



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

In This Issue

Article - Amy Fernandez 1

Letter from the Prez 2

VCA online 2

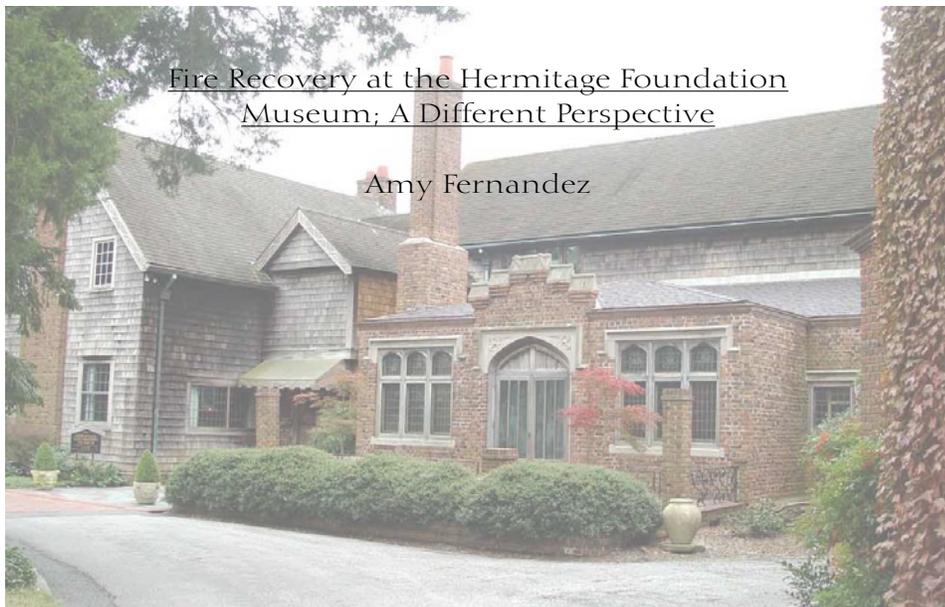
November Program 3

Upcoming Program 3

Regional News 3

News 4

Call for Papers... 5, 6



Fire Recovery at the Hermitage Foundation Museum; A Different Perspective

Amy Fernandez

Hermitage Foundation Museum front entrance

Due to the extensive damage at the Hermitage Foundation Museum, we will continue to feature articles on the restoration and those involved as the work is being done. John Fralin

Tucked away down a tree lined drive in a quiet upscale neighborhood in an older section of Norfolk, is the Hermitage Foundation Museum, and what a jewel this museum is. Behind the Tudor-style façade one finds an extraordinary collection of American, Asian and European Decorative and Fine Arts displayed in an intimate and personal setting. The exquisite taste, sense of style, and knowledge possessed by the late collector Mrs. Florence K. Sloane is present at every turn within the museum.



Portrait of Mrs. Florence K. Sloane

My involvement with this collection was initiated as the result of an unfortunate fire on January 7, 2003 (See VCA article, September 2004.)

I was called upon to survey the Decorative and Fine Arts Objects in the collection and to draw-up treatment proposals relevant to the fire damage. Where possible I tried to segregate deterioration that existed prior to the fire from the more common fire related heat, smoke, and soot damage. One of the

first concerns expressed by the Hermitage was that acidic smoke residues and soot be removed without altering earlier historic surface deposits or patinas. A project like this presents the opportunity to talk about a myriad of treatment issues as they interrelate to the fire but I came to find that the interplay between all of the stakeholders involved was equally important and illuminating.

A key factor in the recovery from a fire is funding and in this case the recovery effort was to be handled by an insurance policy covering the collections as well as the structure. Obviously the insurance company was a primary stakeholder and clearly wanted to address only what it was liable for. The museum on the other hand has been through a rending experience. Closure of galleries, changes in day-to-day operations, and the desire to get back on its feet and attain some sense of normalcy was at the top of the list of their concerns. As conservators, we all know that the preservation of the artwork is the main objective for the conservator, so analyzing the physical and

Interview continued on page 7

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Letter from the President

Dear VCA Membership,

As we enter into our new season of meetings and events with our second meeting of the year, I'd like to welcome you and invite you to attend the next meeting to be held at Fulton Hill Studios. Four of our members have studios there and will be opening their spaces to us on November 18. Thank you to these members, Mary Studt, Kim Overman, Wendy Cowan and Scott Nolley, for sharing their space and time with us all.

We've got some exciting events coming up, as well. Our Program chairs are working on bringing you a number of interesting and fun meetings over the course of the next year as well as a possible field trip next spring. In addition, we'll be holding our annual Winter Party in early December at Virginia House. Stay tuned for details.

Our Education Chairs are in the process of arranging a workshop on digital cameras for our members. We should have more information for you on that in the coming months.

Also, we now have a functioning website: www.virginiaconservationassociation.org Please feel free to check in with the site and to let me know if you have any suggestions or comments on what you'd like to see posted at the site. It's still very much under construction at this time and any help is much appreciated. Please contact me at hisstah@aol.com with any concerns or suggestions.

Thank you all and I hope you will enjoy our next meeting! I'm looking forward to seeing you all there!

Sincerely,
Lorraine Brevig
VCA President

VCA website, Receive your VCA Newsletter online

The VCA now has a website - virginiaconservationassociation.org. You can now go online to view the newsletter in the PDF format. Not only will this save the treasury money in printing and postage, but this will allow us to archive back issues of the newsletter.

Or if you prefer, you can sign up to receive the VCA newsletter via e-mail, also in the PDF format. The images are better and there can be more articles and info included - we are not restricted in the size of the document. To sign up to receive the VCA newsletter via e-mail, contact the publications chair at john@fafas.com or the membership chair at mmyers@dhr.state.va.us.

As part of the mission of the Virginia Conservation Association's newsletter, we strive to disseminate the knowledge and experience of each member to the other members. As editor, I would like to include a column in future publications called *Regional News*. This column would include tabs on members experiences, projects of work or study, job changes, etc. Please remember to contact John Fralin, Publications chair, with any news in your part of the world. We cannot promise we will include everything sent to us in the printed version, but everything will be included in the PDF version online. And pictures, don't forget to send pictures. *When using e-mail to submit a story or pics, please remember to put VCA in the subject line. Submit to:*

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VCA Program

Open House at Fulton Hill Studios November 18, 2004 6:00 PM until 8:00 PM.

Scott Nolley (Fine Art Conservation of Virginia), Wendy Cowan and Mary Studt (Richmond Conservators of Works on Paper) and Kim Overman (McHugh's Restoration, a ceramics restoration company) will all be open for visitors. We are hoping some of the resident artists will have their studios open as well. Projects will be displayed for discussion about treatment techniques and materials. Wendy and Mary will have a demonstration area for cyclododecane fixative with tips and discussion of risks for its use.

The refreshments for the meeting will include a spread of handcrafted, delicious and mostly vegetarian Indian foods with wine, beer and chai tea.

Directions

From downtown Richmond:

- Take EAST MAIN STREET east through Shockoe Bottom
- Take a left onto WILLIAMSBURG ROAD (just past Millie's Diner and Poe's Pub)
- Drive about 1 mile in a valley then up a hill
- Take a left at UNION STREET at the top of the hill
- Drive to the end of UNION STREET and see the Fulton Hill Studios (brick school house)
- Pull into the parking lot and park immediately
- The door to the right of the building around the corner from the trash cans has a buzzer for Richmond Conservators of Works on Paper

From I-95 South (Fredericksburg etc):

- take exit 74B which takes you to FRANKLIN STREET
- Take a left at the stoplight onto EAST FRANKLIN STREET
- Take a right at the next street, N 15th Street
- Take a left at the first stoplight ONTO EAST MAIN STREET
- Drive ~ 1.5 miles through Shockoe Bottom
- Take a left onto WILLIAMSBURG ROAD (just past Millie's Diner and Poe's Pub)
- Drive about 1 mile in a valley then up a hill
- Take a left at UNION STREET at the top of the hill
- Drive to the end of UNION STREET and see the Fulton Hill Studios (brick school house)

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From 64W (Williamsburg etc.):

- Take the VA-156 SOUTH exit towards RIC AIRPORT/SANDSTON, exit #197A
- go 0.2 mi
- Continue on S AIRPORT DR - go 0.6 mi
- Turn right on WILLIAMSBURG RD - go 4.2 mi
- Turn right on UNION ST
- Drive to the end of UNION STREET and see the Fulton Hill Studios (brick school house)
- Pull into the parking lot and park immediately
- The door to the right of the building around the corner from the trash cans has a buzzer for Richmond Conservators of Works on Paper

Upcoming Program

The VCA is planning a workshop on digital photography. The tentative dates are May 6 and 7, 2005. The instructor will be Yosi Pozeilov - collections photographer for LA County Musuem. Look for more info and registration forms in the January Newsletter.

Regional News

Mary Studt and Wendy Cowan of Richmond Conservators of Works on Paper would like to welcome Heather Logue as paper conservation intern for the year 2004. Heather is currently working in their Fulton Hill studio on the Davidge and Semmes letters for the James Monroe Museum in Fredericksburg. She has developed a database for these letters and is currently flattening them prior to rehousing. Heather is a student at VCU where she is majoring in Art History and she is also an employee of Main Art and Frame

Valinda Carrol has recently accepted a position as Preservation Co-ordinator at Hampton University Library.

Carry Howlett has recently accepted a position as Senior architectural Conservator and Senior Project Manager with John Milner Associates, an Architectural Firm in Alexandria, VA, specializing in Historic Preservation.

News

New online bookbindings exhibition features close-up magnifier

A new online exhibition will allow viewers to closely examine historic bookbindings from the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Firestone Library.

"Hand Bookbindings From Special Collections in the Princeton University Library: Plain and Simple to Grand and Glorious" includes more than 200 books. Two major themes are illustrated. First, many of the books offer examples of the elements that make up a book's binding, such as sewing, endleaves, cover attachment, clasps and tooling. Readers learn not only what these elements are but also see specimens dating from different eras and locales. Second, numerous examples highlight historic national technical styles and "bespoke" bindings for famous collectors, as well as specialty styles such as those with fully silk-embroidered covers. Examples date from as early as the 12th century and come down to the end of the 20th. The entire show is arranged in virtual cases, represented by 26 thumbnail images on the web site's opening page.

Clicking on a thumbnail leads the reader to a page showing vivid, colorful images of each book, together with descriptive notes. Another click on an image leads to a full-page enlargement of the binding that can be examined in greater detail, thanks to a digital close-up magnifier. The reader can move the magnifier as well as change the size of the area under magnification. With magnification, details otherwise little noticed, such as a binder's name stamped into the leather or the stitching of silver thread, become visible.

Scott Husby, Firestone Library's chief rare book conservator, organized the show for two reasons. When he came to Princeton in 1997, he was astonished not only by the size of the library's collections, which had been built over two centuries, but also the amazing range of historic bindings from Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and ancient China. Every book posed questions not only about how to restore it but also about its place in the long history of bookbinding. The show records what Husby learned and demonstrates for the first time in many years the extraordinary scope of Princeton's holdings.

The online show follows an exhibition of hand bookbindings that ran in Firestone Library's main gallery from November 2002 through April 2003. To view the online exhibition, visit <URL:<http://www.princeton.edu/rbsc/exhibitions/online.html>> and click on the entry for "Hand Bookbindings from Special Collections."

For further information, contact the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections 609-258-3184 rbsc@princeton.edu

SCMRE Gets New Director

Dr. Robert J. Koestler was appointed the new director of the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education (SCMRE), effective August 30, 2004. Dr. Koestler is a cell biologist and electron microscopist known for his advancements in art conservation. He brings to the Smithsonian more than 30 years of museum experience, with an emphasis in the conservation of natural history collections and art objects. He has spent much of his career at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Dr. Koestler is highly regarded as an excellent scientist and leader. As director, he will bring new research capabilities and focus to SCMRE's research and conservation and will work closely with the Smithsonian's museums. Dr. Koestler is known for his advancements in art conservation research, including quantification of biodeterioration and early detections systems, assessment of visual changes in material surfaces and control of insect and fungal infestations in objects. He developed a specialized method for eradicating these damaging organisms and has treated thousands of objects all over the world without harming the artworks or exposing conservators to dangerous chemicals. He has consulted on many projects worldwide for foundations, museums, collections and government conservation institutes and has served as an adjunct professor for New York University's Institute of Fine Arts Conservation Center. Dr. Koestler has appeared on the PBS program "Innovation and the BBC program "Nova" and is listed in the "Who's Who in Science and Engineering" in the 1993-1994 and 1995-1996 editions, and was featured in a recent Nature News article.

From the Cons Dist List

Call for Papers

Date: 16 Sep 2004

From: Randy Wilkinson rwilkinson@99main.com

Subject: Call for papers--AIC Wooden Artifacts Group

June 8-13, 2005

First call for papers to be presented to the Wooden Artifacts Group (WAG) at the 2005 AIC conference being held June 8 -13, 2005. All interested in presenting should submit their name, professional association, title and abstract to me ASAP.

Randy Wilkinson

WAG program Chair

Date: 21 Sep 2004

From: Holly Huston Krueger hkru@loc.gov

Subject: Call for papers--AIC Book and Paper Group

Please note that the "deadline" for submitting abstracts for the Book and Paper Session during the 2005 AIC Annual Meeting in Minneapolis is fast approaching. While the theme for the General Session is "Documentation" the Book and Paper Group welcomes papers on any paper related topic. If you are thinking of submitting a paper, please call or write the BPG program chair,

Holly Krueger hkru@loc.gov 202-707-2171.

Date: 20 Sep 2004

From: Alison Freake alison.freake@gov.ab.ca

Subject: Call for papers--CAC Annual Conference

Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property 31st Annual Conference and Workshop Jasper, Alberta, Canada May 19-21, 2005 The Alberta

Regional Group, your host for the 2005 conference and workshop, invites you to magnificent Jasper National Park in the heart of the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

The 31st Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property takes stock of accomplishments, and looks confidently to the future. Papers are invited on all aspects of conservation and conservation science of artifacts, archival material and works of art. Posters and video presentations are also welcome.

This year we would like to invite papers for two specialized sessions: Education and Training, and Moving Collections.

Abstracts submissions should include the following: the title of the presentation; the names of all contributors; mailing address, telephone, Fax: number and e-mail of the contact person; the name of the presenting author. Abstracts should be between 300 and 500 words and will be published as part of the conference proceedings. The deadline for abstracts is December 31, 2004

Contact: Lee Churchill leec@glenbow.org or Heather Dumka hdumka@glenbow.org

Program Co-chairs

403-268-4183/4185

Fax: 403-265-9769

Call for Papers

Jasper 2005 Pre-Conference Workshop Fur Trade Legacy:

The State of Preservation of Organic Materials May 17-18, 2005

In 2005, Alberta will celebrate one hundred years as a province. Alberta's earliest success was intimately linked to the Canadian Fur Trade, and the Workshop explores the specialized area of organic materials conservation. What is the state of preservation of collections that were once the foundation of nation building? Where are the products of the fur trade that once brought wildlife to the brink of extinction: the beaver hats, the swan skin powder puffs, the ermine trims, the buffalo coats and bear rugs, the plumes of the Belle Epoque, the mink capes?

continued from page 5

The Workshop aims to answer questions such as: What advances have been made in conservation treatment of historic furs and feathers? What are the ideal environmental conditions for fur storage? What are the chemical and structural properties of mammal hairs and bird feathers, including their pigmentation, that impact display decisions? What goes wrong with leather?

Case studies on cleaning, stabilization and moth control, hands-on identification of fur and feather specimens, planning and maintaining cold storage, and research into the light-fastness of organic pigments will be presented for a comprehensive overview of the state of preservation of organic materials in history collections. Presenters are invited to share curatorial, scientific, technical and conservation expertise with workshop participants. The hands-on components include cleaning techniques and the preparation of reference slides and identification kits.

Submissions will be published in English and French as Preprints of the Jasper 2005 Conference Workshop. The deadline for abstracts is December 31, 2004. The deadline for final papers is January 31, 2005.

Contact: Margot Brunn, Workshop Program 780-453-9167 Fax: 780-454-6629 margot.brunn@gov.ab.ca

Subject: Call for papers--AIC Research and Technical Studies

The topic for this year's RATS (Research and Technical Studies) session at the AIC meeting will be: "Polymers: Sticking Together." The session will focus on both the practical and theoretical aspects of polymers and be geared towards both scientists and conservators. Papers could cover one of the many aspects such as adhesives, consolidants, coatings and media. Submissions regarding a range of topics are encouraged, including the analysis and technical study of museum materials, treatment techniques and issues, and materials used in conservation practice. Please send abstracts (300 words) and brief author biographies to the following address by November 30, 2004:

Ellen Chase
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler

Gallery, MRC 707
Smithsonian Institution
PO Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013-7012
ellen.chase@asia.si.edu

Positions

Seeking Position

Kelly Harrington - an Art History Major at VCU - is seeking employment in an art conservation related field. Please contact Kelly at 757-812-5982, keharrington1@hotmail.com.

chemical impact of the fire upon the collections and formulating a treatment protocol to address the collection's needs was foremost on my mind. Seems straightforward enough doesn't it? Although my experience in working as a part of the team in this recovery effort taught me many things, I thought it might be of interest to concentrate upon one object that had suffered from the fire and discuss some of what had not been anticipated at the onset of its treatment.

Passing through the entryway of the Hermitage Foundation Museum one comes immediately to the center gallery room. The focal point in the gallery is a three-quarter life-sized seated Buddha with Mandorla flanked with bodhisattvas which seems to anchor all the other exhibits in this area. The sculpture is carved of marble and polychromed in the 6th century tradition of the Honan province in China. Its actual age may be a topic for further research. The figure sits on two levels of lotus blossoms. A 1" jade stone adorns the Buddha forehead and is secured in place with a dark resinous material. The marble surface is polychromed in earth tones of red and yellow ocher, terre verte (natural occurring green), carbon black and traces of white. The binder was not identified, although there is a high pigment to binder ratio which gives the paint a matte appearance. There appears to have been multiple paint campaigns during the sculptures' lifetime. From a materials point of view, the age of the object appears to be at least 500 years old due to the complexity and wear of the multiple paint layers. There are dark resinous deposits on the sides of the lotus petal base and on the underside of the legs, as well as on the underside of the curls on the head, all of which suggest that these residues are from candle soot and/or incense resin derived from ceremonial use in a temple setting. Black carbon based drawings are present underneath the paint layers on the eyes, lips of the figure, and lotus petals on the base.

Although there was obvious loss of structural features and some aspects of its condition are completely unrelated to the fire, the purpose in evaluating this object's condition was to assess fire related damage so that a proposal could be formulated along with a cost analysis for its treatment. The object is located about 20 feet from the origin of the fire and was separated only by a barrier wall. As one might expect the



Polychromed Marble seated Buddha with Mandorla flanked with bodhisattvas.



Soot accretions on broken arm and historic deposits on and under the bent leg.



Moderate soot layer over lightly bound paint film.

pH on the surface of this object was found to be highly acidic, at pH 5, in addition to a moderate to light amount of smoke residue and particulate matter found upon its surface. Soot was most prominent on the vertical surfaces and the smoke residues seemed to vary in composition depending on the location (height) as indicated by solvent testing. The amount and composition of smoke residues were important because in some areas the polychrome displayed a comparatively higher ratio of pigment to binder making those areas more fragile and less stable than the paint layers found in other areas. The fire damage in combination with this pre-existing condition compounded the complexity of this treatment was to be expected.

What was not expected and what I learned from this experience is that the additional copious amounts of time required on the part of all of the stakeholders involved in resolving the multitude of questions that arise during recovery can easily be overlooked and not factored into the initial time and cost proposal. The actual time required to complete this treatment was amplified and went beyond the obvious "cause and effect" aspect of a fire recovery effort. For example, the relationship between a deleterious soot layer found upon a fragile and easily damaged paint layer can raise a question about the level or degree of appropriate treatment. The matter deserved to be explored and addressed by the curatorial staff, the conservator involved, and ultimately the insurance company responsible for payment. What I found is that the additional time that such issues deservedly require is simply not apparent at the outset and was not incorporated into the initial proposal. In this case, not just myself, but by all of the stakeholders involved. In order to answer this and other questions I needed additional information from the curatorial staff including historical photos and documentation, (which were not available in this case), accession records, correspondence (if any existed), as well as catalogue records and references. The time required of the institution's staff to respond to such requests is ultimately a direct result of the impact of the fire, but who knew?

Another example in resolving questions about the level and appropriateness of treatment can best be summarized in the "good soot, bad soot" question. Because it appeared that the Buddha was in fact historically a cultural icon with residual

continued from page 7



Evidence of historic underdrawing on eyes.

soot deposits likely resulting from the burning of incense, it was appropriate to try and preserve these accretions. However to an insurance adjuster, soot can just be soot and the nuance relevant to the age of that soot can easily be lost. Again, this is a matter that requires curatorial involvement in the decision making process regarding the level and degree of cleaning. It also requires a well constructed and clear explanation to insurance representatives – all of which takes time.

In this discussion I have tried to shed light upon

some of the unanticipated aspects of a fire recovery conservation project and hope that others will learn something from it as well. For the institution's part, the full cost of managing the recovery itself, delegating additional staff responsibilities, and responding to requests from the insurance company, conservators, cleaning contractors, electricians, etc. can be a daunting experience. Similar questions to the ones described above arose during the course of treatment with other objects as well. For instance, the matter of an unstable lifting and cupping paint on a 17th century polychromed wooden figure with a layer of acidic soot found upon it. The paint layer would need to be stabilized prior to the removal of the soot, but who is responsible for that aspect of the treatment? The cupping paint is a pre-existing condition unrelated to the fire and therefore the need for it to be stabilized is not fire related. On the other hand it could be argued that the removal of the acidic soot was necessitated by the fire and the stability of the paint is simply to be factored into the treatment. The point here is that each stakeholder can have a different point of view and regardless of the ultimate conclusion, the process itself takes time to come to resolution by all parties involved.

I thought a brief discussion of these less apparent aspects of disaster recovery might be illuminating and food for thought should you be called upon for assistance in a similar situation. This has been a learning experience for me, but at the same time exceptionally rewarding as I watch the Hermitage continue its brilliant recovery and renewal from this disaster.