

Newsletter to Members 2009 SPRING... ISSUE #1/4

The mission of the Ames Historical Society is to preserve local history and illuminate its stories.



The center section of the mural shows a dissected kernel and young corn plant superimposed on an ear of corn.

Ames Historical Society Board:

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Mary Atherly, Bob Bourne, Matthew Donovan, Nick Howell, Carol Phillips, Meg Speer, Rollie Struss, Willie Struss, Neal Tarman, Fred Walker, Sharon Wirth

The Board meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at City Hall at 6:30pm. Members welcome!

Administrator Alan Spohnheimer
Staff Sara Vouthilak, Dennis Wendell

Ames Historical Society is an incorporated, 501c3 not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting interest in state and local history through publications, programs, exhibitions and operation of an archive and historic site.

Headqtrs: 416 Douglas, Ames, IA 50010
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Website: www.ameshistoricalsociety.org

The newsletter is published four times a year for AHS members. Direct comments and questions to: Editor, PO Box 821, Ames, IA 50010 or e-mail above.

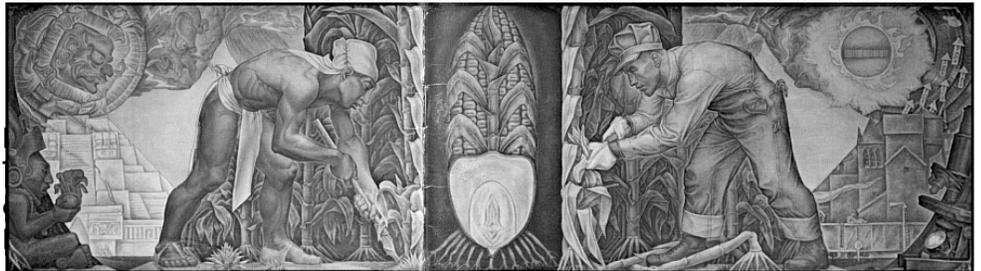
Hoggatt School is located on the grounds of Meeker School, near 18th and Burnett, Ames, IA. Open April 1 through October 31.

Evolution of Corn: Ames' Own WPAP Mural at the Post Office

By Dennis Wendell, Society Curator

One of Ames' most treasured works of public art is the Post Office mural titled *Evolution of Corn*. It is a major contribution to Depression era art by a local artist, Lowell Houser, whose life experiences are worthy of an adventure film!

The mural was created as part of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), a New Deal program employing artists to beautify public buildings. Houser was awarded the contract for the Ames Post Office mural on August 1, 1936 and the completed work was hung on the north wall on April 20, 1938. The imagery was solidly based on careful study of the details of nature and of man and his works in two periods.



Left section (Mayan)



Farmer: Mayan Indian cultivating with an obsidian hoe lashed to a stick; wears head cloth, loincloth, sandals
Gods: Corn God holding pot of young corn plants with hieroglyph for maize below; Sun God and a Chac as Rain God
Temple: white pyramid with smoke rising from burnt offering

Center section

Ear of corn with superimposed dissected kernel and young plant

Right section (American)



Farmer: 1930s Midwestern man husking feed corn by hand; wears an engineer-type visored cap, white cotton canvas work gloves, work shoes, red bandana handkerchief
Science: microscope, sun with superimposed absorption spectrum, water molecules evaporating skyward (resembling arrows or skyrockets at the upper right corner), concentric measurement rings with symbols of elements essential for photosynthesis, hygrometer

Industry: freight train boxcar with rider, cascading ticker tape with grain market symbols (B and CK indicate a bid on May corn)

Buildings: grain elevator; Iowa State College campanile, Marston water tower

Artist signature

LHouser 1937 on ribbon at bottom right; also sets of initials: SDP for Prof. Dale Phillips in ISC Architectural Engineering, JEJ for Ellsworth Jones of Ames (model) and FJL for Frank Linn (model) of Shelby who was captain of the ISC wrestling team in 1937-8.

VIEWER REACTION

The contractor, the U.S. Treasury Department, was very pleased with the mural, and, in general, Ames residents reacted quite positively, with many preferring the Iowa farmer section.



Although there was some discussion on the appropriateness of the farmer's cap, criticism mainly centered on the difficulty of interpreting the confusing "arrows or sky-rockets" in the upper right corner.

YOUTHFUL ADVENTURES

Born in Chicago in 1902, Lowell Houser came to Ames in 1911 with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Houser. The family lived at 918 Wilson Avenue. Houser graduated from Ames High School in 1921, attended Iowa State College for a quarter and launched his art career by studying for three years at the Chicago Art Institute starting in 1922.

Yearning for adventure, he traveled to Mexico where he stayed for three years. There, he studied under Jean Charlot, well-known painter of the Mexican school that included José Orozco and Diego Rivera, and studied Aztec sculpture in Mexico City museums. His major project was as an artist with the Carnegie Institute of Washington expedition to Yucatan where he made drawings of Mayan artifacts being excavated at Chichen-Itza. At the time, photographic technology still lacked the means of accurately recording detail and color.

Still anxious for more adventure after finishing his drawing project, Houser and Gustav Stromsvik, a Norwegian archaeologist colleague built a 27-foot sailboat in Biloxi, Mississippi and started to sail from New Orleans to South America. Unfortunately, the boat capsized during a storm, and the pair of sailors were rescued and transported to Haiti where Houser sketched, painted and did prints of the islanders for a number of months.

Houser then went to New York City to spend a year in book illustrating and painting. In 1929, during his residence in New York, he had a one-man show at the noted Weyhe gallery.

INSTRUCTOR & ARTIST

Returning to Ames in 1931, he worked first as a pennant designer for the Collegiate Manufacturing Company and later as instructor of the Art Students workshop in Des Moines for three years. He also joined the architectural engineering staff at Iowa State College as instructor of freehand drawing. He exhibited his artwork widely, winning the 1937 sweepstakes in

the watercolor class at the Iowa State fair's art salon. He had his work exhibited at the Chicago Art Institute's international watercolor show and international wood engraving show, at the New York Art Center, in the New York Metropolitan Museum's Mexican print show, and in galleries in San Diego, San Francisco, Des Moines and Cedar Rapids.

In 1932 he spent the summer with the Earl Morris archaeological expedition to cliff dweller ruins in Canyon del Muerto, Arizona.

AMES PROJECTS

He was selected by Grant Wood as one of 14 artists to assist in the painting of three mural panels for the Iowa State College Library during 1934. In 1936, Houser won the commission for the Ames post office mural through a competition open to Iowa artists. Houser was paid \$1,320 for the oil-on-canvas commission that he



completed in 1938. Assisting Houser with some of the work of painting were his colleague, Professor Dale Phillips, Ellsworth Jones of Ames and Frank Linn of Shelby, captain of the Iowa State college wrestling team.

CALIFORNIA

In 1938 he was hired by the art department at San Diego State College, and returned there after serving in World War II, finally retiring in 1958. He died in 1971 at Fredericksburg, Virginia in a studio home he had designed.

MURAL RESTORATION

After half a century the corn mural was visibly suffering from accumulated surface grime. Wisconsin-based art conservator, Anton "Tony" Rajer, was commissioned to clean and restore the painting in 1987. The Ames Post Office was his 50th such project completed for the U.S. Postal Service. Tony's credentials include art conservation training at the University of Wisconsin, Harvard University, University of London and the University of Rome. He has written five books and many articles on preservation, exhibited his own photos and paintings in the U.S., Europe, Latin America, and Asia, and was an artist ambassador in Latin America on a Fulbright scholarship.

Legacy Ames: Campaign Update

By the end of 2008, the Legacy Ames Building Fund had amassed a balance of \$428,000 – generous gifts from many donors! On December 31, 2008 a large partial payment was made on the 416 Douglas property and a 3-year contract signed for the balance – approximately \$178,000. Fundraising continues! Since January 1, many additional contributions have been received. The account stands at ~\$51,000, including the carryover balance after the large payment and the additional donations. Another payment may be made soon to reduce interest payments on the balance due.

A large donation may come our way through the City of Ames. Long-time Ames resident, the late Mary Adams, gave her home and property to the City. The land (except for 1.8 acres) was merged with Ada Hayden Park, providing a walkway from the adjoining neighborhood. A court hearing has been set to provide a judgment on the City's desire to sell the home as a private residence through a sealed bid process. It is the intention of the City to gift the proceeds of the sale to the Society for the Building Fund. Pending a successful hearing and bidding process, the Society should be able to substantially reduce its balance due and begin to accrue funds for renovation.

416 Douglas Progress Report

Since taking over the responsibility for the building, many inquiries and decisions have been made, including:

- drafting new leases for our tenants
- filing for property tax exemptions
- clarifying electric meter hook-ups and telephone, cleaning and waste disposal expenses
- organizing keys and dealing with security issues
- investigating building façade improvements
- measuring all spaces and creating working blueprints
- installing programmable thermostats (left, volunteer



Paul Clark donates his expertise)

We are grateful to Board member, Neal Tarman, who is donating cleaning services.

In addition to its first floor space, the Society has also taken occupancy of one of the small 2nd floor offices.

High on the "To Do" list is developing a long-range plan (3-5 years) for eventual occupancy of entire building.

For more information about the mural and the people involved – including interesting biographical information about the Hauser's painting assistant, Dale Phillips, and the models, John Ellsworth Jones and Frank Linn - please see our website, following the link "About Ames" to "Residents" then, "Lowell Houser".

PARTIAL LIST OF SOURCES

Meixner, Mary L. "Lowell Houser and the genesis of a mural" in *The Palimpsest*, v. 66, no. 1, Jan-Feb. 1985.

"Mural will be hung in Ames Postoffice next week" in Ames Daily Tribune and Times, April 16, 1938.

"Postoffice mural hung here today" in Ames Daily Tribune and Times, April 20, 1938.

"Many React Favorably to Postal Mural" in Ames Daily Tribune and Times, April 21, 1938.

"Post Office mural restored" in Ames Daily Tribune, 1987.

When Tillage Begins, the other arts Follow: Grant Wood and Christian Petersen Murals by Lea Rosson DeLong, 2006

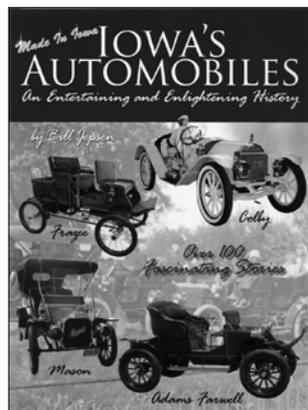
Jerry P. Jones interview, March 22, 2009

Corinne Jones interview, March 22, 2009

Museum Shop News

Carrying Award-Winning Book

In 2007 after six years of hard work, Bill Jepsen, of rural Boone, released his first book, "Made in Iowa: Iowa's Automobiles." It has received many positive reviews and was recently awarded the Thomas McKean Memorial Cup award from the Antique Automobile Club Association.



"Considering it's the only award that they give on a yearly basis for literature, I feel pretty good about it. I got a silver plate but the cup itself stays in Philadelphia," Jepsen said. "The hardest part about writing a book is sitting down and getting started."

Jepsen has a long history of interest in old cars and after coming across a volume on them that glossed over the history of cars in Iowa, he decided to take a closer look. The book is self-published.

We are very pleased to be able to offer this book to our members and the Ames community – among many other unique items. The shop is open Wednesday, Thursday and Fridays afternoons from 1-5pm or by appointment. Call 515-232-2148 for more information.

Ames Historical Society News

2009 Series Final Lecture

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

A Drive through Ames and Story County on Its Highways and Streets

The Iowa Department of Transportation has a wealth of historic images that have never been seen by the public. Archivist Hank Zaletel will introduce us to the DOT's collection and share many images for the first time. Among highlights from the 19-teens through the 1950's will be the Squaw Creek bridge collapse, construction of the Grand Avenue underpass and a 1958 film of the Lincoln Highway.

7pm, City Auditorium, 520 6th Street, Ames.

\$2 donation defrays auditorium rental expenses

Intern Shares His Time

Iowa State University history major, Shane Lucas from Roscoe, IL, joined the Society's staff this semester with a desire to learn the behind-the-scenes processes of a small museum. Shane comes down to 416 Douglas once a week, and has been very helpful on a number of



fronts. He aspires to a museum position in an organization such as the Baseball Hall of Fame and felt the experience with us would help him achieve that goal. The staff will miss him when the semester concludes in May.

Hoggatt Season Opened April 1

The 2009 season at Hoggatt School opened April 1. Several elementary school classes have already scheduled visits to the little school!

Regular open hours start Saturday, June 6. Game Fests are planned for the first Sunday of the month on June 7, July 5, and August 2. Bring your family, friends, and neighbors for some old fashioned fun based on games from the 1860s! Hoggatt School is open to the public each Saturday and Sunday from 2-4:30 in June, July and August.

Please contact Carol Phillips at caphill@mschsi.com or 232-0595 to join the activity at Hoggatt by becoming a volunteer. Carol is now taking preferred hosting dates. Training is available!

Thanking Our Donors

In 2008, donors provided funds to The Society in three areas – to the Legacy Ames Building Fund, to the Endowment and to day-to-day operations.

The Legacy Ames update and donor listing was included in the last newsletter.

Operations Donors

We would now like to acknowledge and thank those who contributed extra dollars to our day-to-day operating fund. These donations (along with memberships) allow us to purchase needed supplies, pay our staff and provide service to our many visitors.

We are grateful to:

Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau, Alan/Gina Spohnheimer, Ames Class of 1953, Bob Bourne, Bob/Marge Benson, Cable-Dahmer Chevrolet, Carol Schmidt, Carol Winkler-Schade, David/Stacy Smith, Don/Sharon Wirth, Donald Schmidt, Doug/Faith Finnemore, Elizabeth Poletti, Gene/Margaret Chamberlin, M/M Handsaker, Harris/Kathryn Seidel, Helen Ingvaldstadt, Herman Quirmbach, Jeanne Svec, Jerry Jones, Jerry/Joan Sell, Joann Miller, Joann Peterson, Joann Shelton, John/Julie Stephens, Joyce Lines, Judith Middleton, K. Cameron/E. Baird, Kathryn Engel, Kenneth Gammon, Kiwanis Club of Ames, Linda/Kent Woodworth, Lyell Henry, Martha/Fred Ho, Merl/Betty Core, Old Oaken Bucket Questers, Olive Harrison, Onandaga Questers, Neal Tarman, Richard/Priscilla Matt, Robert/Suzanne Kelly, Roger/Norma Schupp, Rotary Club of Ames, Russell/Ardyce Bishop, M/M Skartvedt, Terry/Diann Wycoff, William/Helen Tjernagel, William/Marna Stevens

While most of these gifts came in the form of extra donations over and above memberships, some came in the form of grants and some came from memorials.

Endowment Donors

The following donors provided funds in 2008 to our Endowment. This fund is a permanent fund that will provide income to the Society from a percentage of the interest that accrues. Growth of the Endowment will be a key factor in providing stable financial support as the history center and museum grows and expands.

We are grateful to:

Ames High School Class of 1943, Bob Bourne, Jo Craig, Burt Drexler, Tom/Molly Boast, Carol Cummings, Jane Graff, Shirley Held, Neta Snook Questers.

We deeply regret errors or omissions. Please let us know!

We Like Getting Get Your Letters, E-Mails and Phone Calls!

January 22, 2009

A note enclosed with a renewal check from Virginia Skinner Harris, Frazier Park, California, said, "Thank you for such a great historical "walk" through Ames history [in your newsletter]. I love each issue!"

February 2009

Comment received by e-mail, "The latest issue of the AHS Newsletter arrived today. I enjoyed reading about Marv Miller, a fine person and citizen. The feeling of this publication is always so enthusiastic and forward-looking. Good folks surely abound in that office."

(Editor's note: Indeed they do!)

January 28, 2009

Note to AHS president, Kathy Svec after the January 27 lecture titled, *In the Footsteps of Our Founders*, "Wanted to say how great your lecture was last night! Very nicely done. I might want to see if we could do an abbreviated version after a Main Street Cultural District General Membership meeting sometime. I'd like more people to see it. Thanks again! Tim & Janice Coble, Temptations on Main, Ames, IA

January 28, 2009

"Dear Kathy and Society Staff, I really enjoyed Monday's presentation on downtown Ames. It was well presented, informative, and most interesting. I learned a great deal and enjoyed recalled memories while listening. I look at the downtown buildings with renewed interest. Congratulations on a job well done. I look forward to future presentations." Marie Johnson, Jewell, IA

Alan Spohnheimer, Society administrator, says, "I'd been so close to the photos and downtown walking tour that they were old to me. I was unsure how the presentation would

be received because I figured it was largely old stuff. What a relief to hear the reactions last night and today! Tom Flack called today and gave me two names of folks who "want to be on our mailing list" so they might be aware of our next lectures. Today I found a photo of Mr. Bosworth of Bosworth's Drug Store (left). Our society is so young that every day is a day of discovery!"



Mid-February 2009

Teacher Diane Smith and her Talented and Gifted program students from Akron, Iowa, visited Ames because the students were researching Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project. She had arranged for a visit to Ames Laboratory and Iowa State University Archives to study the Ames connection. Through the Society, Smith connected with former Ames Lab employee, Rollie Struss (2nd, right), who was pleased to help. Rollie met them at Ames Lab and related the Manhattan Project story, taking along a graphite block from the early reactor so the kids could touch it. He reported that he continued to get e-mails from the children after they left.

February 11, 2009

Note to our Curator from Arlen Twedt, Coordinator, Central Iowa Norwegian Project, "I visited your center today for the first time and had to write and tell someone how impressed I was with your archives. On your website I saw you had two exhibit panels about the Bauge home restoration. I wanted to see if they had information I should add to my talk and footnotes. I asked [administrator] Alan if I could see the exhibit panels and he told me that there was other information I might be interested in reviewing. To my great surprise Alan brought me three notebooks and four file boxes full of information. As I spent the rest of the afternoon reviewing these materials I was frankly amazed at the all the research your volunteers did for the project and how carefully they documented every step of the restoration process. For someone who is totally dependent on archival information for his local history work, you can imagine my pleasure in reviewing the materials. I only just glanced at the other resources in your center, but you can expect me back again. I can see you have an excellent library for doing background research for the exhibits you will eventually have in your museum. Best wishes for your fundraising campaign where everyone with an interest in the local history, be it archival information or material artifacts, can have the kind of experience I had today."

2008 Annual Report – An Exciting year of Progress!

Legacy Ames Capital Fund Drive Launched for an Ames History Center and Museum

- To buy 416 Douglas, formed “Legacy Ames” capital campaign committee in January with pro bono services from a fundraising professional
- Signed Offer to Buy in April; put \$50,000 down
- Initiated “silent phase” of fundraising drive and by October raised 50% of necessarily funds to purchase 416 Douglas
- Launched “public phase” of fund drive in October
- Made large payment of \$330,000 in December; signed 3-year contract in December at 2% interest for balance; will continue with fund drive in 2009
- Obtained pro bono service from architect for concept visuals and floor plan
- Established framework for a separate Board of Governors to concentrate exclusively on fund raising
- Invested donations with Story County Community Foundation for Building and Endowment Funds
- Operations Endowment Fund grew to \$19,328

Around Society Headquarters

- Membership now at 337 paid members, with nearly two-thirds joining above the minimum level
- Increased visibility and traffic - 1,693 visitors at 416 Douglas; responded to increasing number of inquiries for information via mail, e-mail, phone, website – from all over the world!
- Gave 42 presentations with attendance totaling 1,523; includes 4-lecture winter series at City Auditorium
- Two half-time paid staff plus part time curator
- 35 regular volunteers contributed over 3,000 hours of service; in addition special groups volunteered such as 4-H and ISU fraternity; regular volunteers include DOT, ISU and Ames Public Library retirees
- Grants received to purchase portable voice amplification system for tours and to develop a traveling “history trunk” to take to schools and children’s groups
- Gift Shop - Many new items: slate boards and pencils, clickers, train whistles, post cards based on images from our collection, goose quill pen sets, Iowa flags and patches, hand propellers, historic playing cards
- eBay - volunteer advertises de-accessioned and donated items seasonally; proceeds earmarked for collections supplies

Exhibits

- Presented both at 416 Douglas and at Ames Public Library in the lounge display case
- Included: WWII, Farwell Brown biography, Trains in Ames, Skunk River, RAGBRAI and Bicycling, Holy Cards Art Walk featuring artwork of Sara Vouthilak,
- Music Walk featuring street organ music by David Wilder, Ames

Website (our virtual museum)

- 2008 Statistics: 1,029 pages of content; traffic at 229.81 GB (129.26 last year); 194,321 unique visitors (111,285 last year); 523,297 page visits compared to 333,953 last year

Hoggatt School House Museum

- Total attendance: 614 (April-October)
- Hosted state-wide Country Schoolhouse Conference Oct. 10 & 11 with attendees from all over the state (see note below)
- Hosted monthly Summer Game Fest days that were quite successful
- Involvement and authenticity enhanced by providing individual slate boards and pencils for students and period dress worn by school “marm”; slate boards made by volunteer from donated slate

Collections

- Another record year for donations; all categories of collections were enhanced: books, photos, maps, archival records, artifacts. Gifts were solicited and unsolicited. Some donors gave items obtained on eBay, others parted with family heirlooms.
- Projects - proofread, coded and merged three indexes of WWII Story County veterans (100 volunteer hours); gathered information on early Afro-American families in Ames; continued identifying and cataloging Ames Tribune Photo Archive images; coordinated restoration of original 1926 Ding Darling political cartoon *Not the First Time the Call has Gone Unheeded* (paid for by all eight Questers chapters in Ames); displayed at state conference
- Curator attended S.O.S. (Save Our Stuff) Preservation Workshop and 10th annual meeting of Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium (Des Moines, June 6)

November 23, 2008

I'm enclosing a check to help with the purchase of a building for AHS. Several members of the Ames Historical Society made significant contributions that helped us have a very successful Country School Preservation Conference in Ames last month. These persons included Carole Jensen, Carol Alexander Phillips, Bill Boon, Kathy Svec and Alan Spohnheimer. All of them did a great job! Thank you!

Bill Sherman, coordinator of the annual Iowa Country Schools conference

More Thanks!

Gift from Altrusa Home Tour



Board members, Rollie and Willie Struss attended the January 13, 2009 Altrusa International meeting where the Society and two other

charitable organizations were presented with a portion of the proceeds from the annual holiday home tour.

The Society received \$1,000 for the Building Fund. Club members worked very hard to present an interesting and varied tour. We thank them and the residents who opened their homes:

Sharon and Don Wirth (above), Stan Rabe, Rollie and Willie Struss, J.D. and Pam Schlieman and the owners of the Iowa House Inn, Russ McCullough, David Keller and Susan Lassila, and innkeepers, Harold and Lilith Dorr.

FREE to current members as long as supplies last:
Full-color numbered fine art poster, *Historic Homes of Ames* by Jacquelyn Olson; 16 x 20", Stop by Society Headquarters soon, 416 Douglas, to pick yours up!

Deep Roots in Ames

This note from Phyllis I. Thompson Harris, arrived in January with her donation to the Building Fund:
"The enclosed is in memory of my father, Samuel Holliston Thompson, who came to Ames in 1914 as (I'm told) the first farm management specialist, and my mother, Irene B.W. Thompson, who came to Ames in 1918 as a home demonstration agent. They married on October 25, 1920 and built their home at 1208 Clark. Best wishes in this big endeavor!"

Renew Now for 2009

Membership renewals for 2009 are due on the one-year anniversary of last year's payment. See the label on this newsletter for information about your membership.

Introductory - 1st year	\$10	Sustaining	\$100
Individual	\$25	Benefactor	\$500
Family	\$40	Patron	\$1,000
Friend	\$50		

Additional amount for:

Building Fund \$ _____ Operations Endowment \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Checks payable to Ames Historical Society; send to:

Ames Historical Society, PO Box 821, Ames, IA 50010

Return Service Requested

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