervision, I allow a few of them to crank the forge while I hammer out a double headed nail into a miniature sword of which they seem to be quite proud of. We had almost a half dozen forges going.

Jerry Achterberg called our meeting to order and reminded us of the upcoming Comal blacksmith shop auction on October 29, the Buggy Barn demo November 4 &5, and our first all lady blacksmith demo in Devine, December 10. Tom Leinning informed us that his 250 pound power hammer is up and running and feel free to contact him if you want to do some forging with it. Vince Herod explained that the Balcones Forge Dispatch will no longer be mailed out, (as of January 2017) but is available on line. Dave Koenig gave everyone an open invitation to contact him about the Plantersville demo where they will be building 1, 2, & 3 burner gas forges from kits. Smokey Thompson explained his display of colonial lighting items, hand forged and fully useful as well as beautifully done. Jerry A. showed the technique to stop tong rivet wear by inserting a stop on one side of the tongs, a very clever idea.

Of course, as the day progressed, mother nature sent our first 'cold front' preceded by ominous displays of thunder and lightning which is suppose to warn everyone a storm is brewing, so time to put your equipment in the truck. Well wouldn't you know, just about everyone of us was soaked to the bone! How does that go: Ain't got 'nuff sense -----?

Tim Tellander, Balcones Forge Secretary



COMAL BLACKSMITH SHOP AUCTION OCTOBER 29TH

October will take us to the Comal blacksmith shop located just south of New Braunfels on the 29th, where Balcones Forge will auction the entire contents of the smithy. The shop is now owned by the Zipp family, who will be hosting the meeting. The smithy has not been in operation for many years and is now in disrepair. The Zipp family would like to see this equipment go to blacksmiths that will continue to use it and pass it on to future smiths.

Meeting time: 9:30.

Trade item theme :Halloween

There is also a historical marker in the front of the shop.

Comal Blacksmith & Mechanical Shop

New Braunfels

Comal County, Texas

29 38.725' N 98 13.395' W

Text: The Wenzel/Schwab (aka Comal) Blacksmith Shop was originally established sometime prior to 1915 by Peter Ignatz Wenzel, one of the original founding colonists of New Braunfels, Texas. On June 10, 1851 and again in 1864 Ignatz Wenzel purchased 100 acres and 303 acres of land, respectively, in the Comal Settlement Area (seven miles southwest of New Braunfels, Texas) where besides farming operations he established the community's first blacksmith shop (exact date of formation unknown) along the historic "Post Road" that has since become FM 482. In 1915, ownership of the blacksmith shop passed to Bruno Schwab, grandson of Valentine Joseph Schwab an original settler of the Comal Settlement Area and after whom Schwab Road is named. Bruno was an inventor who developed many devices for use by the farmers of the area such as a "Pear Burner" for use in burning off the stickers of the cactus plant so the cattle could eat the cactus in very dry seasons when no vegetation was growing. He patented the first hard rubber tire remover with the U.S. Government Patent Office. He was an original manufacturer of farm implements and ranch gates spread throughout the Texas Hill Country area. Bruno enjoyed music and played in bands for special occasions throughout the Comal County area. The blacksmith was a vital part of the prosperity of the farming communities due to the farmer's dependence upon the blacksmith's skills to keep their horses shod, wagons repaired, cattle branded, etc. Presented by the Schertz Historical Preservation Committee.

The address is 6615 FM 482, Cibolo, TX. 78132. It is about 1/4 mile east of John Paul II high school. Google & Mapquest maps will tell you this is in New Braunfels.



Comal Blacksmith Shop



WEB PAGE UPDATE

Hello Balcones Forge members. The website now has many new aspects to it. As some of you know you can now fill out membership applications online under the membership page. Also the member gallery needs an update so please send some pictures of your work along with a short biography as to how you became a blacksmith. Please email this to Shane Tilton at:

flex201214@gmail.com

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On another note many of our members offer teaching or other blacksmithing related services. If you are one of these individuals please email Shane the title of your service, prices or a price range and method of contact for the service. I look forward to your submissions and emails.

Thank you,
Shane Tilton

The 1597 Tongs

Michael Wollowski
wollowski@rose-hulman.edu

The image in figure 1 shows a blacksmith forging nails. It dates back to 1597! The tongs in the image, as shown in the close-up of figure 2 are intriguing to me. They look somewhat like a duck bill. Looking around the picture, it looks like the blacksmith had just two pairs of tongs. It stands to reason that those tongs should be well thought out and useful. To find out, I decided to build a pair and give them a try.



Figure 1: Ignis (Fire) by Nicolaes Jansz Clock. 1597.

© The Trustees of the British Museum

seems to be a fairly sharp, angled end to them. Studying the image, I found the pose struck by the smith to be very unusual. He seems to be squatting down to a certain degree. Depending on how you look at the image, the tongs seem to rest on his upper left leg. Certainly, this would be not necessary from a perspective of exerting sufficient force to hold a small piece of steel.

As the close-up in figure 2 shows, the two bits are quite different. The tip of the top bit ends up flat and fairly wide, as shown in the top of figure 3. The bottom bit, on the other hand, comes to a rather narrow end, as shown in the top of figure 4. When looked at head-on, the bit ends look like a stylized duck bill. While not obvious from the image, I suspect that the top bit is slightly cupped. I imagine that the bottom bit is slightly rounded over. This will create three contact points: the two edges of the top bit and centered between them, the bottom bit. Arranged in this fashion, the three contact points should offer a lot of holding power, certainly more than flat-bit tongs.

Before going into the details of building the tongs, let's turn our attention to the ends of the reigns. Consider figure 2. You will notice that the top arm is shorter than the one at the bottom.

Additionally, the bottom arm terminates with a nice bend. It is somewhat unusual to have one arm shorter than the other. Upon closer inspection of the image, it appears that the end of the top arm simply broke off. The artist did not

draw them nicely rounded over, rather there



Figure 2: Close-up of tongs.

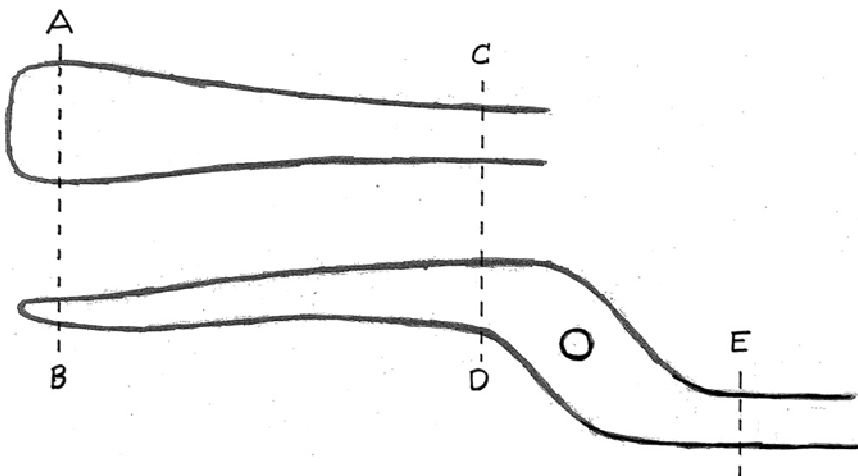


Figure 3: Profile and birds-eye view of top bit

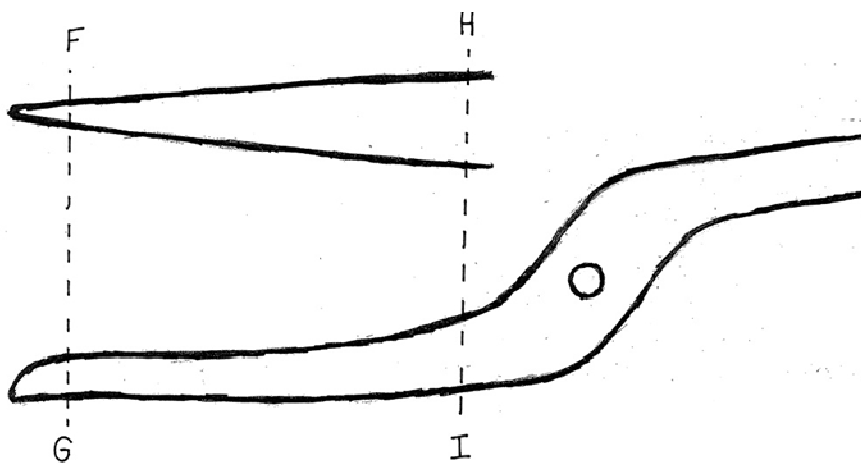


Figure 4: Profile and birds-eye view of bottom bit.

The remainder of this article contains construction notes on building these tongs as well as an evaluation of their use. I built a prototype from 1/2" square 1045 medium carbon steel. When it comes to the overall length, I used the width of the blacksmith's wrist as a guide. Measuring the wrists of some of my burlier friends, I determined them to be about 4 1/4" wide. Based on my calculations, this makes the tongs about 23" long. The bits are 5 1/2" long, as measured from the center of the rivet hole. These dimensions are too large for me, as such I built tongs that are just 21" long and for which the bits are just 4 1/2" long.

Top Bit. In the bottom of figure 3, you will notice that the tip of the top bit is gently bent upwards. There is a corresponding bend in the lower bit, as shown in the bottom of figure 4. Together, they ensure a three point contact area for a reasonable range of thickness of the materials to be held. The width of the top bit at (A) is 7/8" and it's thickness at (B) is about 3/16". The width at (C) is 7/16 and the

thickness at (D) is 3/8". The reigns at (E) are 1/2" thick and 3/8" wide. They gradually taper to 3/8" thick and 5/16" wide just before the ears at the end of the reigns.

Bottom Bit. In the bottom of figure 4, you will notice that the tip of the bottom bit is rounded over and somewhat angled backwards. I imagine that this aids in picking up steel that is in the fire. This way, the bottom bit will slide underneath the steel, rather than push it further into the fire. When it comes to the width of the bit, as far as I can tell from the image, the bottom bit does narrow at a steady rate and comes to a fairly narrow tip. Additionally, the bottom bit as depicted in figure 2 appears to be slightly shorter than the top bit, by about 3/16". The width of the bottom bit at (F) is 1/4" and the thickness at (G) is 5/16". The width at (H) is 3/8" and the thickness at (I) is 1/2".

General Construction Notes. I began by forming the bits as sketched in figures 3 and 4. In each of the arms, I bent a fairly tight S. Next, I used the pein of my hammer to draw out the S of each arm length-wise, to about 3/4" wide and 3/16" thick. This process will also "widen" the S a little bit. The arms are drawn out so as to gradually taper to the desired dimensions. The ears at the end of the reigns are slightly bent outwards. After punching the rivet holes and dry-fitting the tongs to make any last minute adjustments, I filed the contact area of the tongs flat, to facilitate smooth operation of the tongs.



Figure 5: The prototype



Figure 6: The bits

Evaluation. These tongs are best seen as an improved version of flat bit tongs. They do a noticeably better job at holding flat stock and sheet goods than flat bit tongs. The length of the bits reduces the leverage that could be attained. However, it comes in handy when working larger pieces, such as body armor, something a smith during the middle ages would have produced.

All in all, these are an improvement over flat bit tongs; however, I would not want to give up my other tongs.

Medieval Ironwork, Volumes I and II, by Lennart Karlson, Hardback, 437 pages & 615 pages. Published by Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, Sweden.

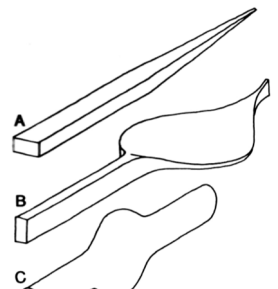
Book Review by Chris Holt



Fig. 246A, p. 128. Door at Mern believed to be made in the middle ages have Romanesque characteristics. Note the lion and dragon near top of door.

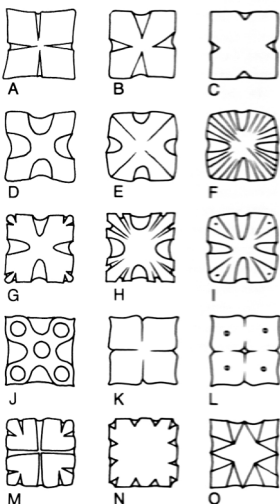
This very special two volume set is dedicated to a complete study of medieval Swedish ironwork. This study is thorough and covers ironwork through the beginning of time. When reading, it is important to be able to have access to the second volume at the same time because the second volume is also a photo catalog with descriptions. The length of detail of each aspect the author covers is exceptional. For example, the study of doors and door hardware is incredible. The symbolism and importance of a door and doorway gives the reader a new perspective. The ironwork on a portal was important, not only for the structure support, but also for security and for spiritual messages. This was during a time when visual symbolism helped convey continuous messages to all that stood before an entrance. "In all cultures the door represents a psychologically significant barrier between two different worlds, a small inner one, snug and well arranged, and an infinite outer one, menacing and chaotic." (Vol, I, p.252) Thieves and robbers were confronted by "robust built doors" furnished with a lock and bar on the inside. Intruders were not the only fear to contend with, but also wild beasts such as wolves and bears. Magical measures were taken to ward against such calamity using amulets as possible added protection. Keep in mind the doorway is the weakest part of a structure. All measures were taken, physical as well as psychological.

It is interesting to learn that through time (Migratory and Middle Ages) forging tools that were developed have changed very little. There are "marginal differences" between classical, medieval, and modern blacksmith's tools. What you presently have in your blacksmith shop: hammer, anvil, etc., is essentially what was used for all of time. This is an curious concept to contemplate. By reading and studying these volumes, the reader surely is immersed in a deep understanding of not only ironwork but man's quest in developing this practical and spiritual art form.



From Vol. I, p.363, A. was referred to as tilting, today we refer to it as drawing out, B. widening C. upsetting.

Another area of study in volume I is the area of dating ancient work. Because the ironwork was so important to the everyday protection of man, dating the work can be puzzling. The wooden panels on doors were replaced when rotted, especially near the bottom. When dating material it was found it to be better to examine the remaining wood in the center of the door because the "new" wood near the bottom could give a false date to the door's entirety. Ironwork was considered valuable. It may have been removed and replaced onto a new wooden door. Therefore the ironwork could be much older than the testing of wood indicated. Again, this is just a mere sampling of information in the complete study in the two volumes. If you are up for a bit of a challenge and really want to learn about ancient blacksmithing, these books can offer you a "college class" in the comfort of a recliner, a fire, and a cold beer. All you need is a little dedicated time!



From Vol. I, p377, Fig. 261. Square nail-heads A-C were frequent and widespread. Forged nail-heads were used when a wooden door was to be "ironed". The construction of the wooden door used dowels, but large quantities of nails were used to attach the ironwork. Left— Examples are of some decorative nail heads.



photos from September meeting by Vince Herod



NEWSLETTER CHANGES COMING

by Daniel Harrington

Balcones Forge has offered members a printed and mailed copy of the Balcones Forge Dispatch at a very low cost (\$5/year) for a number of years... Probably forever. We have also known for some time that the actual cost of producing and mailing these letters is higher than the additional membership fee.

After looking into the actual costs to produce these letters, which about 33% of our members receive, we got a big surprise! The cost to print and mail twelve newsletters to a single member is **over \$26.00**. Since we're only charging \$5, that mean's were loosing... Well, y'all can do the math.

The Board chewed on this one for a while and looked for ways to fix the problem. We considered increasing the fee for membership with hard copy newsletter to \$30/year (from \$25,) but that still leaves us \$16 short for every member receiving a newsletter in the mail. We agreed that increasing the cost to our members any further than that was not an option. This essentially left us with two choices: continue to provide the newsletters at a loss, or move away from the printed newsletter altogether.

After much wailing and gnashing of teeth, we decide to stop mailing the newsletters. The last issue to be mailed out to members will be December 2016.

Our hope is that members understand that this was a difficult decision, but one we felt necessary to make. Our goal is to continue to produce a dozen or so hard copies to be made available at meetings for those who would like to take a hardcopy home with them. Otherwise, the newsletters will be available on our website, and all members who have provided an email address will receive a link each month.

Happy Forging,
DH





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