

## TRAVELS OF "THE BOY AND A FROG"



The Boy and a Frog by Elsie Ward Hering  
Designed and executed in Paris in 1898, this  
statue is now in the herb garden of the Denver  
Botanic Gardens in the town in which Elsie Ward  
Hering grew up.

LOUISA WARD ARPS

AFTER 68 years of travel from Paris to Philadelphia to St. Louis and several times across the United States from New York to Denver, the statue of "The Boy and a Frog" has come home to rest in the herb garden at Denver Botanic Gardens.

Elsie Ward, who grew up in Denver, designed and executed this statue when she studied in Paris in 1898. There it was exhibited at the Society of American Artists, and later, by special request, at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>1</sup> In Denver in 1903, at the opening of the Art Gallery of the Den-

ver Public Library, "The Boy and a Frog" drew favorable attention. Henry Read, president of the Art Commission, and other artists made an effort to purchase for the city "this figure of a noble shock-headed youth crouched on the edge of a rock. He has a bull-rush in his hand with which he is tickling a frog."<sup>2</sup>

The next year "The Boy" traveled to the St. Louis World's Fair where he won a bronze medal for the sculptor, then went to New York where Miss Ward had a studio. He came to Denver again in 1920 in a traveling art

exhibit. After the death of Elsie Ward in January 1923, her family stored the plaster cast of "The Boy and a Frog." Now the author, Miss Ward's niece, is pleased to present a cement cast of the statue to the Denver Botanic Gardens.

Elsie Ward was born in Missouri, where, she remarked years later in an interview, she received the "vital" spark while making images from clay found in the famous clay bed on her father's farm in Howard County.<sup>3</sup> She added that her five brothers and one sister could all make things from clay and she probably added to herself that her sister had helped send her to art schools, and her younger brothers had given her appreciation for the beauty of a child's figure.

From Missouri the Ward family moved to Denver. After graduating from North Denver High School in 1889, Elsie began modeling in private classes. In the first seven catalogs of the annual exhibit of the Denver Artists Club, 1894 to 1900, Elsie Ward's name appears as a contributor with an increasing variety of sculptured pieces, such as relief portraits.<sup>3</sup> One of these was of her mother, Alice Talbot Ward, and one of Margaret Gray Evans (wife of Governor John Evans of Denver). According to the April 15, 1900 *Denver Times*, "Miss Elsie Ward has done especially for the Seventh Exhibit 'The Manila Soldier' for which a handsome young volunteer posed for her in his uniform."

For two years, 1896 and 1897, she studied in New York at the Art Students' League. The *Daily News* for December 24, 1897, listed among Colorado's bright art students in New York, Miss Anne Evans, Miss Elizabeth Spalding, and Miss Elsie Ward. The last, the article stated, was making a brilliant record in sculpture under

Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Her first year she won honors over men students with the first prize for "Youth."

The following year Miss Ward spent in Paris; then, after a sojourn in Denver, with a studio in the Kittredge Building, she returned to the east. Saint-Gaudens, considered by many art critics the foremost American sculptor of the 19th Century, asked her to come to Cornish, New Hampshire, to his art colony, to be one of his assistants. She broke her nine-year stay there with work at her New York studio and at various exhibitions. In 1902 in Charleston, South Carolina, she worked by invitation in the studio of the director of sculpture for the Charleston Exposition. There she received a silver medal for a fountain, "Mother and Child," and also her first important commission for the "Huegenot Group," a father, mother, and two small children.<sup>1</sup> (The French Protestants, Huegenots, were important pioneers in Charleston, having established a congregation there as early as 1680.)

In Charleston, a visitor described her thus: "Any day in the week Miss Ward may be found busily at work, her exquisite clay model of her 'group' beside her. The enthusiasm of the young sculptress, though most quietly manifested, is clearly evident, and the eye of the visitor, while strongly attracted by the work, is to be more fascinated by the sculptress herself in her pink chambray working gown, buttoned in the back in school girl fashion, her vivid face aglow with pleasure and interest in her work."<sup>1</sup>

In 1904 at the St. Louis World's Fair, she not only won a bronze medal for "The Boy and a Frog"<sup>4</sup> but a \$3000 prize for a drinking fountain and a commission to make a portrait statue of a noted frontiersman. She chose George Rogers Clark, young



Elsie Ward Hering

In her pink chambray gown at work on the Seated Lincoln, one of the statues she completed for the famous American sculptor, Augustus Saint-Gaudens. This large statue, now in Grant Park, Chicago, dwarfs Miss Ward who was not quite five feet tall.

military genius of the Old Northwest, and modeled him with fringed breeches and long rifle.<sup>5</sup>

Recognition, of sorts, in her own home town came on February 7, 1906, when she was awarded \$100 for a design for the Civil War Soldiers' Memorial to be placed in front of the State Capitol Building in Denver.<sup>5</sup> It had taken the state legislature forty years to decide to erect a Civil War

Memorial, but even after the design was selected in competition, the legislature failed to vote the \$15,000 necessary for the bronze casting. Elsie Ward's design was of a Winged Victory. The local G.A.R. thought poorly of the symbolic lady, but accepted a gift from John D. Howland, Denver artist, for the figure of a Union Soldier which was installed on the Capitol grounds in 1909.<sup>6</sup>

In New Hampshire, Elsie Ward worked with Saint-Gaudens during the last years of his life. His son wrote that his assistants were even more vital to his father's happiness than his friends and family. At the time of Saint-Gaudens' death, August 3, 1907, the assistants "whom he held in close affection" included Henry Hering and Elsie Ward.<sup>7</sup> Most of the big works from Saint-Gaudens' studio, planned by him in his last years, went through Elsie Ward's hands. These small, disciplined hands fashioned feathers so that even in marble they look soft. To attain this perfection, the artist spent hours studying wild goose feathers sent her from Colorado by her brother Tom. The feathers on the Winged Victory who leads the horse General Sherman rides at 59th Street off 5th Avenue, New York, show her light touch. (This is the statue which caused a Southern observer to remark, "Just like a Yankee to let the lady walk!")

One statue is signed by both Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Elsie Ward. It is the Baker Memorial in Kensico Cemetery, Valhalla, New York — the figure of a seated Christ in bronze with a background of praying angels in bas-relief, of which Saint-Gaudens' son wrote, "Of the angels that were to go behind the figure, Saint-Gaudens left only the roughest sketch... The sketch and modeling of this relief was en-



The Child Angel Baptismal Font by Elsie Ward Hering.

trusted to one of my father's most gifted assistants who, under his direction, had finished much of his sculpture and who had worked for him upon the Christ. She, with infinite care and patience . . . produced an astonishingly beautiful and poetic result."<sup>7</sup>

In 1910 Elsie Ward and her co-worker, Henry Hering, came to her home in Denver and were married in All Saints Church. Back in New York she continued her own work, but also helped her husband with his commissions. The caryatids that support the entablatures on either side of the entrance to the Chicago Museum of Natural History (Field Museum) show the heroic conception of Henry Hering and the gentleness of his wife.

In 1917 Mrs. Hering saw a dream materialize in marble. Twenty years before, in Paris, she had conceived the

The Denver Botanic Gardens Conservatory is open to the public, free of charge, every day Saturday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and on Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. The Conservatory telephone number is 297-2348. Please call there for any information about the new building.

idea of a baptismal font, a child angel holding a large shell. In 1917 this font was commissioned for the chapel at Oaks Home, Denver<sup>8</sup> and now stands in the church in which Elsie Ward was confirmed and married — All Saints, now called the Chapel of Our Merciful Saviour, at 32nd Avenue and Wyandot Street, Denver.

After her death in 1923, this statue was again reproduced in marble. Henry Bacon, architect of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., designed

a setting for it, and he and Henry Hering placed it as a memorial in St. George's Episcopal Church in New York City. Her husband wrote of her, "She never relaxed, even to the end of her last illness, her determination to put into form her dreams of beauty and design. No one can look upon the figure of the Child Angel Baptismal Font . . . without realizing that the world has lost a great artist in her untimely death."<sup>9</sup> Elsie Ward Hering, 1871-1923.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> "Remarkable Artistic Attainments Shown by Miss Elsie Ward," *Denver Republican*, June 27, 1903.
- <sup>2</sup> "Want Denver Girl's Fountain Here," *Denver Times*, Sunday morning, August 6, 1911.
- <sup>3</sup> *Art Scrapbooks*, compiled by Henrietta E. Bromwell, Library of the State Historical Society of Colorado.
- <sup>4</sup> *Who's Who in Art*, ed. by F. M. Levy, 1912.
- <sup>5</sup> "Miss Elsie Ward Wins First Prize for Soldiers' Memorial," *Denver Republican*, Feb. 7, 1906, p. 3.
- <sup>6</sup> *Denver Municipal Facts*, July 17, 1909, p. 6.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Reminiscences of Augustus Saint-Gaudens*, edited and amplified by Homer Saint-Gaudens. New York, Century, 1913.
- <sup>8</sup> *Art in Denver*, pub. by Denver Public Library, April, 1928.
- <sup>9</sup> Memorial statement for Elsie Ward Hering by Henry Hering.

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