



QUESTIONS

for Barbara Lemmen

CCAHA Senior Photograph Conservator and Adjunct Professor at Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation

Education: M.S. in 1991 from the Winterthur Museum/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation / **Years at CCAHA:** 9

You received your degree in art conservation in 1991. What were you doing before then? What led you to conservation?

I was fortunate to discover art conservation while still in college. As part of a winter course in the chemistry of pigments and paint, my class toured a Midwest art conservation center, which was close to campus. I had a 'eureka' moment – here was a field that combined the two subjects I had come to love in college: chemistry and art history. From that point, for the next five years, I focused my academic and work efforts on preparing for graduate school. At the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC), I had an equivalent moment of career excitement when selecting photograph conservation as my major. I enjoyed all of it and was lucky enough to have conservators and museum professionals willing to mentor me right from the start.

What kind of photos are your favorites to treat and why?

Traditional black-and-white silver gelatin photographs "can take a licking and keep on ticking." Their major components, paper and gelatin, are malleable, often enabling rewarding

repairs. During my post graduate internship, I conserved a black-and-white photograph belonging to Henry and Nancy Kissinger, which their dog had chewed to pieces. It was very gratifying reconstructing this ruffled puzzle, then flattening it and inpainting the losses in the image.

You do a lot of treatment work at CCAHA, but a large part of your work also involves preservation education.

I could not have imagined all of the opportunities that would be open to me when I first came to CCAHA. I have become much more involved in education. Working with the photograph conservation majors in WUDPAC means that treatment innovations and information flow back and forth, benefiting the students and CCAHA staff.

I really enjoy site visits of all kinds. It is always pleasurable to visit famous institutions and especially rewarding to visit places that don't have a lot of resources knowing that CCAHA and I can help them preserve the photographic materials they value.

What are the challenges in conserving digital photography?

It is critical to the success and safety of treatment to identify the process by which a photograph was made. The pace of innovation and change in digital printing means that photograph conservators will have to make a concerted effort to keep abreast of the different printing methods, and the supports, inks, and printers creating them.

Fortunately, there is still some time before photograph conservators will regularly encounter digital output needing conservation treatment, and research is already producing answers to major preservation questions.

What advice do you have for young photograph conservators?

If you are considering entering the field, do your homework to be sure that it is a perfect match. Photograph conservation is just as it appears – an intellectually rewarding mix of craft and science. However, as the complexity of the field increases, so does the time and financial investment needed for training.

If you are already a photograph conservator, it is never too soon to start mentoring.

—KELTIE HAWKINS