

Proposal from the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts to The McLean Contributionship

Executive Summary:

The Conservation Center for Art and Historical Artifacts (CCAHA), based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, respectfully requests \$18,000 from The McLean Contributionship to purchase a new suction table for our paper lab. Our mission at CCAHA is to provide expertise and leadership in preserving the world's cultural heritage, but in order to do so we need to have the proper equipment. Perhaps the most important of the high-tech equipment in our lab is the suction table, a piece of equipment which takes part in the treatment of nearly all paper-based materials. Created by CCAHA founder Marilyn Kemp Weidner in 1977, the suction table is now a staple piece of equipment in conservation labs worldwide. CCAHA's current suction table has begun to wear down due to age, requiring frequent repairs in order to keep running.

Statement of Need:

In order to provide the best services possible, the CCAHA needs to have the highest level in professional equipment to supplement the expertise of our staff. This is especially true of a piece of equipment like the suction table. Generally, 4000 items per year are treated at the Center, and a good half of these require use of the suction table, making it one of the most important components of our paper lab and our operations in general. Specific functions of the suction include flattening parchments, stain reduction, application of delicate linings, varnish removal, and washing of artifacts with water-sensitive media.

Purchased in 1984, CCAHA's suction table is 27 years old, and has been to treat tens of thousands of historic documents and artworks. At this point, the table requires a great deal of maintenance to be able to function, not to mention the aging equipment's constant noise that creates a less than ideal working environment in a crowded paper lab. Within the past year, the entire motor section has had to have its brushes replaced, the housing of the fuses has melted, the table has had to be resealed due to air leaks, and recently, the table has begun to make strange noises and shut itself off automatically. While constant minor repairs have been successful in keep the table functional so far, this is becoming less and less of a viable option and the table will eventually and inevitably become irreparable.

If a sudden shutdown or irreparable malfunction occurred, the Center would be unable to perform a number of our conservation treatment services until a proper replacement was found. Due to the integral nature of the suction table to the Center's delicate work of conservation treatment, consistency of performance is an absolute necessity. Breakdowns cause costly delays and can endanger the quality of the treatment of artifacts. The purchase of

a new suction table will ensure the Center will continue to be able to be able to treat artifacts in an effective and expedited manner.

Project Description:

A suction table is a piece of equipment similar to a normal work table in appearance, but with a perforated top containing a vacuum chamber. This vacuum holds various pieces (mostly paper items) in place while they are being worked on through the usage of controllable degrees of suction. CCAHA's current suction table was purchased in 1984, and it grants the Center a great deal of options in dealing with friable or soluble elements, and can control drying and distortion in a way that no other piece of equipment can. Due to the variety of uses the suction table has, nearly all of the treatments at the Center involve the usage of this table in one way, shape, or form, whether the treatment is specifically related to suction table applications (drying, applying and removing solvents, etc) or simply providing a flat, stable, and safe environment.

In preparation for this purchase, the Center has talked to several vendors of quality conservation equipment, and the \$18,000 requested represents a median price for their advertised suction tables. Onsite demonstrations will be requested before making a decision on a final purchase.

After the suction table has been purchased, the actual set-up will be quick and simple. As with past grants from The McLean Contributionship, CCAHA will send a detailed report describing the purchase and setup of the table, along with examples of treatments that have been undertaken using the new suction table, approximately six months after the purchase of the new table.

Organizational Information:

Since its foundation in 1977, the Conservation Center for Historic Artifacts has become an invaluable resource for museums, archives, libraries, and historical societies in the Mid-Atlantic region, both through our own work in preservation of artifacts and a variety of programs designed to help other institutions do the same. Our mission is to provide leadership and expertise in preservation of the world's culture, and to achieve this, we:

- provide quality treatment, examination, and conservation services for paper based artifacts, including maps, charts, manuscripts, books, photographs, and parchments;
- educate individuals and groups in the community through programs, surveys, assessments, seminars, conferences, and publications;
- create internships and training opportunities for future conservation professionals;
- work on local, regional, and national initiatives to ensure the survival of our national treasures.

The quality of CCAHA's treatment programs are nationally recognized, as is shown by our involvement of over 20 *Save America's Treasures* projects, more than any other conservation lab in the country. In addition, we have had past involvement with the State Library of Pennsylvania, the New Jersey State Archives, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Franklin Institute Science Museum, and the David Library of the American Revolution. Some of our current projects include treatment of a *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (the world's first geographical atlas) volume from the Boston Public Library's Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, the improvement of photographic collections from Historically Black Colleges in conjunction with several other organizations, and preserving the vestry minute books of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, the first African American Episcopal Church.

CCAHA presents approximately 20 educational programs a year, designed to provide essential information and training for long-range preservation planning. They range in scope from one-day programs on focused topics to major three-day workshop series on subjects of broad concern. Approximately 750 museum and library professionals attend CCAHA workshops each year. In addition, since its founding, CCAHA has maintained a professional training program as part of its mission to educate preservation professionals. Through these opportunities, CCAHA has worked with two apprentices and 44 interns. Former CCAHA interns are employed in nationally recognized cultural institutions in the U.S. and abroad, including the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, Harvard University, Yale University, the U.S. Holocaust Museum, Winterthur Museum and Library, and the Museum of Modern Art.

Impact of New Equipment:

With the purchase of a new suction table, CCAHA will increase the quality and efficiency of its laboratory operations. While some functions of the table have already been mentioned, more specific suction table applications include:

- Creating a controlled atmosphere using suction, allowing treatment of delicate artifacts such as pastels or charcoals without running the risk of damaging them.
- Applying flexible and sensitive linings to the backs of paper artifacts, the suction functions lessening the need for adhesive.
- More efficient and safe use of solvents when restoring artifacts, both in application and removal. The ability to adjust temperature also helps with some solvents.
- Complete control over the drying process, allowing the use of pulp infills and moisture in certain places on paintings to improve their condition and appearance.

Within the past three months, several new treatment projects have been approved that will require the use of the suction table. Among these are multiple *Save America's Treasures* projects, including documentation of the building of the Panama Canal from the Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology in Kansas City, Missouri; Pennsylvania-German

fraktur from the Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College; and the papers and manuscripts of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist Judaism movement, for the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

Conclusion:

CCAHA is an institution that has placed itself at the forefront of the movement to conserve all manner of artifacts for future generations. In order to continue this process, we need to continue to invest in the most current and highest quality equipment in order to maintain the standard of service we have both set for ourselves and that organizations who have worked with the Center in the past have come to expect. With this quality equipment in conjunction with the hard work of our skilled staff, these precious documents of our cultural past will continue to be accessible for future generations to appreciate and learn from.