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Virginia's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts Honorees for 2023

One of the most popular, effective, and innovative programs of VAM is our Top 10 Endangered Artifacts program, which for eleven years now has drawn the attention of the Commonwealth to the need for conservation of museum collections. This year brought in a slate of very impressive artifacts for the public voting, and a very diverse one. The ten fantastic artifacts participating ranged from textiles to artwork to documents; spanned the state of Virginia from Tidewater to Roanoke; and spanned our history from the Revolution to the First World War. The crowd-sourced poll attracted 16,000 votes from as far away as Sweden and Romania. By any measure it was a highly successful year.



Office of Historic Alexandria
“George Seaton's Bible” 1853
Alexandria, VA

George Seaton was the first African American member of the Virginia General Assembly and an early educator for African Americans in Alexandria. Additionally, he was a member of the grand jury that indicted Jefferson Davis. His 1853 Bible with its burgundy velvet cover and clasped metal edging survives, but the velvet is worn and detaching on the spine. The front and back

cover are also detached. Conservation will stabilize this tangible legacy of a groundbreaking African American leader.



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Amherst County Museum & Historical Society
“Mount Moriah Baptist Church Pulpit Bible” 1867
Amherst, VA

Mt. Moriah, the “mother of churches” in Amherst County from which at least ten other congregations branched, ministered to enslaved and to free blacks as early as 1745. This 1867 pulpit bible of pastor J. D. Richeson preserves his signature and that of many of his successors. It bears

witness to the importance of the African American church in rural counties, but is gravely in need of restoration, with the binding in very poor condition and back cover detached.



Historical Society of Western Virginia
“World War I Gas Mask of Robert Johnson” 1918
Roanoke, VA

This Type H, Small Box Respirator gas mask is an important artifact relating to the Great War, and a horrific reminder of the evolution of chemical warfare. It was used by local resident Lt. Robert Johnson of the 318th Infantry, 80th Division, when he deployed to France in May 1918. Johnson subsequently remained in the Virginia National Guard until his death in 1930. The mask is in poor condition, with rubber components brittle, the elastic headband deteriorated, visible

rusting on the yellow-painted, and a crack in the resin-coated glass lenses.



James Madison Museum
“Portrait of James Madison in Retirement” 1833
Orange, VA

The last known live-sitting portrait done of James Madison, it was painted by James B. Longacre in the summer of 1833 at Montpelier. The painting is in dire need of professional cleaning and the original frame is deteriorating frame. Proper conservation will help prevent further potential deterioration.



MacArthur Memorial
***“Independence Proclamation of the President of the Philippines,
General Emilio Aguinaldo” 1899***
Norfolk, VA

During the Spanish-American War, Philippine revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo declared the Philippines independent of Spain. But when the postwar settlement made his nation a territory of the United States, Aguinaldo declared the Philippines independent from the United States on January 5, 1899. A Philippine newspaper *La Independencia* printed copies of his declaration which were then hung across the city of Manila. This particular copy was saved by an American soldier in a scrapbook, which was later given to General Douglas MacArthur in 1958. The MacArthur Memorial’s copy of Aguinaldo’s Proclamation is the only one of its kind in existence, but is extremely fragile and tattered, with old adhesive tape affixed in places.



Red Hill
“Patrick Henry’s Law Book” 1785
Brookneal, VA

Founding father and Virginia governor Patrick Henry used this law book for reference in the late 18th Century. It features his signature in two places, as well as that of his brother-in-law Philip Payne. This artifact has suffered both physical and chemical deterioration. It is missing pages and both the front and back covers are fully detached. The binding is also fragile: two of the seven cords along the text block have broken. Without immediate intervention to rebind the book and conserve its pages, greater loss of information will occur, and what left of its original leather spine will be lost.



Rocktown History
“Harrisonburg Spring House Finial” 1832
Dayton, VA

The 191-year-old finial is an 8-foot-high piece of architectural décor that once sat on the dome roof of the old Spring House on Court Square in Harrisonburg, VA. Constructed from soldered sheet steel, the finial is now rusted and in poor condition. The conical top end is bent and the bottom is jagged. There are also small holes in the metal. The finial will continue to

deteriorate without conservation.



Stratford Hall
“Last Will and Testament of Arthur Lee” 1792
Stratford, VA

The handwritten 1792 will of the youngest son of Thomas and Hannah Lee of Stratford Hall, Arthur Lee (the "Penman of the Revolution" authored more than 200 documents in support of the American cause at home and abroad. He names his beloved brother Richard Henry Lee executor and (without children of his own) distributes his wealth among his remaining brothers, nieces, and nephews. The fragile document has pulled apart along some of the many folds, and old archival tape still adheres to the document in several places.



Poe Museum
“Ambrotype of Edgar Allen Poe” 1848
Richmond, VA

The museum which received the “People’s Choice Award” for garnering the most votes in the online voting. The fantastic artifact they nominated was a unique image of America’s favorite poet.

The ambrotype of Edgar Allan Poe shows him on the day he became engaged to Rhode Island poet Sarah Helen Whitman in 1848. Their engagement didn’t last, but Whitman kept the original daguerreotype plate until a few years before her death, and this is the earliest known copy she allowed to be made of it, predating all other copies by over a decade. The image, unknown to scholars until it entered the Poe Museum’s collection a few years ago, is now barely visible due to its poor condition, but we look forward to a conservator restoring it and revealing Poe’s face to the world.



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Virginia Beach Museums
“18th Century Calamanco Quilt”
Virginia Beach, VA

The 18th Century Calamanco Quilt of the Virginia Beach museums was recognized as the “Juried Award Winner.” This deep indigo glazed quilt from the 18th Century, with a “Tree of Life” pattern and elaborate trapunto work is extremely rare—no other similarly patterned quilt has been found. The quilt is dry, brittle, and acidic throughout, with tears and fading expected with a textile this old. But we hope this award will be the impetus to seeing this fantastic quilt restored to its former glory