

THE MECHANICK'S ADVISER

March 18, 2023

Apothecary – The Apothecary is open Sunday. It will be closed March 20-31 for maintenance.

Blacksmith – This week, the Blacksmiths have been hard at work on a variety of goods: Mark has been working on a rim lock; Aislinn on a sign bracket; Ken, Josh, and Broadus on gate hardware; and Alex on hoes and axes. Kitchen utensils also occupied much of the Apprentices' time.

To continue from Ken's entry on our Shop's trip to Pennsylvania and the various historic sites we visited, I wanted to speak on Landis Valley, in particular. As a smith who has been working very closely with our Farmer program, I have a special interest in Landis Valley's collection. The large selection of ploughs, axes, and other farming equipment, as well as tools like wagon jacks, gave me a great perspective on both similarities and variety of form. Jennifer Royer, their Curator, was an excellent host who was both enthusiastic about our interests and extremely accommodating, even when a small piece on a distant shelf caught our eye. Although their selection of barshare ploughs was of particular interest for my current work, I was also greatly excited by their collection of locks.

Because of Lancaster County's heavy German settlement, German aesthetics pervade the ironwork just as it does their other handicraft. German locks have some characteristics distinct from their English counterparts, such as the use of levers instead of doorknobs, and more highly decorated escutcheon plates. This preference for decoration reaches other products, too: decorative piercing in the handles of cooking utensils, fanciful engraving on hinges, and other examples. This contrast with the English preference for "plain and neat" aesthetics in the late 18th century is interesting because the function of the objects had little difference between types. Whether English or German, the bolt arrangement inside a lock was familiar; bowls of ladles and cooking spoons were of similar size; and the coulter, mouldboard, and share of a plough were very familiar.

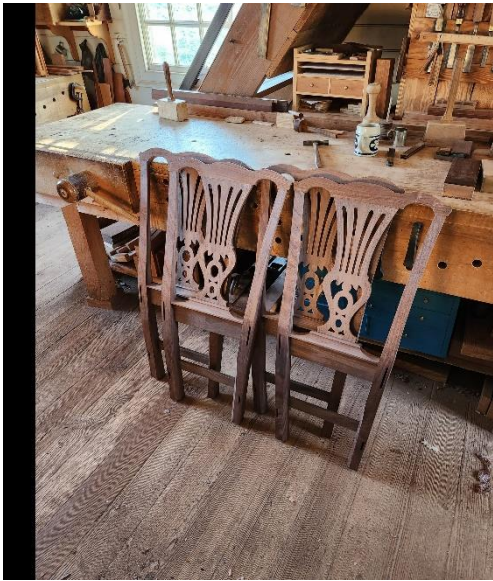
The greater appreciation for the functional aspects of these tools and hardware, as well as seeing tool marks where they were left, has given me a greater understanding of how these things were made and what elements were important, as well as what was variable from culture to culture or even user to user. As they say, there's no accounting for taste.

Wherever you're from, and whatever you will, all's well that falls well at the foot of the anvil.

The Blacksmith is open Daily.

Bookbinder – The Bookbinder is open Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.

Cabinetmaker – This week, John has gotten the backs of his chairs almost complete, with just a small amount of work yet to do. He'll move on soon to making the rest of the chair. Jeremy has been sampling out some chair legs of his own, making decisions about his designs before he starts the heavy labor. Bill is making up the interior parts for his writing table drawer, which is proving time consuming, to say the least. This week, members of the Shop also ventured to Archaeology to look at Hay Shop artifacts with Curator Sean Devlin. Thanks to Sean and his team for having us!

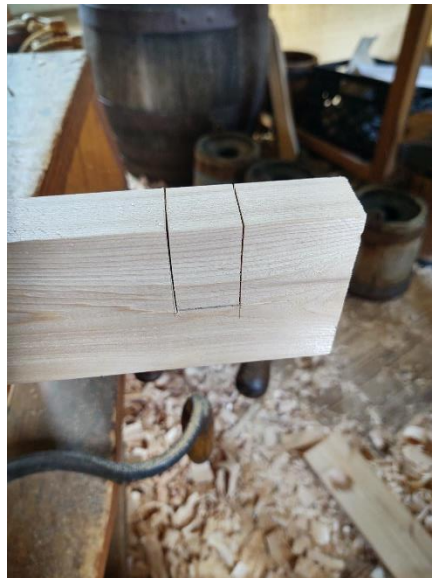


The Cabinetmaker is open Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday through Saturday.

Carpenter – The Carpenters Yard is open Sunday through Wednesday, and Saturday, weather permitting.

Cook – The Palace Kitchen is open Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday. The Palace Scullery will be open on Sunday, March 19th, 10:00 - 3:45, for “The Arts and Mysteries of Brewing”.

Cooper – The Coopers recently made some simple stands for washtubs to sit on, using some knotty wood that otherwise would have been thrown away. In doing so, we stepped outside of our traditional cooping techniques and into the world of simple lap joints. The accompanying photos show a few details of the work.





The Cooper is open Sunday, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Engraver – The Engraver is open Sunday through Tuesday, and Thursday.

Farmer – A New Day began this week with the Farmers' first week at Ewing Field. Guests (Scott and Krista from Georgia) came in the gate within the first hour of opening. We started right off harrowing our new field. Over this year, we will grow tobacco, corn, barley, cotton, pumpkins, try some indigo, and turnips.



Kevin Tobias harrows off the field.

The Farmers will be at Ewing Field Tuesday through Saturday, weather permitting.

Fifes and Drums – It was a busy weekend for the Fifes and Drums as we wrapped up our last classes before the performances started; attended the Youth Interpreter Expo to recruit for this fall's Recruit class; and played not once, not twice, but three times for "A Common Cause to All." Now, we are starting our first week of regular programming for the year. The Senior Corps did a great job on Wednesday, and the Junior Corps is preparing for their first program as I type this. Come out to see us Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday at 4:40 pm on Market Square, or Saturday at 12:30 pm for our Capitol-to-Palace March followed by "The Art of Fifeing and Drumming" at 1 pm on the Play House Stage. This week will feature the Fife/Drum Sergeants (our most advanced musicians) on the stage. Lastly, we'd like to congratulate Sam Carvajal for passing up to Lance Corporal and Gavin Asbell for passing up to rank of Drummer! We have some exciting things in the works, so stay tuned over the next few weeks!

The Fifes and Drums will be performing Wednesday through Friday at 4:40 pm in Market Square, Saturday at 12:30 pm starting at the Capitol and marching to the Palace, and Saturday at 1 pm on the Play House Stage.

Founder – The Foundry is open Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Gardener – Physical changes to the Historic Garden were in much evidence this week. Pruning of sundry plants was undertaken with muscadine grape (*Vitis rotundifolia*), blood peach (*Prunus persica*), and John Clayton honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens* f. *sulpherea*) all being thinned.



Pruned muscadine grape vines are to the left with unpruned vines to right (left). Silhouetted John Clayton honeysuckle having been pruned and artfully tied upon the Garden lamp pole (right).

Over a period of two days, Apprentice Marc wove previously coppiced black willow (*Silex nigra*) into a new wattle fence beneath the blood peach tree. Willow is a determined plant and still continues to show life despite having been cut some four weeks in the past.



Despite the appearance of ease, the inattentive Apprentice frequently caught his cap on the lower branches of the peach tree.



Arguably the sturdiest wattle in the Garden!

Other spring chores filled the balance of the week with the sowing of two varieties of spring radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum s. sativus*) and scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*). Large scale spring weeding began with the clearing of the dry bed.



Spring-planted radishes and scurvy-grass to the left, overwintered swiss beet (*Beta vulgaris*) to the right.



With the removal of weeds, one can take note of the mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and echinacea (*Echinacea pupurea*).

And finally, this week marked the blooming of a Gardener-favorite flower, the snake's-head iris!



The *Iris tuberosa* is looking right at you.

The Colonial Garden is open Daily, weather permitting.

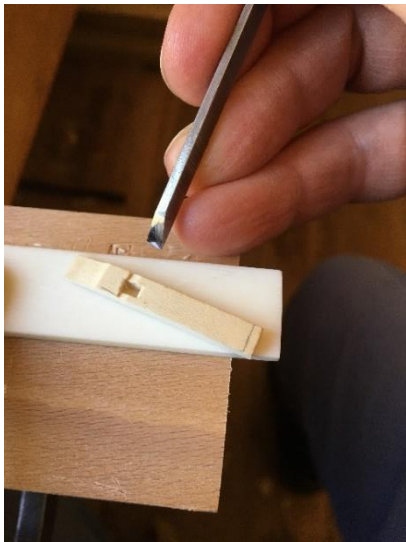
Gunsmith – The Gunsmith Shop is open Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Harpsichordmaker – From the Harpsichord corner ... The plectra in the William Harris spinet were originally made from the usual bird quill. Later in the 18th century, the instrument was altered with leather plectra. The leather is not a single piece, but a laminate of thick, soft leather capped with thin smooth leather. The two leathers are glued into a double layer block, then knifed into narrow strips.

The little holly tongues in the jacks have mortises that can hold such large plectra. We have reproduced a method of hand chiseling out these tiny mortises, cleaning the holes with small needle files, then inserting the leather, trimming it off, and then trimming the plectra to an angle so that it will pluck and pivot in the jack, as usual. The photos show some of the tools used in the process, plus a picture of two original jacks and two of our modern reproduction ones (with a penny for scale). Small work, and holly holds up beautifully if the worker is careful and methodical.



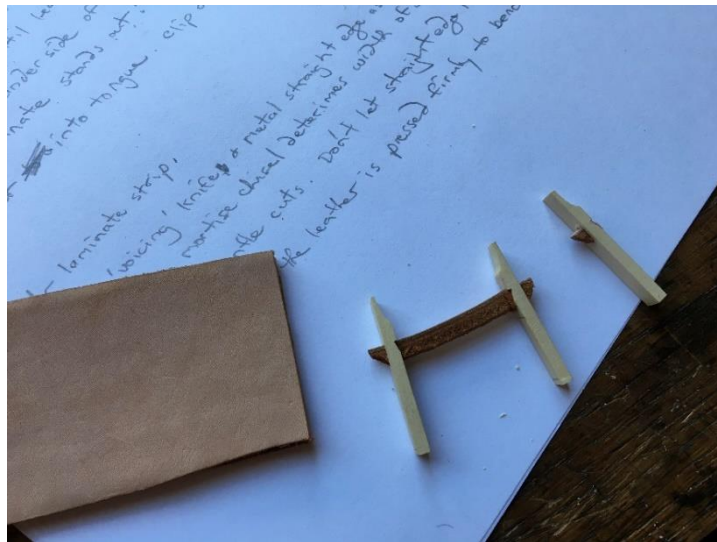
Chiseling mortise for leather plectra



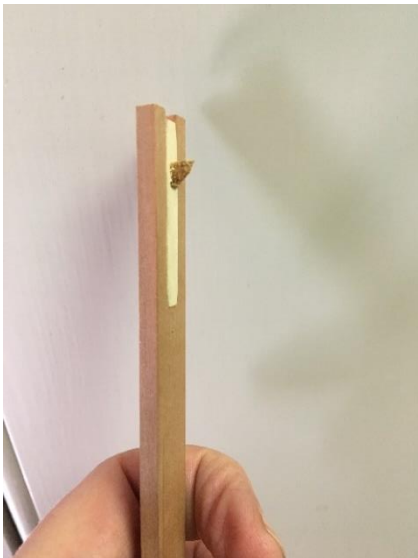
Finish chiseling mortise



Leather laminate and jack tongue with sleeve hole



Leather laminate, cut leather strip inserted into tongues, and a finished tongue



Modern leather plectra detail (l). Modern reproduction leather plectra with scale penny (c). Original Harris Jacks Leather (r).



Smoothing the Mortise with Square Needle File

Ours is certainly not a fast method, but it works. Even though we have a method for producing these leather plectra, we will make our new spinet with traditional bird quill. And yes, there is a subtle difference in the tone, leather producing a slightly more mellow character which suited end-of-18th-century tastes more and more.

Come and see the work, we'll have them out to show. Cheers.

The Harpsichordmaker is open Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday through Saturday.

Joiner – The Joiner is open Sunday through Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Leather Breeches Maker – The Leather Breeches Maker is open Tuesday through Saturday.

Masonry – This week in the Brickyard, the crew became acquainted with the new spring schedule just in time for it to feel like spring! If you have visited us recently, you may have noticed that we have two sets of gates, quite exciting for us. Our wide entrance for materials and such now has two gates which were crafted by the Apprentice Carpenters, the dream team of Mary and Harold. Otherwise, this week, we continued to unstack the benches which created the fire tunnels of last year's kiln.



The Brickyard is open Sunday, Monday, and Thursday through Saturday, weather permitting. On Monday, March 20th, the Masonry staff will present, "Who Designed This Place?" Join Master Bricklayer Josh Graml as he explores how 18th-century buildings were designed and built as gentlemen architects plied their trade in Virginia. Where did they get their design inspirations, and how did they translate English architectural forms to Virginia-born tradesmen?

Military Programs – Military Interpretation at the Guardhouse is open Daily.

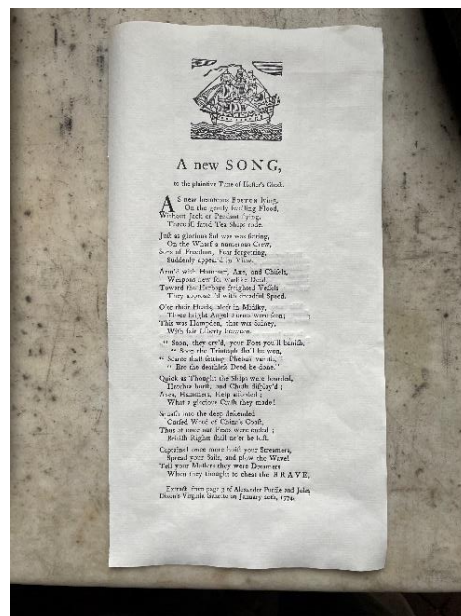
Milliner and Mantua-maker – The Milliner and Mantua-maker will be open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday (9:30-3:00). On Saturday, March 25th, 4:30 pm in the Hennage Auditorium, the Milliners will present, "Disaster Strikes! The Cost of Dressing in 1769." It's 1:00 am, and you've just escaped your burning house with only the nightclothes on your back and the slippers on your feet. What would it take to rebuild the "average" woman's wardrobe? How many pieces might that include? What would those pieces cost? Using a 1769-70 merchant's account book from Louisa County, Virginia, the Milliners and Mantua-makers will demonstrate the layers of a woman's everyday outfit and discuss the number of garments and other pieces that might comprise her full wardrobe.

Music – On Friday, March 24th, 4:30 pm in the Hennage Auditorium, member of the Music staff will present, "Phillis Wheatley and the Music of Freedom". Join the Governor's Musick in an exploration of the inconsistencies of the Age of Enlightenment ideal of freedom, as seen through the life and poetry of Phillis Wheatley and the music of George Frederic Handel.

Musket Range – Training for Andy and Alex is going very, very well. Both of them are now gaining confidence in their interpretation of history. The number of Guests is up as the warmer weather is approaching. Jeff continues his HTS Leadership Training. Scott is going to attend the NMLRA Gunsmithing Training Conference in Kentucky this June, where he will build a rifle.

The Musket Range is open Sunday, Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday with sessions at 9:30am, 11am, 1:30pm, and 3pm.

Printer – Fresh from the press, "A new SONG."



The Printer is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Shoemaker – The Shoemakers will be working at the Leather Breeches Maker Tuesday through Saturday.

Silversmith – The Silversmiths continue to work through their long list of projects. With Preston’s help, Megan has soldered her bowl, and she is now working on filing off the excess solder. Bobbie is working on a reproduction of an 18th-century sweet meat basket. She and Megan decided it looked like a hat, and with the Wigmaker’s help, they turned it into a fashionable accessory. Look out, Milliners and Mantua-makers, we’re coming for your fashion accessory turf! Chris is continuing the first polishing stage for her tray. Preston has taught Megan how to solder holloware and has also soldered his bowl together. George has been hammering out more ingots and is also working on a camp cup.



Megan’s soldered bowl



Megan modeling the silver “hat”



Chris’ tray



Preston's bowl



George's cup

The Silversmith is open Sunday, Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.

Tailor – The Tailor Shop will be open Sunday, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Tin Plate Worker – The Tin Plate Worker is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Weaver, Spinner, and Dyer – Work on the bed rug marches on. With one full panel done, we are celebrating the halfway point. The fabric has helped illustrate to Guests young and old just how time-consuming fabric can be, and while it is a unique type of cloth, it's recognizable to many. It truly looks like a 1970s shag rug. Most folks guess that it is a rug, but many are unaware that rugs don't go on the ground in the 18th century. It's an opportunity to discuss how the meanings of words change over time as our language adapts to an evolving world.

We are also working on plain fustian hand towels. With an unbleached linen warp and an undyed cotton weft, these towels are rather plain, but they will certainly be useful. We always hope the fabric we make will actually get used!

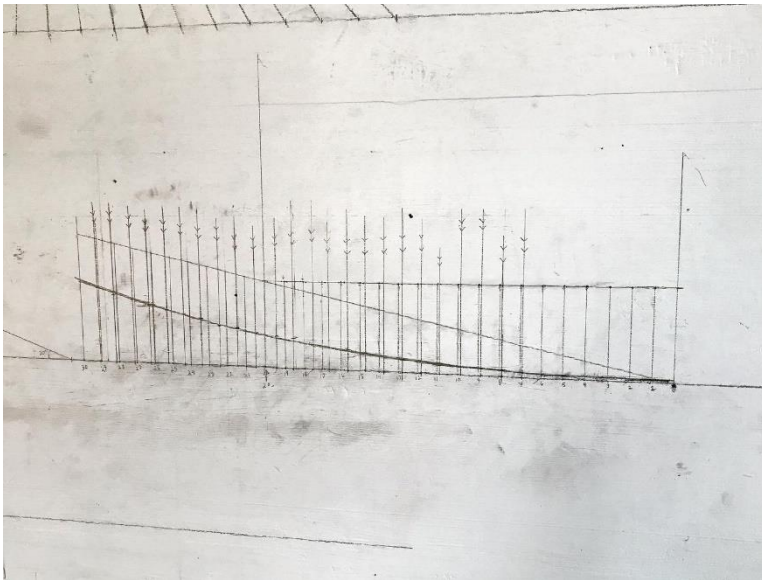


The Weaving Shop will be open Sunday through Thursday.

Wheelwright – This week, we have made significant progress towards two of our big projects for the year: the Small's plough and the velocipede. You can see the so-called "sock-mandrel" casting pattern has been shaped out (the weird pointy wedge thing pictured). This required some intense drafting and making a specialized bevel gauge that was offset by 16 degrees. The casting pattern will be utilized by the wonderful folks at the Geddy Foundry to cast a cast-iron mandrel for our Blacksmiths to make the ploughshare. Also, the Engravers completed the engraving for the massive 30" diameter protractor that we will use to help shape out the mouldboard of the Small's plough.

Meanwhile, the velocipede project is moving along swimmingly. Both wheels are made and ready for tiring, and the saddle has been upholstered by the Leather Breeches Makers.

Stop by anytime to chat with us about these awesome projects!





The Wheelwright Shop will be open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. On Wednesday, March 22nd, 4:30 pm in the Hennage Auditorium, the Wheelwrights will present, “The Road MORE Travelled”. Williamsburg is known as a sleepy, quiet southern town, but what did it look like in its heyday? Join a Colonial Williamsburg Wheelwright as they take you onto the colonial Capitol's streets to discuss what was rolling and who was driving.

Wigmaker – The Wig Shop will be open Sunday through Tuesday, and Friday.

Women’s History Month Tour – On Saturday, March 25th, 11 am-12 pm, departing from the William Pitt Store, join us for “Women at Work!” We have all heard that a woman’s place was in the home during the 18th century, but it was far from the only place. Join us for a walking tour discussing the often-surprising realities of women’s labor, skills, and rights in 18th-century Williamsburg and the Colonial Atlantic World. We will explore roughly half a mile of sites, stories, and continuing research into hidden history. Limit of 25 guests.

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