

**ART CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
REPORT OF EXAMINATION AND PROPOSED TREATMENT**

ARTISTS: Charles C. Dawson,
William E. Scott, and Erik Lindgren

TITLE: *Landing of Slaves at
Jamestown, Virginia, 1619 (First
Slaves in Virginia)*

IDENTIFYING NUMBER:
ACP 1694

EXAMINER: Amanda Kasman,
Conservation Intern

DIMENSIONS: 38 inches x
55 inches x 24 inches
(96.52 cm x 139.70 cm x 60.96 cm)

OWNER: The Legacy Museum

EXAMINED: May 2017



*Fig. 1: Recto of Diorama showing support beams,
labeled with dimensions, courtesy of Joyce Hill Stoner*

General Description:

The diorama depicts the historic arrival of the first African slaves to the colony of Jamestown, Virginia in the year 1619. The center of the scene is punctuated by a procession of five male slaves connected by chains leading from a large seagoing vessel moored beside a wooden dock to a muddy shore. There the chained slaves encounter three other slaves, at least of which are female, sitting and kneeling on ground. The captives are flanked by three white, male colonists donning vibrantly-hued, anachronistic garments. Red-and-white striped shirts are iconic of 18th century depictions of seamen. The colonist second from the right scrutinizes the features of the first chained slave, inspecting his eyes, while the two other colonists look on the edges of the scene. Parallelism of the composition is completed by the presence of towering, wooden structures looming over the right and left extremes. On the left, a structure positioned on the dock partially obscures a vessel with masts that stretch to the highest viewable point of the scene. On the right, a blue, clapboard, similarly anachronistic structure emerges from the beams of the diorama's support frame.



Fig 2. Comparison of anachronistic attire of a colonist figure from the diorama to a 20th century engraving of a 1730 slave revolt published in the Atlantic Black Star and a detail of a Howard Pyle's heavily researched painting of the arrival of slaves at Jamestown in 1619 for Harper's Magazine in 1901.

Made for the American Negro Exposition of 1940, the work was exhibited alongside 32 other dioramas all exemplifying the theme of African contributions to world history. Commemorating achievements from the construction of the temple complex at Kharnak in the Middle Kingdom of the Egyptian Empire (2050-1800BC) to the completion of 'new negro school[s]' in 1936, the diorama being examined was listed as the sixth scene in the chronological sequence printed in the American Negro Exposition program (Kharnak, 1555)(American, 11). The 33 dioramas were displayed alongside 24 murals by William E. Scott depicting African American contributions to American history, 24 portraits of historic figures with African ancestry, and a twelve-foot wooden replica of Lincoln's Tomb by sculptor Robert Jones (Gibson, 58).

Following the conclusions of the American Negro Exposition, artifacts and artwork collected by the Tuskegee institute were installed in new museum, the George Washington Carver Museum, opened in 1943. The dioramas were located there until a fire of unknown origin damaged the building and portions of the collection in 1947, at which time the dioramas were returned to Tuskegee. Not until 2009 were the surviving dioramas acquired by a museum, The Legacy Museum, a direct consequence of the Federal governments acknowledgement of the unethical practices of the United States Public Health Service Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male in Macon County, Alabama (Payton, 3). Better known as the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, this clinical study lasting over 40 years failed to treat sufferers of syphilis when effective treatments were established in medical practice in order to study the debilitating effects of the disease left untreated. After the exposure of the secretive experiment in 1972, the Office of Human Research Protections was established to ensure the rights of participants of clinical studies (Tuskegee).

Though the feat of completing of the set of dioramas is thought to have been achieved by the employment of over 120 African Americans, both skilled artists and novices, the project was

led principally by Charles C. Dawson, William E. Scott, and Erik Lindgren (Gibson, 57)(American, 11)(Negro, 2).

Renowned African American Chicago artist, Charles C. Dawson (1889-1981) was a key player in the Black Chicago Renaissance and the New Negro Movement in visual arts. First studying to be an architect, Dawson changed paths to become one of the leading African American illustrators of the 1920s. His designs incorporated into advertisements geared to an African American audience marked a new level of recognition for Black culture. Dawson broke numerous racial barriers in the arts establishing himself as a natural leader in the artistic community as well as the African American community at large. Not only was he the first African American admitted to the Arts Students League, but he attended the Art Institute of Chicago, served as secretary of the Chicago Architectural League, manager of the Annual Chicago Architectural Exhibition, and founder of the Arts and Letters Society, the first black artists collective in Chicago. Despite his prominence within the city of Chicago, Dawson struggled to find stable work following the onset of the Great Depression. After being denied employment by the Public Works of Art Project, a New Deal Program, Dawson was hired by the National Youth Administration (NYA) to organize the American Negro Exposition. Following the success of this initiative, he was made curator of the Museum of Negro Art and Culture and the George Washington Carver Museum in 1944 (Schulman).

Born in Indianapolis, Indiana, William E. Scott (1884-1964) pursued fine arts from an early age and studied under the prominent African American artist, Henry Ossawa Tanner in Paris. There he acquired a loose style with a restricted palette indicative of his teacher and formulated his mission to transform the representation of African Americans from one of passive servitude to honor through hard work. It was in Paris, where African artists exhibited with white artists on equal terms, that Scott developed his reputation as a skilled painter. Soon after returning to the United States, Scott traveled back to Europe with African American regiments in World War I, documenting their experience in sketches, two of which were selected as covers for *The Crisis*, a magazine published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Following the war, Scott continued his examination of African culture, first through a trip to Haiti funded through a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship. There he acquired a more colorful palette. Then, he traveled through the American south beginning in Alabama. Despite Scott's notoriety as a mural painter, including the earliest public depictions of African American and Federally funded murals for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, records indicate that Scott aspired to be a sculptor (Rosenfeld)(William). In this way, Scott's travels and artistic aspirations can be seen as harmonized through his collaboration with Dawson and Lindgren on the American Negro Exposition dioramas.

Support:

The diorama is assembled inside of a frame of fifteen wooden beams in the shape of a trapezoidal prism – the recto of the diorama corresponding to longer beams than the verso – that are secured with screws and wedges. The wood beams appear varnished, judging from their dark color, yet they are unsanded and splattered with paint used in various parts of the miniature scene. Furthermore, a third horizontal beam on the front positioned approximately five inches below the top beam may serve as an additional support, despite partially obscuring the window through which to view the scene. Handwritten on the right of the top beam of the verso, it reads “Dock.” The wooden frame, therefore, can be assumed to have been entirely hidden from the

view of the public when displayed at the American Negro Exposition of 1940. The beams are in stable condition and appear to have minimal deterioration, except for the vertical beam in the back left which has been split. This damage can be assumed to have resulted from stacking of this artwork under other dioramas of the same set. Photographic images of the present storage conditions in the Legacy Museum corroborate this. Some pest trails are visible on the surface of the bottom most beam of the verso, but this damage may have occurred prior to the diorama's assemblage. Several insect carcasses were removed and collected from the diorama during preliminary examination, however none have been identified as cause for worry at this time.



Fig 3 & 4. Detail of the mortised corner of the diorama's frame (not intended to be visible in exhibition) with screws and an un-sanded finish (left). Hand written "Dock" appearing on right of top beam of the recto of the diorama (right).

Within this frame are two subsidiary supports: a trapezoid-shaped, wooden baseboard on which the plaster ground, figures, and structures were adhered and a Masonite backdrop. The baseboard is obscured by layers of plaster and is encircled by the Masonite, so little can be determined about it. The Masonite backdrop is curved in order for it to be nailed to the front corners of the recto and center back of the verso. Seen from the verso, the smooth side of the Masonite is unpainted and not intended to be seen. The bottom edge of the Masonite is straight while the top imparts a gentle curve. Visible from the verso, is the textured side of the Masonite painted with a waterscape, presumably in oil paint. The join between the Masonite and the baseboard is concealed by components of the scene including piles of rocks, two structures, a ship, and waves approaching the shore in the foreground. Several of these elements are secured to the backdrop with wires passed through pairs of holes through the Masonite which are then twisted together. Three such wires are present on the recto of the left side of the diorama, surrounded by a smattering of nails and screws serving as additional supports. These three wires appear to correspond to the pile of rocks and shed-like structure on the left side of the



Fig 5. Detail of the verso of the diorama showing two wires puncturing the Masonite support, securing the model ship.

scene. The backdrop is stable except for a split, also in the back left, starting from the top of the Masonite and traveling down to approximately half height. The exposed edges of this split need to be repositioned and re-adhered for both structural stability and visual continuity.

Lining the interior of the top support beams in the frame is wiring for illumination presumed to be original to the diorama's debut in 1940. Three sockets for bulbs are present connected by fabric and metal lined tubes: one on the shorter side beam on the left side and the other two on the interior of the front beam. The third socket, rather than presenting in the center of its beam, like the other two, is positioned one quarter of the total beams' length from the right corner of the verso. In this way, the lighting may have been installed with the intention of producing lighting effects evoking morning or evening light. Such effects are yet unconfirmed and consultation is being conducted to determine the proper lighting fixtures to be implemented in the conserved work. The condition of these wires remains a mystery. Additionally, the three bulbs believed original to the diorama were shattered, their glass fragments littering the scene below. These shards were removed and collected during preliminary examination.

A general thick layer of dust and grime coats the surfaces of this work, with the greatest accumulation on the tops of horizontal surfaces. In places this grime appears caked on, required more than dry brushing to expose the original color of the material.



Fig 6. Recto of the diorama with the split in the Masonite indicated by a yellow arrow and the three sockets connected by original wiring indicated by three red arrows.

Ground Layers and Three-Dimensional Components:

When viewed through the window formed by the verso of the frame, the scene of the diorama is visible, consisting of 11 figures, two wooden structures, and a ship. These three dimensional components are secured to the Masonite and baseboard supports by nails, wires, screws, plaster, pins, and presumably adhesive. The identification of the plaster was supported by analysis under UV, which showed exposed areas that appear white under natural light fluorescing

reddish-purple. According to *Non-Destructive Micro Analysis of Cultural Heritage Materials* the fluorescence of calcite, the primary chemical constituent of plaster, varies by deposit appearing orange, red, blue, or purple. The structures and ship have maintained stability through their physical connections to the Masonite though they can sway and warp under minimal applied pressure. The figures, however, are cause for concern as their stability is dependent on the stability of the plaster ground below them, and the plaster is ground is crumbling severely.

Again, through analysis of the other dioramas in storage at the Legacy Museum, of which some have broken figures, it become apparent that the only elements securing the figures to the diorama are pins protruding less than an inch from the feet which were inserted into the plaster ground. While the figures themselves, made from baked clay (Chicago Tribune), appear stable, the plaster is flaking presumably as a result of layer during the diorama production process. From examination of the plaster exposed by losses at least two distinct layers of plaster are visible. The first lower layer is painted a warm brown on the surface and appears to follow the general contours of the second layer. The second layer notably consists of a plaster containing plant fibers or grasses, and the top of this layer is also painted, this time a cooler brown. The plant materials may be the cause of much of the plaster's instability, but both layers are friable. Under minimal applied pressure it is found that most of the figures can wobble with varying degrees of instability. Cracks have formed between the feet and surrounding plaster of nearly all of the figures.

Though the figures themselves see fairly stable, evidence of previous conservation (probably by non-conservators) suggests prior damage. Three of the figures have had their heads

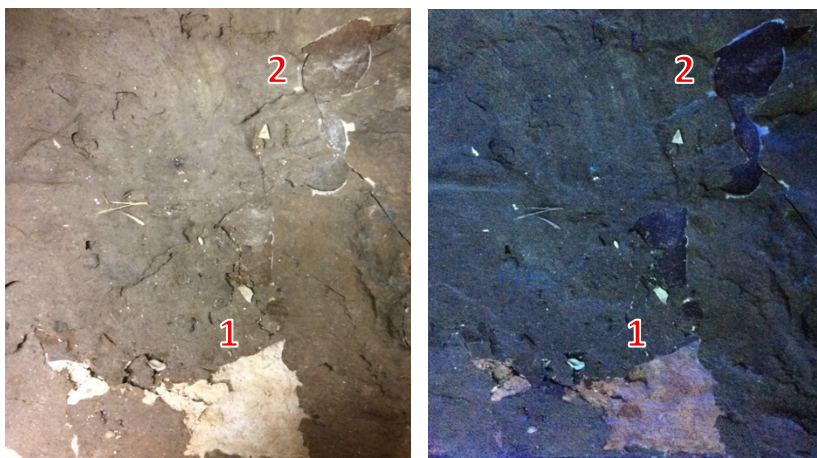


Fig 7. Detail of flaking plaster under visible (left) and UV (right) light showing (1) exposed plaster fluorescing reddish purple and (2) a painted layer of plaster underneath the top layer, appearing dark.



Fig 8. Detail of figure cleaving away from the plaster ground, held in place by an unseen pin.

re-adhered with an unknown adhesive that fluoresces bright white under UV. Two of these figures have also had a leg severed and re-adhered with the same unknown adhesive. Another adhesive, perhaps original to the work, secures the miniature chain to the wrists of the slaves. This adhesive imparts a high gloss to the figures' wrists in natural light, and fluoresces dark orange under UV.

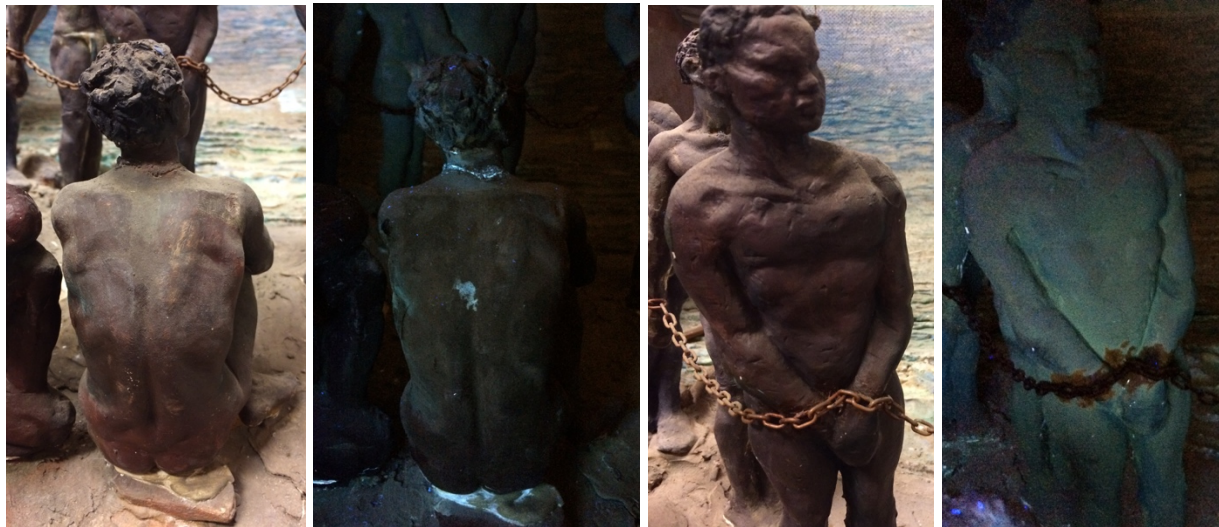


Fig 9 & 10. Details of two figures with adhesives that fluoresce under UV: an adhesive used to reattach a head that fluoresces white (left), and an adhesive to secure miniature chains to the figure's wrists (right).

The wooden components including the two structures, the ship, and other decorative accents show structural damage only to incredibly fragile elements such as the muntin bars in the windows and miniature oars resting against both of these structures. The masts of the ship are also separated from where they were once nailed to the deck.

Several smaller components of textile and plant material are in poor condition throughout the diorama. Of principal concern is the rigging of the ship composed of carefully knotted and now broken threads. A sample of this thread has yet to be taken to a textile conservator to identify the characteristics of the original thread and the desired attributes of the thread to replace it. Additionally, two wound bundles of twine serving as miniature rope for two anchors on the dock on the left of the scene are severely deteriorated. These will likely need to be replaced. Lastly, unidentified plant materials appearing as dried grasses among miniature wire plants are present in the foreground on the left. If these materials are indeed botanical rather than wire, treatments may need to be altered to account for their structural and chemical delicacy.

Paint Layers and Surface Coatings:

Nearly every surface in the diorama's scene is painted, the wooden dock structure being the primary exception. All of the clay figures and other supports are coated in perhaps several kinds of paint, evidenced by the differences in gloss between the foreground and the backdrop – an indication that the latter is painted in oil – and the solubility of two of the paints – a reddish brown paint and a light blue paint – in 0.5% citrate solution balanced to pH 7. Cleaning tests were performed on dozens of paint regions across the diorama with 0.5% citrate solution

balanced to pH 7, acetone, isopropanol, and xylene on cotton swabs. The only soluble paints identified – the two listed above – were soluble in citrate alone. Swabs with acetone removed no pigments even in these sensitive areas. The soluble reddish-brown paint is believed to be present on the three seated slaves and on the roof of the right structure. The soluble light blue pigment has so far been found on the pile of rocks on the far left and the upturned boat partially hidden under the dock. No fluorescence was observed under UV in the painted areas in the absence of adhesives. This indicates that there is not an organic varnish, however the presence of other surface coatings has not been ruled out.



Fig 11 & 12. Details the two regions of paint found to be water soluble: blue on the rocks (left) and reddish-brown skin (right).

References:

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Proposed Treatment:

- Removal of bulk of dirt with dry brushing and a Nilfisk vacuum
- Selectively cleaning plaster ground where flaking is most severe with DI water on PVOH sponges cut into small wedges
- Consolidation of flaking plaster with 15% B72 in acetone with syringes and brushes
- Re-adhere largest plaster flakes with 30% B72 in acetone with syringes and brushes
- Filling gaps under large flakes with 15% B72 bulked with 3 micrometer glass balloons in a syringe
- Fill losses in plaster ground with Modostuc or Flügger
- Clean wooden structures and figures with 0.5% citrate solution pH balanced to 8 with NaOH on cotton swabs (with the exception of three seated slaves)
- Clean three seated slave figures, blue rocks, and row boat with acetone
- Clean plaster waves with cosmetic sponges, then consolidate with Aquazol, remove excess Aquazol with acetone, and remove remaining grime with 0.5% citrate solution
- Reduce adhesive added in previous treatment with solvents and scalpels
- Inpaint losses with PVA of Gamblin Conservation colors

Permission to Proceed with Treatment

I have received the Report of Examination and Proposal for Treatment prepared by Amanda Kasman regarding the diorama: *Landing of Slaves at Jamestown, Virginia, 1619*, ACP 1694
As the curator for the Legacy Museum, I give permission for the treatment to proceed as outlined in this document.

Name _____ Date _____

Dr. Jontyle Robinson, Tuskegee University, jontylerobinson@aol.com 334-727-8888
Tuskegee, AL 36088

If you approve, could you please sign this page and fax back to us at 302-888-4838, scan and e-mail, or mail back to us c/o Joyce Hill Stoner, Winterthur Museum, Rt. 52, Winterthur, DE 19735

Further examination and beginning treatment will be carried out by our four students in the "Two-week Introduction to Practical Conservation [TIPC]," June 12-23, 2017, and then will be continued by an advanced honors student in painting conservation along with other conservation interns under the supervision of Dr. Joyce Hill Stoner.

As estimated by Arthur Page and Page Conservation, Inc., if this treatment were carried out by a their Washington DC conservation practice, the treatment would cost about \$25,000.
We anticipate that the full examination steps and treatment and an honors thesis on this work will be completed by April 2018; there will be no cost to the Legacy Museum for the treatment.
Questions regarding the progress of the treatment should be directed to Dr. Joyce Hill Stoner, (302) 888- 4888, email: jstone@winterthur.org