

Clifton E. Ralph Obituary

[Posted October 12, 2020](#)

Very glad to see this topic of blacksmiths and the skill and importance of blacksmithing as a skill. My dad Clifton E. Ralph was a blacksmith for 68 years by until his passing in December 2018. He was an industrial blacksmith for 35 years at Youngstown Sheet and Tube (later LTV steel). After retiring at 50 as his plants blacksmith shop was eliminated he chose a more important route.

it took him some time but he started going to steam shows, tractor shows and blacksmith events that they called "hammer-ins". He read called "ton", "hammerman", and tons of other names but he built a reputation and began to teach and demonstrate until his passing in 2018!

He also was a tremendous fan of Wheel Horse tractors and bought his first in 1961 and passed on his passion for them to his sons!

He loved to pass on the nuances of smithing. He was one of 20 blacksmiths and woodworkers asked to remake the original John Deere plow in Illinois by the Illinois Blacksmith Association.

What mechanical and inquisitive nature I have about machines like our Wheel Horses came from being around my dad. His shop was always filled with projects. Thousands of his students and various blacksmith groups around the country benefited from his interest in keeping the art and skill of blacksmith alive.

I am pleased to see Red Square Forum members who are doing the same!

As dad use to say keep hammer-in!



Clifton was born in Fordsville, Kentucky on March the 9th, 1931. He often stated he was born upside down, buck-naked and backwards. He loved being raised on the farm. In time, his dad decided to move the family north for opportunity. The

steel mills of East Chicago were the families next stop. Clifton hated the tiny apartment and city life. He was much happier when his dad found an old house for rent in Calumet Township and moved the family. There was room to roam and a quieter lifestyle. He was back in his element.

Clifton attended Horace Mann High School in Gary, Indiana. Here is where he met the love of his life, Margaret Joan Fabian. He was a member of the ROTC in school and worked for Matthews Nursery. His senior year he began his career in the steel mills and also completed school. He and Joan graduated in spring of 1950.

On October 20th of 1950, he and Joan married in Gary at the First United Methodist Church. Lane arrived in September of '51, Wade David in October of '53, Cindy in July of '57 and Connie in April of 1959. The family enjoyed traveling and camping, taking trips out west, visiting Kentucky and Expo '67 in Montreal, Canada. Clifton and Joan took the kids often to extended family events, reunions, Christmas Eve gatherings, and summers in Wisconsin.

Overtime the family grew to include grandchildren and great grandchildren, daughters-in-law, and sons-in-law. Life was good.

Clifton was a community leader; member and president of the Ross Community Club and board member of the Whiting Coast Guard League. He also represented United Steelworkers Local 1011 as a union griever.

Clifton excelled at industrial blacksmithing and enjoyed a long career in the steel mills. He retired in December of 1980. He then became involved in demonstrating at local schools, fairgrounds, state parks and festivals. He enjoyed the people and loved the platform for his unique way of making people think while doing what he loved.

After retirement he joined the Indiana Blacksmithing Association. He represented the IBA as a past president. He was also affiliated with blacksmithing chapters in Ohio, Illinois, and Alabama as well as Artesian Blacksmith Association of North America (ABANA).

A friend, Paul Moffett filmed Clifton and they developed a set of power hammer instruction. The set has been sold around the world and has enriched many a smith's knowledge of the power hammer. He taught classes at several venues at home and around the country.

Clifton was also the recipient of the prestigious Alex Bealer Award.

Clifton was a son, husband; father, grandfather, great grandfather, brother, blacksmith, and philosopher. He loved his family and friends and loved teaching anyone and everyone who wanted to learn. His anvil will continue to ring in many an ear for years and years to come. Our hearts are broken with his passing.

With all our love, rest well and keep hammerin' dad