



**Know your county**  
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Columnist

## Accounts give hints of jail activity

(Continued from last week)

County commission accounts from the 1880s show regular expenses incurred for the jail. The jailor, W.W. Rankin, submitted the bills, which included his fees. When business was poor, these could be less than \$2, but a spate of lawlessness could crank it up to \$10, \$20, or more. Items included washing bed sheets for prisoners

The county maintained the public well on the town square, and regular work was required to keep it clean and functional. This job frequently fell to H. G. Trotter, who kept a store in town. In 1885, the county paid him \$2.63 for "Buckets and Rope for Public Well." Trotter also repaired the glass in one window of the jail that year, receiving a note for 50 cents.

Scattered among County Commissioners' accounts of 1883-1891 are tantalizing hints about subjects I wish were better fleshed out. For example, Wm. L. Angel earned \$4 in 1883 for "attending Ferry Boat on Ten. River." The county paid Sam Reese \$1.00 for "Fixing Pulleys to Ferry Boat." At the same time, R.L. Porter received \$250 for "paying hands for Bridge, &c." This may have been when the bridge collapsed. An older gentleman wrote The Franklin Press about that event in 1932, giving the year as 1884, but his memory may have confused the date.

Work on the new iron bridge apparently began in 1889, when R.A. Wood and L.H. Stallcup earned \$22 for "plan and specifications for bridge." The county was still patching the old bridge at this point, but the amount was much smaller than before, only \$1.50 to S.B. Sawyers. There were other bridge-related entries around this time, including \$4 to Joe Calloway for "filling road at east end of bridge."

In 1883, a prisoner whose name is given only as Hellman required special treatment for some mysterious reason. In the December accounts for that year, W.H.A. Greenwood earned \$14 for guarding "prisoner Hellman at Hotel." Later, C.C. Smith earned \$2 for the same task, "per order of the Sheriff." Regular jail fees were also paid during this period, so it seems the jail was open for business. "Prisoner Hellman" also ate hotel food, for which D.C. Cunningham, the innkeeper, was paid only \$7 of his \$14 claim for 14 days. This account was paid in March 1884.

In the April 1884 accounts, Dr. J.M. Lyle received \$10 for "Med. Services rendered M. Hellman prisoner." Then, in May, an entry shows up for \$1.50 to Joseph Fritz for feeding a prisoner now called "Tallman" and guards. Only much later is his full name revealed as Martin Tallman.

Was the hotel considered more secure than the jail? Was the prisoner too ill for jail conditions?

One obligation the county assumed in those days was attending to the burial of paupers. In June 1884, the county paid E.H. and J.D. Franks \$2.15 for "Burial clothes for Wm. Frady," and J.A. Brown \$2.50 for making his coffin.

In January 1885, H.G. Trotter received \$5.82 for "Burial Expenses of Jake Morrow, Pauper."

An entry of \$1.50 for "relief of Amanda Pendergrass" was struck, apparently because it should have been paid from the pauper fund, not from county funds. Burials, however, were another matter. The county also assumed some expenses for the care of children with special needs. D.C. Cunningham was reimbursed \$2 in 1889 for "hack fare for Mrs. Young and blind children to Dillsboro."

Occasional environmental costs show up in the accounts. E. D. Franks earned \$1.50 in May 1889 for "removing drift from Tennessee River." An early instance of environmental damage was recorded in February 1885, when Mrs. A.A. Marr received \$15 for "damages of a road through her land."

A much more serious instance of environmental damage occurred in 1889, when the county paid James T. Moore \$106 for "damage sustained by new road." This was one of the largest single outlays of cash made by the county in the eight years covered by the account book, so the damage must have been severe. W.A. McConnell and J.A. Guffey also received compensation for "damage to new road," but their payments were only \$6.50 and \$3 respectively.

The record doesn't state where the road in question was located, but McConnell lived on Iotla Street.



## Masters of Metal

Photos courtesy of Amazon

Steven, left, and Jacob Midgett have forged a successful online jewelry business.

## Father and son forge business with Amazon

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Steven Midgett spent just a year at Western Carolina University, but an elective course he took there set him on his career path.

Today, some 40 years later, he and his son, Jacob, are recognized as leading artists in the demanding craft of making patterned metal jewelry.

The son of a well-travelled Methodist minister, Midgett attended WCU simply because "I wanted to be in the mountains."

His father had made some jewelry, so Midgett picked a jewelry class as an elective course.

"It took me about that long to decide that I really did not want to be an academic," he said. "I wanted to be an artist and a craftsman, so I started writing all over the country to ask for apprenticeships."

He landed an apprenticeship in an unexpected location.

"I would have moved to North Dakota had I got a job there, but it just happened to be in Key West, Florida," he said.

After learning the craft in Key West, Midgett became fascinated with making patterned metal jewelry and began to focus on the specialty in 1989.

### The business of art

Jacob Midgett partnered with his father to form Steven Jacob after the tech startup he was with shut down in 2012 in Boulder, Colorado. He was looking for a new career when he visited his father for Christmas.

"I said, 'I got this project making Damascus steel rings. I have a great process worked out but I don't have time to do it,'" Steven Midgett said.

Jason became a frequent visitor to Franklin as the two worked out their business model.

"We realized that this is really popular, that people love what we're doing. I said, 'let's go into business.' It's just grown from there."

Jacob was no stranger to metal working.

"Jacob grew up in my shop," Midgett said. "As a kid he would come in here do waxwork

for casting, forging work, sheet work and soldering."

Today the two work together from thousands of miles apart.

"Both of us really love where we live and don't want to move," Steven Midgett said. Steven Midgett does all the forging at his Franklin home workshop.

"I take it from sheet metal or powder, forge it into a billet (a squarish piece of semi-finished steel) that gets forged into a ring," he said. "Then I send those rough forged rings out to Jacob, and he does finishing work and ships it from there. We keep FedEx very busy."

### The process

Their company, Steven Jacob, specializes in creating unique Damascus steel and Mokume wedding bands, and their work is lauded all over the world.

The ancient Japanese metalworking technique called Mokume-gane, often called just Mokume, forges together two non-iron metals like copper, precious metals and titanium.

When iron ferrous or iron-bearing alloys are used, the process is known as Damascus steel, a technique once used by blacksmiths to create swords and armor.

In both processes, metals are forged together, then carved, twisted and formed into a ring. The ring is then acid-etched with a pattern.

### Teaming with Amazon

Steven Jacob got its e-commerce start selling on Etsy.

"Jacob asked me to get on Etsy a year before we did," Midgett said. "I said, 'no, we don't want to be on this little crafts website.' But we put a few rings up and they really started selling."

The relationship with Etsy soured when the site started including manufactured goods, despite a policy against carrying manufactured products and resellers, he said.

"Our Etsy sales just crashed with so much competition, almost all of it made in China," he said. "It is 10 times worse now."

That's when Amazon launched Handmade at Amazon, a business devoted to genuine craftspeople.

"When Amazon came along and said they were going to do Handmade, I was so excited that I wrote directly to Jeff Bezos because I heard his email address is jeff@amazon.com," Midgett said. "I just laid out the problems I saw with Etsy and the challenges of a being a craftsman online, trying to get customers."

"I didn't get an email back from Jeff, but I got two emails from his associates the next day," he said. "They brought us in to get feedback and input," he said. "They've been really good at keeping the junk off the hand-made section."

Steven and Jacob were among the first artisans to join Amazon Handmade when it launched in 2015.

### Coming to Franklin

How did he get to Franklin? "By accident," he said, echoing the experience of many people who have found their way here.

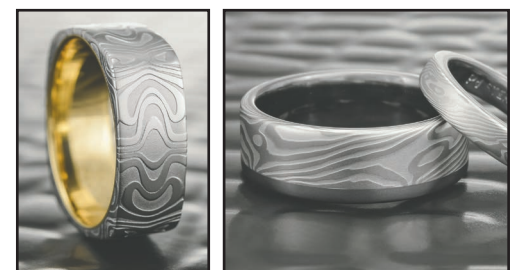
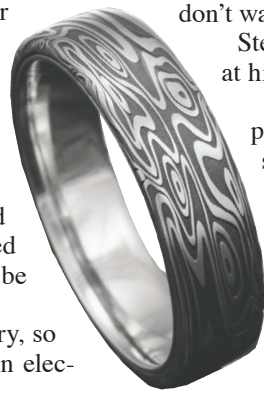
He and his then-girlfriend and future wife were vacationing in the North Carolina mountains in 1975 and stopped in Franklin, where they happened to park in front of a real-estate office.

A couple of weeks later, Midgett was the owner of a "house in the middle of the woods on the side of a mountain."

His craft is ideal for a small house, since his workshop occupies just one room. And the lifestyle suits him.

"I like people, but I don't like selling so much," he said. "If I can make beautiful things and present them tastefully online, that's a really good fit for me."

To learn more about Steven Jacob and its rings, go to [amazon.com/handmade/StevenJacob](http://amazon.com/handmade/StevenJacob).



Steven forges the wedding rings in his Franklin workshop, and son Jacob adds the decorative touches on them in Boulder, Colorado.