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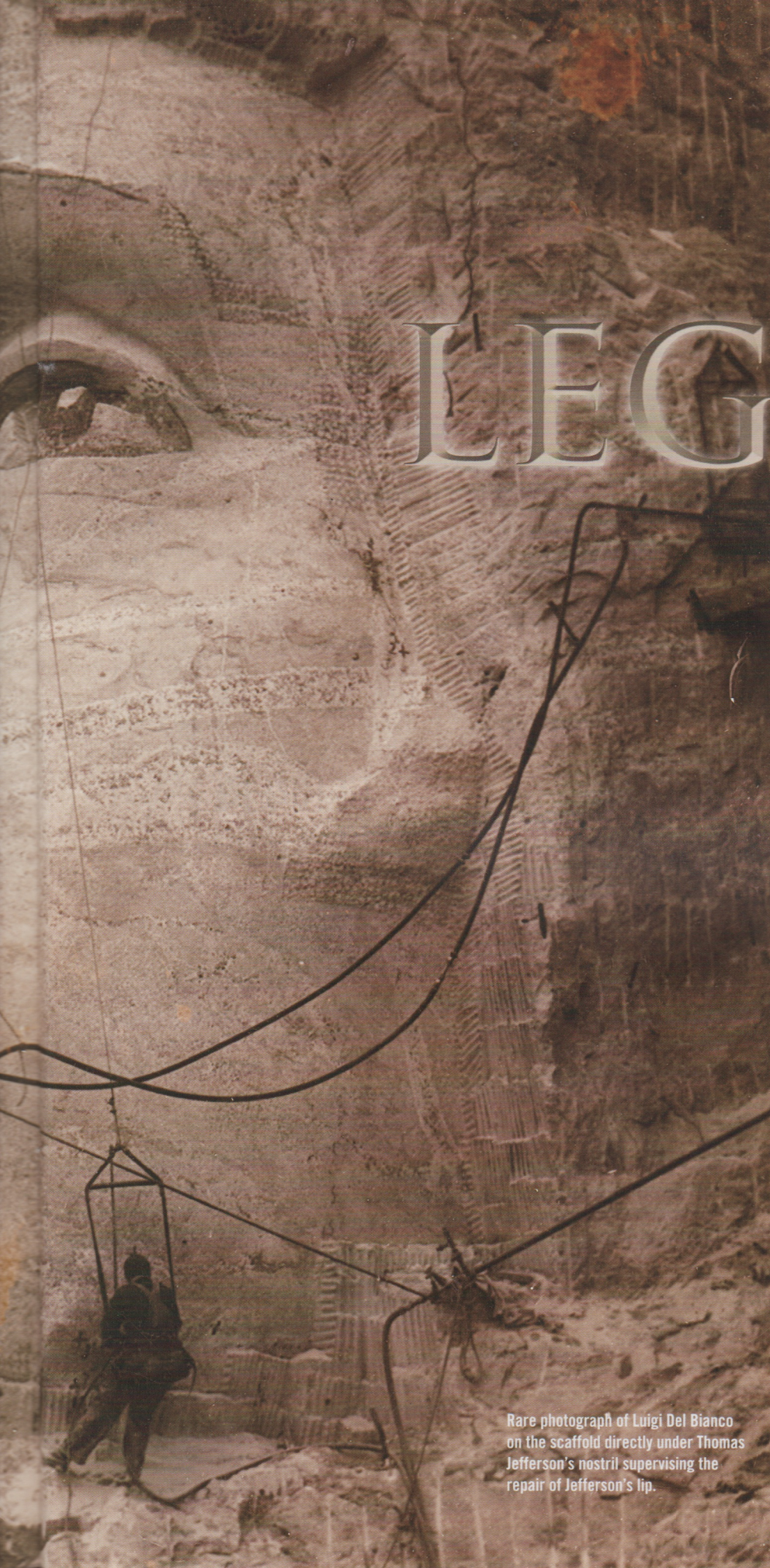
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# LEGACY CARVED INTO STONE

Lou Del Bianco Crusades to Correct His Grandfather's Place in History

*By Douglas Gladstone*

History has not treated Luigi Del Bianco kindly.

An immigrant from Meduno, Italy, Del Bianco was already a seasoned stone carver when he came to America in 1909 to live with his cousins in Barre, Vt. Having trained in both Venice as well as Vienna, Austria, his cousins told him he could find plenty of work as a skilled carver here in the States.

And find work he did. Throughout the 1920's, Del Bianco assisted the famous sculptor and designer Gutzon Borglum with the Governor Hancock Memorial, in South Carolina, as well as at Stone Mountain in Georgia, and the Wars of America Memorial in Newark, N.J. ▶

Rare photograph of Luigi Del Bianco on the scaffold directly under Thomas Jefferson's nostril supervising the repair of Jefferson's lip.

But if you're not familiar with Del Bianco's name, you're not alone. Although he worked as the chief carver on what is arguably the most iconic of American monuments—the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota—you'd be hard pressed to find even anecdotal mentions of Del Bianco's contributions to the famous "Shrine of Democracy" in most history books and scholarly publications.

For instance, in what is widely considered to be the definitive book on the artistic and engineering dynamics that went into the creation of Mount Rushmore—the late Rex Allan Smith's "The Carving of Mount Rushmore"—there is not a single mention of Del Bianco.

Similarly, in his thoroughly researched master's thesis, entitled "A Socioeconomic Study Exploring the Immigration of Artisan Stone Carvers from Italy to the United States Circa 1830-1920," Adjunct Professor Russ Joseph Morisi, of the College of Staten Island, doesn't mention Del Bianco. "I just never came across any information on Luigi," acknowledges Morisi. "But I wasn't really surprised. Stone carvers were never credited for anything."

Even the United States National Park Service (NPS)—the federal agency charged with supervising and administering the monument—doesn't tout Del Bianco's work on the memorial. Instead, says the stone carver's grandson, 50-year-old Lou Del Bianco, of Port Chester, N.Y., the agency's policy is to acknowledge all 400 men who worked on the monument as a group, regardless of their titles or contributions.

"My (late) uncle Caesar was very passionate about his Papa's contribution to Mount Rushmore," continues Lou Del Bianco, a professional storyteller who has been performing a 45-minute, one-man show about Luigi's life and work, "In the Shadow of the Mountain," for the last three years. "He was a very funny man but very serious about the omission of his father from many of the published books about Rushmore. I can still hear my uncle shouting, 'It's like talking about the Yankees and not mentioning Joe DiMaggio!'"

Lou actually performed his show at Mount Rushmore on July 3, 2011. "It was surreal," says Lou, adding that standing in the same studio where his grandfather had worked on models of the presidential faces "was just a more profound experience for me than I ever thought it was going to be."

According to Amy Bracewell, the former historian and education coordinator for Mount Rushmore National Memorial, "Luigi Del Bianco was one of many assistants to Borglum. Gutzon Borglum invited many of his colleagues and co-workers from his home studio in Connecticut to join him on his Mount Rushmore project. Some of them stayed on for a short time and some remained involved in the project for many years.

"Mr. Del Bianco was one of these artists that joined Borglum from their time in Connecticut. One of the history publications cites at least four or five of these artisans that Borglum invited to the project."

Author Carol Hagedron's "Why Is Mount Rushmore Carved in South Dakota?" identifies the three other professional carvers, besides Del Bianco, as William S. Tallman, Joseph Bruner and Hugo Villa. Villa preceded Del Bianco as the chief carver before Borglum reportedly fired him over a dispute regarding where the sculpted face of Thomas Jefferson should be located.

"This is all I know of Mr. Del Bianco's involvement with the project," said Bracewell, in an email prior to becoming the site manager for Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park, in Virginia.

However, Borglum's papers in the Library of Congress and the National Archives in Washington, D.C., tell a far different story. In them, it is clear how much he valued the work of Luigi, or as he affectionately called him, "Bianco." Here is an entry dated June 3, 1933: "Bianco has all of Villa's ability plus power and honesty and dependability. We could double our progress if we could have two like Bianco."

And here is an entry dated July 30, 1935: "All drilling of all kinds, roughing, finishing and carving of features must ▶



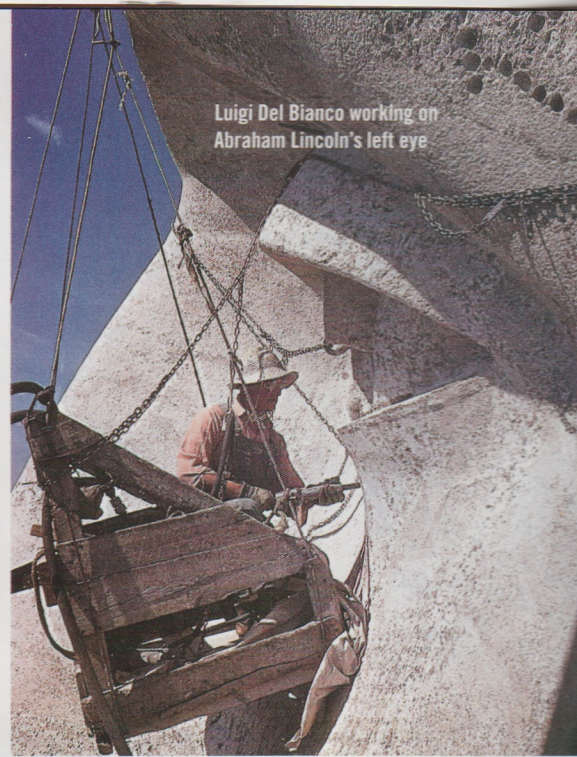
Luigi Del Bianco in Gutzon Borglum's studio at Mount Rushmore with the models for George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Borglum originally planned to make Rushmore faces and torsos, but didn't due to lack of funding and skilled laborers, and faulty rock.



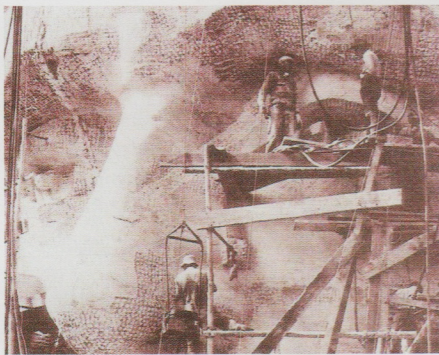
Luigi Del Bianco and a relative, Luigia Del Bianco, at his home in Meduno, Italy, on one of his many trips back to the Province of Pordenone.



Then six-year-old Lou Del Bianco and his grandfather, Luigi, circa 1969, shortly before the elder Del Bianco passed away.



Luigi Del Bianco working on Abraham Lincoln's left eye



Luigi Del Bianco and Gutzon Borglum (right) discuss how to make Abraham Lincoln's left pupil catch the sunlight as it travels across the sky.



Photo courtesy of Jananne Abel, Westmore News

Lou Del Bianco with the marble bust his late grandfather, Luigi, who carved it himself in 1921 when he was 29-years-old.

be directed by the chief stone carver and his directions followed. The chief carver will be held responsible for the ways and the means for removing and finishing the sculpture.... I have appointed Luigi Bianco for this most important task."

In fact, in one of the only books that does heap praise on Del Bianco, Judith St. George's "The Mount Rushmore Story," he is credited with single-handedly saving the face of Jefferson. "He patched the crack in Jefferson's lip with a foot deep piece of granite held in place by pins—the only patch on the whole sculpture, and one that is hard to detect even close up," writes St. George, who subsequently noted that, "with the exception of Luigi Del Bianco, few of the carvers worked out."

He also carved the life-like eyes of Abraham Lincoln. In a 1966 interview, Luigi told the Yonkers Herald Statesman that "the eye of Lincoln had to look just right from many miles distant. I know every line and ridge, each small bump and all the details of that head so well."

Says Lou of his grandfather's unique contributions to Mount Rushmore: "He was more than a worker, that's obvious. Why can't the Park Service see that?"

"I have such pride and love for him, even though I only knew him for

such a short time," adds Lou of Luigi, who died on January 20, 1969, of accelerated silicosis that was brought on, in part, by his not wearing a mask while working at the monument. "His lungs had turned to granite by the time he died."

But it is not just pride in his paternal relative that motivates Lou. Lambasting what he calls the pejorative image of Italian Americans that reality shows such as "Mob Wives" and "Jersey Shore" helped perpetuate, Lou says that Luigi "can be seen as a new, refreshing and positive symbol of what it means to be an Italian American."

"I have always been proud of my heritage, first and foremost, because of the great artists, musicians and scientists that came out of our culture," he explains. "Knowing that my grandfather was a great artist of that ilk who contributed to a world renowned sculpture is inspirational."

"I mean, working at Rushmore was the American dream for him," adds Lou. "The chief carver on an American icon was an Italian immigrant to this country? If that's not the American dream, what is?"

In his efforts to rewrite the history books and champion his grandfather's work, Lou has written to his local representatives in the New York State Legislature about the matter. In addition, at least one member of Congress, ▶



Lou Del Bianco performing his one-man show, "In the Shadow of the Mountain," in the sculptor's studio at Mount Rushmore on July 3, 2011.

United States Representative Nita Lowey, has contacted the National Park Service to plead Lou's case.

Besides his show, Lou also spreads the word about his grandfather through a newsletter, a website ([www.luigimountrushmore.com](http://www.luigimountrushmore.com)), and a 184-page e-book written by Del Bianco and his wife, educator Camille Linen, that is available via Kindle. He is also attempting to raise \$15,000 for a bust of his grandfather that is expected to be unveiled in Port Chester this year.

"I'm in it for the long haul," says Lou. "I have been telling stories since 1987, but this was the story I was leading up to, this is the story I was born to tell." ▲

*Douglas Gladstone is the author of the forthcoming book "Carving A Niche for Himself; The Untold Story of Luigi Del Bianco and Mount Rushmore" (Bordighera Press, 2014), as well as 2010's "A Bitter Cup of Coffee," which is widely credited for helping get retired individuals who played Major League Baseball financial compensation. A freelance writer, his next story about a survivor of the USS Indianapolis sinking appears in the current issue of History Magazine.*

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