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Longmont man sheds light on 19th-century sculptor

Almost everyone would recognize the life-size marble statue of Abraham Lincoln in the rotunda of the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Yet few have heard of Vinnie Ream, its sculptor of more than a century ago. Longtime Longmont resident Glenn Sherwood has just completed "A Labor of Love, The Life and Art of Vinnie Ream." "Being related to the Ream family through both of my parents, I had often heard stories of this legendary ancestor," said Sherwood. "When I grew older, I did more research." A writer for the Smithsonian Museum called Ream "the most prominent American woman sculptor of the 19th century." Yet the pretty young woman with long dark curls was largely neglected by the history books.



Now, after years of archival research, Sherwood gives Ream the recognition he feels she had been denied. Ream was born in 1847 in Wisconsin Territory, then considered part of "the West." It was said that the local Native Americans recognized her talent and taught her to draw and paint. After being educated in Columbia, Mo., Ream moved with her family to Washington, D.C., at the start of the Civil War. She showed a remarkable ability to work with clay and was tutored by an accomplished sculptor. President Lincoln posed for Ream when she was a struggling teen-age artist. At age 18, she was the youngest sculptor and the first woman ever to receive a federal commission for a statue. Ream remembered Lincoln as a "man of unfathomable sorrow."

Lincoln was assassinated before the clay sculpture was completed, but Ream acquired his clothing and measured it in order to accurately finish her work. The Lincoln statue was rendered in marble in Rome and unveiled in Washington, D.C., in 1871.

Critics accustomed to the ideal likeness of the neoclassical school attacked her style. They claimed that "men did her work" and called her a "fraud" and a "humbug." Eventually, the criticism died out when her work became popular and was accepted by the public. Besides

Lincoln, Ream sculpted more than 100 statues, busts and medallions, many of them of major military and political figures of the time. These included Admiral David Farragut and General George Armstrong Custer. Ream's

History



Silvia Pettem

art fell into obscurity following her marriage to Civil War veteran Richard Hoxie and the subsequent birth of their son. As a military wife, she was permitted to work for love but not for money. Just before her death in 1914, she sculpted Sequoyah, an Indian chief in the Oklahoma Territory. Sequoyah is now in Statuary Hall, also in the United States Capitol Building. Besides her art, Ream was a musician who sang to wounded soldiers and worked at war-relief concerts. Sherwood is an engineering technician at the National Institute of Standards Technology in Boulder and a member of the Longmont Symphony. "She and I share a lot of common interests," said Sherwood. "Writing is a bridge between the present and the past." The book is available from Sunshine Press Publications Inc. You can call SunShine Press at (303) 772-3556, or you can visit their Web site at: www.sunshinepress.com.