

Emergence of a Craftsman: One African American Artisan's Journey into 18th Century Woodworking

What: A one day retrospective of a decade-long journey in 18th century woodworking and textile work inspired by Thomas Day.

Where: Horace Williams House: 610 E. Rosemary St. Chapel Hill, NC 27514
(919) 942-7818 ~ www.ChapelHillPreservation.com

When: August 9, 2009

Why: Thomas Day is one of the greatest North Carolina cabinet makers of the nineteenth century, and a free Black man, is a major inspiration for the artisan **Jerome Bias**. Watch Thomas Day come to life through his hands hands. For the last ten years Bias has been making furniture using only 18th century tools and techniques (NO Power Tools. Sorry Norm.) You'll see pieces of furniture, quilts and family heirlooms. All made or restored, in the tradition of Day and other great African American North Carolina artisans. Much of Bias's work reflects his North Carolina heritage. You'll see many pieces that are inspired by Day. You'll enjoy exact reproductions of other works originally made here in North Carolina. Join Bias August 9 on his journey as an artisan. Learn about the greatest furniture makers America has ever seen. From a time long ago and very much alive today.

Who: The Artisan—Having deep roots in the African American communities of eastern N.C., the Outer Banks, and even a dairy farm here in Orange County, **Jerome Bias** has developed a passion for North Carolina furniture. Bias primarily builds copies of 18th and early 19th century furniture made in eastern North Carolina and southern Virginia. His show, *Emergence of a Craftsman: One African American Artisan's Journey into 18th Century Woodworking* features a series of chests that are adaptations of a 17th century chest from eastern North Carolina.

A particular inspiration to Bias' work is Thomas Day, a successful nineteenth century free Black cabinet maker from Milton, N.C. From Day, Bias has learned not to be constrained by stereotypes, to look for the benefits of bringing disparate groups together to seek common interests, and most importantly, to persevere through life.

While primarily an 18th century cabinetmaker, Bias is also a quilter and enjoys upholstery work. As a period furniture maker Bias only uses the tools and techniques that would have been used at that time. His goal is to produce a piece of furniture that not only looks similar to the original, but also shows the thought processes and considerations that the original maker would have experienced.

Bias is largely self taught and has been practicing the arts and mysteries of woodworking for the last ten years. During that time he has studied the works of Thomas Day and other African American craftsmen in antebellum North Carolina. Other influences include aesthetic contributions from various ethnic groups in the state.

Bias has done woodworking demonstrations and talks for the Chapel Hill Preservation Society and the Thomas Day Educational Foundation and serves as a consultant with the N.C. Museum of History. Recently, he was awarded the Decorative Arts Trust Scholarship to attend the MESDA Summer Institute to study ethnicity and material culture in the southern back country.



“I want you to persevere in the practice of music and in all other accomplishments that may be useful or satisfying to you and your friends in your intercourse through life.” –*Thomas Day, an African American, antebellum artisan, wrote these words to his daughter on November 27, 1851.*