



Winterthur/University of Delaware
Program in Art Conservation
Conservation Report



Accession #: 2001.0017.0017

Owner: University of Delaware Museums: “The Baltimore Collection”

Permanent Location: UD Museums Collections

Object: [Studio portrait of unidentified woman standing in front of a wooden background]

Object Date: 1886-1894

Artist/Maker: Lewis Horning, Parlor Gallery, 525 South 9th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Materials: Albumen print; cabinet card

Dimensions: Image: 14.5cm (5.75in) x 10cm (4in)

Mount: 16.5cm (6.5in) x 11cm (5.25in)

Reason for Treatment or Examination: Examined as part of the photograph conservation block documentation project and aimed to add to the curatorial and conservation body of knowledge.

Examined by: Jennifer Myers, WUDPAC 2020

Consulted: Debra Hess Norris, *Chair and Professor, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation*

Dr. Julie McGee, *Associate Professor of Africana Studies and Art History at the University of Delaware*

Report Date: January 17, 2018

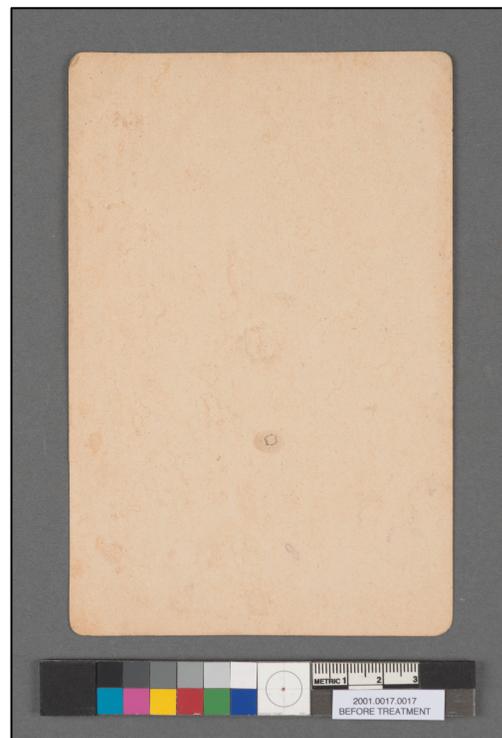


Fig. 1-2 - 2001.0017.0017 Before treatment – Recto and verso

DESCRIPTION

This photograph is a full-length portrait of an unidentified woman posing against a painted backdrop of trees. The props in the photograph include a fence made of tree branches and a molded, chest-height, ball-topped column, with cast or carved decoration. The figure is dressed in late 19th century attire, with an ankle length skirt and a fully buttoned bodice extending to fingertip length. The subject is wearing a dark scarf, appearing to be made of hanging fur or feathers. Her hair is either short or has been styled closed to her head. The subject's left arm is resting on the column.

The photograph is an albumen print on a lightweight paper support. The silver in the albumen binder is photolytic. The paper fibres are visible, as there are only two layers present in cross section. The print is mounted onto a 3-ply paper mounting card, known as a cabinet card. The printing at the bottom of the card reads: "PARLOR GALLERY" and "525 S. 9th St., Philada." from left to right.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This photograph is one component of an assortment of unknown photographs known as "The Baltimore Collection." These were found in Maryland and donated to the University of Delaware in 2001 by Neil, Reba, and Jessica Porter because the photographs were in need of conservation, as they had been damaged by multiple agents of deterioration, most noticeably, mold and moisture. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs consist of portraits of Black or African American individuals, taken in the Baltimore, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, and Washington, D.C. areas. Included in the 53 objects are tintypes, albumen prints, matte collodion prints, silver gelatin printing-out prints (POP), silver gelatin developing-out prints (DOP) and one halftone (Hess Norris, 2017).

In the Fall of 2017, a graduate-level course titled "Curating Hidden Collections & the Black Archive" was led by Julie McGee to "study . . . the photographs as objects of material and visual culture; consideration of the sitters, photography studios, photographic portraiture, clothing, and self-fashioning trends in Black Baltimore and the Mid-Atlantic region; early African American portrait photography; and an introduction to archival and theoretical challenges in making this collection and others like it available to the public" (McGee, 2017). The course resulted in a WordPress website and digital ArtStor archive for "The Baltimore Collection."

This particular cabinet card is labeled with a photography studio, the Parlor Gallery. Research by Kelli Coles indicates the building occupied by the Parlor Gallery contained white-run businesses, but all of the known photographs from the studio featured African American subjects. The Parlor Gallery was in business from 1884 to 1889 in the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia, a historically African American neighborhood with interracial business activity (Coles, 2017). The Parlor Gallery was one of several photography studios under the management of photographer, Lewis Horning. It was listed in business and city directories or documented as located at 525 S 9th St. between 1888 and 1900 (Coles, 2017). Coles writes,

"The payment of portraits, the crafting of self-presentation and self-possession was a tactic used by many to assert citizenship, demonstrate success in life, and at the same time consciously or unconsciously subvert negative depictions (or portrayals) of Black people featured in caricatures, racist literature, and scientific racism studies. By the end of the nineteenth century the democratic nature and economy of photographs allowed people of all economic stratas to partake in the activity (Coles, 2017)."

The albumen print is commonly found in this cabinet card form. This method of printing was popular in the second half of the 19th century. These types of prints are printed out by light on a thin paper substrate

that is coated on only one side. Because of this, they have a tendency to curl up and tear, resulting in the common practice of mounting them to cards with adhesive in order to keep the print flat.

CONDITION (BEFORE TREATMENT)

This albumen print is in fair condition, with compromised stability and the potential for disassociation, as the photograph is becoming separated from the mount. There is a tear through the print in the upper right quadrant, beginning along the right edge and continuing quarter-way towards the top edge, diagonally. The interior edges of the tear have darkened from embedded soiling. There is a second, smaller, tear in the bottom right corner. Both tears have prominent planar distortions that follows this tear and continues to the edge, ending in small complete material losses on the point of the tear. Planar distortions follow around the print edges (curling), where it has separated from the mount. This is most prominent along the bottom third of the print that is curling up and away from the mount. The top left corner is creased and folded over. There are three moderate dents in the photograph near the center, that include planar distortions and small silver image loss through the binder and into the paper substrate. In addition, there are many scattered and small indentations that disrupt the surface sheen. Localized areas of dark green and embedded accretions surround the subject's torso. The entire photograph and mount has moderate inactive mold and water damage, with subsequent staining and planar distortions (warping and wrinkling). This is heaviest on the mounting paper in the middle and upper left side. The surface of the print contains scattered, small, black, and embedded staining spots that are possibly mold spores. The entire albumen surface has a layer of surface grime and uneven matting of the glossy binder. The albumen binder in the printed photograph is yellowed and has slight surface cracking, visible with magnification. The image has faded significantly, especially in the highlights. The mounting paper has yellowed and become brittle. It is composed of three layers of thin paper, which are prominently delaminating. It contains a small hole in the lower center of the verso. The verso contains evidence of mold damage, with purple tidelines and stains. The recto mounting paper has a lightened area of pink mold staining at the top left and purple staining overall, heaviest at the bottom edge.

RATIONALE FOR TREATMENT

This photograph is of important historic and cultural value to the history of African American culture and the growth and development of photographic technology and innovation. The Baltimore Collection is in poor condition as the result of prior water and mold damage. The past conditions of housing and storage did not protect these images from disaster. Efforts to stabilize, provide supportive housing, and bring clarity to the images are of great importance to both researchers and the community.

TREATMENT PROPOSAL

1. Document the albumen print (recto and verso) in high resolution RAW and .tiff files, using digital photography.
 2. Surface clean using dry methods to remove loose surface grime and debris. Test small areas first.
 3. Surface clean with wet methods to remove more embedded and solubilized grime. Test small areas first.
 4. Open and flatten creased corner with humidity.
 5. Repair two tears using methyl cellulose. Flatten.
 6. Inpaint small losses with watercolors over a methylcellulose barrier.
 7. House photograph in archival housing.
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TREATMENT REPORT

1. The photograph was documented before and after treatment on the recto and verso, using high resolution RAW and .tiff files, with a Nikon D800 DSLR camera. Raking light photography was also utilized to document the planar distortions of the object.
2. The surface was cleaned first with a soft, natural bristle dry brush, followed by cleaning under magnification, using a polyurethane cosmetic sponge, after testing.
3. The surface was cleaned with a mild enzymatic solution using cotton swabs, after testing. The enzymatic solution was cleared using deionized water. This was done under magnification with small and very slightly dampened swabs to minimize water being brought to the surface.
4. The crease in the folder upper left corner was humidified with a 50:50 ethanol and water mixture, applied to the crease with a small synthetic brush. After humidifying, the corner was lifted open with a microspatula and laid back into a flat position. The print was the laid on a blotter, covered in a piece of pellow, then another blotter and a piece of glass. This sandwich was weighted with marble blocks and allowed to dry.
5. The larger tear was mended by inserting a small piece of mylar under the flap, applying a 1% methylcellulose in water solution to the verso of the flap. The mylar was removed and the flap laid onto the mounting paper. The small tear was mended with a small amount of 1% methylcellulose used to adhere overlapping paper fibres. The print was the laid on a blotter, covered in a piece of pellow, then another blotter and a piece of glass. This sandwich was weighted with marble blocks and allowed to dry.
6. The small losses in the dents and tears were infilled with a barrier layer of 2% methylcellulose in water solution, then inpainted or toned using Sennelier watercolors and deionized water, applied with a sable brush.
7. The print was placed into a polyester L-sleeve for storage.

CONDITION AFTER TREATMENT

The condition of the print has improved visually and is more stable condition. It has a reduction in surface grime, with an improved clarity of image and a more even and glossy surface sheen. The tears are still visible, but are not lifted nor catching. The losses are toned and less visible. The print has further curled further, possibly due to fluctuations from the HVAC system responding to rapid changes in the weather during the period of treatment. Further recommendations for treatment would include detaching the print from the mount, for further grime and discoloration reduction of both surfaces and possibly to line the torn and vulnerable print. The pieces may then be flattened and remounted to assure there is no disassociation. Placing the photograph into an L-sleeve allows the researcher to handle and view this object in a safer manner.

PREVENTIVE CONSIDERATIONS

In order to ensure the longevity of the photograph, it is important to maintain proper storage and environmental conditions. Should the Baltimore Collection is to be stored together, one might consider the proper storage for their entirety, which contains silver gelatin (POP and DOP), matte collodion, tintype, half-tone and albumen prints. The following recommendations are for the large grouping of the collection, which is likely the practical consideration.

Too high of a relative humidity can be the cause for image fading, mold growth, and sulfiding (the loss of mid-tones in the photograph) if any remaining fixer was left behind (Lavédrine, 2003). The hygroscopic quality of gelatin, combined with the protein based emulsions of albumen and gelatin, make photographic collections particularly prone to microorganisms. If possible, the temperature should be kept below 68°F with a relative humidity between 30-55% (Image Permanence Institute, 2015).

Oxidizing agents can be the cause of many deterioration problems in photographs, most notably silver image degradation, and should be kept away from prints and negatives. Peroxides can be found in certain cardboard boxes and recently painted walls (alkyd-based paint) (Lavédrine 2003).

Light levels should be minimized and should not exceed 50 lux if possible, with a maximum annual light exposure of 50,000 lux hours per year. Yearly exposure to ultraviolet light is to be as close to 0 milliwatts per square meter as possible (Wagner, McCabe and Lemmen 2010). If displayed, the images should be properly framed with archival materials and ultraviolet filtered glazing, and should pass the Photographic Activity Test. If in storage, the collection should be housed in polyester L-sleeves stacked in drop side acid-free boxes. If digital images are not adequate for research, scholars should be alerted about the fragility of the collections and keep the photographs within the sleeves if possible. They should also have clean hands or gloves when possible, and use a rigid support to prevent breakage.

In addition to storage and display measures, the University of Delaware should ensure that a disaster plan is devised and well-communicated to various staff members involved in caring for the collection. Water events are of particular concern as these collections are very sensitive to the damage associated with moisture.

The albumen print has its own specific preventive care needs: the temperature and humidity should ideally remain constant. Albumen prints are particularly susceptible to damage related to high humidity levels. A lower range than the general range would be recommended (30-40%) (Hess Norris, 2017). This specific print has dimensionally out-of-plane tears, is partially detached from the mount, and the mounting card has delamination. These factors make sleeve storage and handling essential. It may benefit from a permanent rigid support on the verso to further prevent damage.

WUDPAC Graduate Fellow: Jennifer Myers

Date:

Conservator:

Date:

Curator:

Date:

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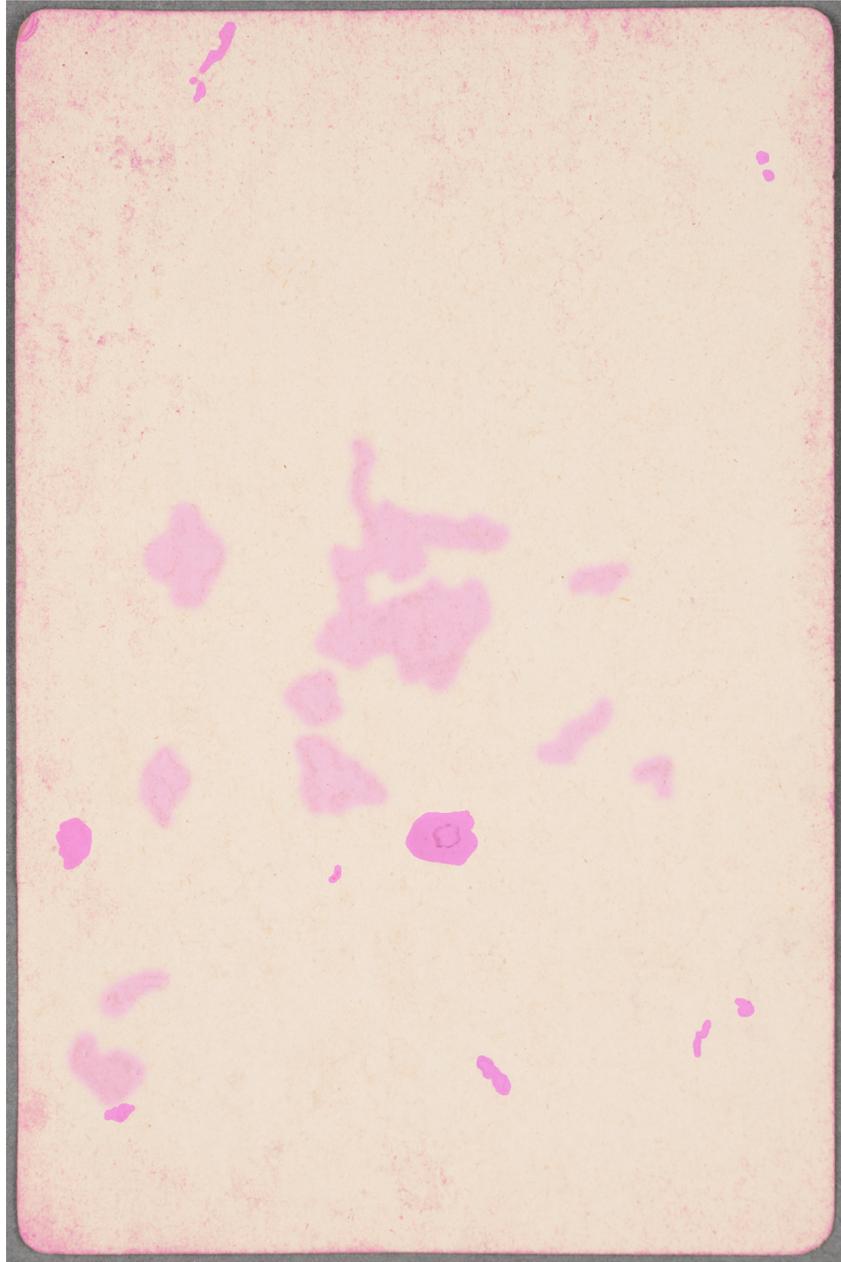
APPENDIX 1





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| ■ Damage to image, binder, and/or lacquer due to loss, abrasion, flaking, cracking, crazing, and planar distortion | ■ Iron corrosion |
| ■ Mechanical damage to primary or secondary support resulting in tears, folds, creases, and planar distortions | ■ Tape and/or tape adhesive |
| ■ Discoloration due to material off-set, acid migration localized discoloration and staining, and tide lines | ■ Accretions and localized surface dirt |
| ■ Silver Image deterioration such as localized fading, mirroring, and yellowing | ■ Mold and/or mold damage |
| | ■ Complete loss of primary and secondary supports, binder, and image |

Fig. 7 – Recto Condition diagram



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|---|--|
| ■ Damage to image, binder, and/or lacquer due to loss, abrasion, flaking, cracking, crazing, and planar distortion | ■ Iron corrosion |
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| ■ Silver Image deterioration such as localized fading, mirroring, and yellowing | ■ Mold and/or mold damage |
| | ■ Complete loss of primary and secondary supports, binder, and image |

Fig. 8 – Verso Condition diagram



Fig. 9 – 2001.0017.0017 – Recto in Raking illumination

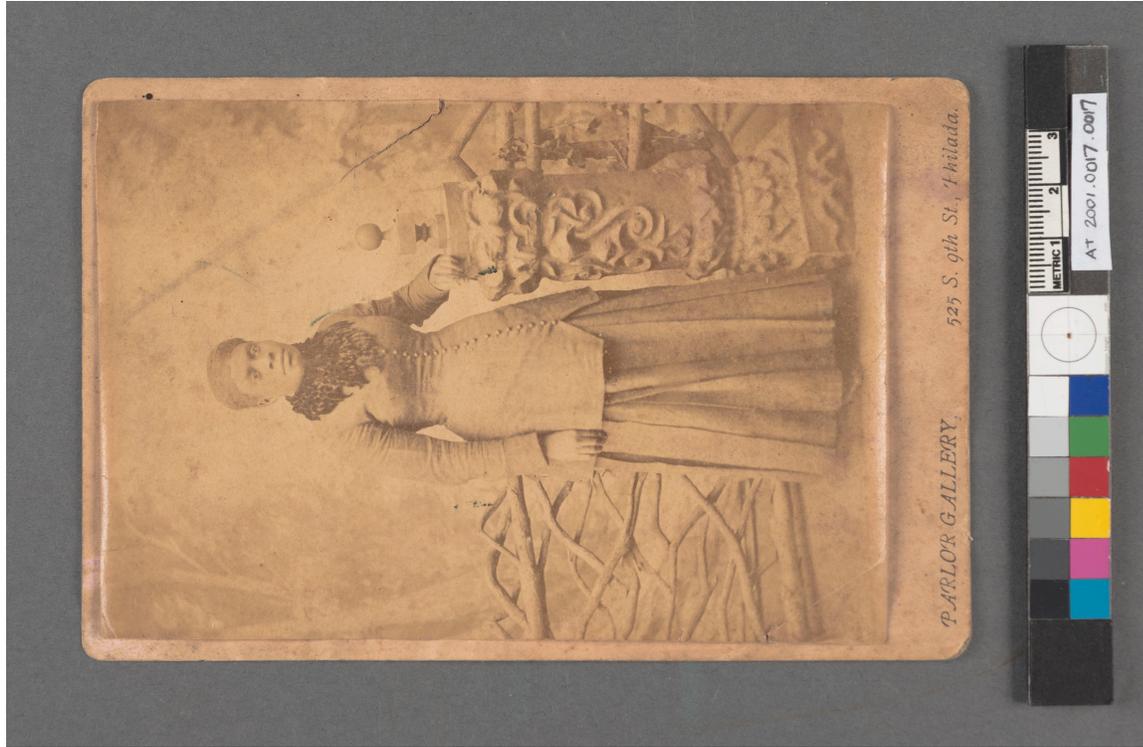


Fig. 10-11 – 2001.0017.0017 After Treatment – recto and verso