

THE MECHANICK'S ADVISER

May 13, 2023

This week's Trades Talks at 4:30 pm in the Hennage Auditorium:

On Monday, May 15th, the Coopers will present "Tracing Adam Waterford". Adam Waterford was a free Black man who worked as a cooper in Williamsburg around the time of the American Revolution. This program explores how we know that, and what else we know and don't know about him, in a discussion of the documentary evidence that allows us to glimpse who Adam Waterford was.

On Wednesday, May 17th, the Wheelwrights will present, "A Primer on Paint". Long before humanity created villages and towns, there was paint. Paint serves not only as an aesthetic enhancer but as a means of preservation of wood and metal objects. Come join a Colonial Williamsburg Wheelwright on a journey following the science and history of this often-ignored part of our lives.

On Saturday, May 20th, Alex from Military Programs will present, "Defenses of the Delaware". A nation's capital is always of paramount importance for governance and morale of an army. Philadelphia was the De Facto capital of the United States, and as such, a prime target for the British. In 1777, General Howe set his sights on it and sailed with the British Army South. Given the power of the Royal Navy, the fear was an approach by water through the Delaware River. Come learn about American attempts to fortify the river and their fierce defense as the Royal Navy desperately tried to push its way towards Philadelphia.

Apothecary – Busy as always at the Pasteur-Galt Shop! Mark is suffering pain in his great toe as a result of his lecture to the National Society of Clinical Rheumatologists, but luckily has his gout lecture notes to refer to for treatment. Margaret gave the first of five Wednesday lectures on 18th-century mental health and healthcare on May 3rd and headed back on the 10th for more. (Come check it out if you're free; it forms part of the Tuesday-Thursday lecture series on the Public Hospital.) Sharon has been reviewing applications for the Assistant position opening in June.

The Apothecary is open Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday.

Blacksmith – This week, the Blacksmiths have enjoyed a productive week. Mark is hard at work on making a lock for the Bray School. The lock is really shaping up nicely, Mark having finished the key and warding and now onto the bolts. The Apprentices have enjoyed peeking over Mark's shoulder, keenly observing the process, and dreaming of the day when we, too, get to make a lock. The crew has also been making a large variety of kitchen utensils for Mount Vernon, and it has been fun to hear that the Guests are impressed by that task. For Mount Vernon, Ken has been making oval spoons, Broadus has been making spatulas, Alex has been making pot hooks, and Josh is embarking on grid-iron making. Aislinn has been working on some small folding knives and fire place tongs. Together, we banded two wheel hubs for the Wheelwrights, as well. Our Guest quote of the week is, "We've been coming here for 54 years and every time, we learn something new."

The Blacksmith is open Daily.

Department of Historic Trades and Skills

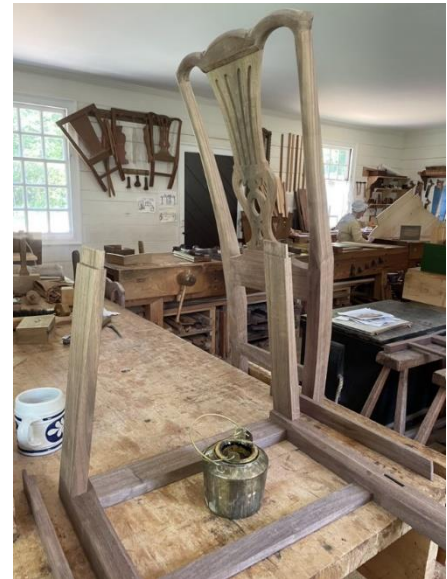
Volume 9, Issue 19

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

Cabinetmaker – This has been finals week for our neighbors at the College of William and Mary, and that means Sarah has reached the end of her Internship. Amid her final exams and big research papers, she managed to finish up work on her walnut candle box. Congratulations to her for a job well done! Fortunately, she'll be able to stay with us as a Volunteer over the summer, so the box is just the beginning ... Meanwhile, John has been hard at work with the final glue-up of his side chairs. Stay tuned to next week's post for a closer look at those. In addition to making more parts for his writing table, Bill has been behind the scenes mixing up and experimenting with 18th-century stain recipes. Pictured below is brazilwood in water - this will eventually take on a deeper purple color that actually pushes woods like mahogany towards a brilliant red (thanks are due to the Weavers for their advice on making dyes).



Candle Box



Gluing-up chairs



Brazilwood stain

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

Carpenter – This week in the Carpenters Yard, we’ve finished up the rafter feet and the gable end studs. We still have four braces to cut and test fit before we wrap up the frame. Next Monday, we will be working with Dale to dig the holes over at Ewing Field. The framing will get moved next week for the wagon shed. We hope to raise the frame in the next week or so.

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

Cook – The Palace Kitchen is open Sunday, Monday (11:30-5:00), Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Cooper – Last week, the Farm site at Ewing Field took delivery of the first of two tubs from the Coopers for use in watering draft animals. This picture is of the second, which we completed this week and is awaiting pick up.



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

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

Farmer – The Farmer will be at Ewing Field Friday and Saturday, weather permitting.

Fifes and Drums – The Fifes and Drums will be performing Wednesday through Friday at 4:40 pm in Market Square. This weekend will be “Drummer’s Call”.

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

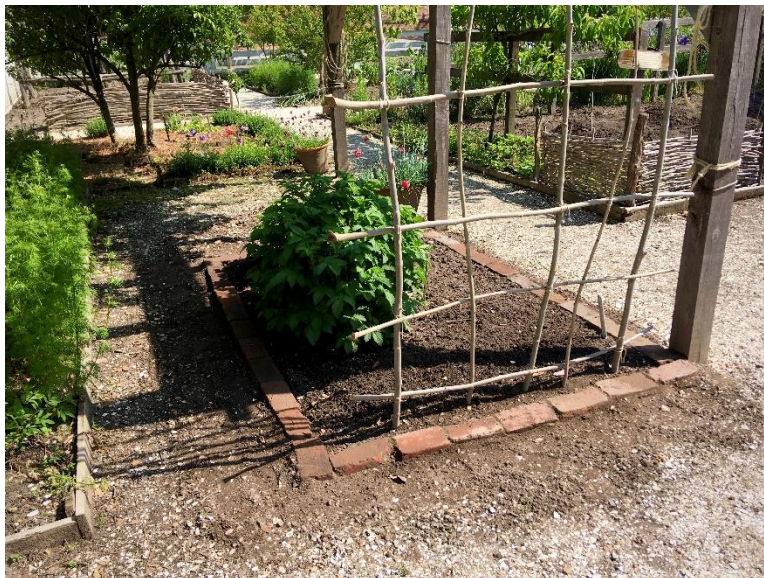
Gardener – The Historic Gardeners have now planted out nearly everything that will be growing in our Garden for summer. New additions planted from seed this week include pole beans, cushaw squash, and castor beans; and we also transplanted seedlings into the Garden of cockscomb flowers, hot peppers, and basil that we started in March in a hotbed. Our Garden is the perfect place to find all the ingredients for a lavish salad this time of year; and we sent lettuce, radishes, onions, herbs, and a beautiful assortment of edible flowers to the Historic Cooks at the Governor's Palace Kitchen. Apprentice Gardener Marc and our

Intern, Andrew, had a chance to practice several Garden skills this week, and kept busy constructing a trellis for climbing beans, pruning pomegranates, and adding a brick border to a small bed beneath our grape arbor.

We also began repotting a few of the flowers and herbs that overwintered in our Garden. While repotting our rosemary and updating our plant label, we discovered that in 2017 rosemary's genus and species was reclassified from *Rosmarinus officinalis* to *Salvia rosmarnius*. It's a good reminder that the science of botany, much like history, is not static and that new discoveries can require that we reconsider and update our previously held knowledge. The moderate temperatures of the last month have been ideal for our spring flowering plants, and a staggering number of flowers are in full bloom. Some highlights at the moment include foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), corn poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*), snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*), Maltese cross (*Silene chalconica*), and canterbury bells (*Campanula medium*).



Newly planted cockscomb flowers and trellises for beans and cucumbers (left). Salad ingredients including edible flowers harvested at the Historic Garden (right).



The completed brick border for a Garden bed beneath our grape arbor



A bed of ornamental corn poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*) in bloom at the Historic Garden

The Historic Garden is open Daily, weather permitting.

***Gunsmith* – The Gunsmith is open Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday (11:30-5:00).**

Harpichordmaker – From the Harpsichord corner ... Part of our work allows experimenting with methods, and sometimes, what worked in the past doesn't work now. We soaked our oak bentside for about five days and bent it on our form. We've had great success with this method in the past with walnut, but the oak proved too porous, swelled considerably, then fractured all through the lower half of the board as it dried. You can see the light peeking through in one of the photos. We believe we oversoaked it more than necessary. We will try again with a new oak board, and a shorter soak. Bending wood is a tricky business, always.



Cracks in bentside showing through light



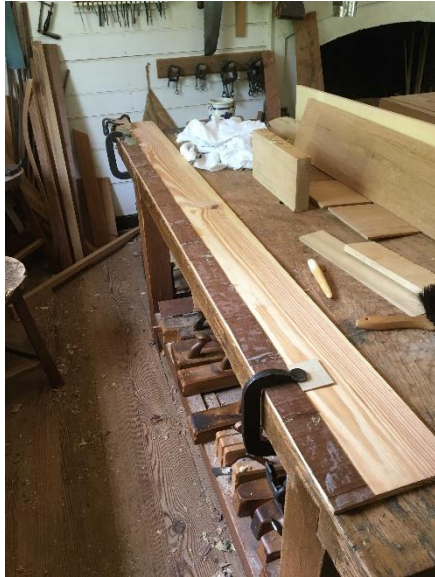
First bentside with unfortunate damage *in situ*

As a side note, the black color of the oak came from soaking it in an iron trough. The iron reacted with the tannins in the wood, turning it black. It is superficial and can be scraped off. The same reaction occurs when oak trees fall into peat bogs, and the wood goes seriously black over time. Fifteenth-century wood inlay workers in Italy used that 'bog oak' for dark backgrounds in their wooden wall panels, since ebony was not generally available yet and would be too dense for their type of woodworking. Flemish harpsichordmakers used it for the black key caps on their keyboards.

So, this darkened oak had a role in historical woodworking. We won't have to worry about this effect, since all visible surfaces on the bentside of our instrument will be scraped and covered with walnut veneer.

And speaking of veneer, check out Melanie's finished banding work for the inner rims of the case walls. It will really leap out to the eye when we get everything together and oil those surfaces.

Ed has worked at assembling and fitting the oak cheek boards that will flank the keyboard area. It was easiest to clamp the entire current assembly to the side of the workbench and saw and chisel the grooves into which the oak pieces fit. See the photo where we have brought parts together as they will eventually join up (lacking the bentside, of course, but that will come soon). Best to you all from the corner.



Backboard inner veneer after gluing (left). Backboard inner veneer with strip inlaid and smoothed (right).



Fitting the keyboard flank cheek walls into inner assembly (left). Spinet parts laid out *in situ* pre assembly

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

Joiner – Work continues at the Joiner Shop. The Brickyard reached out last week, looking for a new brick mold based on the historic brick excavated at the First Baptist Church, so the Joiners have banded together to get this project cranked out. Due to his affinity for Brickmaking, Peter has led the charge on this particular project, delegating material preparation and joint cutting to the other folks in the Shop.



This has briefly pulled Brian away from his work on the lathe, and Laura away from working on a stool for the Tinsmiths. Meanwhile, Scott has continued to work on his corner cupboard. Corner cupboards are massive, requiring hundreds of board feet of material and hours upon hours of time dedicated to their construction. The current focus for his attention is the sash door that will fit into the upper section of the cupboard. Window construction relies on careful layout and precise joinery, so Scott has taken his time getting everything just right.



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 for the Brickyard crew, the Brickmaking season has begun, while paving continues under the drying shed. Once all four bays have been paved, the whole shed will be ready for sundried bricks, which will be stacked there all summer long. The production thus far will go on the paving to establish the first of many rows to come. Otherwise, this week, the Apprentices, Nick and Madeleine, started to experiment with the tilemaking process, culminating in the first sundried tile from the Brickyard. This process will likely go through a lot of changes as we figure out what works best in terms of processing clay and how best to mold them.

Apprentice Madeleine was also featured this week in the *Peninsula Chronicle* as part of a series featuring women in Trades at Colonial Williamsburg.



The Brickyard is open Sunday, Monday, and Thursday through Saturday, weather permitting.

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

Milliner and Mantua-maker – Kate's forty-inches-of-fabric jacket has been completed! She did a meticulous job aligning stripes and seams. You'll have to take our word for it until next week, though, since we haven't been able to get a photo of the completed jacket and petticoat ensemble yet. She's now on to making another in a different fabric, which should go much faster because of the new fabric's more stable weave structure and its printed pattern that doesn't require matching.

She and Janea also finished the festive red, white, and blue silk ribbons that adorn this year's "Drummer's Call" medallions. Janea has divided much of her time this week between training and preparations for today's film shoot, in which she'll be demonstrating spinning as well as weaving with silk on a tape loom. Rebecca continues work on Edith's green cloak and is compiling research for a new program proposal for next spring.

Our big excitement this week was being summoned by the Curatorial and Conservation Team to help mount a 1740(ish) gown for a photoshoot for a British museum. CW owns the earliest known example of a pleated back gown, which we believe dates to the mid-to-late 1730s to about 1740. The team in Collections has been struggling for days to figure out how the gown is meant to drape on the body; with its on-the-grain straight cut and its lack of waist seam in the front, there was a lot of wrinkling and excess fabric that just didn't want to behave. With our Mantua-making eyes, we took the approach of visualizing the draping of the fabric as a tradeswoman in 1735-40 might have approached it, seeing it as the natural evolution of the mantua into this new transitional style that quickly resolves into the gown style that dominates for the next four decades. With some strategic mantua-making fiddling, plus the addition of a reproduction quilted petticoat, a stomacher to approximate the "breaking point" of the top ridge of the stays, and a bunch of reference images, the seven of us collectively figured out the puzzle. It's always rewarding to see the intersection of tradework and extant garments; not only do extant garments teach us about how they were made, but knowing how they were made often provides the key to understanding all of the secrets of an extant piece as well.



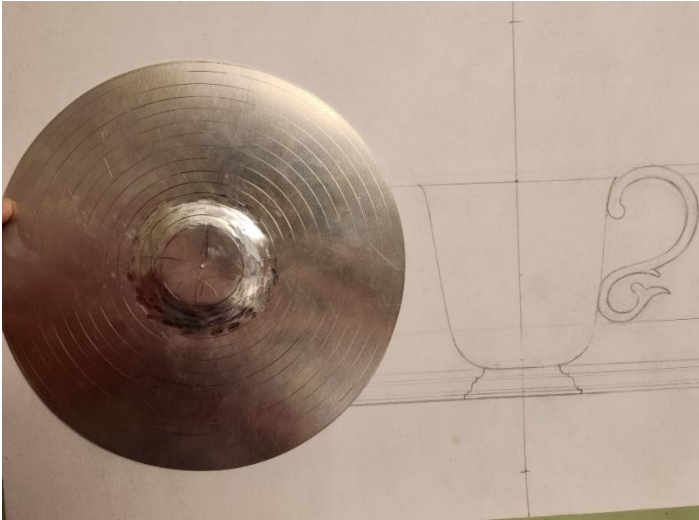
The Milliner and Mantua-maker is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

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

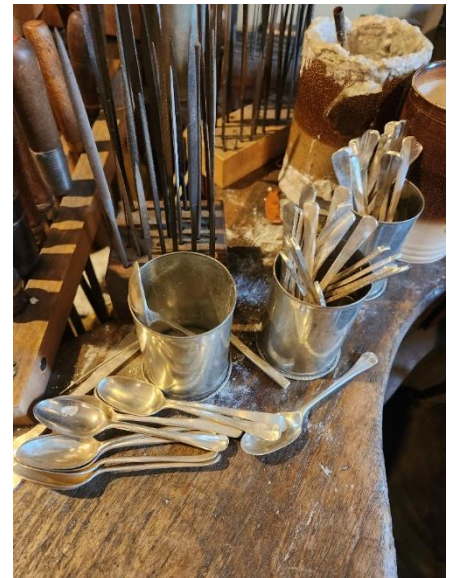
Printer – The Printer is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

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

Silversmith – The Silversmiths have been quite busy with a multitude of projects this past week. Megan has started raising her first set of mugs, while Bobbie is continuing to raise her sweetmeat basket.



Left to right below: Chris is continuing to chase and define the well of her new tray, Preston has been raising more small bowls, and George continues to hammer out spoons and ingots.



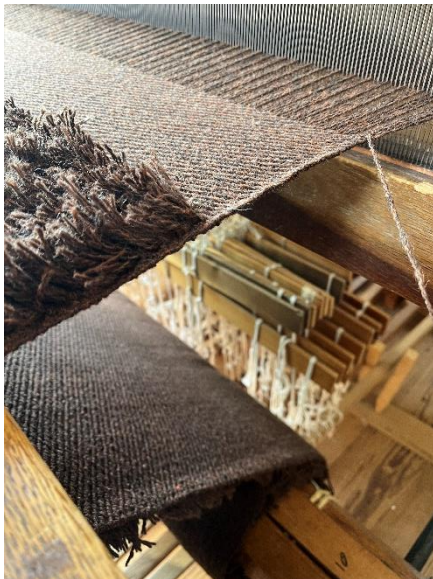
The Silversmith is open Sunday, Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.

Tailor – The Tailor is open Sunday (12:00-5:00), Monday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Tin Plate Worker – The Tin Plate Worker is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday (11:30-5:00), and Saturday.

Weaver, Spinner, and Dyer – Last week, we went on a field trip! The team attended the 50th Annual Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival. We each took several fiber-related classes in the days before the weekend festivities, which helped add to our knowledge of the modern fiber world. We spoke to vendors selling anything and everything fiber related. We watched sheep dog trials and a sheep-to-shawl competition. We experienced a Viking encampment (complete with warp-weighted loom and tape weaving demonstrations!). And we shopped till we dropped. Overall, the Festival was a reminder that many people continue to make a living doing the same kinds of work that people of the past did, and while it may look very different today, the ingenuity and creativity of people who make things is certainly not a thing of the past. So often we find ourselves lodged in the techniques of the past that it is easy to forget that our Trade is not dead here in the present.

On Monday morning, we picked up where we left off: the blue upholstery on the counterbalance and the brown bedrug on the countermarch. Happily, Pamela finished the bedrug on Tuesday, and there was much rejoicing! Now, all that's left is to finish off the warp and get the next one built. Joe has been spinning yarn for his Journeyman project and has just finished spinning about 25% of the estimated yardage. He believes the spinning should take him around eight months to complete.



Pictured is the warp-weighted loom from the Festival (left) and the completed bed rug (right).

The Weaver is open Monday through Thursday.

Wheelwright – This week, we saw a lot of progress on the velocipede project. The frame was shaped out and handle bars turned. With these two parts done, the velocipede should be coming together in no time. We are also making progress on the market cart for the Coach and Livestock team. The tailgate was knocked together and attached via toggles. Now for painting! Come check out all the ongoing projects at the Wheel and Wagon Works!



The Wheelwright Shop is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Wigmaker – Hello from the Wig Shop! Maintenance continues, as usual. Edith has been working on wooden combs and has recently gotten some horn cards from the Tinsmiths to begin working with. Benton has been diligently working on his hand knotting and has already gotten to practice with the smallest gauge we have. Debbie recently attended training sessions at BHS about Communication, Active Listening, and Coaching Techniques. Thank you, Evan P., for the informative classes! As always, please feel free to reach out to us with hair-related needs or questions.

As a reminder to our male presenting colleagues with long hair: with the warmer weather arriving, if you plan to bind your hair at the nape, please remember to use black ponytail holders, and if at all possible, cover the holder with black ribbon. We are more than happy to supply you with both holders and ribbon, if you need them.

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

The Mechanick's Adviser is a publication of the Colonial Williamsburg Department of Historic Trades & Skills.

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