

# American Elk Shoulder Mount Restoration

*By Chloe Wingard, Curatorial Projects Specialist*



*Before*



*After*

The American elk shoulder mount in the Great Hall of the Manor House is hard to miss; it's a favorite of visitors, young and old alike, and it has hung over the fireplace since the Seiberlings made Stan Hywet their home in 1915.

According to F.A. Seiberling's unpublished autobiography written in 1950, this is the story of how he obtained the elk in 1912:

"... probably one of the first things a stranger would notice there [the Great Hall] would be a great elk's head which hangs over the massive fireplace. About the time I was starting to build our house, a friend of mine, a mining engineer, was traveling in Idaho [Documentation says it was actually Wyoming]. One day I got a wire from him saying, "Am in touch with an elk's head. . . Can buy it for you." Then he named a price [\$110]. At the time I had no more use for an elk's head than I had for a dinosaur, but this fellow was a good friend of mine, and he seemed to think he was doing me a favor. So I wired him to ship it along. At first I put it up in the Goodyear smoking room, but when our house was finished, it occurred to me that the far wall of our great hall would be just the spot for it. It's been there ever since. In the family we have always described it as "shot off a bar in Idaho," and we all have a kind of affection for it. To me, that huge head, with its vast antlers stretching half across the wall, as it looks down on all that English-born grandeur, is as blatantly American as the Seiberlings themselves." (Chapter 23)

By 2015, after almost 100 years of hanging in the Great Hall, the elk was in bad shape. His antlers were drooping, his fur needed extensive cleaning and repair, and his features needed to be re-pointed. Stan Hywet contacted a professional natural history exhibit service in New Jersey to restore the elk.

Due to the extensive repairs needed, and the presence of toxic components from historic taxidermy methods, the elk could not be restored at Stan Hywet. Instead, he was professionally crated and shipped to New Jersey for restoration.

Since the mount hung over a fireplace for decades, it was layered with soot and dust. The entire object underwent a thorough cleaning with HEPA vacuuming, dry/wet wipes, and a conservation-grade washing and conditioning of the hair.

But why were the antlers drooping? The skull plate was examined, and the restorers found that the sutures in the skull had separated, and the sculpting material had disintegrated. The weight of the antlers was simply too much for the structure to bear. So the elk head was reinforced with additional steel supports to stabilize this area

Once the antlers were strengthened, all cracks, splits, scars and separations to the remaining skin were addressed. The eyes were polished, and any loose material was steadied to prevent any future damage. All facial features (nose, lips, eyelids, ears) were stabilized and restored. The mount was then re-pointed. Facial features of the elk were rebuilt and re-colored A final top coat was applied to achieve the desired "wet" look to the mouth, nose, and eyelids.

The Elk returned to Stan Hywet and was rehung over the fireplace in the Great Hall in April, 2016.

The photo gallery of the restoration process begins on the next page.

## Photo Gallery of the Restoration Process of the American Elk Head



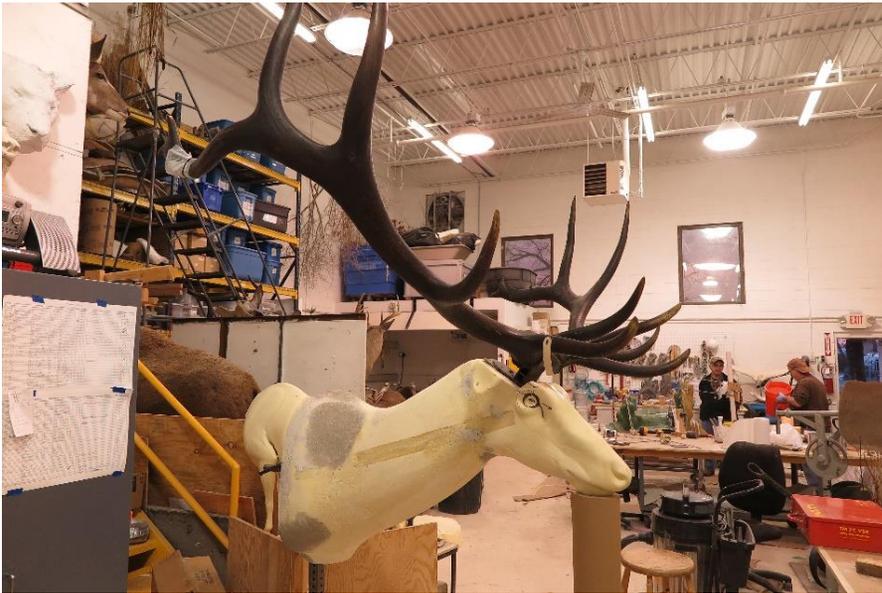
The art handlers built a custom carrying crate for the elk mount. It was so big it had to be carried out through the Music Room doors and crated on the terrace.



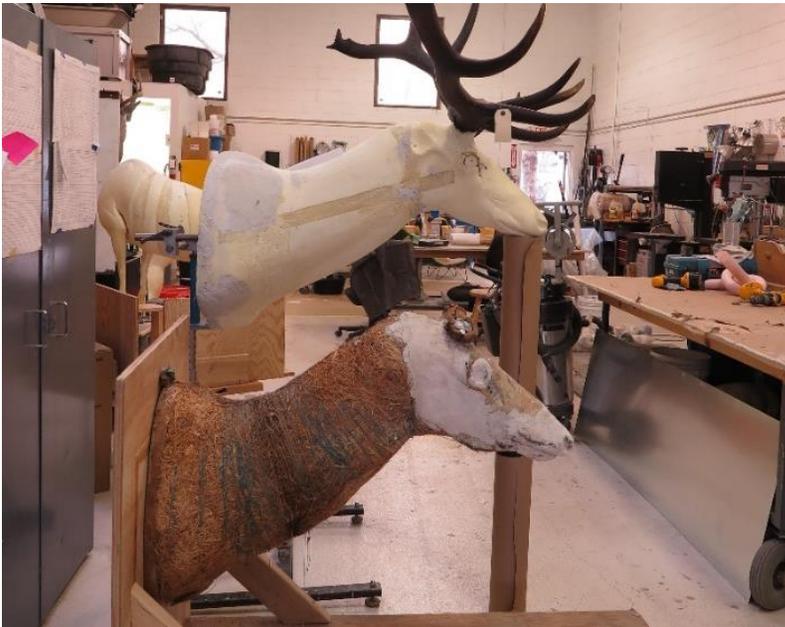
The mount was heavily photographed before restoration began.



The elk's face before restoration had dents and cracks that needed to be fixed.



A new mount structure for the fur and antlers was made of polyurethane foam.



The old mount is on the bottom, the new one is on



The antlers were given steel supports so they wouldn't droop anymore.



The Elk is reinstalled on the Great Hall mantle in the Manor House. the antlers are now removable, so cleaning and care is easier.



*Back at home!*