

ART MUSEUMS *of Colonial Williamsburg*

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RARE ASA AMES PORTRAIT ACQUIRED BY THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION



Williamsburg, Va. (March 13, 2023)—When the young sculptor Asa Ames (1823-1851) died shortly after his 27th birthday, he left behind nearly a dozen carved portraits, many of which are signed. Most of his sculptures portray family and friends, including a wooden bust of the artist's nephew Millard Fillmore Dewey (1845-1916) at the age of two. This likeness descended from the subject through his son and was recently given by bequest to The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. The bust of Millard Dewey is the third Ames portrait to join the Foundation's esteemed American folk art collection.

“This documented and well-preserved example of Ames’ work is a particularly welcome addition to Colonial Williamsburg’s outstanding collection of American folk art,” said Ronald L. Hurst, the Foundation’s Carlisle Humelsine chief curator and senior vice president for education and historic resources. “In addition to its

obvious aesthetic appeal, the sculpture provides an important opportunity to better understand the artist's carving, painting, and construction techniques."

Ames's carvings are among the most celebrated in American folk sculpture, despite the artist's desire to align his work with fine art. Use of the word "sculpturing" to describe his occupation on the 1850 Federal Census suggests Ames considered himself more akin to a sculptor working in marble or stone. His familiarity with academic principles and formal artistic conventions can be seen in several of his figures. Ames's carved portraits are life-like in their simplicity and serve as poignant portrayals of the artist's subjects, residents of his Evans, New York, community. Examples of Ames's work include carved full-length, half-length, and bust-length portraits of his extended family, the children of his physicians, and a few yet-unidentified subjects. Sadly, his death just four years into his budding career did not allow him time for further artistic output.

Millard Fillmore Dewey (1845-1916), painted on what appears to be tulip poplar, shows the toddler with short brown hair, brown eyes and rosy cheeks wearing a white shirt with blue belt. It stands 14-1/2 inches tall, 14-5/16 inches wide and is 6-11/16 inches deep. Inscribed into the base of the sculpture is "A. Ames" and "Jan. 1847." At least two other sculptures of Millard's siblings were carved by the children's uncle at this same time suggesting the artist was living with the family when they were created.

Either at the subject's death in 1916 or during his lifetime, Millard's carved likeness descended to his son, George Mosher Dewey (d. 1917) and daughter-in-law Nellie Greene Dewey (d. 1919). After the couple died, their niece, Vivian F. Green (daughter of Nellie's step-brother Daniel B. Greene), found the bust in the attic of the Dewey's home. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation received the object as a bequest of Mrs. Greene.

"In part because *Millard's* ownership extended to only two generations, the bust survived in a remarkable untouched condition, requiring only a minor cleaning to remove age-old dirt and grime," commented Laura Pass Barry, Colonial Williamsburg's Juli Grainger curator of paintings, drawings, and sculpture.

Millard Fillmore Dewey (1845-1916) is now on view in *We the People: American Folk Portraits* in the Gladys and Franklin Clark Foundation Gallery at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, one of the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, where it is a focal point of the exhibition. A full-length carved portrayal of three-year-old Amanda Armstrong, also by Ames and owned by the Foundation, can be seen in the Art Museum's Wilson Family Gallery.

Additional information about the Art Museums and Colonial Williamsburg as well as tickets are available online at colonialwilliamsburg.org, by calling (855) 296-6627 and by following Colonial Williamsburg on [Facebook](#) and @colonialwmsburg on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg

The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg include the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, both of which are housed in their newly expanded building that offers an additional 65,000-square-feet of space, 25-percent more gallery space and numerous enhancements to the visitor experience. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum is home to the nation's premier collection of American folk art, with more than 7,000 folk art objects made up to the present day. The DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum exhibits the best in British and American fine and decorative arts from 1670–1840. The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg are located at 301 South Nassau Street in Williamsburg, Va. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Colonial Williamsburg operates the world's largest American history museum, preserving Virginia's 18th-century capital as a fully functioning city. Fun, engaging experiences transport guests back in time and highlight the relevance of America's founding era to contemporary life. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed buildings, historic trade shops, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 36 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center managed by Trilogy Spa, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization; philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and operations sustain its educational programs and preservation initiatives.

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**Millard Fillmore Dewey (1845-1916), Asa Ames (1823-1851), Evans, New York, 1847, paint on tulip poplar (est), Bequest of Vivian F. Greene (2022.701.1)*