

Artist Sculpted Lincoln

NIST Staffer Authors Book On Controversial Ancestor

Glenn Sherwood, 48, a mechanical Technician at NIST in Boulder, Colorado will soon see publication of a biography he's written of Vinnie (Vinita) Ream Hoxie, a controversial 19th century female sculptor and ancestor of Sherwood. Vinnie Ream created a statue of Lincoln which stands in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda and one of Civil War hero Admiral David Farragut, which is the centerpiece of Farragut Square in Washington, D.C.

Lincoln posed several times over a period of five months for his likeness before he was slain by John Wilkes Booth.

Ream was controversial because of her age at the time of her main artistic activity - she was a teenager; her sex, few women were active in the field during her era; and her approach, she disdained the classical practice of romanticizing contemporary figures by dressing them in Roman togas and smoothing out their features. She favored a realistic style of depicting people, in the case of Lincoln, warts and all as it were.

Her statue of Farragut shows a grim, determined sailor clutching a telescope and looking into the face of danger. Her national fame had a short life, however, and she drifted into obscurity.

Publication culminates some 10 years of effort by Sherwood. He became interested in his once illustrious ancestor while browsing through papers left by a half sister after her death. These included some articles and other written material on Vinnie Ream

which intrigued Sherwood but which he found incomplete, not entirely accurate and altogether unsatisfactory. Thus he decided to embark on writing a thorough biography, including an explanation of why her fame failed to endure.

Basically, that was due to her marriage to a Civil War veteran, birth of a son who developed mental disabilities from a childhood accident, and thus transfer of energies from art to family. Controversy over her artistic style died out when the statues of Lincoln and Farragut became popular with and accepted by the public.

Although Sherwood found two books on Ream, neither was in depth, he said. One was a children's book, the other a much fictionalized account of her artistic period. "I became appalled that no comprehensive book on Vinnie Ream had ever been produced," Sherwood said.

So he began researching material and sending letters to sources he felt might be productive, including the office of the Architect of the Capitol. Because of the Lincoln statuary, it had a large biographic file on her and tips where other material could be located.

Correspondence between Sherwood and the capitol architect included a notice about available fellowships. He applied for and received one in the form of a \$3,000 research grant. Sherwood used this for a 21-day stay in Washington.

He found that Ream was 4 feet, 7 inches tall and slightly built. She was born in what



was then the Territory of Wisconsin and moved with her family to the nation's capital just before the Civil War. In Washington, she studied for two years with another famous sculptor of the time, Clark Mills.

Just before she turned 19, she won a Congressional commission (for the Lincoln work), becoming the youngest person and first woman to be so recognized.



Sherwood found in his research that Ream was also a musician and singer - she sang to wounded Civil War soldiers and at war relief concerts. That gave the researcher/author and sculptress something in common - he is a classical musician who plays contrabass in the symphony orchestras in Colorado - of Boulder, where he works, and Longmont where he lives.

His book, *A Labor of Love: The Life and Art of Vinnie Ream*, 8-1/2" x 11" - 464 pages with 220 photos and illustrations, \$60, is scheduled for publication by Sunshine Press of Longmont May 6.

