



Art Conservation *and the heritage of ownership*

When a six-inch-tall Pennsylvania German basket became a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) second-year Fellow Emily Brown, its small size and organic composition differed markedly from objects she had encountered during her pre-program experiences.

[Those projects had included ceramic and glass restoration, and the conservation of both bronze sculptures and textiles.] The willow basket is one of ten baskets on permanent display in the museum's 8th-floor Lebanon Room. In 2012, it became a treatment project for then second-year WUDPAC Fellow Courtney Von Stein. Courtney prepared a treatment proposal and condition report, carefully cleaned the basket's surface, reshaped the form, and mended the foot. As an objects major with a minor in preventive conservation, Emily's goal was to complete the treatment and return the basket to display.

The basket was made for export in Germany's Upper Franconia region, most likely in the 1830s. It has an oval body 8 ½-inches long x 4 ¼-inches deep that narrows to a flared and rimmed neck and a domed lid, and two handles that join to the body at the top. The basket has an intricate weave construction and is decorated with simple, multi-colored floral and geometric designs. A paper document adhered inside the lid explains the heritage of ownership through the female line of the donor's family in Pennsylvania, back to 1836.

Emily's treatment involved compensating for losses and breaks in the willow rods along the basket's rim, repairing the handle, replacing a broken hinge on the lid, and replacing a missing hinge for the handle.

Making frequent use of magnification as she worked, Emily used many different materials in her mends, including Japanese paper, archival board, thin splints of bamboo, and an easily reversible adhesive. She also consolidated the flaking pale pink paint by applying a dilute adhesive with a small brush. Emily will return the basket to the Winterthur collection after she creates a soft, internal mount for the rather heavy lid—this will provide adequate support to the structure of the basket and help maintain its shape during the years of display ahead. Considering all the hours spent on this project, Emily said that besides the refinement in hand skills that the treatment provided, she developed a strong, new appreciation for basketry and the artistic and historical information that the art form can preserve.



ARTC Spotlight—June 2014

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. 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: Basket with Painted Floral Decoration (Germany, 1835-1870), Winterthur Museum collection, accession #2010.0050. Historical paper insert detailing the descent of the basket through the family, and lovingly given to Anna Becker by her grandfather "for Rememberance." Above: Local humidification applied to the basket to relax the willow skeins that bind the rim elements together. Left: The broken rods before and after treatment with Japanese paper fills. Far left: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Emily Brown inserting toned Japanese paper fills to restore losses in the willow rods. (Photos: Claire Curran and Emily Brown.)

