




CONUNDRUM

IN

CATLINITE



Exploring the History of a Masterpiece



Jeffrey P. Tordoff

A FEW OF THE OBJECTS in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society may, rightly, be considered masterpieces of their genre. Like the best objects of any type, we would like to learn all we can about them. It is gratifying, then, to find documentary support for a great piece, more information than is inherent in the object itself. It is also gratifying to discover that almost all of the statements in such a precious document can be checked against other evidence allowing one to say, with confidence, that they are right or wrong. A less happy circumstance is finding that all of the verifiable information is wrong and the one remaining assertion, which refers directly to the origins of the object itself, resists being rendered true or false.

An example of such an instance is the pipe donated in 1904 by Annie Rankin Adams, widow of U.S. Army chaplain, sometime Sunday school functionary, missionary and U.S. agent to the Sisseton and Wahpeton Dakota, Rev. Moses N. Adams. Mrs. Adams thought to provide a letter regarding the pipe, dated March 12 and addressed to Warren Upham, then secretary of the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS):

Dear Friend,

After the Indian Outbreak in '62 quite a number of the Indians left the Sisseton reservation and took up claims in the neighborhood of Flandreau [in present-day South Dakota]. They were very destitute. Did not have axes, spades or hoes to commence farming with. Rev. M. N. Adams had six thousand dollars (\$6000) sent him from Washington, D.C. to purchase [sic] for them things that they could not farm without. When these things were given to them, they were so over-joyed that they presented him about 1863 or 64 with the pipe which I sent you yesterday. They considered the presenting of a pipe to a man the greatest honor that could be conferred [sic] upon him.

Respectfully Yours

Mrs. M. N. Adams

[Postscript] "D.F." on this catlinite pipe is for David Faribault, who carved it.¹

The initials to which Annie Adams refers appear on the front of the mouthpiece, as part of a geometric pattern of poured-lead inlay. This type of inlaid deco-

¹ MHS museum accession number 3325 E342; MHS archives, correspondence files, 1904. The author thanks Alan Woolworth for generously loaning his files on Nancy McClure and the two David Faribaults. Thanks are also due to Marcia Anderson, who read and commented on the first draft, and to Steve Nielsen and Ruby Shields for their help in the MHS archives reading room.

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ANNIE R. ADAMS, as she looked in the 1890s in a portrait by St. Paul photographer C. A. Zimmerman

1564 Laurel Ave., St. Paul, Minn.
Mar. 12, 1904.

Mr. Upham,

Dear Friend,-

After the Indian Outbreak in '62 quite a number of the Indians left the Sisseton reservation and took up claims in the neighborhood of Flandreau. They were very destitute, Did

ration, the treatment along the front and back of the legs, and the use of catlinite are the only attributes that suggest manufacture by an American Indian. The figure is apparently that of a white man, wearing a white man's clothing, beard, and hair. It is one of the most detailed examples of catlinite sculpture known today, and the detailing serves to emphasize the enigmatic aspects of the pipe as a cultural artifact, made by an artist equally at home with Indian and white idioms. The fact that it is *signed* also suggests a considerable degree of acculturation toward Euro-American forms, assuming the artist to be, in part at least, of Indian descent.

This pipe is 11.5 inches from elbows to mouthpiece and was carved from a single piece of catlinite. The smoke channel was formed by four separate borings: from the top of the cap to midtorso, from the mouthpiece to the knees, and two connecting channels originating at the buttocks. The aperture for the latter two is plugged with a cogwheel-shaped piece of catlinite. The decoration of the outseams of the figure's jacket and, particularly, the trousers suggests to some that the carved garments were meant to be buckskin. These seams look as though they might imitate the punched-and-laced technique sometimes used with that material. On the other hand, this decoration may have been purely ornamental, a stylized representation of bead- or quillwork. Other features also point toward cloth construction, including the short self-belt below the

rear waist of the trousers and the cuffs and pocket flaps of the jacket which look knitted. That the garments are of Euro-American cut, though, is beyond question.

Also non-Indian in style are the cap and boots. The former has the short, downward-pointing visor common to U.S. military headgear between 1821 and 1851 and what looks like a knit cuff and ear-flap arrangement. The boots have distinct, separately applied soles and elevated heels. The uppers are incised with a pattern of alternating shaded and plain triangles and—their only gesture to life on the frontier—a fletched arrow on the front of each, point downward.

ANNIE ADAMS'S letter has not always been in the museum's accession file for this pipe, having come to light in 1984 when museum collections personnel surveyed MHS correspondence files. It therefore escaped the notice of John C. Ewers, noted historian of Plains Indian art and the one person who has published a photograph of this artifact with anything more than an inadequate description. His brief discussion concluded that "It is unfortunate that [the artist] must remain nameless."² Indeed. The presence of a letter stating that Faribault carved the pipe, a letter that Ewers did not read, gave this author a few moments' smug satisfac-

² John C. Ewers, *Plains Indian Sculpture: A Traditional Art from America's Heartland* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 88.

tion at finding the solution to the expert's mystery. All that was necessary was to discover David Faribault's relationship to Moses Adams.

In pursuing David Faribault through the records it became apparent that Mrs. Adams's recollections were, perhaps uniformly, in error: there were *two* David Faribaults; and the Santee settlers at Flandreau moved from the Santee Reservation in Nebraska in 1869, not from Sisseton shortly after the "outbreak." The David Faribault with whom Moses Adams dealt probably arrived there, with his family, from the Crow Creek Reservation on the Missouri River; in any case, he was in Flandreau by 1870.³

³ Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), viii, 242. On Faribault's various residences, see U.S. Congress, *Condition of the Indian Tribes. Report of the Joint Special Committee Appointed Under Joint Resolution of March 3, 1865* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1867), 404; and *Early Residents of Brookings County, South Dakota: Census Data for 1860-1870-1880* (Brookings County Historical Society, 1960), 94.

BACK view, showing clothlike details of the costume



Furthermore, Moses Adams raised \$10,000, possibly more, rather than \$6,000. These funds were approved by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in irregular increments between January and June of 1873, and the money was used to purchase oxen, plows, carts, tools, groceries, and other items. Most of these goods were distributed on June 14, 1873, a decade later than Mrs. Adams recalled. Finally, it appears that there was no excessive joy on anyone's part at all of this having been accomplished. None, at any rate, in David Faribault's correspondence with Moses Adams during the months following the distribution. While it is certainly possible



MOSES N. ADAMS, posed in about 1865

that Adams received the pipe for services rendered, this “greatest honor” appears to have gone unremarked in what remains of the written record, which contains only one mention of a pipe other than Mrs. Adams’s assertion: a listing of “1 Pipe Red. Pipe Stone” in an inventory of the Adams household made at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, in 1878. That this was probably our pipe sheds no light on its origins or how it came into Adams’s possession.⁴

DAVID FARIBAUT was the Flandreau settlers’ liaison with Moses Adams in the transactions surrounding the distribution of goods. That he was David Faribault, Jr., is apparent for three reasons. An 1873 list of the Flandreau Santee records the David Faribault household as consisting of two men, one woman, a boy, and a girl. At this date David, the younger, had two of the four children he was eventually to have with Mary Eastman—a boy and a girl. David, Sr., who may be the other adult male in the household (his whereabouts at this time are otherwise unknown), had no offspring younger than 20 years of age and had been left by his wife a year or so before. He was probably not the head of a household in 1873. If he was, it was not at Flan-

dreau. The David Faribault with whom Adams corresponded was a Presbyterian, a trustee of the Flandreau Presbyterian church and brother-in-law to its minister. The elder Faribault appears to have remained a Catholic almost all of his life. Finally, there are letters to Mendota fur trader Henry H. Sibley from the elder Faribault written before his son’s birth. They are in a different, though equally competent, hand from that of the David Faribault writing to Moses Adams.⁵

It seems that Adams, who was never officially agent for the Santee, was trying to obtain an additional

⁴ Statement of Purchases for Santee Sioux, 13 June, 1873; David Faribault to Moses Adams, Aug., 1873, Aug. 8, 25, 26, and Sept. 6, 1873; Complete Inventory of Household Goods Ft. Gibson, I.T. Aug., 1878—all in Moses N. Adams Papers, MHS.

⁵ Roll of Members of Families at Flandreau Belonging to the Santee Sioux Indian Tribe June 13, 1873, and bill for the purchase of a lot from said church, for building a school, June 6, 1873, both in Adams Papers; “Gossip, Vengeful Lover, Indian Scare Enliven Triangle of Frontier Dakota,” *North-west Pioneer* 4 (Jan., 1935): 9–10; *Iapi Oaye*, Nov., 1887, a Dakota-language newspaper published in Dakota Territory; Faribault to Sibley, Sept. 12, 1836, Henry H. Sibley Papers, MHS.

DAVID FARIBAUT, SR., probably in the 1870s





DAVID
FARIBAULT
JR., about
1904

\$20,000 worth of support for them late in 1873. We lose sight of his efforts at year's end when federal officials appointed John Williamson special agent to the Santee. Correspondence from Faribault to Adams ceases after a letter dated December 19, 1873, of which only part remains. Those are the facts that the historical record has yielded to date. With Annie Adams's credibility in question, then, and no mention of the gift of a pipe in any of the correspondence between Adams and persons in Flandreau, it is impossible to say whether David Faribault, junior or senior, made this pipe. It is worthwhile, though, to look again—and more closely—at the pipe itself. It does have those initials, after all.⁶

JOHN EWERS saw enough similarity between the facial features of the figure in the pipe and those of Moses Adams to suggest that Adams was the person portrayed.⁷ This author sees less of a resemblance. Both faces have wide, prominent cheekbones, but the simi-

larity ends there. Adams's eyes are set wide apart, those of the pipe are almost simian in their close spacing. Adams has a beard but no moustache, and he wears his hair in a discreet, ministerly style. The man of the pipe is rather more extravagantly hirsute, and his hair is worn in a style of the 1840s, not of 1873. The photograph of Moses Adams, while not dated, may be assigned to about 1865, possibly a few years later, on the basis of its type in combination with the age of the subject and the style of his clothing. The figure on the pipe wears the tight-fitting costume of an earlier era, about 1845. This is not the sort of modest garb one would expect of a man of the cloth, nor is the attitude of the figure one of sober piety. It probably cannot be said that an artist caught a minister in an unguarded moment, creating, if conceivable, a candid portrait. The figure is one of a dandy. The boots are *fancy* ones—"loud" boots, if you will, of a type sported until about midcentury, perhaps even in Morocco leather of the very shade of the stone from which the pipe was made. This author does not believe that this is an image of Moses Adams.

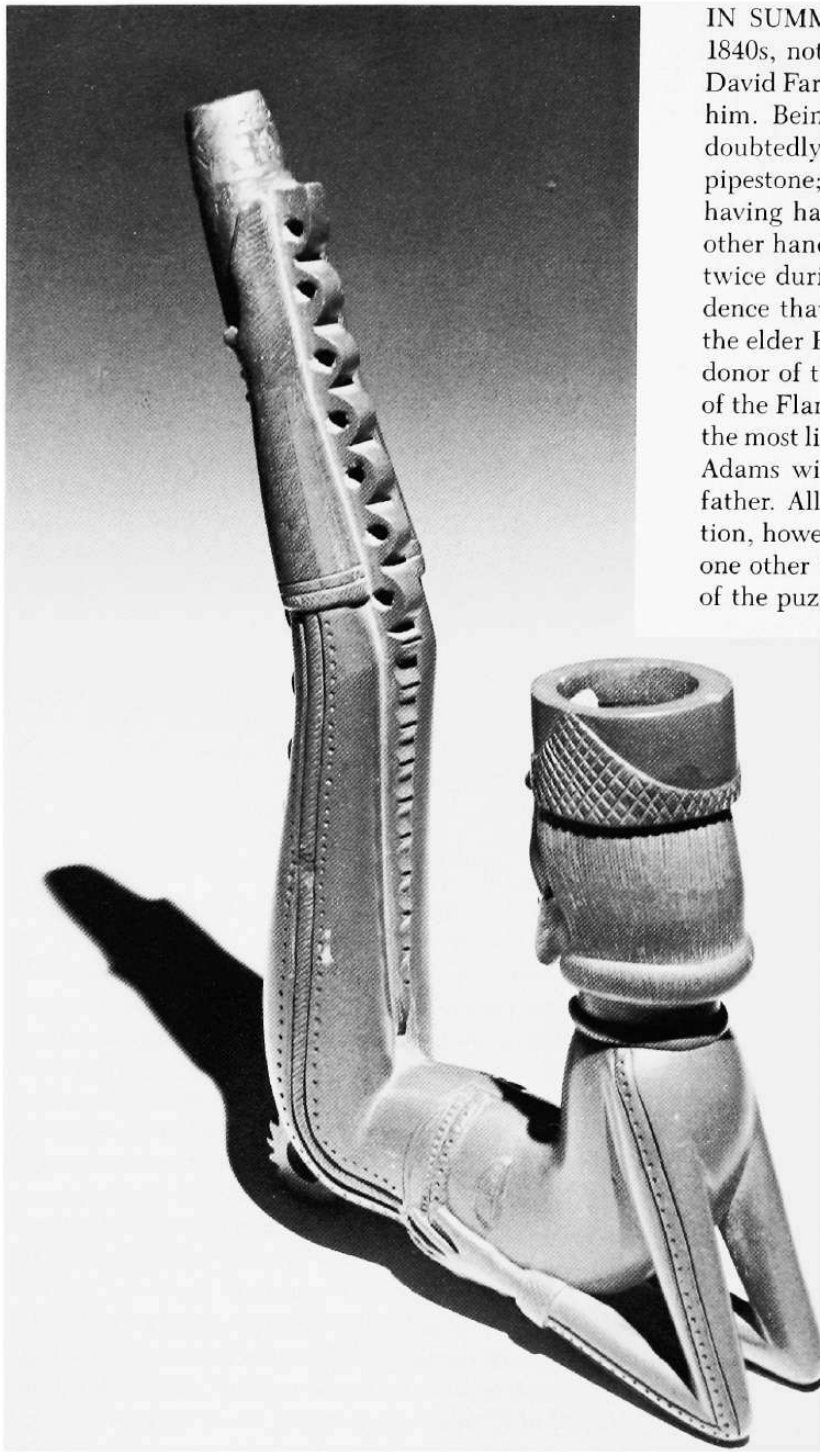
Could it be one of the Faribaults? The initials should be either those of the maker or of the person *for* whom the pipe was made. They may even be both. If we place a date of about 1845 on the pipe, we can certainly eliminate the younger David as the subject and probably eliminate him as the person for or by whom it was made. (He was seven years old in 1845.) We may not, however, eliminate him as a person who could have given or sold the pipe to Adams. David, Sr., is a much more plausible candidate for having made this pipe or been the model for it. He was 28 years old in 1845, a good age for combining physical maturity with the vanity implied by the posture and dress of the subject. He was also on the cusp between white and Indian cultures, being of Dakota and French-Canadian ancestry. He was literate and an effective entrepreneur in the nascent cash economy of his time and place. If either David Faribault can be associated with the production of this pipe, it would have to be the elder.

Paradoxically, if Moses Adams *did* obtain it from a Faribault in the early 1870s, it would almost certainly have had to come from the younger David. His father lost all of his belongings twice: in 1862 when his house, two miles from the Lower Sioux Agency, was plundered during the course of the "outbreak," and in 1868, when a "strong Indian war party" again took all that the Faribaults had. (At this time the elder David Faribault was running a mail post about 30 miles from Fort Ransom, Dakota Territory, but was at Fort Carry [Winnipeg] seeing to his daughter's schooling.) It is reasonable to conclude that the pipe, having been made earlier, was in the possession of the younger Faribault in the early 1870s.⁸

⁶ List of Articles required for the Santee Sioux at Flandreau D.T. Oct. 27, 1873; see also John Williamson to M. N. Adams, Jan. 15, 1874, both in Adams Papers. Williamson was, by this date, special agent at Flandreau.

⁷ Ewers, *Plains Indian Sculpture*, 88.

⁸ "The Story of Nancy McClure," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (St. Paul, 1894), 6:459.



IN SUMMARY, I believe that this pipe dates to the 1840s, not to 1873. It could easily have been made for David Faribault, Sr., and could also have been made *by* him. Being a person of both cultures, he would undoubtedly have been exposed to persons working in pipestone; however, no evidence has been found of his having had any inclination to carve catlinite. On the other hand, since he was divested of all of his property twice during the 1860s, and since there is no real evidence that he was anywhere near Flandreau in 1873, the elder Faribault is not a convincing candidate as the donor of the pipe. His son was the principal on behalf of the Flandreau Santee and, as such, would have been the most likely person to express gratitude by presenting Adams with a pipe, obtained at some time from his father. All of this is no better than informed speculation, however, in the absence of a document—by someone other than Annie Adams—giving us another piece of the puzzle.

THE PICTURES on p. 314 and 316 (top) are from the MHS audio-visual library; those on p. 315 and 318 are by Paul Malcolm; the ones on p. 316 (bottom) and 317 are courtesy of William L. Bean, a Faribault descendant.





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