

# SERCA

Southeast Regional Conservation Association

## NEWSLETTER

Fall 2019 Volume 2, Number 2

### From the Desk of the Vice President

### Conservation Corridors: Engaging with the Local Conservation Community in Atlanta, Ga

*Michelle Savant, Vice President*

How did the Conservation Corridor Lunches come to be? Well, I had the pleasure of carpooling with Andrew Huot and Stephanie Watkins to the Charleston SERCA meeting. In the car we discovered that we live relatively close to each other. Andrew made a play off of Chamblee's "Antique Row" and came up with the title "Conservation Corridor" for our region.

A year passed, and SERCA was at Emory. Again I had the pleasure of sitting next to Andrew at the Saturday dinner. Even though we live less than 10 miles apart, we hadn't seen each other in that year. Something was wrong there, and we needed to fix it. Andrew came up with the Conservation Corridor Lunches. We would meet once a month for lunch to discuss treatments, conservation, and to just plain see each other on a social level. Those surveyed that night agreed this was a wonderful idea. And thus "Conservation Corridor Lunches" began in earnest in May of this year.

Andrew's concept of the lunch would be for conservators in private practice to meet. After all, we mostly work alone. But after the first lunch, which consisted of me, Larry (Shutts), Andrew, and Stephanie, I decided to add our institutional colleagues to the list. I felt they have a greater chance to undertake research and read literature and so would educationally enhance our lunch discussions. Besides, I like hearing their stories, seeing their faces, and giving them a reason to get out of the lab as well! There are currently 17 names on our list and approximately half of us have shown up at each lunch.

The location varies but date and time is always the same. If you find yourself in Atlanta on the third Wednesday of the month you are more than welcome to join us! To be added to the mailing list, contact Michelle via [michelle@savantandshuttsartconservation.com](mailto:michelle@savantandshuttsartconservation.com).

## SERCA 2019 RECAP

### Workshop 101: Dispelling the Myth of Putting on a Workshop

*Ginny Newell*

#### **Conception:**

The workshop at ReNewell, Inc. happened very spontaneously. SERCA's speaker last year ended with: "and we haven't even gotten to foxing and enzymes." Because I truly do operate by the premise that if you don't ask, the answer is always no, I jumped up and asked if they ever came and taught at private labs. YES. So I pulled out my calendar and in no time Sept 20-24, 2018 was written in ink. I looked at the conservators standing around as I talked with our speaker and asked if they were interested. Another YES and DONE. My workshop was in the works.

The point to remember is that the "gurus" in our field are incredibly knowledgeable and generous with that knowledge, so all you have to do is ASK. This was not the first instructor to come to my lab, though this was the largest workshop I have held.

In the end, there were 6 participants for a 3 ½-day workshop. They were all paper conservators in private practice that I knew and respected as colleagues. Some participants had experience with the cleaning systems covered, while others were newbies. What was interesting about this group was that everyone had completely different educational paths and interests. This created a well-roundedness to the group that was helpful, supportive, well versed and informative. The group was small enough that camaraderie was formed yet large enough to reasonably and affordably divide all the costs. In this case, the instructor's costs were \$500 a day plus expenses.

#### **Implementation:**

Once back at the lab, I wondered what I'd gotten myself into. There is nothing hard about hosting a workshop, it just takes a lot of time and organization. The remaining work was just a lot of emailing to coordinate participants and instructor, and getting help with logistics and housing. Six weeks prior to the workshop, doing a deep, deep cleaning of the lab prepared the space.

Requested materials and supplies were ordered, requiring even more emails. Some supplies were found and obtained locally. The already well appointed lab supplemented last-minute, spur of the moment supply requests by the instructor throughout the extended weekend.

The day before the workshop, the lab table was set up, a final, touch-up cleaning and tidying done, groceries purchased, and anxiety meds taken (lol!). The evening before, all participants were hosted to a welcoming, delicious homemade dinner and dessert at "Chez Ginny."

### **Conclusions:**

The things I learned about hosting were many. Tap into your local network. A friend rented out bedrooms for colleagues to offset an Airbnb rental house. You might think of hosting the instructor yourself but there really is no need....it only adds additional pressure and stress. Next time, I will create a distinction between "accommodation" and "workshop" hostessing: put the instructor in a hotel despite the cost because it is very hard to host 24/7.

Likewise, asking workshop participants to be self-sufficient helps the host focus on the workshop contents too. Initiate the workshop with an "orientation" in the lab as to how to make copies, where everything is (bathrooms, microwave, copier, phone), etc., so that people can take care of their own needs. Or have an assistant just sitting there to help people.

While my homemade, welcoming dinner was enjoyed and appreciated, it created added stress for me. Gathering at a favorite local restaurant to welcome and acquaint everyone the evening before could have served the same purpose.

And last but not least, take a longer lunch and then work later in the lab going straight to dinner. It was too hard to get "home" and then go back out for dinner. Taking a longer social break mid-day also helps to better process and retain concepts.

The bottom line is that the value and benefits of this workshop FAR exceeded the time and expense. Just do it!

## **Know your Limits: Utilizing Adjusted Waters & Managing Expectations**

*Katie Boodle*

Adding ammonium hydroxide and acetic acid to deionized water then imbuing agarose gels with it is gaining traction as a useful paper conservation method. Popularly known among paper conservators as "adjusted waters" per Amy Hughes, Daria Keynan, and Chris Stravoudis, the approach focuses on optimizing aqueous treatment to the pH and conductivity of any unique object. I learned about this technique at the Cleaning and Conductivity Workshop at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, TX in Dec. 2017, and subsequently applied it to an object that came through NEDCC for treatment. While the information about how to adjust water was interesting, the most beneficial part of the entire experience was the detailed insight into how conductivity and pH affect papers and stains. The adjusted waters approach is something to add to our tool box to treat complicated media, substrates, and adhesives in a more targeted manner.

My primary takeaways from the workshop were that by working to the specific pH and conductivity of any object we can gain the following benefits:

- Precise control over the fibers by limiting the swelling or shrinking.
- Improved absorption of the solution into the paper and overall fiber saturation.
- Limited residues. The volatile nature of ammonium hydroxide and acetic acid limits or prevents residues from being left behind; however, this is a double edged sword as it means that the solutions have a limited shelf life.
- Use of a targeted approach, replacing harsher stain reduction and bleaching techniques.
- Control shifts in pH through the use of a buffered solution resulting in subtle and more prolonged washing results.





Treatment of a thank you card from the Carnegie Hall Archives showcased both the benefits and the limitations of adjusted waters. The card was made of a very heavy cardstock with metallic embossing and fountain pen ink signatures of Andrew and Louise Carnegie. Biological staining damaged the left half and the verso. The object was an ideal candidate for using adjusted waters because the localized staining was very water soluble while the rest of the object was in good condition. The thickness and density of the paper made the ability to tightly control the swelling of the paper fibers also desirable.



The staining and paper were tested with 5% agarose plugs to obtain pH and conductivity readings of both areas using the method described by Amy Hughes in her 2017 article. These results then led to the creation of several solutions for further testing and use during treatment: pH 5.5/1000  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ , pH 5.5/6000  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ , pH 6/1000  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ , and pH 6/6000  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ .

Five-percent agarose was prepared, then placed in each solution until it was fully saturated. To determine the best solution, several small agarose plugs were placed on the stain for 20 minutes. The results showed that the 6/6000 worked best, with the 5.5/6000 being a close second. Both the 5.5/1000 and 6/1000 minimally removed the staining. The 6/6000 gels were cut to the shape of the stain and placed on the object for an hour under light weight, checking periodically to monitor progress and prevent tidelines forming. This process was repeated until the 6/6000 gels ceased removing discoloration from the object.

However, the stain was still noticeable on both sides of the document. Therefore, after the paper dried completely, the pH and conductivity readings were repeated. The new results of decreased conductivity and near neutral pH indicated that the next step should be to use the 6/1000 gel. This hypothesis was tested locally for 15 minutes and proved to remove more discoloration. The gels were cut and applied as before. After this second gel solution application, the stain on the recto had decreased to an acceptable extent, though it had not disappeared entirely. Therefore, as the client's exhibition goals were met, the treatment stopped at this point.



While the treatment succeeded in its goals, it fell short of my expectations. After seeing this technique applied to many modern artwork case studies in the workshop, I had high expectations. However, my limited experience of the process likely contributed to my disappointment. The experience offered me good insights and information about the technique to use in the future. I hope this case study using adjusted waters helps others when considering this application.

Recommended Reading/Sources:

- Brücke, Irene & Gerhard Banik. *Paper and Water: A Guide for Conservators*. Routledge: London, 2011.
- Hughes, Amy. "Measurement of surface pH of paper using agarose gel plugs: a feasibility study." *Gels in Conservation*. 2017: pp 62-66.
- Hughes, Amy & Daria Keynan. "Testing the Waters: New Technical Applications for the Cleaning of Acrylic Paint Films and Paper Supports." *The Book and Paper Group Annual*. 2013. Vol 32: pp 43-51.

**American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) and Conservation Collaboration**

# Georgia Local Section of AIHA

*Will Ewing*

My name is Will Ewing and I currently serve as a director on the board for the Georgia Local Section of AIHA. Last year I had the opportunity to attend the 3rd Annual Safety & Cultural Heritage Summit at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and was amazed to learn about the various safety and health challenges currently facing the conservation and preservation industry, such as the use of hazardous chemicals during a restoration process or handling a collection piece that is comprised of hazardous components itself. I had the chance to meet the Potomac Local Section of AIHA who worked with the Smithsonian and other organizations to host this event, and was invited to join the working group and assist in their goal of having local sections network with local conservation guilds and other similar organizations.

The Georgia Local Section of AIHA has many safety and health professionals who can serve as a great resource for assistance in areas such as training and program development, education, hazard identification and characterization, exposure risk and control, safety and health risk management, and more. Many of our members are Certified Industrial Hygienists with many years of experience and are always excited to confront and solve new problems. As industrial hygienists it is our job to anticipate, recognize, evaluate, control, and prevent hazards from work that may result in injury, illness, or affect the well being of workers. If you are reading this and think there is an area of collaboration where our professions can come together to develop solutions to the conservation and preservation industry's challenges then I invite you to check out our website at [www.georgiaaiha.org](http://www.georgiaaiha.org) and to reach out to anyone on our board or executive committee for contacts. By working together we can minimize the impact that occupational hazards pose to museum, historical sites, and collection care professionals.

## Museum, Historical Sites, and Collection Care Risk Management Working Group

*Will Ewing*

Last year, members from the [American Industrial Hygiene Association \(AIHA\)](#) and the [American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works \(AIC\)](#) came together to form the "Museum, Historical Sites, and Collection Care Risk Management" working group. The purpose or mission of the group is to bring together health, safety, fire protection, museum, conservation, educational and cultural heritage professionals and trade organizations to effectively address the occupational risk management needs of the collection care industry.

The working group has put forth five strategic goals as a framework for accomplishing this mission:

1. Raising awareness via continuing education and conference presentation
2. Local section networking

3. Exposure risk and control assessments
4. Co-producing training and resource products
5. Career path development

Recently the group has been hard at work to develop joint summits and encourage networking among professionals and local sections.

## Membership Experiences & Opportunities

### Spring 2019 Professional Opportunity Grant Experience

*Marianne Schmeisser, Conservation Technician, North Carolina Museum of Art*

**Virginia Museum of Fine Arts African Art Symposium:  
Bridging Disciplines in the Study of African Art: The Curator-  
Conservator Connection (April 4 -5, 2019)**



The April Symposium hosted by the VMFA was truly an interesting mix of viewpoints, wonderfully highlighting the differences in Curatorial vs Conservator research, whilst also showing how they work well together to structure the future of exhibition and information. The first day of the symposium focused on "Materials & Meaning," beginning with a wonderful keynote address by Ellen Pearlstein. Her topics of "Surface, Motion, and Secrecy" encompassed the scope of the Mellon Grant surprisingly well – conservation testing surfaces and discovering some hidden "secrets," while curators studied the motion these objects conveyed and what ARE secrets and should remain so. I found this first day extremely helpful as it gave useful tips and ideas on future exhibitions for our African objects, as well as excitement that our examinations of African objects had revealed similar results and new things to search for.

The second day focused more on the kinds of discussions that need to be a norm between conservator and curators, especially in a Mellon project of this scope. The curators direct the examinations with what questions they have, tempered by the conservator's knowledge of how best to handle the artefact. These both are then governed by the ethics of any interaction with the object – should these tests even be done, are we showing respect to the culture/the people/the object, and are we even allowed to know what we're testing for. These are questions we usually do not ask for Renaissance paintings or Classical Vases, so it was an enlightening moment to stop and think about these issues for what art is in our museum. Overall, I found the symposium a great learning experience, and easily applicable to all of my current work. It gave me context for why conservators do the tests and imaging that we do, rather than just a blanket "to know." It made me eager to continue researching on our objects and to provide all the information I can to inspire all those who come to visit our museum.

**Congratulations!**

**Johanna Rivera-Diaz** is the recipient of the Winter 2019 Professional Opportunity Grant. She will use her grant in her upcoming project, the excavation of a late Mesolithic site from the Ertebolle culture in Bornholm, Denmark.



## Funding Opportunities

### **Leonora Weaver Scholarship:**

Leonora Weaver (1957-2014) was an Atlanta-based conservator in private practice, a long-term member of SERCA, and a mentor to many students and emerging conservators across the southeast and beyond. In honor of Leonora's commitment to education, SERCA is dedicated to the maintenance of the Leonora Weaver Scholarship, which will cover registration fees and provide a small stipend for travel to SERCA's annual educational programs.

To help maintain the Leonora Weaver Scholarship fund:

use link, [Leonora Weaver Scholarship fund donation](#) to pay through PayPal

or

send a check for the desired amount **made out to SERCA** to:

*Brittany Dolph Dinneen, SERCA Treasurer, Michael C. Carlos Museum Emory University  
571 S Kilgo Circle Atlanta, GA 30322*

For questions regarding funding opportunities, please contact SERCA Scholarship Chair, Julie Newton [jnewt01@emory.edu](mailto:jnewt01@emory.edu).

## SERCA Membership

### SAVE THE DATE

**WHAT: 2020 SERCA annual meeting**

**WHERE: North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, NC**

**WHEN: February 28 - March 1, 2020**

**WHO: Gwen Spicer, author of *Magnetic Mounting Systems for Museums & Cultural Institutions***

## Now accepting payments ONLINE via PayPal!

Renewing your membership is even easier without having to worry about mailing in those pesky checks!! You will also be able to register and pay for workshops online. Please be sure to submit **BOTH** the Registration Form *and* the Payment. If you haven't already renewed, please

*As decided, the SERCA membership year will now run from January 1st thru December 31st.*

## SERCA Find A Conservator

If you would like to be included on the [\*Find a Conservator\*](#) page on the SERCA Website, please contact: Rachel Penniman, *Member-at-large/Website Guru*, [rachel.penniman@duke.edu](mailto:rachel.penniman@duke.edu)

## Newsletter Submissions

Working on an interesting project? Have an internship or a job opening to share? Let us know what's going on in your studio! Items for inclusion in the newsletter should be directed to:

Tracey Johnson - Newsletter Co-editor: [tracey.johnson@usg.edu](mailto:tracey.johnson@usg.edu)

*SERCA's Newsletter is published three times a year in April, August, and December. Please note that articles should be sent at least two weeks prior to publication and should not exceed 750 words. Also, there should be no more than 4 accompanying images in jpeg format. The editors reserve the right to copy edit in order to fit available space.*

**Deadline for Submission: November 15, 2019**

**Next Issue: December 2019**



## Southeast Regional Conservation Association

 [Facebook](#)

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