

AN OLD WORKBOOK ON CABINETMAKING

AGNES MCCULLOCH HANNA

Work sheets from foreign cabinetmakers were used in our country in very early days, but this home-made workbook, written in 1856 by William H. H. Johnson, a young Indiana cabinetmaker, for his personal use, has few parallels. It was found some months ago by Mr. and Mrs. L. H. Millikan of Indianapolis while they were looking over family papers stored for many years in Mr. Millikan's family home near Monrovia, Indiana.

William H. H. Johnson, born in 1837, was the son of Dr. Lawrence and Edith Rolls (or Ralls) Johnson. The first members of the family to come to Indiana were Isaac and Mary Cool, who obtained a grant of land in Marion County, three miles east of the "Donation," in 1821. With them, from Princeton, New Jersey, came their married daughter Elizabeth, with her husband, David Johnson. Their son Lawrence went to medical school in Cincinnati soon after they arrived in Indianapolis.

Dr. Lawrence Johnson was graduated shortly after 1826 and went almost at once to the newly organized town of Belleville, Hendricks County, Indiana, where he practiced medicine. In 1834, he married Edith Rolls, and to them seven sons and daughters were born. "Willie" (William H. H. Johnson), born in 1837, began in 1856 to work first for McCurdy and later (1857) for Bland, cabinetmakers.

As the workbook¹ was for his own use, he made no attempt to watch the uniformity of spelling. He sat down measures and methods of procedure; he wrote down formulae for staining and removing stains from furniture; he set forth schedules of wages for various classes of workmen, and

¹ The workbook is 4¾ x 7¼ inches, contains forty-eight ruled pages, and is bound in dark tan leather reinforced by coarse thin binder's board. The inside of the covers are not faced with leather. The matter scratched on the top half of the outside of the front cover in ink has almost reached the stage of illegibility. This cover-page carries the following:

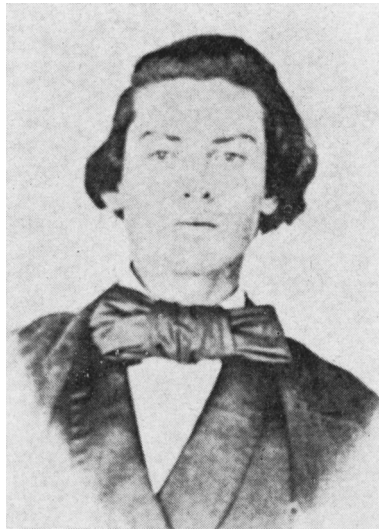
Belleville
Indiana
U S
Amer

William H. H. Johnsons
Book, Belleville
Indiana
Bought in 1856

on pages 38-39, making use of the ruled lines of the notebook, he drew pictures of furniture that he had aided in constructing. Interleaved with his furniture notes are verses to one or more young ladies of his acquaintance and other rhymes, denoting a deeply emotional nature, and revealing that he was not too happy in the work of his hands.

He left the cabinetshop to study medicine—possibly, he recognized his failing health—in March, 1859. Two months later his father wrote in the family Bible: "Willie died at 1 A.M. May 25, happy in the Lord." His notebook was preserved by the doctor-father (Dr. Lawrence Johnson), and, after the latter's death in 1871, his widow (Edith Rolls Johnson) took it with other family papers to her daughter's home near Monrovia. There she lived during the rest of her life with her daughter, Mrs. Eleazer Bales Millikan, and her husband. After Mrs. Millikan's death on May 25, 1938, the notebook was brought to Indianapolis with family letters and records.

Last winter, Mr. and Mrs. L. H. Millikan, knowing of my interest in Indiana cabinetmakers, allowed me to see and make use of some of the notes. It is a great pleasure to know that this unusual book is to be placed by Mr. Millikan in the Indiana History Division of the State Library. The



WILLIAM H. H. JOHNSON

notes and photostatic reproductions of the drawings are unusual and valuable. I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to edit the contents of this booklet for publication in the *Indiana Magazine of History*.

[The Workbook Entries]

Belleville Indiana

January the 4 1856 new year

Beadsteads common ones turned posts mortus 21 inches from the bottom short rails 4 ft. long ons 6 ft. tenent $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch long.

Stands Common ones posts 2 ft. 4 inc long single drawer side rails 15 inc long back and front rails 17 inches long with $1\frac{1}{4}$ inc tenent the front rails being the top one $1\frac{1}{4}$ inc wide the bottom one 1 inc wide leaving 4 inc drawer between the side rails being $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches dressed up with gides $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide. dollar for making

Stands double drawers

the same hith [height] of comenes [commonest] ones side rails 10 inc wide and 13 inc between shoulders front rails 15 inc between shoulders $1\frac{1}{4}$ inc tenent top rail $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide the other to [two] 1 inch wide top drawer 3 inches the bottom one 4 inc

Bellville

Dec 23 1856²

fancy Stands. posts 9 in long with a turning of 2 in at the bottom front rail bottom one 1 in wide 4 in drawer top rail inch and one $\frac{1}{4}$ wide fourteen inches between shoulders end rails 12 inches between shoulders tenents 1 inch long posts $1\frac{1}{2}$ in square pillars as uprite peaces inches long 4 inches square at the bottom with turning 2 inches and taper from it up to the top too [two] inches turned tenent on each end bottom peise according to pattern with scroll feet

Bellville

January the 24 1856

Burows [Bureaus] Common ones 3 ft. 10 inch high. for [four] drawers. from the bottom to the rail 8 in and $\frac{1}{2}$ long. bottom rail inch & $\frac{1}{4}$ wide. 8 in drawer. then inch rail. 7. & 6. & 9. inch drawer top rail 1 in & $\frac{3}{4}$ wide gides 10 in nomber. 2 inches wide, with 13 in & $\frac{1}{2}$ between sholders. $\frac{3}{4}$ inch tenent. end rails bottom one 8 inch wide. top one 7 inches wide, with 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ in tenent on them. plowed $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in the rails so as to let the pannel in. back rails 5 & 6 inches wide scant one sixteenth of an inch longer then the front rail and the end rails must have a shoulder on both edeges

Bellville Ind

May 1. 1856

Burows full coll [columns?]

Posts 3 ft. $3\frac{1}{2}$ inc High from the bottom to the first rail 8 in rail $1\frac{1}{2}$ in wide then 8 in drawer rail 1 in wide and then 7 in drawer

² This entry, from the second page, is dated Dec. 23, 1856, and is followed by the entry from the third page, dated Jan. 24, 1856. Mr. Johnson frequently left blank pages, some of which he used for later entries.

1 in rail then 6 in drawer with a fals [false] rail $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch wide then 1 in rail 4 in wide that is it runs back 4 in then 7 in drawer top rail 2 in wide end rails bottom one 8 in wide top one 7 in wide with gides 2 in wide tablet to reach from the top of the post down below the fals rail and when dressed up must be left as thick as the post is wide. posts when dressed up $3\frac{1}{2}$ in wide $1\frac{1}{2}$ in thick end rails $13\frac{1}{2}$ in between shoulders tenents $1\frac{1}{4}$ in long rails 2 ft 11 in between shoulders back paneled in and back rails top one 5 in wide Middle one 4 in wide bottom one 6 in wide top one plowed in the under side middle one both sides bottom one top edge with a hانش of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch at the top edge and the others allso [sic].

Bellville

April 5 1856

How to make Safes the posts 4 ft 4 in High x $2\frac{1}{2}$ in wide $1\frac{1}{2}$ in thick with to [two] front rails 2 in wide Side rails bottom one 5 in wide top one $4\frac{1}{2}$ in wide and the others 2 in wide back rails top one 4 in the other 5 in and it must be put up 1 in higher then the other side-rails, so as to give room for the bottom to go in by cutting a place in posts large enough to let the bottom slip through it and there must be gides plowed and nailed on for the bottom to slide through into the front rail which is ploughed the doors they must be long enough to fill up between the rails the top stile must be $2\frac{1}{2}$ in wide so as to fill up the difference between the top front rail and the bottom of the top side rail which is 2 in from $4\frac{1}{2}$ in leaves $2\frac{1}{2}$ which is the width of the top door stile then mesher [measure] the distance between to [two] of the end rails which will give the distance between the door stiles so as to have them all to range with each other and the bottom end rail which is 5 in wide and the bottom front rail 2 in wide of corse the bottom door stile must be 3 in wide for 2 from 5 leaves 3 which is the width of the door stile in order to made it eavin with the side rail so as to make all the rales Come eavin. and the front rails must be 2 ft. 11 in between shoulders with $1\frac{1}{4}$ in tenent

• Bellville Indiana
Staining for Wood

To stain wood red take two ounces of brazil wood, and two ounces of potash; mix them with a quart of water and let the compisition stand in a warm place for several days, stiring it occasionaly; with this liquor made boiling hot, brush over the wood, till the desired depth of colour is obtained. then with another brush, brush over the wood while yet wet, with a solution of alum in the propotion of two ounces of alum to a quart of water

2 for a pink or rose red add to a gallon of the above infusion of Brazil two additional ounces of the pearlashes and use it as was before directed, but it is necessary in this case to brush the wood over with the alum water. by increasing the propotion of pearlashes the red may be rendered yet paler; but it is proper when more than this quantity is added to make the alum water stronger; or use double the quantity of Potash.

for a less bright red dissolve an ounce of dragon's blood in a pint of spirits of wine, and brush over the wood with the tincture till the stain appears to be as strong as is desired; but this is, in fact, rather lacquering than staining³

May the 3th [*sic*] 1856

Bellville

How to lay off a Coffin bottom according to measurer that is the length foot 7 inches wide head 8 in wide across the shoulders from 18 to 20 as the case may be in groan [grown] persons end peases [pieces] about 11 or 12 inches long the sides 5 in longer than the bottom and the top about 10 in longer than the bottom so as to give plenty room to put on the top

Bellville Indiana

March 16th 1859

Commenced work for McCurdy at the Cabinet trade the 2 day of April 1855 worked till May the 6th 1856, which was the Close of one years work for which I received \$60 dollars half in Store and other Cash and spent all and was in debt 53 cents at the Close of the year.⁴

Bellville Indiana

one years work to a Close the 6th of May 1856 for which years work I received \$60 dollars half Cash and half in the Stores and I Spent all of the 60 dollars and was in debt \$1.35 Cents at the Close of the Year 1856 Wm J

to Stain wood purple, take one ounce of logwood and two drachms of brazil wood; boil them together in a quart of water over a moderate fire. when one half of the fluid is evaporated, strain the decoction and brush it several times over the wood after the wood is dry, brush it over with a solution of a drachm of pearlshes in a pint⁵

[Transferring dark pictures]

on dark painting give too [two] Cotes of white paint just large enough for the picture varnish it and let it dry and then [then] varnish it again and put on your picture and let it dry and when dry

³ This entry is followed by: "transferred to page 19."

⁴ The next entry appearing on page 17, which had nothing to do with the young cabinetmaker's trade, reads: "I would be thine when storms arise and Thempests brake through the Sky to cheer the [thee]."

⁵ This entry is followed by a poem, entitled "lilly dale," which runs to four stanzas and a chorus. The first stanza and the chorus follow:

"It was a calm still night
And the moons pale light
Shone soft ore hill and dale
When friends mute with grief
Stood around the death bed
Of my poor lost lilly dale

"O lilly, sweet lilly dear lilly dale
Now the wild rose blossoms
Ore the little green grave
Of my poor lost lilly dale"

⁶ This is evidently a description of a method of transferring a picture on paper or cardboard to painted and varnished wood.

dampen it a little and than rub it untill the paper is all off and the picture will be plain

to Stain oak a mahogany Color

Boil togeather brazil wood and Roman alum and before it is applied to the wood a little potash is to be added to it. a sutible varnish for wood thus tinged may be made by dissolving amber in oil of turpentine mixed with a small potion [portion] of linseed oil

to stain beech wood a mahogany Colour break two ounces of Dragons blood in pieces and put them into a quart of rectified spirits of wine let the bottle stand in a warm place and shake it frequently. when disolved it is fit for use

Stain for musical instruments

Purple. Boil a pound of Chip [ped] logwood in three quarts of water for an hour than [then] add four ounces of pearlash and two ounces of indigo pounded

Bellville Indiana

General Explanations

- 1 all men working by the day to be paid according to their average wages by the piece to find their one [own] Candles
- 2 tables to be meshered on the top for length and width.
- 3 all kind of drawer work in single carcasses or eny work to represent the Same to mesher on the widest carcass
- 4 all drawers to start without locks except bureaus and Secretaries if not Specified in the preamble
- 5 no lock [?] plates to be let in except Secratory falls or writing falls
- 6 all drawers to be blocked except small drawers in headwork
- 7 all bureau backs to Start with one pannel it two pannels no addition
- 8 making patterns and shaped Colls [Columns] to be propperty of the Journeymans or the prices of making them to be Settled exclusively between the Journeyman and employers.
- 9 filling up worm or knot holes repairing shakes or cracks reducing slabs sawing veneers Cock beads to be paid according to time
- 10 all staining to be paid for according to time
- 11 all round tables when veneered to measure the same as round drawers fronts per inch. when not specified in the preamble and to be paid according to table of venearing on rounds. all pellow and claw tables to Start with Casters
- 12 all Sofas to Start with Castors
- 13 no Castor plates to be let in except paid for according to table of brass work
- 14 putting on looking glas plates to be at the risk of the employer
- 15 all work made by Journaman to be finished in the bench room and not to be taken apart for the Convenience of the polisher or put to geather after him
- 18 all work considered to be done in a workmanlike manner and when not such to be paid for accordingly

19 veneering staves on the round to be double the price of flat Staves
in loo [low] table bills

Belleville Ind

Feb the 8 1857

Receipt for making ink.⁷

take a drachm of nitric of Silver (lunar Costic) dissolve it in a glass
morter in duble its wait [weight] of pure watter add to this solution
10 drops of nitric acid this is the Ink in another glass vessel
disolve a drachm of salt tarter in 7½ oz of water this is usually
named the liquid Pounce with which the linin is wet Previously to
the application of the Ink.

Receipt for graining

take white zink and mix it with vinegar⁸

Commenced Reading Medicine at Fathers on the old farm 3½
Miles wes [west] of Bellville⁹

⁷ Above the date of this entry, Mr. Johnson wrote the words "to mark
linin." He no doubt intended his heading to read "Receipt for making
ink to mark linen," but inadvertently omitted the main words. The
text of the entry bears out this inference.

⁸ A poem of four short stanzas, "Departed Friends," follows this
"Receipt for graining." The date is December 24, 1858. Under the
same date, there is a second poem with the simple title, "Marion,"
which should have been "Marian." The three stanzas reveal a germ-
inating love that was unrequited. The third line of the first stanza seems
to mean "Come and kiss the [thee] Marion's rose."

"Spirit of the Summer breeze
Wherefore Sleepest though [thou] in the trees
Come and kiss the marions rose
That on marions boosom blows

"Come and fawn about her hair
Kiss the fringes of her eys
Ask her why she looks so fair
When she heedeth not my sigh

"Tell her murmuring Summer air
That her Buty's all untrue
Tell her she should not seam fair
Unless she be gentle too

"Wm. H. H. Johnson"

⁹ This brief entry, which indicates the purpose of the young cabinet-
maker to turn to medicine for a career, is succeeded by two stanzas
labeled "Friendship wishes." This poem is in turn followed by seven
lines without rhyme or title, under date of March 23, 1858. One may
guess that it was meant for a description in lighter vein of a young
woman in whom there was an interest, though it was not serious:

"Extraordinary fair hair
Forehead riseth in a round
Eye brows black and hair thin
Little distance between the eye brows
Eyes nether too little nor too big inclined to black
A picked [piqued] chin reasonably full of flesh
A face of hansom propotion rather inclined to fat."

Bellville Indiana

Jan. 12, 1857

receipt

to remove White spots from varnished furniture

White spots on varnished furniture may be removed by rubbing them with a warm flannel [cloth] dipped in equal parts of Spirits of turpentine and Sweet Oil

Commenced to work for Bland the 13th of october [1857?]

Receipt for making Ink

take one oz ounce of Prussian Blue $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce oxalic Acid 4 quarts of rain water Put the above mentioned articles in the water Cold and shake it up well before use

To Make Read [Red] Ink

take three pints of stale beer rather than vinegar and four ounces of ground Brazill wood simmer them together for an hour dissolve half an ounce of gum arabic in it then strain it through a flannel [cloth] and bottle it up (well stopped) for use. to prevent ink from freezing put a glass of brandy into it and to prevent it from turning mouldy put a little salt in it¹⁰

¹⁰ The heading for another entry followed, "Tincture of Cantharides," but the entry was never made.