

Yadkinville Journeyman

Yadkinville is a long way from Hillsborough at 6:30 in the morning. At least, that's what I was thinking last Sept. 18th as Chris Paul, a new member of our local ABANA guild, and I got under way to do a blacksmith demonstration for the Yadkin Valley Harvest Festival. The organizers had asked the Triad area chapter, but they were already committed to another event, so the Triangle chapter – represented by Chris and me - was filling in. I had loaded the truck the previous evening, but it was still going to be a long way before breakfast.

I was, however, looking forward to the event. It would give my new portable “Eric Campbell” post-vise a really good shakedown trial. Eric had spent a morning a few weeks earlier providing me with the design, steel, and general fabrication advice so I could build my own. Chris Paul and I had practiced with one of the nail headers made at our February 2010 meeting and I was planning to give it its public debut. I had been assigned a prime location adjacent to the outdoor stage, and could look forward to hearing great local artists perform all day long. And, the weather forecast was favorable – a little warm, maybe, but just right for an open-air show.



We arrived in Yadkinville around 8:15 and started setting up for the 9:00AM opening. My traveling forge is an old farrier's forge with a crank blower I have modified to also use a little squirrel cage electric blower. I also have a small anvil with a good oak stump for a base, the post vise mentioned above, a quench bucket, and of course, coal, tools, table, awning, and enough spare stock for ten demonstrations. With a lot of hard work, Chris and I had steel in the fire when the festival got under way – not a moment too soon, because we had an audience as soon as the coal smoke began drifting over the area.

One lesson I have learned by working at our State Fair booth is that the best demonstrations are for familiar objects that can be made start to finish in roughly 20 minutes – about the attention span of a walk-up audience. Sure, there are smiths whose artistry is so impressive people will watch for hours, but I am not one of them. Chris and I made lots of hooks, nails, pokers with fancy handles and twists, and door pulls – all simple, but which allow people to see steel transformed from raw stock into something familiar and even beautiful. Of course, there are always questions. “How hot is the fire?” (Between 10 and 15 times as hot as boiling water). “Have I ever been burnt?” (Yes, but not recently). “Do I make horse shoes? (No – blacksmiths used to, but modern horse shoes are stamped by machine and farriers do the actual shoeing) One father and son pair was interested in learning knife-making. “Did I make them?” (No, but they should look up a Triad chapter meeting and hook up with someone who does). We were busy most of the day, accompanied by some very talented folk and blue-grass artists on the stage across the square.

The best memories, though, are of the people you meet, like Karla Causey, a young folk singer who had a 2-hour gig from 1-3. Two quite lovely ladies of, ahem, suitably mature years, who made my day when I overheard one of them confide to the other, “Look at the arms on him!”. The surprise and delight from everyone to whom I gave whatever I had just made as a souvenir of the festival. But one couple stands out. He was tall, white-haired, almost certainly over 60 (like me) and his height, ramrod-straight posture, western garb, and fluent Spanish suggested “Texan”. She was petite, Latino, dressed somewhat traditionally, and quite beautiful. And whether it was a recent discovery or the work of years together, you could tell they were in love. I decided to make her a “pass-thru” cross. My version is about 4” tall, made from 3/8” square stock, with the horizontal bar passed through a 3/8” square hole split and

drifted in the vertical bar. Its quick, fairly easy, but also has “blacksmith magic” - only a blacksmith can put a 3/8” hole in a 3/8” bar. Brushed, brassed, and clear-coated, the result was one of my better efforts.

“Here, this is for you”, I said, and held it out to her.

Her English was sketchy, and evidently not sure what I was saying, she looked up at him. Smiling, I repeated, “Yes, its for you. A souvenir”.

Her tall, quiet companion managed a “Thank you”, then turned and in rapid-fire Spanish confirmed my offer.

As she turned back to me I placed the cross in her hand. “It is my gift”, I said, and was startled to see her eyes fill with tears. I'm not sure exactly what she said after that, because it was in Spanish. I caught “gracias”, and “Christos” and possibly “Salvador” but it obviously meant more to her than I had ever expected. By now he, tall Texan notwithstanding, had tears in his eyes, and my shop glasses were a little clouded too. She produced tissues for them both from wherever it is that women carry these things and with some final “thank-yous” and “gracias” off they went. Soon after that it was 4:00pm and time to pack up.



So, that pretty much sums up our day at the Yadkin Valley Harvest Festival – good company, good music, good weather, hot steel to hammer – and a couple who will never forget a small town in North Carolina and a blacksmith's blessing. Oh, and the blueberry smoothies were an absolute slam-dunk!