

Trailing Questions from Conservation Primer: Care of Historic Furniture January 14, 2016

Maggie Ordon [Helena, MT]: Will fish glue attract insects?

Rian Wilkinson [Baltic, CT]: Once dry, fish glue will not attract any more insects than the wood or other organic materials on it.

Tad Fallon: *Rian is correct.*

Jo Dickinson [London, UK]: What do you think about the argument that items which have been exposed to certain seasonal fluctuations for a significant number of years are no longer be further damaged by seasonal changes?

Tad Fallon: *I think to some extent this is true, or more accurately some objects tolerate seasonal fluctuations better than others. But I would submit that if something in the "exposure" equation changes, the object can still suffer further damage.*

Jasmin Simmons [Trinidad]: How do you treat with items that have been affected by termites. After fumigation how much restoration should be done?

Tad Fallon: *I suppose that is dependent on the level of damage the termites caused. The first priority in my thinking would be to assess the structural stability of the object in question and determine if consolidation of the deterioration is appropriate as a first step. Then, it would become more of a curatorial/conservation discussion to determine the merits of further treatment.*

Lydia Littlefield [Pittsfield, MA]: What is the solution to the problem of saponification caused by Murphy's [Oil Soap]?

Gina Trujillo [Phoenix, AZ]: We would use a small amount [of Murphy's Oil Soap] only on the wooded stairs, no furniture. We will be sure to stop application.

Tad Fallon: *Once the damage of saponification occurs, it is difficult to reverse. If some level of treatment is deemed inevitable, I would tend to think next in terms of a barrier coat/additive varnish treatment to see if the damage can be contained and encapsulated.*

Jeremy Lynch [Fort Smith Arkansas]: In my pipe band we use almond oil for the blackwood drones. Is this a good oil to use?

Tad Fallon: *I am not sure of the musical instrument maintenance traditions, but from a conservator's perspective, almond oil is non-drying oil and could pose polymerization and build up issues, including darkening over time. However, there are many debates on the historical use of this oil in the maintenance of wooden instruments, and it is worth further review before deciding if Almond oil is right for your application or not. Check out the www.test.woodwind.org website, go on the Clarinet Board, and type in*

Almond oil. There are lengthy discussions and debates here that are quite interesting.

Laurie Webb [Grand Bend, Ontario]: how would you remove dents into a soft wood like pine? Can you steam the dents out?

Tad Fallon: *That is a complicated question but the short answer is that yes, in some cases the dents can be steamed out. This is usually not 100% effective but I have had pretty good success steaming dents out in some cases. The things to consider before proceeding are to what degree is the tolerance for disturbing the finish, color, patina, etc, (as some effect to the surface is inevitable) and how can that be compensated for? I also find it best to use distilled water, and keep any steel or iron tools away from the equation as they can cause greyness that will be problematic.*

Josslyn Stiner [Leesburg]: What do you recommend for restoring wooden steps treated with oils that have caused it to darken and become gray in color?

Tad Fallon: *Again, this is a complicated topic. I will try and give some recommendations. More often than not, if you are seeing greyness on oiled stairs, it is due to two things: one could be embedded polishes and/or dirt and accretions, or more likely slight iron staining from mopping. In the former case, the idea would be to see if the dirt and accretions could be successfully cleaned off the surface without and further damage. In the latter case, water containing natural iron will react with tannins in the wood and create grey to black discoloration over time. The reason this happens is likely because the oil top surface is worn or discontinuous, allowing seepage of water into the wood below. Sometimes this can be treated with an application of oxalic acid crystals dissolved in distilled water and applied to gently bleach out the surface. This gets complicated in the sense that the wood will then require some degree of color adjustment to bring it back in line with the surrounding surface, and perhaps, a re-coating of some sort to "pull things together" afterwards. I hope that helps!*

