

# Adopt-an-Artifact

By Debi Murray, Chief Curator

**Did you know that the Historical Society of Palm Beach County has an Adopt-an-Artifact program? Donors can help by sponsoring an artifact that needs to be conserved. The following is one recent story of the adoption of a painting.**

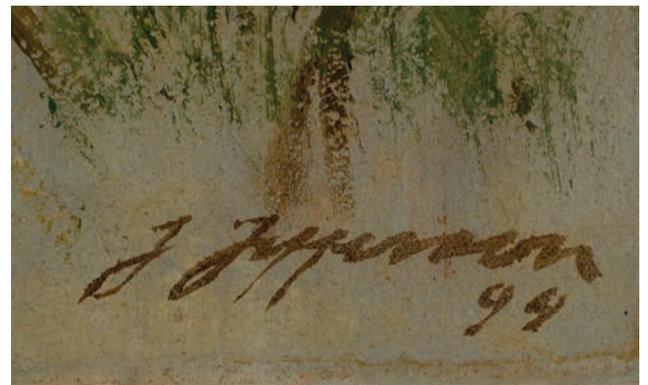


The 120-year-old painting, “Everglades,” by Joseph Jefferson before conservation, courtesy SFAC.

**B**irthdays can be good things; so can adoptions. The Historical Society of Palm Beach County was honored recently when Edward Pollack asked his wife Deborah what she would like for her birthday. Deborah, author of several books including *Orville Bulman: An Enchanted Life and Fantastic Legacy* and *Laura Woodward: The Artist Behind the Innovator Who Developed Palm Beach*, and art gallery owner had always admired the Historical Society’s Joseph Jefferson paintings. One of them, entitled “Everglades,” an oil on matt board, dated 1894, had badly yellowed, and Deborah had long mourned its condition. So, when Ed asked what she wanted, she requested the cleaning of the painting. After discussing the project with staff at the Historical Society and a field trip to South Florida Art Conservation (SFAC), the Historical Society gladly accepted the Pollacks’ offer to adopt the artifact.

After examining the painting, Jeronimo Perez Roca of SFAC reported that the painting had not been touched since the artist applied his own varnish in 1894, making the project much easier since he did not have to undo any other conservation efforts. Jeronimo wrote an email detailing his work:

*The surface of the painting had an old layer of varnish that was hiding the original colors. The natural resins present in the varnish oxidized with age, changing significantly the appearance of the colors and creating a yellowish monochromatic look. The cleaning of the surface and the removal of the varnish was meticulously done using the appropriate mixtures of solvents with no harm to the original paint layer. As a final step, the painting was re-varnished, this time using a modern low molecular weight varnish based on a synthetic resin that will provide better stability and protection in the future. In conclusion, it was a reasonably straightforward procedure that improves significantly the way we can now look at the original work of Joseph Jefferson.*



Detail of Joseph Jefferson’s signature, courtesy SFAC.

When staff delivered the painting and Jeronimo began the initial examination, we discovered that the painting was in an ill-fitting frame. Then, once we saw the cleaned painting, we knew we had to remedy that situation—the once again brilliant colors of Jefferson’s artistry put the frame to shame. Choosing a modern-made, but period looking frame has put the finishing touch on the Joseph Jefferson painting begun by the generosity of Deborah and Edward Pollack.



Above left: “Everglades” half completed, showing the difference during the conservation process, courtesy SFAC. Below left: the completed painting after cleaning, courtesy SFAC. Above right: A detail showing the cleaned left side and the dirty right side, courtesy SFAC. Middle right: Jeronimo Perez Roca in his SFAC studio, courtesy SFAC. Below right: Edward and Deborah Pollack, courtesy the Pollacks.