

Art Conservation *and historical documents*

A popular volume found in many late 18th and early 19th century schoolrooms was a hieroglyphic Bible, in which some of the words in the text were replaced with pictures. This simple method of storytelling both addressed parents' goal of teaching Scripture and was considered a pleasant way to help young children become readers. One of the best known of these biblical textbooks was "A Curious Hieroglyphic Bible," illustrated with woodcuts and published first in London in 1784 and also in Massachusetts by 1788. A 1796 edition of the Bible, published in London and dedicated to the "Parents, Guardians and Governesses of Great Britain and Ireland," has become a treatment project for second year Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Carrie McNeal.

The fragile 136-page text, which had been part of a study collection, came to Carrie missing its front cover and some threads in the binding. A few pages were detached and many others were dirty and damaged, especially along the gutter. Carrie's goal was to stabilize the paper, stop the degradation and mend the damage.

Working under the direction of Winterthur Library Conservator Consuela (Chela) Metzger, Carrie began by cleaning the spine, which consisted of small pieces and bits of leather. She first applied a piece of Japanese tissue to hold the fragile fragments together so they wouldn't disintegrate as she lifted them off. She then moistened and softened the spine by applying a thin solution of wheat starch so that she could more easily remove the remaining leather dust and adhesive. Once the spine was clean, she removed the threads that held the binding together and separated the folios. She cleaned the paper by placing each folio between two sheets of pellow and immersing them in three, 20-minute tap water baths. To dry the pages, she created two stacks composed of layers of felt, blotting paper, pellow and the folios, all compressed under heavy pieces of Plexiglas. She then used Japanese tissue paper to mend small tears in the paper and frayed and torn places along the edges. She also used Japanese tissue to strengthen and mend the pages that were detached.

Finally, Carrie put the book back together by sewing through the folds of the folios. She created a new cover by wrapping leather around stiff pieces of Matboard, which she fashioned from scratch in order to match the thickness of the original. The book will become a teaching tool and part of her portfolio.



ARTC Spotlight—March 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>

Above: Second-year WUDPAC Fellow Carrie McNeal using a soft brush to remove adhesive residues from one folio, and a detail from another folio before treatment. Right: The poor condition of pages and spine before treatment. Top: View of the re sewn folios after treatment. (Photos: Chela Metzger and Carrie McNeal).

