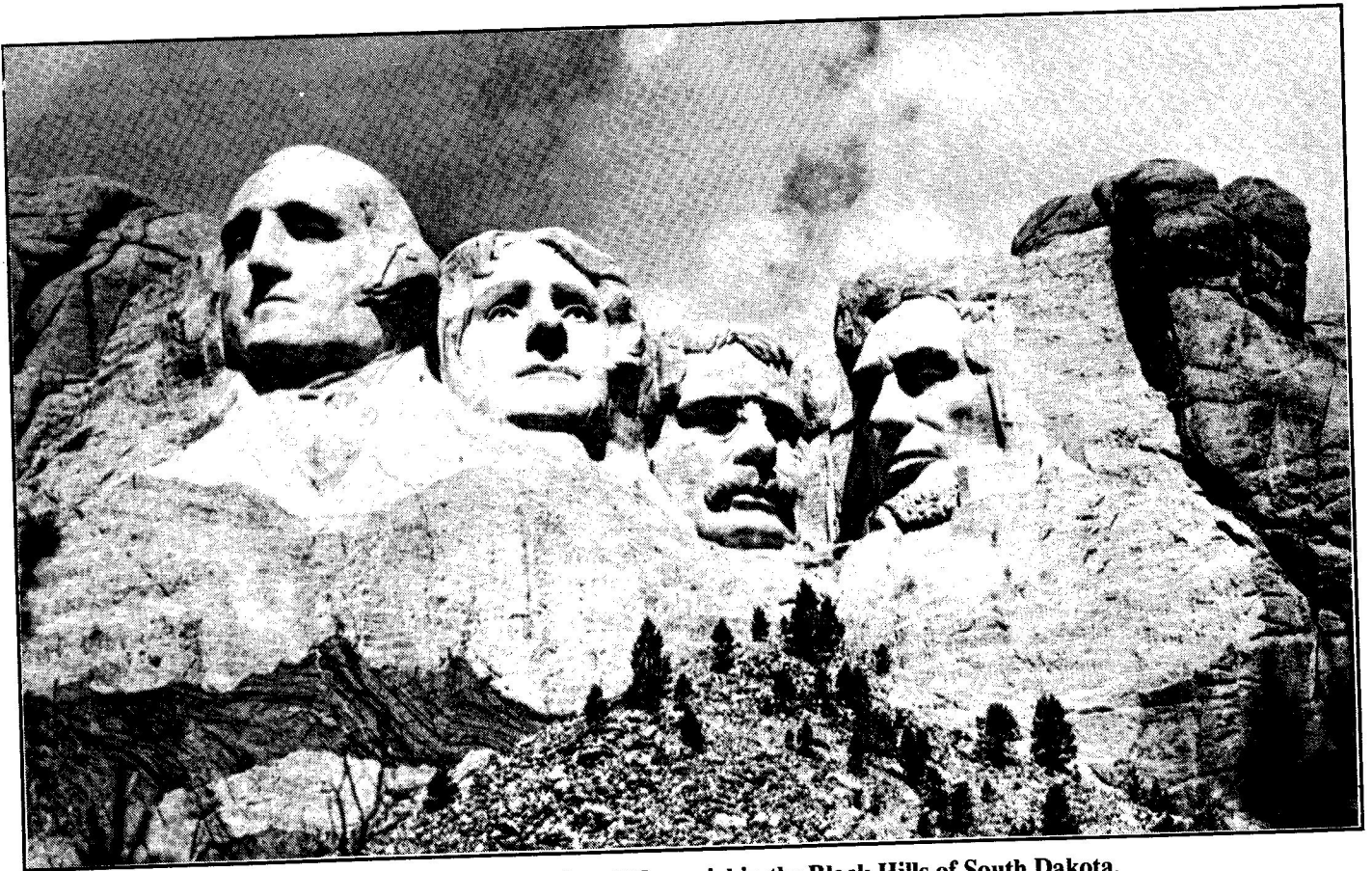


Luigi Del Bianco and Mount Rushmore: A monumental job

*Port
Chester
man
reached
national
heights*

**Luigi Del Bianco works
on Mount Rushmore.**





The Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

By Yvette Kahn

It was standing room only for family, friends, history buffs, and the plain curious who gathered in the Port Chester Public Library meeting room on June 17 to hear Port Chester resident Caesar Del Bianco speak about his father, Luigi Del Bianco, and his work on Mount Rushmore. Interest was heightened by the official dedication of the monument that was less than a month away. The late Mr. Del Bianco, who died on Jan. 20, 1969 at the age of 76, served as chief carver of the national monument located in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Caesar, who lives on South Regent Street, became interested in his father's contribution to the project about five years ago when he could find no mention of him in books written on the subject. "There was no mention of my father," said Caesar. "I even ordered books from South Dakota, but that wasn't enough for me."

Caesar made several visits to Washington, D.C., to the Library of Congress—in 1988, 1989 and twice in 1990—researching original documents. His perseverance paid off. Among the papers of renowned sculptor Gutzon Borglum, the Stamford,

Ct. resident who conceived and managed the project, he found many references to his father, who was called "Bianco" on the project. Bianco was number three man in terms of responsibility.

Although the purpose of his research is to give his father the credit he's due, Caesar does not want people to forget that "Borglum was the most important man on the project. Next came his son Lincoln, the pointer, and then my father, the chief carver."

"Without Borglum there would be no

Continued

"All the drilling of all kinds should be directed by the chief carver. The chief carver is responsible for the ways and means of finishing the sculpture. I have appointed Luigi Del Bianco for this important task."

—Gutzon Borglum

Mount Rushmore. He is the genius of the project," said Caesar.

Mount Rushmore was not Bianco's first association with Mr. Borglum. They had collaborated on previous commissions, including the Stone Mountain Project in Georgia and the Wars of America Memorial in Newark, N.J.


Caesar hopes to continue his research. "I like Washington. This is where I found all my research on my father's work. It is where I found out how important my father's work was."

Idea for an icon

The idea for a monumental sculpture in the Black Hills of South Dakota was the brainchild of then South Dakota State Historian Doane Robinson as a way to attract tourists to his state. What Mr. Robinson had in mind were mammoth images of western heroes such as Lewis and Clark or Bill Cody.

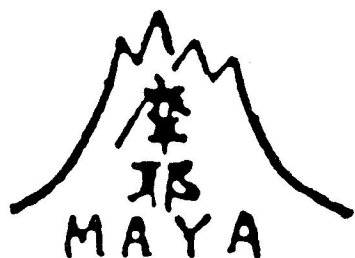
Gutzon Borglum, an internationally recognized sculptor, was hired to carry out the task. But before plans were finalized, the project evolved from one with a regional motif to one with a national scope—the likenesses of four American presidents—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. As symbols of the republic, Washington represented the founding of the U.S.; Jefferson the adoption of the U.S. Constitution; Lincoln the preservation of the Union; and Roosevelt the preservation and expansion of the republic.

In a report to the Mount Harney Memo-
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Luigi Del Bianco with his three sons—Silvio, Caesar and Vincent—in the mid 1930s.

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Gutzon Borglum, renowned sculptor, who is credited with the realization of Mount Rushmore.

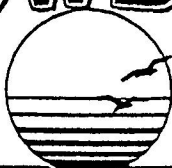
rial Association, original sponsors of the project, Mr. Borglum wrote:

"South Dakota lies by the Providence of God in the center of this great Union, in the center of America, in the center of the territory which marked the first step from colonial conservation to continental dominion...Careful consideration of all questions that should be weighed in so extraordinary an undertaking causes me to recommend the building of this great monument as a memorial to and in memory of the continental development of the republic, commemorating in sculptured portraits those dominating personalities who furthered its creation and preservation. If this monument is so conceived and so developed, it becomes in all seriousness a monument of national significance."

The South Dakota Legislature authorized the project's go-ahead in 1924. Drilling on the 5,725-foot-high mountain began on Oct. 4, 1927. Work ceased in 1941 with the death of Mr. Borglum.

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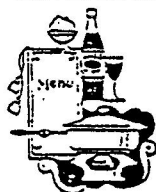
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Making of a monument

Mr. Borglum designed the Mount Rushmore monument and supervised its creation based on a series of photographs by The Rev. C.H. Loocke of Rapid City, S.D., known as the "Sky Pilot of the Black Hills," who was a friend of Mr. Borglum's and worked closely with him.

A reference to Luigi Del Bianco appeared in a July 30, 1935 directive to superintendent of the mountain William Tallman. Mr. Borglum wrote: "All the drilling of all kinds should be directed by the chief carver. The chief carver is responsible for the ways and means of finishing the sculpture. I have appointed Luigi Del Bianco for this important task."

As chief carver, Bianco was paid \$1.50 an hour or \$72 a week. "That was good pay then," said Caesar. "We lived well."

In another entry to the superintendent, Mr. Borglum wrote, "Bianco is the only one who understands granite and this work as sculpture."

Approximately 400 men worked on the sculpture at various times, many of them



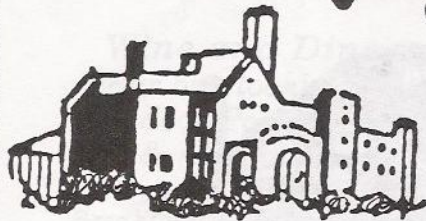
Luigi Del Bianco stands outside his Clinton Street studio with one of his sculptures about 1950.

former miners trained by Bianco on the job. Because of the nature of the work, keeping a staff was a major problem. Each day the workers walked 500 steps to the top of the mountain to be lowered in a Botsvain chair over the face to work 400 to 500 feet in the air.

As Judith St. George wrote in her book *The Story of Mount Rushmore*,

"With the exception of Luigi Del Bianco, few carvers worked out. By the time a carver was highly skilled, he had usually reached middle age and the prospect of working in a harness or a swinging cage on the windy mountain held so little appeal that if any of them even started, they soon quit. Even Del Bianco always worked in a cage, refusing from the start even to be lowered over the mountain in a harness."

Work on the mountain progressed in four stages: drilling, blasting, carving and finishing—all based on calculations made by chief pointer Lincoln Borglum, then



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about 22. His job was to take measurements from a model approximately 20 feet high at the base of the mountain and multiply the numbers by 12. He then relayed the figures to those working on the mountain.

“My older brother, my father and myself became blood brothers with the Indians, cutting out fingers and mixing blood.”

—Vincent Del Bianco

In the days before commercial air travel and the interstate highway system, Bianco made the six-day drive across the country from Port Chester to South Dakota nine or 10 times, spending six months at a time on the project.

In his research, Caesar discovered a 1933 letter from Mary Borglum, Gutzon’s wife, to his father regarding travel to South Dakota. She suggested that if traveling by car, Mr. Del Bianco should travel via Philadelphia, Pa. She estimated the cost of the 2,000-mile journey to be \$75 for the car’s maintenance and \$40 for gas. She also noted that there were tourist camps along the way for overnight stays.

Family visit

In 1935, the Del Bianco family of five children and two adults went to live in Keystone, S.D., for a year while Bianco worked on the mountain.

Seven years old at the time, Vincent Del Bianco, who now lives on North Regent Street in Port Chester, recently reflected on his experience. “It was like cowboys and Indians,” he said. “I went horseback riding. We visited the Indian reservation nearby.”

The Indians of the region were called Lakotas, part of the Sioux nation. “My older brother (Silvio), my father and my-

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Caesar Del Bianco alongside a self-portrait of his father.

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self became blood brothers with the Indians, cutting out fingers and mixing blood. My father crossed blood with the chief. We were at the reservation all the time," said Vincent.

Dedication events

Because of the advent of World War II in 1941 and the subsequent death of Mr. Borglum that year, Mount Rushmore was

never formally dedicated. The sculpture was never actually completed as original plans called for it to include the torsos of the four presidents.

On July 4, 1991, 50 years after its unveiling, the mountain was to be dedicated in an early morning ceremony attended by President George Bush, national and local officials and national celebrities. Among the invited guests were men who

had worked on the mountain and their descendants, including Bianco's son Vincent and his sister Gloria Del Bianco of Los Angeles.

The dedication ceremony was at the last moment moved up to July 3 because of the president's schedule, but the Del Biancos did not receive notification of the change in time to attend the ceremony. Their disappointment was dispelled by attendance at an evening ceremony on July 4. "The lights were on the mountain as they are every evening, and there was singing," said Vincent. "My sister was interviewed by the local press. It was very moving."

That evening, the Del Biancos were fortunate to be included in a dinner for celebrities and fund-raisers. Among the celebrities present were Barbara Eden and Jimmy Stewart with whom Vincent spoke.

This was not Vincent's first trip back to South Dakota; he has returned several times since his boyhood stay. While in South Dakota in July, he attended a class reunion, visited the Indian reservation to attend a pow wow (dance competition) and toured the area. "I saw the house where I lived, the

Facts about Mt. Rushmore

- ⇒ Largest sculpture in the world.
- ⇒ Each head is twice as large as the Sphinx.
- ⇒ Head of George Washington symbolizes founding of the U.S.; unveiled July 4, 1930.
- ⇒ Thomas Jefferson recalls adoption of U.S. Constitution; unveiled Aug. 30, 1936.
- ⇒ Abraham Lincoln preserved the Union; unveiled Sept. 17, 1937.
- ⇒ Theodore Roosevelt protected and expanded the republic; unveiled July 2, 1939.
- ⇒ Lincoln's dimensions scaled to proportions of a man 465 feet tall; 60 feet top of head to chin, nose 21 feet long; 2 men worked in cages inside each eye.

Source: *Mt. Rushmore: A Scenic Guide to South Dakota*

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stream where I went swimming, the woods where I played and the school," said Vincent.

Local observance

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the completion of Mount Rushmore and Luigi Del Bianco's part in its creation, the Port Chester Historical Society had 100 limited edition commemorative envelopes printed and sold them at the Port Chester Post Office on July 3 for \$5 each. The demand was so great that the society printed 100 more. A few are still available for sale. The money raised will be used to purchase a permanent display case for the Port Chester Public Library in which the historical society will exhibit rotating displays of local and national interest. The society also hand-cancelled envelopes with a special commemorative stamp in honor of Mr. Del Bianco.

On the national level, the U.S. Post Office issued a 29-cent stamp to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Mount Rushmore.

At 4th of July ceremonies in Port



Vincent and Caesar Del Bianco pose in Caesar's home with sculptures and a mosaic of President Abraham Lincoln created by their father.

Chester, Caesar received honors for his father, including congratulations from the family of Vice President Dan Quayle, a letter from Governor Mario Cuomo and proclamations from Westchester County Executive Andrew P. O'Rourke, the County

Board of Legislators and Rye Town Supervisor Donald Gioffre. Congresswoman Nita Lowey entered a statement recognizing Mr. Del Bianco's work on Mount Rushmore into the Congressional Record.

Biography

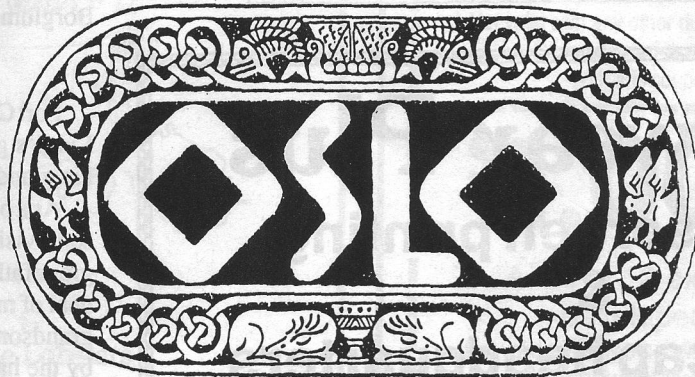
Luigi Del Bianco was born of Italian parents in Le Havre, France, on May 9, 1892. His family was returning home to Meduno, Italy, after a holiday in the United States.

As an adolescent he studied sculpture in Austria and later in Venice, Italy. At 16 he came to the U.S. and Port Chester, returning to Italy during World War I to serve in the army.

On Dec. 31, 1922, he married Nicolette Cardarelli at Holy Rosary Church in Port Chester. The couple had five children—Theresa, Silvio, Vincent, Caesar and Gloria. He became a U.S. citizen in 1928.

Mr. Del Bianco was introduced to Mr. Borglum by his brother-in-law Alfonso Scafa, a stonecutter, and in 1920 began working in Mr. Borglum's Stamford, Ct.

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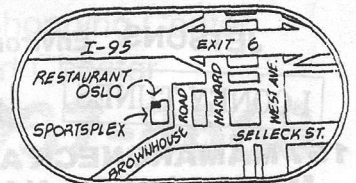
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studio. The association continued until Mr. Borglum's death.

Mr. Del Bianco was also a sculptor in his own right. Out of his 26 Clinton St. studio, located behind his residence, he carved over 500 gravestones for St. Mary's Cemetery in Rye Brook.

The stone carver set many local works, notably the statuary at Corpus Christi Church on South Regent Street, the Our Lady of Fatima statue at Holy Rosary School on Central Avenue and the Spanish American War Memorial in Summerfield Park.

One of Mr. Del Bianco's sculptures is the fist of World Heavyweight Champion Primo Carnera, who came from his hometown in Italy. In fact, Mr. Carnera, an orphan, was brought up by Mr. Del Bianco's parents. So the boxer often visited the Del Bianco family in Port Chester.

Other sculptures carved by Mr. Del Bianco that are still in Caesar's possession include busts of President Theodore Roosevelt, Jesus Christ and a self-portrait as well as a statue of a mother and child called "Motherhood" designed by Mr. Borglum.

Reflections

Port Chester storyteller Lou Del Bianco, Luigi's grandson, has vivid memories of his grandfather.

As a boy of six or seven, Lou, Vincent's son, visited his then retired and ailing grandfather every Sunday. "He made a big deal of me for I am his namesake, his only grandson," said Lou. "He would take me by the hand and walk me to the bureau to see his work."

"He rolled out the red carpet," Lou continued. "He always said, 'I'm Luigi Del Bianco; you are Luigi Del Bianco,' letting it be known that we were connected."

Lou described his grandfather as having Navaho Indian-like, craggy features. "He had a strong image. He was an imposing man."

One reason Lou believes his grandfather and the Sioux Indians got along so well was because "they were both foreigners out there; he was a foreigner and the Indians were foreigners also." ■