

# LINCOLN LORE

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## ROGER'S—COUNCIL OF WAR

John Rogers at last is coming to his own. Upon the completion of the New York Historical Society's new building, a room on the main floor will be dedicated as the "John Rogers Memorial Room." The acquisition by the society of thirty-five original bronze statuettes, supplemented by a large collection of the plaster studies by the famous sculptor has served as an incentive for the creation of this Rogers memorial.

Rogers was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on October 30, 1829. When but a boy he worked as an apprentice to a merchant at Boston and later as a draughtsman, at Manchester, New Hampshire, where his artistic temperament first found expression. There a certain kind of clay invited him to try his hand at moulding figures. This led to his giving more attention to his hobby and later on, while living in Chicago, he saw one of his first models called "Checker Players" bring seventy-five dollars at a Sanitary Fair auction. This encouraged the beginning of a career which brought to his studio in New York some of the famous people of the day.

Rogers was not primarily a vender of cheap plaster statuettes but he was, in fact, an artist who was able to express through his work the emotions and feelings of his contemporary country-men at work, at play, and at war. He also interpreted some of the famous episodes in literature. In 1896, William Cullen Bryant paid this tribute to the sculptor:

"You have succeeded in a higher degree than almost any artist of any age in making sculpture a narrative art, and giving to motionless and speechless figures the power to relate their own adventures."

Sometime in the month of June, 1864, Rogers presented to Abraham Lincoln one of his war groups called "Wounded Scout," depicting a wounded soldier being sustained by a civilian in a swamp. In Lincoln's letter of acknowledgment, written on June 13, 1864, we find these words:

"I can not pretend to be a judge in such matters; but the Statuette group 'Wounded Scout'—'Friend in the Swamp,' which you did me the honor to present, is very pretty and suggestive, and, I should think, excellent as a piece of art."

Possibly the most famous study created by Rogers was the Council of War, portraying Lincoln seated, with Stanton and Grant standing at the rear of his chair. Here, in one group was the Commander in Chief of the armies of the Republic, the Secretary of War, and the highest ranking general.

The famous "Council of War" group was not created until after Lincoln's death. A copy was sent to Stanton, however, who responded with these words:

". . . Am highly gratified with the genius and artistic skill you have displayed . . . I think you were especially fortunate in your execution of the figure of President Lincoln. In form and feature it surpasses any effort

to embody the expression of that great man which I have seen . . ."

It has not been known, generally, that there are two different studies of the famous group, both of which are in the library and museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation. Just which one of these is the earliest study it is difficult to ascertain. The chief difference in the statuettes is found in the figure of Stanton. In one portrayal he is seen holding his glasses in his left hand with his right hand dropped by his side. This design we will call figure A. The other study shows Stanton with his glasses in his left hand and in the process of wiping them with a handkerchief held in his right hand. This we will call figure B.

Figure A bears the inscription, "John Rogers, Patented March 31, 1868" and it might indicate that the early patent date inscribed would suggest it was the earlier study of the two. Ten years later he was advertising extensively a "Council of War Group" at \$25.00. Whether or not it was figure A we are not able to say.

Figure B bears the inscription "John Rogers, New York" with no reference as to copyright or date of copyright. This is similar to the figure cast in bronze which is in the New York Historical Society Collection. It is also this same figure which appears in advertisements as early as 1885. One in the *Century Magazine* for May of that year priced the "Council of War" at \$20.00.

Figure B seems to have been duplicated by those who deal in plaster statuary today, one firm advertising the study at \$30.00.

There is one more rather obscure work of art by Rogers which should be better known and that is his heroic bronze statue of Lincoln at Manchester, New Hampshire. When the Lincoln National Life Foundation published its beautiful brochure on *Heroic Bronze Statues of Lincoln* in 1935, the statue was in some way overlooked. Through the kindness of Caroline C. Clement, librarian of the Carpenter Memorial Library at Manchester, we learned that John Rogers, himself, who was a resident of Manchester, presented the original model in plaster to the city in 1895 and it was placed in the city library building. Later on it was removed to the high school.

Preliminary steps were taken in 1909, shortly after the centennial celebration of Lincoln's birth, to have the Rogers statue of Lincoln cast in bronze. On Memorial Day, 1910, largely through the efforts of Louis Bell Post, G. A. R., the heroic bronze statue of Lincoln was dedicated. It now occupies a site on the lawn of the Central High School.

It is very evident that this seated Lincoln, although an independent study of the Lincoln in the "Council of War" group, borrowed much from the earlier study of Lincoln made by Rogers in 1868.