

“THE MECHANICK’S ADVISER”

For December 16 - 21, 2019

Armoury:

Blacksmith – “The Blacksmiths are feeling squirrely this week, and the wreath that adorns their Shop becomes more squirrely by the day. At the workbench, paws scrabble away at a variety of projects: garden scoops from Aislinn, bucket parts and a tool rack from Mark, curtain rod from Owen, and shutter dogs from Alex and Tim. There’s bright eyes and bushy tails at the foot of the anvil.”

Cabinetmaker – “Greetings from the Cabinet Shop! It has been a busy week. Bill and John are in full swing preparing for the Conference in January and continuing work on the high chest. John has glued up the case for the upper section. Ed and Melanie are continuing to work on the register for the next spinet – first working on layout and design and now on to its construction.

“We are very proud of Bill, who was named Master Cabinetmaker! Also, we have a new Apprentice who should be joining us in January just ahead of the Conference.”



High chest – Bill inspecting John’s joinery



John and the upper section for the high chest (above), and Ed and Melanie working on the register (below)



Colonial Garden – “Last week, the Gardeners were lighting some lovely fires to combat the chilly mornings and keep our busy hands warm. We’ve harvested many lettuce heads, onions, and Jerusalem Artichokes from our Garden for the Palace Kitchen. We helped harvest turnips and carrots from the Prentis Field for the Palace Kitchen as well, and close to fifty pounds of turnips were sent to the Williamsburg Inn for use by the chefs there. The Gardeners have turned the narrow bed near the work yard in anticipation of planting in the near future. Our current nemesis is the lone deer coming in at night and eating our greens, so if anyone sees a very round and well-fed doe, go ahead and scold her for us!

“This week was busy with greeting our many guests who were in town for the Grand Illumination. Our real work has been re-glazing our hotbed window, which was in poor condition. Lots of scraping and sanding. More lettuce went to the Palace Kitchen for a salad fit for the Governor’s table, as well as Spanish black radish, onions, and sweet potatoes. We are enjoying our time in the Palace Kitchen working with Frank and Barbara. The added knowledge enriches our interpretation of the Garden.

“The most-asked question this time of year is in regard to the bell jars and hand lights. There is a great amount of garden envy from guests residing in colder climates, envious that we can grow lettuce all winter long under the glass. Our peas continue to thrive in the hotbed as well as the plants placed in the spare hotbed to extend their lives. The cayenne and scotch bonnet peppers are still thriving, and the borage is blooming. The beer swimming pool in the cold frame managed to capture a few slugs, a grub, and a few other pests eating their fill of lettuce and flowers. If you are not familiar with the technique: to catch slugs, sink a shallow dish in the ground near the damaged plants and fill the dish with stale beer. The pest will be attracted to the beer and not being prepared to swim, will perish.”

Farming – “This is a picture of poverty in the 18th-century Tidewater region. Cotton was not a cash crop in this area. Rather, it is a “have-to” crop during the Revolutionary War for the average farmer. Reliance on tobacco as the engine of commerce is a house of cards when the Revolutionary War disrupts shipping. Near-empty stores are the result and along with it, the cloth to make our garments. In response, farmers turn to fiber crops to clothe themselves. This is poverty.”



Joinery – “Cold burns the wind these last few days, but tireless and resolute the Joiners carry on. Scott, trusting in the strength of his skill, has begun to turn the feet for his food safe. This is the final obstacle before he assembles the frame and installs the tin panels. Amanda, too, toils at the lathe this week. Each stretcher for her chair must be shaped from stubborn hickory and made round upon the lathe. Peter issued himself the challenge of completing his four-panel door in a month, and the fifteenth fast approaches. His mortises are chopped, the thumbnails are moulded, and the grooves all plowed. The tenons and assembly await his hands. Darker grow the days, but do not despair; come the solstice, light will come back into the world!”