



Draft #3

Note: This is the long version, but the most thorough version of my opinions. It is also addressing some of the feedback I have received from others.

Dear ABANA Members, ABANA Board, and ABANA Editors,

Based on content found in the “Anvil’s Ring” and “Hammer’s Blow” that promote the use of modern metalworking processes to produce a project in its entirety, sometimes using catalogue parts, or to produce a jig, I must object to this content in the magazines of an organization designated to be for and about forging processes, and the art and craft thereof. All aspects of modern processes, (or fabrication) can be learned within 20 minutes of just about anywhere in the USA. The same cannot be said of forging.

Article II in the ABANA by-laws states under “Purposes and Objectives”: “The Association is organized exclusively for educational purposes, including, but not limited to, the following: to encourage and facilitate the training of blacksmiths; to disseminate information about sources of material and equipment; to expose the art of blacksmithing to the public; to serve as a center of information about blacksmithing for the general public, architects, interior designers, and other interested groups....”

“Blacksmith” and “Forging” Vs. Other Metalworking Processes

The act of what a blacksmith does (forge or forging) is a unique process in relationship to other metalworking trades. For example, electric welding is also a unique trade, and therefore its processes do not fall under the umbrella of forging. Otherwise, one would learn also how to forge in a welding class designed for welding certification.

The late Francis Whitaker (1906-1999) was renowned mainly as “The Dean of American Blacksmiths”, but he was also a fine welder. Was he any less a blacksmith because he was a welder? No, and visa-versa. But Francis would be the first to admit that electric welding is not the work of a blacksmith. Nor would he teach electric welding in a forging workshop or demo. So it would be proper to say that Francis was more than a blacksmith, as he was also a welder.

We must continue to focus on forging process, i.e. the nine forging fundamentals: *drawing down, upsetting, twisting, bending, punching, drifting, cutting, joints and forge welding*. There are also the aspects of forging high carbon steel, annealing, hardening and tempering. Beyond the processes, there are the aspects of style, current and what has come before. Further, there are the fine points of design, i.e. historically, aesthetically, and structurally.

Whether forging iron, steel, bronze or stainless, it is forging process that defines a blacksmith. It is that sound process that the late Francis Whitaker witnessed as lacking way back in the 1990's. It is process that separates a blacksmith from a fabricator. It is process that this organization was built upon.

A blacksmith cannot be defined simply by A.) Material B.) End product or C.) Tools. A blacksmith is defined mainly by process, and to a lesser extent, A, B, and C. Otherwise we'd see articles written by farriers, tinner, jewelers, and more.

Please do not write back and challenge the use of power hammers, electric blowers, oxy-acetylene, gas forges, etc. as these do not directly effect the *process*...which is what this all boils down to...forging process.

Intent of this Letter

Question: Why did you join ABANA? 1.) To learn to be a blacksmith 2.) To learn what forging is all about. 3.) To learn to use an arc, MIG, TIG, welder 4.) To learn modern (post 1900) fabrication techniques.

I personally joined for reasons #1 and #2, as ABANA, and its affiliates, are some of the few places where I can learn, and learn where to learn, forging processes. As I said, the other metalworking processes are taught most everywhere.

Please understand...I am not stating that it is wrong to use modern fabrication methods in the home shop or workshop. This is not an attempt to stop anyone from combining metalworking techniques at home or the workplace. Your work is your work, and your clients are your clients, and that is your business.

Rather I am stating that ABANA should only promote forging processes. Referring back to Article II, I do not believe the intent of the wording "but not limited to..." refers to exploring metalworking processes outside of forging. That phrase is not an open-ended statement for an excuse to stray from the charter.

Because of this trend to include other metalworking processes, ABANA is losing or has already lost many fine smiths; smiths who once led, and who could once again lead this organization. We need these leaders, as good leaders lead others to where they ought to go, not necessarily where they want to go.

Common Arguments for Other Metalworking Processes to be Included in ABANA

- 1) I know several people who combine metalworking disciplines that would object to ABANA prohibiting anything but forging process. Some of these folks have stated that having ABANA focus solely on forging would be limiting folks; an anachronistic approach to growth, or to expression in their metalwork.
Rebuttal: A.) That is short-sided thinking, as it would assume that anyone who forges, or is an ABANA member, never delves into any other form of metalwork, or belong to other metalworking organizations (i.e. National Ornamental and Miscellaneous Metals Association, Society of North American Goldsmiths, American Bladesmith Society, etc.) B.) If you feel that anyone who chooses to solely use forging processes is limited in design or expression, then you are again being very shortsighted. (I have been trying not to use names in this dialogue, but in relation to the latter, see the works of Tom Joyce, Doug Wilson, Daniel Miller, Steve Bondi, Alfred Habermann, Anthony Robinson, and others, too many to list here.)
- 2) Some folks want to display their work in the AR or explain a process in the HB regardless of the process, as they are “modern blacksmiths.” **Rebuttal:** A.) A blacksmith is a blacksmith, the process does not change with time no matter whether one lived 200 years ago, in the present, or the future. Forging is a unique discipline and trade. One might combine forging with other metalworking processes, but that is not a modern blacksmith. That is merely one, who may be a blacksmith, and/or a welder, etc., who combines processes. So a modern blacksmith technically is no different than a blacksmith in any other time period. B.) Because they are combining metalworking processes, ABANA should not highlight this work, based on Article II.
- 3) Some folks feel ABANA can serve both blacksmith processes, as well as other metalworking processes. **Rebuttal:** For ABANA to be true to forging, it should be about forging and nothing else. There are many places and organizations to learn to apply the other processes to one’s work. Plus, younger smiths, novices, etc. have a difficult time knowing what is correct process and what is not, without clouding the issues with a free-for-all or a scattergun approach to metalworking. ABANA has a prime directive, Article II, for good reason, and that is to promote, to teach, to inform, and to preserve forging.
- 4) I will again bring up the fact that folks feel that this thinking is an attack on other processes, combining processes, or forcing them to do something else. **Rebuttal:** Belonging to an ABANA that solely promotes forging in no way restricts anyone from combining processes. It is simply an organization that promotes forging processes. Take what you learn from ABANA, and run with it in whatever direction you please. Whether one wishes to remain a purist (one who uses solely forging processes), or combines forging with other disciplines, the point of ABANA is to *allow you to learn what you can and apply it to what YOU do*. So how is this thinking an attack?

- 5) How can ABANA deny member's articles or teaching about other related forms and processes of metalwork, i.e. French repoussé, pitch repoussé, chased work, engraved work, inlay, or gilded work, or work of the whitesmith and locksmith? **Rebuttal:** This is truly a good question, as of these, some fall directly under the heading of blacksmith, others do not: A.) Blacksmith, whitesmith and locksmith have some overlapping processes. Just as all squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares, the same is true for these disciplines. Whitesmiths and locksmiths are blacksmiths, but not all blacksmiths are whitesmiths or locksmiths. So the last two qualify as blacksmiths. B.) As to these other processes, they can be visual compliments to the work of the blacksmith, i.e. an acanthus leaf formed by French repoussé can be applied to a forged scroll; a forged grape bunch can be gilded; a shield formed in pitch can be applied to a forged railing; and a forged ax head might be inlayed with silver, engraved, or chased to add ornament. The difference here is this: In and of themselves, they do not change the process of forging. C.) Using electric welding and other forms of fabrication can alter the forging process.
- 6) Then why can't cast or stamped elements be included in my work and shown in the AR and HB? **Rebuttal:** The products of both disciplines are typically not by the hand of the maker. Therein lies the major difference.

My personal Experience as a Blacksmith and this Subject

I began forging in 1979; went professional in 1993; have been an ABANA members for over 30 years; served on the ABANA Board from 2000 to 2006; chaired the Education Committee; chaired the "Controlled Hand Forging" committee for almost nine years; helped plan two ABANA conferences; demonstrated at three ABANA Conferences; lectured at one; wrote numerous articles for the AR and the HB; have taught, demonstrated and lectured around the USA at colleges, craft schools, museums, and conferences since 1994; and was offered the position as "Forging Professor" at the "American College of the Building Arts", Charleston, SC in 2007. I have also belonged to NOMMA since 2003, have written articles for their magazine "Fabricator", and have received four awards for workmanship from NOMMA. In 2010 I was honored to have a solo exhibition at "Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum" in Milwaukee, WI.

Don't get me wrong, I truly enjoy non-forged metal sculpture. Many large sculptural works are breathtaking. I myself have created welded sculpture. However, do non-forged sculptures belong in the Anvil's Ring? To be fair, they do not. This is a bold statement, but simply because an individual is a prominent blacksmith, does not mean ABANA needs to include everything they make in the AR or HB. The line has to be drawn somewhere.

I combine other metalworking processes into my work, though they are not dominant in my work. Am I a blacksmith? Yes, however I am more than a blacksmith. Consider this metaphor: I am a duck hunter. But I am more than a duck hunter, as I also hunt deer, geese and grouse. I would never use duck decoys to hunt deer, nor sit in a tree-stand to hunt ducks. The end results to each hunt are also very different. So there are different processes to each type of hunting, yet similar tools are used, i.e. shotguns, decoys, camouflage clothing, etc. To say that I am a “hunter” doesn’t focus enough on what I do either, as I do not hunt moose, elk, African game, etc.

The National Ornamental and Miscellaneous Metals Association (NOMMA) is a fine organization, that is focused on all aspects of forming metal, as well as promoting the professional aspects of running a decorative and ornamental metals shop, whether it be a blacksmith shop, fab shop, or something in-between. So there already is an all inclusive organization...we don’t need ABANA to be another one.

Let’s either adhere to ABANA’s charter, or else we will need to redefine what ABANA truly has become. Otherwise, we could see articles on machining in the future. Never say never, as I never thought I’d see the day where we are presently.

Alternative Actions

- 1) If “all forms of metalworking processes” is the new ABANA normal, then perhaps we need a new organization that will lead those who wish to learn sound forging processes, and at all levels of forging experience, and promote sound forging workmanship.
- 2) At the very least, there needs to be a distinction between what is forged and what is not. The publications should demand that the processes are spelled out, as not to deceive the reader, i.e. 90% fabricated, 10% forged.
- 3) Start a sister organization called the “Artist Metalworkers Association of North America.”
- 4) Partner with NOMMA.
- 5) Divide the publications AR and HB into two categories, “forged” and “fabricated”, and devote two issues a year to each category.
- 6) Create two new magazines for the membership to address fabrication, i.e. the “Welder’s Buzz”, and the “ArtFab Rag”. When someone signs up, or a member renews, then they also indicate whether they want the AR and HB or the WB and AFR. If they want all four, they pay extra.
- 7) Amend Article II, change ABANA’s name to reflect more than blacksmiths, i.e. the “Artist Blacksmith and Metalworkers Association of North America”.

Any of the above will take a lot of time and effort. All are a compromise. I propose to simply defend “Article II.” Remember, forging was almost lost, and though progress has been made, much remains to be relearned. Let’s learn from history, not repeat it.

If you are thinking I have been long winded here, consider that I am trying to avoid arguments by stating the case in as thorough a manner as possible. Plus, as an artisan, it is my nature to be detail oriented.

Though we may differ in our opinions, I respect all who have responded to these and my original statements. This discussion could and should be healthy for ABANA.

One last word...let's promote not only sound forging processes, but also sound design and execution.

Sincerely,
Dan Nauman
Kewaskum, WI
February 8, 2014