



## Art Conservation *and mending the past*

For most of his adult life, Joseph H. Stidham (1788-1870) kept a diary. The Wilmington, Delaware ropemaker and wire weaver, writing with a quill pen, homemade iron gall ink and perhaps at night by the light of a candle or oil lamp, recorded details of his work, the weather, the places he had gone, and other aspects of his daily life between 1830 and 1867. As the pages accumulated, he bound them into 16 separate journals that today belong to the Winterthur Library, where they have been archived for use by researchers.

This year, Kaeley Ferguson, a library and archives conservation major, became the most recent Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow to treat one of the volumes as part of an ongoing project that began in 2018. The project's goal is to stabilize the diaries to ensure that they are able to withstand the heavy research use anticipated by the library. Though housed in archival folders, the diaries, which vary in size and are bound between paper covers made from assorted papers such as sugar paper and wallpaper with leather and cloth covered spines, had many loose pages and were difficult to handle. Kaeley, who like other WUDPAC Fellows, spent last year's pandemic shutdown working remotely while taking classes via Zoom, welcomed the project and the ability to work in a lab at the Research building at Winterthur.

The volume Kaeley is treating measures about 6.7 by 4.3 inches and spans the years 1866-1867. When she retrieved it from its archival folder, she found that the sewing had failed in some areas, and some pages had become loose, including additional pieces of paper that had been slipped between bound pages. She also found small strips of paper attached to pages with animal hide glue and sewing in spots where Stidham wanted to insert more information after he had completed his entry.

Kaeley first removed loose dirt and grime from the surfaces of the covers and pages with a small, clean brush and cosmetic sponges. She then used linen thread in places where Stidham's sewing had broken to anchor pages to the leather sewing supports and repaired the cloth spine. She also mended some pages with long-fibered mulberry paper to give them more support. When she completes her treatment, Kaeley will place the diary in a customized archival box and return it to the folder with Stidham's other diaries in the library, where it will be ready for use by researchers.

### ARTC Spotlight—October 2021

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](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).

Top: Detail of one of the fold-out additions Stidham included in his diary. Above: WUDPAC Fellow Kaeley Ferguson surface cleaning the pages of the diary using a cosmetic sponge. Bottom left: Detail of the leather sewing station on the spine after Kaeley sewed in the detached pages with linen thread. Bottom right: The three things within the archival folder, including the diary, and two inserts that were loose within its pages before treatment. Photos: K. Ferguson, V. Mercado Oliveras.

