

VCA News

P.O. Box 4314
Richmond, VA 23220

Newsletter of the Virginia Conservation Association

Volume 16 Number 3 January 2006

January 19 Members Meeting

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The title of our next members meeting program is ***George Washington and the Schoolgirl: The Conservation of an Early 19th-Century Silk Embroidered Picture of the Washington Family.***

Claudia Walpole, a professional textile conservator in Charlottesville, will offer insights into the genre of schoolgirl silk embroidery. The discussion will focus on the conservation of an embroidery of an 1825 portrayal of the Washington family by Miss Better B. Lewis, granddaughter of Fielding and Betty Washington Lewis. The picture is now in the collection of George Washington's Fredericksburg Foundation.

Claudia is a member of The American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works, The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Virginia Conservation Association, and The Costume Society of America.

Meeting Details

Date: Thursday, January 19

Time: 5:30 p.m.—Refreshments and business meeting

6:30 p.m.—Program

Location: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts located at 200 North Boulevard

The meeting will be held in the base-

ment of the south wing of the building. Attendees will need to enter at the loading dock (facing Grove Avenue). Members need to sign in with security and will be escorted to the meeting room. The lab will also be open for us to examine their current projects.

When our program concludes, VCA members are invited to attend Art After Hours. The Joe Scott Band will be entertaining the crowd with jazz/rhythm and blues. If you didn't fill up on refreshments at the VCA meeting, there will be adult refreshments for sale during the event!

Directions:

From Interstates 95 and 64, take exit 78, the Boulevard exit. Follow the Boulevard (Route 161/S) for 1½ miles, through 9 stoplights. The museum is on the right on the corner of Boulevard and Grove. Turn right on Grove. The loading dock (employee's entrance) is located on the south side of the building facing Grove Avenue. Parking is available on Grove or behind the Studio School in "visitor" designated parking areas.

The VCA News is published five times a year and is distributed free to members of the Virginia Conservation Association. The next newsletter will be published in late February 2006. If you have any information (employment opportunities, articles, events) you would like to include in the newsletter, please forward to Tracy Bryan at tbryan@vahistorical.org by February 15.

Virginia Conservation Association 2005-2006 Board

www.virginiaconservationassociation.org

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Minutes from the VCA Board meetings will be published on the VCA website. Visit www.virginiaconservationassociation.org

Notes from the VCA President

Over 50 members attended the November meeting. The Winter Party had over 40 members, bearing good food. Attendance seems to be booming. Being an active member in the VCA provides a place to reflect and share ideas, and to coordinate outreach education with a group of talented and creative people.

Your board has been focusing on several upcoming events and programs for you. The Education committee is tying up loose ends for a spring class on Photo Shop, which will follow last year's class on Digital Photography. Informative programs and events for spring include: The March program on Hazardous Holdings with Susan Peckham, at Wilton House Museum, the VCA Annual April Field Trip and the May program on the Recent Re-interpretation/Restoration of Wetherburns Tavern at Colonial Williamsburg, with Catherine Anderson. Enhancing our disaster response initiative has been an ongoing discussion at board member meetings. Should we be honing our skills and collecting materials for future disasters? The National Park Service is collecting materials ahead of disasters for quick response, should the VCA provide this service for others? What exactly should we provide? In addition to these discussions, the AIC is looking for future annual meeting locations and is considering Richmond.

Hope to see you at the next meeting.

Carol Boyers Givens

The Conservation of Archaeological Materials: Current Trends and Future Directions

“The Conservation of Archaeological Materials: Current Trends and Future Directions” was held at Colonial Williamsburg from November 13th-17th 2005. The conference was planned in conjunction with the Archaeological Discussion Group, a subgroup of AIC’s Objects Specialty Group. The aim of the conference was to communicate new technologies and to serve as a forum for discussion regarding both the present practice and future development of archaeological conservation and its interactions with other professions and communities.

The conference was divided into five sessions focusing on: defining archaeological conservators; on-site documentation and stabilization; conservators and the technological record; archives and repositories; and finally, collaboration and community involvement. Each session was anchored by a “keynote speech” which was intended to focus on the development of the field and the greatest perceived challenges for it within that area of focus. These keynote speeches were delivered by Chris Caple of the University of Durham, Rae Beaubien of the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education, Patricia Griffin, Hedley Swain of the Museum of London and Glenn Wharton of New York University.

During the first session several interesting conceptual models were put forward as tools, not only for conservators to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses, but also for communicating the underlying philosophies of conservation to external audiences. One, created by John Watson, is reproduced on page 6. The second session included information on potential new treatments for archaeological iron and waterlogged cork and on the uses of 3-d scanning for documenting and replicating artifacts. The third focused on the conservator’s ability to add to the technological record both through artifact studies and through non-destructive testing. While all the papers in this session were fascinating, one in particular brought a new analytical technique—the use of neutron diffraction analysis—to the table. The session on archives and repositories stressed the need to begin to take control of the process of creating archaeological collections as well as their use. Materials need to be cared for so they can be used, but greater efforts need to be made to ensure that collec-

tions care is done holistically and that it is sustainable. This is true not only of physical collections but also of digital collections. The role of conservators in this process was stressed by most speakers. The final session focused on four broad overlapping areas: outreach, professional collaboration, community involvement and the political/regulatory arena. Paper topics ranged from working with volunteers (see below) and involving descent communities (see below), to the conservator’s role in areas of conflict and the conservator’s ethical responsibility regarding looted artifacts.

The conference was well attended—over one hundred conservators and archaeologists from 7 different countries participated—and the discussion periods were fully used. One of the most heartening things about it was the number of archaeological conservation projects that are being carried out across the United States and within the Middle Atlantic region in particular. Projects such as the conservation of the Monitor, The Hunley and the Queen Anne’s Revenge have focused new light on the field and brought new energy and enthusiasm to it. It is intended that the proceedings of the conference will be published within the year. Several of the abstracts are reprinted here.

The Elements of Conservation: A Conceptual Model

John R. Watson

Conservator of Instruments

Department of Conservation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

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Marie Berducou has distilled the *objectives* of conservation into three: accessibility, durability, and integrity. The *actions* of conservation prompted by each of these objectives I have further categorized as investigation, intervention, and prevention. Like the periodic chart of the elements, the resulting matrix of objectives and actions constitutes a conceptual model showing relationships among the component parts of the conservation discipline. The model (see VCA newsletter page 6) can identify blind spots and imbalances. Built into the matrix are tensions that derive from the paradox of restoration and the overlap of interests between conservators and archaeologists.

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The Conservation of Archaeological Materials: Current Trends and Future Directions (continued)

(Continued from page 3)

The matrix also accommodates the diverse values of conservators and other stakeholders, particularly in the dichotomy between the economic and informational value of objects. The model thus sheds light on the meaning and role of conservation and on several of the controversies in which we sometimes find ourselves.

The model carries implications, for example, about the potential for archaeological conservators as collaborators with archaeologists. A certain division of labor between these specialties is beneficial, allowing each to excel in their separate areas that together would be too vast for a single person to master. However, too much segregation of conservators and archaeologists for the sake of convenience or territorialism is to forego a collaboration that reveals from the material past information that cannot be discovered any other way. The conservator's toolkit includes an array of investigative sciences and technologies that can reveal not only the morphology of an object, but also its relationships within the context. Objects are an integrated part of an environmental and cultural system, and so the work of the conservator informs and is informed by all parts of that system, including its material, social, religious, economic, and environmental subsystems. Conservators contribute tools and methods of investigation and intervention, and archaeologists contribute the questions that need to be asked of the material. The clarity of our picture of the past depends in part on the quality of that collaboration.

Non-Invasive Technological Study of Archaeological Iron Objects

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The understandable reluctance of curators to allow samples to be cut from metal artifacts has limited the amount of technological information that can potentially be extracted from the objects. This is particularly the case with early iron and steel artifacts, as practically all of the information regarding how the object was made and what it is composed of can only be determined by microscopic examination of a cut and polished internal

section. This paper presents the results of pilot experiments to develop a new, completely non-invasive method of microstructural and compositional analysis of archaeological iron, using the ISIS neutron diffraction facility at the Rutherford-Appleton Laboratory.

Neutron diffraction analysis is shown to be a viable, totally non-invasive, method of characterizing ancient iron artifacts. A high throughput of samples is possible, compared to, for example, metallographic sample preparation time. Although the method involves nuclear particles, it does not leave the objects radioactive. Neutrons are more penetrating than x-rays, and thus provide a more effective means of assessing preserved metal under corrosion layers than x-ray diffraction. However, due to the extreme microstructural heterogeneity of archaeological iron artifacts, further work is necessary to optimize the resolution of the method. A combination of neutron methods, e.g. diffraction, tomography, and chemical analysis by prompt-gamma activation analysis, could in future provide much more comprehensive non-destructive characterization of iron objects.

Care in the Community: The Volunteer Program at the Museum of London's Archaeological Archive

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The London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC), managed by the Museum of London, holds material and records from 5,000 London sites. The aim of the LAARC is to make this material accessible to researchers, schools, universities, local archaeology groups and the public. To support and promote the LAARC, conservators and curators developed an active program of events, learning activities and a volunteer-supported collection care program.

A recent three-year project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Getty Grant Program, funded the first phase of work to improve the stan-

The Conservation of Archaeological Materials: Current Trends and Future Directions (continued)

standard of packaging and documentation of material from the earliest sites (1970s and 80s). It was always planned that volunteers would be an essential part of the work, but the success of the volunteer program was unexpected.

The paper will describe various elements of this volunteer program including recruitment, induction courses and training materials, initiatives to motivate the volunteers, and the training and skills required by staff for dealing with volunteers. The outreach activities, a series of themed open days supported and often inspired by the volunteers, will also be featured.

The program has been a successful and unusual combination of conservation and public involvement on many levels. Volunteers were given a sustained and rewarding experience while contributing to genuine progress on collections care and documentation of the collection. Having conservators and volunteers jointly participating in public events enabled communication of conservation to a wide audience, and made evident the possibilities of using collections care as a way of including more people in the Museum of London's learning activities. On the strength of this volunteer program, the LAARC has been short listed for the Care of Collections award in the 2005 Conservation Awards (a high profile award in the UK, sponsored by several heritage institutions.)

The Museum is now developing inclusion programs to bring in different and varied audiences, and to raise awareness of careers in heritage work to young people. The potential of collections care work to introduce archaeological skills and to strengthen other transferable skills such as literacy, IT, presentation skills and team working will be assessed in a pilot project that is planned to begin in 2006.

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In 2003, two tombstones, one belonging to Lucy Ann Dunlop, a manumitted slave and the other to Robert Hill, a man believed to be her father, were excavated in Williamsburg, Virginia. Historical records showed that the tombstones had been uncovered in 1965 during routine maintenance, photographed and reburied in situ. In addition to the stones themselves, the 2003 excavation located a secondary burial containing the commingled remains of two individuals nearby. The archaeological circumstances in which the tombstones and the remains were originally excavated, reburied and subsequently excavated, as well as the identity and histories of the individuals, posed a number of issues related to their long-term disposition. In order to resolve some of these issues, it was both necessary and desirable to open the discussion up beyond the typical archaeologist, conservator, curator interplay. The result has been a dynamic and evolving project that has provided new histories and avenues of discovery, sparked internal debate and opened new lines of communication with other institutions in the town, including both the College of William and Mary and the First Baptist Church (one of the oldest African-American churches in North America). The presence of the stones in the laboratory during this decision-making process has also served as a powerful tool for explaining conservation approaches and rationales to the Foundation's guests, allowing the lab's staff to engage with our visitors in new ways.

THE ELEMENTS OF CONSERVATION: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL		John R. Watson, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation		
		Actions		
	Investigation	Intervention	Prevention	Communication
Accessibility Making the artifact in its historical form accessible and understandable to the present generation; (<i>aesthetic / cultural integrity</i>)	Analyze internal evidence of missing or altered material for visually and functionally accurate reintegration Where internal evidence is missing, analyze evidence from related examples and historical documents Scientific analysis of historic materials and construction	Restore historical form and aesthetic qualities Reduce concretions that obscure object Replace or infill missing material based on evidence	Design safe and accessible exhibit and storage environments Balance accessibility with use to limit wear and tear Turn to complete or partial reproductions to reduce or eliminate wear of historic artifacts or most vulnerable components	Advocate aesthetic reintegration (restoration) Share results of investigation; participate in interpretive dialog Record interpretations revealed during treatment Collaborate with owners and other shareholders
Durability Helping the artifact survive unchanged for study and use in the present and future generations (<i>structural & chemical integrity</i>)	Analyze efficacy of conservation materials Analyze properties of materials: physical, structure, stability, and aging Analyze deterioration causes, effects, byproducts, and stabilization Analyze conservation materials for stability and aging Analyze destructive effects of environment and use	Stabilize Clean surfaces of destructive deposits Reattach loose components Consolidate friable surfaces and unacceptably fragile materials Isolate incompatible materials Add protective coatings or barriers	Identify and reduce hazards to objects and to people working with them Reduce destructive environmental conditions Monitor environmental conditions Design safe moving containers and procedures Maintain emergency preparedness	Advocate stabilization Recommend maintenance and preservation procedures Advocate preservation statutes
Integrity Protecting for future generations the historical content physically encoded in the artifact; (<i>Stewardship; physical integrity.</i>)	Analyze condition problems and minimally intrusive treatment alternatives Analyze material evidence Identify materials and their historical uses to differentiate historical construction, use and alteration Analyze construction methods for effect on condition, stability and physical state Investigate object's past context and history to corroborate and interpret physical evidence	Minimize interventions Use highly targeted methods Consider non-treatment Select treatments that are minimally intrusive Make interventions detectable Aspire to "reversible" treatment alternatives Consider preservation-worthiness of past alterations	Safeguard original material and other cultural content Monitor and document changes in condition See to the archival storage of components and materials removed during treatment	Advocate preservation of evidence & evolved state Collaborate with shareholders to accommodate diverse values Record condition assessments and conservation Interventions See to the archival storage of documentation Recommend methods to protect vulnerable material evidence
Practicality Adapting to economic, safety, and human resource considerations	Avoid investigations to answer irrelevant questions Limit investigation to fit time and money constraints	Reduce intervention to fit time and cost constraints Increase intervention to enhance economic values Concede to lab safety	Balance cost and benefit in planning preventive conservation measures Be practical in managing risk for artifacts	Keep documentation appropriate but economical in time and cost Advance the discipline through publications and other discourse

***The Maymont Council for Conservation Preservation and Restoration
invites you to attend a Council Luncheon and Program:***

Scott W. Nolley
Conservator

"The Art of Conservation"

Including Maymont Council Funded Projects

Wednesday, February 1, 2006

Twelve o'clock noon

Maymont's Garden Hall

1700 Hampton Street, Richmond, VA

Lecture and luncheon – \$15.

To reserve your seat, please call Dotty Robinson, 358-7166 ext. 341 by Friday, January 27, 2006.

**The University of Delaware Art Conservation Department, Winterthur Museum, Beauvoir (the Jefferson
Davis Home and Presidential Library) and the Ohr-O'Keefe Museums**

Immediate Appointment for a

Gulf Coast Regional Preservation Consultant

12-month temporary position

Hurricane Katrina has had a devastating impact on Mississippi's Gulf Coast museums, and on-site preservation and collection maintenance expertise is urgently needed in this region. Applications are sought for a temporary (12-month), full-time conservator to work immediately with two Biloxi institutions (Beauvoir and Ohr-O'Keefe), and to act as a conservation/preservation resource for other Mississippi Gulf Coast cultural heritage institutions. Beauvoir and Ohr-O'Keefe's collections are of immense importance to our understanding of 19th-century American history and material culture.

The successful applicant will be expected to spend 65% of his or her time on Beauvoir's collection and 35% of his or her time on general conservation consultation for Ohr-O'Keefe and other Gulf Coast cultural institutions. The position will consist of assisting Gulf Coast museums with emergency stabilization of artifacts, development of a long-term plan/prioritization for the treatment and preventive care of the affected collections, construction and/or modification of collections management plans for affected institutions that includes artifact conservation and preservation, development of emergency response plans, identification of regional resources for preventive and treatment-oriented conservation of collections, coordination of five one-day conservation workshops for regional institutions, oversight of summer work projects for art conservation students, and development of a lasting relationship between Gulf Coast institutions and the conservation community.

The successful applicant will have at least 3 years of postgraduate experience, strong communication, administrative, collaborative, and problem-solving skills, and the ability to work independently and in challenging conditions. Prior emergency response, preventive conservation, American material culture, and education/training experience is preferable.

This 12-month, full-time position includes a generous salary and housing allowance, full University of Delaware benefits, travel funds, and support for AIC annual meeting expenses. The successful applicant will report to the Winterthur/UD Katrina Response Team directors.

Visit <http://aic.stanford.edu/news/UofDel.GulfCoast.pdf> for more information.

Thank you to all and a special thanks to Mary Studt, Jennifer Zemanek, Tracy Bryan, and Michelle McClintick for making the Winter Party a wonderful success!

Did you know?

Museum Artifacts Across the U.S. Are in Danger, According to Survey

Millions of rare artifacts in museums and libraries across the United States are slowly disintegrating because of improper storage, according to a survey said to be the largest-ever look at the condition of such collections.

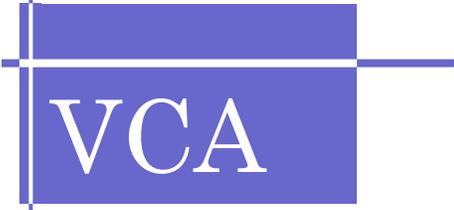
Damage is occurring at institutions of all sizes, but is worse at small-town museums and historical societies, said the report, to be made public Tuesday at the New York Public Library.

For the rest of the story, check out <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=1379391>

The VCA Directory will soon be published.

It's still not too late to pay your dues.

A nominating committee will be elected at the January meeting. The Committee will be seeking to fill these upcoming positions in May 2006: Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer; Committee Chairs: Refreshments (one vacancy), Education (one vacancy), Programs (one vacancy), Publications (one vacancy), Bylaws, and Disaster Response.



VCA

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Richmond, VA 23220

Next VCA Members Meeting

Thursday, January 19

**5:30 p.m.-
Refreshments and
business meeting**

6:30 p.m.- Program

Location: VMFA

**See page one for
details!**