

# Levi Fisher Ames (1840-1923)



Levi Fisher Ames was born in Pennsylvania in 1840, and his family moved to Wisconsin when he was a young child. After fighting in the Union Army during the Civil War, Ames returned to Wisconsin to raise a family. He learned wood-carving skills during the war. Using these skills, Ames made and repaired wooden musical instruments and carved several hundred wooden animals over the years. In the 1890s, Ames took a selection of his imaginative carved **menagerie**, which he displayed in hinged shadow boxes, on a **regional tent tour** as the L.F. Ames Museum of Art.

Ames's wooden beasts and bugs, carved from life and his imagination, were passed down through his family. The works were then given to Kohler Foundation, Inc., in 2001 to be conserved, and then were gifted to the John Michael Kohler Arts Center after their conservation.



Artist Overview



# Albert Zahn (1864-1953)



Albert August Zahn lived in Door County, Wisconsin, for most of his adult life. Although little is known of his childhood in Germany, Zahn remembered that he began to whittle while working as a shepherd in Germany. When Zahn was fifteen years old, he **immigrated** with his parents, brother, and sister to Wisconsin. In 1891, he married Louise, and together they raised nine children on the family homestead in Forestville, Wisconsin.

Zahn maintained a successful dairy farm. He collected wood to use for his furniture making, including walnut, black ash, pine, and white cedar, from the woods surround his home. Zahn's **utilitarian** works, such as wardrobes, tables and chairs, included imagery of animals similar to the carvings he would create later in his life.

In 1924, Zahn gave his farm to his eldest son, Albert Jr., and moved with his wife and two of his children to a house he built in Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin. He spent his days carving woodland animals, birds, angels, and characters from local stories. His wife, Louise, then painted the sculptures with house paint. Zahn attached carvings of birds and other creatures such as deer, to the outside of their home. He named his art environment Birds Park. By the early 1930s, hundreds of carved flying creatures dotted the house and yard and it was a well-known Door County attraction.

Portrait of Levi Fisher Ames, c. 1880–1895; framed gelatin silver print; 16 3/8 x 14 1/4 x 1 3/8 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

Levi Fisher Ames, *The Gigantic and Prehistoric Pig, Captured in Alaska;—Big as a Small Elephant / The Gigantic and Terrible Equinoctopolis of Catagolla Captured in the Swamps of Catagolla;—Weight 9 Tons and 7 Ounces*, c. 1895–c. 1910; wood, fabric, glass, graphite, ink, metal, and paper; 8 1/2 x 21 x 2 1/2 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

Albert Zahn, untitled, c. 1924–c. 1950; wood, paint, and metal; 40 1/4 x 20 x 13 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Diane Hiatt and Kohler Foundation Inc..

**John Michael  
Kohler Arts Center**

[jmkac.org/learn/education-resources](http://jmkac.org/learn/education-resources)



# Words to Know

## Menagerie

A collection of wild animals kept in captivity for people to look at.

## Regional Tent Tour

Common in the 1800s and early 1900s, regional tent tours were shows or exhibits that took place in large tents that would travel to different towns.

## Immigrate

Move permanently to another country.

## Utilitarian

An object that has a specific function.



Artist Overview

## Literacy Link to the Arts

*Spots in a Box* by Helen Ward tells the story of a guinea fowl who did not have spots. He writes a letter asking for spots to be sent to him, and receives many packages in the mail containing different types of spots and patterns for him to try.

Visit [socialstudio.space](http://socialstudio.space) to watch a video in English or Spanish of JMKAC staff and volunteers reading *Spots in a Box*.

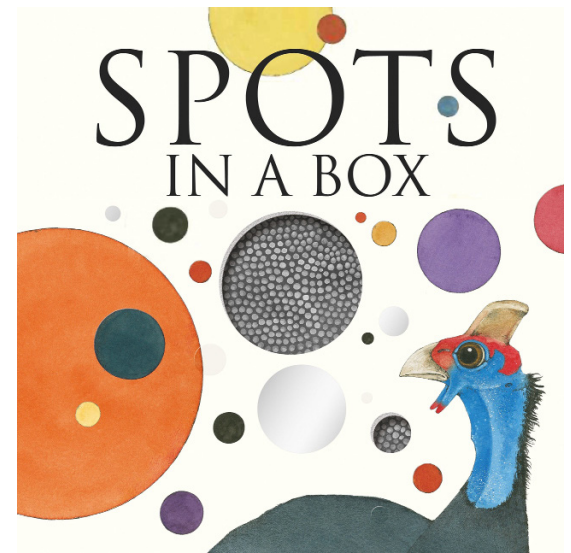
Keep exploring!

Visit [artpreserve.org](http://artpreserve.org) to see more work by Albert Zahn and Levi Fisher Ames.

Use the coloring sheet on [socialstudio.space](http://socialstudio.space) to create patterns on outlines of flying creatures Zahn and Ames created.

Write a story about one or more of your creatures. Where are they from and what makes them unique?

Invite friends and family to learn about your creatures just like Levi Fisher Ames did at the "L.F. Ames Museum of Art"!



L. F. Ames (center) with his traveling L. F. Ames Museum of Art, c. 1900; gelatin silver print; 11 1/8 x 14 1/8 x 1/2 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

Ward, H. (2015). *Spots in a box*. Candlewick Press.