

# 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](http://virginiaconservationassociation.org)

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### Next Member's Meeting

*Make It 'Till You Fake It:  
Simulating Historic Chair  
Tapestries*

**November 17, 2022**

### VCA Winter Party

**December 10,  
2022**

### Mark your calendars!

*Field Trip to The Chrysler  
Museum with presentation  
on the treatment of a large  
Thomas Cole painting*

**February 11, 2023**

# Letter from the President

Hello there, VCA!

As warmer weather has made way for cool days and even cooler nights, I've found myself wistfully thinking of Virginia's beautiful falls: that brief period of transition, when both hot and cold weather lovers can agree that it's nice to put the lawn mowers away and enjoy long, golden shadows as the sun creeps ever closer to the horizon. While I am farther north this year, I am so glad that the VCA will be hosting its first in-person meeting since 2020 this fall. For those of us who cannot be there in person, there will be an option to join the gathering via Zoom.



*Paige Schmidt, VCA President*

As always, my compulsory SHARP Grant update: I'm happy to say that VAM was able to get an extension for the grant, which must now be completed by April 2023. The VCA board and VAM's new executive director, Rick Hurley, are meeting to discuss how we will proceed. As a refresher for those unfamiliar with the grant, we will be working with VAM to produce 5-6 short collections care videos. Conservators who participate will be compensated. The VCA board has compiled a list of video ideas, and we are happy to add more to the list, especially if anyone has a specific video idea they would be willing to help create. Video ideas currently include things like textile display options, storing books and works on paper, caring for unframed paintings, general preventive care, and how to locate a conservator and what to expect when working with them.

I recently had a long phone conversation with VCA Treasurer Amy Byrne. While we discussed things pertinent to the VCA, we also found ourselves talking about things ranging from our shared experiences in conservation to rock climbing in the northeast, and the joys and challenges of living in rural areas. At some point we reflected on how wonderful it was that two conservators living outside of Virginia (New York and West Virginia) were connected through the VCA. And in retrospect, the two of us may consider ourselves members of the 'old' and 'new' guard. The VCA has meant many things to many people over the years. It has ebbed and flowed, waxed and waned, as all sustainable and lasting organizations do. The VCA may never look the same from one year to the next, but I for one am glad to be a part of what it is today.

Paige

# Upcoming Member's Meeting

Our first member's meeting of the year will be held in person at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture in Richmond on Thursday, November 17<sup>th</sup>. The meeting will also be accessible via Zoom for those who can't attend in person, a link will be emailed prior to the meeting. We hope to see you there!

## ***Make It 'Til you Fake It: Simulating Historic Chair Tapestries***

Handwoven tapestries were used on select seating furniture up until the early twentieth century, when they generally fell out of favor because of their labor-intensive costliness as well as changing fashion. Conservators confronted with the challenge of matching and replacing irretrievably damaged or missing tapestries face a dilemma, as there are no traditional weavers available who can affordably match old tapestries.

This presentation will discuss cost-effective techniques developed by F. Carey Howlett & Associates to address missing tapestries on two suites of furniture at the Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, Florida. Carey Howlett will describe the projects in question, conservation of tapestries on a Louis XV-style suite of seating furniture from the Flagler Music Room as well as the later reupholstery of twenty-four original chairs from the elaborate French Renaissance-style dining room. He will discuss options considered for simulating the missing tapestries and the ultimate plan developed to address the issue. Susan Adler will describe her conservation treatment of surviving original tapestries now exhibited alongside the simulations, and Suzanne Collins will address the techniques she developed to hand-paint simulated tapestries. The work, which included the application of conservation upholstery foundations and trim, also involved the skills of VCA members Talitha Daddona and Claire Martin.

## *Make It 'Til you Fake It: Simulating Historic Chair Tapestries*

Presented by Carey Howlett

**When:** November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Refreshments at 5:30  
Presentation at 6:00

### **Where:**

Virginia Museum of History and Culture

428 N Arthur Ashe Boulevard,  
Richmond, Virginia 23220

Reynolds Meeting Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

Enter the South Entrance (facing the VMFA, near the Mellon horse statue)

**Parking:** street parking (free) or parking in the lot behind the building (\$5)



*One of the 24 original dining chairs from the Flagler Museum as it appeared when returned to the Flagler after a nearly 100-year absence.*



*New simulated tapestry upholstery on one of the two large armchairs from the suite.*

# SHARP Grant Update

As previously reported, the Virginia Association of Museums (VAM) was awarded funding through the CARES act to create content aimed at small museums and cultural heritage institutions that may not have funding to hire conservators for basic collections care. Content will be made accessible to VAM and VCA members as ten-minute videos, hosted and promoted on the websites of both organizations. Each video will be accompanied by an annotated bibliography or short list of resources.

VCA members will be working with VAM to create content on a variety of subjects identified by VAM members. We're closing in on finalizing video topics and contributors. Participants will meet with VAM and VCA in December to finalize a timeline, with filming taking place in February and March of 2023. All videos will be completed and edited by the end of April, and the grant will be finalized in May of next year.

We continue to welcome participants and ideas for video content, and an honorarium of \$600 will be awarded for each video. If you are interested in being a part of this exciting outreach opportunity, please contact a member of the VCA board before **November 11, 2022** (see contact information at the end of the newsletter). We will be discussing this project at the member's meeting in November!

*SHARP Grant Outreach Project*

*Deadline to submit content ideas*

**November 11, 2022**

## VCA's Winter Party

The 2022 VCA Winter Party will be held at the ancestral home of Charlie Cuthbert at 405 S. Sycamore Street in Petersburg. The large brick Italianate home was built in 1871 (see image below). Careful restoration and conservation of the house and its furnishings has taken place for the past several years, much with the assistance of VCA members. As the project nears completion, Charlie and Beth have generously offered to host our winter party!



The house has a remarkable interior, with fourteen-foot

ceilings on the first floor, a central hall with an elaborate staircase and other woodwork featuring original faux-painted burl walnut paneling, surviving nineteenth-century window hangings and original brass chandeliers. Furnishings include ancestral paintings, some believed to be by George Caleb Bingham during his 1840-41 tenure in Petersburg, a Federal dining table damaged by a cannonball during the siege of Petersburg, furniture used by Lincoln during his visit with Grant near the end of the

*VCA Winter Party*

Hosted by Charlie and Beth Cuthbert

**When:** December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

4:00pm – 8:00pm

**Where:**

405 South Sycamore Street  
Petersburg, Virginia  
23803

We'll be emailing a link to RSVP in early December!



*Original faux walnut- and burl-walnut-panelled staircase in the central hall, after cleaning, consolidation and inpainting (left to right Claire Martin, Carey Howlett, Talitha Daddona).*

Civil War (from an earlier Cuthbert ancestral home in Petersburg), and other furniture ranging from the early nineteenth-century Federal period through the Renaissance Revival of the 1860s and 1870s. These images offer a sneak-peek at some of the Cuthbert's objects and interiors, many of which have been conserved by VCA members.

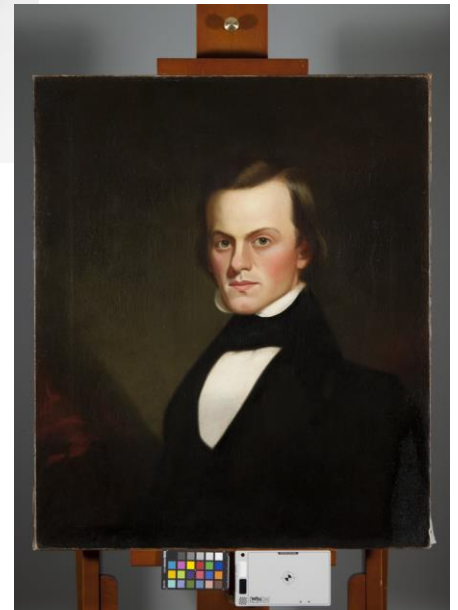
We hope you will join us for this rare opportunity for VCA members and friends to celebrate the holidays in a wonderful setting in Petersburg, one of Virginia's most historic cities.



*Elizabethan-style chair used by President Lincoln when meeting with Gen. Grant in Petersburg, 1865.*



*Document cabinet with a history of belonging to William Mahone, founder of Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad (ultimately Norfolk and Western), in the office at 405 S. Sycamore St.*



*Portrait of Christopher Fry Fisher, unidentified artist (possibly George Caleb Bingham), ca. 1841., after treatment.*

# #Ask A Conservator Day and Digital Outreach

Ask A Conservator Day, an annual opportunity to engage with the public and celebrate the international exchange of knowledge in remembrance of the 1966 Florence flood, will be celebrated on Friday, November 4<sup>th</sup> this year. In the spirit of reaching a broad audience and sharing the important but often behind-the-scenes work of conservators, VCA members discuss how their institutions and practices incorporate digital outreach into their workload. Many thanks to the individuals who shared their experiences: Kirsten Moffitt on behalf of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Beth Fulton for the Richmond Conservation Studio, Kate Ridgway for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and Debbie Linn for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts!

**Who manages your digital outreach (one person, or is it a shared duty in your department)? Which platforms do you use (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TickTock...) and which do you find to be most effective?**

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: One person acts as the social media liaison for the department. This person schedules and accepts regular posts from each lab, and is responsible for editing and revising them, and running them by upper management before posting (includes adding appropriate links, hashtags, etc.) This way our content has a consistent voice. The Foundation's social media team allowed us to establish a private Facebook Group, so we have to approve followers upon request, which minimizes trolls and bots. However, the disadvantage of a private account is that followers cannot share our content with anyone outside the group, which could, in turn, help grow our following. If you are thinking of starting a Facebook group, this is certainly something to consider.

Richmond Conservation Studio: I (Beth Fulton) manage the digital outreach for the studio which includes Facebook and Instagram. I find Instagram to have more interactions and response.

Virginia Department of Historic Resources: At the moment we have one person in each division of our department who is designated to do social media outreach. This includes organizing posts for Facebook, Twitter, and our homepage. Each month is a theme and the social media point people help to find stories in their division that apply to this theme. I do not know what is most effective, but my best guess is Facebook. I think that our website and Twitter have followers and are effective for certain types of information sharing, but the age range of the majority of the members of the public that we work with lends itself to Facebook.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: The Social Media Manager in the Communications Department, the Marketing Department, and the Education Department are responsible for the museum's digital outreach and social media. VMFA has Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok accounts. They all reach a slightly different audience. Conservation occasionally contributes to one of these, but historically, it has been rare.

**How much time per week/month do you spend on outreach? Does this include spending time answering comments/questions posted by the public?**

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: It depends, but about 2-4 hours/week, including responding to comments from the public. We don't usually get hardball questions that require much time to answer. Most of the time is spent finding new content, revising posts, and the back-and-forth emailing between colleagues to get all the details and permissions right.

Richmond Conservation Studio: How much time per week/month I spend on outreach is an interesting question and it depends on what is included in the definition. If it's solely about making content to put on social media and interacting with the public, I would say I don't spend more than an hour a week, sometimes less. And it does include answering questions- which we do not get that often.

Virginia Department of Historic Resources: I do not know how much time it takes. My guess is it is significantly more when there is a news article that mentions our department, especially if the news item is controversial. Serious public inquiries and comments are replied to.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: To date, very little time has been spent doing outreach on the museum's social media accounts. We would like to change that to both promote conservation at the museum and to be able to respond publicly to questions.

**What types of content seem to be most engaging for your viewers?**

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: Images with conservators in them. Also time-lapse videos. BT and AT images side by side. Anything with Leroy Graves (our upholstery conservator). Content that is short and sweet gets the most responses. Anything weird or unusual (an early post on kidney stone residues in chamberpots got tons of likes).

Richmond Conservation Studio: The types of content we get that tends to be most engaging is cleaning videos- or videos of the process of cleaning a painting. The next would be before/after of treatments or food or dog-related posts (not conservation).

Virginia Department of Historic Resources: My understanding is that they love the Ask an Archaeologist posts and the few times conservation items are posted, those are well received. They also like stories about the Historic Highway Marker program.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: People seem to love to see the behind-the-scenes work at the museum.

**Do you plan to participate in Ask A Conservator Day, and have you participated in the past?**

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: Yes, for the past 3 years I believe. In the past we did not have our own Facebook group so we took over the Foundation's Instagram stories for the day. This year we plan to do it

differently, via Facebook, and we're taking over the Foundation's Instagram stories We're still in the planning stages.

Richmond Conservation Studio: We are not currently planning on participating in Ask a Conservator Day (as far as I am aware), but in the past, Lorraine and Cleo I believe have both participated in some form or another.

Virginia Department of Historic Resources: I am not currently planning on participating. Infrastructure and resources make it difficult for me to participate. My own lack of interest and aptitude at social media also makes me hesitant. I have not participated in the past.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: Yes, we are participating for the first time this year.

### **Do you have any tips or things to avoid for social media / sharing conservation content with the public?**

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: I have not officially evaluated any patterns between our content and our responses, but in general I try to schedule posts on weekdays, just before lunchtime or just after 5pm, when most people are on a break or have finished work for the day, and might be relaxing and scrolling. I think these are the times our content will get the most views. I have also noticed shorter posts (100 words or less) and one or two great photos make for more likes and responses.

Richmond Conservation Studio: I do not have any tips on sharing content with the public except to say that one should keep in mind that people in their audience may try what they see for themselves...

Virginia Department of Historic Resources: Right now, avoid politics and anything to do with the Confederacy. I try to stick to solid tried and true conservation advice. Also, if you don't know something, say it and refer them to a person with that area of expertise.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts:

- Follow the institution's social media policy.
- Follow security policies. Avoid posting information about security measures (alarms, number of security staff, cameras, etc.), and avoid posting pictures of entrances/exits, cameras, and alarms.
- Make sure to check in with relevant departments/individuals to confirm policies discussing incidents caused by visitors, vandalism, etc.
- Be aware of other's comfort level with social media. Do not post pictures without permission.
- Credit photographers.
- Do not post information that can be used as a 'how to' guide for treatments.

### **How has your digital outreach changed over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic?**

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: Digital outreach became a major focus during the pandemic, especially as we stopped providing lab tours to the public at that time. Our department needed a platform to grow our visibility



both within and outside the Foundation. We turned to social media as a way to engage with the public, and reach an even larger audience than those visitors who could be physically present in our labs. At first, because of internal policy, we had to submit content to the Foundation's social media team, and had no control over when it was released.. In the last year we have been able to establish and curate our own Facebook Group (due to infrastructure, we cannot use Instagram at this time). Our goal with the FB group is to build a following of interested people as well as our colleagues in conservation, using it as a place to share conservation-related news in greater detail than we could on the Foundation's Instagram page. During the pandemic we also established a series of Livestream programs called "Consider the Sources" in which conservators and curators discussed current projects and fielded live audience questions. These live permanently on Youtube and our website.

Richmond Conservation Studio: Our digital outreach has increased a little over the pandemic, but mostly in terms of answering emails sent to us from people interested in becoming conservators. We've had a lot more interest in people wanting to become art conservators.

Virginia Department of Historic Resources: I give so many more lectures because of the pandemic. Nationwide access to better video internet platforms makes outreach to places outside Virginia much easier.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: Increased a small amount via social media. However, zoom and video conferencing has allowed for much greater outreach for virtual tours of the lab and "What is Art Conservation?" opportunities.

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## ECPN Regional Liaison Update

*Hannah Sanner*

The Williamsburg Regional Emerging Conservation Professionals Network will be participating in an outreach event this coming November. Students from William & Mary's Light at the Museum chemistry class will be touring the Colonial Williamsburg labs to see conservation in practice. Our ECPN liaison will be giving a casual talk regarding conservation as a prospective career. Information will be provided on basic prerequisites, internships, and organizations that a student should consider before exploring the field.

If any teaching professionals or community leaders are interested in a similar ECPN "Conservation Basics" talk for their class, please email [williamsburg.ecpn.liason@gmail.com](mailto:williamsburg.ecpn.liason@gmail.com). We can forward along a brief facts sheet or arrange a full talk in person or online. Alternatively, if you would like to share your experience with entering the field and information you wish you had known earlier, please email us. Everyone has a unique experience and we value all perspectives when discussing professional development with students.

Useful Links:

Read more about the ECPN AIC group and find excellent resources on our website:

<https://www.culturalheritage.org/membership/groups-and-networks/emerging-conservation-professionals-network>

See what is new, check us out on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/419707523031/>

# Emerging Conservation Professional Spotlight

*Abby Peterman*

This summer I had the incredible opportunity to be a pre-program intern at the Chrysler Museum of Art. As a junior in the University of Delaware's undergraduate art conservation program, I am constantly looking to visit new museums and meet the conservators who care for the artworks. I could not have found a better opportunity than learning from conservator, Mark Lewis, and NEH Paintings Conservation Fellow, Jennifer Myers. Under their supervision, I had the opportunity to develop my observational and documentation skills, learn new treatment methods and approaches, and deepen my understanding of materials used in works of art and their conservation.

I helped treat various paintings, including *The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds* (1833-34) by Thomas Cole while on view in the gallery, *Wild Pony Round-Up* (1951) by Ruth Starr Rose, and an unidentified self-portrait. My favorite project this summer was probably treating the self-portrait. Chrysler bought this painting in 1960 from Harry B. Yotnakparian, an art dealer from New York, and included it in his traveling exhibition "The Controversial Century: 1850-1950." In this exhibition, the painting was attributed to James Abbott McNeil Whistler as a portrait of Mary Cassatt. While this painting was not by Whistler, it appears to be a self-



*Inpainting cracks on Ruth Starr Rose's Wild Pony Round-Up, Chincoteague, VA (1951) to prepare it for loan. Courtesy of Mark Lewis.*



portrait of a woman painter and highlights an interesting part of the Chrysler Museum of Art's history. The treatment steps I carried out were filling losses with Modostuc and wax/resin, texturing those fills with silicone molds, toning the losses and abrasion with gouache, learning about the basics of varnishing, and inpainting with Gamblin Conservation Colors.

*Marla Curtis (left) removing discolored varnish while I (right) am toning losses with gouache on The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds. Courtesy of Michelle Moore.*

It was enriching to learn not only about the treatment aspect of conservation in a museum, but also about proper documentation, communicating with other departments within the museum, working within a deadline, and teaching others about conservation while working in the gallery.



*The self-portrait before I began treatment (left) and at the end of my internship (right).*

## Looking ahead...

2023 is right around the corner, and the VCA is planning some exciting in-person events! Mark your calendars for a field trip to the Chrysler Museum on February 11, 2023 for a presentation on the research and treatment of Thomas Cole's large *Angel Appearing to the Shepherds* (see the image of Abby and Marla working together on this painting on the previous page). Details about timing and plans for the day are forthcoming, look for them in the January newsletter!

### *Visit to the Chrysler Museum*

**When:** February 11, 2023

Look for more details in the next newsletter!

# VCA SEPTEMBER BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Board Meeting - September 26, 2022

## ATTENDEES

Paige Schmidt, Marla Curtis, Elizabeth Robson, Amy Byrne, Sara Ludueña, Jackie Peterson-Grace

Call to Order: President Paige Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT (PAIGE SCHMIDT)

Paige reported on her conversation with the new director of VAM, deadlines for the SHARP grant have been extended and the board will meet with VAM leadership in late October to discuss plans for moving forward.

## TREASURER'S REPORT (AMY BYRNE)

Amy reported on automatically renewing expenses: the Zoom account was renewed in August and monthly website management fees have increased. Memberships dues are coming in now, Amy will work with Elizabeth to manage that information.

## SECRETARY'S REPORT (SARA LUDUEÑA)

No updates to report.

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## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Programs Committee (Marla Curtis)

Planning for this year's programs is underway. At present the board is planning for one fall program, a holiday party, a program in early 2023, and a spring program/field trip. Marla is working on details and venue locations.

### Membership Committee (Elizabeth Robson)

At the time of the meeting, about 30 membership forms had been submitted.

### Publications Committee (Jackie Peterson-Grace)

Jackie requested ideas for future newsletter content and updated the board about changes that she requested be made to the website to update documents and remove redundant information.

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Meeting adjourned by President Paige Schmidt at 7:30pm



## 2022 – 2023 Board Members

Paige Schmidt president.vaconservation@gmail.com	President
Sara Ludueña 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

#### Virginia Conservation Association

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Richmond, VA 23221

[www.virginiaconservationassociation.org](http://www.virginiaconservationassociation.org)  
[www.facebook.com/VaConservation/](https://www.facebook.com/VaConservation/)