

A Sampler of Missouri Blacksmiths

*An Exhibit of the Missouri
Folk Arts Program*





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*On the Cover: Anvil and tools in the Lawson, Mo.
workshop of BAM member Mike McLaughlin, 2018.
Photo by Thomas Grant Richardson.*

Introduction

Historically, the blacksmith's shop was one of the central features of pre-industrial communities. Providing a wide variety of products—from agricultural to architectural to domestic to military—the operations of the blacksmith's shop were deeply rooted in the day-to-day life of the population it served. However, the cascade of technological and economic shifts brought on by the Industrial Revolution, exemplified by reproducible items composed of identically machined components, led to a tapering in the role of the blacksmith beginning in the late eighteenth century. In spite of this, twenty-first-century blacksmiths still find their trade in great, albeit reduced, demand.

Today's blacksmiths may be called on to fashion architectural hardware, to forge tools, to tend to horses' shoes, to rebuild historical objects, or to produce metal items for which precision machining is not required. The centralized blacksmith's shop has been replaced by home workshops and forges, folk schools, guilds, private



Blacksmithing apprentice Doug McKnight working at a powerhammer at Pat McCarty's Washington Forge, 2013. Photo by Deborah A. Bailey.

businesses, and living history sites. In these various locations, blacksmiths may work alone or in groups; may administer informal apprenticeships; and depending on occasion, product, and resources, the modern blacksmith is likely to work in more than one of these scenarios. In Missouri, master blacksmiths can recite a list of elders and peers with shops open to anyone with the passion and dedication to practice the tradition.



Tom Clark, Bob Patrick, Doug Hendrickson, Phil Cox, and Darold Rinedollar are often recalled as mentors, sometimes pioneers. A few beyond the state line also resonate: the late Francis Whitaker, a National Heritage Fellow from Colorado, is widely credited with a revival of the tradition in the United States, and Uri Hofi of Israel

Series of forges at Burnett's blacksmith school in Kidder, Mo., 2018.
Photo by Thomas Grant Richardson.

travels around the world—as far as Missouri, even—presenting workshops that marry efficiency, ergonomics, and innovation.

Blacksmith Association of Missouri

In 1983, a dozen Missouri-based blacksmiths joined together to establish the Blacksmith Association of Missouri, also known as BAM. Encouraged by Barry Bergey, Missouri's first state folklorist and first Traditional Arts Apprenticeship (TAAP) program coordinator, BAM co-founder Bob Patrick was one of two smiths to administer an apprenticeship through the TAAP program. This established the relationship between BAM and TAAP early on, which has yielded thirty-eight apprenticeships taught by sixteen master blacksmiths and helped sustain the art of blacksmithing in the state of Missouri.

BAM worked early on to establish itself nationally as well. In 1985 it became an affiliate member of the Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America (ABANA), a group founded only twelve years earlier by blacksmiths working out of Georgia. Today, BAM boasts over five hundred members in and around Missouri, while ABANA's 4,000+ membership includes chapters around the United States and abroad. Now in its thirty-sixth year, BAM has developed into an organization



Blacksmith Bob Patrick demonstrating his trade at the Frontier Folk Life Festival in St. Louis, 1983. Courtesy of Bob Clark.

with its own methods, traditions, and programs. BAM hosts bimonthly meetings, produces a newsletter, and attends an annual conference each May. A benefit offered to members, one which is a crucial, tangible, and key component of any blacksmith's craft, is discounted access to regional coal stations. BAM's bi-monthly meetings include "iron-in-the-hat" fundraisers—quick raffles to support BAM's budget—as well as the swapping of "trade items" at each meeting.

Made according to a simple prompt given out at each meeting (“a cooking tool” or “a dipper or spoon in your signature style”), trade items are an opportunity for individuals to show off skills, creativity, and innovation in a seemingly simple item. Additionally, BAM holds potlucks and barbecues, and even marks certain important rites of passage for its members; at graveside funerals for deceased blacksmiths, for instance, members invite mourners to put hammer to anvil to honor the recently passed.

The Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program

The Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (TAAP) is a National Endowment for the Arts–funded project run by Missouri Folk Arts Program that supports and administers intensive lessons between Missouri-based teams of master artists and apprentices. Conceived on a napkin at Columbia, Missouri’s legendary restaurant Shakespeare’s Pizza, TAAP is committed to sustaining the artistic traditions and cultural heritage of our region. In the thirty-six years since its inception, TAAP has supported 436 apprenticeships taught by over two hundred master artists residing in every region

of this large state. Originally dedicated to traditional performative arts—old-time fiddle, gospel vocals, button box accordion, and Kansas City–style jazz violin—the project’s coordinators expanded the scope of the program in its second year to include “material culture.” Defining material culture as “functional objects made by hand and passed down orally or by observation within a community,” the program’s variety of apprenticeships grew to include saddle making, coverlet sewing, basket weaving, chair building, and blacksmithing.

Claude Williams performing at Frontier Folklore Festival in St. Louis, 1985. Photo by Barry Bergey.





Hand-forged steel tongs, ca. 2016

Hand-forged steel tongs, ca. 2016

Courtesy of Missouri School of Blacksmithing

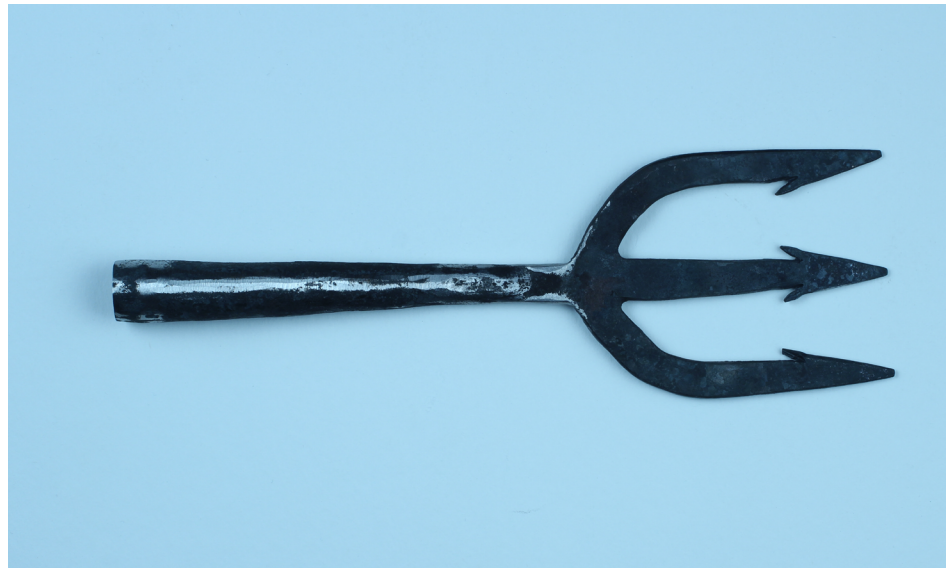
Matthew Burnett (b. 1989, St. Joseph, Mo.), Blacksmith

At thirteen, Burnett first caught the blacksmithing bug while attending the annual Kansas City Renaissance Festival. He joined the Blacksmiths Association of Missouri and honed his skills with apprenticeships and intensive workshops in Missouri and Maine, including in 2007 with master blacksmith Ed Harper, via the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program. In 2016, Burnett founded the Missouri School of Blacksmithing on his family's homeplace in Kidder, Mo.

 [Watch a video of Matthew Burnett at work.](#)

Matthew Burnett twisting metal at his Missouri School of Blacksmithing in Kidder, Mo., 2018. Photo by Thomas Grant Richardson.





Three-prong gig and a spike, ca. 2019

Three-prong gig and a spike, ca. 2019

From the collection of Lisa L. Higgins

Ray Joe Hastings (b. 1937, Briar, Mo.), Blacksmith

Hastings crafts seemingly simple, yet artistic,

pronged tools, known as “gigs,” that are used to hunt fish along the Ozark Riverways during the winter. He is regionally recognized as a master gigmaker, as well as a knowledgeable collector and documentarian. Hastings and his neighbors grew up gigging from wooden johnboats along the crystal clear Current River for recreation and sustenance. In the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program, Hastings apprenticed in 1996 with Paul Martin of Bunker before teaching his own apprentices between 2003 – 2021.



Watch a video of Ray Joe Hastings talking about gigging.

Ray Joe Hastings smoothing a gig-in-process at the Tom Kennon Blacksmith Shop in Doniphan, Mo., 2012. Photo by Deborah A. Bailey





18th Century Lamp Reproduction, ca. 2019

18th Century Lamp Reproduction, ca. 2019
Hand-forged steel table lamp and candle
Courtesy of Osage Bluff Blacksmith Shop
Bernard Tappel (b. 1950, Jefferson City, Mo.), Blacksmith

Tappel recalls accompanying his father to the local blacksmith for farm machinery repairs. After teaching himself and attending workshops, he joined a dozen other blacksmiths in 1983 to establish the Blacksmith Association of Missouri. Tappel loves the whole gamut of smithing, from repairs and simple tools to colonial objects, fishing gigs, and architectural pieces. His family hosts an annual “hammer in,” a day of smithing, eating, and fellowship with BAM friends. He taught in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program in 2013.

 *Watch a video of Bernard Tappel at work.*

Bernard Tappel describing the Blacksmith Association of Missouri from his Osage Bluff Blacksmith Shop near Jefferson City, Mo., 2015. Photo by Lisa L. Higgins.





Six Metal Leaves, ca. 2019


Six Metal Leaves, ca. 2019

Hand-forged iron, aluminum, stainless steel, titanium, copper, and bronze

Courtesy of Washington Forge

Pat McCarty (b. 1950, St. Louis, Mo.), Blacksmith

McCarty has an extensive history of teaching blacksmithing: one-on-one classes at his own Washington Forge, workshops at Luxenhaus Farm in Marthasville, Mo., and “treasure chest” workshops at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. A juried member of Best of Missouri Hands, McCarty demonstrates by invitation at Silver Dollar City in Branson, Mo. He taught in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program in 2009 and 2019.

 *Watch a video of Pat McCarty at work.*

Master blacksmith Pat McCarty (left) and apprentice Matt Dickson (right) working on joinery at McCarty’s Washington Forge, 2019. Photo Courtesy of Pat McCarty.





Bluegill, ca. 2010

Bluegill, ca. 2010
Hand-forged steel mounted on driftwood
Courtesy of Scrub Oak Forge
Robert Alexander (b. 1951, St. Louis, Mo.), Blacksmith

Alexander, a full-time blacksmith at Scrub Oak Forge in DeSoto, Mo., forges restoration hardware for historic homes, creates custom pieces for contemporary homes, makes tools for tradespeople and knives for hunters. He also enjoys sculpting in metal, as he has with this rendition of the freshwater bluegill. He taught apprentices in Missouri's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program in 2015, 2019, and 2020.

 *Watch a video of Robert Alexander at work.*

Top: Master blacksmith Bob Alexander watching as apprentice Lisa Thompson works at Scrub Oak Forge in DeSoto, Mo., 2019. Photo by Deborah A. Bailey.

Bottom: Alternate view of Bluegill, ca. 2010.



FOLK ARTS



Missouri Folk Arts Program

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