

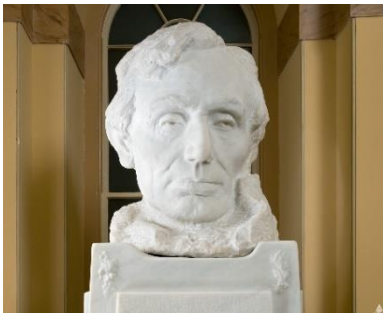
STORIES SERIES, NUMBER FIVE

*SAMUEL POMEROY COLT, AUGUSTE RODIN, GUTZON BORGLUM,
THE JOURNEY OF A 4 ½ TON ABRAHAM LINCOLN, AND JOE LOUIS*



1909 was the 100th year anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, and what eventually would be called “Lincoln-mania” swept across the nation. The committee in charge of celebrations in Chicago raised \$40,000 for a week-long commemoration. The culminating banquet that week ended with a keynote address by the President of Princeton University, Woodrow Wilson. President Theodore Roosevelt marked the occasion on February 12, 1909 at the Lincoln birthplace in Kentucky. New York

City’s events were funded by City Hall to the tune of \$25,000. The year saw the introduction of a special Lincoln gold medallion, and the Lincoln one cent coin.ⁱ 1909 also pushed Congress into actually passing the bill that would fund the construction of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The committee had been working since 1867 on the project – finally, an actual appropriation was passed and construction began. The official dedication, however, would not be until 1922.ⁱⁱ



A young sculptor, inspired by many of these events, carved a “pensive bust of Lincoln more than a yard high” that he “succeeded in selling to investment banker Eugene Meyer.”ⁱⁱⁱ Mr. Meyer generously donated the bust to the United States government. Mr. Lincoln’s likeness was located close to the White House at first, then moved to the Rotunda of the United States Capitol, and finally (in 1979) found its way to its present location one floor below, in the Crypt of the Rotunda. Eugene Meyer was an investment banker in New York when the sculptor created his first Lincoln bust. Eventually Mr. Meyer left New York, took a job in Washington DC under the Wilson administration, and in due time bought The Washington Post. His daughter was Katharine Graham, who led the newspaper from 1963 to 1991.^{iv}



Gutzon Borglum

Mr. Meyer became a patron of sorts to the sculptor, even loaning him substantial funds - which were never paid back. Eventually their relationship became acrimonious and beyond repair.^v

The young sculptor was Gutzon Borglum. Born and educated in the United States, he travelled to Europe in the late 1890s. Historians say he left America

SCULPTOR DESTROYS HIS CATHEDRAL ANGELS

Wouldn't See Them Wrangled About and Carted Off.

HE PUT HIS SOUL INTO THEM

And When Some One Criticised Their Sex It Roused His Artist Spirit; Therefore He Smashed 'Em.

There will be no wrangling over the question whether the statues representing the Angel of the Annunciation and of the Resurrection at the entrance to the Belmont Chapel of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, on Morningside Heights, shall be men or women. Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor who conceived and executed those two immense statues as beautiful women, went up to the Cathedral very early on Monday morning and broke to pieces the two figures he had taken most interest in since he took charge of the sculpture work of the church.

"I felt like a murderer," he said last night, "but that was the only thing to do under the circumstances. They belonged to me in the sense that they could not be sold for other purposes; they did not belong to me in the sense that I could not take them away from the Cathedral."

as a painter, and in 1901 returned a sculptor, greatly influenced by Auguste Rodin – not only because of Rodin's immense talent, but also by his status as a "rock star" celebrity in the art world. Rodin may not have had intimate knowledge of Mr. Borglum, but he did write letters of introduction to many of his own American patrons about Borglum's talents.^{vi} Mr. Borglum deployed Rodin's references judiciously, and earned a major commission in New York City at St. John The Divine Cathedral. By 1905 he was deep into his work carving angels for the Chapel of St. Saviour in the Cathedral in Morningside Heights.

But an artistic difference with the Archbishop led to notoriety – and a front page accounting in the New York Times. Apparently, the Archbishop preferred that the angels be men, and not women as sculpted by Mr. Borglum. Borglum was not pleased with the challenge to his artistic creativity, smashed some of his pieces and then reworked the angels. He took away their calla lilies and gave them swords.^{vii} New Yorkers followed the drama with keen interest.

The United States Rubber Company had an office in New York City, 1790 Broadway, on what was known in those days as "Automobile Row". The major auto makers of the day displayed their machines in elaborate lobbies bordered by street level picture windows and sold their creations to an insatiable public. Automobiles needed tires, and United States Rubber Company under the leadership of Samuel P. Colt was right there on the Row to remind everyone of that fact. Ruth Butler, in her book about Auguste Rodin, reminded her readers that sometimes the wealthy industrialists of the day "purchased art to show people that they had money" and she particularly made mention of Mr. Colt: "Samuel P. Colt.....published the amount of his surplus and capital on his letterhead.....In October of 1906 he sent Rodin a check for twenty-five thousand francs as down payment for a 'statue of a girl or a muse' apparently having no idea what he would get. He assured Rodin that he knew the statue 'will be all that I could desire'."^{viii}

The Bristol Phoenix of October 15, 1915 reported the arrival of four Rodin statues, commissioned by Colt in 1906 and on their way to their new home at Colt's "Farm" at Poppasquash: *The Lion in Agony*, *Eve*, *Pysche*, and the *Hawk and Dove*.^{ix} Later, in Mr. Colt's obituary that appeared in "The Rubber Age", one additional Rodin piece was attributed to Mr. Colt, *The Hand of God* (now in the collection of the

SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 1911
TALLEST BROADWAY BUILDING ABOVE TIMES SQUARE SECTION

Twenty-Story Structure Going Up for United States Rubber Company on Fitzgerald Corner at 58th Street—An Artistic Addition to the Automobile District Designed for Practical Business Purposes.



The United States Rubber Company Building to be Erected on the Southeast Corner of Broadway and 58th Street, New York City.

Rhode Island School of Design Museum).^x

The National Magazine, an illustrated American monthly, whose banner line was "Mostly About People" published in 1919 a somewhat breezy article about a reporter's encounter with Samuel Pomeroy Colt in his New York Office. The reporter recounts seeing the bust in the United States Rubber Company window, and deciding to pop in to meet with Mr. Colt. The reporter waxes poetic about the genius of Rodin, and then recounts his "little chat" with Mr. Colt: "I began to understand why he loved sculpture," he wrote. "The artistic display of pictures hung about his office, with its plain-top desk, tells the story; and in his home at Bristol, Rhode Island he has gathered many rare pieces that give the touch of Athens." The author then listed the multiple commitments of Mr. Colt to various corporations, philanthropic institutions, etc. and the article concluded "During all these

activities of life he has never been too busy to indulge himself in the study of art. Was it not Emerson who said that “No home is complete without one bit of sculpture – something that suggests all sides of living and breathing life?” “ xi

So, it is not surprising that eventually Mr. Gutzon Borglum found himself in the New York office of Mr. Samuel P. Colt. Mr. Borglum was looking for a new commission that would provide needed income. Work for sculptors and artists had been badly curtailed by WWI. He had been hired by a committee to carve a huge piece at Stone Mountain in Georgia, but funds had not been forthcoming. In 1919 Samuel Colt was interested in adding to his art collection – but at a reasonable price, despite what author Ruth Butler may have thought about him. John Taliaferro, in his biography of Gutzon Borglum, writes: “When Colt would not meet Borglum’s \$10,000 asking price, Borglum settled for \$5,000, then borrowed an additional \$5,000 from Colt, leaving three smaller statues for collateral.”^{xii}

The New York Times announced the exhibition of the art piece:



“There will be exhibited to-day and for some time afterward in the windows of the United States Rubber Company, 1790 Broadway, a remarkable head of Lincoln in Grecian marble, by Gutzon Borglum.

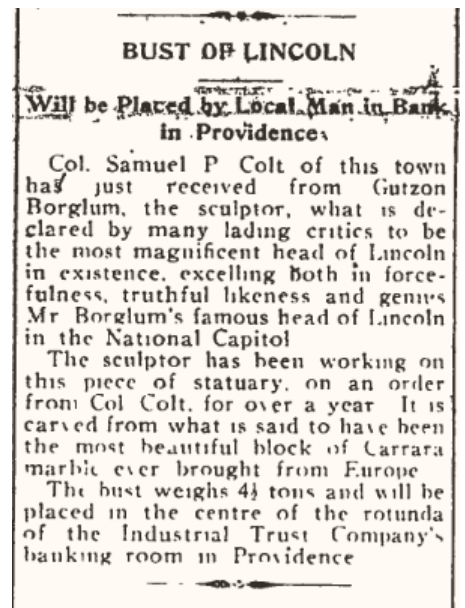
A number of years ago Borglum made a head of similar character which is now in the rotunda of the capitol at Washington. The new head, just completed, is believed by Borglum to be far superior to that in the capitol. The piece was cut from a block weighing six tons, and the finished product weighs four and a half tons. It portrays the head in heroic size. The features are those of Lincoln at the time of his first nomination in 1860.

The piece was executed by Mr. Borglum for Col. Samuel P. Colt, chairman of the United States Rubber Company.”^{xiii}

Auto Topics Magazine of February 22, 1919 also carried coverage of the commission of the bust, and its placement in the windows of the United

States Rubber Company in New York City.

In April of 1919, The Bristol Phoenix reported that the four and a half ton Lincoln was on the move: “the most magnificent head of Lincoln in existence” will be “placed in the centre of the rotunda of the Industrial Trust Company’s banking room in Providence.”^{xiv} Samuel Colt had founded the Industrial Trust Company in 1887. By 1894 it had outgrown its first headquarters on Custom House Street and had moved to its second location on Exchange Street. By 1927 the bank outgrew that building, and moved into its third headquarters, what is nicknamed today “The Superman Building” in Providence.



Bristol Phoenix, April 8, 1919

Samuel P. Colt did not live to see his new bank headquarters. At 26 stories and 428 feet it became the tallest building in Providence, and in Rhode Island. He died in 1921, well before the building’s grand opening in 1928. Auguste Rodin had passed three years earlier. Borglum had been approached by the United Daughters of the

Confederacy to work on their biggest project to date – a monument to the Confederacy on Stone Mountain, outside of Atlanta. Borglum’s concept was a 1200 foot span of four 50 foot tall fathers of the confederacy surrounded by a calvary. Throughout his work on the project, from 1915 to 1923, he became involved in the politics of the Ku Klux Klan, and also saw them as a source of funding for his work.^{xv} But by 1924 the work stalled, and by February of 1925 he was fired from the project because of his “disloyalty, offensive egotism and delusions of grandeur.”^{xvi} In an act reminiscent of his St. John The Divine Cathedral tantrum, he destroyed his models for the carving, claiming they were his property. An arrest warrant was issued, he escaped to North Carolina, and in 1928 the face of Robert E. Lee that Borglum had partially completed was blasted off the mountain. But Borglum’s next project was already in the works – a tribute to the American West in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the dream of historian Doane Robinson, which eventually evolved into Mount Rushmore, which we know includes Lincoln. Borglum worked on that project from 1927 until his death in 1941.

According to biographer John Taliaferro: “One of the reasons he did Mt. Rushmore was to show those people in Washington what Lincoln should *really* look like. Borglum was very jealous of the Lincoln Memorial. He had wanted that to be *his* vision. He thought Lincoln belonged to him.”^{xvii}

Upon Mr. Colt’s death, his bust of Lincoln was acquired by Ralph H. Booth (1873-1931) from the estate trust managed by the Industrial Trust Bank. Mr. Booth began his career with the Detroit National Bank, moved on to the Detroit Tribune, then the Associated Press, and served as American Envoy to Denmark. He served as President of the Detroit Institute of Arts for many years.



Workmen Get Break as Big Bust Bursis Breaker

Lincoln Bust Gives Workers Hard Time

Crew Takes 2 Hours to Roll It 12 Yards for Art Institute Rites

In May of 1924 the bust was placed in the main lobby of the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA). The Detroit News reported: “The head and base - chiseled from one piece of marble weigh four and a half tons. From the bottom of the chin to the top of the hair measures 33 inches, while there is a space of 31 inches from ear to ear. Officials of the Institute would not disclose the purchase price of the head, but estimate cost about \$12,000. The Colt estate place a value of \$10,000 on it.”^{xviii}

Although he died in 1931, Mr. Booth might not have been too happy when his bust of Lincoln was removed from the main lobby, stored in the basement, and then once again placed outside in the mid-1950s. The workers who had to move it did not have an easy time. “It’s got to work”, Paul Miller declared. “They took it *down* in this elevator.” The reminder that the Governor was going to attend the rededication did not phase Mr. Miller. “If we can’t get it going, they’ll just have to tell the governor to come down to the basement and look at it”.^{xix}

To make matters worse, in 1967 it was removed from that position at the entrance to the museum and banished once again to the basement storage area. Finally, according to the Smithsonian Institution Research Information System (SIRIS): “In a joint effort by the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), the Detroit Parks and Recreation Dept, and the Civic Center, the sculpture was restored and relocated to Hart Plaza in 1986. It was rededicated on February 12, 1987.”^{xx}

Sadly, sometime during the not-so-Presidential odyssey, Mr. Lincoln's nose was broken. The restoration did not go well, and the repair was rather clumsy and is in the same state today.

We wrote to the DIA about this situation, and received a prompt reply from Mr. Benjamin W. Colman, Curator of American Art:

"The Lincoln is indeed in the DIA collection, and still on display at the garden of the Veterans Memorial Building (now UAW-Ford) at 151 W. Jefferson, Detroit. The building is directly adjacent to Hart Plaza.

Lincoln's nose was damaged and conserved in the 1960s. We've been aware for some time that the adhesive used to secure the repaired marble is discolored. Due to the difficulty and expense of working on an outdoor piece so large, the conservators have not yet been able to complete the project."

So it appears that Paul Miller and his 1956 crew moved Mr. Lincoln with his nose intact, but the maneuver in 1967 was a little less successful. Ironically, its most recent move in 1986 was done about the same time as the installation of the iconic sculpture by Robert Graham commissioned by Sports Illustrated Magazine to honor boxer Joe Louis, called "The Fist". That piece is also in the collection of the DIA and is located in Hart Plaza.

It honors the power of Joe's punch – against opponents in the ring, and against racism. "It was (Joe Louis) who in 1938 helped shatter the Nazi myth of racial superiority with his dramatic defeat of German champion Max Schmeling during the rise of Nazism."^{xxi} President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said at the time of the fight: "Joe, we need muscles like yours to beat the Nazis." When Joe died in 1981, his son Joe Louis Jr. told ESPN during a retrospective: "What my father did was enable white America to think of him as an American, not as a black. By winning, he became white America's first black hero."^{xxii}

Somehow, we think that Abraham Lincoln, at the end of a long journey, broken nose and all, would not only enjoy being in the company of Mr. Louis, but also appreciate the ironic intersections of American history in the story of his four and a half ton marble bust: a piece commissioned by Samuel P. Colt, successful industrialist and grandson of the slave trader George DeWolf, sculpted by Gutzon Borglum, monumental American sculptor with ties to the Ku Klux Klan, and located today not far from "The Fist" of Joe Louis, a son of sharecroppers and grandson of enslaved people, and the world heavyweight boxing champion from 1937 to 1949.





U.S. Capitol Crypt
Borglum/Meyers



Detroit, Hart Plaza
Borglum/Colt



Mt. Rushmore
Borglum/Robinson

The author Lynn Smith is a volunteer and a member of the Board of the Friends of Linden Place. While not a trained historian, she loves to research stories connected to the mansion and its occupants. The information in this article, while considered to be accurate and reliable, is not guaranteed. Input, suggestions, edits and comments are always appreciated.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Digital Research Library of Illinois History Journal, August 25, 2021
- ⁱⁱ National Park Service Brochure: <http://npshistory.com/brochures/linc/1941/sec1.htm>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/24/books/carve-ev-ry-mountain.html>
- ^{iv} **Abraham Lincoln Bust**, Architect of the Capitol, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/abraham-lincoln-bust>
- ^v **C-Span "Booknotes"** Conversation with John Taliaferro, author of "Great White Fathers: The Story of the Obsessive Quest to Create Mt. Rushmore". December 15, 2002
- ^{vi} Ibid
- ^{vii} *New York Times*, October 11, 1905
- ^{viii} **Rodin: The Shape of Genius**, by Ruth Butler, January 1, 1993, Yale University Press, p.411
- ^{ix} *Bristol Phoenix*, October 15, 1915
- ^x **The Rubber Age**, Samuel P. Colt Obituary, 1921
- ^{xi} National Magazine, Volume XLVIII: January, 1919 to February 1920, pp. 315 and 316, from the archives of the State University of Iowa
- ^{xii} **Great White Fathers: The Story of the Obsessive Quest to Create Mt. Rushmore**, by John Taliaferro, Public Affairs, 2004
- ^{xiii} *New York Times*, February 13, 1919
- ^{xiv} *Bristol Phoenix*, April 8, 1919
- ^{xv} **Great White Fathers**, John Taliaferro: "On a strictly mercenary level, he saw the Klan's burgeoning, highly organized network throughout the South and the Midwest as a source of funds for his expensive undertaking. More than that, however, he came to view the Klan as a promising grass-roots movement with the potential to reshape the political map of the nation."
- ^{xvi} *The Washington Post*, article by Diane Bernard, July 2, 2020
- ^{xvii} **C-Span "Booknotes"** Conversation with John Taliaferro, author of "Great White Fathers: The Story of the Obsessive Quest to Create Mt. Rushmore". December 15, 2002
- ^{xviii} *Detroit News*, May 21, 1924
- ^{xix} *Detroit Free Press*, February 12, 1956
- ^{xx} https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/wm8322_Abraham_Lincoln_Detroit_Michigan
- ^{xxi} *Daily Detroit*, July 10, 2015: **The Real Story Behind Detroit's Giant Joe Louis Fist**
- ^{xxii} Ibid