

question still remains. According to the Churchill genealogy, the family consisted of four girls and a boy at the time the portraits were executed. The Museum paintings depict three girls and the Lees own the portrait of the boy. Did Ware neglect to paint the fourth girl or is the painting lost? Is it possible that a missing portrait may be tucked away somewhere, waiting to be discovered?

Lee Kogan is Senior Research Fellow and Assistant Director of the Folk Art Institute at the Museum of American Folk Art. A fellow of the Folk Art Institute, she is currently coordinating

research for a forthcoming book on twentieth century folk artists.

#### NOTES

1. Dr. Arthur and Sybil B. Kern "Thomas Ware: Vermont Portrait Painter," *The Clarion*, Museum of American Folk Art, New York: Winter, 1983-84, pp. 36-45.
2. Ed Clerk and Bill Frantz from Taconic Art Services advertised the five "Hale" paintings attributed to Ware in *The Magazine Antiques*, November, 1982, p. 943.
3. James A. Kinley, Director of the Essex County Historical Society, Elizabethtown, New York provided John Morris' name and date as a 1950's antiques dealer in a letter dated August 18, 1987.
4. Telephone conversation with Mrs. John Morris, February 5, 1988.
5. Rev. George M. Bodge, *The Churchill Family in America*, Gardner Asaph Churchill, Nathaniel Wiley Churchill, Editor and Associate Compiler,

- 1904, pp. 97-98.
6. In a letter dated, March 17, 1988, Georgia Lee, daughter of the Lees, remembered that the paintings were in a "sealed parlor" "wrapped in paper and rolled up" and kept "in the bottom drawer of a chippendale chest."
7. Woodstock Probate Records, Vol. 31, p. 550.
8. Henry Swan Dana, *History of Woodstock, 1761-1886* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1889) p. 45.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
10. Dana Emmons, Woodstock Historical Society supplied details and sent pictures of the Ware House in Pomfret, Summer, 1987.
11. Dana, p. 162.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
13. Henry Hobart Vail, *Pomfret, Vermont*, Vol. 1 (Boston: 1, Cockayne, 1930) pp. 15, 132.
14. Dana, p. 373.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 582.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

## Pick a Peck: Attributing a Painting

by David Krashes

So much has been published on folk painters of the nineteenth century that attributing paintings to individual artists has become more feasible. Attribution is not difficult when a painting is done in a known style. But, what can you do when the style is not obvious? You keep looking at paintings; hope for a stroke of luck; consult professionals; and, eventually, make a decision. We hope this case history is instructive.

Found originally in southern Maine, the primitive painting *A Young Girl with a Dog*, has been in our home for over twenty years.

Three years ago, while viewing the collection of a well-known folk art dealer, we saw Sheldon Peck's masterpiece, *Anna Gould Crane and Granddaughter Jennette*. Surprisingly, Jennette's face reminded us of the face of our girl. At home, we studied pictures of paintings by Sheldon Peck. The resemblance was incredible. Unfortunately, the reduction of size from an actual painting to printed pictures in books and catalogues allowed little evaluation of details.

With our painting, we returned to the folk art dealer who kindly allowed us to compare the paintings and offered his comments. Similarities included the highlight along the nose, shadow on the

"away" side of the nose, curves at the tip of the nose, shape of the chin, lightened area under the nose and around the mouth, shape of the face,

Photo: Windthrop Photographer, West Boylston, MA



The author is attributing this painting in his collection, *A Young Girl with a Dog*, to Sheldon Peck; Oil on panel; 31¼ x 23¼".

and shadow line around it, and shadow line on the skin at the top of the bodice. On the other hand, well-known Peck features were missing, particularly the trefoil design ("rabbit's feet") on the dress. Also, the structure of the ear with an opening in the front was different. The dealer's opinion on attribution to Peck: "Possibly."

The artists' perspectives are different; Jennette is seen "straight on" and the unknown girl is viewed from top front, which vertically shortens her head and neck. In both, however, light enters from the side.

There were four more "chapters" over a two-year period in this investigation. First, a well-known expert examined our painting in a restoration laboratory without Jennette. She compared the painting with photographs from the literature and was troubled by the ear structure. Gradually, she changed her opinion from "no way" to "possibly." Incidentally, our viewing of many photographs of Peck paintings, as well as the two paintings by Peck of the Prestons at the NY State Historical Society, indicates that Peck's children did not always have the trefoil, nor did he paint all ears alike.

At the IBM Gallery in New York City (Jennette was part of the Museum



Photo: David Ramsey, Charlotte, NC.



**Anna Gould Crane and Granddaughter Jennette;** Sheldon Peck; Circa 1845; Oil on canvas; 35½ x 45½"; Private collection.

of American Folk Art's "Young America" exhibition), we compared a same-size photographic enlargement of our girl — printed backward to have the heads facing the same way — with Jennette. A gallery guard insisted, "It's the same girl!" We had learned two things through this process: First, you must compare like sizes to understand details and second, the paintings you'd like to compare with are usually in difficult places.

We also learned that paintings of children should be compared with other paintings of children. At the Historical Museum in Aurora, Illinois, the painting of the *John J. Wagner Family* shows a number of children. There are no closed ears, plenty of rabbit's feet and numerous similarities to the unknown girl: Nose highlights, chin shape, shadow line above bodice. Later, a Peck expert told us this painting had been restored to the extent that it was unreliable for attribution purposes!

Acknowledging the limitations of photographs, Richard Miller, curator of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center at Williamsburg, Virginia, offered some observations. His conclusions were mainly negative: dissimilar ears; inadequate attention to the girl's costume and chair; lace on girl's dress made by dots, not translucent with the trefoil design.

In some ways, we were virtually back at the beginning of the investigation. There was a difference, though. We had learned a great deal not only about Sheldon Peck, but also about the Vermont artists Aaron Dean Fletcher and Zedekiah Belknap. While we followed leads on these other two artists, comparisons of children in their paintings eliminated them as possibilities.

So, who painted "A Young Girl with a Dog"? My wife and I think Sheldon Peck, because the differences do not seem incontrovertible.

The most important lesson we've learned, however, is that collectors who buy folk art, particularly paintings, should buy on the basis of love, not who they think created the art.

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David Krashes is an entrepreneur metallurgist whose engineering and testing business extends along the Eastern border of the United States. He and his wife have been collecting folk paintings and antique furniture for 35 years.



Left, detail of Sheldon Peck's *Anna Gould Crane and Granddaughter Jennette* compared with, right, detail of *A Young Girl with a Dog*, printed backwards, shows a distinct similarity between the two girls.