

Rocky Forge News

Volume 6, issue 7 – July, 2007

Summer Meetings of the Rocky Forge

By Ted Stout

We had a very hot day forging at Independence and few people in attendance. Rocky Forge had a good turnout, about 15 members. We are starting another row on the sign so if you have an idea of something to make we can put it in that new row. [We] already have two out of six squares.

Our July meeting will be at the Illiana Show grounds on July 20, 21 and 22nd, please plan to attend. It is fun to have so many smiths represented and pounding away on hot metal. Several of our group will be camping, so plan to join in on the fun. I hope to see a good turnout to support the Illiana group, they work so hard to put on a good show. Next year we should have our own building to work under.

July 7 and 8th will be a conference sponsored by the RSMA at the Fort Harrison State Park on the east side of Indianapolis. It is hosted by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The feature demonstrator will be Bill Fiorini of Desoto, Wisconsin. He is an excellent demonstrator. Let me know if you are interested in attending or joining the group.

We are scheduled to demonstrate at the Indiana State Fair on August 14th and 15th so mark your calendars and let David C. or Ted know so the schedule can be made out.

After all this and with the summer heat really in full swing lets take August off and have a regular meeting in September.

Hope to see all of you during these busy times. Remember it's not what the Rocky Forge can do for you, but what you can do for the Rocky Forge group. Let's work to keep our club healthy and continue to learn the art of blacksmithing.

Ted

IBA Direction

By David Childress, Vice President IBA Board of Directors

The IBA Board meeting June 16 was the first meeting with myself and Ray Seese without the John Zile and Harold Winger. As John Wendell could not be in attendance I as Vice President was in charge. (The board may go to great lengths to avoid that happening again.) My objective was to at least get started on having the IBA involved in activities that increase both membership and the overall population of blacksmiths in Indiana. The first such activity is getting 4-H blacksmithing going with more leaders than just John Steppe. John has volunteered to coordinate and I hope to help organize in as many Indiana counties as possible. I also hope to put together a list of smiths who are willing to help new smiths by providing instruction and likely shop space. In a similar direction the IBA needs to be a clearing house for connecting festivals that want demonstrators with smiths that can demonstrate and increase awareness of the craft. Most such activities are new territory for the IBA and inertia is a mighty force. I intend to keep trying.

A Building for the IBA

Setup and teardown for the conference this June was about a hardship to most involved. We are not getting any younger. This has spurred the Board to increase efforts to have a permanent home established. Once more the Board will ask for input from the membership, and if nothing more than past requests produced comes back, a plan for a building will be formulated. Toward this end the Board is going to talk to SOFA as the closest and most successful example of establishing a permanent home and organization. Any suggestions as to where and how will be the next order of business. I doubt that anything beyond planning will happen before the 2008 conference but hopefully by then most of the decisions will be made. We need to determine if the IBA is to be a force in perpetuating the craft or just a social society. The current organization seems to be headed toward becoming a steel sewing circle and not much of a force.

The IBA was chartered as an educational organization and we are not doing much educating right now. We need a place to hold classes and store the assets of the organization so as to ease the labor of holding the annual conference. A permanent address should help with getting outside funding, grants etc.

We also discussed why anyone or any of the satellite groups would want to belong to the IBA. Insurance is always the ready answer, but no one including most of the board knows what the insurance covers. I personally do not think that Insurance is enough of a reason, maybe the social aspect is enough, but I doubt it. We need to have something of value to our members to offer. What the IBA is offering may be enough if the membership knew about everything offered. The volume of complaints says that there is a lack of knowledge or a lack of content. Whichever it is, first we need awareness of what the IBA offers and then we need more to offer. What does the current membership want and what do we need to offer to gain new membership?

Smoke and Noise

Articles from e-mail and the Internet

Compiled by David Childress

Need some shop space

I ran across this and since we are all blacksmiths I knew that it would interest all of us even if it is an impossible project. DEC

This article can be found online at <http://www.jaha.org/BlacksmithShop/history.html>

Built circa 1864 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, the blacksmith shop is the heart of the Cambria Iron National Historic Landmark, one of the oldest surviving complexes from the 19th century steel industry. The city of Johnstown is currently restoring the shop with the goal of signing a lease with a business that will resume forging operations, and allow visitors to witness the metalworking tradition that shaped the region. When completed, the shop will be a vital part of the area's culture and a national center for blacksmithing.

Growth

After Bethlehem Steel shut down their Johnstown operations in 1992, the town experienced a large out migration of population, leaving the economy struggling. With state and federal funds, the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority plans to restore the blacksmith shop, enabling it to be leased by an independent business that will resume forging operations and allow visitors to the shop to experience over 142 years of metalworking tradition.

Johnstown is seeking talented, creative blacksmiths to work individually or collaboratively in the 11,000 square foot blacksmith shop. This is a unique opportunity for artist-blacksmiths to work in a friendly town in the heart of the Pennsylvania Laurel Highlands, in one of the world's most aesthetic shop settings. Blacksmiths will have space to set up their own tools and work areas, as well as the ability to share use of the shop's equipment and air hammers.



This May 2007 photo shows a new concrete pad that has been poured around one of the shop's hammers.

This is not an employment offer. Although some incentives may be available, the city seeks self-sufficient blacksmiths who have an existing customer base or the ability to build one.

History of the Blacksmith Shop

The Cambria Iron Company Blacksmith shop was built in 1864 to supply parts to the company's iron and steel mills. Cambria Iron was an important steel industry innovator during the second half of the 18th century and was one of the nation's largest rail producers. The company boosted Johnstown's

population from about 5,150 in the 1850s to around 30,000 in the 1890s. Johnstown is most famous for the flood of 1889, which nearly destroyed the city and killed over 2,000 people. Though a large number of the mill workers died in the flood, the buildings in the Lower Works sustained remarkably little damage. The Cambria Iron Company was renamed the Cambria Steel Company in 1898, and was bought by The Midvale Steel and Ordnance Company in 1916. The company changed hands once again in 1923, being sold to the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.



A 4,000-pound Bement-Miles Steam Hammer, ca. 1888. A 3,000-pound Chambersburg Steam Hammer is visible in the background.

In 1989, the National Park Service declared the Cambria Iron Works a National Historic Landmark. It is one of two sites in the country with the most intact buildings from the nation's early steel industry. Bethlehem Steel continued to operate the Blacksmith shop until 1992, when they shut down all operations in Johnstown.



Pair of forge blowers, American Blower Corp. All of the shop's forges, both gas and coal-fired, are supplied with forced air from blowers like these.

Bethlehem Steel then began demolishing many of the buildings in the complex. Local agencies banded together to preserve the site, and after lengthy negotiations, Bethlehem transferred ownership of the Iron Works' most historically significant buildings to the city of Johnstown.



2,000-pound Chambersburg Self-Contained Hammer, ca. 1940, powered by a rear-mounted 75-horsepower General Electric motor.

Timeline

- 1864 - The Cambria Iron Works builds the Blacksmith Shop to supply parts to the iron and steel mills in Johnstown. They quickly become the nation's largest producers of rail.
- 1889 - The South Fork Dam collapses, releasing the waters of Lake Conemaugh downstream to Johnstown. The infamous Johnstown Flood kills 2,209 people and destroys most of the city.
- 1923 - Bethlehem Steel buys most of the remaining Cambria Iron Complex and continues with operations, making several additions to the Blacksmith Shop building.
- 1989 - The National Park Service classifies the Cambria Iron Works a National Historic Landmark. The site is one of two in the nation with the most intact buildings from 19th-century steel mills. The oldest of these buildings is the Blacksmith Shop.
- 1992 - Bethlehem Steel shuts down their operations in Johnstown. In the years to come, they begin to demolish 19th-century buildings for economic reasons.
- 2001 - Several local agencies receive three of the oldest buildings still standing in the Bethlehem

Steel complex. The most important of these is the Blacksmith Shop.

2006 - Efforts are ongoing to preserve the Blacksmith Shop through reconstruction, environmental remediation, and facilitation. The overall goal is to allow visitors inside an active shop in the near future.

Restoration

The original building was a 70' X 70' octagonal brick structure topped with a timber framed cupola. Several wings were added over the years to accommodate additional equipment. By the time the community received the building from Bethlehem Steel, the structure was in advanced stages of degradation. The roof leaked, chimneys were rusted, brick walls were crumbling, and the cupola had developed a perceptible eastward lean from the pull of an overhead power cable.



One of several side-by-side gas forges. Each side is an independent furnace, with counterweighted doors front and rear to allow long work to be passed through.

The city's first task was to stabilize the building from further deterioration. In 2005, the hundreds of tools which had been left in the shop were moved into storage to clear floor space (most will be returned for duty when the shop re-opens.) Dominic DeRubis, a brick mason skilled in historic preservation, led a crew to repair moisture-damaged brick walls. The roof was replaced and the cupola was repaired, straightened, and painted a deep red. The shop's tall chimneys were removed and placed in storage for later restoration.



Second Lindberg Pit Furnace. Note steam hammer tooling stacked on quench tank.

Environmental remediation work is now underway to bring the shop into compliance with EPA regulations. The shop's main areas are also undergoing a thorough floor to ceiling restoration. Wood restoration specialists have erected scaffolding inside the shop to access the timber roof trusses and 15-foot tall arched window frames. This phase of work is scheduled for completion in late spring 2007, and will be followed by work to rehabilitate shop equipment such as air hammers and furnaces. By late 2007, the shop is planned to be in operation once again, continuing the steelworking tradition in Johnstown.

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From: ries
Date: Jun 10, 2007 3:22 PM
Subject: Re: [TheForge] Need shop space?

A couple of years ago, I visited this shop, Cambria Forge. It is amazing. And, if you were serious, you could get in there and work. But, and it's a big but, it would require a lot of money, and a lot of jobs, to make it viable.

I run a relatively small business, with up to two full time employees, and myself. I have a fair amount of machines, although nothing compared to the hammers in Cambria forge. And I know what my overhead is - utilities, labor, taxes, consumables, materials, and so on.

To keep a shop like that running, I am guessing you would need at least 5 guys, and to gross somewhere above a half million a year. Probably better if you

doubled that. And that is assuming you got a really good deal on rent.

Imagine the expense when one of those hammers goes down. Imagine the amount of support equipment you need - bandsaws, grinders, drills, plasma and oxy fuel, ironworkers and forklifts, machine shop and fab equipment.

For somebody, it would be great. But without a really go getter of a very successful blacksmith, I can't see that happening. And there are probably only a dozen guys in the country who have the skills, the experience, and the business smarts to make that happen - and they all already have big shops, roots where they live, and contacts.

Johnstown itself is a depressed area, to say the least - not a lot of \$10 million dollar houses being built there that need a couple hundred grand in ironwork.

For that shop to become vital and working again, my guess is only a school, or a government sponsored program would work.

It's a very cool place, though.

ries

On Jun 11, 2007, at 5:52 PM, bmyers647 wrote:

One thing that you didn't consider when you discussed the Cambria forge in Johnstown, Pa - bring customers. Johnstown is a very depressed area. If it weren't for John Murtha bringing home the pork, there would be nothing. There has been a lot of talk about making it a museum. If you could bring in enough customers or sell to remote customers, there might be some pork money in it for you, or perhaps some deduction on your utilities. The city is desperate for something.

Barry Myers (former resident)

From: ries

Unless there is big bucks government funding, which so far, there isn't, it would take someone with a national, if not international reputation and client list.

There is, as you say, no way that a custom blacksmith shop doing really high end stuff is gonna do a million dollars a year, and realistically, that's

what it's gonna take to keep that place running - in Johnstown.

Or in Pittsburgh. You would need to be like Paley, doing several projects worth several hundred grand, every year.

Like I said before - there are guys in the USA who do this - but they all already have shops, houses, kids in school, employees who own houses, and so on. Seems unlikely that any of them are going to want to pick up everything and move to Johnstown.

And although the hammers are all there, I don't think there is air for the utility hammers - originally, they were steam, run from a steam plant a half mile or so away. Sometime more recently, I think in the 70's, they were converted to compressed air, but I am pretty sure they were still supplied from an outside compressor somewhere else. The air feed line for that big boy is something like 4" pipe - I would imagine you would need a 150 hp or so compressor.

There is lots of cool tooling there, racks and racks of it. And amazing, industrial sized heat treating ovens, but some of them are outside, under a roof, but still outside, unused for almost 20 years.

Every single machine like that is gonna take a rebuild. Which means time, and big bucks.

It's a wonderful dream. But unless you have a few million to spare, I kinda think it's gonna stay that way.

Even the big boys in Forging, people like Scot Forge, use hydraulic presses more these days - they probably would think all that stuff is obsolete.

Ries Niemi

Industrial Artist

<http://www.riesniemi.com/>

Announcements

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