

Virginia

Conservation Association

January 2020 Vol. 29 Issue 3



The Virginia Conservation Association 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 developments in the field.

Great Finds!

Members were treated to a behind-the-scenes look at the conservation labs of Historic Jamestowne. Conversations were held about the logistics of working with varied and sensitive materials found on the island, including human remains.



Rare example of "Jack of plates" Armor in Virginia
Image c/o of Elizabeth Robson

Letter From the President



Kate Ridgway, VCA President

I'm not sure about other folks, but I have trouble saying no to professional opportunities. I also want to help out if I can and I actively try for things, such as grants, when I have a chance. In my head, I don't expect everything to pan out, so I try for more things than I can handle, knowing that only some of them will happen. Every now and then, the Universe thinks it is hilarious to give you everything you asked for. Then if some little thing goes sideways, such as your boss and your colleague retiring at the same time or a family member getting cancer, you are quickly overwhelmed by a tidal wave of stress and commitments.

This is what happened to me this past year, and it has meant that I have not been doing my best work in 2019. I have realized two things. First, the value of saying "no" to things, even if they sound like fantastic opportunities. It is better to concentrate on what you can actually get done and allow some things to pass you by for the sake of your sanity and a job well done, no matter how interesting a project seems.

The second realization is the amazing help colleagues and friends can provide in a time of need. I would like to thank the VCA Board for helping me with my work this past year. They have been amazing and are extremely dedicated and generous with their time. We are all volunteers, trying to make VCA happen and they have been doing a fantastic job while I am treading water.

All of this is to say, that as some of my commitments are winding down, life is becoming calmer, and I am learning the power of "no", I am hoping to refocus on VCA. I am looking forward to this coming year of discussions and improvements to this organization that we all love so much. Happy holidays everyone!

2020 Meeting Schedule

Wednesday, January 15th; 6:00 pm

Members Discussion on the VCA

(no program planned)

Main Street Library

110 Main Street

Newport News, VA 23601

Thursday, March 19th; 6:00 pm

Under the Microscope

Susan Buck – Conservator and Paint Analyst

Location: TBD (Williamsburg)

Thursday, May 21th; 6:00 pm

Recent Painting Treatment at Richmond Conservation Studio

Lorraine Brevig – Richmond Conservation Studio

Location: TBD (Richmond)

January Meeting in Newport News: Discussion of Reorganization



When: Wednesday, January 15 6:00 PM

Where: Main Street Public Library
110 Main Street
Newport News, VA 23601

Please join us on January 15 for the first of multiple meetings to discuss the future structure of the VCA.

Bring yourself and your ideas, the goal is to have productive discussion. This is only the first of more meetings to come, so if you cannot attend this meeting there will be other opportunities. Members are also welcome to come to more than one meeting if they so desire.

November Meeting at Jamestown:

Written by Elizabeth Robson

The November meeting of the VCA took place at Historic Jamestowne, in the building that the Jamestown Rediscovery team shares with the National Park Service. Attendees were given tours of the conservation lab and storage vault, led by Dan Gamble and Leah Stricker. This was followed by some delicious Indian food in the café, provided by Tom Snyder. It was a very informative peek into the work accomplished by 2 full-time conservators, as well as 2 interns and several volunteers, who care for over 3 million artifacts!

Dan showed members through the various rooms of the conservation lab, where artifacts are processed, including the digital x-ray machine and new ventless fume hood. He discussed the delicate nature of working with human remains, both literally and logistically. For example, volunteers are not allowed in the lab when such items are being worked on, only staff members. The bones themselves are also very fragile, especially the ancient DNA profiles embedded in them. Important genetic information can be extracted from the remains, so the staff wear gloves, masks, and often full Tyvek suits when handling them. Scientists are currently working to identify the recently excavated bones of a man who was buried in a wide grave near the original churchyard. They believe it could be the first governor of the site, George Yeardley, but a descendant's DNA is needed to compare it to in order to confirm this theory. There are still many burials left to excavate, perhaps hundreds on the entire island, over 70 of which are below the Archaearium. The team makes use of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) technology to locate burials and decide which of them may be uncovered next dig season. Over 4,400 sites, not all of them burials, have been excavated at Jamestown over the last 25 years!

Attendees were also brought into the storage area, which includes an upstairs portion with rolling archival shelves, and a "dry room" for iron artifacts, which is kept at a particularly low RH. It also houses the reference collection, which has been recently rehoused to make it more accessible for researchers. Visitors were able to handle a length of iron chain which had been found at the bottom of a well, in order to experience one of the sounds heard by early settlers. Many international objects have been found in wells at Jamestown, including a cast iron skillet from England, Chinese porcelain, and ceramics from Spain, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands!
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Image courtesy of Lesley Haines

November Meeting at Jamestown:

Written by Elizabeth Robson

However, plenty of evidence revealing the hard lives of the earliest settlers has also been found. The skull of a girl known as Jane, who it is believed was a victim of “survival cannibalism”, was discovered in a cellar here. The bones of a young boy with an arrow embedded deep in his leg were also found in a grave inside the fort. He has been tentatively identified as Richard Mutton, a boy who was part of the original group of settlers and is known to have been killed in the first skirmish with Virginia natives. Leah showed the group facial replicas that have been created based on these exhumed skulls. She explained that though these are not always 100% accurate, they help give a face to the people that lived at Jamestown hundreds of years ago, and make their stories come to life. Leah also shared other fascinating details that can be discovered from these remains. For example, the nitrogen content can tell us how much meat the person ate during their life, and low lead content indicates they likely did not eat from pewter dishes and were therefore more likely a servant than a higher-class citizen.

Leah also discussed the new research being conducted into the presence of native and African peoples living at Jamestown. Evidence of the creation of shell beads was found in wells at the site, pointing to the presence of native women inside the fort within the first few years of its construction. We also know that the first Africans were brought to Jamestown in 1619, and new exhibitions are being constructed around a slave woman named Angela, who belonged to the Pierce family. The team hopes to help shed more light on the experiences of these people and their interactions with the settlers.



In the wet lab, Dan Gamble pictured on far right
Image c/o Elizabeth Robson



Members in the storage vault, examining ceramics
Image c/o Lesley Haines

Please contact Dan Gamble, Senior Conservator, with any questions:

dgamble@preservationvirginia.org

You can also visit the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation/Historic Jamestowne website at

<https://historicjamestowne.org/>

Understanding Unconscious Bias: Fostering Diversity and Inclusion at Your Museum

Monday, February 10

Virginia Museum of History and Culture

Richmond, VA

As the demographics in our workplaces and in our communities grow increasingly diverse, it becomes more and more important that museums become inclusive spaces for everyone. That begins with you and your fellow staff members. Designed for all museum staff, regardless of position, this workshop will help participants better understand unconscious bias and how to create empathy and understanding for the visitors and communities you serve.

Enhance your diversity awareness and bias reduction. Learn to respect and appreciate differences and how to create a work environment in which everyone feels they belong and can be productive. You will come away with an understanding of individual actions you can take to foster inclusion, practical tips and approaches you can implement to help eliminate bias and prejudice at your museum and the motivation and skills to continue working on these issues.

This workshop is presented by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC). The guest speaker is Charm Bullard, Director of Programs for VCIC.

For more further details and registration info visit the url below:

<https://www.vamuseums.org/events/workshop-understanding-unconscious-bias>

Workshop hosted by Virginia Association of Museums

2019 – 2020 Board Members

Kate Ridgway	President	katyridgway@gmail.com
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The Virginia Conservation Association

Membership Application & Dues Payment

***Required**

*Date: _____, 20_____

* _____ New * _____ Renewing

*(Name as you would like for it to appear in the Directory-Please indicate if you do **not** want to be included in the Directory)*

*First _____ *Last _____

*Address: _____ *City _____

*State _____ *ZIP _____ *Telephone: (_____) _____

*Email: _____ Title: _____

Organization(s): _____ Website: _____

I Identify As:

_____ Administrator	_____ Conservator	_____ Librarian
_____ Appraiser	_____ Conservation Technician	_____ Post Graduate-Intern/Fellow
_____ Collector	_____ Curator	_____ Supporter
_____ Collection Mgr./Registrar	_____ Framer/Preparator	_____ Student
_____ Other (Specify) _____		

Areas of Conservation Expertise:

_____ Objects	_____ Furniture	_____ Paintings
_____ Ethnographic Objects	_____ Frames/Gilded Objects	_____ Painted Surfaces
_____ Archaeological Objects	_____ Textiles	_____ Conservation Science
_____ Architecture	_____ Books and Paper	_____ Preventive Conservation
_____ Sculpture	_____ Photographic Materials	_____ Accept Private Contracts
_____ Other (Specify) _____		

Are you willing to be a Disaster Response Volunteer in the event of an emergency? _____

Are you willing to serve as a Mentor? _____ Would you like to have a Mentor? _____

Are you interested in serving on the VCA board in the future? (see website for details) _____

Practicing Conservator/Consultant Conservators Only:

Would you like your contact information included in our website's VCA Services Directory? _____

The Virginia Conservation Association is open to all interested individuals. To become a member, complete this form and return it with your check made payable to VCA for \$30 (Regular) or \$15 (Student: Enclose a copy of a valid student ID) to the address below. To join online, visit www.virginiaconservationassociation.org/wp/.

Application and dues payment must be received by **October 15th** to ensure inclusion in the VCA Directory.

The Virginia Conservation Association
P. O. Box 7023
Richmond, Virginia 23221