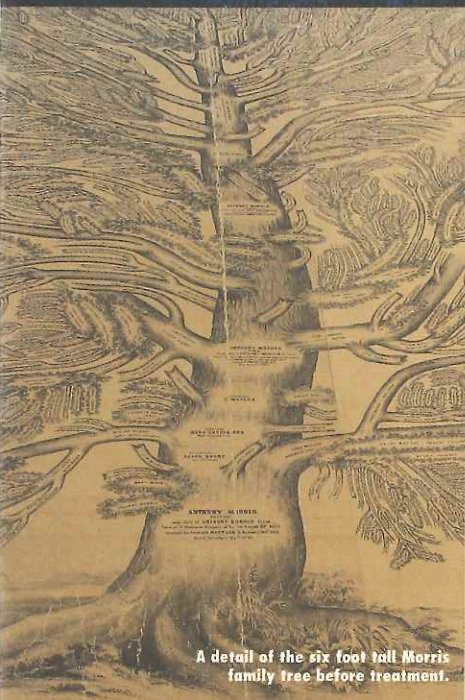


# Artifacts

CONSERVATION CENTER  
for Art and Historic Artifacts



A detail of the six foot tall Morris family tree before treatment.

## My History is America's History

9/6/EP/3K/1/2/CP  
return

On a recent winter day, Jeff Morris Welsh walked into CCAHA with a seven foot tube tucked under his arm. Inside the tube was a giant lithograph of his nine-generation family tree. The tree had been passed down from his grandmother to his mother, and now he had decided to bring it to CCAHA for treatment and housing. "I don't want to lose our history or the paper that it's on," he said. "I want to one day pass it along to my son."

By the time he does, the 73" by 60" lithograph will be even denser, as another generation takes its place atop the family's deep roots. Consider this: The span of time between the founding of this country and the present day represents 14 generations. In that time, the average person doing a genealogy will have had 4,096 ancestors. That's 4,096 stories, names, documents, deeds, wills, and ships' manifests that have to be sifted through in order to piece together a cohesive, comprehensive family tree. The paper it would be printed on could look more like a mural. (For archivists and for the amateur family historian, this raises interesting questions. Given the daunting amount of information collected in the average ancestral search, how do we best preserve it for the next generation?)

Yet despite the long hours of work, or maybe even because of it, investigating family ancestry is tremendously popular in the United States. One might even say it's big business. There are countless internet sites, databases, DNA depositories, and how-to guides available to the burgeoning population of amateur genealogists. The appeal is easy to see: Family tree-makers get to play detective—with the bonus being that the mystery solved is the mystery of one's own family.

But on a deeper level, the popularity of family history represents the flip side of the American experiences of migration and reinvention. While family trees elsewhere might trace (continued on page 3)

### WHAT'S INSIDE

page two  
letter from the  
executive director

page four  
questions for  
Mary Schobert

page six  
high watermarks

page seven  
did that fade?

page eight  
calendar of events

Morris family tree

### treatment spotlight:

## Mysteries of the *Christian ABC*

A truly unique book belonging to Ephrata Cloister in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, the *Christian ABC* reveals the soul of an 18th century religious community at its height. We can look at its weirdly beautiful *fraktur* images and sense how they convey the artists' extreme love of God, nature, and art.

But it is a book of mystery as well. We don't know—

- Who the artists were...
- How this book was used...
- Or if it was even conceived as a book.

This year, the *Christian ABC* was selected as Pennsylvania's featured Object of the Year at the annual Heritage Days celebration which ran from March 11th to the 14th. A single leaf from the *Christian ABC* was transported from the CCAHA, where it is being conserved, to the State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg for exhibit. At the State Museum, schoolchildren and adult visitors saw the original 1681 Charter granted to William Penn side-by-side with this strange artifact of a vanished monastic experiment from the 18th century.

In some ways, the two artifacts—the Charter and the *Christian ABC*—go together naturally. William Penn chose to use his land grant to promote religious freedom, and it was this (continued on page 5)



Joan Irving testing the colors for solubility before treatment begins.

back generations of people who lived close by one another and paired off in predictable patterns, the American story is one of people in constant motion, crossing an ocean in one generation, a continent in another, and moving from farm to city to suburb right up to our own day. With each stop comes a new pool of neighbors, a new series of often improbable couplings, and a new generation atop the family tree. Trying to make sense of this story amounts to trying to make sense of America.

This is easier for some groups than for others. Black Americans, for instance, have a much harder time tracing their ancestry. The Middle Passage and 200 years of slavery destroyed records and connections that bind many to their pasts on the other side of the Atlantic. But the publication nearly three decades ago of *Roots* spurred a new interest in African-American genealogy. The 1976 book and 1977 television miniseries that followed chronicled author Alex Haley's family line from a slave named Kunta Kinte to their freedom in America seven generations later.

But whatever a family's particular history, the emotional goal is often the same – trying to make sense of identity in a country where identity can change with every generation.

With Mr. Welsh's family tree, his family identity turned out to be one that was quite well known around Philadelphia.

The Morris Family Tree was compiled in 1861 and begins with the birth of Anthony Morris in 1654. Anthony Morris came to Philadelphia from London in 1682, started a brewery, became a Judge

of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Justice of City Court, Mayor of Philadelphia, and started the William Penn Charter School. His son, Samuel Morris, was a partner in the brewery business, and a member of George Washington's bodyguard unit in the Revolutionary War. Samuel Morris married Rebecca Wistar in 1755, thereby joining two of Philadelphia's elite families. (The Wistars had been a successful Philadelphia family and Caspar Wistar, b.1761, was the 3rd president of the American Philosophical Society –after Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. He wrote the first American textbook of anatomy and the University of Pennsylvania holds the Wistar Anatomy collection, which Wistar started when he was a professor there. Also, the Wisteria vine is named after Wistar.) Throughout the nine generations, the Morris-Wistar family was involved in Philadelphia politics, religion, medicine, education, and business.

At CCAHA, objects with documented provenances from institutional collections are commonly treated. It's more difficult for conservators to learn the history behind the artifacts individuals bring in. Preserving these family objects is part of what connects us to our collective American history and exemplifies the National Endowment for the Humanities' phrase "My history is America's history." Family trees provide a unique opportunity to do just that.

—Keltie Hawkins

Many thanks to Jeff Groff of the Wyck house for his help in researching the Morris family. Thanks also to Nancy Rhoads, a descendant of the Morris-Wistar family.

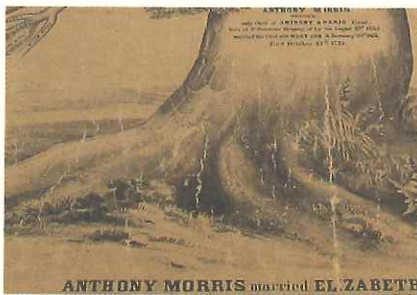
Robert C. Moon, *The Morris Family of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1898) Volumes 1-5.

## Tips for Storing Family Trees

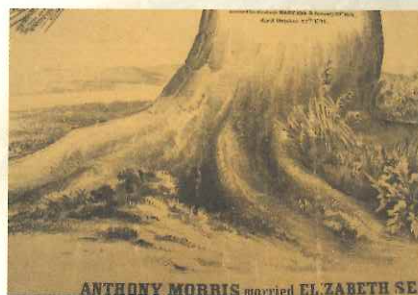
1. Don't banish your family tree to the basement. Store it at the proper temperature and humidity—68°F and 45% relative humidity.
2. Use appropriate housing materials such as alkaline acid-free folders and mats.
3. If possible, store your family tree flat. If it is oversize, put it on an oversize roll preferably made of acid-free materials with a barrier layer of polyester film.



Relining the family tree.



Before toning, infills, and inpainting.



After treatment.

**treatment process:** When the Morris Family Tree arrived at CCAHA, it was in poor condition. The paper support was moderately brittle and the piece was discolored due to aging. Only the weakened and partially torn fabric support was keeping the object from separating into two pieces. There were many horizontal creases and breaks in the paper support overall, caused by the rolled storage and a large paper loss at the top left corner, measuring 8 x 11-inches. There were numerous, small edge tears and losses along the edges and many water stains in the paper support.

Conservator Soyeon Choi spearheaded the conservation of the family tree, but at times, five conservators were needed just to move this oversize object. After careful testing, Ms. Choi washed the object in

successive baths of calcium-enriched de-ionized water to remove discolorations and acidity from the paper. The cloth backing and the old adhesive residues were removed during washing. The object was then lined with Japanese paper and wheat starch paste and dried under tension on a table. Large losses in the paper support were filled with acrylic toned Japanese paper and small losses were toned with watercolor and pastel. Water-damaged areas were retouched with grated pastel. With the treatment complete, Ms. Choi noted, "Overall, the conservation treatment has greatly improved the physical and chemical condition of the object – Mr. Welsh's family will be able to enjoy it for many more generations. Personally, the collaboration on oversized objects with my co-workers at CCAHA always brings me the most joy."