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Project Review

Middleton Chair Conservation Project

Tracey Todd Director of Museums
Historic Charleston Foundation
40 East Bay
Charleston, SC 29401

Object: Fancy painted arm chair, black and gold, from the Nathaniel Russell House Collection

History: Donated to the HCF by Hope Middleton Wood.

The Middle chair, one of the only pieces of furniture that is original to NRH, has returned from Colonial Williamsburg Conservation Lab. The chair underwent cross section analysis and a paint layer reveal. It has been determined that the original color scheme for the painted arm chair was not black but light shades of yellow, cream and white, ornamented with gold leaf gilt decoration.

The current color scheme of black paint and bronze powder paint that is flaking away, is not original to the chair.



Update: The loose joints that were previously considered stable have shifted and the chair now sits skewed. The proper right leg and arm are tilting to the left. Consultation with furniture conservator, David Dick, established that the chair is secure and structural treatment is not advised.

Project goals: As the chair is to be used as a study piece on display in the gallery, I suggest further testing to see how much of the original surface can be revealed. The transformation process, I believe, would be of great interest to the visitors of the house. To see the craftsmanship of the original fancy painted furniture with true gold gilding in contrast to the dull, secondary coats of black and bronze paint would be extraordinary. Comparing the finesse of the earlier techniques with the later repairs could be a great teaching tool.

February 10, 2025

The original color scheme under the black paint layer may prove to be damaged or abraded but the extent of the damage will not be known until larger sections of reveal are opened on the chair's surface.

Proposal: Execute tests on consolidation adhesives and test cleaning to reduce black paint and bronze paint. The beautiful surface of the highly finished cream/white paint and the gold gilding will be a significant change. A demonstration in the change in appearance from dulled bronze pigment paint to a real gold surface will be stunning.

Schedule:

Begin testing process mid February.

Arrange photography with HCF's Liza Holian to document the stages of the chair undergoing the transformation process and promote the process on social media.

Reassess condition of surface after reveal areas have been analyzed.

Submit a full proposal including new findings in March



Thank you for your business