

“THE MECHANICK’S ADVISER”

December 30, 2020

Apothecary - “Sharon wrote a blog this week. Mark is reading details on dentistry. Robin spent time looking for some primary source information for Austin for his character interpretation. Happy New Year to each of you!”

Armoury:

Blacksmith - “Signs point to busy Blacksmiths this past week, as Ken worked on a sign bracket for a private customer. Also on commission, Ken has been working on a traveler, a measuring tool used by Wheelwrights. Mark has been hard at work on hatchets for the Cresset Crew, who light the way on event nights, as well as vehicle hardware for a cart being built by the Wheelwrights. Aislinn continues work on buckles and a leather stamp, both bound for the Leatherworkers. Owen has been busy with hook and eye fasteners, with stanchions, and with general jollity. Broadus returned from the far west with second-hand files in fine condition and continues his work on thumb latches. Alex has continued work on hoes and has repaired a heavily abused nail header, using it to make a handful of clinch nails for the Wheelwrights.

The James Anderson Blacksmith Shop and Armoury wishes many happy returns to all in the new year. The Shop plans to be open every day of the week, and we look forward to seeing you there, because all’s well that falls well at the foot of the anvil.”

Cabinetmaker - “The Cabinet Shop is staying busy with the ‘Woodworking Conference’ just around the corner. John and Jeremy are finishing up their work on the apothecary chest and preparing their materials and presentations. Bill is making good headway with his writing table and, likewise, immersed in Conference preparations. Ed and Melanie continue working on the cheeks that surround the keyboard - they are coming together nicely. Good progress all around. We would like to wish everyone all the best for a safe, happy, and healthy New Year as 2021 fast approaches.”

Colonial Garden - “The end of the year is one of the quietest times in the Colonial Garden, and our work revolves around protecting our plants from frost and winter weather. Despite the cold temperatures, we were still able to harvest lettuce, parsley, welsh onions, and even a few edible flowers to send off to the Armoury Kitchen this week. Work never truly ceases for the Gardeners, and we are already thinking about our plans for the spring. At the end of January, we will begin collecting manure to heat our hotbeds. The hotbeds in our Garden are composed of a two-foot-deep pit lined with brick and covered by a wooden frame that supports glass windows. We will fill the pit with fresh horse manure and then cap it with a layer of rich soil. The heat from the manure allows us to start our spring seeds much earlier than planting them directly into the Garden. Our other main task in January and February will be pruning our fruit trees and vines. Peas can be planted in the ground as early as mid-February, and we are constantly cycling through new rotations of lettuce that have been started in our cold frame. From all of us in the Garden, Happy New Year!”



Lettuce ready to harvest in the cold frame.

Historic Farming - *“Flax processing by Historic Farming will continue throughout the winter, producing fiber for use by the Weaver Shop. Shown below are some of the processes.*



Photos by Susan McCall

The stalk is crimped by the flax break, which breaks the inner core of the plant. The broken stalk is pulled through a series of hackles. The first removes tangles and much of the inner core now called ‘hards’.



Photo by Susan McCall



The final hackling is done by a sort of whipping motion passing the fiber through the fine teeth. The results are ready to go to the Weavers.

Milliner and Mantua-maker - "This year's wedding gown program - and Rebecca's apprenticeship! - came to an end on December 19th, with everything finished a couple of hours ahead of schedule! The week prior kept us busy with a flurry of last-minute details, which included creating the trim on the cloak featured in our source portrait. The cloak itself is copied from an extant black silk example in the MFA. While that original is edged with black Ipswich lace, our portrait cloak appears to have a rather more complex combination of netting and/or lace bordered with loops of ribbon. After diligent experimentation, Janea finally landed on a pattern that set us knotting for hours...and hours...and hours! All told, we estimate that the completion of the cloak took about 40 hours, (nearly as long as the gown itself!), and we're most grateful to the Shoemakers for lending us the capable hands of Alexa to assist us in its completion.



Many hands made light(er) work as Rebecca, Alexa, and Brooklyn stitched the cloak's trim into place.

On the 19th, the lovely Mrs. Smith met us at the Museum just after Noon with a gorgeous arrangement of hair created by our amazing Wigmakers, in the style featured in the portrait. As we finished the final details of the gown's trim and elbow ruffles, Michelle entertained the guests with the history of Maria Walpole and her (in)famous connections to both the millinery trade and the royal family. By 2:30 pm, we had her fully attired, with completed petticoat and gown, lace elbow ruffles, 'collar,' hair ornament, pearl bracelets, cut steel beaded bow, and earrings arranged to perfection. We sincerely appreciate the generosity of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in allowing us to have the portrait reproduced in full scale, as the visitors clearly enjoyed the visual context of seeing 'Maria' come to life before their eyes!



Michelle Smith meets Maria Walpole

We'd like to offer our gratitude to the many individuals and departments who helped to make Rebecca's final apprenticeship project so special. Thank you to Michelle Smith for your enthusiastic embrace of our project from the beginning; to the Wigmakers (especially Edith) for your artistry; to the Bookbinders and Historic Interiors for lending us the appropriate historical props to realize the portrait's setting; to the Silversmiths (especially Chris) and the Cabinetmakers (especially Bill) for their fascinating insight into the jewelry and side table details; to CDC (especially Melissa) for completing Maria's look on the right (and left) foot; to Mary Cottrill and the Museum staff for hosting our yearly program in this time of Covid; to Erin Lopater and Valerie Eppolito for the portrait reproduction; and to the VMFA for their generous cooperation in granting permission to use their portrait as our inspiration. We couldn't have done it without you all!

Now that our Holiday program has officially concluded, we've spent the past week tying up loose ends. Janea made up a new curtain for the Weavers' kitchen as a thank you for being our hosts for the past several months. Rebecca has completed the re-trimming of last year's changeable silk wedding gown, and it has now gone to its owner for use in programming, complete with new lace elbow ruffles stitched by Brooklyn. And as a thank you to Michelle

for her personification of Maria, we collectively created a grey-green wool cloak with black silk trim she can use to keep warm whilst out and about the city!

We've also set our minds and our needles to a new program for February, which will bring together our Trades and the ladies of the Actor/Interpreter Department to share the stories of three enslaved women who appear in runaway advertisements. When Betty ran away in 1762, she carried with her, among other things, a blue and white striped gown and a black and white striped petticoat, both of which we've started to recreate. We're very excited to see the lives and stories of these women re-emerge and look forward to continuing our work with Hope, Deirdre, and Zakiyyah!



Betty's black and white petticoat and blue striped gown, which 'she had on when she went away.'

Sadly, the end of this week also marks the conclusion of Brooklyn's time with us. She began as a Summer Intern immediately after our re-opening in June, and we were able to persuade her to stay on through the end of the year. Her passion for the trade, her eagerness to learn, her enthusiasm and skill as an experienced interpreter, and her humor and joy will be sorely and very truly missed. Thank you, Brooklyn!"

Music - *"Greetings from The Governor's Musick! Normally the end of December is like the end of a triathlon for us, but of course, this year hasn't been normal, and while the end to seasonal programming signals new content, some things will continue into the new year without much change.*

One thing ending is 'Songs of the Season,' the outdoor Holiday program with some of the Actor/Interpreters. It is always a pleasure to work with the A/I's, and we hope to develop more programs with them (in warmer weather, though). As of now, Evening Programs is looking to revive our Jefferson/Jupiter program on the Palace grounds, 'The Music that Binds', in the Spring. Our presence in the Art Museums has continued and expanded to four days a week, in our new quarters in the Levanti Gallery. As in previous years, January will also be a time to plan for the coming year, even if, like everyone else, we will have to include contingencies in all our brainstorming (via Teams). But we are learning to roll with the punches and finding new and wonderful ways to work. When we need a rehearsal with more than just a couple of people, we've been able to rehearse in the Geddy Dining Room, where we can maintain proper distancing from one another. (Big thanks to Rachel Merkle!)

Even though the coldest weather is yet to come, things seem better with an end in sight, however far off. We all hope everyone has a happy New Year and are looking forward to the day we can tell you all in person as well as in print.”

Musket Range - “The Musket Range is looking forward to a steady January and February due to our ever-changing visitation. It will be open at its present capacity of four throughout the winter, on its normal operating days of Friday-Tuesday. Remember, if you direct guests to buy tickets for the Range, they need to be prepared to drive themselves, since we are unable to socially distance in our van. Have a Happy New Year!”

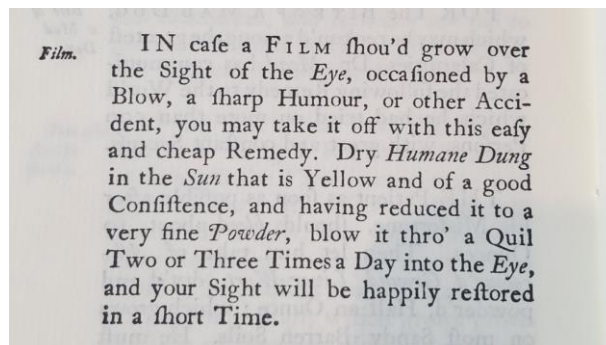
Printer and Bookbinder - “A Happy and Blessed Hogmanay (New Year) to you and yours, from the crew at the Printing Office and Bookbindery!”

Our two Shops end the year much as we began - printing, researching topics relevant to our respective Trades, and creating books for our fellow colleagues. Our Shops also added our time and talents to the Trades line up at the Dewitt Wallace Art Museum, and from the feed-back we have received, it has been quite a success. Moving into 2021, the Bookbinders are also looking forward to sharing our trade with guests at the Raleigh Tavern Dining Room on Thursdays.



Journeyman David, proud Scottish American, hard at work.

Here we see David, enjoying his work as always. David, Peter, and Chad Jones have been busily printing and stitching the 3rd edition of The Poor Planters Physician, otherwise called Every Man His Own Doctor, written by Dr. John Tennet. The pamphlet was first printed by William Parks right here in Williamsburg and was quite popular, judging by four editions being printed by 1752. I inquired of the gentlemen of the more notable medicinal recipes included in the book, and was directed to the different uses of tobacco, as well as this little ditty.



I am very grateful we live in a time in which this is not employed as a remedy!

Moving on, the Bookbinders are happy to report that we have found a leather-dye quite reminiscent of an ice-cream sandwich! And there's only one thing to do with an ice-cream sandwich...



And Finally,

*May the best ye've ever seen,
Be the worst ye'll ever see.
May a moose ne'er leave yer giral,
Wi'a a tear drap in his e'e.
May ye aye keep hale and he'rty,
Till ye're auld enough tae dee.
May ye aye be juist as happy,
As I wish ye aye tae be.*

~Traditional Scottish Blessing

With affection and best wishes, and until we meet again, stay safe out there."

Public Leather Works - "Greetings from the Agents of Leather!!

They say that hindsight is 20/20, and it is with great joy in our hearts that we will soon have this 2020 in our hindsight.

So, without dwelling on the past (which we do for a living), the Agents of Leather now present a list of goals for 2021.

- Continue to provide excellent interpretation to our guests.
- Continue to support our colleagues and the mission of Colonial Williamsburg physically, spiritually, and emotionally.
- Develop virtual and electronic interpretive experiences.
- Find new and exciting projects to make out of leather and/or heavy textiles.
- Develop an interpretive dance to complement our current Shop interpretation.
- Coordinate with the other trades and the Music Department to create individual Shop theme songs.
- Organize a 4th of July Trades water balloon fight.
- Conduct battle reenactments on the Golden Horseshoe as an added challenge to the golfers.
- Discover a source for Unicorn Leather.
- Learn to play the Zither.

Please join us in our attempt to make the coming year far better than the one we leave behind (yes, we know it's a low bar)!!!"

Shoemaker - "Rob has just removed his pesch heels from our cast iron press. The heels are comprised of leather shavings and paste, which are then compressed. These blocks will be for the covered heel pumps that Rob will be making for Zac Pinsent. Rob is also working on a pair of common shoes for himself and another pair for Amanda Doggett.



Nicole has finished a pair of bound slippers with mock round-closing for Barbara Swanson. The ink is currently drying on the sole, and she will blacken the uppers this afternoon. Nicole is also working on a pair of common shoes for Brendon Mooney.



Alexa is currently working on a pair of bound Morocco slippers for Louise Blystone. She is also dividing her time between the Shoemakers, Wigmakers, Milliners, and Weavers.



Val has just finished a pair of shoes for Daniel Cross, based on a description of what Washington favored regarding footwear. He is also starting to repair a pair of common shoes for Joel Anderson, and then a pair for Barbara Scherer.

The Shoe Shop would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year."

Weaver - "When a Weaver sits down in front of the loom, presses the pedals at their feet, and sends the shuttle back and forth... all the hard work is already done! Even before the Weaver attacks the loom with threading hook in hand, the warp itself must be built. The method we use most commonly in our Shop is the warping mill. This contraption organizes and straightens the yarns as they are pulled through it, as well as determining the cross in the warp and the initial density. Pulling each individual yarn through this would be positively nightmarish, so instead, the new yarns are tied to the ends of the yarns from the last project so they can all be pulled through at once without need for any tedious programming. Pictured below are the sixty-one Weaver's Knots needed to make that happen for this particular project. Once all of that is set up, then individual bands are

wrapped around a wooden frame as many times as needed to achieve the length and width needed. And that is our finished warp! Now all we need to do is wind all on to a back beam, transfer the beam to the loom, thread the loom, sley the reed, lash it on to the cloth beam, apply appropriate tension, weave a header to stabilize it, and THEN we will be ready to weave. Oof. Merry Christmas everyone, and a Happy New Year.

