

VIRGINIA CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION



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The Virginia Conservation Association (VCA) promotes the care and preservation of cultural materials. The VCA offers education and training for those involved in conservation and provides a forum for discussion of pertinent issues and new developments in the field.

The VCA is open to anyone with an interest in the care and preservation of art and historic artifacts.

virginiaconservationassociation.org

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Upcoming Events

Presentation on the Bray School at
Colonial Williamsburg

October 4, 2023

Field trip to Charlottesville

Spring 2023

Letter from the President

Welcome to the first VCA newsletter of our 2023-24 season! I am pleased to take on the position of VCA president at this time, knowing that the previous board, under the positive, dynamic leadership of former president Paige Schmidt, accomplished remarkable goals and made important decisions that will ensure the future of the VCA for years to come.

Paige and the board took on the reorganization of the VCA begun by her predecessor, Kathryn Ridgway — a task prompted by such issues as a large and unwieldy number of board positions, declining membership, fewer attendees at meetings, limited outreach, and a perceived lack of response by members to requests for meeting ideas, participation, etc. Paige and her board undertook the following important initiatives to address these issues:



F. Carey Howlett, VCA President

- The board is now much smaller, limited to the positions of president, secretary, treasurer, publications, and membership. We believe this will not only address the difficult task of filling vacant positions, but will expedite decision-making and better serve the goals of the VCA. Board meetings are now much easier to attend for our far-flung members: all board meetings are now regularly conducted using Zoom.
- This month the VCA will unveil its newly-designed website. The board hired a professional website developer for the design. This new website will better reflect the activities of our group and will be much easier to update than our previous site.
- Elizabeth Robson, our membership chair, is automating our membership list using a program that will greatly enhance the renewal process and should aid us in the retention of members. How many of us have unwittingly let our membership lapse at times? This new system should help with automated, targeted reminders. By the way, now is the time to renew your membership!
- Regarding our meeting schedule, we are no longer obligated by our by-laws to an annual schedule of five meetings. Nonetheless, Marla Curtis, our programs chair, proved last year that members will come out for meetings on a range of interesting topics, and she intends to continue with an enticing schedule of programs in the coming year.
- Jackie Peterson-Grace, our publications chair, produces an entertaining, visually exciting and informative newsletter, keeping us up-to-date on all meetings, events and initiatives of the group. I can personally attest to Jackie's skill as a journalist: her write-up of last November's talk on the Flagler dining room chair tapestries I gave along with Susan Adler and with help from Suzanne Collins perfectly documented the goals and tasks of the project.
- The VCA accomplished a major outreach objective over the past year, producing a highly informative series of five collections care videos in partnership with the Virginia Association of Museums and funded by the National Endowment for Humanities, with support from Colonial Williamsburg, the Kluge-Ruhe Museum, Monticello, the Mariners' Museum and Curtis Fine Art Conservation. These videos are available on the websites of the VCA and VAM.
- We re-instituted the annual VCA Winter Party last year, the only purely social VCA event of the year. Held at the partially restored 1871 Italianate home of Beth and Charlie Cuthbert in Petersburg. Charlie

and Beth have generously offered to host the event again this year, with the house fully restored and furnished.

The items above comprise a combination of useful changes to the operations of the VCA, a return to some of our older activities, and some remarkable new achievements for the group. I thank Paige Schmidt and her board for their hard work! I hope for an equally successful 2023-24 season, but member participation is key. With a much smaller board from now on, the VCA will be ever more reliant on ideas and assistance from our members. We welcome any ideas you may have for meeting topics, special tours, educational outreach or in-house workshops or courses. We hope to hear from you, and don't be surprised if we even come calling for your ideas and support!

Carey

Upcoming Events

First Member's Meeting of the 2023-2024 Year

For the first member's meeting of the year Matthew Webster, Executive Director, Grainger Department of Architectural Preservation and Research at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, will speak with us about the Bray school. He will discuss the school's history and its recent move to Francis Street, including challenges faced during the move and plans for the building's stabilization and presentation. This meeting will take place on **October 4th** at The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Stay tuned for more information and an announcement about the time and location!



The Bray School in its new location at the corner of Francis and Nassau Streets in Williamsburg.

There will also be a field trip to Charlottesville next Spring to see "Madayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Paintings from Yirrkala" at the Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia. In tandem with the exhibition, we have been invited to tour the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, hosted by Nicole Wade, Collection Manager. While there, we will visit storage where Nicole and Amy & Greg Byrne will discuss exhibition and treatment challenges related to the traveling exhibition. We have tentatively planned this program for April 20th.

North American Textile Conservation Conference

October 23-27, 2023

The Conservation Department at Colonial Williamsburg is preparing to welcome the 14th North American Textile Conservation Conference. The weeklong meeting will open with a series of workshops, local tours, and two and a half days of presentations that will explore the theme, *Considering Costume: The Conservation of Apparel, Adornment and Accessories*. So far nearly 100 attendees are expected with more joining virtually for the simulcast talk presentations via Zoom. Registration at the regular rate of \$390 will remain open until September 30, with student registration for in-person attendance (\$170) and virtual registration (\$120) options available. The full program of events can be found on NATCC's website <https://natconference.com/>.

Pitt, Peale, and the Patriots Symposium

September 9, 2023

Come to Stratford Hall for a multi-perspective exploration of Westmoreland County, Virginia's 1768 portrait of British statesman William Pitt by the noted artist Charles Willson Peale. The portrait embodies a fascinating moment in Virginia history — informing us of the ideals and actions that led to the Revolution while at the same time giving important insight into the development of the American fine art tradition. Edmund Jenings of Maryland and London gifted the portrait to the “gentlemen [and women] of Westmoreland” through Richard Henry Lee. The painting hung at Lee residences Chantilly and Stratford Hall before settling finally in the Westmoreland County Museum. An exquisite reproduction painting and complementary frame now adorns the parlor at Stratford Hall.



Dr. J. Patrick Mullins, Associate Professor of History and Director of Public History at Marquette University, will present a keynote address on the political significance of the portrait and its emblemology. Lucinda Dukes Edinberg, Curator, Hammond-Harwood House Museum, will look at the painting from an art historical perspective, examining the career of Charles Willson Peale. Realist painter and accomplished portraitist Bradley Stevens and conservators F. Carey Howlett and Sandy Jensen will discuss the research, artistry and technical skills necessary to reproduce the historically accurate reproduction of the Pitt portrait.

The symposium will take place in the Council House at Stratford Hall, followed by a reception and a viewing of the original portrait at the old Westmoreland County

Courthouse in Montross. To register or for more information go to <https://www.simplertix.com/e/pitt-peale-the-patriots-symposium-tickets-135637>.

VCA Member's Meeting Summary

May 25, 2023

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Sculpture Garden

On a beautiful spring evening the VCA gathered in the sculpture garden of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to reconnect. A brief business meeting was held over refreshments, during which Carey Howlett and Claire Martin were announced as the new VCA president and secretary, respectively. The board gave a brief update about revamping the VCA website and thanked outgoing board members Paige Schmidt and Sara Ludueña.

The evening's program began with a presentation from Debbie Linn, Interim Chief Conservator of the Susan and David Goode Center for Advanced Study in Art Conservation, who spoke about the analysis and recoating of *Chloe* by Jaume Plensa. Constructed in 2017, the white textured coating of the sculpture began to fail almost immediately. Within months of installation, the coating had visible cracks and discoloration that quickly worsened. Damage was concentrated on the back of the sculpture, which remains largely shaded and much damper than the front.



A portion of the back of the sculpture before treatment, showing large sections of flaking coating, dirt, mold, and lichens.



Several sandblasting materials were tested to evaluate their effectiveness and impact on the sculpture's textured surface.

of which is a two-part epoxy, required very specific temperature, relative humidity, and time parameters for application. The perfect weather window fell within two and a half days in late October that, of course, coincided with a significant fundraising event for the museum. Working efficiently and safely, the team was able to apply all components of the coating to the sculpture. Going forward the sculpture is gently power washed twice

Analysis helped illuminate the inherent issues with the sculpture's materials. The textured white surface was achieved with a gel coat containing marble dust, followed by a polyurethane top layer. Cracks had formed in the polyurethane and filled with dirt. The artist's studio was contacted, and conversations resulted in the selection of a new coating. The failing coating was to be removed by sandblasting. A local company was contracted to approach the coating removal sensitively, and testing determined that an abrasive slurry of water and medium grit crushed recycled glass was the most efficient and effective method of removal that preserved the original texture of the sculpture. Following testing, coating removal took only two days.

The new coating system consists of four layers, each

annually which provides the opportunity for close examination and the removal of surface soiling, as well as the spiders that seem to gravitate to the surface and the ever-present layer of Virginia pollen.

The prominent location of the sculpture in the VMFA's garden and its engaging optical illusion qualities make it a beloved landmark in Richmond. Debbie stressed the importance of educating both museum staff and the public about the sculpture's condition and treatment, so the community understands the work being undertaken and the dedicated and specialized work that goes into caring for the objects in the E. Claiborne and Lora Robins Sculpture Garden.

Following Debbie's presentation, Andrew Baxter (Bronze et al, Ltd. Fine Art) offered an interesting tour of several of the outdoor metal sculptures at the VMFA. He started with *Rumors of War* by Kehinde Wiley—a contemporary monument of a man on horseback sitting atop a stone base. The man and horse were assembled onsite at the VMFA after being displayed temporarily in Times Square in New York. When the sculpture arrived at the VMFA, Andrew noticed green corrosion on the bronze, especially where the pieces came together. He discovered that the metal was treated in production with potassium sulfide, which is applied to darken bronze. This doesn't age well and can be problematic. Andrew described washing the sculpture with an Orvus solution, letting it dry and then using a paste wax tinted with carbon black dry pigment to coat it.



Chloe, surrounded by scaffolding that permitted access to all areas of the sculpture for treatment.

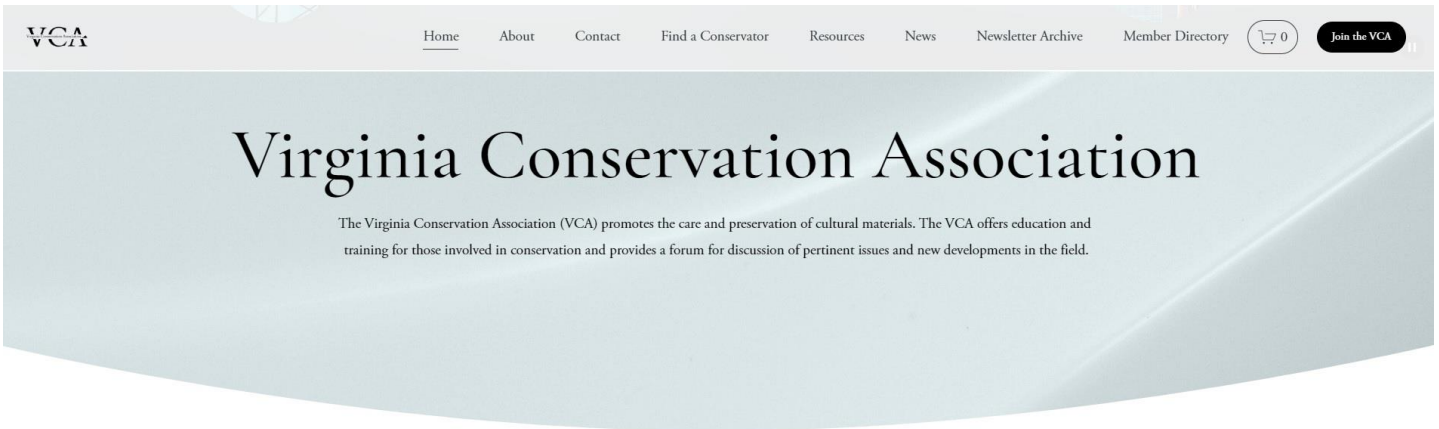


Andrew describes his work on the VMFA sculpture collection to meeting attendees in front of the museum.

Andrew went on to discuss three other metal sculptures on the VMFA grounds, describing the methods for cleaning and coating them to help develop and preserve a patina while protecting them from the elements.

Updates to the VCA website

Near the end of the last program year, the VCA Board decided that it was time to update the VCA's website. Several factors led to this decision, including wanting more control over the content, and improving the membership application process. We decided to hire an outside contractor to help us migrate the current website onto the Squarespace platform, due to its functionality and user-friendliness. These costs were added to the budget for this year and approved by membership in May 2023. You can now view the new website at the same web address: <https://www.virginiaconservationassociation.org/>! Thank you to all those who sent in content for inclusion on the site.



These changes with the website will result in somewhat of a difference in the membership renewal process this year. You can still choose to mail in a PDF and check, but we would like people to apply through the new website at this address: <https://www.virginiaconservationassociation.org/membership-form-page>. Once you submit the form, you will be directed to a payment page where you can add a regular price or student membership to your "cart". Payments will still be processed through PayPal for the time being. Please bear with us as we iron out any issues with this process and let us know if you encounter any problems or have any questions. Thank you for your continued support of the VCA!

A screenshot of the VCA Membership Form. The form is titled 'VCA Membership Form' and contains several input fields: 'Name *' with separate boxes for 'First Name' and 'Last Name'; 'I am: *' with a dropdown menu showing 'Please Select'; 'City *' with a text box; 'State/ Province *' with a text box and a note 'Please enter your 2 letter state/province abbreviation.'; and 'Phone Number *' with a text box containing '(000) 000-0000' and a note 'Please enter a valid phone number.'

Virginia Conservation Association 2023 Board of Directors Election Results

At the end of the last VCA season, the 2023-2024 fiscal year budget was approved and the new board was elected. New Board terms began August 1, 2023. Meet our new board members below!

Many thanks to everyone who voted and to the members who volunteered to serve on our board!

Board

President: F. Carey Howlett

Treasurer: Amy Byrne

Secretary: Claire Martin

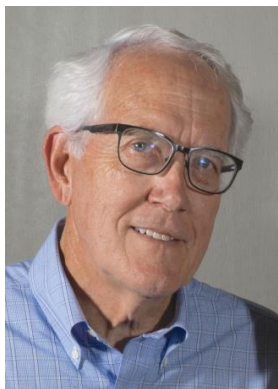
Committee Chairs

Membership: Elizabeth Robson

Programs: Marla Curtis

Publications: Jackie Peterson-Grace

F. Carey Howlett is a conservator with more than 45 years of experience in the conservation of historic furniture and architectural interiors. He is president and chief conservator of F. Carey Howlett & Associates, a firm providing services to museums, historic sites and private clients. He is a graduate of the Smithsonian Program in Furniture Conservation and served in the conservation department at Colonial Williamsburg for fourteen years, where he was director of conservation from 1998-2001.



Amy Byrne began her lifelong passion in art conservation in 1985 when she began the Pre-Conservation Program at Virginia Commonwealth University and graduated with a BA in Art History. Amy held pre-program positions at Richmond Conservation Studio and the Virginia Museum of



Fine Arts which eventually lead to getting a Master of Arts Degree and Certificate of Conservation from Buffalo State College. Post graduate positions included the National Park Service, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. In 2002 Amy started Amy Fernandez, Inc., a private practice specializing in Fine Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Easel Paintings, Polychromed Objects, and Historic Collections. Amy is a Professional Associate in the AIC and has been a member of the VCA since 1989. Amy lives on a small farm in Shepherdstown, WV with her husband Greg, where they enjoy gardening and entertaining along with their two dogs, two cats and five chickens.

Claire Martin

has just started as the conservation technician for furniture and frames at Williamstown Art Conservation. She was formally a Marshal Steel Post Graduate Fellow in



the Furniture and the Archaeology lab at Colonial Williamsburg. She graduated from West Dean College with a post graduate degree in Conservation of Furniture and Wooden Objects in 2019 and has an undergraduate degree in Art Conservation from the University of Delaware.

Marla Curtis is the Senior Painting Conservator and owner of Curtis Fine Art Conservation, LLC, in Williamsburg. She earned her Master of Arts degree and Certificate of Advanced Study in Art Conservation from Buffalo State College. She also holds a Master of Arts in Art History from



Virginia Commonwealth University. After completing her graduate coursework, Marla worked for ten years in the Painting Conservation studios of several art museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The Phillips Collection, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

Elizabeth Robson

is now the Paintings Conservator for the State of New York's Bureau of Historic Sites. Previously, she has held fellowships at the Chrysler Museum



of Art/Hampton University Museum and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. She received her Master's degree from SUNY Buffalo State College after completing an internship at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, FL. She also volunteered in Colonial Williamsburg's conservation labs as well as at The Mariners' Museum and Curtis Fine Art Conservation pre-program. She will miss the pleasant Virginia autumns and winters this year but is remaining on the Board to ensure a smooth transition with the new website.

Jackie Peterson-Grace is the Associate Textile Conservator at The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. She completed a Master of Science from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation in 2018 with concentrations in textile and



preventive conservation and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Conservation Studies from Marist College. As a graduate student, she completed internships in the textile conservation labs at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Peebles Island Resource Center. She worked closely with collections care staff at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia from 2018 to 2020 to address textile preservation needs.

The VCA at AIC

AIC's 51st annual meeting was held in Jacksonville, Florida in May of 2023. The meeting theme and specialty sessions focused on how the field of conservation can address the broad and numerous global crises that face us today. General sessions explored methods of sustaining our profession and the climate, moving beyond neutrality, and conservation imaging in the age of change. Recordings of main meeting sessions are available to registered members until October 31st.



Congratulations to the VCA members who participated in this year's AIC annual meeting!

“The Technical Study and Conservation of “The Kiss II,” a Multiplex Hologram”

Patrick Ravines, Emily Hamilton, Lindsay Cross

“Measure Twice, Cut Once: Reusable Efficient Fosshape Torso Mounts”

Sara Ludueña, Jacquelyn Peterson-Grace, Gretchen Guidess

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

“Novel Use of MA-XRF to Analyze the Efficacy of Two Common Treatments for Bronze Disease”

Skyler Jenkins

Virginia Museum of Fine Art

[PDF of poster available for download here](#)

Polarized Light Microscopy Refresher Workshop & “Early American Graining: A Technical Survey”

Kirsten T. Moffitt

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

“Improved Interpretation of A-D strips with Colorimetry and Visible Light Spectroscopy”

Lindsey Zachman, Emilie Duncan, Molly McGath

The Mariner's Museum

[PDF of poster available for download here](#)

Emerging Conservation Professional Spotlight

This year's emerging conservation professional spotlights feature the experiences and reflections of interns and fellows who spent the summer of 2023 gaining conservation experience at local institutions. Each of these submissions, written at the end of their summer experience, provides a glimpse into the exciting research, treatment, and accomplishments taking place in our region!

Lyndi Kiple

Conservation Science Fellow

The Mariners' Museum and Park

Working in a museum facilitates interactions with caring people who have a wide range of expertise but work together to preserve history and promote learning. This summer, I focused on science's role in supporting preservation as a conservation science fellow at The Mariners' Museum and Park, funded by the National Park Service's National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. During my fellowship, I collaborated with Research Scientist Molly McGath and Senior Conservator Elsa Sangouard to conduct research – via literature review and laboratory experiments – on the chemistry of sulfur in waterlogged wood. Our goal was to explore possible treatments for the extraction of sulfur from wet archaeological wood.

In marine environments, sulfur-reducing bacteria deposit sulfur into organic objects. Upon exposure to oxygen or high humidity, the accumulated sulfur can oxidize to sulfuric acid or sulfur salts, which both degrade wood. This sulfur contamination and acidification has become a common issue in timbers from shipwrecks around the world, including from the Museum's own *Princess Carolina*. Developing a sulfur extraction treatment could prevent degradation of organic objects that have been kept wet, including pieces of USS *Monitor* and many yet undiscovered shipwrecks across the globe.



Testing solutions of polyethylene glycol (PEG) to use in sulfur solubility experiments. Courtesy of Amanda Shields, The Mariners' Museum and Park.



Acidified areas of timbers from Princess Carolina. (left) Large, patchy deposits of sulfide crystals on an area approximately 35 cm. (right) Heavy accumulation of crystals around a fastener hole (approximately 1 cm) where iron was present and speeded up the chemical process. Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum and Park.

In the first few weeks of my fellowship, I dug into the literature to learn about “the sulfur problem,” the relevant chemistry, and the ways other teams have tried to address the issue ([read more in my blog post](#)). As a scientist, I aimed to understand the sulfur compounds and chemical interactions pertinent to the extraction process. My investigation also led me to sources in engineering and industry because extracting sulfur from fuel has been targeted to decrease pollution. With information from a range of sources, I designed and conducted experiments to further explore sulfur solubility. We prioritized solvents that were safe for archaeological wood, safe for people, and safe for the environment.

As with most scientific research, the experiments turned up many challenges but still offered progress toward solving the sulfur problem. My time at The Mariners’ Museum and Park emphasized the importance of scientific research in tackling persistent problems in conservation. I’ll be continuing my research for a few more weeks and sharing what we’ve learned with the conservation community so we can work toward a solution together.



Ready to use the UV lamp to visualize the results of chromatography experiments. Courtesy of Molly McGath, The Mariners’ Museum and Park.

Meredith Martin

*Pre-program Conservation Intern
The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*

My name is Meredith Martin, and I have known since my sophomore year of high school that art conservation was a career path I was interested in pursuing, as it perfectly combines art and science. I have been fortunate enough to attend the College of William & Mary, which has opened doors for me to explore this field, even as an undergraduate student. One of the wonderful opportunities I’ve had is to work as a pre-program intern in the Colonial Williamsburg paintings conservation lab, under the guidance of Shelley Svoboda, Senior Paintings Conservator.

During my time in the conservation lab, I have worked under supervision to conserve various paintings including new acquisitions needing basic care as well as preparing existing collection paintings for exhibition. *Scared Zebra* (2021.301.1) by Geneva Beavers was my first project, for which I completed photo documentation before and after treatment, cleaned the reverse, and applied a protective backing board. I am currently working on preparing a *Portrait of Major General Whitaker* (2023.100.1) for exhibition within the Colonial Williamsburg Folk Art galleries. I have prepared a protective backing board with a passive insert to assist in protecting this unlined painting and inpainted a few small, discolored past damages, as well as completed appropriate photo documentation.



Completing documentation for treatment and technical examination on *Scared Zebra*, including discussion of artist’s changes found in IR imaging. Photo by Shelley Svoboda. With permission of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



Inpainting 'Portrait of Major General Alexander Finley Whitaker', ca.1835. Photo by Shelley Svoboda. With permission of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

I have also had the amazing chance to work in a wonderful research lab, under the supervision of Dr. Kristin Wustholz, Associate Professor in Chemistry at the College of William and Mary, who partners with Shelley Svoboda, to work on a project using Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy (SERS). This ongoing project focuses on identifying fugitive organic colorants present in various paintings within the Colonial Williamsburg collection. In recent years, we have primarily looked into red lake pigments present within paintings by 18th-century Williamsburg artists. I have also had the good fortune to undertake SERS research on another significant artist, Joshua Johnson, who worked in Baltimore, Maryland. To do this research, microscopic painting samples are prepared with an extraction-hydrolysis solution to separate the dyes from their respective mordants. They are then spotted with a silver nanoparticle solution which allows for a spectrum unique to a specific molecule to be produced when hit with a laser. This successfully identifies the pigment used by the artist.

My experiences in the research and conservation labs have given me a diverse introduction to heritage science and conservation, and I am so grateful that I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from such wonderful people who have contributed so much to this field. I am looking forward to my senior year where I will be continuing with both my college research and gaining experience in the painting conservation lab.



Preparing passive-insert for Portrait of Major General Alexander Finley Whitaker, ca. 1835. Photo by Shelley Svoboda. With permission of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



Applying silver nanoparticles to samples from paintings by Joshua Johnson. Photo by Shelley Svoboda. With permission of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



2023 – 2024 Board Members

F. Carey Howlett president.vaconservation@gmail.com	President
Claire Martin secretary.vaconservation@gmail.com	Secretary
Amy Byrne treasurer.vaconservation@gmail.com	Treasurer
Elizabeth Robson membership@virginiaconservationassociation.org	Membership Chair
Marla Curtis programs.vaconservation@gmail.com	Programs Chair
Jackie Peterson-Grace publications.vaconservation@gmail.com	Publications Chair

VCA Student Scholarship

VCA offers two annual scholarships of \$250 each to be used for furthering education in the field. Use of funds may include conference or class fees or other professional-development expenses. Applicants must be VCA student members to apply. Applications are accepted throughout the year and will be evaluated during the April and December Board meetings.

To apply, submit a one-page proposal for use of funds that specifies how the scholarship will assist in the pursuit of a career in conservation or a directly related field. To apply, email our

Contribute to the Newsletter!

Are you working on an interesting or challenging treatment? Have you made exciting research discoveries, come across valuable resources, or attended an inspiring professional development event? We want to hear from you!

Our all-volunteer publishing team regularly calls for content and any VCA member is welcome to contribute. If you are interested in writing for the newsletter but would like some advice and guidance, please get in touch with our Publications Chair to discuss your ideas.

Contact Us

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