

APRIL IN OLDENBURG, TX

HABA and some of its members came together at Kennie and Susan Hall's place in Oldenburg, TX, April 1-3, 2005. The purpose of coming together was to forge some small items for HABA's inventory, sell individual hand forged items to the public and to promote the art and craft of blacksmithing. The Hall's welcomed all of us with open arms, made us feel at home, fed us well Saturday evening and told us about a big change.

This is HABA fifth year to be invited to



Oldenburg on the last weekend of the Round Top Antique Festival. There are thousands of vendors and tens of thousands of people who come to the area to look for antiques and collectables. Oldenburg is located just north of LaGrange on highway 237. A few miles north of Oldenburg is the town of Warrenton and a little farther north is Round Top. The location is about half way between Houston and Austin. The scenic and rural area is beautiful in springtime with Bluebonnet flowers covering the hillsides.

Setup, March 31

Site preparations began March 31 when Jim Wheeler, Tee Hines and Dave Koenig arrived at Oldenburg with signs and pennants. Kennie mowed the area usually used for member parking and the site took on a whole new spacious look. After three hours of driving posts, erecting signs and the shower, and stringing pennants, Jim, Tee and Dave arrived at Cowboy Szymanski's shop in Bellville, TX to load two tons of coal on Tee's gooseneck trailer. Thursday turned out to be a long and productive day.

Coal Supply

FYI, Cowboy received a 25 ton delivery of bulk Pocahontas coal, so Tee and Dave picked up their order on the way home. If you are interested in purchasing coal, call Cowboy for pricing and pickup times at 713-724-6813.

Friday, April 1

By Friday night after a beautiful blustery day, Gary Evensen, Richard and Ginger Boswell, James, Cathy and Richard Porter, Jim Wheeler, Tee and Darla Hines and Dave Koenig were setup at Oldenburg and ready to demonstrate. Richard Boswell had a trailer of consigned anvils, blowers, forges and tongs to sell.

Darla Hines was also ready to demonstrate gourd decorating and to sell some of her completed gourds. The centerpiece of her display was the beautiful gourd she decorated and donated to HABA. It is a beautiful piece of work depicting the HABA Logo, and tools of the craft. She chose that specific gourd because the mold marks unmistakably resemble coal smoke. Darla's gourd will be offered for sale or be included in one of HABA's fund raising auctions.



Those who arrived early and setup on Friday were 'blown out'. In typical Oldenburg fashion, the weather made itself know in a dramatic way

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by blowing so hard that some signs blew off of the poles, the shower was knocked over and the Hines canopy was uprooted and blown into the nearest oak tree. Needless to say, it was not possible to do any forging. By 6:00 that evening the wind died down and stayed down through Saturday. Friday ended around the campfire for all who camped at Oldenburg. The last group finally hit their sleeping bags early Saturday morning.

Saturday, April 2

Saturday turned out to be one of the most beautiful days to date at Oldenburg...no wind, rain, excessive heat or cold or all of the above. Activities began early. A couple of forge fires were going around 8:00 and the first people looking for smithing tools arrived. While this was going on Fred Titera setup his forge and Bob McDonald from Hutto, TX and a Balcones Forge member setup to sell some ironwork and recycled files.

A steady stream of people stopped to see what was happening, to ask questions about where to find smithing tools, books and information, to find out what to look for if they happened upon an anvil, blower, vise, etc in Warrenton and to stand in wonder and watch as a hot piece of metal was transformed from a rod into something recognizable or useful. It seemed like more families stopped by this year than in the past and experienced the magic of forging for the first time.



The seven people working at their forges were physically tired by the end of the day. Body parts exposed to the sun were tinged red and their voices were a little rough because of all the talking.

Before we called it a day, Richard Boswell presented HABA's Treasurer, Cathy Porter, with a \$1,200 check from the Cultural Arts Center for Houston and Harris County (CACHH). HABA earned this money by demonstrating March 18-20, 2005 by demonstrating for CACHH at the Bayou City Arts Festival at Memorial Park.



Why Come To Oldenburg?

Each trip to Oldenburg is the same in some ways and at the same time is different. Oldenburg events are always a lot of work to organize and setup and teardown for HABA and for individuals. The weather always seems to throw us some kind of extreme which the weatherman was not able to predict. Everyone taking part always goes home tired and asks himself or herself if coming to Oldenburg was worth all of the effort. The conclusion for some is yes and for others no. This came up in a conversation.

Saturday evening John Korb, Tee Hines, Dave Koenig and Gary Evensen happened to return to Gary Evensen's travel trailer. The reason was to grab a cup of hot coffee...and get rid of the chill resulting from the dropping temperature and the ice cream and cobbler dinner desert. This group's conversation, like most at these kinds of events, was free flowing and covered a lot of territory. One topic was especially poignant. Generally put, it was something like: "HABA advertised the purpose of the April Hammerfest was come to Oldenburg to make things for HABA to sell. As far as I know nothing was made". The conversation immediately turned to answering the question: Is Oldenburg really a place to make something.

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The consensus soon reached was that Oldenburg was really not a good place to set up a forge and to get serious about making anything this year. There were just too many interruptions. Someone was always walking up to ask what are you doing or do you know where I can buy this or that or what is a good beginning book to read about blacksmithing, and on and on. And then there are the adults and kids who just stand there and watch you form a piece of metal with a hammer and anvil. These are generally the people who are really getting excited about what they are seeing...maybe for the first time.

This year people seemed to start at one end of the line of forges and then spend some time visiting with each demonstrator.

We always talk about selling what we make at Oldenburg. So far selling hand made forged ironwork at Oldenburg has been quiet limited. What historically sells is new and used blacksmithing equipment. For example Richard Boswell was able to sell on behalf of HABA, eight anvils, a blower or two, a forge table and a few other things he had on consignment. A few individuals also managed to sell or trade a few things which certainly did not financially justify the expense and effort of spending the weekend at Oldenburg.

So the question seems to be: why would HABA want to be represented at Oldenburg and why would any professional or hobbyist blacksmith want to setup at Oldenburg?

The answer for HABA appears to be simple. HABA's reason to exist is to preserve and to promote the art and craft of blacksmithing. Oldenburg is one venue where this is happening

at both the spring and fall events. The last two fall HABA Oldenburg events offered featured demonstrators and the sale of new and used blacksmithing tools. Primarily smiths from the region have come to take advantage of the forging demonstrations and the equipment sales resources which are made available. Historically the spring events are more low-key. They are simply an invitation for smiths to join HABA in selling and demonstrating to the public. All of this is preserving and promoting the art and craft of blacksmithing.

Now what would motivate an individual smith to invest his time and dollars to setup to demonstrate and sell at Oldenburg? A client



sales base for hand forged art and utilitarian items has not developed so far. That may be because there is no consistent inventory of items at Oldenburg from one event to another. However there is a developing client base for buying and selling blacksmithing equipment. Individuals can compete with HABA and its invitees.

Oldenburg is a great place for anyone to learn how to demonstrate. All that is required to learn is to:

- Have an interest in teaching the craft.
- Watch or work with an Oldenburg demonstrator.
- Find an approach which fits your personality and skill level.
- Adhere to HABA's demonstrator guidelines.
- Begin demonstrating at Oldenburg.

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Demonstrating and answering questions for others is also a great way to learn. Teaching not only promotes the craft but it can be downright satisfying when you are lucky enough to get some feedback. Most of the time feedback is limited to completing a good demo piece and providing some answers. Often you can see the interest you are generating by the quality of the questions you are getting asked, by the look people have in their faces and by the tone of their voice and their body language. It's a lot like being a grandparent, you just know something special is happening.

Then there are those rare occasions when someone will come up to you and tell you how much they enjoyed what you just did for them or what interest you generated for them when you talked to them last year. That person may be someone gathering the tools to start smithing or even a child. It is hard not to feel pretty good when someone else says you helped them out or when someone stops by to show you what they make because of you.

For example, here is an e-mail Tee Hines received:

Tee,

I am very grateful for the time you spent with Tucker and me. On the way home, he talked about me building a box for him to stand on and the thought of getting a smaller anvil for him to work on beside me. What a fulfilling thought that your boy wants to spend time side by side with his dad. He has shown that nail to everyone and carried it with him.

We plan on attending all the events we can this year.

I started splitting the iron for the deer, but I am out of town all week and it will have to wait until Saturday. I will look at the horse as well.

Thanks again, I am amazed at the warm reception from the entire group. It truly is the old school, old trade way of living the right way.

Warm regards,

Scott, & Tucker

And then there is the most basic reason to come to Oldenburg... to just enjoy the trip whether you are taking an active part as a demonstrator or camping out, visiting or shopping in the area.

At dinner Saturday night where Kennie and Susan Hall welcomed all the smiths to have dinner with the extended Hall family and friends, we learned that there were going to be some



changes made at Oldenburg. Kennie is planning to build a 40' x 60' pavilion which should be ready in October. There will be a roof with 12' eaves, no sides and a gravel floor. This means the Oldenburg experience will definitely change. More people will stop to see what is happening. There will be a place to get away from the sun and the rain when the sky opens up. There will undoubtedly be more vendors to draw even more customers.

So the answer to the question, why would a smith want to come to Oldenburg is manifold...to support HABA, to sell what you make, to sell your excess tools, to teach, to purchase tools, to purchase examples of other smiths' work, to learn about the forging process and to just enjoy yourself.

Sunday, April 3

Sunday morning things seemed to get started a little later than Saturday in spite of the fact that

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the camp fire got banked early Saturday night. By 9:00 or so the first of the last minute tool shoppers stopped by and by the noon Richard managed to sell a couple more anvils off of the trailer.

One by one during the morning everyone got their personal gear packed for the trip back home. All of HABA's signs, posts and pennants were taken down and packed or stowed for use in October. By noon we had everyone packed up and heading home.

Conclusion

April at Oldenburg was another very successful event for HABA. HABA renewed contacts with members not seen for a while. It also answered questions for people it met for the first time and saw many young and older faces light-up as they watched what happened at the forge. The reasons for smiths to come to Oldenburg are many.



Looking Ahead - Fall Forge Festival

HABA now is focused on the **Fall Forge Festival** at Oldenburg, October 7-9, 2005. Please note the name change for the fall Oldenburg event. Les Cook will be organizing the **Fall Forge Festival** which will feature regional demonstrators and vendors. The new pavilion Kennie plans to build will add a whole new dimension to the event. Many more people will be stopping to see what is going on and there will most likely be more people selling from this new facility.

Those of you who came to the Bayou City Art Festival probably noticed the importance of presentation when it comes to selling artwork. The three hundred vendors at the festival had 300 different ways to effectively show their

work. All of the things Pat Ahuero told us about presentation for selling were on display there. For those of us who would like to sell our work, there will not be a better time make a special effort to do just that in October.

Special HABA Thanks

A Very Special Thanks go to Kennie and Susan Hall who once again invited HABA and its members to their property at Oldenburg to preserve and promote the art and craft of blacksmithing and to sell our wares. They prepared a wonderful dinner for us Saturday evening and made sure we were supplied with orange juice and Oak Farms chocolate milk...compliments of Nelson Randerman.

Special Thanks goes to Frank Walters for preparing the flyer for 2005 Spring Oldenburg event.

Special Thanks goes to Richard Boswell for making the trip to Vidor to pick up the consignment of anvils, blowers, vises, etc. which he sold to generate interest and revenue for HABA.

Special Thanks go to Tee Hines, Jim Wheeler and Dave Koenig for making a special trip to Oldenburg to setup the site, and stayed to clean up.

Special Thanks to Tee and Darla Hines, James, Cathy and Richard Porter, Jim Wheeler, Richard and Ginger Boswell, Dave Koenig, Fred Titera and Gary Evensen for setting up a forge and demonstrating.

And Special Thanks to Kevin Crawford for assisting with demonstrating and teardown and to Bob McDonald for setting-up to sell.

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