

# Living History

A Quarterly Journal of Historical Preservation

Volume 2, Number 3

## “To dye for ...”

“We’d like you to do an indigo dye-pot.” The request came from Historic Bethlehem, a Pennsylvania pioneer site with an active program of living history and re-enactment. To dyers with little experience with this early dye, the request was welcome. Indigo provides a true blue that lasts the life of the fiber on which it is used. The very word evokes images of Eliza Pinckney striving to master the complex process of fermentation on her South Carolina plantation. We have also found references to indigo being imported and sold in colonial Philadelphia. A magical opportunity to work with this costly dye and forge a link with its past users beckoned.

We’d like you to be as authentic as possible.” Since the members of Past Masters enjoy working as accurately as we can, following period receipts and trying not to let 20th-century ways intrude into 18th-century processes, these were equally welcome words.

Indigo is easily, if expensively, purchased from weavers’ and dyers’ supply houses. There is a cheaper modern synthetic available, but for us no discussion was needed. We purchased half a pound of “the real stuff,” which looks like bright blue coal. Pulverizing it is tedious, time-consuming work. I often longed for a small cannonball, which would have made the job SO much easier. Its use was described by J. and R. Bronson in 1817: “The common method of grinding indigo by hand is to suspend an iron pot, of a suitable size, with a rope, and using a cannon ball, which is rolled round by taking hold of the legs with the hands....

The ball is then to be rolled round for about one hour.”

The dyeing process took serious investigation. We found there were two approaches: hot and cold. If we were to be like the professionals and be “as authentic as possible,” we would have had to use an iron vat enclosed in a brick structure like the one at Old Salem, North Carolina. With this, the blue-dyer could heat the dye-bath and maintain the temperature as long as required. Since such equip-

*Continued on page 8*



***Weavers in 19th century costume, hang freshly-scoured wool behind the Vierling House in Old Salem. Weaving was an integral part of the economic system in early Salem, a Moravian community which was established in North Carolina in the mid-18th century. Today 990 buildings of Old Salem have been restored and reconstructed. Costumed interpreters demonstrate early crafts and provide guided tours of this unique open air museum in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. (See ALFHAM Report page 4.) Photo courtesy of Old Salem Inc.***

# COMMUNICATIONS

**TO THE EDITOR:**

Our mutual friend, Michael Brody, brought me a copy of *Living History*, with the suggestion that it might be the perfect place to advertise. I believe he's right, though the product I sell is imported; I hope neither you nor your readers have a problem with that.

Thanks very much, and best of luck with your entertaining and informative magazine.

Judy Allen  
Carmel, NY

**DEAR JUDY:**

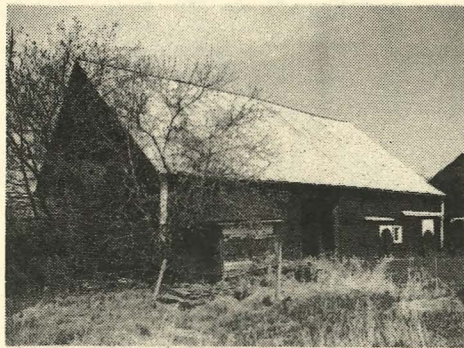
Thanks for your letter and classified ad. The problem I had with the Smithsonian importing quilts from China was not an objection to free trade (see Letter from the Editor, LH Spring 1992) but to a public institution becoming a capitalist enterprise. You would expect it of Jamesway depart-

ment stores, but I thought the Smithsonian is supposed to be an institution that preserves, interprets, and encourages American culture, not a place to market a Chinese imitation.

My attempt to ban certain advertising from LH, that is, Smithsonian quilts, ozone-depleting substances, American Indian artifacts, and New England tombstones was not totally successful, and I'm glad my simplistic solution to historic preservation was tested. (Read the Brookline classified just below yours). So if you have any artifacts or old tombstones to sell, please advertise them in *Living History*. We welcome advertising and subscribers; we need them too, and all their complaints.

Sincerely, Peter

**TO THE EDITOR:**



The above Post Revolutionary Barn is for sale. You will be able to see the squared, not round end tongues.

The barn has been well-maintained over the years. The asking price is \$40,000.

Dorothy J. Moreford  
Licensed Real Estate Associate  
Amsterdam, NY  
(518) 842-8859

**DEAR MS. MORFORD:**

Thanks for the information on the Covenhoven

family New World Dutch barn in Montgomery County. The tongues you refer to are known to barn people as extended tennons. They are a distinctive feature of early Dutch barn frames, but a Dutch barn preservationist like myself does not give greater value to round or square ends. Even the later Dutch barns which do not have extended tennons, I believe, should be equally valued as monuments to an area's early settlers.

I understand from our phone conversation that the owner would sell the barn with 8 acres for \$65,000. For a barn preservationist, restoring a barn on its original site is preferred. A great deal is always lost when a barn is moved and reconstructed. Shirley Dunn, one of the founders of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society, estimates that only 300 examples of the barn remain standing in New York and New Jersey. The Dutch barn is an important and endangered historic artifact.

If the barn were sold for \$40,000 and moved, I estimate it would cost an additional \$10,000 to dismantle the frame and take it to a new site. Add to that \$100,000, or more, depending on how it is reconstructed, and its clear that maintaining historic barns where they are is good economics as well as good preservation.

Over the last 100 years, through the systematic study of artifacts preserved in the ground, archaeology has begun the understanding of pre-history. In the centuries to come we can expect to know more by finding additional artifacts and evidence that awaits us, but the archaeology of barns is not protected and the artifacts are rapidly disappearing. Of the 300 Dutch barns remaining I would guess that only a handful of traditional mangers and animal stalls remain in place and these are all of later styles and not original to the barn. Our understanding of how the Dutch barns were originally used is fragmentary and needs further study.

If we are to preserve any understanding of the New World Dutch barn it is the responsibility of barn preservationists to document them before they are converted to other uses, moved to new sites, or crumble and rot from neglect. So thanks for your information on the situation of this example and I hope it finds a thoughtful and loving owner.

Sincerely, Peter


# LIVING HISTORY

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# Thistle Hill Associates

An abandoned grist mill in the small village of Cherry Valley, New York, has become the home of Thistle Hill Weavers, a firm that weaves and sells reproductions of historic fabrics. Located in upstate New York in the headwaters of the Susquehanna River, a few miles from The Farmers Museum and the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, Thistle Hill was founded two years ago by Rabbit Goody and Stanley Horton, Jr., who have combined their extensive experience in museum research and hand-weaving and their technical skills to reproduce a wide range of authentic historic textiles for modern use.

The noise, size, and complexity of the half-dozen power looms and bobbin-winding machines on the first floor is impressive. Goody and Horton's love of historic textiles and old equipment shows in the care with which they operate and maintain their machinery. Larger mills had found this equipment no longer efficient, and it was destined for destruction. But Thistle Hill has been able to take advantage of the flexibility of these older power looms to produce small quantities of many different types of fabric, giving their clients custom fabrics at reasonable prices.

Thistle Hill produces a line of commonly used fabrics, such as cotton jean cloths, shirting, and ticking, as well as a traditional New Hampshire-style wool blanket with the center seam that was the hallmark of hand-weaving done in homes 200 years ago. These windowpane check blankets are woven of pure wools spun in New Hampshire and are available in a number of colors.

Thistle Hill also does custom work and special orders for museums and people interested in reproducing period clothing. Whether it is wool stroud cloth for Indian pow wows, authentic uniform fabrics for military reenactments or the curtains and bed hangings for historic sites, Goody and Horton design and weave it all. At present their looms are producing 18th-century white cotton dimity curtains, like those for Monticello. Thomas Jefferson chose dimity because he believed it was beautiful without being ostentatious.

Occasionally there is a call for hand-woven fabrics, and in these cases Thistle Hill has teamed up with Kate Smith, a hand weaver from Vermont. She is presently making cus-



tom bed curtains for an historic site on Staten Island.

Before going independent, Rabbit Goody and Stanley Horton had been involved in the museum field for twenty years as researchers, curators and weavers of reproduction fabrics. They understand textiles from the collection management and exhibition point of view, as well as that of the manufacturer, and they continue to be active in research, frequently conducting workshops at museums and historic sites in the Northeast.

An article by Goody in the spring issue of *The Clarion*, published by the Museum of American Folk Art, is the result of her research into the jacquard coverlets of the early 19th century. These flowered coverlets, often in blue and white, have attracted the attention of collectors and historians for many years. Filled with Masonic and patriotic symbolism and sometimes names and dates, these beautiful weavings were the product of professional weavers, often men, who had developed complex looms that made the art possible. Today much of this technology is still speculative.

Thistle Hill Associates, joined by Cooperstown Textile School, also offers a wide range of three- and four-day workshops in textile identification and dating, as well as courses for beginning and advanced weavers. Students have the unique opportunity to examine fabrics and a collection of equipment used in the 18th and 19th centuries, and to experience power looms reproducing the fabrics they are studying. Classes, which are limited to 15 students, are given in the spring,

summer, and fall.

The attraction of Thistle Hill is enhanced by its rural setting in a friendly and historic valley of upstate New York. Local bed-and-breakfasts and motels offer reasonable rates; good places to eat are available in Cherry Valley.

For further information contact ...  
Thistle Hill Weavers  
P.O. Box 102, Cherry Valley, NY 13320  
(607) 264-8400

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## ALFHAM REPORT

In June the twenty-second annual meeting of the Association for Living History Farms and Museums was held at Wake Forest University near Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Three hundred fifty members from throughout North America attended the weeklong conference, which featured a wide variety of workshops concerning historic foodways, material culture and interpretation.

ALFHAM serves an important need in the expanding world of living history by creating a friendly and helpful network between young and old, large and small; it is even becoming international. The association includes the trained staff of agricultural museums and historic sites, both the historians and administrators and the paid and volunteer interpreters, those they call "front liners." It involves those who study and interpret history at public sites as well as some who independently practice and market an historic craft or service. It is a group of people who share concerns and enjoy being together.

One conference session was entitled *The World's Open-Air Museums*. Debra Reid from the Farmer's Museum at Cooperstown, New

York, reported on The International Association of Agricultural Museums and her experiences at the Danish Frilandsmuser. Myron Stachiw from Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts gave a report on a recent return to his homeland, the Ukraine.

A year ago, Stachiw was one of ten members of the vernacular Architecture Form, who visited the open air folk museums and research institutes of the Ukraine. Their report in the VAF Newsletter, Fall 1991, reads, "The trip coincided with the first anniversary of the Ukrainian Declaration of Sovereignty, and indeed one of the most striking aspects of the trip was the political aspect of architectural history and its interpretation. In a country where historic churches experienced widespread demolition by the socialist government as late as the 1970's, Ukrainian nationalists view their traditional folk architecture as a valuable part of the heritage they wish to glorify."

Edward Chappell, an architectural historian working in Williamsburg, Virginia, and one of the ten VAF members who made the trip, published a strong article in *The Nation*, December 2, 1991, entitled "Politics of Ukrainian Museums," in which he writes that "Within the past year, state-sponsored folk museums throughout the Soviet Union have begun to assume an extraordinary role in the cultural life of their regions, one never intended by most Communist Party leaders who underwrote them. This development has implications for museums of folk culture everywhere in the world."

Chappell points to the positive role the open air museums are playing in the restoration of freedom and national identity to the Ukraine, but points to the challenge of keeping "xenophobic zeal from replacing the old totalitarian control." He writes that there are no Jewish buildings in Ukrainian folk parks, just as Turkish material is rare in Bulgarian museums."

"Exclusionary museum presentations are not confined to Eastern Europe." Chappell writes, "By omitting Africans from 'the great cultures that created America,' the Museum of American Frontier Culture in Staunton, Virginia, joins countless other history museums in quietly suggesting that African-Americans and later arrivals have no place in the ranks of our heroic ancestors."

Chappell does list five American and a number of European exceptions to the exclusionary museum category, and Living History would like to add one more: Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. While meeting at Wake Forest University, the ALFHAM Conference spent one day visiting nearby Old

Salem. Originally established as a Moravian community in the mid 18th century, today it consists of 90 restored and reconstructed buildings and costumed interpreters who represent the community as it was in the 18th and early 19th century.

Visited by 300,000 people a year, Old Salem has a strong research and interpretation program. The visitor is free to explore the streets of the village and visit shops, restaurants, and working demonstrations of early crafts, or to join a small group and follow a guided tour. One was titled *African-Americans in Salem*.

The tour begins with a slide and tape presentation that explores the lives of three or four of the blacks who were owned by the Moravian church during the colonial period and rented to families within the community. The Moravians were strong believers in an orderly community and a good educational system. Because of their literacy, many descriptive records were kept and have survived. We learn that in the early years some slaves joined the church, some improved their job situation through their personal skills, and some eventually bought their freedom.

On a walk through Old Salem an interpreter in colonial costume describes the life of the African-American in the community, visits the places where he worked and lived and a place called God's Acre, a Moravian cemetery that is still in use after 200 years and where many blacks were buried. In this orderly Moravian cemetery, each grave is marked with a simple small stone set flat into the ground—all Moravian bodies, whatever their color, are buried side by side. The individual is not interred with his earthly family but with his heavenly choir. As in life, the Moravian community is divided into six choirs; boys, single men, and married; girls, unmarried women, and married women. They are separated but equal in death.

A visit to Old Salem is an eye-opener for anyone not familiar with the Moravian culture and its history in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. If you are interested in a more accurate and complete interpretation of Old Salem, write, call, or visit ...

Old Salem Inc.  
Box F, Winston-Salem, NC 27108-0346  
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Next year's ALFHAM conference will be held in Minneapolis and the 1994 meeting in the Albany area. For further information on publications and meetings of ALFHAM write...

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# Christiansbrunn Brotherhood



1.

**1.** A Hank of flax and a FlachsNewwel used to carry it. The flax is harvested by pulling the plant out of the ground with its roots, which contain an important part of the fiber.

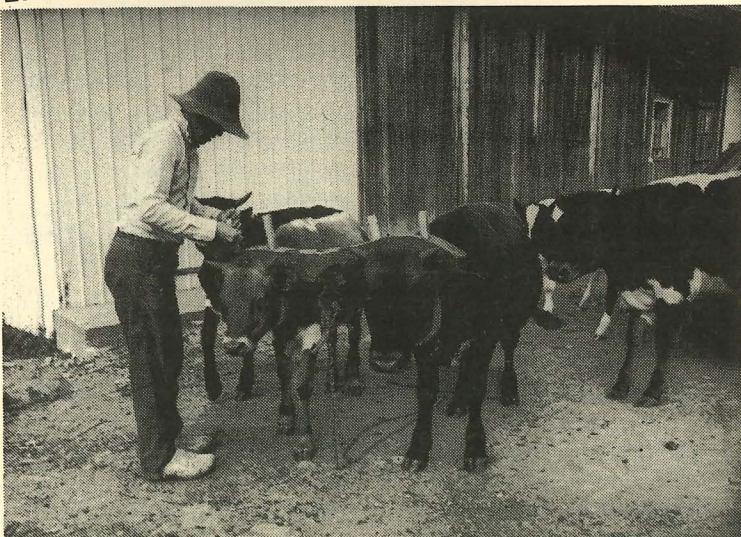
**2.** Brother Johannes yokes a pair of oxen at the barn. This team is half-grown and being trained. When they are full-grown a larger yoke will be built for them.

**3.** Brother Johannes takes his oxen for a walk on the pasture behind his one-room log cabin. The cattle share the large pasture, but often gather at the barn and house.



3.

2.



A sixty-two acre farm established four years ago in the Mahantongo Valley of east-central Pennsylvania is home to the Christiansbrunn Brotherhood, an intentional community historically and spiritually based on a Moravian brotherhood founded near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1749. The farm is known as the Kloster (cloister). Operated without electricity or motors, it is being planned and built as a relatively self-sufficient community that could support ten brothers. There are presently three, as well as a number of individual associates who live elsewhere and assist occasionally.

The Mohantongo Valley is about 25 miles long. Its creek joins with the Susquehanna River, which flows south into Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay. To the original inhabitants, Mahantongo meant "plenty of red meat" and they visited the valley seasonally to hunt. Today, the wild cat remains in the wooded hills and is an occasional pest to valley people, many of whom maintain a diversified and flexible farming economy. White settlers came to

the valley in the late 18th century, and an unwritten low-Dutch dialect is still spoken by some of its older residents.

High on a large open hillside pasture, enclosed with stone walls and rail fencing the Kloster is entered off a dirt road. A dark van with 100,000 miles is parked beside the long fore-bay barn, partially sided with pale green aluminum. These are things that will eventually change here. Less noticeable is a nearby piece of low masonry, the top of a stone lined, hand-dug well, 15 feet deep. It is waiting for a long sweep and bucket. Till now, the spring across the road has served the community. The dug well had been abandoned and filled when the brotherhood first arrived and has been one of the difficult chores necessary to establish the place. It will probably last long beyond their own times.

Every morning after breakfast, Johannes (see his Letter to the Editor in the Spring 1992 Living History), one of three brothers presently living at the Kloster, leaves his comfortable one-room



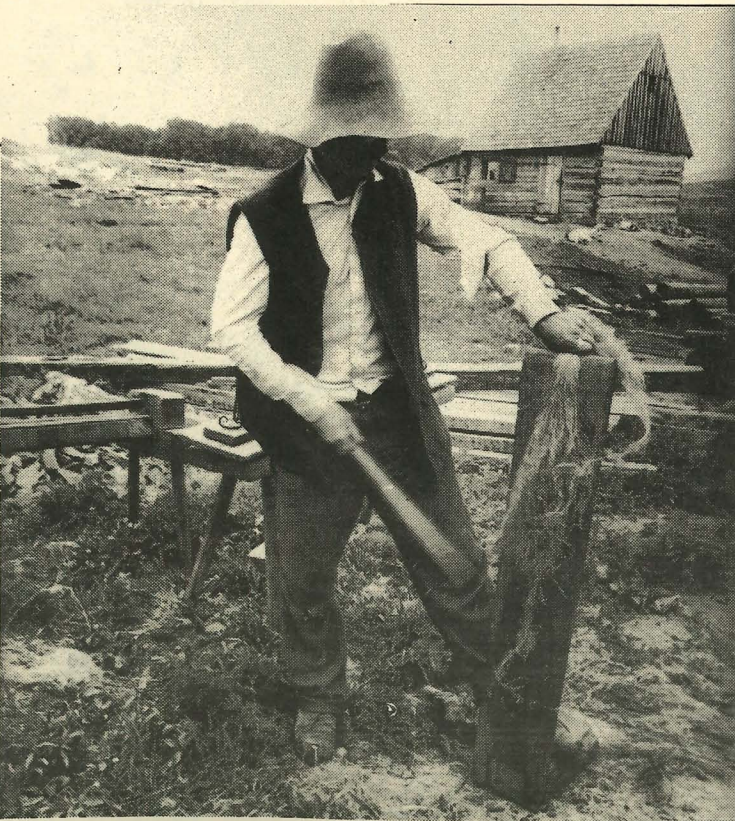
4.

**4.** Brother Christian watches brother Johannes brake the flax. On the hill to the left are the fenced vegetable garden, the smokehouse, and the bake house.

**5.** Brother Johannes straightens the broken flax and removes the loose fiber covering, using a wooden Scutching Knife and Scutching Board.

**6.** Brother Johannes scutches the flax. Behind him is the stone foundation of a log house and the beginnings of its reconstructed brick fireplace. Behind that is the log craft-house with a gambrel roof. Brother Christian has a room on the first floor where the print shop is located. The second floor is planned as a weaving loft.

5.



6.

Minor Breeds Conservancy (see LH spring issue, *Preserving American Livestock Heritage*, by Don Bixby).

The brotherhood maintains two types of sheep as well as a small gentle breed of goat. The female goat is presently giving a gallon of milk a day. The brothers are hoping to make cheese soon. Their large Pennsylvania fore-bay barn, built in 1926-27, is the only remaining structure from the previous farm, perhaps the last timber frame barn built in the Mahantango Valley. Intended for the storage of bailed hay, which had replaced loose hay on this farm, the design of its frame remained traditional to the region. In the basement of the barn are three Gloucester Old Spot pigs, two sows and a hog; this rare breed of English pig was almost lost because of its leanness at a time when lard was highly valued. The brotherhood is one of three breeders of this pig. The others are in Vermont and Ohio.

In addition to vegetables, the brotherhood raises buckwheat, winter rye, oats for feed, and one acre or two of flax. Flax is a plant which is grown for its tough and long-lasting fiber, from which linen is spun and woven. The growing and processing of flax was an important and widespread tradition in North America in the 18th and early 19th century. The brotherhood enjoys demonstrat-

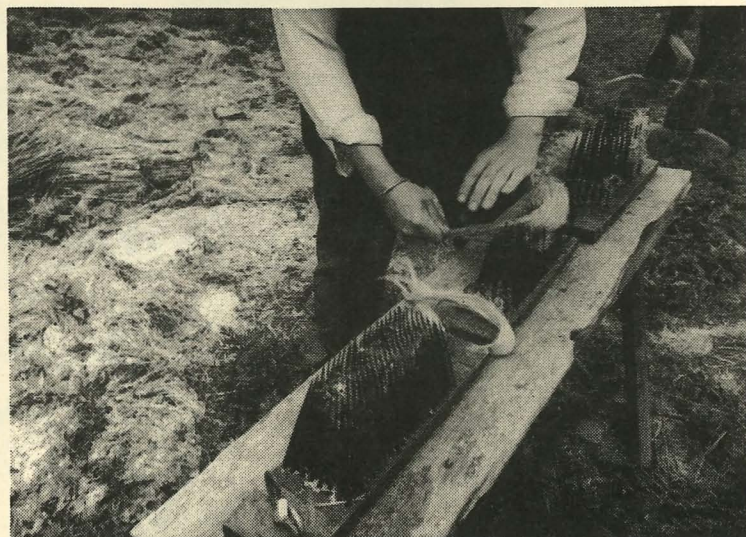
ing the process for local schoolchildren and occasionally at the Landis Valley Museum in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

A number of buildign projects are under way and others are being planned. One of major proportions will be the moving of a two-crib log barn, one of the last of this early style in the valley. The frame will be disassembled, moved, and reassembled at the kloister. At present the frame serves as a basement fore-bay barn; at the kloister it will be restored to its original drive-through form.

Library research is also in the future for the Christiansbrunn Kloster. A number of unpublished and untranslated letters and diaries of the founder, Brother Christian Zinzendorf, which are held in German and American collections, need translation and publication. Recently a hand-powered printing press with a seleciton of movable type was donated, and the brothers hope to



8.



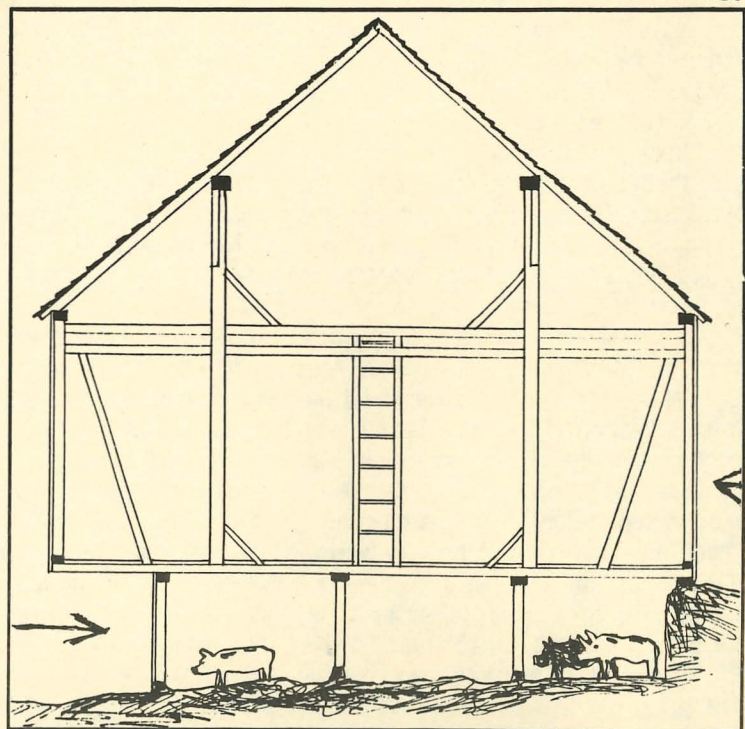
7.

7. Brother Christian combs the flax fiber on a Hetchel. His portable bench is fitted with three hetchels to prepare coarse, medium, and fine thread.

8. Brother Christian holds up a bundle of Flax Stricks ready to be spun into thread. This bundle represents the product of a quarter acre of flax and many hours of work.

9. Mid section of the brotherhood's forebay barn built in 1926-27 showing its timber frame bent resting on an earthen ramp and three columns. The pigs are a rare breed of Gloucester Old Spot temporarily being kept in the basement stable. The arrows represent the base and first floor entrances.

9.



be printing and distributing a newsletter soon.

For information about the newsletter or the cloister write ...

Christiansbrunn Kloster  
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## "To dye for ..." continued ...

ment was totally beyond our capabilities, and Historic Bethlehem neither had nor desire such a vat, we eliminated the hot process. This left the cold-vat; since no fire was used during the dyeing, the vat could be made of wood. There were fervent strictures against using copper for the vat because the vessel would be corroded during the process. There was no way I was going to allow my 20 gallon copper dye-pot to become corroded! Iron was too heavy to move, much less transport; we cook and make cheese in the brass kettles. Thank goodness for wood! We purchased a half-barrel which we very thoroughly, and expensively, caulked with pitch. (Notice how often the word "expensive" occurs...)

Having settled on the cold-vat, we set to work finding out as much as possible about it.

flat blue, middling-blue, sky-blue, queen's-blue, turkish-blue, watchet-blue, garter-blue, mazareen-blue, deep-blue, and very deep or navy-blue."

The weather in October 1990 was unseasonably warm. Daytime temperatures were in the upper 80s and low 90s for several weeks, during which our Nutt vat fermented, but nighttime temperatures fell into the upper 50s. When we tried dyeing woollen cloth, we were only able to get a wishy washy pale blue that was streaked and somewhat mottled. This was a disappointing experience that we felt did not lend itself to demonstration and interpretation for the public. A good blue would have been okay, but not this.

We also tried the common 18th-century cold-vat, which used chamber-lye: stale human urine, easily collected and requiring no treatment except being kept covered. There

indigo. Because the indigo washed off, we knew we had not properly refermented it, which is why it could not or would not oxidize when exposed to the air. The powdered animal urea seemed to be a factor in the failure so we did not use it again. However, this does not explain why a very well-worn cotton diaper accepted the dye and held enough through washing to be a respectable blue. Perhaps the fact that it was a much used *diaper* is important.

We thought of transporting the ingredients to Historic Bethlehem and mixing them there. However, if we did that, we would have had to rely on people there to do the twice-a-day stirring. When I had tried the Pennsylvania Blot Pot as given in Rita Adrosko's *Natural Dyes and Dyeing*, a well-meaning person who had not heard all of the discussion about stirring, oxidized the pot by having *every* visitor to the site "give the pot a GOOD stir!" The pot was ruined and \$25 worth of indigo never had a chance to dye fabric or fiber. Once burned, twice shy—I was afraid to leave the care of our vat to someone not totally committed to its success.

Timing was a factor, but the details were largely unknown. How long is long enough when refermenting indigo? How stale is stale enough to put in the dye? Donald Graves and Michael Colby of the Christiansbrunn Brotherhood, who have worked with indigo, assured us that indigo was always tricky, that July and August were the best months for the chamber-lye process, and that one ounce of indigo to one gallon of liquid was the proper proportion. With their encouragement, we went ahead.

On April 14, 1991, each family in Past Masters was given an empty 1-gallon plastic milk jug and told to "fill it by May 15." By May 15, more than seven gallons of chamber-lye had been collected. One member did not contribute because of a bladder infection; the bacteria causing this could interfere with the refermentation and antibiotics taken to correct the condition would probably prevent the process entirely. Another member harried family members to contribute and then dropped the container during delivery—half a gallon poured down the gutter in front of my house before the jug could be righted. It was especially infuriating to have one contributor view this accident as hilarious. However, six plus gallons were plenty for the half-barrel vat. The indigo was powdered, the madder was chipped and the dye-pot proceeded. The chamber-lye and other ingredients were divided as evenly as possible among three 5-gallon plastic buckets with snap-lids, set to one side in my yard where they would get

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### ***"There were fervent strictures against using copper for the vat ... no way was I going to allow my 20 gallon copper dye-pot to become corroded!"***

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Professional dyers' manuals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries are available in facsimile reprint, so we began with these. Although there are modern recipes available, we chose not to consult them in any depth because they are "translations" and sometimes use modern methods or ingredients, such as hydrosulphite.

The Pennsylvania Blue Pot, in Thomas Copper's 1815 treatise on dyeing was very tempting. It came from Pennsylvania and did not appear difficult to manage. However, it was just a little too late for us as well as being from the Pittsburgh area, rather than the easter part of the state. A mid-century dyer's record book, complete with samples, survives in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA. It is crammed with receipts and comments about indigo. However, there are questions about its origins, possibly in Ireland, and its use here.

The same library has a receipt book, dated 1702, which belonged to a Samuel Nutt of Chester County. It contains a splendid and eclectic collection of receipts, including an uncomplicated one for an indigo cold-vat. Essentially, it says to take water, bran, yeast, and powdered indigo; allow this mixture to ferment (the weather must be very warm); and then color fabric or fiber by dipping and airing until the desired blue is obtained. According to Elijah Bemiss (1815), the following shades comprise the range of blues possible with indigo: "milk-blue, pearl-blue, pale-blue,

are many receipts, but they are usually vague on essential details. One such "detail": How long must the chamber-lye stand to be strong enough or stale enough to work? Professional dyers of the colonial period received training as apprentices, since the basic techniques were passed on to apprentices orally and through practice, they did not have to be written down.

With our refined 20th-century sensibilities, added to the need to transport the dye-vat and possibly its contents about 40 miles, we cast about for ways to make the whole process a little less daunting. One thought was to try powdered urea from a garden supply store. We purchased some and after consultation with a friend who had used indigo, mixed one cup in one gallon of tap water. It had no smell and no color, so we added about two quarts of urine, a little at a time, and let the mixture stand covered, for several weeks. Then one and half ounces of powdered indigo and three-fourths ounce of madder were added. This was kept covered with a linen cloth and stirred carefully twice a day.

The chamber-lye vat was even more disappointing than the other; it smelled more during the actual dyeing and the color never got very dark. The worst part came when the dyed woollen fabric was washed in lye soap and water. On most of the samples, the blue washed off, leaving a pink from the madder—which had been an ingredient not for color, but as a starter for the refermentation of the



maximum direct sun during the day. They were opened and carefully stirred twice a day until June 1.

The re-fermentation did occur. The weather was unusually hot; day-time temperatures were in the 90s and nights in the high 60s. The liquid looked purplish and developed a lovely cooper sheen on the surface. As time passed, the purple faded and the liquid appeared dark, dark blue.

Because of our drive to Bethlehem, the dye was transferred to the original collecting jugs, which had screwtops. If one were to tip over, there would be a better chance of its staying closed, and if it didn't the most we could lose was one-seventh. Nevertheless, the thought of any dye liquid loose in my car was unnerving to say the least! When the liquid was transferred, it was a dark olive-green in color. As much sediment as possible

mask the smell, and people tended to stand to windward, which also helped.

The dyer, however, was exposed to the vat's contents for half a day, dipping pieces of cloth. The stench is indescribable! An intensely penetrating ammonia quality spirals up through the sinuses and seems to swirl throughout the cranium. Thank goodness the sense of smell anesthetizes itself after a while—otherwise, the process would be unbearable!

Because manuals of the period were silent on the subject of premordanting cotton and linen, we used two sets of linen strips. One was untreated before dyeing; the other had the customary pre-treatment of tannin, alum, tannin. These pre-treated strips became a muddy color, not a blue. The untreated samples took the color much better.

One woolen sample was left in the dye-pot overnight. When lifted the following morn

process in July or August, just to see if it does work. His other dye-receipts do, so why not this? We'll see.

Clarissa F. Dillon, Ph.D.  
Past Masters in Early  
American Domestic Arts  
June 1992

*Clarissa Dillon is an active researcher and re-enactor of 18th-century household practices in southeastern Pennsylvania and works with a variety of subjects and sites in Pennsylvania. She is a founding member of Past Masters in Early American Domestic Arts and is hoping to make cheese with the Christiansbrunn Kloster, at some future time. For further information write ...*

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***"... the thought of any dye liquid loose in my car was unnerving to say the least!"***

was left in the buckets.

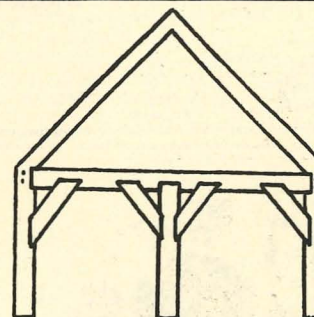
The drive was smooth and uneventful. The jugs were stored overnight in the Historic Bethlehem springhouse with the rest of our gear and taken to the worksite the following morning. The half-barrel, well caulked with pitch, was partially filled with water. Wherever droplets appeared further caulking was done until there were no more leaks. This took some time; fortunately pitch cools and hardens very quickly. The dye-liquid was gently poured into the vat. Its color was still green but there was definitely a bluish tinge to it, probably from the transfers among containers which required pouring through the air, and from the jiggling during transport.

There had been some discussion about the placement of our indigo-vat. We were concerned that the aroma would upset or alienate visitors unused to such a reek. We had also decided not to dye any fabric or fiber to be used for clothing because traces of scent are left even after washing. Our indigo-vat was placed on a low platform made of two large logs set on the very back of our work site. My large copper kettle for dyeing with black walnut was set over a fire to the side, much closer to the area used by the public. This way both dyes could be interpreted and people could see, but did not have to be close to the indigo unless they wanted to. We were careful to explain its ingredients frequently so visitors would not be surprised if they did step closer. The acrid smoke from the fire helped

ing, it was greenish and turned blue when exposed to the air. This was the deepest and most effective color we obtained. Samples dyed the second day were bluer and held the color through washing better, possibly because the dye-pot was undisturbed overnight. Michael Colby said that when he sifted his indigo-vat during the summer of 1990, it took it two weeks "to recover."

What to do when the Handwork Festival was winding down? The vat itself belonged to Historic Bethlehem, but no one there wanted to use the indigo-bath. Fortunately, another demonstrator wanted to experiment with it, so we were able to put the liquid back into the travel jugs and walk away.

What did we learn from all of this? Mostly, we learned that the expense of paying a professional blue-dyer, like Richard Fawke of Goshen Township, Pennsylvania, back in 1799, was more than worth it. The amount of time and energy spent in cooling this dye bath along, only to achieve questionable results because of our lack of experience, was incredible. Busy women, both then and now, don't begrudge the money if their time and energy are saved and the end results are good. We also learned about the problems of using indigo "their way" and why modern methods are so appealing. We are now able to talk, with real feeling, about indigo-dyeing, and most of us do not see the need for further experimentation—although now that it is some months later, I'm toying with the idea of trying Nutt's



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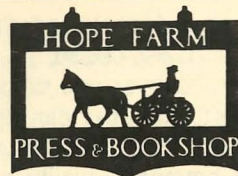
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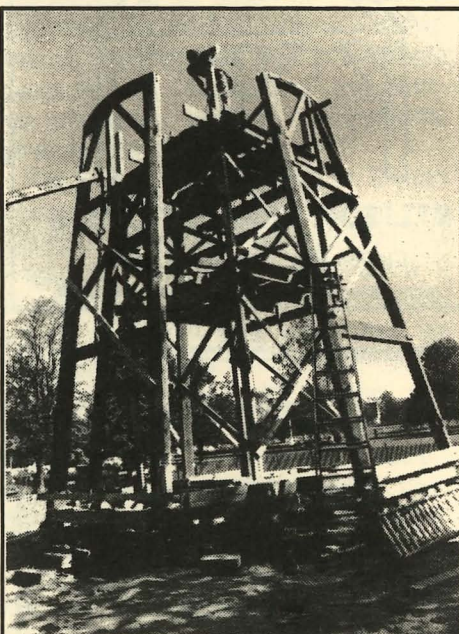
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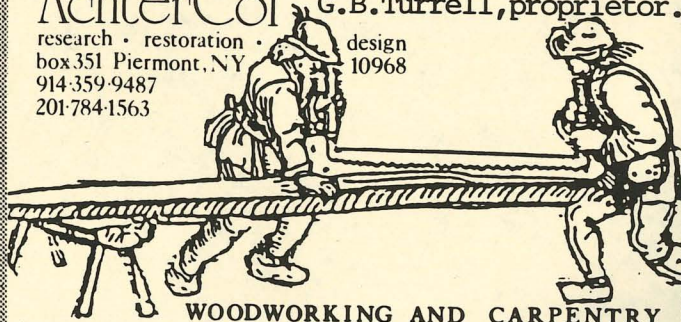
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