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PRESERVATION OFFICE

April 26, 1979

Dear Mrs. Gilpin:

This is in response to your letter to me of March 27 in regard to the removal of rubber cement used for mounting photographs. It is difficult to suggest an appropriate solvent for the particular problem you are dealing with, since, as you may know, there are a variety of so-called rubber cements. Most of them can be expected to cross-link and change their character during natural aging. It is usually a matter of experimenting with a range of solvents to find the one that will work successfully, without side effects, and is safe for user and material, some rubber cements can be expected to be removable with acetone or ethanol, while others may respond to benzine (note: not BENZENE) or other petroleum derived solvents. Rubber cements often penetrate into a work of art, and when they also cross-link they often leave a hard and brittle residue.

All solvents should be considered toxic, particularly benzine and toluene, and should be used in a fume hood or in a well ventilated area. The user should wear protective gloves, goggles and a face mask specially designed for toxic vapor. An additional cautionary note: we have found in working with old photographs that retouching can be damaged by solvents. Gelatine emulsions also, if dehydrated by application of solvents, can develop disfiguring cracks. This potential damage can be often controlled by gentle humidification of the photographic print following solvent treatment.

I raised your second question with Gerald Maddox in the Prints and Photographs Division, I believe you know each other well. He tells me that your print collection is scheduled for rematting and appropriate conservation work later this year. In view of this, I think that I can assure you that your collection is being well-cared for and I will look forward to becoming better acquainted with your work when we receive the prints in our workshop.

Mrs. Laura Gilpin

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I hope this information will be helpful. If you have more questions regarding problems in removing rubber cement please do not hesitate to write us again.

Sincerely yours,

*Peter Waters*

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Restoration Officer

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