

LINCOLN LORE

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ST. GAUDENS' LINCOLNS

The city of Chicago is fortunate in having two heroic bronze statues of Abraham Lincoln by the sculptor, St. Gaudens. One is a standing figure located in Lincoln Park close to North Avenue Boulevard, the other is a portrait of Lincoln seated, which occupies a commanding site in Grant Park at the foot of Van Buren street. While art critics almost unanimously have selected the standing figure as the premier piece of art among the more than fifty heroic Lincoln statues in America, the sculptor himself felt that his seated Lincoln was his masterpiece.

St. Gaudens was born in Dublin, Ireland, on March 1, 1848, of a French father and an Irish mother. He was brought to New York when but six months old. As a youth he became a cameo-cutter and began his studies in art at Cooper Institute in 1861. After studying in Paris and Rome, he returned to New York in 1882. It was not long, however, before he became established in his studio at Cornish, New Hampshire. Here both of his Lincoln studies were completed and for a quarter of a century he sent out from his workshop many famous sculptures. He died at Cornish in 1907, and here a beautiful memorial has been erected to his memory.

The Original Standing Lincoln in Lincoln Park, Chicago

The magnificent standing Lincoln was completed in the summer of 1886 and the plaster study was made ready for casting. The moment the finished work was exposed for criticism it was at once acclaimed as an unusual and remarkable work of art. It was unveiled October 27, 1887. Originality of design was undoubtedly responsible for the statue's almost immediate recognition as a surpassing study. There had been many seated figures and many standing figures created by different sculptors but a heroic bronze representing one who had but just recently risen from his seat was something which had not been achieved up to that time.

The immediate surroundings of the statute contribute much to its commanding appearance. It is set within an oval enclosure and around three sides of the platform curves a stone seat. The steps approaching the elevation are pleasing and several inscriptions from Lincoln's famous speeches

are engraved artistically upon backgrounds of both stone and bronze associated with the exedra. The donor of the famous work of art was Eli Bates whose name appears on the base of the statue. The approximate cost of the masterpiece was \$40,000.

A contributor to *Century Magazine* for November, 1887, made this comment on the statue:

"This Lincoln, with his firmly planted feet, his erect body, and his squared shoulders, stands as a man accustomed to face the people and sway them at his will, while the slightly drooped head and the quiet, yet not passive hands express the meditativeness, the self-control, the conscientiousness of the philosopher who reflected well before he spoke, of the moralist who realized to the full the responsibilities of utterance. The dignity of the man and his simplicity; his strength, his inflexibility and his tenderness; his goodness and his courage; his intellectual confidence and his humility of soul; the poetic cast of his thought, the homely vigor of his manner, and the underlying sadness of his spirit; all these may be read in the wonderfully real yet ideal portrait which the sculptor has created."

The same contributor draws this conclusion about the merits of the statue: "It is the most important commemorative work that Mr. St. Gaudens has yet produced and may well remain the most important of his life. There would be no nobler task for an American sculptor than the task of representing the greatest of all Americans."

The Seated Lincoln in Grant Park, Chicago

It is said that St. Gaudens was never satisfied with his standing Lincoln and received the commission to do a seated Lincoln with great joy. After working for twelve years on his new study of Lincoln he remarked upon the conclusion of the work, "I am willing to render it as my tribute to Abraham Lincoln." He considered it one of his greatest achievements and superior to his standing figure of the Emancipator. The interpretation of Lincoln as visualized by St. Gaudens in the seated statue, portrays the President expressive of the isolation in which he stood in the crucial period of the Civil War. An interesting detail of the study is the famous Lincoln shawl which appears draped over the back of the chair. The statue in reality was St. Gaudens' last outstanding contribution to American sculpture. He

finished the model in 1906 and the following year he passed away.

Possibly it is well that the sculptor did not live to see his most cherished work shipped about the country and stored in warehouses until twelve years elapsed before it was at last placed upon its permanent foundation. Soon after it was completed it was exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. In 1915, it was shipped to San Francisco where it was on display at the Panama-Pacific Exposition. For a decade it was in storage in an old shed in Chicago, until finally it was unveiled on its present site, May 31, 1926.

The delay in placing the seated Lincoln was due largely to the form of the bequest by John Crerar, the donor, who left \$100,000 for the erection of a Lincoln in bronze. He stipulated in his will that it was "to face south in a southern part of the city of Chicago." It might be said that literally the site had to be made for the statue before a satisfactory one was available. The statue is situated in a semi-circular amphitheatre, one hundred and thirty-five feet in diameter. At the front ends of the white marble exedra are two stone columns fifty feet high. The architectural surroundings have contributed much to the idea of isolation which the statue expresses.

Replica of the Standing Lincoln in London

Although Lincoln was often a visitor in Chicago, it is not likely that the environment of either Lincoln Park or Grant Park contributes quite so much to their respective statues of Lincoln as the atmosphere of London contributes to the replica of St. Gaudens' standing Lincoln. On one side Westminster Abbey, and on the other the Houses of Parliament look down upon the statue. Lincoln in this setting assumes the proportions of a great international figure.

Among all the bronze studies of Lincoln which had been created in America, the standing Lincoln by St. Gaudens was selected as the most worthy one to present to the English people. It was unveiled on July 28, 1929. At the dedicatory services, Lloyd George said on behalf of the British people, "In a few moments we shall see unveiled before our eyes a presentment in bronze of the best known historical face in the Anglo-Saxon world—in fact one of the few best-known faces in the whole world. I doubt whether any statesman who ever lived sank so deeply into the hearts of the people of many lands."