Summer Meeting  
Period Furniture Meeting  
Learning to Cut Dovetails  
A Different Kind of Group Get-Together

Document Chest—John Townsend 1760-1765
President’s Message

My time as Guild president will come to a close at the Annual Meeting on September 17, 2011. Over the past two and a half years, the Guild has gone through many changes, having gone all-electronic through membership renewals, program registration, Touch ups, The Old Saw and the Website. In contrast, the Guild’s basic format has remained the same: four meetings a year, a summer trip, a symposium here and there, Sunapee, scholarships, books and the backbone of the Guild, the Sub Groups. All these events happen through a network of volunteers doing one or many specific jobs. I think that Sunapee exemplifies the spirit of the Guild.

There are many people to thank who have given so much time and effort to keep the Guild on its path. What has made my job so nice is the commitment of these people. The volunteers simply do what they say they will do. I cannot list everybody, so I want to thank all of you who have made a difference in the Guild by volunteering. Thanks so much.

I would like to thank the members of the Steering Committee for their serious and thoughtful consideration of the issues we face, all the subgroup coordinators who put many hours into organizing meetings; the Scholarship Committee for the consideration they use when reviewing an application, Jim Seroskie (Journal editor) and Michael Brown (Old Saw editor), who donate large quantities of time and effort to make our publications look and read great and Al Hansen who has brought the level of organization of the Sunapee Fair to a new level by raising $9,000 to $10,000 annually.

Bob Couch and Peter James have been a great sounding board for me, so many thanks for the hours of phone discussions and opinions.

In the end, the members make up the Guild. Without members, we would have no Guild. Thanks to you all.

I look forward to melting back into the Guild as a member, working behind the scene.

It’s a “Wrap”

A Call for GNHW Officers Nominations — If you are interested in running for a Guild office please contact Bob Couch. The election is held at the Guild Annual meeting in September. Positions that are up for election. President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Current nominations are:

President—Bob Couch (Bob is the current Vice President)
Vice President—Claude Dupuis (Claude is the current Secretary)
Secretary—Al Saffron (Al is the current Program Chairman)
Treasurer—Peter James (Peter is the current Treasurer)
Discounted Woodworking Books

Orders for discounted books and DVD’s will be accepted at the fall Guild meetings starting with the annual meeting in September.

Each year we have this opportunity to purchase high quality woodworking books at group discounts. We work with two publishers: Taunton Press, publisher of Fine Woodworking magazine, and Fox Chapel. In addition to books published by Fox Chapel, they also sell books from other publisher such as Sterling, Stackpole, Schiffer and Penguin/Putnam. Taunton offers discounts of 30% off of list price on books and 20% discount on DVD’s. Fox Chapel discounts are approx. 40%. There is also a charge for handling and postage of approx. $2.00 per item.

I will have catalogs available and take orders at Guild meetings, or you can view titles on the publishers’ web sites, www.taunton.com and www.foxchapelpublishing.com, and email your order to me at aaijrg@gmail.com. Please include the following information along with your name and telephone number:

- For Taunton: The exact title, author, type of item (hard or soft cover book, video or DVD), the list price and the Taunton product code (NOT the ISBN #).
- For Fox Chapel: The exact title, author, type of item (hard or soft cover book, video or DVD), list price and the ISBN #.

Taunton has a couple of new titles that may be of interest to turners including: Woodturning Design, Turning Salt and Pepper Shakers and Mills and The Complete Guide to Turning Pens & Pencils. Check them out on the Taunton website.

The last chance to place an order will be at the November Guild meeting, and books should be available in early December for pickup at my home in Mont Vernon, NH, or at a future Guild meeting. Note that we do not mail books to a member’s home.

All email orders will be acknowledged within one week. So if you do not get a response, please call me - I have vigorous anti-spam software. I’ll email you with the net cost when the books arrive. Payment is due immediately and the books are not returnable.

Contact Tony Immorlica, Book Coordinator at 603-673-9629 or aaijrg@gmail.com.

Note: Discount magazine subscriptions, also an annual event, takes place in the February timeframe - watch the January Old Saw for details.
The first event of the Guild’s 2011–2012 year is the Annual Meeting on September 17th at Pinkerton Academy.

I know a lot of members are thinking this is the really exciting meeting when we vote for officers that many of us don’t know and listen to the treasurer’s report and other Guild business that’s probably important and sounds good, but…

Why bother coming to the Annual Meeting?

The annual meetings are important and your attendance is greatly appreciated. Yes, the new officers will be introduced and voted on. You may vote for the officers but it’s the entire Steering Committee that’s important as this committee manages the Guild. The SC includes the four officers and about eight members in various Guild positions, i.e. scholarships, programs and publication editors. Most will be at the Annual Meeting. Come and see who is on the SC (“Oh, so that’s who he is.”) learn who does what (“OK, he’s the one I gotta talk to”), and say hello and introduce yourself.

To encourage you to attend…

As is the tradition, we will be holding the AUCTION. For the uninitiated and those with long-term memory issues, members bring woodworking items of all kinds that they no longer need, and we auction them off to other
members. The items brought are donated to the Guild, and
the proceeds go to our general fund.

Clean your shops, go through your tools and bring all
that extra stuff others may need. Donated items may be
tools-- new and used, hand and power, and bench and
floor. You can donate stock from 12/4 to veneers, FAS to
#2 common, F4S to rough or potential stock in need of a
good sawyer. You can donate finishes, finishing supplies,
shop supplies, plans, etc. Items not sold must go back with
those who brought them.

Bring cash!

You’re going to see stuff
that you could use! You can
bid on things you never knew
you needed, at prices too
good to ignore. Just listen to
GNHW expert auctioneer
Jon Siegel tell you how much
of a bargain you’re getting.

Need more encouragement? But wait, there’s more!

We have Gary Wood, finishing guru, as our featured
speaker. Don’t know Gary Wood? Don’t you read your
Guild Journals, Go to subgroup meetings or use the
website’s resource links? Gary has been a furniture maker
and finishing professional from the time I graduated
from high school. He is known for his finishing products
business and his technical knowledge of all things finishing.

Gary is going to demonstrate four techniques to get a
WOW finish:

• Making grain “pop”
• Burnishing on the lathe
• French polishing for those who don’t
• Putting life into water-base finishes

What about your favorite finish? Ask Gary’s advice or
question him about your finishing issues. Be forewarned
you may be asked to share your treasured formulas and
techniques with the group.

Agenda

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival, auction prep</td>
<td>8:00 to 9:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auction</td>
<td>9:00 to 11:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>11:30 to 12:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business session</td>
<td>12:00 to 1:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Wood</td>
<td>1:00 to 3:00</td>
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Places to get lunch are just a few minutes downtown.

Rides

Do you need a ride? Does your donation need a ride in
someone’s pickup? No, you’re all set? OFFER a ride.

I chose to have this meeting in Derry and I know Derry
is not convenient to a lot of members. Share a ride with
other members; you’ll save gas and the drive seems shorter.
Get a ride for your large items in someone’s pickup. Going
with room in the back? Offer a ride for a larger item the
owner can’t transport. You may end up transporting it
home to your shop.

Check the Need A Ride forum on the website. You can
post a ride request, you can post a ride offer or you can just
check the Ride forum if you’re not sure. Check it early and
often. Go to Blogs/Forums, click and scroll down, or use

Remember, items not sold must be taken back by those
who brought them.

Pinkerton Academy

The Pinkerton Academy does not allow smoking or
alcohol on the campus.

Directions to [Pinkerton Academy](http://www.gnhw.org/blogs/forums/need-a-ride/), We are using the
[Shepard Auditorium](http://www.gnhw.org/blogs/forums/need-a-ride/) (Letter K on the Map).
The 2011 Sunapee Fair has come and gone, and once again the Guild’s tent remains a real crowd pleaser. Every day, people attending the fair were clustered around Guild members demonstrating a variety of woodworking skills. They also looked at the thirty-two remarkable items donated for our raffle and reached for their wallets and purses.

Last year we had record-setting raffle sales which was easily explained. We had nine days of perfect New Hampshire summer weather and thirty-eight items (another record) to raffle! We probably won’t be able to do that again, and sure enough the weather was a problem this year. The forecasts were actually worse than what we experienced, and had the effect of fewer fair attendees on seven out of the nine days. But wait—as I did the daily tallies, the sales were close to last year’s! At the end of the fair, despite lower attendance and dire weather forecasts, we were only $198 below last year’s total! How can this be?

Windsor furniture, Shaker furniture, Adirondack furniture, a stunning variety of turned bowls, pens, lidded boxes, peppermills, wooden toys, M&M dispensers, cutting boards, a handmade lidded box, a humidor and last, a strange hollowed Big Spruce burl from Les Huckins and Nova Scotia. This is how it was possible—generous, skilled Guild members donated thirty-two items and all sold raffle tickets.

Guitar makers, wood carvers, wood turners, a toy maker, hand-cut dovetails, inlay work, joinery, and the way to sharpen your tools provided fairgoers with a glimpse into the special world of woodworking.

Lastly, the public was at the mercy of our ever more skillful band of raffle ticket sellers. Always smiling, they wait inside the tent surrounded by all the items from the Windsor candle stand to the cherry bow front table way over there or they wander about, welcoming those coming through the gate, walking by the tent or watching one of the many demonstrators. They wait for the perfect moment to suggest a visitor might want to take a glance and perhaps then a chance at winning one of the beautiful handmade pieces donated by our members.

It all worked. Once again I am so grateful to be part of this fine organization and to work with so many talented, generous people.
Here is the list of raffle winners.

1. J. Blood from Antrim won the Windsor candle stand from Fred Chellis.
2. Costoromo from Manchester, "The Old Man," from Myrl Phelps.
3. Lisa Bazzinotto from Lunenburg, MA. A selection of Hal Liberty’s wooden toys.
6. Louise Berry, Stamford CT, won Brendan Cahoon's Shaker oval box.
7. Calista, from Fairfield VT, Ken Zahn’s walnut Shaker candle stand.
8. Ethan Barker of Concord, a butternut bowl by Stanley Dole.
10. Dana Richmond, Claremont, won a cherry bowl with maple foot by Bob DeAngeles.
14. Wanda Mulinski, Beacon Falls CT, heavy cutting board, Bob LaCivita.
15. Carrie Benigne, Easthampton, CT, John Willisie, cutting board, various woods.
16. Lori Budington, Franklin, Shaker-style side table with veneered top.
17. Robert Loretta, Robert St.Laurent’s childs Windsor chair.
19. Mary McDowell, Manchester, cherry bowl, Dave Harris.
20. Laurie Bissett, Centerville, Ohio, won Ned Gelin's turned lidded butternut box.
21. Roberta Renshaw of Winsted CT, spalted beech bowl, Donna Banfield.
22. Kathy Wolfe picked up Jim Gold's turned olive wood pen at the Fair.
23. Pam Pryor picked up a rock maple bowl made by ClaudeDupuis.
24. Joyce Illinger from Waltham, MA won Ron Pouliot's pepper mill.
25. Ben Larson all the way from Oak Ridge, TN won Jerry Burt's fence post turned bowl.
26. Paul H. was handed Les Huckin's birch burl bowl at the fair.
27. Kate Conner from Wilmot was delighted to win Les Huckin's carved big spruce burl.
30. Diane Mardson, Lowell, MA, was mailed Scott Rueswick's cherry bowl.
31. Rita Robertson, Reading, MA, Bruce Wedlock's Tiger maple Lidded box.
32. Steve Sullivan, Nashua, Steve Costain's bow-front Shaker-style table .
33. Joe Warren, Unity, is enjoying Jim Cozine's Adirondack chair and table.

Dave Frescette's M&Ms® Dispensers were raffled daily.

Janet Arnold was in the tent Saturday when she won.
Christina Frary of Concord won Sunday.
Jana's 6 year-old-daughter of Milford won on Monday.
Rosemary Salvatore's daughter worked in the fair office and was handed Tuesday’s dispenser.
Rory Power of Andover picked his up at the fair.
Jacki Myrick of Concord won on Thursday.
Sophie Potter was in the tent on Friday when her name was drawn.
Kathie Russo was in the tent on Saturday.
Cathy from Sunapee won on Sunday.

Congratulations to the winners, and if you see any of the people who made and donated their work, give them well-deserved thanks.
The Period Case Construction Program

Master period furniture maker Allan Breed has agreed to host the Period Furniture Group in a 24 month program to teach PFG members how to build period case furniture. The meetings will be held every two months and will take the place of the normal PFG meetings.

There are a maximum of 31 seats in Al's workshop and 25 members have permanent seats for the duration of the program as long as they do not miss two meetings in a row. The members with reserved seats were the first to send in requests after the announcement was made to the PFG by email. The other six seats are open for registration for each meeting on a first-come-first-served basis.

The first meeting on September 24 is fully registered. The next meeting will be on December 3. Registration for the six seats will be open on the 15th day of the month following a meeting. As an example registrations for the December 3 meeting will be open on Saturday October 15.

We will be building reproductions of a beautiful document chest by John Townsend. This block front chest was chosen because of its period origins, timeless beauty and small stature. Al will build the chest step by step while explaining the techniques at each meeting. Attendees have the choice of observing and learning the techniques or, as many have chosen, to build their own chest at their shops in sync with what Al is doing in the meetings. Attendees will be able to bring their questions and/or chests under construction to the meetings for comment by Al and other attendees. We are estimating that it will take 10-12 meetings (20-24 months) to complete the chests.

Nineteen of the members participated in a group purchase of beautiful mahogany. These members plus six that purchased wood on their own will be constructing Townsend document chests. See more on the wood buy in an article by Roger Myers elsewhere in this issue.

We will be posting blogs on our progress on the Guilds website and in the Old Saw.

Contact Michael Brown for information.

Document Chest—John Townsend 1760-1765
27¾” x 25¾” x 12¾”
(includes molding)

Reproduction by Stephen Fee
Breed School Student

Original Owned by Chipstone Foundation
at the Milwaukee Art Museum
Members of the Guild’s Period Furniture Sub-group are embarking on an exciting long-term project, modeled in some ways after the recent BIG sub-group project. Under the organizational leadership of sub-group co-leader Michael Brown, and the woodworking leadership of expert period-furniture maker Alan Breed, the group will be following along as Alan takes us through the steps of building a reproduction of the Townsend block front document chest.

This project exhibits all of the classical elements of the Newport period furniture style in a smaller size, measuring roughly two feet by two feet by one foot. With mahogany as the primary wood, the smaller scale of this piece means you won’t have to rob a bank to purchase some nice material. And while our local suppliers do have genuine mahogany available, getting figured stock for this piece and getting appropriate sizes so you can cut certain elements from single boards can make finding the material a bit of a challenge.

At the last PFG meeting, Roger Myers said he would organize a group buy from Irion Lumber in Pennsylvania if there was sufficient interest. Irion’s reputation is built on supplying period furniture makers with the finest mahogany, maple, and walnut—but a 150-board foot minimum for shipping can make it a bit of a challenge for the individual. Roger figured if he had three or four people interested in the group purchase, he could make it work, even if he had to buy a little extra material.

Interest in the project has been unbelievable, a real testament to Alan Breed’s reputation as one of the finest period furniture builders in the country and a real expert on the Newport style. But being interested and being committed are often two different things, so when the call when out to pony up a deposit for the wood purchase—estimated to set each participant back between 350 and 400 dollars—Roger still wasn’t sure how much interest there would be.

Now that 3,200 pounds of mahogany (a bit over 800 board feet) sits in his garage waiting to be divided into kits, Roger doesn’t have to wonder any more. Nineteen woodworkers from four states sent in deposits to purchase the wood for the chest and many have volunteered to help with the kitting process.

How does the wood look? Hand selected by Myron Yoder at Irion lengths range from six to ten feet with most of the material in the nine-foot range and widths up to fourteen inches. The participants in the group purchase will be able to make the exterior of the case from a single board with very attractive figure. The drawer fronts and door, the real “eye-catching” elements of the piece, will be able to be made from another single board, in this case with very attractive “ribbon-stripe” figure. Each participant will have plenty of mahogany to build the case, practice their shell carving, and still have some material left over for other projects, depending in part on how they choose to re-saw or plane stock for some of the thinner components.

The Period Furniture blog on the Guild website will have ongoing reports about this project which will continue for the next eighteen to twenty-four months. This is not a project anyone will be rushing to finish, but one we will be learning a great deal from and learning it from one of the masters!
Period Furniture Meeting

With temperatures in the high 90's the air conditioned environment at Woodcraft Supply in Newington NH was a great place to be on Saturday morning as members of the PFG subgroup got together for our regular meeting. On tap today were two excellent presenters: Matt Wajda to discuss and demonstrate hammer veneering and Gary Wood to talk about finishing with shellac.

Matt Wajda is a name and face familiar to most members of the Guild, especially those of us interested in period furniture. Check out his website for some stunning examples of the work he produces. [www.piscataquadesign.com/aboutuspiscataqu.html](http://www.piscataquadesign.com/aboutuspiscataqu.html)

Today Matt was demonstrating and taking the mystery out of a process of applying veneer known as hammer veneering. In the picture to the right, Matt is holding a home made veneer hammer that is an essential tool in the process. Also available commercially, they can be made in the shop, using brass inset into the end. Avoid using steel as it will cause issues with rusting and staining of the wood. Bruce Wedlock also mentioned that HDPF material would make a good hammering surface. Matt gets his hide glue (the other essential element) from Bjorn Industries [www.bjorn.net](http://www.bjorn.net) and for hammer veneering he likes the 192 gram strength as it has a short open time – a disadvantage for case assembly, but a real necessity in hammer veneering. Matt also suggests that a batch of glue not be reheated more than three or four times as it will begin to lose strength. Matt also spoke about having the correct substrate to be veneered, but that can be an whole other post. Suffice it to say he prefers to make his own lumber core panels.

The glue is prepared by mixing it with water and heating it to between 135 and 140 degrees. He looks for a viscosity where the glue is running off the brush in a steady unbroken stream and is caramel in color. He scuffs the substrate with 80 grit sandpaper or a toothing plane and sizes the substrate with a thinned hide glue allowing it to dry overnight. The next day he scuffs it again with the 80 grit in both directions.

Having your glue and hammer ready, the process then moves quickly. Apply the glue to the substrate quickly and then apply the veneer. Quickly apply hide glue to the top surface of the veneer and, using the veneer hammer, squeegee WITH the grain. Keep going with the squeegee process as the glue begins to cool and dry, getting to the point where it is thickening and getting mucous like. Continue to squeegee and allow the excess glue to accumulate on the hammer. Follow this by testing for voids by tapping the veneer and listening for any sounds that would indicate a bubble or void. If applying an adjacent panel, clean the substrate of excess veneer in preparation for the next piece of veneer. After gluing down adjacent panels, Matt then
applies veneer tape to the top surface to ensure they stay joined as the glue dries fully.

The second half of the meeting was another terrific talk and demonstration by Gary Wood (www.garyrwood.com) on the subject of shellac. While most members of the PFG subgroup have some experience with shellac application, it is still a subject that holds everyone’s interest as we have all experienced challenges with this terrific finish at one time or another, and many people still tremble at the thought of trying to French Polish. Gary has 35 years of experience which he freely shares with us and had prepared some excellent handouts for the meeting. In addition to his demonstration of some techniques, Gary also had a few formulas he shared with us which I know many people are anxious to try. These included adding two tablespoons of pharmaceutical grade talc to 16 oz of shellac to use as a sealing coat. This has the advantage of some grain packing or sealing as well as improving the sanding qualities. He has also used powdered mica in a similar manner and gets his mica and many other pigments from Kremer Pigments in NYC (www.kremerpigments.com). I found his “recipe” for water based shellac the most interesting as this can be used as a sealing coat over colored or dyed woods without the bleed through we often see with an alcohol-based finish like shellac. To make this, he mixes 3 tablespoons of dewaxed shellac flakes with three tablespoons of borax and grinds them to a very fine powder in a coffee grinder (do not use your wife’s coffee grinder). This is then dissolved in 12 ounces of water in a 16 ounce jar in a double boiler. In addition to its use as a single sealing or isolating coat, it can also be used as a flat sheen finish coat.

Gary further discussed the different types of alcohol and the benefits and concerns with each. This was followed by an interesting discussion on brush selection and brush cleaning. Gary’s brush preferences in order are skunk hair, goat hair, and finally badger hair. He wraps his brushes in plastic wrap after each use, cleaning only when dealing with a color change or when there has been too much build up of shellac, especially near the ferule. Then it is time for the ammonia and water washing to clean the brush.

Gary also demonstrated his method for French polishing which he describes as the circle and pendulum—light pressure (different from many other woodworkers) applied in small circles with the pad followed by a sweeping pendulum motion overlapping previous areas. For those who want to see and hear more of Gary and his finishing methods, he will be presenting at the September Guild general meeting.
This is a set of tips on how to make your life a little easier when you finally get around to giving dovetails a go, not a lengthy article on how to cut a set of dovetails by hand.

First off, in my opinion, for hand-made furniture there is no other type of dovetail than hand-cut. They can be half-blind or through but they will always be hand cut. Why? For me, it is my mark of quality; it shows I care enough about the piece to spend a little extra time on it. I also think that the quality of that dovetail illustrates that I have reached a certain level of artistry.

There are a number of approaches to cutting dovetails, but don’t worry too much about this to begin with. Take a class, rent or buy a DVD or watch a demo, then try that method first. After all, if someone taught or demonstrated it, the method must work. When you can do a decent rendition of that method, it may be time to question it and explore your options. This last part is not compulsory. You can choose just to go with the way you were taught. Just don’t get so hung up about who’s method is best that you never get out and try it yourself.

When it comes to approaching the layout of the joint, you need to consider the tools you own. What size chisels you have will dictate how small you can make your pins. But it’s not just your chisels—my pins are usually so small that even a standard marking knife cannot get in there!

Also remember that some tools must work in concert with each other. If you use a Japanese saw to make your saw-cuts—or even one of the new thin kerf western style dovetail saws, such as the Lie Nielsen—a coping saw won’t work for you: you’ll need a jeweler’s saw instead to saw out your waste. Of course, you could go the other way, and decide how you want to lay out your dovetails and go buy the tools to suit. I work this way, which is why I own a chisel that’s 1/16” wide and a 3/64” thick homemade marking knife.

There is a good reason that apprentices of old used to learn to sharpen before learning anything else, because you can’t do anything well without sharp tools. Trying to cut this joint with tools that are anything but sharp may make you decide never to try it again. I can shave myself as effortlessly as I do with a razor using one of my chisels or plane blades. There is no exaggeration here; this is what I mean by ‘sharp enough’!

If you want to learn to sharpen a western chisel or plane blade free hand with water stones, I will gladly show you how; if you’ll drop me an email we can set up a time for you to come by my shop. I am sure there are other Guild members who will do the same if asked. It will take about an hour, two at most. Then you’ll need to put in the practice on your own to become adept, but I am sure you’ll find that it is a worthwhile skill to learn.

One of the 4 sets of dovetails I cut at the League of NH Craftsmen’s Fair in August.
Another piece of advice is not to cut your first dovetails in figured hard maple—you really will regret it. Try something more forgiving such as tulip poplar, cherry or mahogany. Walnut is relatively soft too, but it is difficult to see pencil lines on it. I recommend poplar; because of its softness it will show you whether your tools are really sharp. If the baselines break out then you’ll need to do more work on the “learn-to-sharpen” part.

If you take a class or work from a DVD, they will tell you what tools to use, but if you’ve decided to go it alone and you are going to hide in your shop and cut those first ugly dovetails, then in addition to your sharpening kit here is a suggested list.

1) Sharp chisels: various sizes, but to begin you could probably get away with just a ¼” and a ½” for your first try.
2) A sharp dovetail saw, with rip-form teeth. Learn to sharpen it yourself, so it is always sharp!
3) A small square, 2” or 4”, is less cumbersome on thin lumber, but whatever is square will work.
4) A cutting gauge. I like a wheel gauge rather than the more traditional type. I find the Lee Valley a little hard to work the fine adjustment, but you can’t beat the price. The Titemark is very nice but big bucks even for the mini that I have.
5) Probably the most important thing is a solid bench and vice. I made a small bench that sits on top of my bench and I love it. It’s a real back saver, plans are available from Fine Woodworking Magazine!
6) A bevel gauge or a dovetail gauge for marking out the first side.
7) A marking knife with a blade long enough to mark through the thickness of your material. The cutting edge should be beveled only to one side.
8) Jewelers saw or coping saw.

I find that removing most of the set from my dovetail saw helps to maintain a straight saw-cut and you absolutely need to be able to cut a straight line. It is worth practicing straight cuts before you try your first dovetails. In order to remove the set from your properly sharpened dovetail saw, take a 1000 grit water stone or equivalent and run it
down the side of the teeth on your saw 2x per side. Make a couple of cuts with it and see how it feels. It shouldn’t bind in the kerf but at the same time the kerf shouldn’t be so much wider than the saw plate that you can change direction mid cut. If your kerf is still a little wide run the stone down the teeth on each side again. Repeat until the feel is right. A Japanese saw will negate the need to remove the set but also has its own idiosyncrasies.

Paring: whether you work on the pin board or the tail board, paring down to the baseline with a chisel requires a slow procedure. Do not attempt to chop out huge chunks in one go, but gradually pare down almost to the baseline—which should be a cutting gauge line—until you have 1/32” or so left to go. Next pick a chisel that covers the entire width of your cut if you can. Drop its cutting edge into the knife groove, raise the handle until it is vertical and make the cut. You may need to turn the board over to cut from the backside, too.

As far as paring like this is concerned, I can’t work all day without using a mallet. I normally grip the chisel way down at the cutting edge and I hold it vertically while I concentrate on maintaining its position and verticality while I tap it gently with the mallet. I find that maintaining the chisel’s orientation and verticality, and at the same time applying the cutting force by leaning in or pushing down is just too much and generally it is the orientation that suffers.

You don’t need to spend a lot of time learning to fix gaps, because it won’t take you long to be make joints that fit together without cosmetic enhancement.

If you are going to cut some joints in a drawer that has a lot of hours invested in it and has a front that is matched to several other drawer fronts, then you don’t want to make a mistake. So spend a couple of hours warming up on a box for those wayward bits of hardware that clutter your bench or something else simple to get practice. You don’t even have to finish, do enough to get the confidence to start on the critical piece. I find it more satisfying if I make something quick and simple but ultimately useful.

I mentioned earlier that my dovetails are for show, but they are also a good structural corner joint. They may even be the best and strongest, because they also have a mechanical fitment in one of their directions. This is to your advantage in drawer fronts with half-blind dovetails. The joint is oriented in such a way that it, not the glue line, is providing the structural integrity, and if the glue were to fail, the drawer would still operate. When designing a box or case piece that uses dovetail corners, you need to think about the way in which forces are applied as it is being used, picked up or moved about in order to determine the optimum orientation of the joint.

If you learn from a DVD, I can recommend the Rob Cosman’s, though it is the only one I have ever watched. He comes across as opinionated but he does have a reasonable, no-nonsense technique. But beware: don’t get bogged down in his method of marking out tails with dividers. I’m an engineer and it took me a while to figure out exactly what he is doing and how it works. If you don’t work it out straight away, I would measure the spacing with a ruler and just get going with cutting them out. Come back to laying out later, it is really not critical to the overall method.

If you seriously want to learn how to cut a dovetail joint, take a class, because you cannot beat an interactive class to learn skills like this. Then once you’ve learned how to cut pretty fair dovetails come do a demo day at the Sunapee Fair. It doesn’t have to be perfect and you will have a blast!
Summer Meeting

On a beautiful June day members of the Guild gathered at the Beech River Mill in Ossipee Center NH. We were there to tour the mill and to see the process involved in manufacturing historic reproductions of blinds and shutters, the mill’s primary products. Randy Ouellette, the General Manager and son of the owners Don and Beverly Ouellette, gave the tour and explained the mill history along with the processes in use today.

The mill was built in the late 19th century and much of the equipment used comes from that era. Originally the shop used belt drives powered by a water wheel located in the small dam directly adjacent to the mill. In the basement you can still see the shafts and belts that transmitted power around the basement and then through the floor by large leather belts connected to the machines above.

It is amazing to see how creative and skillful the inventors and craftsmen were around the turn of the century when many of the concepts and inventions from the Industrial Revolution were coming to fruition as useful, actually indispensable, tools. Much of the machinery used at the mill definitely falls into this category. This includes the Crescent 36” band saw, Fay & Egan Lightning 14” linear ripsaw and the Levi Houston single-end tenoner all late, 18th century equipment. A circa 1950’s Crescent hollow chisel mortiser still plays a critical role in production. There is also some newer equipment including a 10” table saw, spindle shaper, radial arm saw, jointer, planer, louver groover and molder.

The Beech River Mill is a small tightly run business. The 2,800 sq. ft. building, overlooking the Beech River, houses all of the offices and production. There are three employees including the shop manager Jeff Drenning who demonstrated most of the machinery to us. Watching this old but beautiful machinery do it’s job was fascinating. Following is the process for producing a stile using a combination of modern and antique machinery.

Producing A Stile

One important component of the shutters manufactured by the Beech River Mill is the stile, the vertical element of the shutter. A similar production process is used for the rails and other elements of the shutter.

Jeff Drenning cuts the rough royal cedar to working length on a radial saw. Spanish cedar would be preferred but it is much more expensive.
The antique in-line rip saw cuts the boards to their final working width prior to jointing. This saw is similar to a table saw except a track located on the bottom pulls the wood across the blade. It is very efficient because the operator can place one piece after another on the track and just keep going.

After rough cutting the material is jointed using a modern jointer.

The jointed material is then taken to the planer where it is planed to its final dimensions.

Once the material is cut to length, jointed and planed it is carefully marked for cutting mortises in all the correct positions.
Jeff the shop manager is using the foot operated hollow-chisel mortiser on the material he had previously marked up.

Next step is the “louver groover” whose job it is to cut grooves into the stile for the louvers to fit into. This is a semi-automatic machine that makes a lot of noise but does a great job. Maintenance is critical on this machine.

Stiles ready to be glued up with rails and louvers.

Completed shutter typical of the work done at the Beech River Mill.
This year a spring trip was arranged because the runner-up for the summer trip seemed too good to put off until next year. We were right. The consensus of those who went this time, as well as those who have gone in the past, was that the Old Schwamb Mill was the perfect place to go and see manufacturing and woodworking history.

What made this tour different—The building is a modest size wood framed structure put up in 1860 along a mill chase in Arlington, Massachusetts. Emigrating from Germany a few years earlier, the Schwamb family bought the mill in 1864 and ran their business there until 1969 when The Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust was organized to preserve the building and its history. What made this tour different was seeing the history of Charles Schwamb & Son and the Charles Schwamb Co., Inc. In addition to checking out a post-Civil-War mill, we experienced the history of a manufacturing company and of the people that worked there.

Did I mention that most of the machines still work, and frames are still made? Because the mill can still produce really custom and unique frames, they still make them for a very few special orders. The Trust employs David Graf, a Maine woodworker and clock-tower expert to make frames and do demonstrations, as he did for us.

The brochure may say the Mill is operated by the Trust, but Dermott Whittaker took our tour request, coordinated with David Graf to run the lathe, greet visitors, give parts of the presentation … and make our visit really enjoyable.

Belt Power—The Schwams went with state-of-the-art technology. When they bought the mill, it was powered by an 18’ diameter water wheel. They replaced it with a
The Guild of New Hampshire Woodworkers

water turbine and a gear-driven transmission. In 1864 a coal fired boiler was installed which piped steam under the road to heat the mill, run the new steam engine they installed, dry stock and heat drying rack pipes in their glue-up room. Open time for their hide glues was not an issue.

The machines are still powered by belts, although the water wheel and steam engine were replaced with electric motors. One can marvel at the system of shafts, pulleys and belts installed throughout the mill. Belt tracking takes on a whole new meaning when you learn that millwrights maintained that system level, plum and square — in a building which wasn’t. As machinery was moved and added, belts were shortened, lengthened or swapped out. Those on machines as well as their spares are preserved and maintained; replacement leather belt suppliers are not exactly common today.

Most importantly, the Schwambs imported their somewhat unique elliptical lathes from Germany. There is a line of three lathes on the main floor and one very large lathe in the basement. Not much is known about their design and development; the Trust found a reference in local newspapers or trade publications of the time that there were no such machines in the United States. The lathes employ a reciprocating block that holds the faceplate while sliding back and forth on a rotating assembly on the lathe, which rotates the frames in an oval. The tool rests are positioned to the far left and a little lower than the foci, basically the only point where the orbit of the frame allows turning with a scraper.

**Small Oval Frame** — The company purchased imported mahogany and domestic walnut, cherry, maple and birch boards which were kept in the ‘dry house’ where the boiler heat would dry them.

The oval frames were made in four quarters. Quarter patterns for every size and frame style were used on their bandsaw to cut pieces to shape. A table saw with a special cross cut sled oriented the pieces to cut the ends square with no end grain. Both ends on each frame piece were then finger jointed on a small tablesaw-like machine. Work pieces were held on end against a fence-like miter gauge and run over finger joint cutters stacked like dado blades. The frames were then brought upstairs to the glue room. A heating rack of horizontal steam pipes was used to heat the hide glue and warm the work pieces so the frames could be assembled and clamped up. When dry, the frames went back to the main floor to be run over a 24” jointer and then mounted on large faceplates for turning on the lathes. Frames were run by size as the lathes required serious adjustment for size changes. After sanding, the frames were shipped. Wholesalers, jobbers and other middlemen would arrange the final staining, painting and finishing for sale to their retailers.

For large frames or designer frames in various shapes, the frames were milled on a large shaper-like machine rather than a lathe. Be forewarned when looking at this 19th century shaper that OSHA was created for good reason.

**The mill was ahead of its time** — At the end of the Civil War, portrait photography was popular and the Victorian fashion was in style so the Schwamb’s fancy oval picture frames sold well. In 1865 the company sold over 100,000 frames and repeated that in 1866. Consider that commerce
was conducted primarily by mail and that the company shipped about two thousand frames a week without FedEx, UPS or Roadway. It is believed the company employed over thirty people at that time. The Schwambis later reduced their labor force to about ten people in 1888 when oval frames were out of style.

With the help of the Schwamb’s accounting journals, business records and grants from various sources, the Trust is researching and analyzing employment records, accident and Massachusetts Workers Compensation reports, time sheets and sales records, and putting the data in context of the local and state business environment of the time.

There are many noteworthy observations. Seeing accident reports showing their shaper was the most accident-prone machine was fascinating but no surprise. It is believed that the company installed their fire sprinkler system in the 1930’s and initiated a no smoking policy at the request of their insurance company, many years before it would be mandatory. There were no sexual harassment issues, probably because no women were employed there.

Scholarship Committee Report

This has been a good year for the scholarship program with several large scholarships and grants awarded along with many smaller grants. Some highlights are:

- The Roy Noyes Scholarship ($1200) awarded to Matt Catalino to study in Scotland at the Chippendale Institute
- The Peter Bloch Scholarship ($1200) to Steve Shultz to study woodturning in Greece
- $400 grant to Beth Ireland to support her “Turning Around America” program
- $400 grant to support the New England Association of Woodworking Teachers
- $400 scholarship to David Tothill for guitar building
- $400 scholarship to Donnie Chesser for Windsor chair making
- $300 scholarship to Bob Katz for woodturning
- $400 scholarship to Dave Frechette for woodturning
- $140 scholarship to Colin Ward for guitar building
- $400 scholarship to Ed Orrechio for woodturning
- $400 scholarship to Syd Lorendeau for woodturning
- $130 scholarship to Mike Korsak for woodworking

Applications are accepted at any time and are available on the website.

By Peter Breu
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