



ARTC Spotlight—February 2012

The University of Delaware Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. Our students are powerful public spokespersons for cultural heritage and its preservation. For more news about our students and other department activities, visit us at <http://www.artcons.udel.edu>

Top: Second-year WUDPAC Fellow Sara Lapham trimming the replacement veneer for the spice cabinet door. Above: Images of the cabinet before conservation treatment reveal damaged wood inlay and degraded finishes, as well as missing brass knobs and center drawer. Insets: An original brass knob, along with Sara's construction of replacement knobs using a metal turning lathe.



Art Conservation *and historical craftsmanship*

The concept is romantic, the reality almost more so. Keep your expensive, imported spices in a lovely small cabinet with many drawers, but don't place it in the kitchen. Instead, keep it in the parlor with the family's best furniture.

And use some of those drawers to store other treasured items, such as jewelry or ivory combs, alongside the precious cinnamon, nutmeg and allspice. Indeed, one of the drawers might even be used to store shot for a gun, which is something second year Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Sara Lapham discovered when working on one of what has been called a "rare and fascinating furniture form" from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Known as spice boxes, they were originally made in England. Even after they became less popular there, and in New England, spice boxes continued to be made in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and could be found in prosperous households in and around Philadelphia. The spice box Sara has been treating belonged to wealthy Philadelphia Quaker merchant and ship owner Thomas Chalkley, (1675-1741), and is owned by one of his descendants.

Much of Sara's work on the Chalkley spice box has involved undoing changes made over the past 300 years so that it will adhere more closely to its original early 18th century appearance. Working under the guidance of Winterthur's head furniture conservator Mark Anderson, Sara quickly saw, for example, that the box's top was both out-of-period and made from a piece of wood, possibly English oak, that looked suspiciously like parquet flooring. She made a plaster profile of the molded edge of the top of a similar 18th century spice box that was on exhibit at Winterthur, and used it to help create a new top out of aged walnut for the Chalkley box.

Sara also determined that one of the box's original 14 drawers was missing and made a new one, also out of walnut. She then replaced out-of-period drawer knobs on the box with more appropriate ones that she made on a metal turning lathe. By hanging them over a mixture of ammonia and water, she created a patina that more closely matched the original knobs still on the box. Sara's treatment also has included removing out-of-period handles, coating the box with a synthetic resin to help protect the wood and give it a more cohesive appearance, replacing pieces of chipped veneer with sumac, inpainting and work on the stretchers on the base, which are not original to the piece.

