

LINCOLN LORE

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THE BRONZE LINCOLN BY FRENCH

The appearance of a Lincoln head by Daniel Chester French on the Gettysburg Address commemorative postage stamp has brought many queries to the Lincoln National Life Foundation about its identity and the name of the sculptor who created the original bronze from which the bust portrait is copied. Another incentive for calling attention to this remarkable study is its use in a full length presentation on the Boy Scout certificate of award for the February 12, 1949, pilgrimage to Lincoln shrines.

For the past fifteen years the Foundation has encouraged an annual trek by Boy Scouts, on the day of Lincoln's birth, to some Lincoln statue or to some historical site associated with the Emancipator. An award in the form of a certificate bearing the likeness of a Lincoln statue is made available for each boy making the pilgrimage. The portraits have been selected for the chronological sequence of the episode portrayed or a characteristic depicted. Very fortunately, and indeed timely, the heroic bronze statue of Lincoln by French, adapted itself for presentation this year when the Lincoln postage stamp is still being circulated among the people.

Quite often a sculptor's masterpiece overshadows his other works to such an extent that some very worthwhile productions fail to receive their proper place in the public esteem. This is very true if the less known work of art portrays the same individual as the more important contribution. The magnificent stone statue of the seated Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial at Washington has almost obscured the bronze standing Lincoln by the same sculptor.

This erect Lincoln occupies a commanding site at the west entrance of the state capitol building at Lincoln, Nebraska. The overall environment of the statue created by the massive tower which soars above the plains, seems to symbolize the Lincoln, six feet four inches tall, soaring above



others. For the immediate background of the statue, here as in Washington, Henry Bacon served as the architect for the appropriate stone surroundings. It is doubtful if Americans will ever again witness such teamwork displayed by two geniuses, as was revealed by these two artists. For twenty years or more they col-

laborated to give America some of her most impressive creations in stone and bronze.

Margaret French Cresson in her well written biography of her father entitled *Journey Into Fame* published by Harvard University Press in 1947, gives a brief story of the preliminaries and the reaction to the statue. She said her father after receiving the commission considered in his mind for several months just what type of a Lincoln he would create. He finally decided to do a figure in deep thought, a meditative Lincoln. In order to provide a quiet atmosphere for such a sympathetic approach, he decided to construct a new workshop at Chesterwood, which would allow him more privacy and here the statue was created.

Mrs. Cresson describes this statue at Lincoln, Nebraska, as "A Lincoln in deep thought, standing with clasped hands as he might have stood before or after one of his great addresses."

At a dinner in honor of the sculptor given the evening after the unveiling, at Lincoln, Nebraska, next to Mr. French there sat a daughter of a woman who had often heard her mother tell of listening to Lincoln speak a number of times. She said to Mr. French, "You can imagine my surprise, when I saw your first model to find that you had chosen the identical pose that my mother had so often described."

The finest tribute which has been paid to the Nebraska Lincoln statue by Daniel Chester French is also noted in Mrs. Cresson's book. Charles Moore, Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, sent to Lord Charnwood a photograph of French's seated Lincoln in the Washington Memorial. In his note of acknowledgment Lord Charnwood praised it as the finest Lincoln he had ever observed and "that he had only seen one statue that approached it and it was the one out in Lincoln, Nebraska." Of course this was the other statue by French.