

SOME NOTES ON THOMAS D. JONES, SCULPTOR OF LINCOLN

By CECIL K. BYRD

Most of the sculpture of Abraham Lincoln—portrait busts, statues, and equestrian statues—that exists in public parks, municipal buildings, state capitols, and museums throughout the north, from Massachusetts to California, was done after his death by sculptors who had no opportunity to observe or study the living person. These latter-day artists have been assisted in executing Lincoln by viewing such sources as the Volk "Life Mask," contemporary photographs, paintings and engravings, and from reading the literature that goes under the name of Lincolniana. Using these aids and their own imaginative talents as a foundation, Lincoln has been cast in bronze and carved in stone as "frontiersman," "soldier," "lawyer," "statesman," and "emancipator." Many of these pieces have been done as commissions for public authorities or patriotically inspired promotional groups, and the artistic quality ranges from excellent to a sugary sentimental or rather standarized version—a brooding, bent figure presumably representing a man of sorrow and loneliness—that has all the appearance of being the product of an unchangeable and uninspired master mold.

While Lincoln became a frequent subject for the painters from nomination until death (there are today in public and private collections more than a score of canvases reputedly done from life), evidence would seem to prove that he posed for only five sculptors; the claims made for a sixth are still unsupported by more than oral history.

These five were not artists of universal talent, and their busts and statues of him, judged solely as works of art, have only minor significance, but as social and historical documents, they are of unquestioned importance because they were modeled from life.

Leonard Wells Volk, who returned from study in Rome in 1857 and opened a studio in Chicago, was the first to sculpture Lincoln. Related by marriage to Stephen A. Douglas, Volk first met the future Civil War President in 1858, during the now famous senatorial campaign of that year, and asked him to sit for modeling. Lincoln apparently agreed, but it was almost two years before he was able to fulfill the promise. While in Chicago, in March, 1860, in connection with a lawsuit in the United States district court, he consented to pose. Volk cast the now famous "Life Mask," and started work on a bust which was completed a short time later. The artist presumably presented to Mary Lincoln a cabinet-sized replica of this bust soon after Lincoln's nomination. Shortly after this, he also made casts of Lincoln's hands.

From the one series of sittings, the "Life Mask" and photographs which he had taken for future reference, Volk was able to turn out several busts, as well as the full sculptured piece, "The Emancipator," now in the Illinois state capitol at Springfield, and the "Lincoln" atop the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Washington Park, Rochester, New York. The artist applied for a patent on a "Hermes" bust of Lincoln, on May 17, 1860; the patent was issued June 12, 1860. Apparently he sold replicas of "Hermes" during the presidential campaign, for in a letter to James F. Babcock, dated at Springfield, September 13, 1860, referring to a photograph, presumably by Alexander Hesler, Lincoln mentioned Volk: "If your friend could procure one of the

'heads,' 'busts,' or whatever you call it, by Volk at Chicago, I should think it the thing for him."

Volk recorded his experience with Lincoln in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, December, 1881, under the title: "The Lincoln Life-Mask and How It Was Made." Though interesting, this account is generally regarded as pure reminiscence, and many of the details of the story are said to be unreliable.

Albert P. Henry, a Kentuckian, was another artist to sculpture Lincoln from life. Henry had no formal training, but displayed some native artistic talents from childhood. He served as an officer in the Union Army, but was captured in 1863 and imprisoned at Libby Prison for nine months. When released, his health was so debilitated that he surrendered his commission and went to Washington to recover and also to seek an opportunity to study and practice his art.

Lincoln became interested in his fellow Kentuckian and agreed to pose for him, making available rooms in the White House for work and modeling during the fall of 1864. The President became so impressed with Henry's ambition and desire for study abroad that he used his influence to get him a consulship at Ancona, Italy, which gave the artist ample opportunity for formal study. While there, Henry used his plaster bust, cast in Washington, as a model to carve a bust of Lincoln from Carrara marble, finishing it in 1866. This bust, probably the most inartistic of the sculpture done from life, was purchased by the Lincoln Monument Association and presented to the city of Louisville, in 1867. It presently is located in the library of the Federal Court in Louisville.

So far as is known, Henry left no personal written record of his association with Lincoln. Robert L. Kincaid

reminded us of this artist in an article, "Forgotten Bust of Lincoln," published in the *Lincoln Herald*, February, 1943.

William Marshall Swayne, a Pennsylvania artist in the employ of the government during the period of the Civil War, was commissioned to do a marble bust of Lincoln to be used in a fair sponsored by the Christian Commission in Philadelphia, in June, 1864. He had previously made busts of Seward and Chase, and secured from the latter a letter of introduction to Lincoln. Using space in the White House and the library of the Solicitor of the Treasury Department as a studio, Swayne received sittings from Lincoln at various times from March to May, 1864.

There is no evidence that Swayne ever started or completed work on a marble bust. A plaster bust coated with bronze, now in the Smithsonian Institution, a statue whose present location eluded us, and an article, "Reminiscences Concerning the Modeling of a Bust of Lincoln," which appeared in *The Federal Architect*, July, 1940, seem to be the entire record of this artist's contact with Lincoln.

Vinnie Ream appears to have been the only woman—we should say girl, for she was but sixteen—to have modeled Lincoln from life. Employed in the Post Office Department in Washington during the Civil War, she became interested in sculpturing under the tutelage of Clark Mills. Ambitious to do a portrait bust of the President, she was granted permission through the influence of Representative James S. Rollins of Missouri to model Lincoln at periodic intervals during the last five months of his life. The bust was completed before or shortly after the assassination.

When Congress decided to memorialize the Martyr President, the young Miss Ream was awarded the contract in 1866 to execute a life-sized statue. Using the bust as a model, she completed the statue which was placed and

dedicated in the rotunda of the Capitol in 1871. A brief account of Ream's impressions of Lincoln appeared in the form of an interview in the *Boston Post* of February 9, 1913, under the caption, "Personal Recollections of Lincoln by the Woman Who Posed Him for National Statue."

A small portrait bust by Martin Milmore, Irish-born sculptor who studied art at Lowell Institute and is remembered for his "Soldiers and Sailors Monument" on Boston Commons, was given to the Indiana University Library for the Lincoln collection, in 1949, by Chaplain and Mrs. Rowland C. Adams. The bust is inscribed: "M. Milmore 1865 Boston." It was given by Milmore to John Edward Henshaw, a student who studied with him, and passed from the Henshaw family to Adams, thence to Indiana. It has been said that this bust was done from life. Unfortunately, we have been unable to find contemporary evidence to support such claims.

Thomas D. Jones, the second artist to sculpture Lincoln, was the son of a stonecutter who followed the paternal craft for several years before turning, without formal training, to sculpturing. Born in Oneida County, New York, in 1811, he moved with his family to Granville, Ohio, in 1837, where he worked for a while on Ohio canals as a stonemason. In 1841, he was in Cincinnati employed as a marble cutter. Soon he began to execute portrait busts in wood, stone, and marble, and within a year was a full-time sculptor. For the next fifteen years, he had studios in Cincinnati; afterwards he established himself in the State House in Columbus, from which city he seems to have moved around wherever his work called him.

Jones and his fellow artists were in demand because of a vogue for sculpture which pervaded the country in the quarter-century before the Civil War. Statuary was con-

sidered fashionable; portrait busts, statues, statuettes, and plain and fancy ornaments of white Italian marble, executed by Americans of the "stonecutter" school or by foreign artists, were to be seen in the drawing rooms of the slavishly stylish. Even the homes of the humble were likely to contain plaster replicas, of very poor quality, turned out in mass fashion by the nineteenth-century "image cutters." This rage for sculpture seeped into political life and led to a close, and not wholly unnatural relationship, between art and politics. Party leaders were quick to see the potential in this development, and an effigy in any medium was considered an effective method of getting candidates and political newcomers before the "people."

Jones had executed several political commissions, including busts of Thomas Corwin and Zachary Taylor for the Whig Party of Ohio, in 1847 and 1848, and one of Lewis Cass for the Democrats of Louisiana, in 1848. He also did portrait busts of Thomas Ewing, Henry Clay, Salmon P. Chase, William Henry Harrison, Winfield Scott, and other prominent persons, in addition to other pieces of sculpture which attracted more than local attention.

After Lincoln's election, Jones was commissioned by a group of Ohio Republicans to go to Springfield and make a bust of the newly elected President. He wrote an account of his journey and experiences with Lincoln and Springfield society in later years, and published this in the *Cincinnati Commercial* of October 18, 1871, under the caption, "Recollections of Mr. Lincoln." Evidently this account was clipped and used by other newspapers, for Rufus Rockwell Wilson published the identical "Recollections" lifted from the *Sacramento Weekly Union*, November 4, 1871, in the form of a pamphlet, in 1934, using the title: *Memories of Lincoln by Thomas D. Jones*.

Two letters, written by Jones from Springfield while engaged in modeling Lincoln, were recently acquired for our Lincoln collection. They are of interest, because they give a close-up and very personal view of the President-elect in that critical period before his inauguration. The addressee is not named in the letters, the salutation consists of "My Dear Friend," but it is believed they were written to Thomas McMillan of Columbus. Judging from the tone in which they were pitched, McMillan was an intimate friend of Jones. They are long epistles and we quote below only those parts that pertain to Lincoln. The originals are faithfully transcribed without the use of *sic* to indicate ingrammaticisms:

St. Nicholas Hotel
Springfield Illinois Dec. 30/60.

Reached Springfield 6.0.clock Pm Chrismass day—Sent word to Mr Lincoln that I was in town, at the same time requesting him to say at what hour I could call on him—He named 9.0 clock the nex morning—I called, and was very cordially received—I presented Gov. Chase's letter first, for it was the first in order—after reading it, he remarked, "as strange as it may appear, I have never see Gov. Chase"—"I look upon him as the Moses that brought us out of the land of bondage, but he has not been as lucky as some of us in reaching the promised land." "I esteem him highly, very highly"—"be seated sir"—as much as I approved of his admiration of our friend, I was at the same time, to use the language of R. C. Parsons, of Cleveland, "I was astounded at the man's simplicity & modesty." In a few minutes, all arrangements were agreed upon about taking his bust, or at least, as far as the sittings were concerned—While conversing with him, he reminded me of Hallecks description of Connecticut—"It is a rough land of earth &c" To be brief, what little I have

seen of him, he will do to tie too—He is the man for the hour—and that includes *all* that can be said of any one—He reminds me of a rough block, of the old red primitive sand-stone—thoroughly tried by fire, and capable of enduring much more—The Union may be divided, before he is inaugurated, but he is the political Vulcan [?] that will weld it together again—at least, as far as I have been able to infer from his conversation,—his mind is fully made up on that point—He has all the *positive* qualities of a Statesman and Soldier, combined *with* the firmness of a Jackson, and the clear perception of a Clay—He will be president of thirty three States, and nothing less. That is *his* ultimatum, let demagogues wheedle one another as much as they may, What Lincoln swears to do, he will execute to the full letter of the law and the Constitution. After room hunting for several days, I was compelled to take a room in the St. Nicholas, a sort of Neil House on a small scale—It is the best, and cleanest House in town—I have made two studies of Mr Lincoln at my room—I will put up my clay on monday, or Newyears day—I want to make a thorough study of Mr Lincoln's head before I begin the clay model. I have a severe task before me. He is by far the most difficult subject that I have ever encountered—

St. Nicholas Hotel
Springfield Illinois
Feb. 11 1861

In reply to your question touching a foreign appointment, I spoke to Mr. Lincoln on the subject, and gave him a graphic description of your efforts in his cause &c—He replied that he would be happy to serve you, when applied to in the city of Washington, *where* (I know) he refers all of his friends. One of the strongest of Mr Lincoln's characteristics, is, his unfeigned gratitude to his friends, hence the great hold Gov. Chase has upon him, in consequence of his efforts in Lincoln's

behalf in 1858. If you are still on good terms with Gov. Chase, (which I sincerely hope you are) you can get almost anything you desire of Mr Lincoln through him. Do not fail to make *early* application—Do not write more than a page of this size to him—He hates long letters—long applications. He generally opened about seventy letters every morning in my room. He *read* all the *short* ones—laid all of the long ones aside. One morning he opened a letter of ten or twelve pages folio—he immediately returned it into the envelope—saying—“That man ought to be sent to the Penitentiary, or lunatic assylum”. When you write him, refer him to Gov. Chase and myself, and do not fail to call on him in Columbus—enquire after me—he may remember you from my description, but he will never forget you—a *young lady* on your arm at the same time will not harm you. I believe I have indicated the only true course to reach him, and he is approachable as a child—God bless him!—I hated to part with him this morning—I witnessed his shaking hands with his old friends and neighbors, for one half hour this morning—All he said to me was the *Point* of a good story I had told him last Wednesday—after he bid his wife and little boys “good-bye”. I saw Mrs Lincoln and her sons to the carriage that conveyed them back to the hotel. Mrs Lincoln remarked, “I regret we have not seen more of you this winter”, “but do not fail to come and see us, when you visit Washington.” Mrs Lincoln leaves this evening—you may see her in Columbus—She had intended to remain a week or so with us—but General Scott telegraphed last evening that she must accompany her husband for what reason, I know not. I have spent some very happy hours with Mr. Lincoln. He is such a perfect child of nature—so fond of fun—tells the best stories in the world, and more of them than any man I have ever met—He retained his self possession until last Saturday, when the uncertain future seemed to absorb his whole being.—it took two of my best stories

to wake him up—when he became as genial again as a summers morn—The only quiet retreat he had for some time before he left, was my room, where he could write, and read his letters in peace. Parts of his inaugural address, were written in my room.—leggs crossed—using one knee as a writing table I will not be able to finish my bust of Mr Lincoln before the first of March next. Hitherto I have mostly devoted my attention to the face and expression—The hair, and draperies are all indicated and want much labor on them to make them what they should be. My bust of Ewing was a great success, but my bust of Lincoln is a triumph, considering all the surrounding difficulties, and the character of my subject. While Mr Ewing's bust is grand and even expressive in repose—Mr Lincoln's is hard, liney, and nothing in repose—Care worn, or rather *thought* worn, as the face of old Dante, but *when* it is illuminated with thoughts or emotions, it is everything one could desire—To produce that illumination of the face has been my *chief* study, to say nothing of pose and arrangement of drapeys. I believe I *have caught* the right expression or treatment of his face—at least all of his intimate friends say so, and that it is the only likeness ever made of him—Even the best Photographs of him, give you no idea of the *man*. You shall judge of my success when you see it.

We do not know exactly when Jones terminated work on the clay model. Apparently it was his intention to complete it in Springfield, for the *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield) commented favorably on his partially finished work, in an issue of January 29, 1861, adding, "When the Bust is furnished [i.e., finished], an opportunity will be afforded our citizens to see it." Soon after the clay model was molded to his satisfaction, it was Jones's practice to make a plaster model before the clay had an opportunity to contract. Once the plaster was complete, the clay model was destroyed.

Two plaster busts of Lincoln by Jones, both possibly cast from the original clay model, are in existence, one in the Ohio State Museum and the other in the New York Historical Society. Both are inscribed: "T. D. Jones, Sculptor 1861."

In addition to the plaster busts of Lincoln, two others by Jones are known. One is a marble bust that is part of the Civil War Memorial in the rotunda of the capitol at Columbus, Ohio. This memorial, executed for the Soldiers' Memorial Society, was dedicated in January, 1871, but the marble bust of Lincoln was done long before the dedication. A bronze bust reputed to have been modeled by Jones from life, in 1864, was formerly in the collection of William Randolph Hearst. We have not been able to uncover any evidence that Lincoln posed for Jones more than the one period, in 1860-61, in Springfield. Jones made no mention of a second series of sittings in his "Recollections of Mr. Lincoln." It is our considered guess that all of his sculptured works of Lincoln stemmed from the one clay model finished in Springfield in 1861.

Some of the information relating to Jones has been obtained for these notes from a pamphlet compiled by Samuel L. Leffingwell: *Sketch of the Life and Labors of Thomas D. Jones, Sculptor, together with a list of his works and the date of their execution* (Columbus, Ohio, 1871). Included in this pamphlet is a section written by Jones telling "How Statues Are Made," in which he outlines his method of work step by step: first a charcoal or chalk sketch on paper, then the clay model, followed by the plaster cast. "When all of the sections made in plaster from the clay model are neatly joined together, so as to look like a complete whole, the plaster model then is ready to be transferred to the foundry to be cast in bronze, or taken from the

studio into the carver's shop, where it is copied into stone or marble, by absolute measurements." Jones summarized what could be termed his artistic credo in this manner: "This much is certain. It requires a man of brains to give the impress of mind to matter—that is to the canvas and marble All great works are, more or less, the reproduction of the artist or poet's second self."

Through correspondence or the intermediation of a friend, one other contact between Jones and Lincoln is recorded. On March 6, 1865, Lincoln addressed a note to his Secretary of State, William H. Seward, saying: "I have some wish that Thomas D. Jones of Cincinnati, and John J. Piatt, now in this city, should have some of those moderate sized consulates which facilitate artists a little [in] their profession. Please watch for chances." It is not recorded that Jones ever received an appointment.

Probably Jones's chief claim to lasting fame will be the "Lincoln" in the Civil War monument at Columbus. Edna Maria Clark, in *Ohio Art and Artists*, adequately summed up his rank as a sculptor: "He was a man of positive talent and originality, but always shows the lack of education." Certainly his conception of art was largely conditioned by the tastes and styles of his contemporaries.

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