

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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First Statue of Lincoln

February is one of the most interesting months in all the year. Both Lincoln and Washington were born in this month. St. Valentine's Day, Feb. 14th, is beloved by both young and old; one for the fun to be had that day, and the other, possible, for sentimental memoirs of by-gone years.

Today we will write of Lincoln and his birthday on Feb. 12, and review a bit of the historical data, concerning this Civil War President. We wonder how many of our readers know that the first statue of Lincoln ever made was executed in San Francisco by a sculptor named Pietro Mezzara?

We have learned from Idwall Jones, the author of "Ark of Empire," that the first artist to live in the old Montgomery Block in San Francisco was Mezzara. The block later became the home of many artists, Bohemia, such as it was, was symbolized by the lively and plump Mezzara, with his checkered trousers, cloak, and flopping hat. On a wave of affluence, after some client had paid for a portrait bust, he would sweep into a room on the second floor, beyond the billiard tables. He was familiarly known as the gnome-like sculptor. For an artist he was prosperous, according to Jones.

Mezzara had a workshop, a drafty barn, and two streets away from the Montgomery Block where he cast heads and floral ornaments, for architects. He was indefatigable, it was said; two or three assistants did the labor and the molding from his designs. His serious work, in ivory and fine marble, he carried on in his own room.

Mezzara had, for his own pleasure, made a sketch in clay of Lincoln. His notion had been to copy it in ivory. Pioche, the banker, who had seen it, and while talking in the lobby with General Halleck and Andrew S. Hallidie, the manufacturer of wire cable, insisted that his friends go to the sculptor's room to see the likeness of the President.

Halleck, who had built the Block and later became general in the ward between the States, asked if the sketch in clay could not be made into a larger likeness. It could Mezzara agreed, though he would rather work in ivory and was unsure of his skill in the heroic. But, nevertheless, he ventured in his workshop. "He

punched in more clay to heighten the statue another foot, and the light of the candles on the floor distended it to something huge." So historians tell us.

The San Francisco Daily Alta's art critic wrote: "P. Mezzara, sculptor, has just completed the model in clay of the gigantic statue of Abraham Lincoln, for which the plaster cast will be made immediately. The height of the figure, exclusive of the pedestal, is nine feet, although it appears much greater and the proportions are in every particular mathematically correct.

"The head is as I should be, the most carefully executed of any part of the work, and the likeness is not only striking, but the expression of the features are commanding and wonderfully true to the original.

"The right hand is partially spread out, as if to protect the Constitution and the emblem of the Union, surmounted by the laurel wreath of victory, which rests between them, while the left is stretched out as if to warn away the traitors who threatened them.

"The statue is intended for exhibition at the Mechanics Institute Fair this season, and will be one of the most interesting objects in the Pavilion." The date was Aug. 10, 1865, four months after Lincoln's death.

The anxious moment for Mezzara arrived when his invitation came for the unveiling: "Formal or Uniform;" and since he wore only velveteens and a slouched hat, he hid in the corner of his workshop. Pioche, the banker, after pleading with him, sent a tailor, a hatter, and a bootmaker, to make the sculptor presentable for the ordeal. He was not required to make a speech, and was seated far back on the stage. Halleck made the first talk, followed by an hour long oration given by Judge Tom Sawyer.

(To Be Continued)