

Perkins, Dempsey Clyde



Woodworker and Blacksmith (1941-2008)

Dempsey Perkins was born in 1941 and was a native of Reeves, Louisiana. Mr. Perkins, a fifth generation sheep farmer, lived on the same property as his grandfather. When not occupied with raising sheep, Mr. Perkins would perform traditional crafts such as white oak basket making, blacksmith tools, and making syrup. He said that he worked with wood since he was a teenager. He learned these skills from his grandfather and continued using them everyday while living on the farm.

Mr. Perkins worked with his wife Brenda on white oak baskets and did most of his work on the weekends. He used 18th- and 19th- century methods when working on his crafts. Dempsey used tupelo gum and white oak to create his baskets, carve wooden bowls, wooden pitchforks, cutting boards, furniture, beds, hay rakes, and much more. He handcrafted many of his own tools in his blacksmith shop.

He cut timber from his own farm and processed the wood for the products at his one-man sawmill, which he designed himself. The family had its own family syrup mill. The day after Thanksgiving, they would grind homegrown sugar cane and cook the juice to make syrup.

Dempsey worked everyday around the farm and sometimes he demonstrated at local festivals. He demonstrated at the Leesville Folk Festival in Leesville, Louisiana and at the Natchitoches/NSU Folk Festival many times. He was inducted into the Louisiana Folk Life of Master Folk Artist in 2002. Mr. Perkins died December 10, 2008.

Updated October 24, 2017 by Natchitoches -NSU Folklife Center Staff

