
**STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**

**State of Damage and Preservation as a Result of the
January 6 Insurrection**

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FEBRUARY 24, 2021

Chairperson Ryan and Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for your ongoing support for the Office of the Clerk’s work and for the opportunity to testify about the Clerk’s response to damage to the House’s fine art collection on January 6, 2021, and our budget request related to that damage.

HOUSE COLLECTION OF FINE ART AND ARTIFACTS

Since the start of the first Congress in 1789, the Clerk, as the custodian of the institution’s official documents, has documented and preserved the material record of the House’s work. In 1988, the House formalized the Clerk’s similar stewardship of the House’s material culture—the art and artifacts that tell the story of the People’s House. As provided in 40 U.S.C 188c(b), the Clerk, under the supervision and direction of the House Collection’s oversight body, the House Fine Arts Board, is “responsible for the administration, maintenance, and display of the works of fine art and other property....”

With that charge, the Clerk’s curatorial office cares for the House Collection, which encompasses the entire sweep of the institution’s history, from the first meeting of Congress to the present. Of the 13,000 objects in the collection, from portraits to photographs to campaign memorabilia, 535 are currently exhibited in the Capitol and House Office Buildings.

Survey

On January 6, 219 House Collection objects were on display in the Capitol. As the events of that day unfolded, I thought first for the safety of my colleagues in the Clerk’s office and the Members and staff across the Hill. As the Capitol was secured that evening, my curatorial colleagues and I turned our attention to potential damage to the House Collection and loans in the Capitol.

During the riot, courageous staffers saved several important artifacts of the House’s legislative history. Quick thinking by a journal clerk secured the House’s 1819 silver inkstand, the oldest object in the Chamber. Sergeant at Arms staff evacuated the Mace from the Chamber. Late in the evening, the Clerk went to the House’s most recently opened exhibition, marking the 150th anniversary of the election of Joseph Rainey of South Carolina, the first African-American Representative, to confirm the safety of artifacts and portraits of Rainey and Shirley Chisholm in that display.

As part of our emergency planning, the Clerk's curatorial staff maintains a detailed record of collection item locations. Early on January 7, guided by that information and publicly available images of locations in the Capitol that rioters breached, the Senate Curator and I undertook a joint walk-through of the building. We coordinated with Architect of the Capitol staff, who provided access to rooms and information on overnight clean-up efforts. At the same time, the House's curatorial staff inventoried and made a preliminary assessment of every House Collection and loan object in the Capitol.

Damage Assessment

The preliminary survey of the House identified eight objects with potential damage: marble and granite busts of Speakers Joe Cannon, Champ Clark, Joe Martin, and Thomas Brackett Reed; portraits of James Madison and John Quincy Adams; a bust of Chippewa statesman Be shekee; and a statue of Thomas Jefferson. These objects are in the corridors adjacent to the House Chamber doors. We noted that they and their frames, plinths, pedestals, and niches were covered in a fine powder, likely residue from a chemical spray.

We collected samples of the powder from the marble bust of Speaker Champ Clark, located next to the House Chamber's west doors. To stabilize all four Speaker busts temporarily and prevent further damage, we encapsulated them in museum-grade plastic until we could identify the particulate. Multiple chemical sprays, from fire extinguishers to bear repellent, were present in the Capitol on January 6. The Smithsonian Institution's Museum Conservation Institute analyzed our sample and identified the powder as discharge from a nearby ABC fire extinguisher, with a slightly acidic pH of 5.5–6. This type of fire extinguisher contains various chemicals, including silicone oil and yellow dye.

Repair and Conservation

On-site investigation by our contract conservator in February expanded our understanding of the damage to objects and provided a roadmap for treatment. Fire extinguisher particulate contains a yellow dye that can discolor the surfaces it touches, particularly porous stone such as marble. The treatment plan we will undertake in the coming weeks will remove the dye-infused oil through a combination of mechanical removal of loose particulate, followed first by a 5 percent solution of ammonium citrate, ammonium chloride, and ammonium hydroxide added to pH 8, and then by a poultice of 5 percent synthetic magnesium silicate clay in successive 2" square patches.

APPROPRIATION REQUEST

We appreciate the Subcommittee’s ongoing support for the curatorial operations of the Office of the Clerk. Each year, the funds appropriated to the Clerk include plans for scheduled, programmatic conservation work. The damage from January 6, however, was significant. We respectfully request a supplemental appropriation of \$25,000 for support of emergency repair and conservation of the House Collection objects.

Conservation of the House Collection—the careful, sound management of the objects—is at the heart of the Clerk’s stewardship responsibilities. Additional funds, if appropriated, would be used for treatment of objects above and beyond what is provided for in our annual collections care budget. We plan for an average of six conservation projects each year, which range in cost from \$1,000 to \$25,000. Most of our conservation efforts are the result of conscious, proactive identification of risks that could potentially affect the long-term health of the institution’s collection and appropriate allocation of resources to reduce these risks.

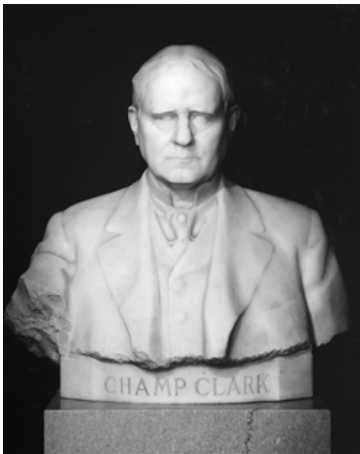
We inspect each object on exhibit and in Leadership offices in person every year. The House’s collection management policies direct that “objects needing treatment upon observation from either inventory or spot-checking are kept on a list. Objects are attended to when determined to be unstable and funding is appropriated.” This cyclical care structure allows for annual treatment of delicate treasures of the institution, like the silver inkstand in the Chamber, and planned treatment of others on a rotating basis.

The Clerk’s budget also accommodates unexpected emergencies. We plan for a single unforeseen conservation effort per year, usually as a result of an accident. Past sources of damage have been HVAC failures, equipment falling against objects, and liquid or food accretions. In the past, that emergency plan has been sufficient.

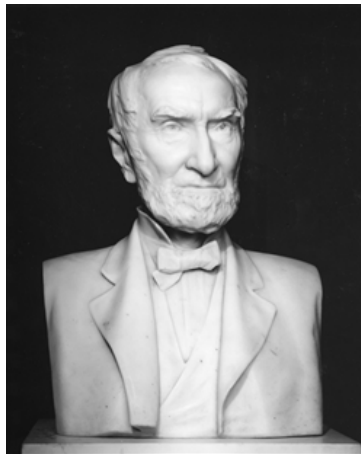
The current emergency conservation needs will require funds beyond our current contingency plan and beyond our six-object annual conservation plan. Response to the damage of January 6 leads us to request the Subcommittee’s support for our supplemental appropriations request to enable us to continue sound management and care of the entire collection for generations to come.

Thank you again for your continued support and for the opportunity to testify.

House Collection objects with identified damage



Speaker Champ Clark



Speaker Joe Cannon



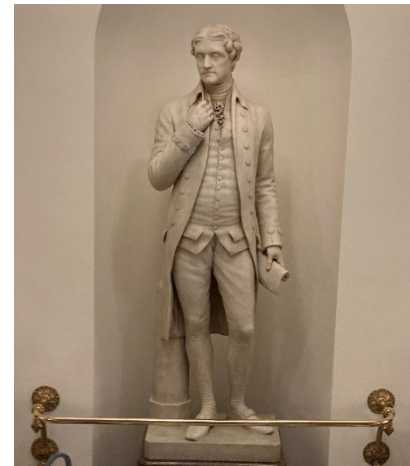
Speaker Thomas Reed



Speaker Joseph Martin



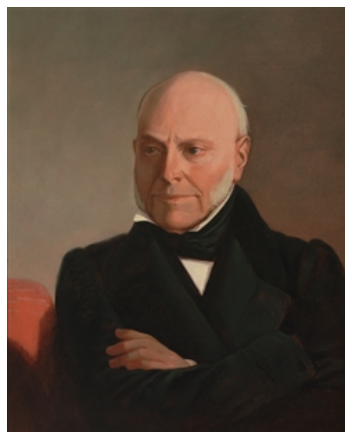
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Thomas Jefferson



James Madison

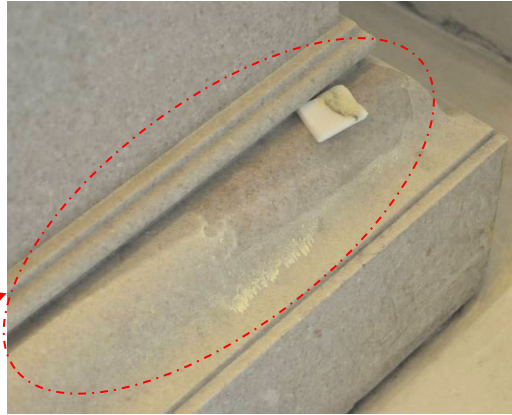


John Quincy Adams

Examples of chemical particulate on House Collection objects



Yellow fire extinguisher residue on base and floor, and sponge used to wipe residues and grime.



Treatment tests showing cleaned areas with start of untreated areas marked

