

Conservation of c. 1924 "Western Luck" Movie Poster

History

When the Orpheum Theatre was renovated in the 1980s, a treasure from the 1920s was found within its walls: a huge movie poster almost seven feet long and wide.

Known as a 'six sheet' because six individual sheets are pasted together to make the final 81" x 81" image, this kind of poster is quite rare.

It arrived in the lab in very poor condition – dirty, folded, and with rips and tears. However, the City of Vancouver Archives' conservation staff and interns have spent time restoring this poster to its former glory.

Learn what we did to change the luck of *Western Luck*...

1. Surface Cleaning

First, we cleaned the dirt and grime off the poster by rubbing a gentle cleaning powder all over it. It looks – and works – like eraser shavings.



2. Backing Removal

We removed the backing that was attached to the poster.



Did you know that by spraying water on water-based adhesive (or sticky stuff made with H₂O) you can make it less sticky?

That's just what we did on parts of the backing that did not come off easily.

3. Separation

We also relied on water to separate the six poster sheets. We always use filtered water to make sure there's nothing in it that could damage the record. Water helps to loosen the grip of the adhesive that had been used to join all the six sheets together back in 1924.



4. Washing

We also washed each of the sheets separately in our big 7' x 4' sink.



It also gives us one last chance to scrape off any stubborn bits of backing stuck to the poster.

Washing each sheet helps to remove any remaining dirt and soluble acids, and increases the strength of the paper.



5. Lining

We lined each poster sheet with special Japanese paper. Why? To give the poster more support so it'll last longer.

To get the tissue to stick to the back of the poster, we first made a thick but flexible paste out of wheat starch.

The paste is cooked like oatmeal in a pot. Then it's strained through a strainer – made of fine horse hair – to get the paste nice and smooth.



7. Reconstruction

Using the wheat starch paste, we joined three poster sheets that make up one half of the movie poster together. Then we joined the remaining three sheets that make up the other half.

We lightly sprayed water on the joined sheets in order to relax them and so they would not become crinkly when dry.

Then we covered the sheets with a special material called Reemay; large blotters to soak up the water; and heavy weights to get the poster to dry flat.



The final step is to join the two halves of *Western Luck* together.

6. Repairing and Inpainting

The original poster had some holes and tears in it, but conservators know how to fix that.

We re-attached torn and loose pieces to the poster by using a bit of the wheat starch paste to stick the pieces in the right spot.



For holes, we used the same special Japanese paper and cut out shapes that fit each hole very closely.

Then we pasted the paper shape in the hole.

Next, we painted the surface of each paper shape to match the original poster as closely as possible.

We used only special watercolour paints and pencil crayons to do this – ones made of high quality ingredients – so that the colours won't fade for a long, long time.



Next we brushed on a thin layer of thick paste to one side of the Japanese paper.

Then we stuck the back of each poster sheet to a sheet of pasted Japanese paper, leaving a border of lining around each sheet.



Each newly lined sheet was then dried on top of a suction table.

This big table creates suction which holds the poster sheet completely flat and allows for controlled drying.