



Art Conservation *and historical keepsakes*

Nineteenth-century travelers, like those today, valued pictures as mementoes of their trips. But while today's tourists can snap photos with a camera or cell phone, those wealthy enough to travel in the nineteenth century would buy paintings from artists who catered to the vacation trade.

One example, an impressionistic landscape painting called *The City Gate, St. Augustine*, recently became a treatment project for paintings major and Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Sydney Beall. The privately owned painting by Frank Henry Shapleigh (1842-1906) dates from sometime between 1886 and 1892 when the New Hampshire artist, generally most closely associated with that state's White Mountain school of art, spent his winters as an artist-in-residence in the popular resort city of St. Augustine, Florida. (The gates were a favorite subject for artists.) In the years since Shapleigh created his version the painting has endured tears, discoloration, and extensive misguided restoration efforts.

Sydney's treatment goal was to mend the tears and remove the discolored varnish and heavy overpaint applied during earlier restorations.

Sydney first used an adhesive to consolidate bits of flaking paint so she could safely turn the painting over and remove a large, brittle patch that had been used to mend a tear in an earlier restoration. Over time, the adhesive used for the old patch on the back had caused withering and ripples visible on the surface of the painting. To remove the patch, she applied a dab of gel with a small spatula until each small area was softened enough to mechanically remove it with a spatula. She placed glass weights on the canvas to keep it in plane as she worked.

She then removed the varnish from the surface, as well as grime and dirt, and finally the overpaint, with gel solutions of varying strengths. To mend a large, six-inch tear she adhered Japanese tissue paper to the tear to help hold the edges together and provide support. To mend a smaller, 'L'-shaped tear, she worked under a microscope to realign individual threads and then adhered additional small linen threads, splayed at the ends, to the carefully lined-up original threads.

She finished by filling and then inpainting areas of loss, including a large loss within a cloud along the longer tear. Before returning the painting to its owner, Sydney, who has a subspecialty in frames, plans to consolidate the gold gilding and re-adhere broken pieces of ornamentation onto its Rococo-Revival-style frame.



ARTC Spotlight—April 2015

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: WUDPAC Fellow Sydney Beall surface cleaning around the tear in The City Gate, St. Augustine; Above: Details of the patch during removal and the tear before mending; Above, right: Detail of the completed thread-bridging tear mend, seen under magnification; Right: Detail after treatment. (Images: Joyce Hill Stoner and Sydney Beall.)