

“MOUNTS ALTERED” MOUNTING TEXTILES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CLIENTS.

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ABSTRACT - In the last few years, I have assisted small museums and organizations with the mounting of their textiles. These institutions often do not have large collections, perhaps only a single example or a small group of textiles that they would like to display. In some cases, the display of the textile artifact was important enough to provide the impetus for fund raising to enable a museum to achieve the better display solutions.

Each of the techniques that I am going to discuss were solutions to such problems, what I like to refer to as “looking outside the box”. Situations in which I tried to balance the desires of the owning institution with concerns for the long-term preservation of the artifact. The mounts used were mostly Small Corp’s standard mounts altered for the particular situation.

1. INTRODUCTION

What does a conservator do when a client has desires that seem to be in opposition to standard conservation practices? Is it just a matter of saying no, or should one seek an innovative solution?

Two mounts were developed during the treatment of two flags. Each design followed extensive discussions between the author and the client and lead on from the insights (about what?) that Harold Mailand discussed so well at the North American Textile Conservation Conference (NATCC) meeting in Albany, November 2003. (Mailand 2003)

Can it really be said that innovation begins with nagging but lovable clients? It is certainly true that this is where the fun and the interesting problems begin. As more of us become private conservators, more of us will be faced with this dilemma. I do not mean to imply that such efforts have not been going on in museums. The difference is that the conservator in private practice has less ability to monitor the treatment once the textile has left the studio and leaves the conservator questioning the success of the treatment solutions. Other questions arise, such as how much more support should have been incorporated into the mount? Have we accurately conveyed our ideas and concerns to the client?

The following case studies, presented in Rhode Island in 2006, illustrates different problems to be discussed among conservators and clients. How do you mount a large artifact when space is a premium? Or how do you support a two-sided artifact without losing the visual access of one of the sides? The two clients served are the Old Dutch Church and the General Knox Museum. The Old Dutch Church needed an “in the round” mount for an encapsulated Civil War flag, installed in a former wall cabinet. The design allowed for rotation with a smaller guidon. This was a temporary solution until funds are available to affect a long-term solution. The General Knox Museum requested a mount for a two-sided painted flag with large window in the mount to show the reverse side through the use of a mirror located in the base.

The mounts themselves and the mounting process are the focus of this paper; only the treatment steps relevant to the mounts are discussed.

2. OLD DUTCH CHURCH

The first example of an adapted mount is from the Old Dutch Church that houses a collection of four Civil War flags from the 120th New York Volunteer Infantry. The 120th Regiment was also known as the Washington Guard. They participated in nearly every major battle after Fredericksburg and were on duty at Appomattox when Gen. Robert Lee surrendered. The Regiment received a new flag in March 1865 with inscriptions of 16 battles. (Wakeman 1991)



(Figure 1)

The flags were first assessed in 1999 for their condition and a preservation plan was suggested. The flags had been displayed in an encased (?) wall cavity for over 100 years in the front of the church. The walls were covered with oak paneling that had off-gassed considerably. The flags had been draped artistically, tacked to the case with large nails and one remained on its staff. The large National Flag with Battle Honors had been folded into thirds with a lightweight blue fabric that draped behind.

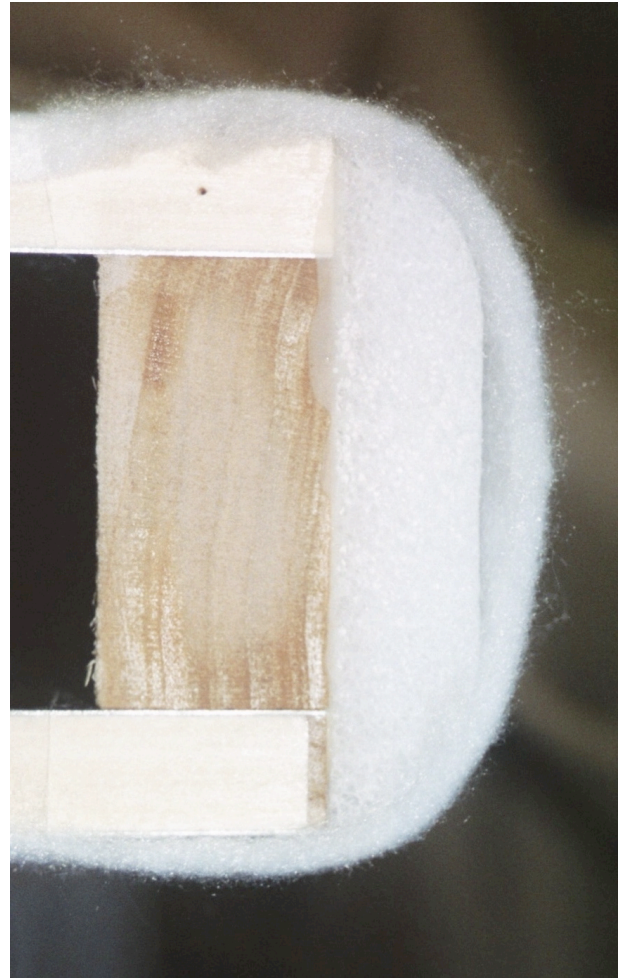
After several years, the staff at the museum wanted to return two of the flags to the Church for a rotating display. The National with Battle Honors and the small guidon were selected. The museum did not have the space for a new storage/display case either in the museum or in the front area of the church. This was a goal for the museum, but the expectation at the time was to do this in the near future, perhaps in a new space. So a plan B was created in which two flags could be mounted and rotated within the existing wall case. This would give the flags exposure to the public and help in continued fund raising efforts.

2.1 MOUNT

Roller mounts have been successfully used in museums to reveal smaller sections of large textiles. Alternatively large textiles can be draped over a padded support. Often these designed mounts are horizontal. (Ashly-Smith 1997) The mounting of the flags was also to be reversible so that once the Museum had means to install a new cabinet each flag could easily be removed from the mount and placed on a new one. The two flags that were selected were both sandwiched using Stabiltex.

For the large flag it was decided to create an “in-the-round” mount to which the flag could be secured

This also recreated a presentation similar to how the flags had hung previously. The mount was made to fill the interior of the wall cabinet. The mount was constructed with two aluminum honeycomb mounts separated with a wooden block at each side. The ends were also rounded out with high-density polyethylene.. It was important that the mount remain lightweight to insure successful rotation. The idea of two tubes supported like a scroll was eliminated due to the difficulty of rotation. The mount was covered with batting and display fabric.



(Figure 2).

The positioning of the flag on the mount was representative of how it had been displayed in the cabinet previously. It was stitched to the mount along the top and bottom edges. Flannel was secured to the mount (between the flag and mount?) and flag as a protective layer. The overlap of the flag at the mount’s back was interleaved with flannel layers. All stitching was performed in the raised embroidered and seam areas, which could easily be felt though the flannel to ease reversibility.

2.2 WALL CABINET:

The wall case was far from ideal, but with a layer of Marvelseal™ and display fabric, a micro-chamber was created. A new seal and ultraviolet filtered glazing was installed in the door of the cabinet. The position of the two flags within the cabinet was dictated by the design of the cabinet’s front door that was divided into two sections. The small guidon was mounted on a small aluminum Honeycomb panel that hangs from a cleat. Support blocks were created for the larger mount.



(Figures 3 & 4).

3. GENERAL HENRY KNOX MUSEUM

The second mount was created for a spectacular painted banner with a central eagle (Figure 5). The flag, known as the Thomaston Cavalry Banner, is owned by the Museum of General Knox's recreated home in Thomaston, ME. The building is a reconstruction of the one built in 1794 by Knox, Revolutionary



(Figure 5)

Gwen Spicer, "'Mounts Altered' Mounting Textiles to Meet the Needs of Clients" presented at American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works 34th Annual Meeting. The Textile Specialty Group Postprints, vol. 16 (2006).

War hero and the country's first Secretary of War. Knox inherited much of the Waldo Patent through his wife Lucy Flucker Knox, the granddaughter of Brigadier General Samuel Waldo. After resigning as the nation's first Secretary of War in 1794, Knox moved his family to the mansion he had erected on one of the most advantageous sites in his Maine holdings, the head of the St. Georges River in Thomaston. After his death in 1806, members of the family continued to reside there until 1854. The structure was razed in 1871 to make way for the Knox and Lincoln Railroad. (Dyer 2004) The banner is believed to be from the early 1800's. The ca. 1800 date according to David Martucci Past-president of North American Vexillology Association, is based on the size of the flag, its color and design that conform in some detail to that specified by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1786 (Maine did not become a state till 1820). Furthermore, the shield on the banner has 15 stripes, the number that would have commonly appeared on a flag of this type between 1792 and 1796—after Kentucky's admission as the fifteenth state of the union, but before Tennessee's admission as the sixteenth. (Dyer 2006) Finally, the 1799 Thomaston Town Meeting appropriated \$200 for flags for its militia companies. At this time, Thomaston fielded five militia companies, three regular State Militia Companies and two 'elite' units—the Thomaston Artillery and the Thomaston Cavalry—which were armed and accoutered solely by local funds.” (Dyer 2004)

The significance of the banner is that the cavalry company was started at the instigation of General Knox. The organizations of such militia had been greatly pushed by Knox while he was Secretary of State for Washington. Two legends are associated with it. One is that it was used in the military escort at General Henry Knox's funeral in October 1806. The other legend or mystery is who the artist might have been. Stylistically, the painted banner suggests that it may have been created by one of the Portland, Maine artists, either John Penniman or his student, better-known landscape artist, Charles Codman, (who began working ca. 1820), known to have worked after the date of the funeral. Whatever its exact date, it is one of the oldest Maine military colors still extant. (Dyer 2006)

Over time the Flag's condition became quite poor. It had been on almost continual display from the time of its donation in 1932ⁱ to 1983. The Thomaston Cavalry Banner was presented by the Lady Knox Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to the Knox Memorial Association in 1932, shortly after Montpelier opened. The provenance of the fragile silk was not documented but the DAR believed it to be significant. The mansion is a replica of the one that Knox had built on the banks of the St. George River in 1794. (Dyer 2004) In the early 1930's the banner had been glued to a hard laminated ground-wood pulp board with the fringe attached along the top and bottom edges and framed behind glass. Areas of loss were present in the lower proper right corner with slits and planar deformation. A clear and distinctive line is seen between the protected and exposed silk areas from the downward positioned fringe along the top edge. The silk appeared to still be flexible, allowing some manipulation to occur. The surface of the silk was extremely dirty with a gray layer of accumulated dirt and debris overall. The banner was removed from the board, by slicing through the board around the perimeter. The remaining glue and paper was removed from the reverse side of the banner while on a suction table. The inscription "Liberty" was located on the reverse, while on the face side (obverse?) was "Thomaston Cavalry".

3.1 MOUNT DISCUSSION:

As with all projects the treatment proposal begins (not necessarily): "The goal of treatment for the Banner is to stabilize the silk and prepare it for both storage and temporary display." The initial proposal planned a small window of about 12" square. However, once the painted eagle was seen by the curator, the proposal was revised to include a mount that would show the entire painted surface that had been hidden for so many years. The paint actually was in remarkable condition having been against the board and not exposed to light. Up close the painting technique was really quite remarkable



(Figure 6).

Owing to the extremely deteriorated state of the silk, the flag was fully backed with Stabiltex and Lauscaux mixture prepared in 1:3 360 HV & 498 HV in a 1:3 with water mixture, applied by brush. A top layer of Stabiltex was applied to the face (adhered or stitched?). (Pollak 2003) This created the package that was secured to the prepared mount.

3.2 MOUNT:

Several styles of mounts have been designed to allow the reverse side of an artifact to be seen. Methods include inserting small windows into mounts, supporting textiles onto Plexiglas, or sandwiched between glazings with a padded pillow between. (Singer 1985) The mount described below does not attempt to fully meet this challenge but it provides another option.

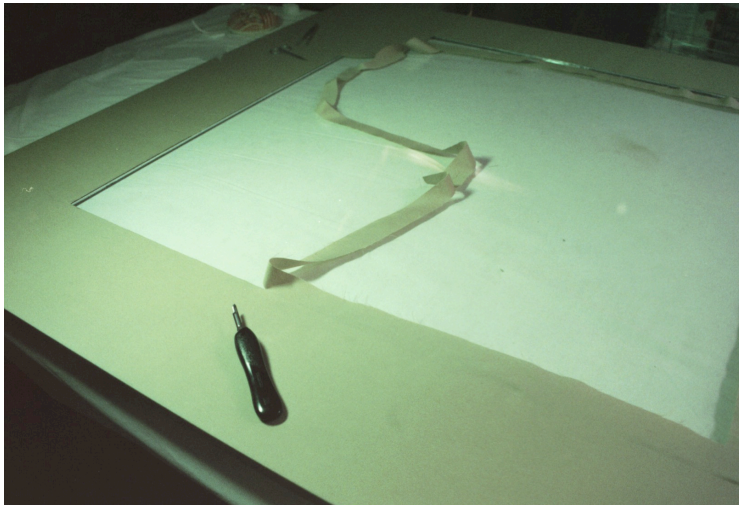
After a day spent creating mock-ups and sketches, with the help of SmallCorp (Sawyer 2005) and Ron Harvey (Object conservator (Harvey 2005) we came up with a solid support panel made with DiBond® with the center cut out and filled with a Plexiglas® window. In essence this is a fancy double mat. The window was made the full size of the painted area, 30" x 29". This gave me about a 6" margin of DiBond® that was covered with display fabric Beva® film-strips were used to secure the display fabric. The edges of the fabric were simply cut to achieve the smoothest transition to the Plexiglas. The fabric gave me a stitching edge to which the outer edges of the Stabiltex and flag package were secured



Figure 7a. Schematic diagram of the Thomaston Cavalry Banner attached to its mount showing the mat design.



Figure 7b Fringe support for the Thomaston Cavalry Banner.



(Figure 8).

Once the flag was secured to the mount, the center of the top layer of Stabiltex was trimmed away and secured to the outer edges of the painted image.

A window mat was then created and covered with the display fabric. The window mat covered the sewing stitches and over-lapped the flag about 1/4". The fringe was stitched to the top and bottom edges of the mat as in the previous mounting, with the exception for the upper fringe positioned in the upward position

The completed mounted flag is raised on a stand with a mirror below for easy viewing of the reverse side.



Figure 9 Thomaston Cavalry Banner mounted before being attached to its frame.

Figure 10 Thomaston Cavalry Banner on its display stand with mirror below to enable viewing of the reverse.

4. CONCLUSION

These were both rewarding projects with many problem-solving aspects that allowed me to look “outside the box”,. The first example of the “in the round” mount allowed for the flag to be returned to where it had long been displayed close to its original configuration. The second example achieved visual access to both sides of this special artifact. Each project had a journey that led both the client and myself to a positive outcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Wakeman, T. 1991. Efforts would restore Flags from Civil War. *Kingston Daily Freeman* May 12, 1991.

SOURCES OF MATERIALS

Polyester batting

-Buffalo Felt Products Corp.

14 Ransier Drive

Buffalo, NY 14224

(716) 674-7990, x 207

Cotton fabric

-Philips Boyne

135 Rome St.

Farmingdale, NY 11735

(631) 755-1230

LauscuxLascaux & Stabiltex

– Talas,

568 Broadway

New York, NY 10012

(212) 219-0770

Marvalseal 360

– Ludlow Packing Company

57 Suffolk St.

Holyoke, MA 01040

(413) 566-0258

Mount Hardware

-SmallCorp, Inc.

P.O. Box 948

Greenfield, MA 01302,

(800) 392-9500,

info@smallcorp.com

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The four Civil War Flags installed in wall cabinet.
2. Mount construction for National with Battle Honors
3. Prepared wall cabinet with mounted guidon
4. Completed mount & wall cabinet
5. Thomaston Banner, unknown artist, overall before treatment
6. Reverse side of the banner, after removal from board and cleaned
7. Sketch of mount and mat design
8. Preparation of mount
9. Banner mounted before frame attached
10. Banner on display stand