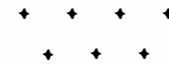


A SCULPTOR'S FORTUNES

Memoir by
Walker Hancock
with Edward Connery Lathem



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piece had been finished and all was silent upstairs, the "gentle sleep from Heaven" was still denied me, and the name Starbuck began to tickle my imagination. Soon this verse formed itself in my mind:

Over the fence, my little sheep
Let me count you as you leap.
I should be wrapped in slumber deep.
Even the star bucks are asleep.

Ten days later I was back in Ospedale Salvator Mundi for another operation — minor but painful, and one that caused me to miss Thanksgiving dinner at the academy. But I was released the following day, and I was soon ready for the strenuous round of activities that made up our life in Rome. Also, I was then able to get on with my major work of that interval: the full-size model of a statue of Vice President Alben W. Barkley for the statehouse at Frankfort, Kentucky.

Alas, as it developed, I was soon again within the walls of the Salvator Mundi — but this time not as a patient. Our dear friend Ethel Richardson was there, suffering terribly with emphysema. She soon died, and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery, not far from the grave of Keats. She had bequeathed me a sum of money nearly sufficient in those days to pay for Deanie's college education.

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Stone Mountain, Madison, Reunions, and a Marriage

MY WINTER'S WORK on the statue of Alben Barkley (the "Veep," as he was known) was well under way when I received a telegram that required my making an unexpected trip to Atlanta, for I was asked to interview the members of the Stone Mountain Memorial Association in regard to their proposed great tribute to the Southern Confederacy. The history of the Stone Mountain Memorial is well known: how Gutson Borglum aroused the enthusiasm of the Daughters of the Confederacy; how his ambitious scheme to carve a whole army in the great granite volcanic plug dwindled to a portraying of only the leaders of the Confederacy; how, when the head of Robert E. Lee was nearly finished, a disagreement with the ladies led him to blast his work off the mountainside and disappear; how Augustus Lukeman was, then, given the assignment to complete the task; and how the Great Depression and Lukeman's death halted the work when it had only been roughed out, with just the heads of Lee and Jefferson Davis finished.

I had seen the memorial in its unfinished state while I was on a tour through Georgia long after the carving had been abandoned. It had weathered so that the rough forms blended into the surrounding gray granite, creating an effect that had something mysterious and even evocative about it. By the late fifties interest in completing the memorial was revived, and the Stone Mountain Memorial Association was formed. A very promising start was made with the appointment of an advisory board that consisted of some of the most distinguished sculptors in the country, with Lamar Dodd, a native of Georgia and an accomplished painter, as chairman. The board determined that the carving should be left as it was, in its weathered state, and that in front of it there would be erected a new great memorial sculpture, with an imposing landscape setting.

Nine sculptors were invited to submit proposals for the new design, each sculptor being required to choose a landscape architect with whom he would

collaborate. I was one of the nine, and I selected Ralph Griswold, head of the Griswold, Winters & Swan firm of Pittsburgh, to work with me. We developed a scheme about which I was very enthusiastic, Ralph providing the inspiration. Our models and plans had been submitted just before I left for Rome for my 1962-63 term of residency at the academy. And it was in February of 1963, after we had been back at the academy for nearly six months, that I received this telegram that informed me our design had been selected and advised me I should come at once to Atlanta in order to confer with the people there about how we should at this juncture proceed.

I flew promptly to New York, and there I boarded a plane for Atlanta. As I stepped aboard the Atlanta flight I was surprised to see a pile of newspapers, each with a large picture of my Stone Mountain model on its front page. I soon learned that the New York papers had been shut down by a strike and that the airline that flew to Atlanta was substituting for the *New York Times*, which was usually provided to its passengers, copies of the *Atlanta Constitution*.

My initial meeting in Atlanta embraced further surprises. I was confronted by a group of local politicians, as well as by reporters from the press. The politicians announced emphatically that "the people of Georgia" insisted the carving already begun should be finished before anything else was done. The reporters, on the other hand, seemed intent upon learning why a Yankee sculptor should be commissioned to finish the Confederate memorial. I saw that the politicians' position was going to cause a huge problem. However, I felt I had an easy answer for the reporters, and to them I proceeded to list all of my ancestral associations with the South, saying that both of my grandfathers had fought in the Confederate army, that my father was one of the highest officers in the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and that my mother had been very active in the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Confident that journalistic attention to this issue had thus been successfully dealt with and diffused, I was startled the following morning to see a headline on the front page of the *Constitution* that read, "YANKEE SCULPTOR CLAIMS TO BE A REBEL."

A night's brooding over the necessity of finishing the memorial's carving gave me my first inkling of the difficulties that would, in fact, plague me for the next fifteen years. Perhaps I should have withdrawn politely. But when Ralph Griswold and I met again with the committee, I agreed to redesign the memorial, making the finished carving the center of the scheme, but allowing for an

ambitious sculptural treatment at the sides. I was encouraged to find that the two men with whom I would primarily be dealing were Ben Fortson, Georgia's secretary of state, and Phil Campbell, the secretary of agriculture. Fortson lived in a wheelchair, a hunting accident in his youth having left him a paraplegic. However, he was extremely active and had a great sense of humor; one could not think of him as handicapped. Both men were clearly dedicated to seeing the project through, and both remained my friends throughout. I signed an agreement making me solely responsible for all aesthetic aspects of the work, but I was to have no say as to the carvers or other contractors who would be involved.

After four days in Atlanta, I headed back to Rome, taking the opportunity to have a quick look at Cape Ann and home en route. I spent the night as a guest of Lyde Cox in his heavenly place, "Crow Island," at Manchester, only ten miles from my Lanesville studio. It snowed during the night of my arrival, and I shall never forget the delight I felt in looking out upon the gleaming white shore and the dark ocean, enjoying the contrast with the tame Italian winter to which I would be returning.

Confronting anew Stone Mountain's design problem, Ralph Griswold developed an ingenious plan that would allow for the carving to be the center of the composition and that would give to it the required importance by framing it with two towers, on ziggurats, well forward at either side. (Though the size of a football field, the carving, without such a framing provision, seemed insignificant on the vast surface of the mountain.) The towers were to be in bronze, formed of flame-like shapes, open, full of light, and embodying figure compositions representing various aspects of Southern ideology and culture. There would be a reflecting pool below the carving, with terraced walks on either side of the approach. A superb landscape design, the concept was enthusiastically approved by the association.

Starting on our new scheme, my initial problem following my return from Rome was primarily the design of the towers. That was difficult enough, but it also involved an enormous amount of research, to find appropriate subjects for the figure compositions. And I had not realized what a problem Augustus Lukeman's model would present. Though a very competent and experienced sculptor, he had made the heads of the three equestrian figures much too large. Carried out exactly according to the Lukeman model, they would have had the proportions of small boys. Accordingly, it would be necessary to alter the

model, and, as two of the heads had been finished, the changes would have to be made in the bodies of the men and in the horses. To add to the complications, in roughing out the stone on the mountain not enough material had been left for the horses' bellies and legs to be done in the corrected proportion, and the only solution to this seemed to be to leave the lower part of the carving and the surrounding area in a quite rough form, as if the group were growing out of the stone.

I had Lukeman's model shipped to my studio in Lanesville, and there made the necessary corrections without changing in any way his design. (I did have to model a new head for the figure of "Stonewall" Jackson, as there was not enough stone left for his profile. I simply turned him somewhat toward the viewer, in order to bring his nose within limits of the available material.) A contractor was employed to enlarge these figures on the mountainside. This was done by a kind of geometric pointing and the use of kerosene torches — a new technique in which a thermo-jet torch was employed. The torch could be adjusted to any temperature up to four thousand degrees. When such intense heat strikes granite, the moisture in the rock is suddenly converted into steam, literally exploding the surface crystals or flaking them off. A vigorous young man named Roy Faulkner was brought in to help. I was told that he had been a U. S. Marine and a steeplejack, but that he had had no previous experience in "carving" with torches. Nevertheless, he soon mastered the technique, and before long he entirely dominated the work on the mountainside.

It was necessary for me to make frequent visits to Stone Mountain, in order to supervise the work, but I could not, of course, move to Georgia and be present constantly. During one of my absences the head of Lee's horse, Traveller, was wrongly placed, and I had to give him, consequently, a different neck. And another thing that happened in my absence distressed me even more. I returned one day to find that the rough stone surrounding, which I had counted on to make the figures seem to be growing out of the mountain, had been destroyed by a sharp framing line cut around the whole carving. Having made a great point with the carvers that this should never be allowed, I was distressed and embarrassed to learn from Roy that it had been done on orders from my good friend Ben Fortson. Obviously, there was no use in my protesting at this stage that my contract made me solely responsible for all aesthetic considerations. The damage was irreparably done.

My supervision, during the periods when I was actually present at Stone Mountain, was carried out with the help of a walkie-talkie. I could, thus, stand at a great distance and by radio direct every move of the carver. I made frequent trips up to the carving itself, which was reached by elevator and a movable platform some four hundred feet above the ground level. I did enjoy those excursions, the view, and the close contact with the gigantic features of the three heroes.

But the towers, rather than the mountainside, occupied most of my time. I completed the sketch model in bronze; then, a scale model in polyester; and, finally, at New York, with the help of professional enlargers, the full-size plaster model (sixty-five feet tall) from which two bronze casts were to be made. While all this was going on I worked on the figures and groups that would be set into the towers, finishing the two main figures (each more than sixteen feet tall).

Ultimately, it was announced by the association that all was ready for casting the towers in bronze. Arrangements had been made with a foundry in England to do the work, and that firm had added to their building in order to accommodate these huge castings. Then, a very short time later, I was told that the towers would not be cast at all; that all the money that was to have paid for their casting had been spent on lawyers' fees. It seems a vast amount of work had gone into wording the contract entered into with the foundry, but that a final agreement was never reached and that costly litigation had followed. The matter was a complete mystery to me — except the hard fact that all our work had gone for nothing.

Ralph Griswold by now had retired. His successor, William Swain, designed a substitute plan that would preserve the idea of the terraces and provide a setting for the two figures I had already completed for the towers. And that is what one sees at Stone Mountain today.

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The research that must be done before undertaking a monumental statue can be very time-consuming. When, however, I was commissioned in 1972 to do the seated marble portrait of James Madison for the massive new supplementary building of the Library of Congress, my approach to carrying out the assignment was greatly aided by the library's providing me (even before the contract for my doing the statue had been signed) a complete list of life por-

During the late 1950s a new approach to the challenge of the memorial was launched. The state made plans to develop the area around the memorial as a park, and the Stone Mountain Memorial Association was formed to resolve the problem of the unfinished sculpture. Lamar Dodd, of the University of Georgia department of art, was chairman of the Association's advisory board. During the spring of 1961 he brought a number of sculptors to see the unfinished monument. They were to report to him their ideas for completing it, and for setting up a competition to select the sculptor best equipped to design and carry out a plan. By autumn the Association had drawn up the competition specifications, and Hancock asked the architectural landscape firm of Griswold, Winters & Swain to collaborate with him on his entry. They submitted their large model and supporting documents in September 1962, just as Hancock was leaving for another stay in Rome as sculptor-in-residence at the American Academy.⁶⁰ There he learned that their plan had been selected by the jury from among the nine submissions.

Winning was a mixed blessing, if a blessing at all. The project dragged on for fifteen years. The consensus among the sculptors whose advice had been sought was to leave Lukeman's unfinished carving as it was, and the competitors developed their plans on that basis. But when Hancock arrived in Atlanta to begin work, he was told that "the people of Georgia" would insist that the relief be completed, so an enormous amount of time and money was devoted to carving the world's largest stone sketch. Much of the work was done by Roy Faulkner, an intrepid steeplejack turned stonecutter.⁶¹ The work progressed faster with modern kerosene torches than it had with the traditional carving methods of Borglum's day, and each year the newspapers announced that this would be the year when the project was completed. Not until 1970 was this prediction correct, however. Meanwhile, Hancock worked on the memorial he had proposed for the foreground.

For all its size, the relief was overwhelmed by its vast setting. Hancock and the landscape architects had proposed to punctuate this vastness by placing, well forward of the relief, two flanking 65-foot bronze towers on wide, stepped, circular granite bases. The towers would appear to be woven of bronze branches, with symbolic figures, such as *Valor* and

Sacrifice, placed among them to signify the ideals of the South. Inscriptions at the bases would quote the leaders and those whom they led using, for example, words written by a Confederate soldier shortly before his death: "Men who saw the night coming upon them somehow acted as if they stood at the edge of dawn."⁶² Hancock devoted years to gathering appropriate themes and giving them sculptural expression, but once again the Stone Mountain project was doomed by insufficient funds. The towers were never cast in bronze. Two of the figures intended for them, a soldier raising a broken sword and a mother and child, were cast at full size (over 16 feet) but were installed in a landscaped setting that had little in common with the design that had won the competition in 1963.

At times the Stone Mountain memorial required an all-consuming effort on Hancock's part, but during many unpredictable hiatuses, he was able to work on other projects. In addition to medals, busts, and statues, he completed a variety of ecclesiastical subjects. He was especially pleased to be offered these commissions because they permitted him to draw on images from his encyclopedic memory of centuries of religious sculpture and used them to create something fresh and appropriate. The first of these opportunities was at All Saints Chapel at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, where a figure of *Christ Preaching* was wanted for the reredos. The work had been delayed by the Stone Mountain competition and by Hancock's appointment for the second time as resident sculptor at Rome. It was there that he completed the model. He then supervised its carving by the Palli family firm at Pietrasanta, near Lucca.

When he returned from Rome in 1963, he finished his only work in wood, *Saint Michael*, for Visitation Academy in Saint Louis. A small statue of Ulrich Zwingli that he had modeled for the Episcopal cathedral in Washington, D.C. was being carved in limestone by Roger Morigi, master carver for the cathedral. The Zwingli was one of a series of figures, commissioned by the cathedral over many years, to go above the arches that separate the aisle chapels. Each figure, somewhat less than a meter high, is supported on a corbel at the point of the arch. For Zwingli's corbel, Hancock modeled the facade of his church in Zurich. Three weeks after the dedication of the Zwingli statue on 2 January 1965, Hancock was asked to model Martin Luther.

for the opposite corbel which had already been carved with allusions to Luther's 95 theses. It is entirely coincidental that these two figures flank the chapel dedicated to the memory of Robert Edward Lee and Thomas Jonathan Jackson, whose likenesses were at the time being carved on Stone Mountain.

Hancock's next assignment from the Washington Cathedral was a difficult one: the central figure for the reredos. The iconography of the sanctuary, set during the early planning of the building, is based on the *Te Deum*, the great hymn that has inspired so many composers. The theme of the reredos derives from another hymn of praise, the *Sanctus*: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. At the center is Christ in Majesty, representing the Lord God of Hosts, with all the company of heaven represented in much smaller scale in the hundred surrounding niches. By the time Hancock was asked to create the central figure, the rest of the reredos was virtually complete. The problems were enormous. From the nave, the reredos read as an intricate Gothic screen, yet Hancock was to supply a focal point that would be legible from a distance. The larger scale of the central figure resulted in larger shadows, for no way could be found to diffuse the primary source of light. The warm, yellowish Caen stone of the earlier parts was no longer available, and tinting limestone to match still left the contrast of a different texture. Hancock worked for four years to overcome these problems, even wishing in one letter to the clerk of the works that American taste would permit the use of polychrome, which would mitigate the effects of the harsh lighting and pull the composition together.⁶³ He made numerous adjustments to the plaster model while it was set into the reredos, calling on his extensive knowledge of altarpieces throughout Europe. He finally achieved a figure that works in its difficult surroundings, but it does not quite triumph.

The next project presented difficulties of another sort. Francis B. Sayre, Dean of the Cathedral, wished to have a chapel open for prayer at all times, but vandals were destroying the one in use. He decided to build a small chapel within the covered exterior walkway on the north side of the cathedral, and asked Hancock to design a vandal-proof altarpiece, one with no thin, easily broken edges. The sculptor went back to the theme of the Good Shepherd and created a high relief, half-length figure that conveys both strength and compassion. Roger Morigi,



The Majestas (Christ in Majesty), 1968-1973; The Washington Cathedral, Washington, D.C.

originality of the ideas that he expresses in vigorous groups of interlocking figures, while other students have established reputations for monuments, statues, and portraits from life. Some work in relief, designing the nation's coins and commemorative medals.

Even as two generations of students invest their sculpture with the skill and vision Hancock helped them acquire, he continues to produce his own new work at the Lanesville studio. He has just returned from the foundry where he made final