

Matthew Burnett

Missouri School of Blacksmithing

I am thankful to be a blacksmith. I have been blacksmithing for 14 years now. I first observed blacksmiths with the Institute for Historic and Educational Arts who were demonstrating at the Kansas City Renaissance Festival in 2002. I was immediately intrigued by it. That November, at age 13, I took a beginners course from them to learn basic blacksmithing skills. I can still remember the excitement of that first class. I did not realize at the time that I had taken the first step in a long and interesting journey. I was fascinated by the whole process, and started collecting the required tools and began blacksmithing on my own shortly thereafter. I joined BAM in 2003 and have been active ever since. BAM has been very important in my development. There are many members of BAM who have generously shared their time and knowledge; Bob Patrick, Guy McConnell, Tsur Sadan, Joe Davis, Ned Digh, Don Nichols, Phil Cox, Ken Jansen, Roger Green, and the now deceased Ed Harper, Joe Wilkinson and Tom Clark. I am very thankful for their teaching and friendship. I am thankful that I can teach others now.

I work primarily in my own shop, but have demonstrated with other blacksmiths at the Missouri State Fair, the Kansas City Renaissance Festival, and at various shows at Cameron, Hamilton, Lathrop, Excelsior Springs, and Chillicothe, for the public, as well as several BAM meetings.

I opened the Missouri School of Blacksmithing in 2016, because I saw a need for it.

I try to approach my classes and teaching from the perspective of what I would like to learn as a student. I look back to how I learned, and I ask myself the question "What would be the best way to learn, and become a better blacksmith?" I try to think about what I would like to learn, or like to make. I emphasize traditional joinery in my work, studying design and balancing form and function.

I think that the variety of my experiences and interests in blacksmithing; i.e. making tools, knives, furniture and sculptures, gives me a fairly broad perspective from which to draw from in teaching, as opposed to specializing on 1 or 2 areas. Something I learned from and discussed with Ed Harper was the value of continuing to learn more about blacksmithing to avoid a sort of stagnation of skills. I have mastered blacksmithing but also see it as a continuing process of learning and discovery. I have enjoyed the journey so far, and I look forward to continued exploration.