

# *THE MECHANICK'S ADVISER*

## *January 13, 2023*

### Anthony Hay Shop:

**Cabinetmaker** – A lot has been happening around the Cabinet Shop of late. The big obvious thing is the landscaping work outside the Shop to help control some of the water drainage issues, as well as just sprucing up the grounds a little. We are all looking forward to seeing the finished work.

Inside the Shop, John has completed most of his preparations for his presentation in our conference just two weeks from now and has returned to working on his set of four chairs. Bill is very close to finishing his demonstration pieces, as well. Jeremy has been in and out this week, balancing his work on a drop leaf corner table with helping to care for a newborn at home. This week, Jeremy completed work on constructing the wooden hinge mechanism of the table, which we refer to as a knuckle joint. This joint will support the swing leg which supports the drop leaf when open. The table is coming along quickly and should be standing by the end of the month, while the baby is coming along slowly and may be standing by the end of the year.



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

**Apothecary** – **The Apothecary Shop will be open Sunday through Wednesday, and Saturday.**

### Armoury:

**Blacksmith** – This week at the Public Armoury, the Blacksmiths were abuzz with activity. Ken worked on a chisel for the Joiners, screws for attaching H-L hinges, and hand axes. Mark spent most of the week with the Wheelwrights in Boston, examining an early-19th-century hay wagon. Aislinn focused on bench hammers and tasting spoons. Among the Apprentices, Alex began work on a gridiron and finished up some hoes for Farmer Ed. Broadus and Josh both produced ladles and holdfasts, forging and filing alternately. We received quite a few comments of appreciation for the Department itself and its capability to produce real, functioning

goods and structures. As one Guest put it, “What you do is really incredible, because you make the things that make the world work.” We know they meant this for all our colleagues in Trades.

The biggest event for our group was travelling to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond. There, we examined the collections of their Division of State Archaeology, including artifacts from Kingsmill, right in our back yard, and Corotoman, a house built in Lancaster County by Robert “King” Carter, completed in 1725. Corotoman provided some artifacts of particular interest because the building was destroyed in a fire in 1729, giving us a four-year window of ironwork to document. Because of iron’s durability and practical nature, it is rare for a site to hold such a specific window into historic usage. Typically, our Shop must examine objects from a long period of occupation and try to work out the stylistic preferences of a period based on clues outside of the archaeology itself, which is not always reliable. Even small things, like the filed decoration of a hinge, can change with fashion, and so having such a specific context helps us determine what character of hardware and tooling might be best for a site. We spent most of our time tracing, photographing, and discussing the excavated pieces, and familiarizing ourselves with the collection, and are deeply grateful to the Division of State Archaeology for the opportunity. But new or old, it must be said that all’s well that falls well at the foot of the anvil.

**The Blacksmith Shop will be open Sunday through Tuesday and Thursday through Saturday.**

***Tinsmith* – The Tin Shop will be open Tuesday through Thursday, and Saturday.**

***Brickmaker*** – This week in the Brickyard, the crew received the “Betsy Ross Flag of Excellence”, which is now flowing at the entrance of the Yard. This is an honor bestowed on the Trades Shop with the most positive Guest comments. This symbol of merit will migrate monthly based on the quantity of positive comments received. The crew is quite proud of their achievement and intend to continue committing themselves to the highest standard of customer service.

Otherwise, this week, the unstacking of the kiln continued level by level. Soon the bricks intended for the Bray School will be palletized and moved off property. We had a break in our usual activities in the form of some early spring cleaning! Through friendship and brute strength, we cleaned up our Yard with some help from the Carpenters and the ineffable Dale Trowbridge.

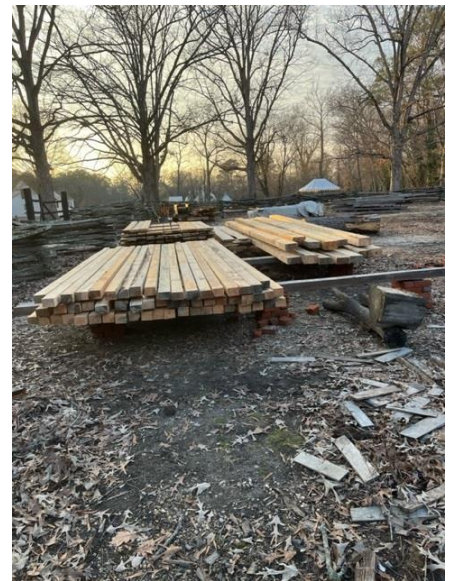






**The Brickyard will be open Sunday through Thursday, weather permitting.**

**Carpenter** – This week, the Carpenters have gotten the clapboards to the next stopping point. We now are installing the upper shuttered windows before continuing the siding. We also took one day to clean out the Yard and organize the material for the next two frames. With help from Dale Trowbridge and the Brickmakers, we moved eight loads of material out of the Yard. We're very happy with the results of one busy day of moving things.



**The Carpenters will primarily be at the Carpenter's Yard Tuesday through Saturday, weather permitting.**

**Colonial Garden** – Compost has been foremost on the mind of the Historic Gardeners this week; to wit, the turning of the compost piles. We possess three piles of compost, each at a different stage of decomposition. The initial pile contains a mixture of fresh horse and sheep manure, straw, and "vegetable dung" collected from about the Garden. After a year's accumulation, the pile is turned by spade into an intermediate pile that begins to take on the consistency of soil. After a second year of exposure to the elements, the pile is again turned and becomes the ready source of potting soil and fertilizer for amending the Garden beds.





Turning compost from the first to second pile one spade at a time



A view of all three piles within the compost yard

The whitesmiths of the Tin Shop were good enough to provide horn shavings to be added to the burgeoning compost pile.



More organic matter to be composted

Pruning season has begun in the Garden. The first two subjects of the Gardeners' delicate attentions were scarlet firethorn (*Pyracantha coccinea*) and black willow (*Silex nigra*). The firethorn was decoratively pruned



flat against our laundry fence in a technique called *espalier*. The willow was pruned in a different manner, *coppicing*. This pruning takes the plant almost all the way to the ground.



Bottom branches of pyracantha have been pruned, while the top branches await attention (l). Row of willow during coppicing (r).



Future wattle?

This week also saw the harvest of three varieties of winter radish: German Bier, Round Black Spanish, and Long Black Spanish.



Table groaning under assorted *Raphanus sativus*.



With the return of Research Days, a sampling of the Gardeners' reading may prove of interest: *The Gardener's Botanical* by Ross Bayton, *Flora Illustrata* edited by Susan Fraser and Vanessa Bezemer Sellers, and *Archeology and the Colonial Gardener* by Audrey Noel Hume.

**The Colonial Garden will be open Sunday through Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday, weather permitting.**

*Cooper* – One of the items we made recently in the Shop is a cannikin, or wooden tankard, based on similar pieces recovered from the wreck of the *Mary Rose*. The *Mary Rose* was an English warship in the fleet of King Henry VIII that sank in 1545.



**The Cooper Shop will be open Sunday, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday.**

*Engraver* – The Engraving Shop will be open Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

*Foodways* – The Palace Kitchen is open Sunday through Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday.

*Foundry* – We kicked off this week by hosting our first Winter Workshop; thankfully, we had the chance to use the Roscoe Cole Stable for a work area, as we were sold out, and it was chilly! Apprentice Drew can finally truthfully call himself a Brass Founder as he completed his first brass pour, as well. It may have just been consolidating scrap into ingots, but he was able to experience the flare and smoke of white-hot brass. We figured rather than waste the hot forge, we followed it up with some fresh musket balls. Rounding out this week, Drew and fellow Apprentice Leanne made some molds for a silver pour we hope to do this coming weekend. Inside are two pairs of shoe buckles for the Milliner and Mantua-makers' March program, silver tray feet for the Silversmiths, and a couple different salt spoons.

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Drew molding



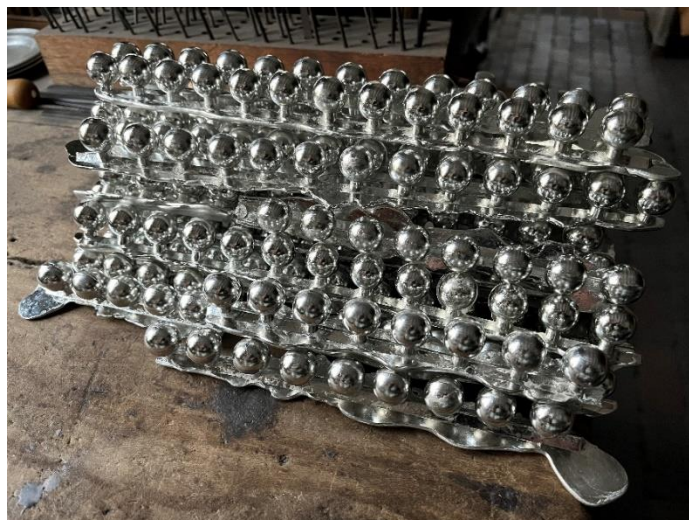
Workshop



Leanne molding



Molds



Musket balls



**The Foundry will be open Sunday, Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.**

**Gunsmith – The Gunsmith Shop will be open Sunday, Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.**

**Joinery** – With the woodworking conference fast approaching, Brian and Peter are buckling down in their preparations of projects and presentations. As you may remember from previous entries, Brian is going to be speaking on pilasters, an architectural trim that mimics columns, and Peter is going to talk about his Journeyman project, recreating an arched portico from the house at Menokin.

Scott, while he is not presenting at the conference this year, also continues work on his Journeyman project, an Eastern Shore corner cupboard. He will soon be working on pilasters of his own, showing how that feature can be used large (to decorate the walls of a room) or small (on an individual piece of furniture).

Laura has completed her first dovetail joint! She'll continue to practice and will soon be applying the joint to boxes.



**The Joinery will be open Sunday, and Wednesday through Saturday.**

**Leather Breeches Maker – The Leather Breeches Maker will be open Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.**

**Military Programs** – Military is currently working hard on establishing our goals for the year, with the aim of developing skills and research to facilitate our new workshop coming in the fall. We will be hoping for an experience detailing the many aspects of a soldier's life, lasting for 2-3 hours. We are also working on future collaborations with the Virginia Frontier Culture Museum, both in programming and in upcoming CW events. We are hoping to interview soon for the position of Military Programs Supervisor; and later this winter, we are hoping to be hiring new staff to help fill out the staff. If you know of folks who might potentially be a good fit, please tell them to apply!

**Military Interpretation at the Guardhouse is open Daily.**

**Milliner and Mantua-maker – The Milliner and Mantua-maker will be open Sunday, Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.**



**Musket Range** – The Musket Range would like to announce our new Supervisor, Jeffrey Thomas, and our new Range Master, Scott Bradford! We are looking forward to hiring soon and are taking applications for the Range as we speak. Later in the year, the Musket Range is looking forward to re-sculpting the shooting berm and removing lead for the first time as part of our duty to steward the environment. While we've recently started this process, we expect this to take place in late August if everything works out as planned.

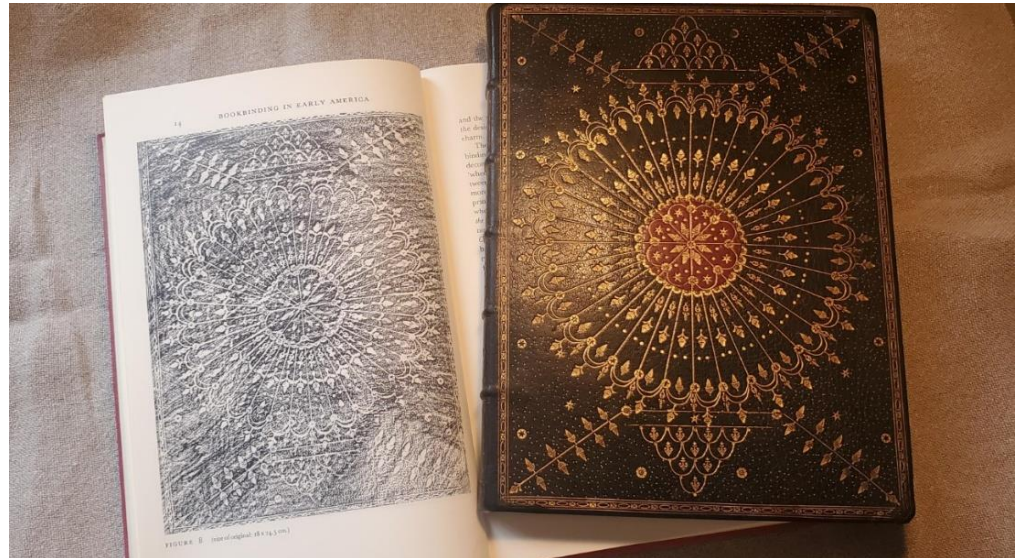
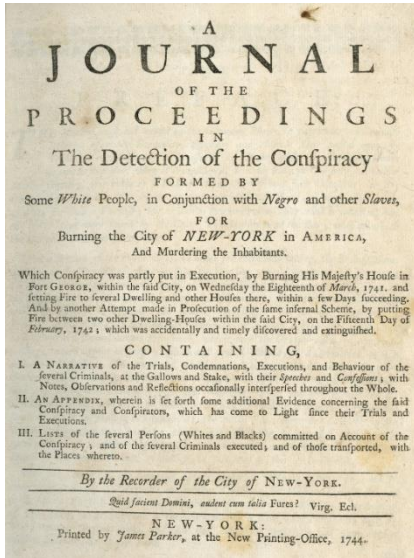
For the moment, the Musket Range is booking sessions of two until we can hire and certify our new staff, but we remain open on our normal schedule through the winter.

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

### **Printer and Bookbinder:**

**Printing Office** – The Printing Office will be open Sunday through Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday.

**Bindery** – Good Day From the Bindery. Sometimes you hear a story that will not let go – it nags at your mind and heart, and you must follow the call. I will be pulling together the complete history of the *New York Conspiracy*, including how it ended up being bound here in Williamsburg for William Byrd II of Charles City County. I have long wondered why the Salem Witch Trials were taught in most schools, but this historical accounting is a surprise to most people who hear about it in our Bookbindery. Stay tuned, as I plan to present my findings when completed. With 13 people burned at the stake, 18 people hanged, and 70 deported to work on sugar plantations at the word of a 16-year-old indentured servant, in exchange for her freedom, it is time for a reckoning. In my line of work, I talk about the process of making books, and many admire the handiwork and skill that gold-tooling involves. In this case, quite frankly, the contents are the more important story.



**The Bookbindery will be open Sunday, Tuesday through Thursday and Saturday.**

**Shoemaker** – Nicole has finished building up a last with a leather pin for a pair of double soled common shoes she is making for herself. These will replace the first pair that she made in her apprenticeship. The Shoemakers made black ball cakes for the upcoming year. Consisting of tallow, beeswax, and bone black, the mixture is heated and then poured into ceramic cups. Once cooled, the cake of blacking slides out, to be used in maintaining staff shoes. The Shop also paid a visit to the Archaeology Department, where we spent a morning drawing shoe fragments from the Custis site.



**The Shoemakers will be working at the Leather Breeches Maker Monday through Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.**

*Silversmith* – Trays, trays, trays, is the name of the game at the Silversmith Shop. Thirteen trays need to be finished over the next few years, along with a host of other projects. Megan has finished planishing her bowl and is now working on cutting and filing wire for a tray rim. Chris has soldered the feet to her tray and is preparing it to be flattened. Bobbie and Megan finished the bulk of the presentation box, and Bobbie is getting ready to fit and solder the wire rim of her tray to the silver sheet base. Preston has been busily working on multiple bowls and has cleaned and polished most of the silver on display in the Shop. George has finished polishing a number of teaspoons and a ladle. Bobbie has been deciphering more of Ann Craig's will.

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Megan's wire for her tray rim

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Chris' tray is looking quite beautiful (l). Bobbie's wire rim and the silver sheet it is being fit to (middle). Preston's bowls are in various stages of completion (r).



George's ladle and one of his teaspoons

**The Silversmith Shop will be open Sunday through Thursday.**

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

**Weaving, Spinning, and Dyeing** – While this past week has seen a noted decrease in Guests coming through our doors, we remain as busy as ever. We are now nearly finished with the first batch of Dutch blankets on the counterbalance loom. We can't wait to see them warm our colleagues and become interpretative tools. Annie is continuing to persevere with the linen huck on our countermarch, and it's coming along very nicely. The textured fabric is often a conversation starter on how we program a loom to give us different woven structures. Joe has been spinning flax as finely as he can in preparation to spin for his Journeyman project. He will need to spin for many months to have enough yarn to weave a replica from our collection. I'm sure he's looking forward to this wholeheartedly and is not at all nervous. Meanwhile, I have been working on dyeing some linen behind the scenes. The project was meant to build my confidence

with following these recipes and achieving the desired color. While I'm proud of the outcome, I now know where my focus is needed for future projects.



**The Weaving Shop will be open Sunday through Thursday.**

*Wheelwright* – Earlier this week, the Wheelwrights (with a Blacksmith in tow) traveled to the North Shore of Massachusetts to study a rare Salt Hay Wagon: a vehicle used to harvest salt hay, a marsh grass grown from New Jersey to Maine for cattle fodder. This survivor was determined to have been built between 1780-1820, making it potentially one of the earliest wagons in the United States. We were also able to study a plow and many wonderful artifacts collected over the years by our host and his friends. Our gratitude to the Donors who allowed us to take such an important study trip!







**The Wheelwright Shop will be open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.**

**Wigmaker – The Wig Shop will be open Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.**

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

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