

FEB. 2024

STWG

# SUSQUEHANNA TRAIL WOODWORKERS GUILD

## FROM THE PRESIDENTS DESK

At last month's meeting I spoke about hand cut Dovetails. One of the interesting things about this joint is that it is the easiest and most forgiving of the hand-tool (non-mechanical) joints. There are basically 3 hand-tool joints: mortise and tenon, dado / groove, and dovetail. All other hand-tool joints are a variation or combination of those three.

Of those three, the dovetail is the easiest and the mortise and tenon is the hardest. However, with the amount of wonder and amazement folks give the dovetail you'd think it took some miracle to create. While nearly no one gives the Mortise the same level of respect; even though a well executed hand-cut mortise should be what we consider the thing of wonder (it isn't fair).

Why is that? The reason is that everything lives in an ecosystem. And that ecosystem skews your view of the possible. In the modern western tradition we are obsessed with machines, and those machines can only make very regular, very precise cuts. So joints like the mortise and tenon are made easier and lose value and respect.

Dovetails however are not a precise joint. In fact, using precision thinking makes them harder; if not impossible. The reason is because with precision thinking the most precise thing (the tool) becomes the reference. Everything gets compared to that. This works fine for the mortise and tenon. But for the Dovetails the error between the work and reference (tool) is compounded with each pin and tail. Thus in a very small number of tails the precision becomes impossible to achieve making the joint seem impossible.

However, ancient woodworkers didn't think that way. Their tools could be inaccurate, out of square, and imprecise, but it didn't matter. They didn't compare the joints to the tool, and thus didn't introduce precision thinking. Instead, they used the work as the reference and took the tools to it. For Dovetails, cut the tails first. Then use the tails as the reference for the pins. Each pin will perfectly accept the tail it was referenced to. Everything will fit as it should. Then you rinse and repeat for each other set of tails. There is no precision here, each set of tails and corresponding pins is unique, but they complement each other perfectly.

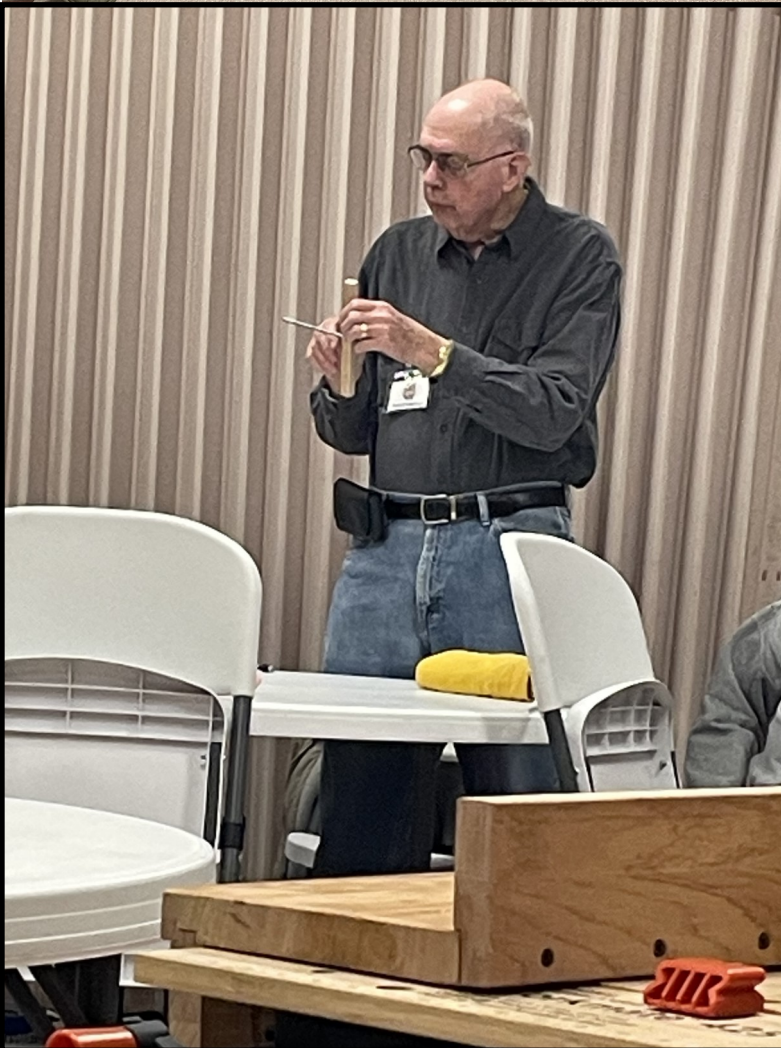
Additionally, since the tails are angled you can have an incredible amount of slop while still having an incredibly strong joint. And because they can have a large amount of slop you can make them very quickly without too much fuss and still be sure everything will work out. This is why they are the fastest and easiest of the hand-tool joints. And why they were usually left for last. Shh. Don't tell! - John

BALTIMORE  
WOODWORKING SHOW





JAN. MEETING





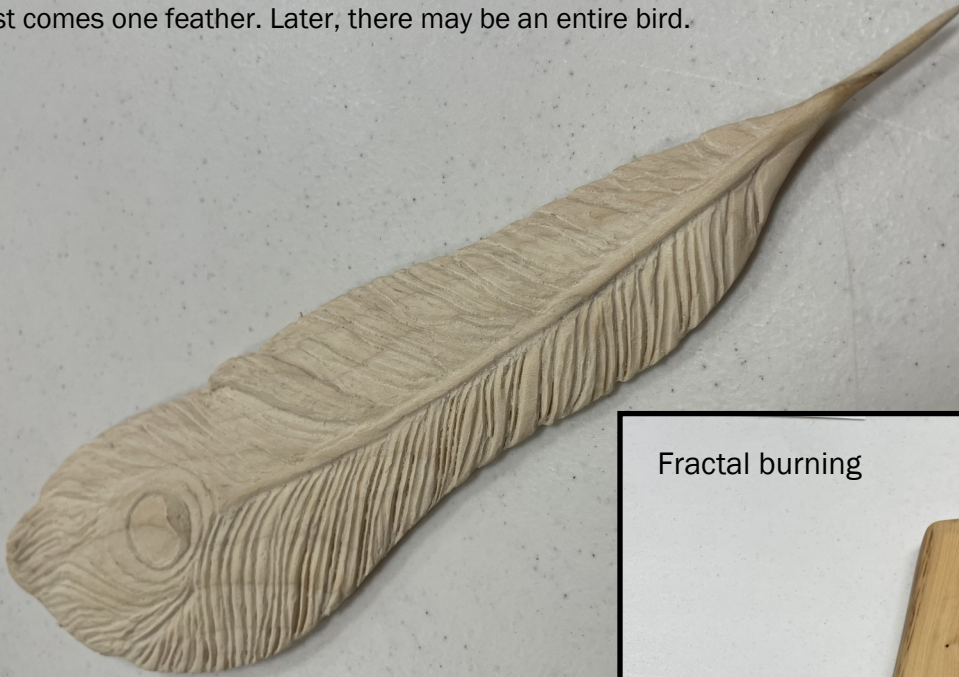
### NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be Thursday, Feb. 22nd, at 7 pm. NOTE: We will be meeting downstairs. Take the elevator, or stairs, down to level 2.





First comes one feather. Later, there may be an entire bird.



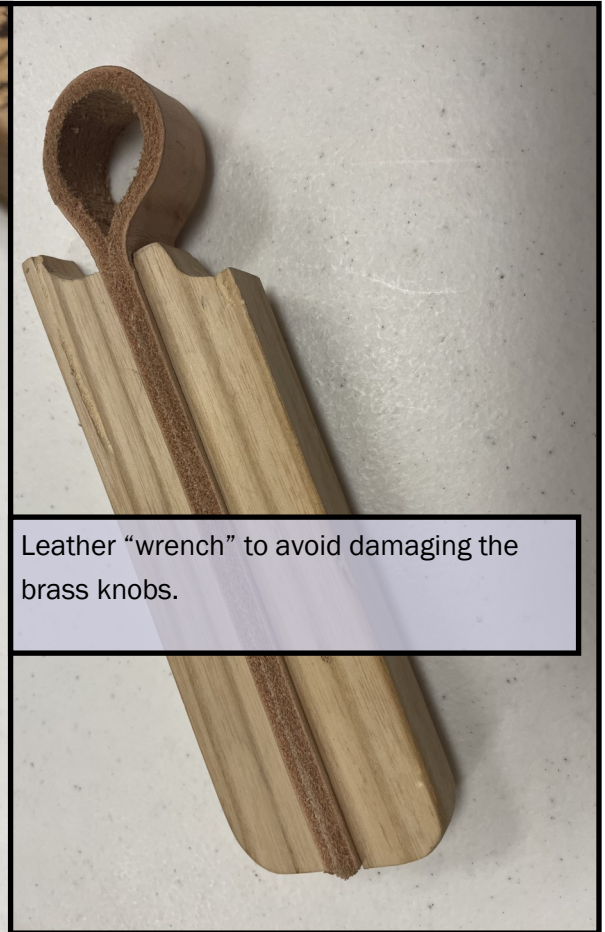
Fractal burning



John's hand cut dovetails







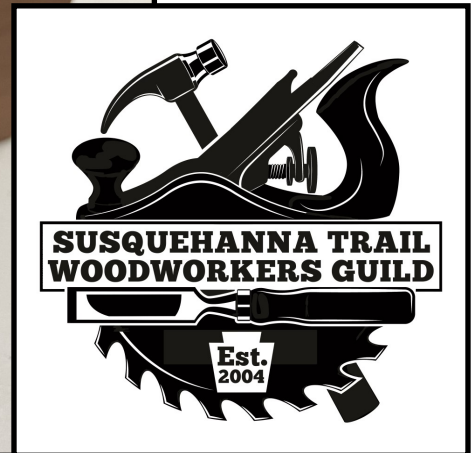
Leather "wrench" to avoid damaging the brass knobs.

Red maple is the most common tree in North America and lives in diverse climates and habitats, mainly in the eastern United States. *Acer rubrum* is a prolific seeder and readily sprouts from the stump which makes it ubiquitous in both the forest and in the urban landscape.

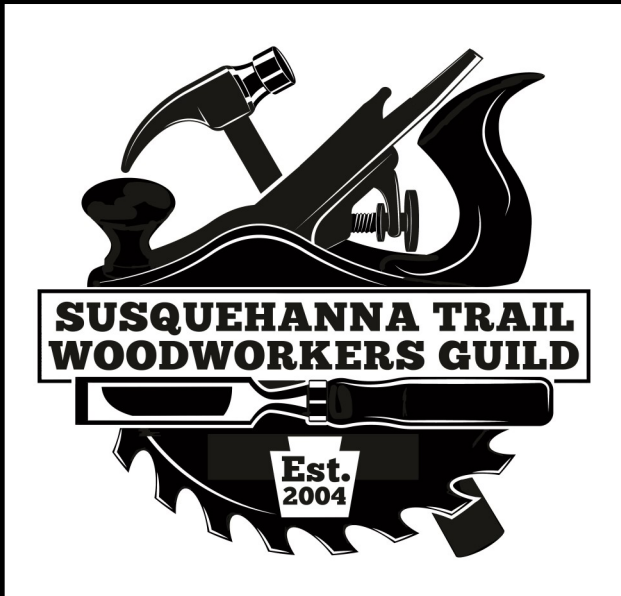
Contact us!

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The tree species known as *Pennantia baylisiana* could be the rarest plant on Earth. A single tree exists in the wild, on one of the Three Kings Islands off the coast of New Zealand, where it has sat, alone, since 1945.

However, it should be noted that hundreds of saplings have been hand pollinated, and planted, in an attempt to save the species from extinction.