



Focus on: Taft's Lincoln the Lawyer Statue

Lorado Zakok Taft was born on April 29, 1860 in Elmwood, Illinois. He was the first of four children, two sons and two daughters, born to Don Carlos and Mary Lucy Foster Taft.

Background

Don Carlos Taft was an academically distinguished man who graduated from Amherst College and then three years later from the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, prior to moving to Elmwood where he met and married Mary. In 1871, Don Carlos was appointed to a position at what was then the Illinois Industrial University and moved the family to Champaign, at which time Taft was eleven years old. Upon coming to the University, Don Carlos became the college's first geology professor.

The family's house was built in 1873 at 601 E. John St., Champaign (now Swanlund Building). This was where Taft lived for most of his adolescence until the age of twenty, which included the time he spent earning his Bachelor and Master degrees from the University of Illinois. The Taft's owned the home until 1882. The property passed through several owners until Prof. Charles Rolfe bought it in 1887. Rolfe owned the property until 1949, when the University purchased it. It was initially used as a Speech and Hearing Clinic (1950-1974) and the office of Campus Parking (1974-1981). It was moved to 1401 S. Maryland Drive, Urbana in 1981.

At the age of twenty, Taft went to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France where he studied art for five years. His art education was based on the study of classical antiquity and on the nude. The school itself was rigidly organized as a government supported institution. Taft only had to pay for boarding costs, the

school had neither tuition charges nor fees. His studies at the school were significant because of the opportunity it offered him to be at the center of western culture and art. He received a Prix d'Atelier award for being the best student in his class before he left Paris. While in France, Taft also actively participated with the McCall Protestant Mission. He taught Sunday School, Bible study classes, and English.

When he returned to the United States in 1886, Taft established himself in Chicago. In 1906, he rented studio space from the University of Chicago, which he called Midway Studios. He began teaching at the Chicago Art Institute as he slowly, but confidently progressed into an internationally known sculptor. He retired as an instructor for the Institute in 1911, but remained a lecturer up until the time of his death.

Much of the work Taft sculpted during his time at the Art Institute was in the form of portraiture and military monuments. These included about a dozen civil war monuments and grave memorials in Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and New York. Then in 1893, two works, *The Sleep of Flowers* and *The Awakening of the Flowers*, gained him national attention and recognition at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. These figures were graceful, intertwining, and delicate in form.

He then modeled *The Mountain and the Prairie* and *The Solitude of the Soul* for the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. Both attributed to the rise of Taft's success, the latter was used as the subject of several period poems.

Taft's national reputation provided commissions all over the country and opened doors for him to publish books, articles,



The Urbana Park District has restored the Lincoln Statue with the help of a Save Outdoor Sculpture (SOS) grant. PACA provided a grant for landscaping the area around the statue.

lectures, and other literature. In 1919, Taft was named a nonresident professor of art at the University of Illinois, where he frequently was seen packing the halls of lecture rooms. The University established the "Lorado Taft Lectureship" to ensure that he would come to campus every spring for a series of lectures.

After 1910, during his later years, Taft worked on larger monuments and commemorative fountains. These pieces demanded more spacious settings and larger proportions than his earlier works. His first fountain was *The Fountain of the Great Lakes*, followed by *The Thatcher Memorial Fountain*, *Fountain of Creation*, and *Fountain of Time*. During this period there is a transition in the execution of Taft's traditional style. There is

A consistent preference for closed monumental forms; a rejection of a

rather unmodified realism for a broader and more simplified treatment of surface and detail; a predilection for the themes of human significance; a talent for monumental schemes; and an ability to adapt to varied kinds of sculptural problems.

It was also at this time that Taft began to sculpt with an American nostalgia, using less and less clay and more and more bronze and stone. He wanted to give something back to his native land through his artwork. He deemed that, "one owes something more than taxes to the community...finer than being an artist is to be an artist-citizen." These characteristics are vividly seen in Taft's *The Pioneers* (1928). "...[I]n his final phase of work [Taft] had a tendency to return to earlier ideas...His work of earlier periods portrayed a classic-allegoric female figure, which has now become less ideal, more human, less Renaissance, more Midwestern."

Urbana's Lincoln

This more simplified display of Taft's traditional sculpting style was at its height when J.C. Blair approached Taft to sculpt a memorial statue of Abraham Lincoln in Urbana, Illinois. Blair, a long time friend of Taft's from their University days, was a professor of horticulture and chairman of the Urbana Park District Board. He was also a trustee, along with Franklin Boggs and George Bennett, of Mary Cunningham's living will. Mrs. Cunningham's will directed that the trustees,

...sell [the Green Street property] and convey at their discretion without authority or approval of any court and to use the proceeds to erect in Urbana a monument and memorial to Abraham Lincoln with discretion as to location, kind, character, and nature.

Judge and Mrs. Cunningham were prominent founding members of the City of Urbana. During their lives they had befriended Lincoln while he worked the Eighth Judicial Circuit through Urbana between 1837-1848. The friendship between Lincoln and the Cunninghams lasted through his presidential days, until his untimely death in 1864. This fed their desire to establish a memorial to their friend, Abraham Lincoln.

After much encouragement from Blair, Taft agreed to sculpt the statue despite the fact that his commission, \$10,000 acquired

from the sale of the Green Street property, would be less than half of what he usually received for bronze work. He began his initial work on Lincoln in the fall of 1924, writing to a friend in the spring of 1925,

I have thought for years I would never undertake a 'Lincoln.' I felt that nothing remained to be said: [Augustus] Saint Gauden had made it impossible [1887 bronze sculpture of Abraham Lincoln in Lincoln Park, Chicago]. To my surprise, I find myself busy...on a working model of 'Lincoln' which is new and promising...the important work which it threatens to become.

The ten-foot tall bronze *Lincoln* statue depicts a very simple, humanistic image of the young Abraham Lincoln, as he was during his circuit lawyer days when he first met the Cunninghams. Taft wrote of his *Lincoln* saying,

He was not 'the martyred president' all of his life. I need not show him as a man of sorrows, but as an earnest good humored orator, stating his case. I shall model him leaning slightly backward, supported by both hands on an imagined desk.

Location

The statue was originally sited facing southeast at the southeast corner of the Urbana Lincoln Hotel, now the Historic Lincoln Hotel, on Race Street in Urbana. *Lincoln* was dedicated at this location on July 3, 1927. Park District Board Commissioners and Taft dedicated the statue on behalf of the Cunninghams. The location at the hotel was only temporary while Park District Commissioners obtained the granite pedestal and molded base.

On December 4, 1927, *Lincoln* was moved to the east entrance area of Carle Park where it was first set upon its pedestal and base. The statue was then placed facing due east in the center of the same larger rectangular tract of land that exists today. In 1954, the statue was moved approximately twenty feet north from the 1927 location to the triangular tract where it presently rests. This second and final move was at the request of Taft who had always envisioned *Lincoln* facing southeast with the sun constantly shining upon the statue's face.

Other Works

Other local Taft sculptures include the

Alma Mater bronze statue (1929), the original plaster cast of *The Pioneers* (1928) inside the Main Library, and *The Sons and Daughters of Deucalion and Pyrrha* (1933) limestone figures on the University campus. The *Alma Mater* is done in much the same, simplified, classical style as *Lincoln*. Her outstretched arms welcome the public to the University as she stands by her throne with Learning and Labor at her sides.

The Sons and Daughters of Deucalion and Pyrrha is done in a different style of art than the above statues. They were originally intended as part of an elaborate sculpture park that Taft had conceived for a space near his Midway Studios. The University instead bought them. While the *Daughters* are presently at their original location in front of the University Library, the *Sons* were relocated from the north side of Foellinger Auditorium to the south side sometime after 1980.

Taft is also known for several works within the State of Illinois including the bronze *Fountain of the Great Lakes* (1913) in Grant Park, *Fountain of Time* on the University of Chicago campus at Jackson Park in Chicago, and *Blackhawk* (1911) above the Rock River in Oregon. His last piece was the *Lincoln and Douglas Memorial* tablet (1936) in Quincy.

Taft is nationally known for works such as his *The Solitude of the Soul* exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition, the *Columbus Fountain* in front of Union Station in Washington D.C., and the *Thatcher Memorial* in Denver (1918)

He is internationally known for his sculptural work at the main entrance of the Horticulture Building at the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Notably, his Midway Studios at 6016 S. Ingleside Avenue in Chicago has been listed as a National Historic Landmark. The studios' significance statement reads "From 1906 to 1929, these were the studios of Lorador Taft (1860-1936), sculptor of realistic works of monumental scale, art teacher, and author. His studios are now owned by the University of Chicago." Taft died at age 76 in Chicago, leaving behind his wife, Ada Bartlett Taft, and three daughters.

This article was taken from the National Register Nomination prepared by UI graduate student, Lauren Kerestes. The statue was listed on March 10, 2004.

Postcard from Detroit

Several months ago I was contacted by Carolyn Mosher from Detroit, Michigan, who is leading a group that is planning to open a "non-profit" architectural salvage warehouse. In April, Carolyn visited the PACA warehouse to see our operation. She invited me to come to Detroit to make a presentation to help gain support for her efforts.

Carolyn arranged for me to stay at the Inn on Ferry Street, on the campus of Wayne State and a block away from the Detroit Art Institute. Elena Fracassa, one of the board members, picked me up and gave me a tour of the downtown. This was important since the next day 1.2 million people would be there to celebrate the Piston's winning the NBA Championship. After dinner we toured a few more areas of Detroit and neighboring Gross Isle. The next morning I was picked up by Becky Binno Savage and joined by Carolyn and two board members. Becky is an active Historic Planner and is the President of the Detroit Area Art Deco Society. We toured numerous historic districts and countless endangered buildings. In fact, Detroit has 83 designated historic districts. Becky pointed out that Detroit is hosting the Super Bowl in 2006 and there is added incentive to "clean up" Detroit. This could mean the creation of a number of parking lots at the expense of up to 20 historic buildings in the downtown.

A lunch meeting was arranged where I met Doug McIntosh. Doug is an architect and acting President of Preservation Wayne. Preservation Wayne is metropolitan Detroit's oldest and largest non-profit historic preservation organization, which

provides services to historic home and property owners and the community at large. Preservation Wayne works to promote the preservation and restoration of historic homes, landmarks, and districts throughout metropolitan Detroit and is influential with a number of the local preservation groups. I had been told that it was important to get Doug's support for the project. I would like to think that I might have helped alleviate some of his concerns.

The subject of my talk for the evening had been left pretty much up to me. I started to get a little nervous when Mike showed me the *Happenings Section* of the *Detroit MetroTimes* that listed the following event: "How Architectural Salvage Can Save Detroit. Sponsored by Architectural Salvage Warehouse of Detroit and Cityscape Detroit, 6:30, Thursday, June 17, 2004 at Wayne State University. This unique presentation will discuss the virtues of rescuing material from buildings slated for demolition. The resale of rescued materials can support efforts of preservation groups working to restore Detroit's historic structures." I was ready for this challenge with the help of Power-Point.

I can't remember too much about the talk, however. I gave a brief history of PACA and highlighted how and why the salvage operation has been successful. I pointed to a number of PACA projects over the years and how, with salvage profits, we have established a number of programs to help raise awareness for historic preservation in east-central Illinois. I looked up at the clock and it was 7:25 and time for the last slide. As the questions began, I looked around and counted about 75 people in attendance. Someone mentioned that the



The Michigan Central Depot was built in 1913 and has been vacant since 1989. Plans are to convert it to a new police headquarters. From forgottendetroit.com.

Mayor had proposed 1,300 demolitions per year. I just thought if they only got 10% that would be full time job for a crew year round! The question session lasted for an hour, until I eventually wore them out. Later, over some beers at a local watering hole, Elena said that I had had an audience that included "key and influential" people from the City Council, state government, and local preservation groups.

I enjoyed my stay in Detroit, and learned a lot thanks to my gracious hosts. I wish the group well. In the next newsletter I will share my impressions of the Historic York Architectural Warehouse in York, Pennsylvania.

On the road with Rich Cahill, Salvage Co-Chair

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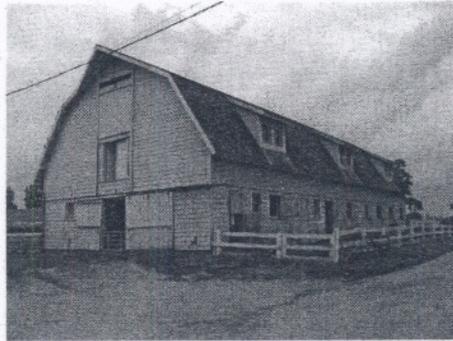
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UIUC Sheep Barn Disposal

The University of Illinois will soon be offering for relocation the east confinement wing of the South Farms Animal Husbandry Sheep Barn (UIUC Bldg. #811), located east of the intersection of First Street and East St. Mary's Road in Champaign, to a person(s) who is willing to reassemble it at an alternate location. This 1912, 90 by 36 foot, gambrel roof, wood frame/clad building contains first-level confinement space and a second-level loft. The Sheep Barn is considered historic, potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, for its association with the University's South Farms operations and University agricultural research.

Although not specifically set, the window for actual disassembly and site clearance will be brief and may be limited to two to three weeks in September 2004. Successful proposers will need to present a disassembly/reassembly plan, fulfill all UIUC requirements, and be prepared to work in an expedited manner with the UIUC Facilities & Services Office of Planning and the Preservation Services Division of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

The formal advertisement period for proposals concerning disassembly and relocation of the property is anticipated to begin on or about 15 July 2004. A complete project informational package will be available by the same date. Interested proposers can submit contact information to UIUC project planner Kevin Duff at 217/244-0344 or kevind@uiuc.edu to be added to the project informational package email/mailling list.



The 1912 UI Sheep Barn on the South Farms is available for relocation this fall.

Preservation Conference

"Restore America: Communities at a Crossroads" is the theme of the National Preservation Conference to be held Sept. 28 to Oct. 3, in Louisville, Ky. Sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the conference will provide know-how, innovative ideas, and help for people involved in saving our nation's historic places and revitalizing its communities. Contact the National Trust at www.nthpconference.org for information.

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PACA Newsletter

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