



Winterthur/University of Delaware
Program in Art Conservation
Conservation Report



Accession #: 2001.0017.0023

Object: [Postcard portrait of an unidentified man]

Object Date: 1900-1930

Artist/Author: Unknown

Materials: Silver gelatin developing-out print postcard

Owner: University of Delaware Museums: "The Baltimore Collection"

Permanent Location: UD Museums Collections

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

Examined by: Joanna Hurd, WUDPAC 2020

Consulted: Debra Hess Norris, Chair and Professor, Unidel –
Henry Francis DuPont Chair of

Fine Arts, Director, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation; Barbara Lemmen,
Senior Photograph

Conservator, Conservation Center for Art and

Historic Artifacts and Adjunct Professor, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art

Conservation; Julie McGee, Associate Professor of Africana Studies and Art History, College of Arts and
Sciences, University of Delaware

Report Date: January 17, 2018

Dimensions:

Photograph: 5 ³/₈" x 3 ³/₈" (13.6 x 8.6 cm)

Window mat: 7 ¹/₈" x 4 ¹/₄" (18.1 x 10.8 cm)

Folder: Opened: 7 ¹/₂" x 9 ¹/₂" (19.1 x 24.1 cm)

Closed: 7 ¹/₂" x 4 ¹/₂" (19.1 x 11.4 cm)



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

According to the homepage WordPress site named for the collection it catalogs and researches, what is now known as “The Baltimore Collection” is an assortment of unknown photographs that was found in Maryland and donated the University of Delaware in 2001 by Neil, Reba and Jessica Porter because it was in dire need of conservation. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs seem to be 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 (2017).

In the Fall of 2017, a graduate-level course “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.”

The postcard examined in this report is dated in ArtStor between 1910 to 1930 based on the “AZO” annotation. Kodak produced Professional AZO Paper beginning in 1904. “AZO” appears as a border around the stamp box in the upper right-hand corner throughout its use, although the shapes accompanying the text in the corners of the border vary. Two triangles pointing up on the top row and two triangles pointing down on the bottom row featured on this card corresponds with the 1918-1930 trends. (Brogdan and Wesseloh 2006). However, the lack of dividing line on the verso of the card is more consistent with postcard styles before 1907 (Norris 2017).

DESCRIPTION

The postcard features a silver gelatin developing-out print photograph on the recto with gray printed text on the verso. The substrate is a cardstock-weight AZO paper. The postcard was mounted with adhesive on the verso in a two-fold folder framed by a window mat. The window mat has a mottled, gray facing paper with black lines bordering the outer edges and inner window and an acidic, light-weight facing paper on the verso. The core is a thin, acidic board. Embossed text is partially visible through all three layers in the bottom right corner reading, “631 Penna Ave., Ralto MD.”

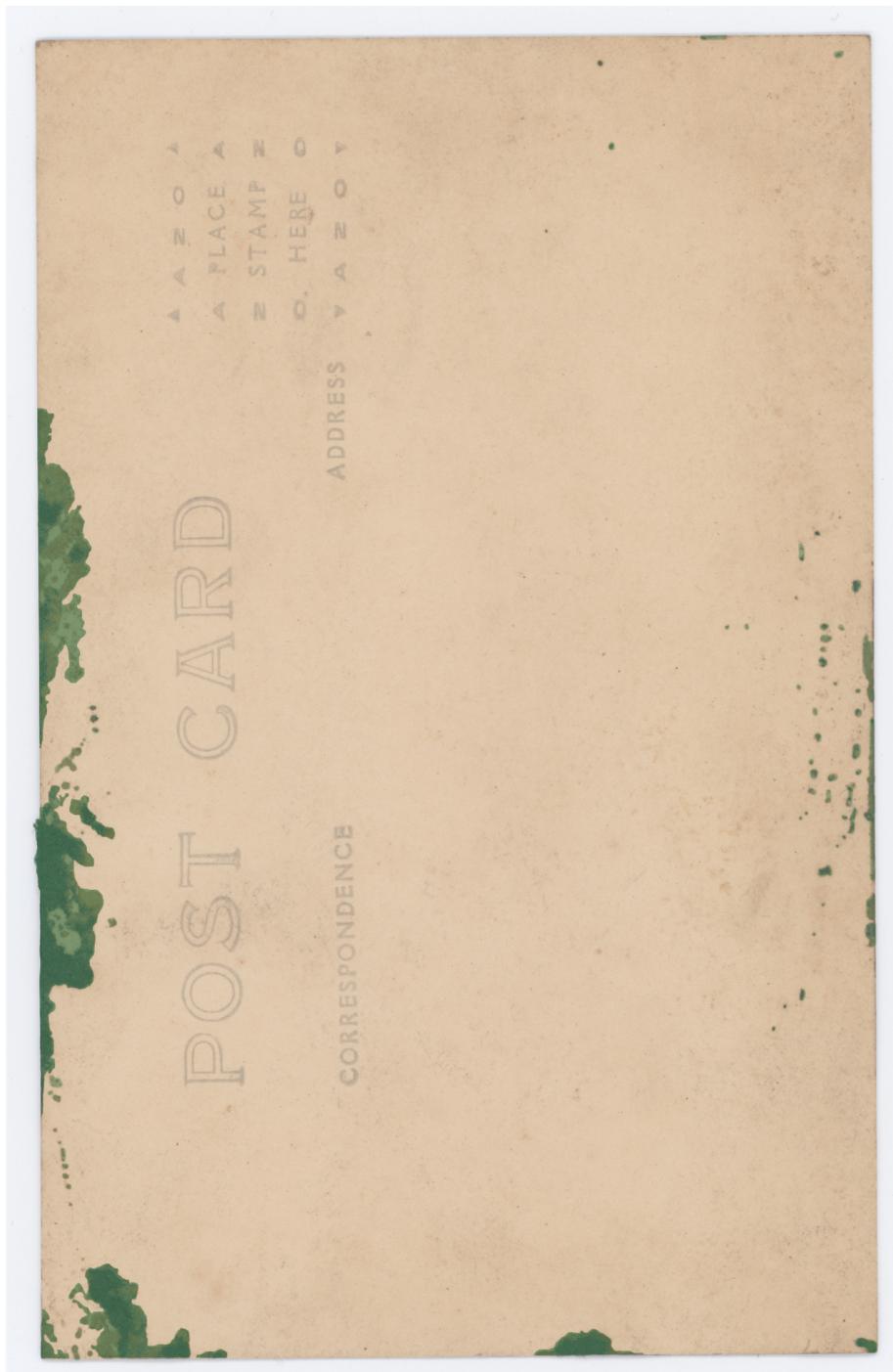
The folder has a mottled gray facing paper similar to that on the window mat on both the inner and outer surfaces. The core appears to be the same acidic board used in the window mat. The outer surface of the left-hand fold features a mottled black line border around the outer edge and a printed orb draped with a floral garland slightly above center.

CONDITION



- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | 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 |

Figure 1. Condition diagram of the postcard recto



- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ 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 |

Figure 2. Condition diagram of the postcard verso

The substrate of the postcard is in fair condition. The paper has yellowed and darkened overall and the edges are worn. The left, right, and bottom edges on the verso feature adhesive residue and paper remnants from when it was attached to the folder.

The gelatin binder layer and silver image are in poor condition. The figure has greatly faded with facial details barely defined. A matte layer of soil further obscures image details. The bottom half of the man's suit is irregularly faded with splotchy areas of dark brown. The dark areas may be the result of mold damage or may be the original, saturated silver image. Faded spots are visible throughout, including in the remaining dark areas, suggesting contact with poor quality materials or exposure to inadequate environmental conditions. Faint silver mirroring is visible along the bottom edge. Fine, irregular cracks in the binder layer appear as a small series of dark lines in the upper right corner of the image. Dark accretions are found in the center of the left edge and appear shiny under magnification. The verso is in fair condition with soiling overall and slight darkening towards the edges.

The window mat is in poor condition with 3 ½" of the top edge missing starting from the top right corner. Slight soiling and worn edges and corners are visible throughout. The verso features adhesive residue and paper remnants on all sides from the original mounting. The verso facing paper is delaminating from the core and the bottom left and top right corners are folded.

The bi-fold folder, examined open, is in poor condition with heavy soiling, darkening and small accretions across the outer-facing surface. The fold creases are weakened and beginning to break. The breaks have permeated through all three layers along the top and bottom edges. Small losses throughout all layers are associated with the top and bottom of each fold, resulting in a "V" shape when opened. Losses in the outer facing paper are found in the bottom right and top left corners, as well as at the top of the left fold. A small triangle of the facing paper is folded back at the bottom of the left fold, exposing the acidic core. Oily stains are found along the bottom edge in the left of the central panel and the center of the right panel.

The inner surface of the folder is also soiled with heavy adhesive residue on the four edges of the central panel. Darkening is localized to the top and bottom edges. Losses within the residue corresponds to paper attachments on the verso of the postcard and window mat. Facing paper along the breaks in the fold are curling away from the break. Small losses are visible in the facing paper along the edges. The oily stain on the bottom of the central panel on the outer surface has penetrated through to the inner side. Another oily stain on the bottom of the inner right panel is emanating from a gray drip mark.

RATIONALE FOR TREATMENT

The postcard and its associated mount are a part of a larger project to document and the Baltimore Collection. To this end, the objects will be cleaned to improve image clarity. Tears and breaks will be stabilized to allow for safe handling and storage.

TREATMENT PROPOSAL

- Conduct before treatment photography to document initial condition
- Dry clean surfaces to reduce soiling
- Test solubility of the emulsion layer in aqueous solutions and wet clean accordingly
- Stabilize the window mat and mount
- Conduct after treatment photography to document condition changes
- Rehouse in archival materials

TREATMENT REPORT

Significant soiling was reduced on the verso of the postcard and on the mounting materials with a cosmetic sponge. Only minor soiling was removed from the image surface with cosmetic sponges so wet cleaning was pursued. After testing the solubility of the surface in water and ethanol, the image was first cleaned with a 3:1 ethanol to water mixture applied with cotton swabs followed by a 1:1 ethanol to water mixture applied in the same way. Moderate soiling was removed during the wet cleaning, however it also revealed mold spots in light image areas. The mold did not appear to lessen with wet cleaning but any active mold spores should have been rendered inactive through the application of alcohol.

A fill was made for the missing section along the top edge of the window mount using acid-free cardstock and toned with acrylic paint. Acrylic paint was also used to tone medium-weight Japanese tissue which was used to reinforce the exterior of the weakened folds in the folder. Klucel G was used as a consolidant on the interior of the folds to further stabilize the crumbling cardstock.

PREVENTIVE CARE RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure the longevity of the photograph, it is important to maintain proper storage and environmental conditions. If the collection is 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.

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, and the protein based emulsions of albumen and gelatin, makes photographic collections particularly prone to microorganisms. If possible, the temperature should be 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. Oxidizing agents such as 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 and 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.

Ideally the postcard should be housed with the mounting materials to avoid dissociation. However, to protect the photograph from acidic or abrasive materials it should be housed in a polyester sleeve inside the mount.

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.

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APPENDIX I: BEFORE TREATMENT PHOTOGRAPHS







APPENDIX II: AFTER TREATMENT PHOTOGRAPHS



