

## History of a family portrait



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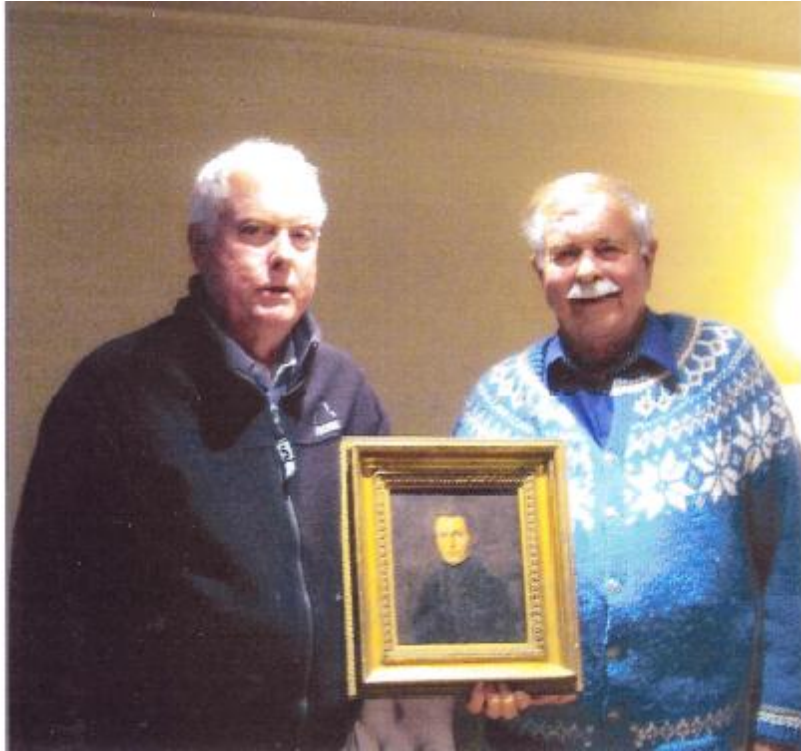
### Background

Fredrick Allen Dahl <sup>1563</sup><sup>1</sup> (Fred) received the portrait as a gift from Luisa Aall Barricelli <sup>742</sup> when he together with his wife Dixie Anne Livingston <sup>1564</sup>, # Dec 1985, visited Oslo on September 12<sup>th</sup> 1954 and met with Luisa and her husband, Rolf Brahde <sup>743</sup>. Luisa, 39 years old at that time, told them that the painting had belonged to her mother Maren Anna Nielsine Aall <sup>270</sup> and Luisa said that the painting was of one of the Dahl ancestors, most likely of Herman Richard Klæboe Dahl <sup>144</sup>, what she was most likely told by her mother.

The painting was until 1963 taken care of by Fred's parents, Dorothy Mae Pratt <sup>1562</sup> and Sheldon Tiedeman Dahl <sup>1325</sup>, then for some years left with Fred's brother David Jay Dahl <sup>1614</sup> and again after some years it was returned to Fred and it was until May 2011 hanging in the dining room in Fred's and his wife's, Patricia Ellen Grisco <sup>2002</sup>, home in South Pasadena, California.

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers are the person's ID number in the Dahl familytree published by John Schjelderup Olaisen



The brothers, Fredrick Allen Dahl 1563 to the right and David Jay Dahl 1614, with the portrait.

## Investigations

Fred was over all the years somewhat concerned that there was no evidence or confirmation of the identity of the person in the portrait. And when John Steinar Schjelderup Olaisen <sup>1</sup> together with his sister, Anne Margrete Olaisen <sup>45</sup>, visited the "West Coast Dahls" in May 2011, Fred asked him to bring the painting to Norway and to seek confirmation of the person.

Back home in Norway, John, on the basis of the following initial investigations;

- several initial contacts especially with The Directorate for Cultural Heritage in Norway (Riksantikvaren) and Ellen Bugge-Næss confirmed that the painting was made by Johan Herman Gørbitz while living in Christiania, 1836-1853.<sup>2</sup>
- there is no information or indications that Gørbitz ever visited the northern part of Norway,
- the Directorate could not find any Dahl portraits among their register of portraits,
- the portrayed person is man about 18 to 24 years old, it could have been Herman Richard Klæboe Dahl <sup>144</sup> born in 1831, however there are no similarities to the characteristics of Herman as by some photos of him and further more; the clothing of the person and the atmosphere of the portrait, do not represent the characteristics of Herman's position while starting his career as a self-made businessman living in Vadsø at the time the portrait was made,

reached his initial conclusions and developed the "Aall theory".

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<sup>2</sup> Link to Gørbitz biography in Norwegian; [http://snl.no/nbl\\_biografi/Johan\\_G%C3%B8rbitz/utdypning](http://snl.no/nbl_biografi/Johan_G%C3%B8rbitz/utdypning)

The "Aall theory";

The portrait originated from Maren Anna Nielsine Aall<sup>270</sup>, who, referring to her Dahl ancestors, more likely had meant or said only "ancestors", meaning on her Aall side. The Aall family had the tradition (s) of being portrayed and several of them painted also by Gørbitz.

John with the assistance of his sister, Anne Margrete Torseter<sup>45</sup>, involved several persons and parties in the further and deeper investigations along the "Aall theory". The research was especially supported by The Directorate for Cultural Heritage in Norway (Riksantikvaren), The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU), Ms Ellen Bugge-Næss, Master in History and Art at Oslo University and other individuals.

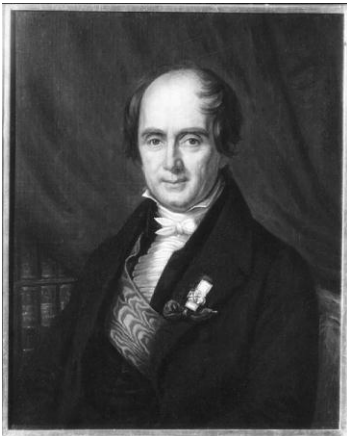
## Findings

### a. Ellen Bugge-Næss

Ms Ellen Bugge-Næss in 2007 did her Master in History and Art on the painter Johan Herman Gørbitz, and she, when being presented with a photo of the portrait, stated that it was a typical Gørbitz painting that was most like made by him during his stay in Christiania, 1836-1853. Gørbitz died in Christiania in 1853.<sup>3</sup>

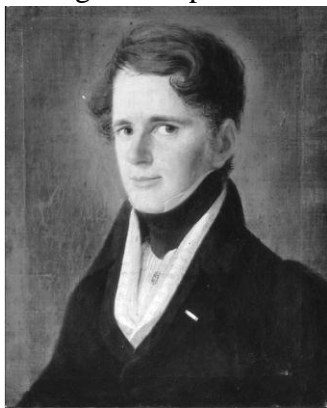
### b. The Directorate for Cultural Heritage in Norway (Riksantikvaren)

The Directorate did not find any copy of the portrait among their register of portraits, however they provided copies of some portraits of Aall persons made by Johan Herman Gørbitz.



Jacob Aall, 1773-1844, the uncle of Hans Cato Aall 666 (Niels Anton HansenAalls father).  
Painted by Johan Gørbitz in 1839

In the register of portraits we also found some Hans Aall portraits:



There is no information for which of the Hans Aalls living in the 1880s those may be.

<sup>3</sup> Link to Ms Ellen Bugge-Næss' master document; <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-17587>

c. The Norwegian National Library

A book or merely a leaflet of 58 pages with the title:

Fortegnelse over malte portretter, litografier og byster a medlemmer av slekten Aall utarbeidet i 1944 av kammerherre Cato Aall.

*(iso translation; A survey and description of portraits, lithographic and statues of members of the Aall family, published by chamberlain Cato Aall in 1944).*

Quite a number of the Aall family were according to the survey portrayed in the century of 1800 and by different artists, Gørbitz was among them. It can be seen as a family tradition to be portrayed. The actual portrait is however not specifically mentioned in the survey.

d. The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU)

NIKU was engaged to make investigations about the portrait; who is the person, when was it made and by whom. NIKU has been provided all background information and the other documents, photos, etc, from the different sources. NIKU has by the use of different technologies, UV-lighting, etc, also been checking the painting for information like signature or date.

NIKU reported as follows on their assessments of the technical conditions of the painting that is about 160 years old:

- The painting measures 25 cm (h) x 20,5 cm (w) and this is the original format,
- There is earlier done some restoration in the painting,
- The painting is lined, probably with the use of wax as lining glue. The lining canvas has a white ground that is visible from the back side. The condition of the original canvas is stable,
- The original canvas has a greyish white ground. There is some retouching done on the painting (some of them are visible in normal light, several is visible using UV-lighting). There is some visible retouching in the man's face and some in the lower, right corner. There is some overpaint in the background and on the clothing,
- There are no signs of loose paint on the front side. The painting is varnished, and the varnish is unevenly added to the surface. There is a greenish fluorescence in UV-lighting that suggests the use of a natural resin. The surface is dirty, matte and has a lot of craquelures.

NIKU was asked to make some treatment to restore and secure the portrait's technical standard, and they have reported the following:

- Cleaning tests revealed that the matte and uneven haziness of the surface was due to a reaction in the varnish ("blanching"). Removal of surface grime did not affect this. In order to restore a more uniform gloss and color saturation a new layer of varnish was applied,
- The surface was first cleaned with saliva on cotton swabs. Then a coat of synthetic varnish was applied with a brush. The painting was reattached in the decorative frame. The reverse-side was covered with a sheet of silicon-coated polyester film in order to reduce the adhesion of dust due to the tackiness of the previous attachment.



Before the NIKU treatment



After the treatment

## Photos

There are two photos of the Aall family (Mathilde Susanne<sup>174</sup> and Niels<sup>175</sup> with children) that have been of importance in concluding the investigations, (1) retrieved by Anne Margrete Torseter<sup>45</sup> from the local Øksnes History Club, and (2) received from Fred.

### 1. The Aall family of 1875



The Aall family around 1875.

In front from the right; Esther Natalia Mathilde, 1870-, Herman Johan Regnor Harris, 1871-1957,

In middle from the right; Cato Nicolai Benjamin, 1865-1957, Charlotte Henrikke Ragna, 1874- (on the mother's knee), Anathon August Fredrik, 1867-1943, Alf Immanuel Gustav, 1868-1903, Maren Anna Nielsine, 1873-1948 (on the father's knee),

Parents, from the right; Mathilde Susanne Dahl, 1842-1910, Niels Anton Hansen Aall, 1833-1896

The family lived in Førde from 1875 to 1877, the photo is most probably from that period, Charlotte (on her mother's knee) was born in 1874 and the daughter Signe born in 1876 is not on the photo.

The family had later three more children, the twins Signe Olava Nicoline and Niels Emil Ude born in 1876 and Dagny Therese Susanne born in 1878.

## 2. The Aall family in the late 1880s



The Aall family in the late 1880 ties.

In front from right; Mathilde Susanne Dahl, 1842-1910 (mother), the twins Niels Emil Ude and Signe Olava Nicoline, 1876-, Niels Anton Hansen Aall, 1833-1896 (father), Next line from the right; Herman Johan Regnor Harris, 1871-1957, Cato Nicolai Benjamin, 1865-1957, Anathon August Fredrik, 1867-1943, Maren Anna Nielsine, 1873-1948, Alf Immanuel Gustav, 1868-1903, Esther Natalia Mathilde, 1870- Charlotte Henrikke Ragna, 1874-, is missing and Dagny Therese Susanne born in 1878, died as child in 1879.

### Conclusion

NIKU has without any definitive technical or physical evidence for who, whom and when, concluded that it is reasonable to conclude as follows:

- the person is Niels Anton Hansen Aall<sup>175</sup>, 1833-1896
- the painter is Johan Herman Gørbitz, 1782-1853
- the portrait was made in 1851 or 1852

Niels Anton Hansen Aall<sup>175</sup> graduated from Nissen High School (ex artium) in 1851 and passed ex philos at Oslo University in 1852, and he was most likely portrayed on one of those occasions.

Fred after learning about the investigations concluded; *"I want the portrait to remain in Norway with descendants of Mathilde Susanne Dahl and her Husband Niels Anton Hansen Aall, and never to be sold as it is a family treasure that binds the Dahl's, Aall's, and Aars' family together."*

Øystein is the oldest living descendant of Niels Anton Hansen Aall<sup>175</sup> that was Øystein's great grandfather. The portrait was handed over to Øystein Aars<sup>739</sup> and his wife Thora Husby<sup>1593</sup> on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012.



## **Johan Herman Gørbitz**

Johan Herman Gørbitz was born in Bergen on September 8<sup>th</sup> 1772 and he died in Christiania (Oslo) on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1853. Johan Gørbitz was never married. His parents were Lucia Margaretha Müller (1762-1825) from Bremen and Martin Gørbitz (1738-1796) from Stettin. Martin was a sea-captain and businessman and the family moved to Bergen in 1764 when Martin was granted a business license. Martin died in 1796 and Lucia was in 1801 re-married to Frantz Anton Putter, a businessman in Bergen. There were 10 siblings, however out of which only five grew up.

Lucia had some artist talents which were obviously inherited by Johan Herman. Johan left Bergen in 1798 and studied at the Academy in Copenhagen for four years, he came back to Bergen where he earned his livings by selling landscape paintings, pastels, pencil drawings and portraits. In 1805 he again left Bergen to continue his studies at with the Academy in Copenhagen where he stayed for two more years. He went to Dresden, where among his production is the portrait of C.D.Friedrich, and on to Vienna where he in 1808 made the portrait of the Danis-Norwegian gesandt G.V. Nissen. He came to Paris where he settled in 1809 and he lived there until returning to Norway and Christiania in 1836. When living in Paris, Johan also spent some time in Switzerland (1822) and in Italy (1833-34).

In Paris, Johan worked at the atelier of Antoine Jean Gros and also with Jean Baptiste Jacques Augustin from whom Johan learned a lot and he was very much influenced. His production was recognized for the French tone and his sense of details and correctness.

Johan, when he settled in Christiania in 1836, was recognized as an artist of world format and he was a popular portrait painter. He was engaged by many famous Norwegian citizens among the business community and aristocrats. The collection of portraits made by Gørbitz included members of most of the high ranking families, so also of the Aall family.

It is estimated that Gørbitz' painted more than 200 portraits during his Christiania life, among those are the two bigger portraits of two high ranking militaries for decorations of Christiania Military Society. This as an illustration of how widely and well his art was recognized.

Gørbitz gave exhibitions in the Salonen in Paris, first time in 1835, and also several times in Christiania as well as Copenhagen. His paintings are represented in the Norwegian National Gallery, the National Historical Museum in Fredriksborg, he State Museum of Art, Copenhagen and can be found in all important collections of art in Norway.

*Summary of Ellen Bugge-Næss; "Johan Gørbitz portrait painter in Christiania, 1836-1853", 2007*  
<http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-17587>

## **Niels Anton Hansen Aall<sup>175</sup> 1833-1896 and Mathilde Susanne Dahl<sup>174</sup> 1842-1910**

Niels Anton Hansen Aall<sup>175</sup> was born in Sandefjord on November 6<sup>th</sup> 1833. His father was Hans Cato Aall, 1807-1862, and his mother was Karen Nicoline Harris, 1807-1856. Hans Cato Aall was a vicar and a dean in Brunlanes, and he also for some years was elected to the Norwegian Parliament.

Niels' professional life covered:

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Studies                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ex artium 1851</li><li>• ex philos 1853</li><li>• ex theol 1858</li><li>• ex samie language 1860</li></ul>  |
| Professional positions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• vicar's assistant, Tromsø, 1862</li><li>• vicar, Nesseby, 1864</li><li>• vicar's assistant, Førde, 1875</li><li>• vicar, Øksnes, 1877</li><li>• vicar, Sveen, 1882, until retirement by end of 1893</li></ul> |

Niels was married to Mathilde Susanne Dahl<sup>174</sup> in Nesseby Church on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1864. Mathilde Susanne Dahl<sup>174</sup> was born in Vadsø on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1842 and she was the daughter of Maren Anna Klæboe<sup>54</sup> and Baard Nicolai Benjamin Dahl<sup>53</sup>. When her husband Baard died in 1876, Maren Anna moved and lived together with the Mathilde and Niels family in Øksnes where she died in 1880.

Children of Mathilde Susanne Baardsdatter Dahl<sup>174</sup> and Niels Anton Hansen Aall <sup>175</sup>

1. Cato Nicolai Benjamin Nilsen Aall<sup>265</sup> , Birth: 19 Aug 1865, Death: 1957
2. Anathon August Fredrik Aall<sup>266</sup> , Birth: 15 Aug 1867, Death: 1943
3. Alf Immanuel Gustav Aall<sup>272</sup>, Birth: 1868, Death: 1903
4. Esther Nathalia Mathilde Aall<sup>268</sup>, Birth: 24 May 1870
5. Herman Johan Regnor Harris Aall<sup>269</sup>, Birth: 22 Sep 1871, Death: 1957
6. Maren Anna Nielsine Aall<sup>270</sup>, Birth: 8 Mar 1873, Death: 1948
7. Charlotte Henrikke Ragna Aall<sup>271</sup>, Birth: 26 Sep 1874
8. Signe Olava Nicoline Aall<sup>273</sup>, Birth: 24 Nov 1876
9. Niels Emil Ude Aall<sup>2011</sup>, Birth: 24 Nov 1876
10. Dagny Therese Susanne Aall<sup>2012</sup>, Birth: 2 Aug 1878, Death: 18 Mar 1879

Nesbru, February 21<sup>st</sup> 2012  
John Schjelderup Olaisen