

# Revealing Hidden Text on Botanical Specimens from 1911

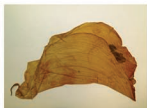
Secret messages in the Princess Bibesco Collection are brought to light after 100 years.



HARRY RANSOM CENTER  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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Some of the more enchanting pieces of the Harry Ransom Center's Princess Marthe Bibesco Collection are love letters from French paramour Prince Charles Louis de Beauvau-Craon, who adored the married Romanian princess despite her obvious inaccessibility. Included in Charles-Louis letters were flower petals he inscribed. Since the petals were pressed, whatever was inscribed within was thought to be lost to the ages. Our goal for this treatment was to safely open the petals and reveal the lost inscriptions within.

After determining that humidification might be an ideal way to open the petals, I ran tests on non-archival flowers that had been previously pressed and dried. One flower was a control, one was humidified, and two were inscribed with different inks to test solubility.



Fortunately, a longer stay in the humidity chamber resulted in a wider opening, but did not affect ink solubility.



Our first barrier to revealing the text was mold removal. Under the microscope, I hovered Scotch tape, cut in 1 mm strips, above the mold so that the adhesive did not touch the object, but so the mold would 'jump' up to the tape and adhere. Mold removal on this object was quite successful and the inscription soon became legible.



Once the mold was removed, there was a question of introducing the object into a humid environment. However, we determined that brief local humidification would not be a safety concern and that the object would be monitored for mold growth in the future.



The flowers were then humidified; each was carefully rotated to receive an equal amount of moisture throughout the creases. After 30 minutes, (15 minutes on each side), I was able to gently open each petal using a soft, barely- moist brush. After treatment, inscriptions on both petals were easily read and photographed.



The inscription reads:

Marthe  
Charles Louis Beauvau  
Craon 1911



The inscription reads:

Lyons  
Charles  
Marthe  
j hov.

At this point, the flower is no longer a pressed botanical specimen, but a three-dimensional object, which alters how it will be housed in the collection. Hence the final aspect of this treatment entailed consulting curators about the design and creation of an appropriate housing and storage space.



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