

Paper Tapestry: Wallpaper Preservation

From 1866 to 1982, Spadina Museum: Historic House & Gardens was home to four generations of the Austin family. Opened to the public as a museum by the City of Toronto in 1984, Spadina Museum is one of ten historic museums operated by the City of Toronto. Toronto's Economic Development and Culture division decided to update the original restoration of Spadina Museum commencing in 2009. After extensive interior renovations to depict how the Austins lived during the 1920's and 1930's, it was reopened to the public 2010. The first and second floor renovations included digital reproductions of the wallpaper based on original source material maintained in the Austin family's records. That restoration project was presented at the 2011 CAC Conference in Winnipeg. This paper picks up where that one left off. In 1912/1913, the Austin family added a third floor to their Spadina home which included servant spaces. The third floor was not included in the previous restoration activities. In 2012, in preparation for opening the third floor servants' quarters to the public for the first time, Spadina Museum undertook the in situ stabilization and treatment of the wallpaper in the servants' hallway, believed to be original to the 1912/1913 renovation. This space shines a light on "the other half" of life at Spadina allowing visitors to now see the servants' living quarters, including the bathroom and water closet, a bedroom and the servants' living quarters, including the bathroom and water closet, a bedroom and the servants' sitting room, all of which are accessed by a hallway decorated with tapestry inspired wallpaper. The space was also the site of a travelling exhibit featuring costumes from the popular television series "Downton Abbey".

Prior to the 2012 renovation, the servants' space was being used by museum staff as a storage area and had been renovated to incorporate an elevator. As a result, the wallpaper suffered physical damage from items being moved through the space and from construction related activities. Damage included numerous small losses and abrasions to the

wallpaper; areas where the paper was delaminating from the walls; and other areas of significant large losses. Additionally, there were water stains from previous ceiling damage, and tears in the wallpaper due to cracks in the lathe and plaster structure it was pasted to. The wallpaper was further obfuscated by a buildup of decades of soot, dust and grime. A different approach was taken with the restoration of the servants' quarters. The original wallpaper was preserved by modifying traditional conservation techniques to clean and treat in-situ, whereas the large losses were infilled with full scale digitally reproduced wallpaper. This paper will discuss the challenges of undertaking this treatment in-situ and those of color matching and achieving the correct scale, proportions and perspective for the digitally reproduced paper, as well as working as an independent contractor with staff and volunteers at the historic property and other City of Toronto divisions and private "partners". This project highlights an emerging approach and modality in conservation and tells the next chapter in the renovations at Spadina Museum.

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