

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1327

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 13, 1954

LINCOLN MURALS

Someone once said to an interior decorator, "We have suffered and fought in the cause of progress and civilization, remind us of it upon our walls. We have had heroes; celebrate them." As far as we have been able to observe, there has been no attempt made to compile a list of mural paintings where Abraham Lincoln appears as the central personage, or where his accomplishments are revealed in allegorical figures. This initial effort to call attention to some of these important contributions to art and history, by nature of the case, must be fragmentary. We trust however, it will bring to light many outstanding wall decorations that might properly be classified as Lincoln murals.

A fine example of murals where characteristics are personified may be observed in the Lincoln Memorial at Washington. They typify the principles displayed in the life of Lincoln. There are two of these murals, each sixty feet long and twelve feet high, placed at the tops of the south and north walls. The decoration above the inscribed Gettysburg address on the south wall consists of three groups: the central figure, Freedom and Liberty; the left group, Justice and the Law; the right group, Immortality. The decoration above the Second Inaugural address on the north wall presents these three groups: central group, Unity; left group, Fraternity; right group, Charity. There are forty-eight figures in the two panels. The standing figures are over eight feet tall. The two mural paintings were created by Jules Guerin.

Two other appropriate murals of allegorical design are placed in the beautiful Lincoln Shrine at Redlands, California. The famous sculptural head of Lincoln by Barnard, set in a recess in the wall of the structure, occupies the central place in the shrine. In the lunette above the bookcases to the right of the Lincoln head is a mural "He freed the slaves" and the companion piece to the left is entitled "The preservation of the Union." These beautiful and impressive paintings are the work of Dean Cornwell.

"Lincoln Sees Slaves Sold at Auction"

Among the many murals in educational institutions one at the D. S. Wentworth School auditorium in Chicago shows Lincoln and a companion in the foreground on a boat and a slave block and auction market on the shore. The artist was James E. McBurney.

"The Great Debate"

At the base of the inner dome of the Illinois State Capitol building at Springfield there is an interesting mural by F. Nicolai which memorializes the joint debates between Lincoln and Douglas. The central figures, of course, are the two 1858 candidates for the United States Senate from Illinois. Lincoln is presented making a speech, while Douglas is seated by a table. There are seven other figures on the Douglas side of the platform and eleven Lincoln supporters grouped with him.

"The Freeing of the Slaves"

A mural which features Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was created by John Stewart Curry for the law school library at the University of Wisconsin. It is entitled "The Freeing of the Slaves." The focus is on the figure of a negro with arms outstretched rejoicing in his liberation. At his feet are soldier casualties of both

north and south. A group of newly freed negroes is observed and the sun shining through troubled clouds. Underneath this painting is a modern plaque with the words of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation carved in it.

"Penn State's Founding"

Abraham Lincoln signed the Federal Land Grant College Act in 1862. Pennsylvania State College is said to have been the first institution established under this act. To memorialize this episode a twelve foot mural has been created on the stair wall in the Old Main building. The central figure is Abraham Lincoln and by his side a youth is portrayed planting a symbolic fruit tree. Other figures which appear represent occupational tasks and professions featured by these early land grant institutions. The artist who did this mural for Penn State was Henry Varnum Poor.

"Gettysburg November 1863"

One of the best known Lincoln murals is in the state capitol at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Lincoln stands with bowed head on an elevated platform. Above him are the words inscribed "It is for us the living rather to be dedicated to the unfinished work." Besides the platform are standing soldiers, widows, orphans, politicians, citizens. The work is by Violet Oakley.

"The Gettysburg Address"

This mural forty-two by seventy inches portrays the union and confederate soldiers also several negroes gathered in memory of the fallen dead with a large portrait of Lincoln in the background. This work is by Jacobian but has not placed as far as we know.

"United States of America"

Among the W. P. A. art projects was one for decorating the interior of the dome of the New York County Court House. One of a series of murals painted by Attilio Pusterla is entitled "United States of America." Washington and Lincoln appear seated back to each other with Liberty standing between them. A migratory passage of pioneers containing groups of colonial figures and tradesmen are in the foreground. This is said to have been the largest art project of the W. P. A. in New York.

"Apotheosis of Lincoln"

When the new state house in Springfield was contemplated not long after Lincoln's death an elaborate mural was prepared which apparently was unacceptable although it did feature the recent passing of the President. It was a large canvass, twelve by fourteen feet. In the foreground were allegorical figures and in the background high above this group Washington is shown about to place a crown on Lincoln's head. Back of Washington and Lincoln, former Presidents of the United States stand in a group. This canvass eventually passed into the hands of an antique dealer in New Orleans and apparently has never found a permanent home.

The Lincoln National Life Foundation would be pleased to learn of other paintings of allegorical or historical influence which might be classified as Lincoln murals.