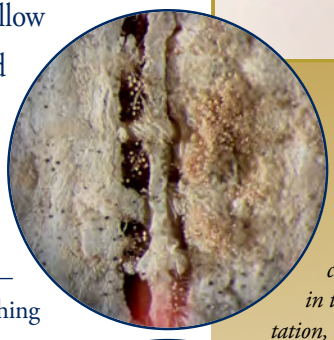
Art Conservation *and preserving young love*

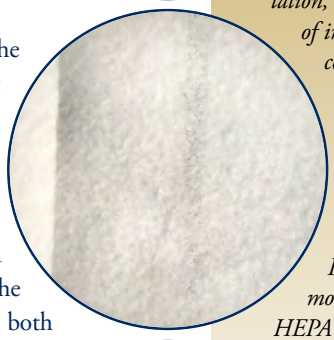
Two young African-American children wearing party clothes, or perhaps their Sunday best, stand frozen in time in a photograph taken in Alabama on a sunny day in 1929. The girl looks directly at the camera while the boy stands behind her, his right hand resting on her shoulder as he gazes into the distance. The photograph, taken by acclaimed photographer Prentice Herman Polk (1898-1985) and titled *Young Love*, is simple, arresting, and significant, as it was gifted to the University of Delaware by Donald Polk, his son, and the Polk Family. The photograph became a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Amber Kehoe this year after collection curators became concerned about signs of mold on the print, likely induced by past exposure to high humidity and temperature.

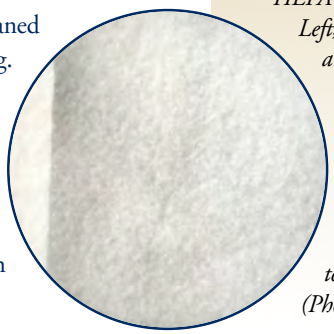
Amber, a photograph conservation major, loves the way photographs make her feel connected to real people and places, and she was touched by the image of the young children, one of whom appears to be the photographer's son, Donald, when he was young. Polk frequently photographed his family and community—people who were important to him—something we still do today.

Amber's treatment goal was to improve the print's overall appearance and stability so that it could be safely handled, studied, and exhibited. She first removed the print from the window mat by cutting the deteriorated, moldy hinges that held it in place. Using a soft bristle brush and a small vacuum equipped with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate arrestance) filter, she gently removed loose mold from the mat and both sides of the print. After consolidating areas of lifting gelatin along the edges of the print, she cleaned the surface with a soft, microfiber cloth to further reduce mold spores and associated staining. Then Amber carefully removed graphite marks on an area of the print surface using small slivers of polyvinyl eraser. Before completing the treatment, she humidified and dried the print twice using a gentle humidity chamber with room temperature, deionized water, and a drying stack assembled with nonwoven polyester webbing, cotton blotter paper, glass platens, and weights.

Amber returned *Young Love* to UD and included conservation documentation and a list of recommendations for storage and display that will help protect and preserve the photograph so that it can be enjoyed by future generations.







ARTC Spotlight—May 2018

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: Detail of the print after treatment. Above: WUDPAC Fellow Amber Kehoe removing mold spores from the print with a HEPA vacuum and soft bristle brush. Left, top down: Mold spores on a mat hinge before treatment, 40x magnification; indentation damage near the print margin before and after local graphite reduction, 25x magnification. Far left: Humidifying the print in a chamber using room temperature deionized water. (Photos: Amber Kehoe, Emily Farek.)