



Art Conservation *and “Evenings at Home”*

First published between 1792 and 1796, Evenings at Home was a six-volume collection of children’s stories that became a popular item in many 19th-century English homes. Its broad range of scientific lessons, fairy tales, fables, poems, and plays, written by John Aiken (1747-1822) and his sister, Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825), is today considered an important example of early children’s literature. One bound volume of a later edition of Evenings at Home, printed between 1810 and 1833, is part of the non-circulating rare book collection in the Winterthur Library.



But the book was almost unusable by researchers until it became a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) second-year Fellow Austin Plann Curley. It had lost its red leather-covered back board, and the front board and spine were not attached to the text block, leaving the fragile pages unprotected and difficult for researchers to handle safely.

Austin’s treatment goal was to find a functional and visually harmonious way to recreate the missing board and securely attach it to the original spine and the textblock. He first created a new back board by using wheat starch paste to laminate together pieces of acid-free card stock until he had a stack roughly 3 mm (about 1/8 inch), high, or about the same thickness as the front board. As the paste dried, he manipulated the stack so that, like the front board, it was slightly arched in the center to match the shape of the textblock.

To duplicate the cover’s visual appearance, he adhered a photocopy of the red leather-covered back board to his new board, atop a piece of light tan Japanese paper that closely matched the leather’s worn areas. He left the Japanese paper exposed at the spine edge and also used it to create a flange for use as a hinge to connect the board to the spine of the textblock.

The inside of the original back board was lined with a colorful marbled paper. Once again, Austin used the photocopier to create a twin that he attached to the replacement board with wheat starch paste. He also used wheat starch paste to attach the boards and original spine back to the textblock. While the photocopy-covered back board does not have the texture or tooling of the original, a casual user cannot immediately tell the difference. More importantly, researchers will once again be able to handle *Evenings at Home* with the confidence that it will remain intact.



ARTC Spotlight—March 2014

The University of Delaware’s 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 our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: WUDPAC Fellow Austin Plann Curley’s work station; the cover has been re-attached to Evenings at Home and the book is in the press. Far left: After attaching the original leather spine, the book is wrapped in an elastic bandage to provide light pressure until the adhesive dries (photo: Aleks Berger). Above: Evenings at Home is shown before treatment with a detached board and loose endbands. After treatment, a facsimile board is attached and endbands are re-adhered. Left: Evenings at Home before treatment.