Church Point Man Gains Much Recognition In Unusual Art

(Article taken from INFO put out by the Acadiaana Arts Council of Lafayette and written by Jon Donlon).

Jimmy Tucker works primarily in wrought iron. He began the BPA curriculum at USL in the early seventies. After pursuing the design courses there he transferred to Natchitoches for specialized schooling in silversmithing. The silversmithing class emphasized, of course, jewelry. Tucker was interested in work on a somewhat larger scale so, following Natchitoches, he traveled to Savannah, Georgia, to study with Ivan Bailey who had, in turn, studied in Aachen, Germany. After a lengthy apprenticeship period Jimmie Tucker secured a position as Artist in Residence at Penland Art School in North Carolina. In December of 1979 the Church Point native returned to Lafayette.

Since wrought iron provides this artist with his mode of material or expression he is called a blacksmith. In the US blacksmiths, until fairly recently, did a great deal of general hot forging and wrought iron work. The label was a vague one because of, first, the sparseness of population and the newness of the settlement pattern and then, later, the diminishing need for hand tooled iron goods. In Europe for hundreds of years and frequently in the US the division of skill fell about this way: the blacksmith fabricated iron objects, the ferrier did similar work but specialized with work associated with animals. “The blacksmith may be an animal,” Jim claimed, “but he doesn’t work with animals!”

It was chiefly an economic impetus which led to the misnomer as it concerns ferrier-blacksmith work. In a town as large as the one in Gunsmoke, for example, there was a strong likelihood that both a ferrier and a blacksmith would set up shop. Both might fabricate a hasp, hook or hinge, but the ‘smith would make the chandelier while the ferrier shoed the horses. The smaller the town the greater the likelihood that one person would perform all wrought iron and similar tasks.

While the dillante may askance at modernized technology saying that “In 1850 they made metal this way and that’s the best way,” the comment shows more than the simple naive of the uninitiated. It shows a strange, for the realm of art, attachment to an archaic tradition. If a choice has been made that the best way for a particular artists to work in iron is to forge it, the only real way to manipulate the metal is by forging. Nothing gives exactly the same effect. However, all the ancillary how tos and wherefores of getting from A to B are up for grabs; the best technique is the one that works. “The only reason, so far as I can see,” Tucker says when discussing the reluctant to use up-to-date methods, “is that old blacksmiths did not use oxy acetaline kits and arc welders is that they don’t have them.”

Much of the work is still done as it was done for hundreds of years: the visual check for iron temperature, the fuels and physics involved are essentially unchanged. Of course, the constant pounding of hammer falls, whether by arm, hydraulic or pneumatic power, determines the nature of the material.

Tucker is working in a sort of symbiotic relationship now at the Acadian Village and Tropical Gardens. He has set up a ‘smithing shop and is working on the organization and installing the equipment there. The product at this time is fairly everyday: hinges and hooks and so on. If you are interested, feel free to visit Acadian Village and watch a present-day blacksmith in a workaday situation.

Jimmy is a graduate of Church Point High School and is the son of Mr. and Mrs. James D. Tucker of Church Point.
TUCKER RESTORES OLD ART OF WROUGHT IRON—Jimmy Tucker, son of Mr. and Mrs. J.D. Tucker of Church Point, is pictured in the old-time “blacksmith’s shop” he has re-created as he pursues his special interest in wrought iron art, this shop being set up at Acadian Village and Tropical Gardens as part of the renaissance of Acadian culture there.