

Guild of Metalsmiths. Monthly discussion FORUM

November 1999 Vol 1 Issue 11

The Guild currently has 319 members. Your renewal date is on the mailing label as 20XX.Q (year.quarter).

Gene Olson, editor

The **GoM FORUM** is published monthly by the Guild of Metalsmiths, St. Paul, MN. It is intended as a community bulletin board, a place for all members to express their opinions, concerns, debate policy, propose projects & workshops. In short, to help us run our organization.

Your comments can be mailed to Dear Forum: The GoM Forum, c/o Gene Olson, 8600 NE O'Dean Ave. Elk River, MN 55330-7167, faxed to 612-441-5846 or emailed to: forum@metalsmith.org

Metalsmith articles:

Those of you working on those informative articles for our quarterly magazine. The copy deadline for the issue 4 of 1999 is Nov 1. Send them to: Marcia McEachron, editor, 451 Taft St. NE RM 8 Door 35, Minneapolis, MN, 55413,

Fax: 612-781-8435

Please!

The October Meeting:

The was held at Marcia McEachron's and I'm afraid I didn't take very good notes. Sorry to drop the ball on that folks, 'specially after Dave thanked me for publishing this at the meeting. I thank you all for providing the material and Karen Boberg for doing such a great job of printing, collating, stapling, folding, and putting up with me.

The Fall conference broke all previous records. We have money in the account. The Education committee reports that the beginners classes are almost full up. The Program committee is still looking for a venue for the February meeting. Publicity is looking for someone to pick up the forum at the U (Smith Hall 1st floor, not too far from the loading dock.)

Marcia did a great job of demonstrating and when she finished some of the rest of the

crew played with her hammers.

A call for Volunteers:

Next month is the annual Banquet and election of Officers. If you are interested in helping to run this organization and would like to be on the board, be one of the officers, or be on one of the committees contact one of the board members. They are all marked in the Directory in **Bold** type.

Lost and Found

Found: A blacksmithing hammer that was left at the Stanaitis Hammer in this June. The hammer and the circumstances are very specific. (The owner will know what we mean). Contact us and describe both the hammer and the circumstance and it is yours. I will add it to my collection if it is not identified by the end of the year.

Pete Stanaitis 715-698-2895

email: spaco@win.bright.net

Francis Whitaker

Blacksmith/Ornamental Ironworker,
Carbondale, Colorado

Born 11/19/06 Died 10/23/99, Age 92

Tradition flows from a sense of community, a sense of shared destiny shaped over time from common activities, values, and lot in life. In the traditional arts, occupations, particularly those founded on the informal passing on of work skills, are an important kind of community. The bonds of work undergird mutual standards of behavior, ethics, and aesthetic expectations. A fine example is the occupation of ornamental blacksmithing, in which apprenticed learning and a strong feeling of dedication to a mutual sense of beauty and skillful excellence forge strong communal ties. Often referred to as "the dean of American blacksmiths," Francis Whitaker more than any other has strengthened the ties of tradition among blacksmiths across the United States.

Some say it is difficult to tell whether he chose blacksmithing or blacksmithing chose him. Born in Woburn, Massachusetts in 1906, Francis Whitaker dropped out of high school at the age of 16 to apprentice with the premier

ornamental blacksmith of the day, Samuel Yellin, in Philadelphia. "The first time I took a piece of hot iron out of the fire and started to beat it with a hammer, I was hooked," says Whitaker. "There s a fascination to it that I have never lost. there s a magic to it, taking something, a stubborn material, and doing what you want with it." After a second apprenticeship in Berlin with the German master Julius Schramm, he returned to the United States during the 20th-century heyday of ornamental ironwork and settled in Carmel, California in 1927. It was the era of the Spanish Revival in California design, and work was plentiful. After working for a general contractor for seven years, he opened his own shop in 1933, during the depths of the Depression. Though times were difficult, "The Depression . . . taught me that if you re dedicated to your work and do good work and are uncompromising about it , there will always be a place for you in society. The others can fall by the wayside, the second-raters." This iron-willed dedication to excellence marked his entire career, spanning nearly three quarters of a century. During his California years, he became friends with John Steinbeck, who used him as a model for a character in "The Long Valley"; his later writer/acquaintance, Leon Uris, would base the heroic character Conner Larkin in his novel "Trinity" on Whitaker.

In 1963, he moved his shop to Aspen, Colorado. As interest in ornamental ironwork revived, his mastery was sought out by younger blacksmiths hungry for the specialized techniques, skills, and knowledge that had been seriously eclipsed during the economic downturn of the Depression, the disruption of World War II, and the changing styles of American architecture. "Then In 1976 I received the call . . . a mission in life . . .

"I realized that I was a link between the heyday of wrought ironwork in the early years of this century and the present renaissance of blacksmithing.."

He spent the next 20 years selflessly devoting himself to passing on his knowledge to the next generation, teaching widely across the United States and

founding the Francis Whitaker Blacksmith Schools at the Rocky Mountain School and the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina. He has received numerous awards, including the 1995 Colorado Governor's Award for Excellence in Arts and an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from the University of Colorado.

Biography by National Heritage Fellows
<http://www.tapnet.org/ncta/whitaker.htm>

Francis Whitaker, one of the old masters of the blacksmithing craft, teacher and mentor to many, had surgery for stomach cancer Oct 15. The tumor was too extensive to be removed and though he came thru the surgery well, he failed rapidly.

Dorothy Steigler was with him at the end and said that, "Francis passed away with hammer in hand at about 10 pm on Saturday October 23, 1999."

From Clay Spenser:

Blacksmithing has lost one of its giants in the passing of Francis Whitaker. He helped all of us and blacksmithing. I was fortunate to be able to take his classes and work with him in several workshops. I appreciate all the help he gave me, his inspiration and encouragement.

If anyone or any group wishes to honor his memory and contribution, you could make a tax free contribution to:

The Francis Whitaker Blacksmith
 Scholarship Fund
 John C. Campbell Folk School
 One Folk School Road
 Brasstown, NC 28902.

Or you could make a donation to:

The Francis Whitaker Blacksmith
 Education Foundation
 The Colorado Rocky Mountain School
 1493 County Road
 106, Carbondale, CO 81623.

It is also tax free.

Clay

From Ernie Dorrill, MS:

If anyone knew the Lord's processes through life, it was Francis. We first begin as raw material, then we're placed in the fire and shaped by pounding over and over. Some of us take more heats than others. When the final shape is produced, we're then ground and polished over a period of years.

When exterior finishing is completed, we're put back into the fire for tempering to produce an edge that will hold up under most all circumstances. If satisfactory, we're then put to use until our job is done. Not only did Francis shape iron, but using the same techniques, he had a strong hand in shaping people.

I think Francis just heard the words, "Well done...", and now the torch is passed on.

Ernie

A Blacksmith

A blacksmith knocked at the Pearly Gate,
 His face was scarred and old.
 He stood before the man of fate,
 For admission to the fold.

"What have you done" asked St. Peter,
 "To gain admission here?"
 "I've been a blacksmith, sir!" he replied,
 "For many and many a year!"

The Pearly Gates swung open wide,
 And St. Peter touched the bell.
 "Come in," he said, "and choose your harp,"
 "You've had your taste of HELL!"

Dave Brown

I have been trying to resolve this in my heart. Thank you for allowing me to keep you posted on this very unfortunate event. I will tell you that I never did see Francis in any pain and I never heard anyone tell me that he had any.

He was surrounded by loving family and friends as he departed this life...he just quietly slipped away. I am so grateful for this. In the words of a great friend and colleague Jim Wallace, "It was a good day to die and Francis was spared the indignities of lingering. That we could all be so lucky."

I thank you for allowing me into your home

during this vigil,
 Warm regards,
 Dorothy Stiegler

From Bill Fiorini who attended the memorial service:

The Francis Whitaker Memorial Service was held in Carbondale, CO on Tuesday Oct. 26th. Most of the family and smiths traveling arrived on the 25th.

Bob Bergman, Dan Nauman, Lou Mueller and myself were the smiths from the midwest area. On Wednesday morning a few of us went to Aspen, CO to the Mountain Forge where Francis worked most of his years in CO. and some of us had worked with him over the years. We spent the morning in front of the shop reminiscing about the times we had with Francis. After an hour or so we drove around Aspen stopping to look at as much of the iron work as possible that Francis had forged during his years in Aspen. We then went to a historic hotel for lunch. The hotel was a favorite of Francis and Portia.

The memorial service (celebration) started at 3 P.M.. Gordon Stonington officiated the service. A biography was given by Charlie Curlee (one of Portia's sons), Will Perry (a Carbondale smith) and Gordon Stonington (Francis's helper at the Rocky Mountain School). Eulogy was then given by Steve Whitaker (Francis's son), Dorothy Stiegler (smith from CA.) and Paul Curlee (son of Portia). At this point there was an open forge. At this time people who were close to Francis got up and spoke a few words. The Service was held in a converted barn next to the shop. One of Francis's anvils, his work cloths, hat, apron and hammer were up front during the service along with a chandelier that Francis was working on prior to his death.

A few minutes of silence was given in honor of Francis and "Ev'ry Valley" by Handel was played by Terry Lee and the piano and John Curlee (son of Portia) on the trumpet. A poem was also sited by Pam Curlee called "Silence". After the music the smiths in the group came up and rang the anvil three times each as a call from the Master Smith. Bob Bergman, Dan Nauman and myself then led people to the

forge carrying the unfinished chandelier.

At the forge the anvil was rung by the smiths 92 times for the number of years Francis Whitaker lived. We then lit a fire in the Whitaker forge and a select few of us threw some of the Francis Whitaker ashes into the coal of the fire.

Francis Whitaker was born on November 29, 1906 in Newton Mass. and died with Hammer in Hand on October 23, 1999 in Glenwood Springs CO. He will be missed by all.

Bill

Koka Metalsmiths

From the New York Times:

October 31, 1999

Francis Whitaker, Blacksmith, Dies at 92

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Francis Whitaker, a blacksmith who never shod a horse but who helped preserve the 3,000-year-old craft of molding iron and elevated it to the level of an art, died Oct. 23 at a hospital in Glenwood Springs, Colo. He was 92.

Before his own proficiency and that of the hundreds he would teach brought him fame, he studied as an apprentice with the great smiths of Europe and America. Over his long career, he hammered thousands upon thousands of iron bars into artistic shapes to adorn buildings throughout the United States.

And in his 70's, when the craft appeared to be dying, he began a mission to pass his Old World techniques and esthetics to young smiths lured by the

magical malleability of the metal. Just a month ago, he helped his son

Stephen fashion andirons for a house he was building in California.

At his explicit request, he grasped a hammer at the moment of his death.

"Iron has a strength no other material has," Whitaker once said, "and yet it has a capacity for being light, graceful and beautiful. It has this capacity -- but no desire. It will do nothing by itself except resist you.

"All the desire, and all the knowledge of how to impart this desire to the iron, must come from the smith."

Some of Whitaker's thousands of delicate, oddly fluid creations can be seen at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York on Liberty Street in Manhattan, as well as at the former Central Savings Bank building at Broadway and 73d Street; on the intricate gates of the Spanish Revival homes of Carmel, Calif., and on a balcony in Aspen, Colo., that is so sensitively made it appears almost feathery.

Whitaker, a big, robust man with appropriately bulging biceps, was named a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1997, but his proudest achievement was working with the hundreds of young artisans eager to follow in his footsteps. He and the handful of other surviving blacksmiths had feared that the acetylene torch and the arc welder, tools developed during World War II, would make working iron as simple as cutting wood or putting a jigsaw puzzle together. Efficiency threatened art.

But by 1976, increasing numbers of young blacksmiths were banding together to preserve ornamental blacksmithing, an architectural tradition with roots going back to 14th-century Europe. At a conference of the new Artist-Blacksmith Association of North America, Whitaker had a sort of epiphany.

"By the end of the conference," he said, "I knew I had a mission. I had never seen so many people hungry for knowledge."

He established the Francis Whitaker Blacksmith Schools, one at the Rocky Mountain School in Carbondale, Colo., where he lived, and one at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, N.C. He taught at more than 150 blacksmith workshops and wrote many articles and a book, "The Blacksmith's Cookbook: Recipes in Iron." He corresponded extensively with many aspiring blacksmiths.

"If it wasn't for Frank, nobody would be doing this as a profession or even as a token craft," said Dorothy Stiegler, a blacksmith who lives in Carmel.

She remembered him telling her how a great blacksmith must look at a hunk of iron and perceive a candlestick or an animal head

hidden in the middle. She also recalled him as an exacting taskmaster. "Now make 100 of these and you'll probably have it," he would say after a lesson.

The effect was to help rescue a dying profession. "It really was on the wane," said Tom Joyce, a 43-year-old blacksmith in Santa Fe who was heartily encouraged by Whitaker. "There weren't many blacksmiths of his generation who were willing to share information like that."

Whitaker was born in Woburn, Mass. His father was an architecture critic who became the first editor of the Journal of the American Institute of Architects. His mother, a suffragist who was once beaten in a demonstration, demanded that her four children know the value of hard work and taught them to cook, wash dishes and darn socks.

By the end of his junior year at an Alabama boarding school, Whitaker had had enough of formal education. Through his father's connections, he was accepted as an apprentice by Samuel Yellin in Philadelphia, perhaps America's most famous architectural blacksmith at the time. He brought few preconceptions.

"All I knew about blacksmiths at that time was that they were usually brawny men who sweated a lot and they put shoes on horses," he said.

He was dissatisfied with being part of a 200-person shop with large commissions from the Federal Government, because he had no opportunity to take a project through to completion. So after completing that apprenticeship, he went to Berlin as an apprentice to Julius Schramm, also a master blacksmith. In addition to sharpening his skills, he became interested in designing artistic ironwork.

He then found his way to Carmel, where enthusiasm for Spanish Revival architecture was strong in the 1920's and 30's and where he found a ready market for his ironwork.

During World War II, Whitaker taught welding in shipyards. He became friends with John Steinbeck, with whom he played cards on the beach. He inspired the pivotal character in Steinbeck's story "The Chrysanthemums," and was also the model for the heroic Connor Larkin in the Leon

Uris novel "Trinity."

Always a strong environmentalist, he was on the City Council in Carmel, as he was in Aspen, where he moved in 1963, when he began to feel that Carmel was losing its small-town charm. After he questioned the commercialism of Aspen, he moved to Carbondale in 1988.

While in Aspen, he married Portia Curlee, who traveled to blacksmithing events with him. She died in 1988. He is survived by a son, Stephen, of Davis, Calif., and a daughter, Sheila Hutchins, of Monterey, Calif.

He is also survived by four stepsons, all of whom have the last name Curlee: Charles, of Houston; Paul, of Grand Junction, Colo.; John, of Eagan, Minn., and James, of South Bend, Ind.

Sarah Harkins, a good friend of 50 years, said she and Whitaker had been planning a train trip to Spain this summer, like many train trips they had taken.

His brother Rogers, a writer for The New Yorker magazine, who died in 1981, had been one of the world's most famous train travelers, logging 2.7 million miles by rail during his lifetime. He wrote about the trips under the pseudonym E. M. Frimbo.

Relatives and friends recalled Francis Whitaker's words before his recent stomach surgery.. "Fix it," Whitaker told his doctors. "There is still so much I have to do."

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To GoM members:

The Guild of Metalsmiths is a Chapter member of ABANA and some of you are ABANA individual members, some are not. The national organization is a separate entity. I have been asked to post this letter.

Ed.

To: Chapter Presidents, ABANA Members, ABANA Board of Directors

From: Dr. Mark E. Williams, Chairman

Subject: ABANA Discovery & Evaluation Committee

Lou Mueller, ABANA President, has appointed an independent, non-Board Discovery & Evaluation Committee to review issues and concerns, problems and opportunities regarding all aspects of the current ABANA structure. Findings of this committee will be utilized to improve all areas from educational materials and publications to communications and organizational structure. Recommendations should result in a more efficient and effective organization that will be better equipped to meet issues and challenges of the future blacksmithing community well into the next century.

We must strive to take the best aspects of the present operational structure and make them even better and possibly add others in order to better respond to the vast array of chapter and member interests, issues and concerns.

In pursuing the committee's charge, we respectfully and sincerely request your comments, issues and concerns, recommendations, gripes, etc., concerning ABANA's relationship to its members and chapters, policy regarding communications, decision making processes, accountability issues, organizational structure, and any other related issue where improvement may be needed.

All author comments are confidential, known only by the committee. We hope to publish results of committee findings and recommendations by the 2000 Conference in Flagstaff, AZ.

Please send your responses to Dr. Mark E. Williams either through email or the postal address listed below or one of the other committee members no later than *Dec. 15, 1999*. Your time and effort to direct ABANA's future is greatly encouraged and sincerely appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mark E. Williams, Chairman

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Ph: 601-267-9120

The Owatonna Arts Center

Yeah, we know the exhibition isn't till June but the entry deadline for the exhibition is March 1st. Now is the time to start planning some great metal piece for the show.

If you lost your entry form, you can get full by calling the Owatonna Arts Center and asking for an entry form for "Metals for the New Century"

507-451-0533

Tim's Auction Watch

Tim didn't have any tips on his web page this month.

Directory Updates:

We left space . Get out your pen.

A hearty welcome to our New Members

BIENFANG, WYATT L.
31124 STATE HWY 93
LE SUEUR MN 56058-9653
Home Phone: 507-248-3840

LYNCH, HEATHER
2719 ALDRICH AVE S
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55408
Home Phone: 612-871-1361
Work Phone: 612-601-9353

PARK, TIMOTHY
1824 FILLMORE ST.
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55418
Home Phone: 612-391-1099

Letters:

To have your letter printed here, Address it Dear Forum: and mail it to The GoM Forum, c/o Gene Olson, 8600 NE O'Dean Ave. Elk River, MN 55330-7167 ; email it to: forum@metalsmith.org or FAX to 612-441-5846

Dear Forum:

We'd like to thank all of the Guild members who were able to attend the open studio, driving 2 or 3 hours to get to our place. We were very touched by the level of support from The Guild of Metalsmiths, at the Open Studio and during our demonstrations in Hastings. We're looking forward to attending future Guild events, after our life settles into place with the new baby (expected near Thanksgiving.)

Bill and Kirsten (Fiorni/Skiles)

Dear Forum:

I am just a neophyte member in the guild (two news letters old.) I'm still learning about the guild and how it works.

The last newsletter raised some concern in the direction of the monthly meeting days and times. I filled out the survey right away. I feel that weekend times would be better for me because of the 120 miles more or less that I have to travel to get to a meeting in the TC metro area. It appears that no matter when a final time and day are settled on it will be difficult for some members.

I thought about this problem for awhile and came up with a few possible solutions.

1. Alternate meeting days every other month. Odd months hold the meeting on a wednesday and even months hold the meeting on a weekend day.
2. Odd months hold the meetings on a Wednesday. During the even months hold the meeting in key areas where members are clustered or where members wouldn't have to travel so far to get to a meeting. I.E. one month in St. Cloud, one month in Rochester etc, etc.
3. Have all of the meetings run live via web cam on the net site. This way all of the members that have internet access could host small gatherings in a more local area. Those gatherings could have their own

small pot luck dinners and then sit down to attend the meeting. If the link was interactive the outstate gatherings could offer input in real time to the issues that are brought up at the meetings.

It's, of course, not like being there, but I think it would give meeting access to more members.

I hope I wasn't too windy!

Jim Newgord

Pillager, Minnesota

Dear Forum:

The August Corn Roast Meeting seems a great candidate for a Sunday late afternoon, more leisurely.

I loved Tom Latané's suggestion about seeing four guys make faces and Gene's suggestion. *(About bringing in a guest craftsman for a weekend of classes and a "meeting")*

Barbara Bradley, Minneapolis

Want Ads:

Any notice MUST be in my hands by the end of the month.

Wanted

I'm looking for a 200lb(?) anvil. Must be in good shape.

Bob Tjostelson, Ramsey Mn.
(just north of Anoka)

612-422-8897 or randd@primenet.com

Video Library request form.

There is a Video request form here so you don't need to cut up your Metalsmith to get one.

Check the Metalsmith for a list of available videos.

DECEMBER MEETING & CHRISTMAS PARTY

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 8TH '99

6:00 P.M. SOCIAL TIME

6:30 POT LUCK

7:00 ANNOUNCEMENTS,

SHOW & TELL, & GALLERY

7:30 MEETING; FOLLOWED BY AUCTION OF
DONATED ITEMS (PLEASE BRING A
NICE HANDMADE ITEM & THINK
ABOUT DOING YOUR CHRISTMAS
SHOPPING & SUPPORTING THE GUILD
AT THE SAME TIME)

HERE'S
TO YOUR
ELBOW!



PLACE:

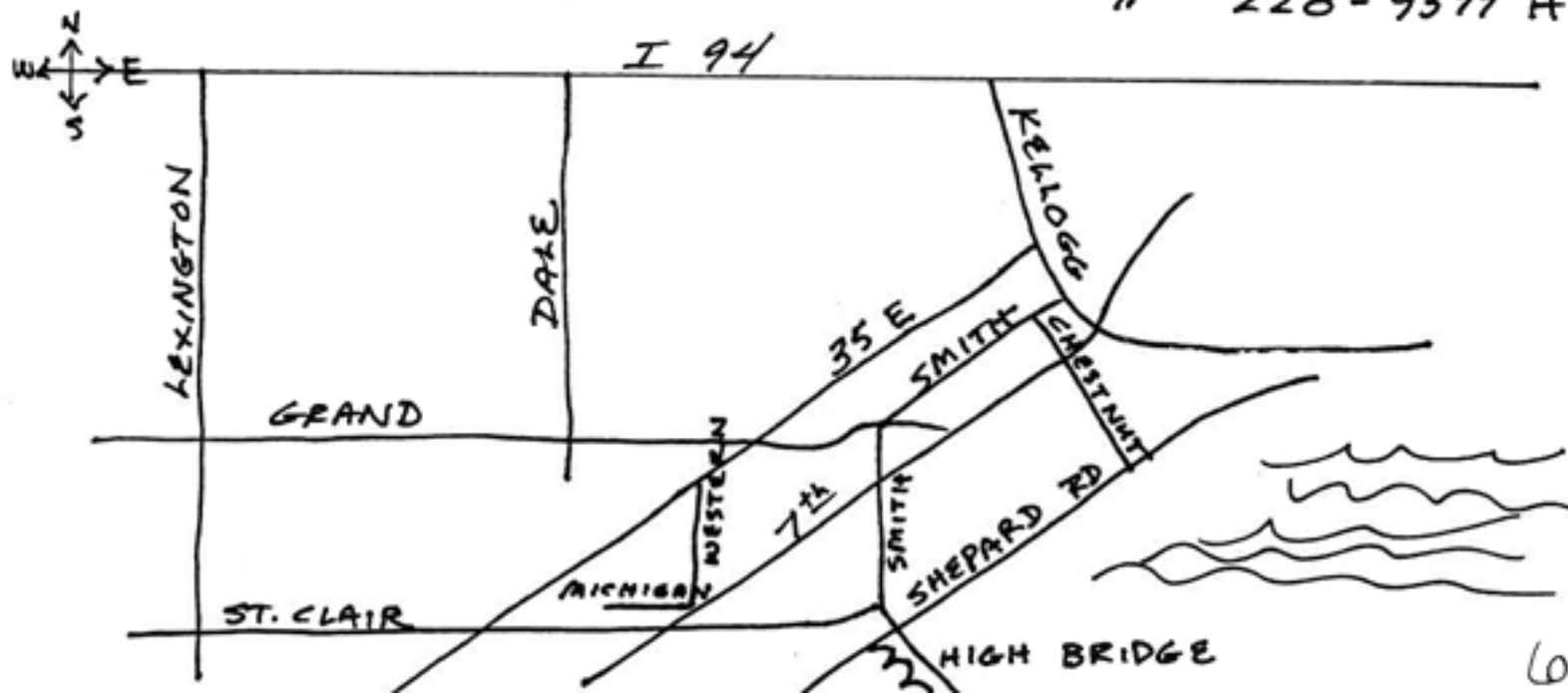
CSPS HALL

383 MICHIGAN AVE.

ST. PAUL, MN. 55102

(@ MICHIGAN, WESTERN, & W. 7TH STREETS)

FOR MORE INFO. CALL JOHN YUST 651-225-9601 W
" 228-9377 H



Guild of Metalsmiths Video Library Request Form
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St. Charles, Mn. 55972

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