



Art Conservation *and clippings from history*

*David Fox Nelson was no more than 12 in the summer of 1862 when he escaped from slavery in North Carolina by making his way to a group of Union soldiers. That daring step suggests a strength of character and intelligence that seemed to catch the eye of important men who later helped him on his way. Once he reached New York City, he worked as an office boy for Henry J. Raymond, a founder of the *New York Times*, and in 1870 journalist and politician Thurlow Weed helped him gain a position at the Post Office, where he spent his career as a messenger and clerk.*

In New York City, Nelson began a life-long hobby of scrapbooking news clippings, letters and other ephemera that interested him. Five of those scrapbooks, spanning 1869 to 1895, now belong to the manuscript and archive collection at the University of Delaware (UD), and this year they became a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Nylah Byrd. Nylah, an objects major with a library and archives minor, has a special interest in preserving the cultural heritage of underrepresented groups and thought it was a happy coincidence that the scrapbooks were available for her to treat for her minor.

The scrapbooks are in varying needs of conservation, and this year Nylah may be able to complete treatment on only the one scrapbook of the five that has lost its binding. It is also one of two in the greatest disrepair. Her goal is to stabilize the scrapbook so that it can be safely handled and used by researchers. Nylah does not plan to create a new binding for the scrapbook because she believes the brittle pages might be damaged in the rebinding process. Instead, she will encapsulate each page in Mylar and then post bind them together with a hard cover. First, however, she will carefully dry clean each page with a hake brush, humidify and relax any creased pages before drying them under a blotter and weights, and mend any tears she finds with wheat paste and Asian tissue paper.

When Nylah's treatment is complete, the scrapbook will be ready to be returned to UD's manuscript and archive collection to be more safely used by researchers. The remaining scrapbooks will be rehoused before they, too, are returned to UD to be available for use by researchers.



ARTC Spotlight—December 2020

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 artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top and above: WUDPAC Fellow Nylah Byrd surface cleaning volumes using a hake brush. Right, top: Before treatment image of Volume 1 (1863-75), with pink staining and loose ephemera. Right, bottom: Before treatment image of the Cassie E. Day volume; Nelson created this scrapbook for his wife Cassie years before they got married. Images: E. Krape and N. Byrd.