

### Three Powder Horns: Treatment and Display

Object conservators Lauren Fair, Linda Lennon, and Bruno Pouliot have recently been working on treatments for three different powder horns, with the goal to make them accessible again to the public. In the process, they have made some interesting discoveries and, with the help of Conservation Assistant William Donnelly, devised innovative display solutions for these objects. One powder horn will be included in the Spring 2013 exhibit: *Common Destinations: Maps in the American Experience*; one was recently put on display in the Kershner Kitchen; and one is for teaching purposes during varied classes and workshops offered at Winterthur.

In the first instance, the powder horn — also known as a map horn—that dates from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, was surface cleaned in preparation for exhibition, greatly reducing the dirt and grime that obscured the finely incised detail of depictions of rivers and villages in New York. During examination and treatment, a historical repair was discovered, and through elemental analysis was found to be made of pewter. Though not a repair technique we would use today, we preserved the old repair, as it says a lot about how its owner cared for this horn and is itself now a rare survivor of historical repair practices.



Powder horn, Winterthur 1958.1000. Image by Jim Schneck.



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The powder horn now on display in Kershner Kitchen is suspended from an existing hook projecting from the wood mantle of an historic stone fireplace, also near a flintlock rifle. Henry Francis du Pont displayed firearms with their accompanying powder horns or flasks, shot pouches, and gun tools in several rooms at Winterthur to demonstrate their essential presence in early American life. Previously,

this horn was attached to a non-original harness leather strap, which weakened over time and became unable to support the weight of the object. In consultation with curator Ann Wagner, the decision was made to construct a new leather strap and mounting system to safely display the horn and to preserve the old strap separately for future reference. Leather was cut and toned to imitate a strap that might have been used to transport this powder horn. The strap hides a system of Velcro closures and transparent acrylic clips that ensure adequate support and limit contact with the stone wall of the fireplace while the powder horn is on display.



Conservation technician carefully placing acrylic clips of mounting system for powder horn, Winterthur 1965.2744. Image by Lauren Fair.



View of stone fireplace in Kershner Kitchen with powder horn, Winterthur 1965.2744, safely on display. Image by Lauren Fair.

The third powder horn is used for teaching purposes and is frequently handled by participants in Winterthur workshops and by students in the WPAMC Program. Careful examination revealed that the horn likely dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; yet before it entered the Winterthur collection, the surface decoration was probably carved, and a new plug and strap were added. This recent strap is also broken and the leather is degraded. In order to facilitate handling of the horn, the strap was carefully removed, and archival housing was constructed to safely store the strap for future reference. Now this horn can be handled and examined closely allowing visitors, scholars, and students to distinguish between what is original and what is a later addition or alteration to a cultural object.