

THE MECHANICK'S ADVISER

April 15, 2023

Apothecary – The Apothecary is open Sunday through Tuesday, Wednesday (11:30-5:00), and Saturday.

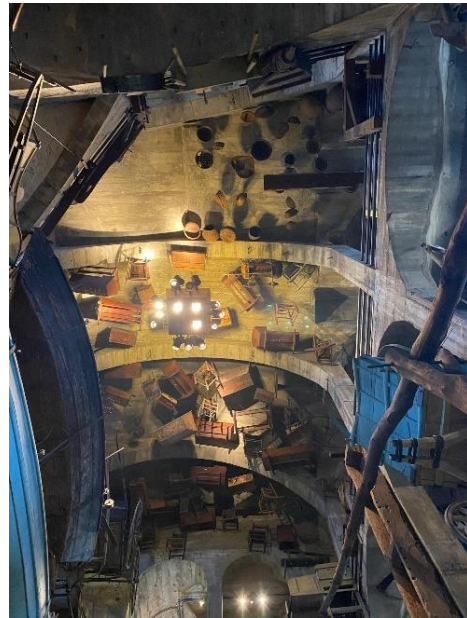
Blacksmith – The Blacksmiths have taken many projects in hand this week: Ken has continued work on a variety of woodworkers tools, including a firmer chisel, froes, and a holdfast. He is also working on a handle for one of the Gunsmiths' fullers, iron work for iron workers. Aislinn has continued filing on pipe tomahawks and started on a hammer for the Leather Breeches Makers. In the Apprentice corner, Josh has made hardware for a well bucket and finished molds for roofing tiles; Broadus has finished his pouring shank for the Foundry, as well as a small slide bolt and a bench hammer; and Alex has finished some cooking spoons and a second clay hoe for the clay tile project, along with adjustments to some weeding hoes for the tobacco season.

Continuing with our series on our research trip to Pennsylvania, we move to the Mercer Museum in Doylestown. The Mercer is a wonderful point of study both as a historic Tradesman and as a museum professional. Unlike some of the collections we viewed, the Mercer primarily showcases the personal collection of a single individual, Henry Chapman Mercer. At the turn of the 20th century, Mercer saw the abandonment of an earlier style of American material culture and handicraft and sought to avoid these objects being lost to history. His interest in early tools and early trades preserved a unique collection in a building of his own design, made of reinforced concrete.

Inside, the Museum contains not just tools but some vehicles too, arranged either in alcoves in the wall or on one of the six levels built around a central atrium. Despite the displays receiving little modification from their original arrangement, the ability to find what we wanted to see was easy because the Mercer arranged these objects by trade, and the groupings of objects were obvious and intuitive to us. The range of trades represented was astounding, including everything from file cutters to launderers to surgeons, and some of the displays included not just tools but occasionally workstations, too. Despite their existence for more than a century, these displays still felt exciting and informative, though as toolmakers ourselves, we likely had greater insight into the trades shown than most guests. Our guides on this journey, Cory Amsler, Clint Flack, and Emma Falcon, were extremely helpful, and we appreciated their help not only in viewing objects on display in greater detail, but also their museum collections, as well. Because the Mercer is operated by the Bucks County Historical Society, it serves not only as a repository of a broad swath of American trades history but also of the very local history of the county itself. Our visit included an introduction to Mercer's Library and Archives, which would be of great interest to anyone interested in the history of the county, and easy for a researcher to access.

The Mercer proved a wonderful site to visit, for the chance to study the objects it contains, to see how they choose to display these objects in a way that tells a story about their use, and how it maintains its relationship with the local community. We'd like to again thank the Davee Foundation, without whom our trip would not have been possible, and give a special thanks to Shari Monaco, Historic Trades Administrative Support, for her arrangements on transportation, lodging, and some changes that needed to be made on short notice. We truly appreciate your work.

As ever, all's well that falls well at the foot of the anvil.



Mercer Museum atrium and atrium ceiling, courtesy of Josh Rachita.

The Blacksmith is open Daily.

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

Cabinetmaker – The Cabinetmaker is open Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday through Saturday. Their Workshop will be held on Tuesday.

Carpenter – This week in the Carpenters Yard, we've cut the joinery for both the front and back walls of the wagon shed for the Farm site at Ewing Field. We're currently testing those joints and laying out for the installation of the braces on the back wall.



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

Cook – As we happily move further into Spring, over at the Kitchen, we have continued to host our Spring Workshop. The second set of attendees had the same experience of candying flowers as the first set, but to ensure every Workshop has a personal experience, we changed up the second activity. Along with the flowers, Frank also put together a batch of pastry dough to transform into decorative pastry, and Dom had a few lemons for the older Guests to cut into baskets and jagged lemon slices. Both the lemon basket and the jagged slices are a go-to favorite of the Kitchen when using citrus to decorate the plate. On the Governor’s table, using expensive imports like citrus fruits was a way to display wealth, power, and access. Citrus of all kinds brought up from the Caribbean would have been a special treat for the average colonial household. The Governor was buying them by the dozen and using them simply for decoration. After a fun hour together, our second group left with similar feelings to the first. We feel as though the Workshops are really making a personal connection to the families involved and helping them better connect with the peoples of the past in a fully hands-on way.



We would also like to give a special shout out to our dear friend and former Foodways Apprentice, Megan Sirak. After joining the Actor Interpreter Department last spring, Megan has begun her own “My Story, My Voice” Program with her character, Mary Craig. Dom and Abbey were fortunate enough to attend her first performance, and we are all so very proud of the work she is doing to bring honest and inclusive history to our Guests through her embodiment of Mary, who was a *Feme Sole* and daughter of a Middling Class saddler here in Williamsburg. If you have the chance to pop by the Charleton Stage one Saturday and catch her in action, it is well worth the walk into town.

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

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

Engraver – The Engraver is open Sunday through Thursday.

Farmer – Ewing Field is plowed and harrowed, so hilling with hoes has become the work of late. Families are all in and help us out! Prior to raising the hills, Eli the Horse pulled a light shovel plow, and the Field was “laid out”. This means that lines were drawn by the plow in a grid-like pattern at six feet wide one way and

four feet the other. The trick to doing this is looking at the previously plowed line and driving the horse parallel to it. It takes time to learn this, but letting the horse walk straight is one of the keys. As Farmer Ed says, “A horse will walk straight if you let him”. The hills are then raised on the intersection of these lines.



A family from Utah raising hills for corn as Volunteer Mike Cecere coaches them on technique

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

Fifes and Drums – The Fifes and Drums will be performing Wednesday and Thursday 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. On Saturday, April 22nd, at 4:30 pm in the Hennage Auditorium, the Founders will present, “Casting a Bronze Mortar.” Join Apprentice Founder Drew to learn about the production of an 18th-century artillery mortar.

Gardener – Bounty from our Garden delivered this week to our colleagues cooking in the Palace Kitchen include leeks, asparagus, parsley, cabbage, lettuce, red and white broccoli, and Calendula flowers. The American Indian Food Plot that had been turned has now been chopped with a hoe this week in preparation for planting. Peppers, parsley, and basil have been potted up from the hotbed. The weeding of pathways is a constant chore.

The Sankofa Heritage Garden was weeded and cleaned up. We hope to turn the soil next week. Weeds were removed from the edges (where netting was placed to thwart the rabbit) and collards that had bolted were removed. We left a row for the pollinators to enjoy for another week.

Our Crown Imperial Lily is growing by the day, and we look forward to seeing the exotic bloom. Roses are blooming as well as the Persian lilac, which scents the air. Spring is here, and we have passed our frost-free date. Summer will be here before you know it.



The Historic Garden is open Daily, weather permitting.

Gunsmith – The Gunsmith is open Sunday, Wednesday through Saturday.

Harpichordmaker – From the Harpichord corner ... We are sawing piles of walnut veneer and the oak boards that will form the walls of the new spinet. Lots of wood, lots of sawing, and lots of cleaning up surfaces with tothing planes (small planes with serrated-edge blades that scratch out strings of wood instead of full shavings as do ordinary planes). With such thin wood, these planes will not catch contrary grain or fibers and tear it out (or through). Even on the oak, many surfaces are prepared with tothing planes. We will have good gluing surfaces by way of these methods when we begin applying the veneers. Come visit and see how it is done. Cheers.



Oak front panel temporarily in place



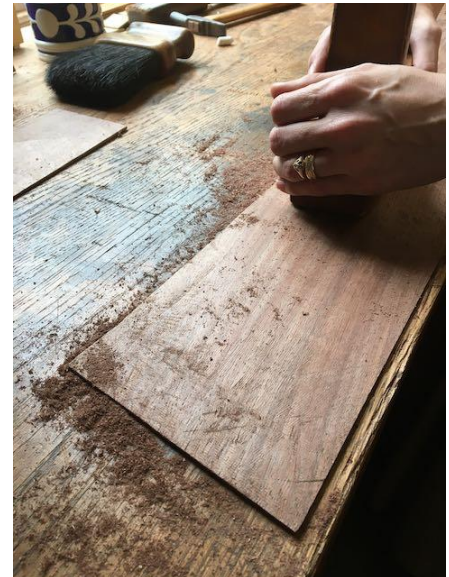
Pile of walnut veneers



Planing walnut veneer clean of saw marks



Sawing walnut veneer



Toothing plane blade edge (left) and toothing plane surface on veneers (right).

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

Joiner – The last week has been a busy time with our Spring Break crowds and a Family Workshop last Saturday. There are two more, this weekend and the following. We've also seen lots of great progress on various projects in the Shop.

Brian has reached the grand finale on his pilaster, a piece created to highlight the process of creating the distinctive grooves seen in the main body of the piece, presented at our annual *Working in Wood* Conference. With all of the parts assembled, including the pedestal, this piece is actually too tall to stand upright in our Shop – you can see that it takes up the entire length of Brian's workbench! As mentioned in previous issues, this pilaster is modeled off of a parlor in the house at Smith's Fort, which has much taller ceilings than our Shop. Pilasters offer a more space-saving way to give a room the grandeur of Greco-Roman-inspired columns and can also be seen in buildings in town, such as the Governor's Palace.



Peter took a brief break from his Menokin portico to turn out a couple brick molds for the Masons to use in recreating bricks in the Magazine. Sadly, those were out of the Shop before a photo could be taken of them, but just head to the Brickyard to see them put to good work. Now, Peter is back to work on the portico, and he can be seen creating the molding that follows the curve around the top of the doorway. There are four of these semi-circular pieces, so he will need to ensure that each one is identical so that when they are assembled, everything matches smoothly.



Scott has continued to make headway on his Eastern Shore corner cupboard, now focusing on the two doors. He's started with the bottom door, which is a frame-and-panel. This is the same style of construction that can be seen on larger doors all over town. As you can see, he's nearly there with three of the four panels completed. Once it is finished, he will move on to the upper door, which will have a sash construction to hold glass panes that would allow admirers to see shaped shelves inside the cupboard, as well as any goods displayed on them.



Finally, Laura has finished construction of her first box, a drawer for her workbench. However, we are still in need of a way to hold it in place under the bench, so the next step is to make supports for the drawer to slide along. This project has focused on dovetail construction, including half-blind dovetails, which allow the joints to be hidden from the front side of the drawer.



The Joiner is open Sunday through Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday (11:30-5:00).

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

Masonry – This week in the Brickyard, work continued on the piers for our tool shed, while we completed the second of three “Daub to Dough” Workshops. This week's Cobb oven has a great deal of character, which all earthen ovens should strive for.

Otherwise, this week through the combined efforts of our Joiners and Blacksmiths, the molds for the Magazine and First Baptist Church bricks were delivered. What our Blacksmiths and Joiners might lack in hygiene, they make up for in skill and a can-do attitude!

Master Josh also received a new round hat to replace his old faithful one, which simply could go on no longer.



The Brickyard is open Sunday, Monday, Thursday, Friday (12:00-5:00), and Saturday, weather permitting.

Military Programs – The Guardhouse is closed for annual maintenance April 16-29. In addition, all Military Programming is cancelled for these dates (“Military Interpretation”, “Musket Demonstration”, “Necessity of Order in Battle”, “Shoulder Your Firelocks”).

On Monday, April 17th and Wednesday, April 19th, at 4:30 pm in the Hennage Auditorium, 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.

Milliner and Mantua-maker – Now that our “Women's History Month” program has concluded, we've turned our hands to some exciting new projects and to catching up on all of the maintenance that clothing continuously requires. Fortunately, we were treated to a solid dose of kindness and sugar to help energize our needles! Ray and Gina brought us a beautiful cake to celebrate the conclusion of "Disaster Strikes!" We're so very touched by their thoughtfulness and the support they continue to show for our work. Thank you again!

Kate is thrilled to have a new gown to wear (now that it's no longer needed for the program) and is working on a suit of millinery to complement it. She also began work on one of her second-year "capstone" projects, which requires making a jacket from only forty inches of fabric. Janea cut the lining for the jacket, leaving Kate to puzzle out how she could utilize her forty inches to the best advantage. She did a fantastic job on the layout and only has to piece in a handful of places to make it all work. She cut everything out and started stitching on Thursday, so stay tuned for more exciting progress next week.

Meanwhile, speaking of piecing, Janea continues to work on transforming a couple of scrap pieces of brown linen into a new petticoat, and Intern Rachel is using up a small remnant of a special reproduction fabric to piece together a sewing roll. Rachel's fabric is copied from a token from London's Foundling

Museum. We know that some of the people associated with the administration of the Foundling Hospital in the 18th century were also closely associated with the Bray School, so we're hoping to integrate this piece into Bray School programming in the future. Rebecca has buried herself deep in the mending pile and is stitching her way out item by item. She and Janea also spent a day this week making adjustments to some Shop stock pieces - in addition to whipping together a few new ones! - to ensure that the new Carpenter Apprentice, Shelby, has a complete outfit at her disposal while she awaits receipt of her Historical Clothing & Dress allotment.

And finally, we've also started the process of "Clothing Check-ins" with our Trades "customers." We're asking every Tradesperson who has something made by the Millinery Shop to make an appointment to bring it by so that we can check for maintenance and confirm that each garment is still doing the job that you need it to do. This will also form the beginnings of our new inventory database, which will formally catalog all of the pieces produced within the Shop and used across the museum. If you haven't yet made an appointment (we promise it doesn't take long!), please get in touch with us at your earliest convenience to do so.



The Milliner and Mantua-maker is open Tuesday through 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 through Saturday.

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

Silversmith – All of the Silversmiths have been busy working on the list of projects, both commissions and apprenticeship pieces.



Megan's bowl is coming along and is in the final stretch of polishing (left). Chris' salver is looking wonderful and is getting ever closer to being fully polished (right).



Bobbie has been working on another rim for yet another salver on our commission list (left). Preston has been drawing silver wire down to make mourning rings (right).



George has been polishing teaspoons.

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

Tailor – The Tailor is open Sunday (11:30-5:00), Monday, and Thursday through Saturday.

Tin Plate Worker – The Tin Plate Worker is open Tuesday through Saturday.

Weaver, Spinner, and Dyer – The Weaver is open Sunday through Wednesday, and Thursday (11:30-5:00).

Wheelwright – The Wheelwright Shop is open Tuesday through Saturday.

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

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

Editor: Shari Monaco

Contributors: Blacksmith – Alex Hinman; Carpenter – Matt Sanbury; Cook – Abbey Shoaf; Farmer – Ed Schultz; Gardener – Eve Otmar; Harpsichordmaker – Ed Wright; Joiner – Laura Hollowood; Masonry – Madeleine Bolton; Milliner and Mantua-maker – Rebecca Godzik; Silversmith – Megan Cantwell