

THE MECHANICK'S ADVISER

August 25, 2023

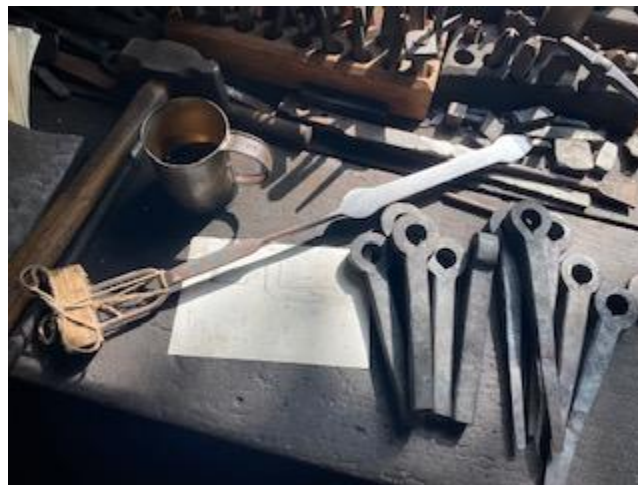
Apothecary – Stephannie has compounded three new medicines this past week, including a lovely pectoral decoction containing raisins, barley, licorice root, and fresh HA figs. This would have been drunk for “defluxions of the breast and lungs” (coughs) & was prescribed without strict dosing instructions. Sharon, in the Galt-Barraud account books, has identified multiple different names for the same medication – spirit of hartshorn/ammonium carbonate – and theorizes that because multiple people contributed to the entries, they may have had their own way of identifying medicine names. Margaret has been over to Archaeological Collections to see more Public Hospital artifacts & study field notes from the site excavations.

The Apothecary is open Wednesday through Saturday.

Blacksmith – This week in the blacksmith shop, Ken spent some time with each of the apprentices to teach us the making of HL hinges. We will be making a number of these for the Bray School restoration and the other constructions coming up in the next several years. The apprentices are excited to get to contribute to the intensive restoration of this original building. The forging of these hinges has its challenges, but after several sets, we are getting the hang of efficiently forging this project. The Mount Vernon Kitchen project continues with work done on a nicely filed cooking fork, meat cleavers, and a second gridiron style beginning to be worked on.



HL Hinge fit temporarily fit up with drift pin.



A fork in the midst of filing and gate hinges in progress.

The Blacksmith shop is open Thursday through Monday.

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

Cabinetmaker – This week, John got the base assembly for his cellarette joined together and up on its feet for the first time. There's still a long way to go, but the first dry-assembly is always an exciting milestone in a project. Bill's writing table is now oiled and waiting to be varnished. We allow the oil to dry for at least 10 days prior to varnishing, so rather than watching the oil dry, Bill is making varnish and plans for his next project – some chairs for January's Working Wood in the 18th Century conference.

The Cabinet Shop is open Sunday (11:30-5), Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.

Carpenter – This week in the carpenter's yard, we have wrapped up the finishing touches on the wagon shed and have started on the next and last phase of construction at Ewing Field. We have got five gates to construct for the site to enclose the site and the windmill. These should keep us busy until the beginning of next month. The blacksmiths are hard at work getting a pile of hardware ready for these five gates. Once the gates are made and the hardware is in hand, we will hang the gates as well.



{Two of the five gates assembled.}

The Historic Carpenters are open at Ewing field (Sunday through Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday), weather permitting.

Cook – Since last week, we successfully had our photoshoot for the website. We had so much fun taking new pictures of the four of us at work in the kitchen. The table this week also saw some of our favorite recipes come out to play. The BBQ pork we made for Marc Meltonville’s cookbook is out on the table and turned out as wonderful as always. One of the most expensive 18th-century dishes, Macaroni, was cooked up by Barbra. Frank whipped up melon soup as a trial run for another recipe we hope to bring to the new CW cookbook. This is very akin to a sweet melon custard, almost in the same realm as a butternut squash soup. Before we lose this season’s squash blossoms, we also put together forced (stuffed) squash blossoms, filled with cheese, shallots, garlic, hot peppers, herbs, salt, and pepper, with eggs and breadcrumbs to bind it together, dipped in batter and fried. A tasty way to use the overabundance of blossoms the vines produce. Just remember to look out for the bumble bees who love to sit and gather nectar from inside the flowers!



One of our fun outtakes from the photoshoot; sometimes it's dangerous being Master of the shop.

The Kitchen is open at the Governor’s Palace Wednesday through Sunday.

Cooper – The Cooper is open Sunday and Monday and Thursday through Saturday.

Engraver – The Engraver is open Tuesday through Saturday.

Farming – Ewing Field is like a laboratory that experiments all the time with different methods and crops to understand the past. This year, one of these experiments is cowpeas, which is an advanced method of making a crop while improving the soil. Most of us today know these as “black-eyed peas.” They were brought to America in the slave trade for food. Once here, they entered the foodways of most people. The vines are excellent food for cattle. We planted them in June, and they took off! We know today that they fix nitrogen in the soil, and so our corn jumped considerably two weeks after sowing the cowpeas. They also provide excellent ground cover and suppress weeds. Check out the picture. It really works!



Cowpeas in the corn.

The Farming Trade is open at Ewing Field Tuesday through Saturday, weather permitting.

Fifes and Drums – 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 and Wednesday through Saturday.

Gardener – This week, the Gardeners kept a watchful eye on our pots of new seedlings. We had excellent germination overall, and the fastest-growing plants have already been moved into larger pots. These will probably be planted into the ground towards the end of September. The muscadine grape vine continues to produce ripe fruit, and we harvested another full basket of grapes for the Historic Cooks at the Governor’s Palace Kitchen. We are also still harvesting vegetables from many plants in the garden, including a beautiful Nanticoke squash from the American Indian Garden. Late summer flowers such as the red spider lily (*lycoris radiata*) have started to bloom, assuring us that fall and cooler weather are on the way.



A Nanticoke squash harvested from the American Indian Garden



Red spider lily, Lycoris radiata



Fall seedlings in pots in the Historic Garden

The Historic Garden is open 7 days a week, weather permitting.

Gunsmith – Recently, the Gunsmiths took a weekend shop trip to the 27th annual Contemporary Longrifle Association show in Lexington, Kentucky. It was a wonderful gathering of hundreds of Contemporary artisans of the Longrifle culture from all over the US.

It truly started here at the Colonial Williamsburg Gunsmith shop in the 1960s with Wallace Gusler. Wallace was the first master Gunsmith here in Colonial Williamsburg and revived some of the historically lost techniques that are vital to building these firearms the way it was done.

Jim Wright made a display paying tribute to Wallace by displaying six rifles made by Wallace as well as a pistol and five tomahawks.

Wallace was kept very busy talking with interested visitors the whole weekend.



The Gunsmith is open Sunday, Monday, Friday, and Saturday.

Harpichordmaker – Greetings from the harpsichord corner...

A keyboard begins as a board, literally. After drawing the visible portion (the portion of the keys that is seen and played upon) from a fixed template, we shape and glue on the bone covers for the natural keys. This way, we can later saw out both wood and bone in one act and finish each lever more consistently.

Melanie had earlier glued up thin sheets of ebony to blocks of pear wood. While Melanie finished the bone applications and scraped all surfaces even, Ed refined the size of the pear/ebony blocks. Melanie's gluing was so good that both pear and ebony still hung together in the individual shavings. Yessss!

After marking where the plucking jacks sit on the keyboard (see the dents and marks in the picture below, Melanie drew out the back ends of the keys so that each key front correctly aligns with its respective jack.

Now we clamp the keyboard to its bed frame and drill holes in both the keyboard and bed for all pins that guide and control each lever's movement. By drilling both the keyboard and bed in situ, everything aligns.

Then the sawing begins.... Wish us well. This is the scary part.



Scraping Bone plates

Planing Accidental Blocks



Pear and Ebony Shaving from Melanie's Glue Up

Final Keyboard Drawing with Jack Position Marks

The Harpsichordmakers are open Sunday and Monday, Thursday through Saturday.

Department of Historic Trades and Skills

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Joiner – The Joiner is open Sunday, and Wednesday through Saturday.

Leather Breeches Maker – The Leather Breeches Maker is open Sunday and Wednesday through Saturday.

Mason – This week saw the Brickyard crew continuing their task, churning bricks out in some surprisingly nice weather. Recently, our good pal Mr. Hudson from the Joiner's shop brought by the highly anticipated coping brick mold. As variety is the spice of life, even in a Brickyard, we jumped into trying it out, which required some creative offbearing. This new mold and the other Gunpowder Magazine brick mold will help finish our summer of production.



Out with the old and in with the new!

The Brickyard is open daily, weather permitting.

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

Milliner and Mantua-maker – The Milliner and Mantua-maker are open Sunday and Thursday through Saturday.

Musket Range – We at the Musket Range welcome Doug Giglio, our new instructor. Doug comes to us from Arizona, where he was an Online auction fulfillment expert. He and his family made the move to the area to be with their family. He can trace his roots back to one of the original Virginia founding families, the Page family. Doug worked at the Freedom Trail Foundation in Boston for several years, portraying a 10th Regiment of foot soldiers. Doug was also a soldier in the US Army. He belonged to the oldest unit in the United States, the 182nd Infantry Regiment, which traces its lineage back to 1636 with the Massachusetts Colonel Militia. Doug is just starting his training at the Musket Range, and after completing it, we will finally be able to open to six shooters per session. Doug enjoys writing and is in the process of writing a historical fiction novel. Doug is married and has 2 kiddos along with 2 fur babies. Doug is very excited to explore our Historic Area and meet everyone!

The Musket Range is open (Sunday through Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday)

The Printing Office – This past Wednesday, the printers hosted six Graduate students attending a workshop hosted by The Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture at The College of William and Mary. These students set some metal type and pulled a copy of the Virginia Gazette at the press before going back to checking quotes and citations.



Image: Masthead of The Virginia Gazette from The New Printing Office.

The Printer is open Sundays through Thursdays. On Tuesday the 29th we will be closed. Starting September 5th, we will be closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Shoemaker – The Shoemaker is open Sunday through Thursday.

Silversmith –The silversmiths are incredibly busy working on the thirteen silver trays order. With a heavy heart, we say goodbye to our intern, Jacob, and wish him the best in his graduate studies! Megan continues to work on her cups and tray. Chris is working on skewers and her tray. Bobbie has been making buttons and planishing the forty-two medallions on order, as well as making tray rims. Preston continues to work on the large bowl and multitudes of small ones. George is hammering out ingots for wire.



Chris's tray is nearing its final stages.

Megan's tray is in the early stages of chasing.

The Silversmith Shop is open at the Sign of the Golden Ball Monday through Friday.

Tailor – The Tailor is open Tuesday through Saturday.

Tin Plate Worker – **Tin Plate Workers** – This week at the Tin Shop, Jenny has been making priming tube boxes for one of the apprenticeship requirements. They're complicated little things due to the construction of the hinges and the fit of the lid on a rectangular base, but they are coming together quite nicely. She's also been finishing some large canisters (though these are the smaller ones in the order) for George Washington's Mount Vernon. Steve is teaching the Tin III workshop at Eastfield Village in New York. Both Steve and Jenny have been producing cups for Prentis Store and hope to have some available there soon.

The Tin Shop is open Wednesday through Saturday.

Weaver, Spinner, and Dyer – Annie is now part of the way through their third overshot coverlet! The stark contrast of the black wool on the white linen helps to show the complexity of the pattern. The wooden bar in the top right of the photo shows a tool called a temple. When one weaves, the width of the fabric becomes less than the width of the warp, so the temple stretches out the top edges of the textile. This ensures that the edges remain square and that no undue pressure is applied to the outermost warp yarns. Since everything on a loom experiences constant friction, anywhere we can alleviate stress to our warp is a priority.



Annie's Overshot Coverlet in black and white

The Weaver's Shop is open Sunday and Thursday through Saturday. It will be open on Monday for workshops ONLY.

Wheelwright – RIP Virginia Wagon. The bed has given up the ghost. We will need to rebuild, but like a Phoenix rising, she'll return! Stay tuned.



Hey, remember the Blue wagon? It is being reinterpreted as a Stage Wagon. Stage Wagons were often freight wagons converted with seats into a low-end mass transit vehicle. Think of a Greyhound Bus. Any more questions? Come on by!

The Wheelwright is open Sunday, Tuesday through Saturday.

Wigmaker – Wig Shop – Work continues on Mr. Wythe’s new wig. Stella is in her last week with us and has made incredible progress on the weaving and stitching of rows for this wig. We will greatly miss her when she returns to school next week, but we know we’ll see her often over the coming months. We will be doing an interview for a NIAHD intern next week. Benton has been working on his hand knotting and continues to research Robert Lyon’s mortgage papers. Debbie continues to work on a new wig which may go onto display in one of our exhibition buildings.

The Wig Shop is open Friday through Tuesday. Beginning the week of September 3rd, we move to Sunday through Thursday.

Director – Ted will have open office hours for Historic Trades and Skills (HTS) staff as follows:

Monday: 10 – 11 am
Tuesday: 10 – 11 am
Wednesday: 2 – 3 pm
Thursday: 2 – 3 pm

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

Editor: Ted Boscana

Contributors: Apothecary – Margaret Perry; Blacksmith – Josh Rachita; Cabinetmaker – Bill Pavlak; Carpenter – Matt Sanbury; Cook – Abbey Shoaf; Farmer – Ed Schultz; Founder –; Gardener – Teal Brooks; Masonry – Madeleine Bolton; Silversmith – Megan Cantwell; Weaver, Spinner, and Dyer – Pamela Russo; Wheelwright – Paul Zelesnikar; Wigmaker – Debbie Turpin