



CARVED BY  
**ASA**  
**AMES**  
**A Chance Discovery**

By Laura Lee

SUSAN AMES HOGUE  
Asa Ames (1824-1851)  
Probably Evans,  
New York  
1849  
Paint on wood  
35 x 9 x 8 1/4"  
Boulder History Museum,  
Boulder, Colorado, gift of  
Mrs. Arch Hogue Sr.,  
B.156.1



## Brings New Facts to Light

### The Discovery

In the late spring of 2003, the surprising discovery of a previously unknown sculpture by Asa Ames at a small history museum in Colorado turned out to be the beginning of a fantastic journey, one that would ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of the artist's life.

At the Boulder History Museum the need for mannequins in an upcoming exhibition led me and my colleague Julie Schumaker into the basement of the historic house that is the museum's home. Searching through old exhibition panels in what used to be the toy-storage area, we uncovered what we thought was a child mannequin, swathed in bubble wrap. The sculpture we unveiled, however, turned out to be the likeness of a young girl, standing on a base. Her piercing blue eyes were a bit unnerving at first, but I was overcome with curiosity about the piece when I noticed the amazing detail. Incised along the left side of the base was: "CARV'D Dec., 1849. A. AME"—the *E* was difficult to distinguish, as the rest of the inscription had been worn off over the years. From her perfect ears to the detailed lace of her pantaloons peeking out from under her gathered skirt, the carving was exquisite.

At an acquisitions meeting at the museum, a board member recognized the distinctive style of the sculpture from an article he'd read in *Antiques Magazine* about the sculptor Asa Ames, written by Jack T. Ericson.<sup>1</sup> Ames's style and attention to detail is what the board member remembered from the twenty-year-old article. As soon as I saw an image of Ames's work *Amanda Clayanna Armstrong* online, there was no doubt in my mind that

the piece in our collection was carved by the same artist. Questions then arose: Who was the girl depicted in our carving, and how had she arrived at the foot of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado from New York, the state where Ames was known to have lived?

### Westward Migration

The original deed of gift for the sculpture indicated the piece had been donated to the Boulder History Museum by Mrs. Arch Hogue Sr. on May 18, 1963. The description simply stated, "Wood carving of mother-in-law of Mrs. Hogue—carved by her uncle in 1849—when she was 3 years old. Presented by her daughter-in-law Mrs. Arch Hogue." I was skeptical of the "uncle" part and figured that since Ames was known by scholars to live with his subjects while he carved their likenesses, it was possible that "uncle" was used as a term of endearment rather than of familial relation.<sup>2</sup> My skepticism disappeared when a mortuary record for Arch Hogue Sr. identified his mother as Susan Ames. This was a good start, but I had to verify whether the donor's mother-in-law was even from the state of New York.

While conducting his research, Jack Ericson located the only known census record of Asa Ames, who was listed in 1850 as residing in the household of a Dr. Harvey Marvin and his family, in Evans, Erie County, New York.<sup>3</sup> In order to determine that Susan Ames was from New York, I looked to the same 1850 federal census and found a Henry G. Ames, age 28, recorded as the head of his household. Additional residents



included Tryphina, age 24, Susan, age 2, and Susan Babcock, age 59. I wondered at the time whether Susan Babcock was Henry's mother or mother-in-law. Either way, it seemed the more I discovered the more questions I had: Was this Susan Ames the subject of the sculpture? And, if so, how could I prove it?

Following the trail of information left by obituaries, census reports, and death and marriage records, I was able to confirm that sometime between 1852 and 1859 Susan Ames moved with her family from Evans to Edgar County, Illinois, where she married Joe D. Hogue in 1864. Their son Arch was born in Shelbyville, Illinois, in 1869. In 1870 both the Hogue family and the Henry G. Ames family moved to Sherman, Texas. Susan Ames Hogue died there in 1926. Arch and his wife, Laura, had moved to Boulder in 1919. Whether they took the carving of young Susan Ames Hogue with them then or acquired it after she died is unknown. Thus far I had managed to develop a fairly clear picture of that branch of the family tree but still had not made a link between Henry Ames and Asa Ames.

### Making the Link

The Internet, including genealogical research websites such as Ancestry.com, provided access to information that would have taken years to compile in the pre-cyberspace era. One of the most important breakthroughs I made was connecting with a living relative of Asa Ames. I had posted a message on the Ames family website at Rootsweb.com requesting information on Henry Ames from New York, and provided some dates. Months later, I received an e-mail from a woman who

said she was descended from the same family.<sup>4</sup> Her records indicated that Henry's parents were John Ames and Susan Gates, and his siblings were listed as Emeline, John T., and Asa. Furthermore, the family was originally from Massachusetts but had moved to New York before Henry and Asa were born. This living relative was a direct descendant of John T. Ames.

How could I be sure that this was the artist's family? Two significant facts stood out from the descendant's original e-mail: Asa's mother's maiden name was Gates, and after her husband John died, around 1830, she married a man whose last name was Babcock.<sup>5</sup> Susan Ames Hogue's middle name was listed as Gates on her death certificate. Moreover, Susan Gates Ames Babcock was most certainly the 59-year-old Susan Babcock recorded as living with Henry Ames—whom we can now identify as Asa's brother—in the 1850 census for Evans, New York: She was his widowed mother. The connection was complete. *Susan Ames Hogue* is a carving of the artist's niece.

### New Facts Come to Light

Previously, there were few facts known about the life of Asa Ames. He was born in New York in 1824 and died, probably of tuberculosis, in 1851. He lived, worked, and was buried in Evans, a town about twenty miles south of Buffalo. In researching the Susan Ames Hogue sculpture and making contact with a living relative of Ames, new facts about the artist's life have come to light.

Asa Ames had two older brothers and an older sister. At first glance this may not seem like an important discovery.

This simple piece of biographical information, however, helps give new meaning to the artist's body of work. Although the subjects of some of Ames's sculptures have been identified, their relationship to the artist, if any, was previously unknown.

Ames's sister, Emeline, married Abner Dewey on November 17, 1834.<sup>6</sup> They had three children, Adelaide, Maria, and Millard. Ames carved a figure of Millard F. Dewey in 1847, and by making the connection between the artist and his sister, Dewey can now also be identified as the artist's nephew. Furthermore, the figures attributed by Ericson as Maria and Adelaide Dewey can be identified as Millard's sisters and Ames's nieces.<sup>7</sup>

Additional links between the artist and his subjects can be made through the memorial to Sarah Reliance Ayer and Ann Augusta Ayer carved by Ames in 1850. The girls were 3 and 1, respectively, when they died in May 1849.<sup>8</sup> According to family tradition, Ames lived with the Ayers during the winter of 1849 to 1850. It is interesting to note that in the 1850 census for Evans, the household listed after the Abner and Emeline Dewey family is that of James and Mary (Hathaway Terry) Ayer, the parents of Sarah Reliance and Ann Augusta. Ames probably knew the Ayers because of their proximity to his sister's family, and the memorial may have been carved as a gift for grieving friends.

Another surprising discovery is that, according to family records, Ames was married to a woman named Emma shortly before his death in 1851.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that the Emma he married is the Emma Hurd of the Marvin household listed just above Ames in the 1850 census. The relationship of Hurd to the Marvin family is unknown, but it is possible that she was a resident caretaker—if Ames was, indeed, staying at Dr. Marvin's for treatment of tuberculosis, as has

**Asa Ames (1824-1851)** is credited with at least thirteen figural carvings that were created between 1847 and 1851. Based upon inscriptions on many of the works, they appear to be specific portraits. Three-dimensional carving is an uncommon medium for this genre; typically, nineteenth-century portraiture was painted, and woodcarving was the domain of trade-figure and shipcarvers. Although we do not know the nature of Ames's training, one family with whom he resided remembered him as a seaman, suggesting, perhaps, that he may have learned to carve in a traditional shipcarving shop. The artist is highly regarded for his skill and his sensitive portrayals of young children, although he carved some adult figures as well. His work is characterized by the careful depiction of details of costume and drapery; the linear treatment of hair with repetitions of incised lines; the deep-set eyes with lashes painted as a series of dots; and the fully modeled ears.

Ames first came to public notice in the seminal exhibition "American Folk Sculpture: The Work of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Craftsmen," presented in 1931 at the Newark Museum, in New Jersey. At the time it was exhibited, *Bust of a Girl [Maria Dewey]* was thought to be one of three portraits of sisters, and the artist was incorrectly identified as Alexander Ames. It was not until 1977 that Jack T. Ericson located Asa Ames in the federal census



**PHRENOLOGICAL HEAD**  
Attributed to Asa Ames  
(1824-1851)  
Evans, New York  
c. 1850  
Paint on wood  
16½ × 13 × 7½"  
American Folk Art Museum,  
bequest of Jeanette Virgin,  
1981.24.1

of 1850 for Evans, Erie County, New York, in which Ames listed his occupation as "sculpturing," and was living in the household of Dr. Harvey Marvin. In 1847 the artist may have been living with another physician, Dr. Armstrong, when he carved the full-length figure of Amanda Clayanna Armstrong.

Ames's most ambitious work, a memorial to Sarah Reliance Ayer and her sister, Ann Augusta, who both died in 1849, features a young girl, seated, with one arm around the lamb of Christ, and a salver, or small tray, in her other, outstretched hand. The carving was completed in 1850, the year in which Ames was living with Dr. Marvin in Evans. Marvin was a physician who was interested in alternative therapies, such as the "water cure," magnetism, and phrenology. Given this association, it is likely that the young artist carved the *Phrenological Head* in the American Folk Art Museum's permanent collection about this time, and was perhaps seeking a cure for "lung fever," or tuberculosis, a disease that was terminal in the age before antibiotics. Ames was unsuccessful, and died in 1851 at the age of "twenty-seven years, seven months, and seven days," as inscribed on his gravestone in the Evans Center Cemetery.

—Stacy C. Hollander



## Checklist of Known Works

**MILLARD F. DEWEY** / 1847 / private collection  
Millard F. Dewey was the artist's nephew. Inscription: *Jan. 1847 / A. Ames*. Illustrated in Jack T. Ericson, "Asa Ames, Sculptor," *Magazine Antiques* 122, no. 3 (September 1982): 526, pl. VI.

**MARIA DEWEY** / 1847 / present location unknown  
Maria Dewey was the artist's niece. This carving was exhibited in "American Folk Sculpture: The Work of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Craftsmen," at the Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey, in 1931. Inscription: said to be signed by Ames and dated 1847. Illustrated in Jean Lipman, *American Folk Art in Wood, Metal, and Stone* (New York: Dover Publications, 1948), p. 185; Ericson, p. 524, fig. 1; and Stacy C. Hollander, "Asa Ames and the Art of Phrenology," *The Clarion* 14, no. 3 (summer 1989): 32.

**ADELAIDE DEWEY** / 1847 / Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, Massachusetts, gift of Milton Cushing, 1930; destroyed in a fire in 1933  
Adelaide Dewey was the artist's niece. Inscription: said to be inscribed by Ames with a location of Albany and dated 1847.

**AMANDA CLAYANNA ARMSTRONG** / 1847 / private collection  
Family tradition has it that the artist was living with the family of Dr. Thomas and Joanna (Terry) Armstrong when he made this carving. Inscription: *AMANDA C / ARMSTRONG / BORN MAY / 26 / 1844 / BY A. AMES / NOV 1847*; illustrated in Ericson, p. 526, pl. V.

**BUST OF A YOUNG MAN** / 1847 / New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, gift of Stephen Clark  
Inscription: *A. Ames March 1847*; illustrated in Ericson, p. 522, pl. I.

**BUST OF A YOUNG MAN** / c. 1847-1851 / Huntington Art Museum, Huntington, West Virginia  
This may be a self-portrait or a portrait of John T. Ames, the artist's brother. The Huntington Museum acquired the carving from an auction house in Iowa near the town where John Ames and Asa's widow, Emma, are buried. Illustrated in Ericson, p. 523, pl. III; and Hollander, p. 32.

**BUST OF A WOMAN** / c. 1847-1851 / collection of the Regis Corporation  
Illustrated in Ericson, p. 524, fig. 3.

**BUST OF A YOUNG WOMAN** / c. 1847-1851 / Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Williamsburg, Virginia  
Illustrated in Ericson, p. 522, pl. II.

**GIRL HOLDING A BOOK** / c. 1847-1851 / private collection  
Inscription: *A. Ames*; illustrated in Ericson, p. 527, pl. VII.

**SUSAN AMES HOGUE** / 1849 / Boulder History Museum, gift of Mrs. Arch Hogue Sr., B.156.1  
Susan Ames Hogue was the artist's niece. Inscription: *CARV'D Dec., 1849. A. AMES*.

**NAKED CHILD** / 1849 / private collection  
Inscription: *By A. Ames, Evans, N.Y. June 1849*; illustrated in Ericson, p. 524, fig. 2.

**MEMORIAL FOR SARAH RELIANCE AYER AND ANN AUGUSTA AYER** / 1850 / Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut  
In the 1850 U.S. census, the James and Mary (Hathaway Terry) Ayer family is listed after the Dewey family. Inscription: *By A. Ames. Carved APR 1850*; illustrated in Ericson, p. 523, pl. IV; and Hollander, p. 34.

**PHRENOLOGICAL HEAD** / c. 1850 / American Folk Art Museum, bequest of Jeanette Virgin, 1981.24.1  
This carving was probably made when the artist was residing with Dr. Harvey Marvin, a physician who was interested in phrenology.

been suggested—or a servant. At the time of this printing, no marriage record has been found. Still, there are three Hurd family member graves surrounding the grave of Asa Ames, in Angola, Erie County, New York, suggesting that his wife and the resident in the Marvin household are one and the same.<sup>10</sup> Census and family records indicate that, after Asa's death, Emma Ames moved west, to Traer, Iowa, with Asa's mother, his older brother John, and John's family, and that she lived with them until her death in 1893.<sup>11</sup>

The bust of a young man attributed to Ames in the collection of the Huntington Museum of Art, in Huntington, West Virginia, was purchased by the

details of the artist's life and his subjects will be uncovered. In any case, by verifying the identity of the sculpture in the Boulder History Museum's collection as that of Susan Ames Hogue, new facts about Asa Ames's life have come to light, facts that help to flesh out the artist as a person. ★

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museum from an auction house in Marshalltown, Iowa, in 1978. It hardly seems a coincidence that Marshalltown is approximately thirty-five miles southwest of Traer, where Emma Ames and her brother-in-law John T. Ames are buried. The subjects of at least four of Ames's sculptures have been positively identified as family members of the artist's. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the bust of a young man in the collection of the Huntington Museum is either a depiction of John T. or, due to one clue in particular, a self-portrait. An intriguing and unusual feature of the Huntington bust is the circular cutout on the figure's shirt. Family records state that Asa was honored for his woodcarving skills by the New York State Agricultural Society in 1848.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the cutout was meant to hold the medal he was awarded.

It certainly seems that in continuing to follow the same trail of genealogical leads, even more

1 Jack T. Ericson, "Asa Ames, Sculptor," *Antiques Magazine* 122, no. 3 (September 1982): 522-529.

2 Ibid., pp. 525, 526.

3 Ibid., p. 523.

4 Carol Baumeister, e-mail to the author, January 7, 2004.

5 Ibid.

6 *Buffalo Daily Star*, November 20, 1834.

7 The sculpture of Adelaide was lost in a fire at the Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, Mass., in 1933. See Ericson, pp. 523, 527.

8 Ibid.

9 Baumeister, e-mail to the author, January 9, 2004.

10 Kevin Enser, e-mail to the author, April 16, 2004.

11 "Mrs. Emma Ames," *Traer, [Iowa] Star-Clipper*, April 28, 1893.

12 Baumeister, e-mail to the author, April 11, 2004. Corroborating the claim that Ames submitted pieces for competition is an entry on page 27 of the 1848 New York State Fair catalog, which states, "A. Ames, Evans—Carved likeness of General Taylor; figure small girl."