



Art Conservation *and planning a treatment*

Brigadier General M.C. Meigs (1816-1892), Quartermaster General of the Army during the Civil War, was involved with many significant engineering projects, including the rebuilding and expansion of the U.S. Capitol and Dome between 1853 and 1859. However, WUDPAC Fellow and photograph conservation major Ashley Stanford feels Meigs' most interesting undertaking may have been a large album called Plans for Heating & Ventilating the Capitol of the United States, the General Post Office, and the University of Virginia by Captain M.C. Meigs.

The book documents the Capitol's reconstruction from 1857-1859 through photographs, architectural plans, diagrams, and text. A copy of this book is in the Winterthur Library's collection. The photographs were taken by John Wood, the U.S. government's first official photographer and the first to photograph a presidential inauguration, that of James Buchanan in 1857. Most interesting to Ashley is that many of Wood's photographs in the album are salted paper prints. Dating to 1839, this was the first fully developed process for producing positive photographic prints from negatives. The process, which produces a positive image from a negative by exposing it on paper treated with a solution of common table salt and silver nitrate, is credited to William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) and was widely used until about 1860.

Before turning to the album, Ashley gained some technical experience by using the salted paper process to create her own prints from a single negative during a workshop with process historian Mark Osterman. She explored two different techniques, the developed-out process which uses chemical development to produce an image and the more common printing-out process, which uses UV light. The resulting prints differed in appearance depending on the processing method used. Ashley believes the knowledge she gained will give her a better understanding of the technique Wood used to create the album's prints.

Ashley will continue building on her technical research into salted paper prints with the Meigs Album in mind. Working with Adrienne Lundgren, Senior Photograph Conservator at the Library of Congress, Ashley hopes to determine the specific salted paper printing process used by Wood for the Meigs Album. The album is in good condition overall, although some pages contain tears, and the cover is detached from the binding. Ashley will mend the tears but will not reattach the cover because she does not want to disturb the binding structure. Once her study and treatment are complete, Ashley will return the album to the library with hopes that it may be exhibited in the future.



ARTC Spotlight—November 2022

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 artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: Photographs of the U.S. Capitol found inside the album Plans for Heating & Ventilating the Capitol of the United States, the General Post Office, and the University of Virginia by Captain M.C. Meigs. Above: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Ashley Stanford examines one of the large salted paper prints of the U.S. Capitol. Left: Ashley's collection of prints from her workshop with Mark Osterman where she explored various ways to create salted paper prints. (Images: A. Stanford and B. Weakley.)

