



Dave Koenig

7418 Branch Point

Houston, TX

77095-2649

281-855-2869

76021.3660@compuserve.com

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To: HABA Distribution List

Re: The Newsletter of the Proposed Houston Area Blacksmiths' Association (HABA)

INTRODUCTION

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NOTE FROM THE PREZ

Enjoy the Holidays!

A Look Back

HABA had quite a 1999! It started off with a bang with the Bob Bergman and Nana Showalter demonstrations graciously hosted by Triple-S Steel Company.

The Oldenburg demonstration/selling event got off the ground in April and came to life in October. Kenny and Susan Hall invited HABA and any other blacksmiths to their land in Oldenburg, TX to demonstrate and sell during the Round Top Antique Show. This invitation is again open to all smiths in April.

In July, *Celebrate Smithing in Texas!* got smiths from all over Texas involved in making hardware for the new Barrington Living History Farm at Washington on the Brazos State Park. Smiths who never made hardware before found themselves making hinges, hooks and hasps. Larry Newbern built a beautiful fireplace crane for the new kitchen.

In November, HABA was invited to have a meeting at the Tomball Museum. The number of people attending this meeting was on the small side but most enthusiastic. Homer Gilbert for sure thought it was one of the better meetings of the year. He became the new owner of a like new 500 pound Columbian anvil. Everyone who came was served a delicious BBQ lunch courtesy of our hosts, the Tomball Museum. This meeting was the first of many more to come.

Between these major events of the year, about 175 people a month received 10 issues of the HABA Letter. Another 20 or so people per month attended the third Saturday HABA meetings. Some people dropped off the HABA mailing list but more people were added than who dropped.

HABA had a prosperous 1999 and thanks to everyone for contributing with your time, your expertise, your money and your ideas. HABA works because we all contribute. HABA has a lot to look forward to next year.

Albert Paley was in town in November to speak at the Museum of Fine Arts and to open a show of his work at a

local gallery. Six HABA members were able to attend his lecture. There is more in an article below.

There is a sad piece of information related to 1999 too. Francis Whitaker passed away in October. There is a short bio of Francis and some additional thoughts below.

A Look Ahead

A revised draft of the HABA Bylaws is now in the hands, Larry Hoff, Dave Koenig, Larry Newbern and Frank Walters. At this time, these are the four proposed initial board of directors for the Houston Area Blacksmith's Association Inc., a Texas nonprofit, nonmember corporation. The proposed board hopes to meet during the first week of January to go over the bylaws and details of forming a new Texas corporation. More work needs to be done to prepare documents that will be filed with the State of Texas for incorporation and the Internal Revenue Service for nonprofit status.

Lee Oates will conduct a knife and sheath making workshop on January 15 to start off the year 2000 for HABA. This meeting will be a workshop. That means bring some tools and plan on making a knife and a sheath. The objective of this workshop is to complete the process of forging a blade and making a sheath. Pretty does not count. Getting done does. All knives will be made from a railroad spike, big or small...your choice. The sheaths will be made from leather. This will be good. There are more details below.

Be sure to check the Coming Events section below. Dorothy Stiegler will be demonstrating in Marble Fall, TX at the end of January. She will be hosted by TABA. NTBA will host Brad Silberberg in Forney, TX at the end of February. If there is any way you can make one or both of these demonstrations, take advantage of this opportunity.

HABA is still in contact with Dennis Cordes of Texas Parks and Wildlife. With a little luck, the smiths of Texas will have an opportunity to come together at another State Park and contribute some form of ironwork. *Celebrate Smithing in Texas!* was a success. Several people involved this year thought we should continue. So, that is what we plan to do.

FRANCIS WHITAKER 1906 1999

By The National Heritage Foundation

Tradition flows from a sense of community, a sense of shared destiny shaped over time from common activities, values, and lot in life. In the traditional arts, occupations, particularly those founded on the informal, passing on of work skills are an important kind of community. The bonds of work under gird mutual standards of behavior, ethics, and aesthetic expectations. A fine example is the occupation of ornamental blacksmithing, in which apprenticed learning and a strong feeling of dedication to a mutual sense of beauty and skillful excellence forge strong communal ties. Often referred to as "The Dean of American blacksmiths", Francis Whitaker more than any other strengthened the ties of tradition among blacksmiths across the United States.

Some say it is difficult to tell whether he chose blacksmithing or blacksmithing chose him. Born in Woburn, Massachusetts in 1906, Francis Whitaker dropped out of high school at the age of 16 to apprentice with the

premier ornamental blacksmith of the day, Samuel Yellin, in Philadelphia. "The first time I took a piece of hot iron out of the fire and started to beat it with a hammer, I was hooked," says Whitaker. "There's a fascination to it that I have never lost...there's a magic to it, taking something, a stubborn material, and doing what you want with it." After a second apprenticeship in Berlin with the German master Julius Schramm, he returned to the United States during the 20th-century heyday of ornamental ironwork and settled in Carmel, California in 1927.

It was the era of the Spanish Revival in California design, and work was plentiful. After working for a general contractor for seven years, he opened his own shop in 1933, during the depths of the Depression. Though times were difficult, "The Depression. . . taught me that if you're dedicated to your work and do good work and are uncompromising about it, there will always be a place for you in society. The others can fall by the wayside, the second-raters." This iron-willed dedication to excellence marked his entire career, spanning nearly three quarters of a century. During his California years, he became friends with John Steinbeck, who used him as a model for a character in "The Long Valley"; his later writer/acquaintance, Leon Uris, would base the heroic character Conner Larkin in his novel "Trinity" on Whitaker.

In 1963, he moved his shop to Aspen, Colorado. As interest in ornamental ironwork revived, his mastery was sought out by younger blacksmiths hungry for the specialized techniques, skills, and knowledge that seriously eclipsed during the economic downturn of the Depression, the disruption of World War II, and the changing styles of American architecture.

"Then In 1976 I received the call . . . a mission in life . . . I realized that I was a link between the heyday of wrought ironwork in the early years of this century and the present renaissance of blacksmithing." He spent his remaining years selflessly devoting himself to passing on his knowledge to the next generation, teaching widely across the United States and founding the Francis Whitaker Blacksmith Schools at the Rocky Mountain School and the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina. He received numerous awards, including the 1995 Colorado Governor's Award for Excellence in Arts and an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from the University of Colorado.

I Remember Francis

By Dave Koenig

I met Francis at Peaceable Kingdom, a small craft-like school, near Washington, TX. The year was 1980. I signed-up for a beginner's workshop with Joe Pehoski. I showed up at the shop and there were a number of people milling around. Francis finished a workshop the day before. He was in the shop and looking at some work before heading to the airport.

I did not know Francis from Adam's cat but I knew something special was happening. When Francis said something, people listened. Someone, as I recall, asked a question about welding. That question turned into a lecture about quality of work, always doing your best and never giving your customers anything but your best. By this time Francis was starting to run late but took a few more minutes to tell us that he was thinking about retiring and doing more teaching.

During the next hour or so, the previous workshop members and the new ones sorted themselves out and Joe started his workshop. He began by filling us all in about Francis and what Francis's class was about. Joe worked for Francis earlier in his career. It was quite obvious to me that Joe and others who knew him had a lot of respect for this man. Francis was beginning to look larger than life to me, a person who barely knew which end of the hammer to grab.

At the time I thought Francis would make one heck of a teacher. He came across not unlike a few I already experienced. Well, I never got to take a class from Francis but learned more about him through the Anvil's Ring, his books and word of mouth. Hearing a story about Francis Whitaker at a gathering of smiths became as pervasive as someone saying his grandfather was a blacksmith at a public demonstration.

I met Francis face-to-face at national ABANA meetings, Green Bay, Flagstaff, Alfred and lastly at Asheville. Asheville in 1998 was very special because I got to talk with him before breakfast one morning.

About 6 AM a crowd gathered outside the cafeteria waiting for breakfast to be served inside. Out of nowhere Francis walks up and sits down beside me and says to anyone in earshot: If you have any questions about smithing I will be happy to answer them.

Someone got a question out and Francis answered it. Then maybe another question or two but Francis' answers were pretty short. By this time the group of maybe six or eight of thinned out.

I like to work with the hammer, forge, anvil and hot iron. This fascination prompted a question I still have. It is: What can I make with a hammer and anvil that someone with a power hammer cannot make quicker and easier? This question made Francis stop and think for a minute. His reply was scrolls. Five minutes later I had a private lesson on making scrolls. When Francis was done, we were by ourselves. I have to admit that was a highlight of the Asheville conference.

From my first meeting of Francis in 1980 to Asheville, not much changed. His story remained consistent. Work hard at your craft. Do your best. Always give your customer the best work.

The kind of blacksmithing Francis talked about is only learned during a lifetime at

the anvil. It required a lot of work to master and probably got honed by teaching others. In Francis' case he made the most of his time as a master blacksmith and a motivating teacher. Any one of these roles would be more than a full career for most of us. For Francis there was time for two long careers and he used every bit of it for art and craft of blacksmithing.

POCKET SCULPTURE

PAPERWEIGHT

Be Creative and have fun!

Material: Wrought Iron square...old jail bars...2" x 2" x 3/8" flat stock with jail bar hole in the middle.

Focus on chiseling. Bold chisel marks catch light.

Consider a design for both sides.

Heat and square-up the sides if necessary. Reduce the thickness a little...maybe.

Upset the corners in the vise and pull to one side so when finished the piece will stand on four legs...or leave it flat...or upset the corners evenly and it will sit on the corners no matter what side is up.

||

Top View Side View Bottom View

Put your stamp on the piece.

Etch in muriatic acid to the desired depth. (Please read the warning labels when working around any acid!)

(Note: Probably the best reason to be creative with the bottom side of anything is because you are able to do it!)

Leaf Form – (A version of a leaf form learned from Doug Hendrickson of Lesterville, MO.)

Start with a piece of 1 x 3/8" flat stock.

Think in terms of tapers at every step.

Process

1. Taper a point keeping the same stock thickness... maybe create a 1/4" tail at the point
2. Then taper a one sided edge on the rounded side. This will turn up the point and make the piece look like a thick knife.
3. Using the far edge of the anvil notch the form about three inches from the point. This notch will be the stem of the leaf. The thickness of the bottom of the notch will determine the base of the central vein going up the thick side of the leaf.
4. Taper the bottom of the notch to match the taper on the rest of the leaf form.
5. Using a straight chisel, cut-in a large leaf vein. Chisel a line starting at the base of the notch and move toward the tip of the leaf. Think taper as this is done. The straight side of the chisel should face the thick edge of the piece.

It seems better not to cut the vein all the way to the tip. Continue to cut with the chisel until there is about 1/8 or 3/16" of stock left. Round the outside of the stem with a rasp.

6. Using a rounded punch about 3/8" wide and 3/4" long begin to punch 90 degrees to the main vein. The punching will take several heats. The punches toward the tip of the leaf will be shallower than those near the base... Think taper again.

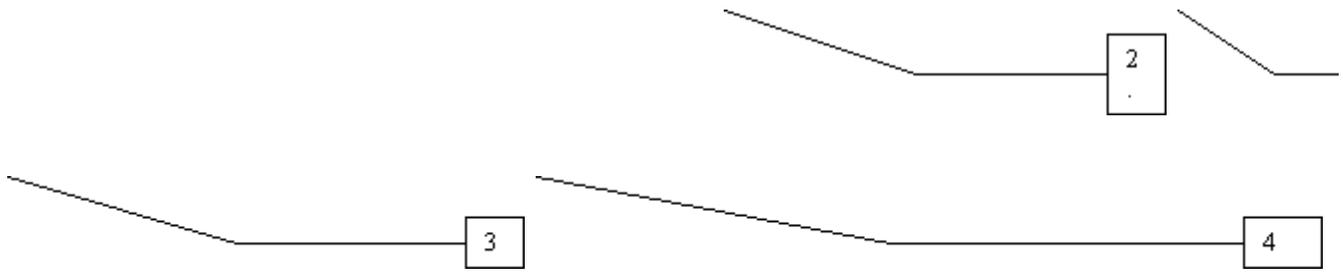
Now the leaf needs to be raised a little. Take a heat and turn the leaf face down on a stump and strike with a rounding hammer along the vein and the center of the leaf. Two things happen. One, the distance between the vein and punched section of the leaf will widen. Two, the punched part of the leaf will be rounded outward and the punch marks will widen.

If there is a tail at the point of the leaf, upset it to a round tapered point. Bend to taste. Rasp the inside of the vein to round the edge. Consider rasping other parts of the leaf to create additional texture.

7. The final step is to cut the form from the bar stock. Cut the leaf about an inch or so behind the notch. The triangular stem shape remaining can be shaped with a hammer or with a rasp to remove the sharp edges. Thinning the center of the stem a little works or even drawing out a thinner stem may work.

Bend the stem to where you like it or where it needs to be.

NOTE: If the form is to be used as a drawer pull for example, the tip of the form and the stem need to lie flat as a place for the fasteners to pass through.



Step 1 Steps 2& 3 Steps 4 & 5 Step 6 Step 7 -Done.

Cross Sections – Steps 1 & 2 & 3 Steps 4 & 5 & -6 Step 7

RESOURCES

FARRIER AND JOURNAL TITLES

by Chuck Hamsa

(Revised, May of 1999)

Part 5 of 5

FARRIER TITLES

Krolick, David. SHOEING RIGHT: ADVICE TO HORSE OWNERS FROM A WORKING

FARRIER.

Ossining, NY: Breakthrough Publications (310 N. Highland Avenue, 10562 [800] 824-5000), 1992 (c1991). Paperbound. ISBN Number 0-914327-39-9. \$14.95.

In addition to covering the total range of the farrier's craft, Krolick presents a great amount of information regarding what one can expect in the way of diseases of the horse. The result is an impressive title, which would be excellent reading for anyone interested in the subject.

Wiseman, Robert F. THE COMPLETE HORSEHOEING GUIDE.

Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press (1005 Asp Avenue, 73019-0445), 1973. 2nd ed. Paperbound. 286 Pp. ISBN Number 0-8061-2719-8. \$16.95.

Nearly fifty pages were added to revise the first edition, published in 1968. Of potential value to farmers and anyone else, Wiseman includes new sections dealing with problem horses and types of horseshoes to use in different situations.

JOURNALS

There are also journals. Four stand out as representing the entire blacksmith's trade:

ANVIL MAGAZINE

PO Box 1810, Georgetown, CA 95634. anvil@anvilmag.com

This magazine shifted gradually from straight farrier type articles to include blacksmithing subjects as well. Advertisements still center around farrier type items.

THE ANVIL'S RING.

This is the official publication of the Artist-Blacksmiths' Association of North America, (PO Box 206, Washington, MO 63090). Included as part of dues to ABANA, \$ 45.00 per year. The Association also publishes THE HAMMER'S BLOW, a quarterly, which members receive as part of their membership. At least get a hold of a copy if anyone is interested in finding out where there are classes and courses for all levels of blacksmithing. THE ANVIL'S RING's editor is Jim McCarthy, 5821 Helias Drive, Jefferson City, Missouri

65201. jimmac@socketis.net

BLACKSMITH'S GAZETTE,

950 South Falcon Road, Camano Island, WA 98292.\$30.00 per year.

Fred Holder is the editor. This journal, in newspaper format, has become a clearing house for information concerning blacksmithing activities all over the country. Fred also published BLACK POWDER TIMES, which he sold recently to Bart Saunders. Mr. Holder continues to be in the editor. The new address for the TIMES... is PO Box 234, Lake Stevens, WA 98258. The cost for that publication is \$20.00 per year. But Bart has a deal in store for you. He has started the BLACK POWDER ARMS FOUNDATION (same address) where you get membership in the ... FOUNDATION for the same price and receive BLACK POWDER TIMES as well.

BLACKSMITH'S JOURNAL: A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF ILLUSTRATED TECHNIQUES.

PO Box 193, Washington, MO 63090. \$32.00 per year. Monthly, loose-leaf format.

This publication was already in Washington, Missouri before ABANA's recent move. If anyone is looking for both basic and advanced blacksmithing techniques, this would be an outstanding choice. This librarian labels this as a "journal" because it comes out in parts. (He also gets upset when he finds can goods in a grocery store are not in alphabetical order.

NEXT HABA MEETING – JANUARY 15, 2000**KNIFE AND A SHEATH WORKSHOP****The Workshop Leader**

Lee Oates, professional bladesmith from La Porte, TX, will first demonstrate how to make a knife and a then a sheath. The knife will be made from a railroad spike. The sheath will be made of leather. Lee will then coach us as we work through the processes of forging a knife and making a sheath. All of the knives will be made from either a large or a small railroad spike. The choice is yours.

The Event

Everyone attending will have an opportunity to leave the first HABA meeting of the new millennium with a handmade functional knife and sheath.

The Objective

The objective of this workshop is to complete the process of forging a blade, hardening and tempering it, and making a sheath. No points will be given for how sharp or how pretty the blade looks. These two attributes of

knife making are left to you after the meeting.

The Prize

Anyone completing the process of making a knife and a sheath will have a chance to win a hand forged Bill Bastas smithing tool. HABA commissioned Bill to make a tool for this first HABA meeting of the new millennium. What Bill makes will be known when the lucky winner opens the package.

Expectations

It seems there will be a number of people taking part in this workshop. It will be important to work with due deliberation and safety and be willing to coach others as needed.

What to Bring

Bring the following for your comfort and safety:

1. A pair of safety glasses with side shields.
2. Your favorite hammer, tongs, gloves and any other personal tools you think you may need. If you have leather working tools, bring those too.
3. A forge and anvil and a second anvil if you have one. (This will be the first time anvils brought onto the forge site will not need to be checked for a Y2K certification!) We may need to double-up at the forges.
4. Something to eat for lunch.
5. Something for the HABA Raffle. Two items of note for this HABA Raffle will be:

A. A hand made blacksmith's bench made by Troy Stollones. The bench is part of Troy's 'Inept Rustic' series.

B. A 30" or so square section of wrought iron jail bars. This sought after piece was donated to HABA by David Wilson, Vice President of the North Texas Blacksmith's Association.

1. Lots of money for the HABA Raffle and the HABA Hat.

What HABA Will Bring

HABA will provide the following:

1. Coffee to get you started and soda for later.
2. Large and small railroad spikes for the knives.
3. Leather and tools for making the sheaths.
4. The Prize.

Start Time and Place

The Knife and Sheath Workshop will start about 9:00 AM, January 15, 2000, at Tudor Forge.

Directions to Tudor Forge

Take 249 NW from Houston. Travel through the towns of Tomball, Decker Prairie and Pinehurst. At Pinehurst, 249 changes to 1774. Stay on 1774. About three miles ahead on 1774 look for a Texaco station on the west side of the road. One half mile past the Texaco station, turn left or west on Tudor Way. You will find the forge about a mile down the road.

From the intersection of 1488 and 1774 in Magnolia, go south on 1774 about 4 miles. Look for Tudor Way just after the Country Jamboree building. If you see the Texaco station you went too far.

FEBRUARY HABA MEETING

SPUR AND BIT MAKING

AND

BOOK SIGNING

The February HABA meeting will take place at the Tomball Museum and will feature a guest speaker and author Kurt House. Kurt will also have his latest book available for signing too. More details will be in the next HABA Letter. Below is a little bio of Kurt.

Kurt House was born and reared on a ranch in Three Rivers, Live Oak County, Texas that is 75 miles south of San Antonio. He attended both Texas Christian University and Southern Methodist University earning the B. A. and M. A. in Anthropology and all but dissertation on his Ph.D.

In addition writing books, Mr. House published over thirty articles on various scientific and collecting interests from antique firearms to natural history and now cowboy spurs.

JOE BIANCHI: VILLAGE BLACKSMITH OF VICTORIA, TEXAS is the most recent book by Kurt. It begins with a fictional account of the arrival of the 17th Century French explorer LaSalle and the establishment of his Fort St. Louis in Victoria County. The book then places the county into historical perspective, with its role in the Texas Revolution, the Republic, Annexation and the Civil War periods.

The focus is then narrowed to a particular emigrant family, the Bianchi's, as they arrive in Victoria to work on the Texas-Mexican Railway. One of these sons, Joseph, became an outstanding blacksmith especially famous in the south Texas ranching country for his craftsmanship in horse bridle bits and spurs needed by the local cowboys.

Joe Bianchi's fame spread far and wide as his quality products were tried under the harshest conditions and found to be of a quality admired and respected, even revered by cowboy users and later collectors alike. Including a discussion of blacksmithing in Texas, the modern surge of interest in collecting western memorabilia, and the identification and chronology of Bianchi products, the book concludes with the importance of the blacksmith to early frontier towns in general, and particularly this emigrant

whose life was a success story of the American Dream

MARCH HABA MEETING

The March HABA Meeting will take place at Washington on the Brazos State Park. The March 4 and 5 weekend is the Independence Day Celebration and the grand opening of the Barrington Living History Farm. Anyone who contributed to the hardware of the farm will not want to miss the event. All Texans are invited!

APRIL HABA MEETING

HABA will host a boy scout group at Tudor Forge.

COMING EVENTS 1999

Dorothy Stiegler Demonstration - January 29 and 30, Marble Falls, TX

TABA is pleased to bring Dorothy Stiegler to Texas. Dorothy is one of the best smiths in the country.

Dorothy is a past president of ABANA and is a current board member. She recently received the Alex Bealer award, the most distinguished honor awarded to blacksmiths in America.

Dorothy will be demonstrating a lot of forge welded handles and baskets as well as different types of flowers and leaves.

When: January 29-30, 2000.

Where: Marble Falls, TX, Larry Crawford's Hammerfest Forge. 830-693-1391

How Much: \$45 seminar fee plus \$15 TABA dues if you are not already a Member. If you would like a catered evening meal on Saturday please add \$5.00.

Please make your check payable to TABA and mail it to Rick Dawdy, 6823 Still Lake Dr.. San Antonio, TX 78244. Rick's e-mail address is: rdawdy@flash.net. His phone number is:210-662-7001.

Brad Silberberg Demonstration - February 26 and 27, Forney, TX

A recent demonstration by Brad Silberberg in England was described in the British Artist Blacksmithing Association magazine. Here is an excerpt from the article titled "Gestures In Iron":

“Brad brought around two dozen of his vast array of meticulously crafted stamping tools, worthy art object in themselves. They were made from old jackhammer bits – forged, annealed, filed or ground, and air hardened – and stood up very well under heat and impact. Most of these were for use under the power hammer, though he emphasized that smaller scale tools of the same type are suitable for hand-hammering.

He employed the arbor press to chase the central line down the bar as some of his twists required, and to help control kinks which form when sinking bowls. The bowl-sinking itself was accomplished by forcing a heated, ¼ inch thick embossed disc through a sinking ring.

Otherwise, Brad’s tool of choice was the power hammer. In his demonstration in Scotland the week following, Brad was to use the 5 ctw Massey hammer for upsetting and embossing the blank for one of his lidded vessels, and the 100 ton press for driving the cone-shaped punch which opened the interior.”

Where: Brad will make this rare appearance in Texas at Bill Epps’ shop in Forney, TX.

How Much: Registration fee are \$25 for both days.

Send Check: Send your registration fee to: NTBA Registrar, Verl Underwood, 613 N. Bailey, Fort Worth, TX 76107. Verl’s phone and e-mail numbers are: 817-626-5909 and <vauder@aol.com>

ALBERT PALEY COMES TO HOUSTON

By Dave Koenig

I went to the lecture by Albert Paley at the Museum of Fine Arts in November. It was about an hour and a half and covered about everything he ever made. I cannot believe the quantity and quality of this work!

I bumped into Albert and Frances before the lecture began. We talked for a few minutes alone...small talk...HABA, etc. Then a crowd started to form and I moved on. There were six other HABA members at the lecture too. Still before the lecture he came up and we talked some more. After the lecture we had a group picture with him.

I did not get any notes. I just listened and got engrossed in what I was hearing and seeing. A couple of things seemed to stick in my mind. One was the importance of positive and negative space and how they work together. Another was his feeling about his work. Someone asked him what was his favorite piece. His response was that he understands the question but does not have any.

He went on to say that that the piece he is working on is the one he is most enthusiastic about and the ones in public places are more satisfying because he influences many people and he hears about it. Albert says he is a problem solver. Each job has its own problems and he enjoys solving them. Then he is ready for the next set of problems.

He also works long hours and says he still gets his hands dirty. On any given day he has about 200 jobs going in a

complex web from concept to installation. There are usually two big jobs in progress and a lot of smaller ones. He sketches the big ones and turns what is on the paper into iron.

What he enjoys most is taking a piece of metal and just making something...no drawing...just doing. Now that is something anyone with a piece of hot iron in his or her hand can relate to with no problem!

Albert has a vocabulary and is as articulate as anyone I ever listened to. I think I understood a lot of what he was saying about his work but would not want to take a test on the material. He is a good communicator.

Up until this meeting I heard that he was a very private person. He may be but when he goes public you have no misunderstanding about his abilities and charisma.

I went to the gallery where his work was shown and took it in. He was showing about 30 pieces of iron and 20 prints. I went with the intention of taking a lot of pictures but ended up taking none.

Like any show I really liked a few things and most of the others went over my head. I was thinking about why I didn't get any pictures. I think it has something to do with the fact that little of the iron was forged. What was very clear however is that his quality is second to none and I could not possibly capture that with my camera.

Listening to Albert and seeing so much of his work in one place was quite a thrill!

A PARTING THOUGHT ABOUT FRANCIS WHITAKER

By Frances Trahan

“I am also very sorry to hear about Francis Whitaker. It's like watching a bridge connecting two shores fall. From what I've heard and read, he's shared so much of an almost extinct tradition and we can never hope to realize the scope of human experience that he embodied. I am just thankful that he reached out and some people had enough sense to reach back. That significance is not lost on me...” Frances Trahan

THE FINE PRINT

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Dave Koenig

7418 Branch Point

Houston, TX 77095

