

# NEWSLETTER OF THE

### VIRGINIA CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 4314, Richmond, VA 23220 May 2013 ~ Volume 22, No. 5

# From the President

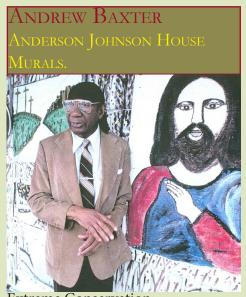
On 16 May The Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center in Newport News will welcome the VCA for the next Members Meeting. The Downing-Gross is home to a striking, dynamic collection of folk art created by Elder Johnson, a self taught preacher, musician and artist who came to the attention of the art world later in life. For many years Johnson maintained a house of worship in Newport News where he showed hundreds of his artistic works. His home eventually was procured by the city of Newport News and demolished as part of an urban renewal project. Fortunately the artwork was rescued and collected by the Downing-Gross where it now is a featured on permanent exhibition. During the meeting long-time VCA member Andrew Baxter will discuss his role and work in helping to save the Johnson artwork and prepare it for museum display. His presentation promises to be exciting, thoughtful and perhaps even worthy of debate. You will not want to miss this event, the last members meeting of the current program season.

This final meeting before the summer break also will include the annual election of the VCA Board of Directors. You already should have received the slate of candidates for the 2013-14 Board, and it is included in this issue of the VCA Newsletter as well. Absentee voting is permitted by those of you who may not be able to make it in person to the meeting (see instructions on the ballot form). There also will be a member vote for approval of the VCA budget for 2013-2014, as proposed by the standing Board. Accordingly this is a very important meeting and I encourage each of you to be there in support of the operation of your organization.

Much appreciation should be shown to the Programs Committee Co-Chairpersons, and Suzanne Collins in particular, for making the arrangements that resulted in the April field trip to Montpelier. The staff at Montpelier showed our group grand hospitality. We were treated

# VCA Members' Meeting

Thursday, May 16th, 2013, 5:30 pm.
Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center
Newport News



Extreme Conservation:
The 17-year Journey with Anderson
Johnson's Faith Mission

to a special tour and inside information about the restoration of the mansion during the past decade and continuing today. We also were delighted to hear from and speak with members of the Archaeology Department about their current work. The forecast rain even held off, the "cherry on top" of a very enjoyable visit.

This spring Karri Richardson of the Programs Committee also spent time to conduct a survey of the membership to gain feedback about the types of programs that are preferred and the range of conservation subjects that are of most interest. The information obtained will be used directly as planning is made for future programs and events. A summation of the survey results has been

included in this newsletter. Thank you very much to all of you who responded to the survey and made the effort to express your opinions and ideas. If you did not complete the survey and desire to let the Board know your thoughts about programmatic issues, just contact Karri at your convenience and she will provide you with the questionnaire and instructions for response.

The conclusion of the May Members Meeting will bring to completion my second consecutive term as VCA President, which will mark the end of my tenure in this office after four years of service. Over this period of time I have had the opportunity and pleasure to work with so many of you and become more than casual acquaintances, for which I am grateful. It has been an honor to stand with each of you, Board members and members at large, while striving to enhance the organization, its operation and its offerings. My intention has been to help the organization attend to the interests of the membership, surely the most important responsibility of the Board. In addition, however, I sought to bring renewed focus towards working with other associations committed to cultural arts and history, and making the collective knowledge of the membership more available to the interested public. Perhaps I could have done a better job, but I did try to do my best.

There is a lot more that the VCA can do to attain these goals if the direction of the Board so remains next year and beyond. I encourage and challenge the Board and all members to continue with programs that highlight the importance of art and artifact conservation, discuss the various conservation projects in the region and educate our members, colleagues, members of other interested groups and the general public. The VCA actively should endeavor to become and be recognized as the primary source for information about art and artifact conservation in the state of Virginia. Does not VCA stand for Virginia Conservation Association? If the VCA is not of this purpose, we are not fully embracing our interests and chosen responsibility as an organization to promote



#### **Officers**

President: Frederick Wallace
Vice President: Heather Logue Emerson
Secretary: James Christopher Wilkins
Treasurer: Nancy Beck

#### **Committee Chairs**

Bylaws: Mark Lewis
Disaster Response: Kathy Garrett-Cox
Education: Carol Givens
Membership: Thomas Snyder

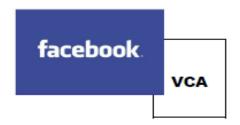
Outreach: Will Hoffman

Programs: Suzanne M. Collins, Karri RichardsonPublications: Tracy Bernabo, Charles PhillipsWeb Management: Valinda Carroll

conservation and collections care of cultural heritage as either professionals or lay persons. Let's make it happen.

My sincere thanks to everyone for your support and involvement with the VCA over these past years and on into the future.

Frederick Wallace -- President



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Or on Facebook!
Virginia¬Conservation¬Association

March Membership Business Meeting Summary

Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA March 21, 2013

#### PROCEEDINGS OF THE BUSINESS PORTION:

Fred Wallace (VCA President) welcomed everyone for attending the meeting with special thanks being extended to Stacy Rusch for providing a venue at the Virginia Historical Society and to Heather Emerson (VCA Vice-President) for organizing and providing refreshments. Fred informed the members that a current financial statement is available from Nancy Beck (VCA Treasurer).

Karri Richardson (Programs Co-Chair) distributed a questionnaire to the attending members regarding programming; what was liked, what was disliked and a space for writing potential ideas for upcoming meetings.

Fred discussed the upcoming VCA fieldtrip to Montpelier, home of James and Dolly Madison, set for Friday April 19. The trip has been scheduled for a Friday to take advantage of present staff, special tours and special access to other areas. There will be an archaeological lab tour and Mark Winger (Architectural Historian) will give a talk about the five year restoration of the house. Lunch will be supplied by a local gourmet deli for those who sign up for it. Family and friends are welcome.

Fred informed the members that the VCA annual elections will take place on May 16. Positions open for candidates include president, vice president, secretary, programs co-chair, publications co-chair, outreach chair, and refreshments chair. Patricia Sellenger (Nominating Committee Chair) can be contacted to submit names of potential candidates.

Carol Givens (Education Chair) reminded the membership of the Chris Stavroudis workshop on the Modular Cleaning Program to be held on July 15-19, 2013. The workshop will be partially funded by a Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC) grant.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will host the event. The workshop will cost \$550-650 per attendee depending on the FAIC grant. Payment can be made by check, full amount up front. Carol reminded the membership that there are only 15 spaces available for the workshop.

The next members meeting will be held May 16 at the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center in Newport News where Andrew Baxter will be presenting on the Anderson Johnson House Murals.

Summary Submitted by

Chris Wilkins - VCA Secretary

### VCA NEEDS YOUR HELP!

We are looking for volunteers who are willing to bring a dish to share at the next VCA member's meeting on May 16 at the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center in Newport News.

Please contact Heather Logue (heather.logue@hotmail.com)

if you would like to help.

### **Andrew Baxter Lecture**

### 16 May

at the Members Meeting at The Downing-Gross Cultural Center, Newport News

### Extreme Conservation:

The 17-year Journey with Anderson Johnson's Faith Mission.

Please join the VCA for Andrew Baxter's presentation on the painstaking dismantling, conservation and installation of nationally renowned folk artist Anderson Johnson's Faith Mission. Johnson (1915-1998) was a self-anointed evangelical preacher who spent his early years traveling the country and preaching the Gospel. He settled in Newport News in 1985, and, in an effort to continue his ministry, he covered the exterior and interior of his house with hundreds of religious and folk life paintings (many painted directly on the plaster walls and ceilings). Using basic house paint, roofing tar, and any piece of scrap material he could find, Johnson transformed the two-story house into his Faith Mission.

In 1995, the City of Newport News purchased Faith Mission and other surrounding buildings with the intent of demolishing them in the name of urban renewal. Andrew Baxter was called in to carefully dismantle the building and save as many of the paintings as possible. Facing several conservation, environmental, and community challenges, Baxter and his team successfully removed the great majority of Johnson's paintings. Following their removal, the paintings were stabilized with plywood backings and put into storage in a local warehouse. The artworks sat in storage for over 15 years before the City of Newport News found a new location for their display. In 2012, Baxter was summoned back to Newport News, but this time to the new Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center where a gallery had been reserved for the permanent display of Johnson's Faith Mission. Baxter conserved and installed over 600 paintings and architectural salvage pieces to create the DG-CAC's Working in the Spirit: The Visionary Art & Life of Elder Anderson Johnson, 1915-1998.

Karri Richardson - VCA Program Co-Chair

For more information Andrew Johnson and the Faith Mission, please see the following links:

http://www.downinggross.org/facilities/anderson-johnson-gallery

http://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2012/braxton-plays-keyrole-in-creation-of-anderson-johnson-exhibit.php

#### **Directions:**

The Downing-Gross Cultural Center, 2410 Wickham Ave. Newport News, VA 23607 Phone: (757) 247- 8950

From the west:

- 64 East to exit 264 to merge onto I-664 south toward Downtown Newport News/Chesapeake/Suffolk
- Take exit 6 for 26th Street/27th Street
- Keep left at the fork and follow signs for 27th Street; merge onto 27th Street
- Turn right onto Jefferson Avenue
- Turn left at the 2nd cross street onto 25th Street/Martin L. King, Jr. Way
- Turn right onto Wickham Avenue, the DG-CAC will be on the left.

# Anderson Johnson House Murals.







# A Tale of Two Sofas:

# Belter Furniture at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

On March 21, 2013, VMFA Chief Conservator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts Kathy Gillis gave a fascinating talk on the conservation of the museum's two Belter sofas. John Henry Belter (1804-1863) was a German immigrant cabinetmaker operating in New York who became famous for his distinctive rosewood Rococo Revival furniture. Belter laminated layers of rosewood together to form concave chair and sofa backs with decorative high-relief carvings.

The documented history of the VMFA's Belter sofas starts with a 1907 photo taken of them in the Georgetown residence of John Roll McLean (1848-1916). McLean was the owner and publisher of the Washington Post. McLean commissioned John Russell Pope to design a massive house in which he could display his art and furniture collection. Photographer Frances Benjamin Johnson was enlisted to photograph the interior of the house in 1907, hence providing the first photographic record of the two sofas. McLean's son, Edward, inherited the house and its contents in 1916. Following Edward's divorce in 1931, the house was sold but the sofas remained with his ex-wife, Evelyn Walsh. Upon her death in 1947, the sofas were photographed for an auction catalog of her estate. It is not known for sure who bought the sofas at that time, but they later surfaced in the collection of Mrs. Hamilton Farnum Morrison. Mrs. Morrison gave the sofas to the VMFA in 1954 in memory of her parents. Upon their entry into the VMFA collection, the sofas were reupholstered and placed in the galleries to be used as seating per Mrs. Morrison's wishes.

Although the two sofas are very similar in scale, they are not a matching pair. The carvings are slightly different, one having a flower basket along the top edge and the other a cornucopia. There are also differences in the floral and fruit sections along the bottom rail. However, what ties them together is the fact that they are both gilded. These two sofas seem to be the only two pieces of documented Belter furniture that are gilded. There is no evidence that Belter ever gilded any of his furniture. Furthermore, Belter's mastery of rosewood laminating techniques resulted in a lustrous effect which needed no enhancements such as gilding.

Despite the presence of the gilding, the VMFA is confident that the sofas were in fact made by Belter because of their resemblance to other documented Belter sofas, the elaborate laminate and carving techniques, and evidence of known Belter upholstery techniques. It is believed that the sofas most likely started life without any gilding, and that a later owner,

perhaps John McLean, had them gilded. It seems logical that McLean gilded the sofas because the 1907 photograph shows other pieces of gilded furniture in the same room. The sofas in the 1907 photograph were definitely gilded, and it is even possible to see gilding over small areas of carving losses, further indication that they were not originally gilded.

Microscopy evidence proves that the sofas were originally finished with resin and wax. Both of the sofas were later finished with water and oil gilding (this was done to add depth to the carved surfaces). When the areas of oil gilding were analyzed, it was found that gold leaf had been applied over the original oil resin varnish. Where water gilding had been applied, the original oil resin varnish had been stripped and gesso applied in its place.

With this evidence firmly in hand, the museum began a conversation with furniture curators and conservators about the best treatment for the sofas. After much debate, it was decided to retain the gilding on one sofa and restore the original wood finish on the second sofa. Retaining the gilding on one sofa would preserve the evolution of its decoration, while restoring the second sofa would allow for its appearance "the way God and Belter intended."

Kathy and her team cleaned the gilded sofa with the intent of restoring it to its state after the first gilding campaign. They removed previous touch-ups which consisted of bronze and acrylic paint, and in-painted and re-gilded as necessary to restore the gilded surface. The existing upholstery was left intact.

For the second sofa, Kathy and her team faced the daunting challenge of removing all the gilding from the very ornate carving. They found that the oil gilding was easy to remove because the original resin varnish layer separated the gilding from the wood. However, the areas of water gilding were very difficult to remove as the varnish had been striped and gesso applied directly to the wood. They applied water and poultices to remove the gesso, but this had the effect of causing the original laminate glue to swell temporarily. Fortunately, this did not cause any de-lamination. Following the removal of all of the gilding, resin was applied where it had previously been stripped and wax was applied to areas of original varnish.

Textile conservator Jennifer Zemanek reupholstered the restored sofa. In deconstructing the upholstery, Jennifer

identified several upholstery fabrication techniques were very similar to known Belter upholstery (the Met had recently completed a similar re-upholstery project). During her investigation, Jennifer did find small pieces of newspaper that had been used in between the layers of wood in the lamination process (another Belter hallmark). One piece of paper carried the date 1848. This evidence dates the sofa 1848 or later.

Finally, VMFA Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts, Dr. Susan J. Rawles, researched period upholstery and consulted with the Met before choosing a blue damask in mid-19th century pattern. The deep blue color sets off the dark wood, further enhancing the beauty of the Belter carvings.

Karri Richardson - VCA Program Co-Chair







Photos by Travis Fullerton©

April Board Meeting Summary

James City Library, Norge, VA April 17, 2012

#### Attendees:

Fred Wallace, Tom Snyder, Valinda Carroll, Tracy Bernabo, Will Hoffman, Heather Emerson, Nancy Beck, Suzanne Collins, Karri Richardson, Kathy Garrett-Cox and Chris Wilkins

#### Proceedings:

Fred Wallace (VCA President) started the April board meeting by giving thanks to the outgoing board members. He pressed the board to find more willing members to run for offices on the board. The ballot for the May elections will be sent to the membership on April 25.

Fred talked on behalf of Carol Givens (Education Chair) about the Chris Stavroudis Modular Cleaning Workshop to be held July 15-18. Under discussion were the plans for the week of the workshop including a reception at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on Monday, coffee and bag lunch at the Virginia Historical Society on Tuesday, cocktail party and private dinner on Thursday and coffee on Friday. Registration for the workshop will be \$600 for AIC members and \$750 for non-AIC members. The workshop capacity has expanded from 15 to 20 registrants.

Fred suggested to the board that a portion of the VCA reserve funds be invested. There has been a balance of more than \$6000 for the last several years and a return on investment would benefit the VCA. Nancy Beck (VCA Treasurer) gave the Treasurer's Report and indicated that starting balance as of August 1, 2012 is \$9,385.33. Income total since August has been \$2,645.00 while expenses for the same period is \$1,024.40. Nancy informed the board that part of the income was from the registration for the fieldtrip to Montpelier and that a portion of the money would be paid out for the trip. Balance as of April 17 is \$11,005.93. Fred informed the board that \$400 that is set aside for two members to attend and present a program at the Virginia Associa-

tion of Museums (VAM) annual meeting was not used this past year. This money could be used to off-set costs associated with the Modular Cleaning Workshop or another program. Discussion turned to the proposed budget for 2013-2014. Some changes were made including a decrease in refreshments and an increase in programs. The proposed budget will be open for vote during the next member's meeting.

Fred indicated that the next member's meeting will be May 16 at the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center in Newport News where Andrew Baxter will be presenting on the Anderson Johnson House Murals. The VCA was asked to consider variouss ways to inform potentially interested parties about this meeting program. The consensus was that the Downing-Gross should be responsible for press releases to regional papers and the VCA will place an announcement on the Conservation DistList.

Suzanne Collins (Programs Co-Chair) informed the board that there has been an addition of a 15 minute archaeological talk by Matt Reaves to the Montpelier fieldtrip. She also requested money to pay for the lunches of those who are presenting. The board agreed to this request.

Karri Richardson (Programs Co-Chair) tallied the results of the member's survey distributed during the March meeting at the Virginia Historical Society. The results will be published in the next newsletter.

Valinda Carroll (Web Management Chair) stated that the service directory should be completed by the time of the next meeting.

The board applauded Fred for his service as VCA President.

Summary Submitted by

Chris Wilkins - VCA Secretary

#### **Programs Survey Results**

Which of the following programs have you attended during the 2012-2013 program year?

We had 26 surveys completed and of those, only 5 had attended the March meeting only; most of the remaining 21 people had attended at least three of the four meetings (yeah!).

Do you have any comments of feedback about the program content or themes so far this year?

Almost everyone surveyed had positive comments (8 people did not answer this question). Comments included:

- "I thought they were great a nice mix of dis ciplines and topics."
- "Excellent job I like the variety"
- "Programs have been very thought-provoking as well as informative and interesting."
- "I like how there is no preference for certain types of conservation. I like how there is a broad range of topics."

Do you have any program and/or field trip suggestions for the 2013/2014 program year?

- "Could we have a "What were they thinking?" evening? (ex. textiles soaked in coffee; concrete fills these are real)
- "I'd love to hear Bruce Suffield talk about a project or research he's done and/or Mark Lewis"
- "Field trip to Gunston Hall"
- "Bermuda Hundred, Flowerdew Hundred"
- "Visits to local historic sites historic houses & their conservation/presentation issues."
- "More meetings at historic houses if possible."
- "Menokin, Hillwood in DC"

# Considering choice of future programs, how would you rank your interest (1-4; 1 = highest, 4 = lowest)?

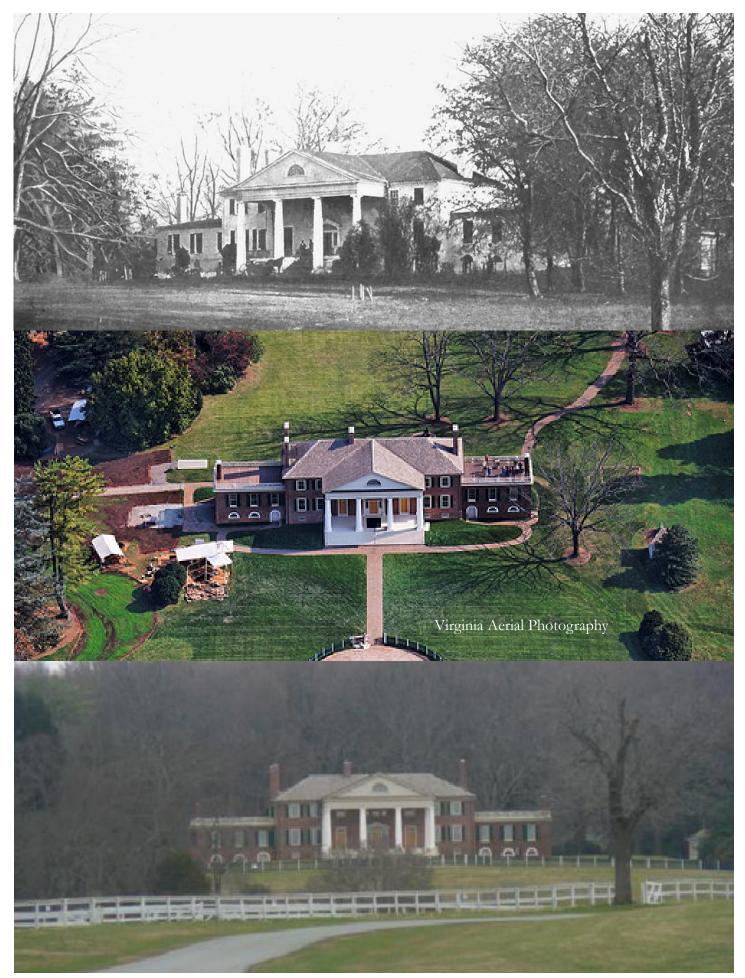
	1	2	3	4
<b>Technical Aspects</b>	5	7	6	
Philosophy	8	6	5	
Case Studies	11	6	3	1
Other	1		1	2

So the most popular option for future programs is Case Studies in Conservation followed by Philosophy of Conservation. Some of the "Other" options included:

- "Programs of sites, buildings, art, etc. saved/restored/protected"
- "Site/Lab visits"
- "Tours of places not normally available to the general public"

Do you have any comments or suggestions to add to the survey results?

If so, please email Programs Co-Chair Karri Richardson at kjrichardson@mac.com.



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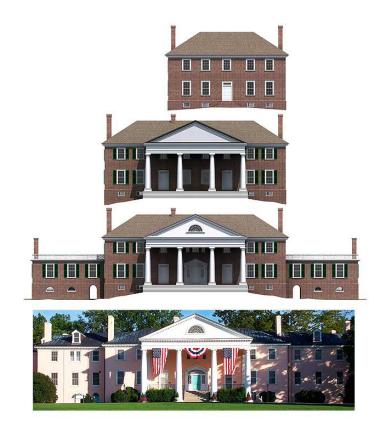
#### Montpelier Field Trip

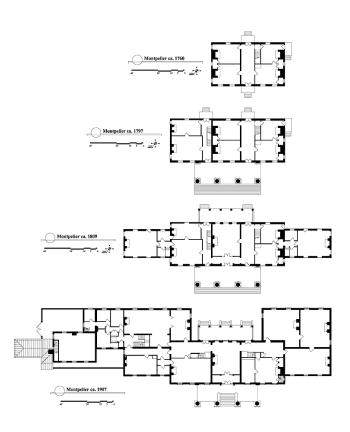
VCA members, relatives and friends enjoyed the opportunity to experience gracious hospitality at the home of James Madison on April 19th. A house tour was lead by Meg Kennedy, curator of collections at Montpelier. Typically Ms. Kennedy does not give tours, but she gave an enthusiastic insiders' perspective speaking to the interests of the conservators, curators and house museum people in our group. Ms. Kennedy discussed the discovery of original furnishings retrieved, the deductive reasoning behind the selection of carpets, drapery, and wall paper and the fabulous finds yet to arrive.

We lunched in the beautiful duPont Grand Salon and there Mark R. Wenger, lead architect, of the 5 year, 20 million dollar house restoration, spoke about the clues found within the house that uncovered President Madison's home from the additions made during duPont family's residence at Montpelier.

A bonus presentation was given by Matt Reeves, Director of Archaeology, concerning the current and future archaeology excavations. Evidently, when the du Pont family lived at Montpelier the fields were not cultivated for agricultural crops. The farm structures such as tobacco barns and slave quarters that had collapsed within these fields were left undisturbed. Pristine sites for archaeological discovery await Matt and his crew. It is very exciting. We ended our visit with a tour of the Archaeology Lab where Kimberly Trickett spoke with us about the procedures involved in preserving what has been found at Montpelier to date.

Suzanne Collins - VCA Program Co-Chair





# VCA The Modular Cleaning Workshop

# VIRGINIA CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION www.virginiaconservationassociation.org

### Instructor Chris Stavroudis, Conservator in Private Practice, West Hollywood, CA

Location: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia

Dates: July 15 -19, 2013

Partners: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), Virginia Conservation Association (VCA) and The Founda-

tion of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC) funding in part by a FAIC Development Grant

Registration fee: \$600 AIC Members; \$750 non-members

Local Coordinators: Carol Boyers Givens (VCA) and Sheila Payaqui (VMFA)

Number of Participants: 20

Description: The Modular Cleaning Program is a systematic approach to cleaning works of art utilizing water-borne systems, solvents, solvent gels and emulsions. This five-day workshop will provide conservators with a series of concentrated aqueous stock solutions, modular solvent gels, and the materials to mix a range of emulsions and microemulsions. The provided database, "The Modular Cleaning Program", assists the conservator in formulating and combining stock solutions, which allows the conservator to create optimized cleaning solutions for more precise and tailored treatments.

The workshop consists of approximately 2 days of lecture interspersed into the hands-on workshop. The lectures present the scientific underpinnings of aqueous and solvent solubility theory in as non-technical terms as possible. The goal is to make the participants comfortable with the theoretical underpinnings of cleaning and give them the tools to manipulate that knowledge to customize cleaning systems. The more precisely a cleaning system can be matched to a particular cleaning challenge, the better the success of the overall conservation treatment.

Participants will have the chance to apply what they have learned during lectures at lab time. Initially, the participants will mix the stock solutions, both contributing to the set of solutions they will take back to their studios, but also getting comfortable with mixing solutions, using pH meters and seeing how pH affects the chemistry of the materials we use. While the instructor is a paintings conservator, the theories and solutions can be, and are being applied to many different conservation cleaning problems. Treatments on and discussion about other art materials are welcomed and benefit everyone as these allow the theory to be better understood.

Registration (form on website): Registration will be on a first-come-first-served basis and all fees are due at time of registration. Participation for this workshop is by order of enrollment and is limited to 20 participants. Participants must have professional experience in conservation or have completed substantial study, and have a working knowledge of basic laboratory procedures and safety.

Information and Travel / accommodations please contact:

Carol Givens: cbgivens09@gmail.com;

Sheila Payaqui: sheila.payaqui@vmfa.museum

# **Ballot for VCA Board Election 2013**

President					
Rick Vogt					
Conservator, Richmond, VA					
Write In					
Vice President					
Marla Curtis					
Conservator, Williamsburg, VA					
Write In					
Cogneter					
Secretary  Dath Fulton					
Beth Fulton					
Assistant Conservator, Richmond Conservation Studio					
Write In					
Programs Co-Chairperson					
Mary Scott Andrews					
Conservator, Richmond, VA					
Write In					
Bylaws Chairperson					
Mark Lewis (incumbent)					
Conservator, Chrysler Museum of Art					
Write In					
Outreach Chairperson					
Will Hoffman (incumbent)					
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Conservator, The Mariners' Museum					
Write In					
Publications Chairperson					
Charles Phillips (incumbent)					
Conservator, Winston-Salem, NC					

Note: The election will be held during the 16 May 2013 Members Meeting at the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, Newport News, VA. Send absentee ballots by Tuesday 14 May to: <a href="mailto:info@virginiaconservationassociation.org">info@virginiaconservationassociation.org</a> or to Nominating Committee, VCA, P.O. Box 4314, Richmond, VA 23220

Write In

# VCA Members Meeting Schedule for 2013

Date	Speaker	Topic	Location
January 24	Charles Phillips	Anastylosis with Glass Fill	Maymont Richmond
March 21	Kathy Gillis	Belter Sofa, VMFA	VMFA Richmond
May 16	Andrew Baxter	Restoration of Anderson Johnson House Murals	Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center
			Newport News

Virginia Conservation Association P.O. Box 4314 Richmond, VA 23220 www.VirginiaConservationAssociation.org



Next VCA Members Meeting Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, Newport News 16 May 2013

Andrew Baxter Extreme Conservation: The 17-year Journey with Anderson Johnson's Faith Mission