

## Intermuseum Conservation Association Treats Important Portraits

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Photography by John T. Seyfried for the ICA

This academic year two historically significant portraits in the Oberlin College Archives received treatment by the Intermuseum Conservation Association (ICA), Cleveland. The conservation activity was made possible with income from the endowed Hunt Fund for Preservation and Digital Access established in 2007. This fund enables the Oberlin College Archives to undertake preservation, conservation and digital access projects for artworks, recordings, photographs, and other objects in need of treatment, stabilization and/or migration to new media. Without this dedicated fund, the Oberlin College Archives would not be able to proceed with preservation projects, especially during the financial downturn of the past year. Emeritus Archivist Roland M. Baumann established the Fund in the last years of his tenure as College Archivist.



***Bas-Relief Photographic Portrait of Amzi L. Barber, ca. 1900***

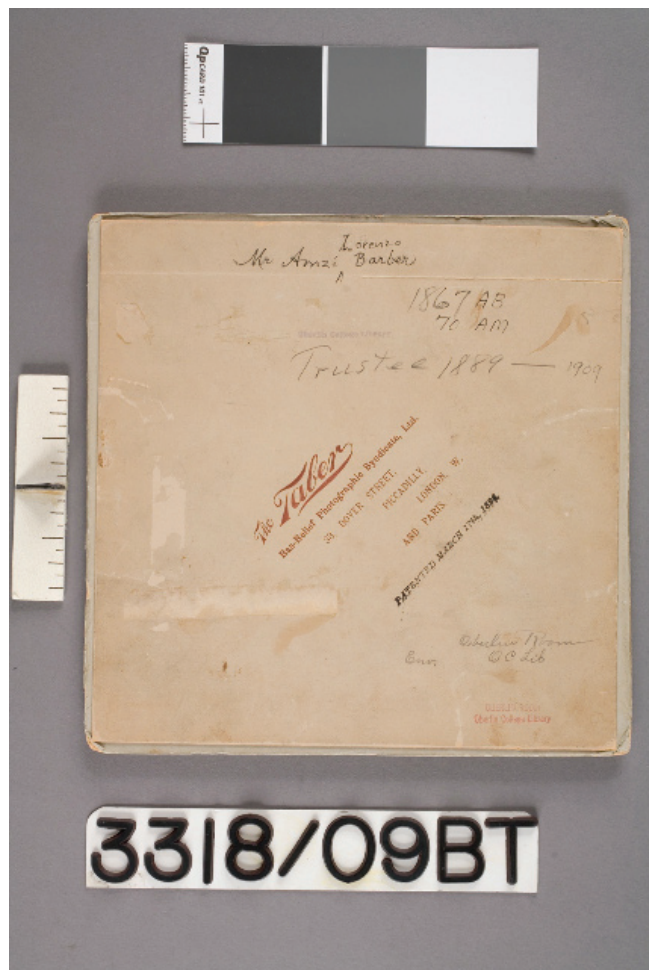
One of the two portraits treated is a rare, bas-relief platinotype of Oberlin graduate Amzi L. Barber, made by the Taber Bas-Relief Photographic Syndicate in San Francisco around 1900. It had been encased in a damaged

metal frame under broken glass. Particles of glass had scratched the photograph's surface, and the frame did not provide enough space for the object to expand and contract normally in response to changing humidity levels. Conservation treatment involved removing glass particles and dust from the surface of the photograph, retouching a small loss in the image caused by the broken glass and reframing the object in a larger sink mat to allow for expansion and contraction. ICA returned the Barber portrait to the Oberlin College Archives in May of 2009.



The Intermuseum Conservation Association had never seen this type of photographic object before, and were so intrigued that they pursued research on the object, the patented process and the photographer, Isaiah West Taber (1830-1912). They learned that the process for "embossed photographs" was patented in 1896 by Freeman A. Taber, brother of Isaiah West Taber. The brothers operated a studio in Syracuse, N.Y., 1857-1864, before Isaiah Taber moved to San Francisco. He opened his own studio there in 1871, and took over the studio of the better-known Carleton E. Watkins in 1876.

The back of the Barber portrait indicated that Taber had established studios in London and Paris. The finding guide to the Isaiah West Taber Family Photographs Collection at the Bancroft Library at U. C. Berkeley informed us that Taber had received a commission to photograph Queen Victoria's Jubilee pageant and to make a portrait of King Edward VII. Unfortunately Taber's career ended in 1906 when his entire collection of glass plates, view negatives and portraits on glass were destroyed in the earthquake and fire in San Francisco. The Ban-



croft Library holds a small amount of Taber's family portraiture, including Taber's self-portrait using the bas-relief process. It can be viewed from the Online Archive of California's website at <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf1199p1s5&brand=oac/>.

Amzi Lorenzo Barber (1843-1909) received the A.B. degree from Oberlin in 1867. He was a successful businessman as the founder and president of the Barber Asphalt Paving Company, which paved Washington D.C.'s thoroughfares. He served Oberlin as the Principal of the Preparatory division prior to his business career, and later continuously as a Trustee from 1889 until his death in 1909.

The other portrait treated by ICA, painted on porcelain in 1862, is significant for its subject, Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875). Finney was the foremost evangelist preacher in pre-Civil War America with a long tenure at Oberlin, from 1835 until his death in 1875. He was the College's second president, from 1851-1866.

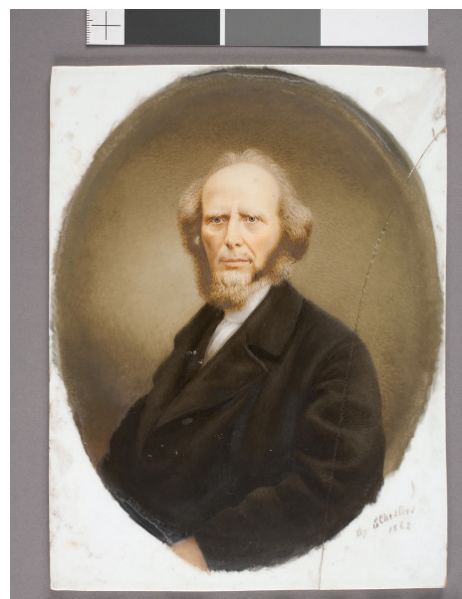
Finney's oval portrait on a rectangular porcelain plate came to the Archives' collection as two broken pieces glued together and placed into a plain black metal

frame. The frame obscured the edges of the piece and did not provide adequate stability for the fragile porcelain. The crack through the portrait greatly marred the delicate painting of the fiery preacher. The treatment at the Intermuseum Conservation

Association consisted of separating the two pieces, removing the old adhesive and reattaching both pieces of the object with conservation grade epoxy. The areas around the break were retouched to diminish their appearance, and the object was fitted into a custom-

made sink mat padded with felt to protect the object and placed into a walnut frame. The new rectangular window mat allows the viewer to see the edges of the oval painted area and the signature of the artist, which had previously been obscured by the original mat.

For more information on Charles Grandison Finney, see the Finding Guide for the Finney Papers at the Oberlin College Archives, <http://www.oberlin.edu/archive/holdings/finding/RG2/SG2/index.html>. Other portraits of Finney can be seen in the Archives' Select Historic Portraits digital collection at <http://www.oberlin.edu/archive/historicalPortraits.html>.



**Portrait of Charles Grandison Finney by S. Chesters, 1862**

