

## Luigi DelBianco Recalls Danger And Glory Of Mt. Rushmore

# He Carved The Face Of History

By MARGUERITE GIBBLE

The face of Abraham Lincoln is more familiar than the image of his friends to Luigi DelBianco of 68 Grant St., Port Chester.

"I know every line and ridge, each small bump and all the details of that head so well!"

His sensitive, long fingers gently were tracing the outlines of Lincoln depicted on the yellowing pages of a 36-year-old magazine spread open on the table before him.

Mr. DelBianco could have said the same about George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or Theodore Roosevelt, whose names recall the years of hard, frustrating and dangerous work as head stone carver at Mt. Rushmore Memorial in South Dakota.

### He'd Do It Again

But to Mr. DelBianco it is superbly satisfying to have had an important part in creating a national memorial which may endure a quarter million or so years.

"I'd do it again, even knowing all the hardships involved. I would work at Mt. Rushmore, even without pay if necessary," he said emphatically, and added; "It was a great privilege granted me."

Every April for nearly 14

years, work was taken up at the memorial site near Keystone, S.D., and carving continued until winter winds and snow made the sheer cliff too dangerous for the men, suspended from the mountain top by cables and straps, to continue chipping and smoothing the surface of the rock.

Mr. DelBianco, named "head carver" at the memorial in 1933, has been described as "one of the most competent men ever employed at the mountain."

### The Great Borglum

He was called simply "Bianco" by the renowned designer of the "Four Presidents", Gutzon Borglum, with whom he was associated not only at Mt. Rushmore but also, earlier, at the sculptor's studio in North Stamford, Conn. and at the controversial Stone Mountain project in Georgia.

For Mr. DelBianco, the presidents immortalized at Mt. Rushmore were so long an important part of his life that he still feels he knows them intimately and understands what they stood for.

He studied from every angle the models of heads created in the studio under the direction of Mr. Borglum and then saw them,

day by day, translated in proportion on the mountain peak.

It was "Bianco" who brought life-like light to an unseeing, dozen-foot-wide stone eye in the 60-foot tall head of Lincoln. (The president's figure would be 465 feet high if carved full length in the same proportions.)

### First The Dynamite

When the first head was started at Mt. Rushmore, Borglum was able to have his men get within a foot of the planned carving surface with dynamite. Later, blasting techniques were worked out by which dynamite removed rock within a few inches of the proposed surfaces of the faces before the carvers went to work bringing the features out of the mountain stone.

The dust from blasting had barely cleared away when the winches housed at the mountain top began groaning and cables were reeled out to lower the narrow platforms or strap seats for the carvers to reach the work area on the cliff.

Describing how it was, he raised one hand as if to touch the rock cliff before him and brought the other arm up in back of his head in mock preparation for striking a blow on a chisel, then leaned back as

far as possible in his chair.

"I could only see from this far what I was doing, but the eye of Lincoln had to look just right from many miles distant."

### Any View Is Perfect

In "The Black Hills", Robert Casey wrote, "From the studio near at hand or . . . from a peak five miles away you will see the Four Presidents gazing at you with the same majestic calm . . . free from even a hint of distortion."

Mr. DelBianco is an artist, sculptor, and worker in stone in a variety of forms. Several years ago the Port Chester Library had an exhibition of some of his smaller works. Busts of presidents have been favorite subjects but he carved "A Blind Beggar" in South Dakota, made "Desperate Man" bookends, and did a figure of a cousin of Crazy Horse, among other sculptures. His works range from realistic to modern to symbolic in style.

He had his own stone cutting shop for some years at Clinton Street in Port Chester. About 500 of the gravestones at St. Mary's cemetery were made by him from rough Vermont marble.

### Learned From Father

Luigi DelBianco was born aboard a ship near Le Havre, France, while his parents were

returning from the United States to Italy. When he was a small boy hanging around the wood carving shop of his father at Meduno, Udine Province, men of the village used to say, "Look how curious the little one is!"

In time, Vincent DelBianco became convinced that his son was interested in carving and had more than ordinary ability. He took the 11-year-old boy to Austria to study under a skilled stone carver. Luigi later studied in Venice and Vienna. Although he came to the United States at 17, he returned during World War I to serve with the Italian Army. Back here after the war, he worked for a time as a stone cutter at Barre, Vt.

His brother-in-law, the late Alfonso Scafa, a Port Chester stone cutter who was doing some work for Gutzon Borglum, introduced Luigi DelBianco to the noted sculptor. "Bianco" then began working at the Stamford studio and the association of the two men continued until the death of Borglum in 1941.

In 1922, after Mr. DelBianco married Nicoletta Cardarelli of Port Chester, the newlyweds lived for some time in a cottage on the grounds of the Borglum estate in North Stamford.

The three sons of the DelBiancos, Vincent, Silvio and Caesar, remember happy and ex-

citing days of summer at the site near Keystone. The flurry caused by important visitors arriving to see progress on the national memorial, the clouds of smoke rising after blasts of dynamite, and watching the men who looked so small from a safe distance below, as they carved, all were fascinating. They liked, too, the family excursions by car into the country when their father was free from work.

They feel a little sorry for their sister, Gloria, a student at the American Academy of Dramatic Art, because she is too young to have known those happy days.

Although Borglum was a controversial figure, "Bianco" has only praise for him.

"It was a sad, sad day when my master died," he said, with eyes misted and voice filled with emotion. "The world lost a great genius."



LUIGI DELBIANCO, who celebrated his 74th birthday just a week ago, stands beside a bust of himself which he carved in 1921, when he was 29.—Staff Photo by John Sarno.