

Battlefield Journal: First, I LOVED the book. I am a lover of Civil War monuments and have done a lot with the New England town square monuments as well as written a book about Gettysburg from the point of view of the monuments. My question is how did you choose which monuments to include in the book?

Jim Percoco: First of all I am glad you loved the book. All writers want to hear that. I actually visited about 30 monuments of which seven ended up with full chapter treatments. The others are listed in an Appendix. My criterion was based on the following:

- The statues had to be from the Great Age of Lincoln Sculpture 1870-1935
- All sculptors had to be born in the century in which Lincoln lived – 19th
- The statues had to reflect the several genres/themes related to Lincoln sculpture – Great Emancipator, Great President/Statesman, Man of Sorrows, Youthful Lincoln, Commander-in-Chief
- The sculptures had to be of high artistic merit – meaning that aesthetically they had to be successful or they had to have a story that was deeply tied to the Lincoln myth or legacy. I was actually tempted to give each of the seven I picked a report card grade, because I only think that three of the seven deserve an A for artistic merit, *The Standing Lincoln* by Saint-Gaudens (Chapter 4), *Lincoln of Gethsemane* by Borglum (Chapter 5) and *Lincoln* by French in the Lincoln Memorial (Chapter 7). I really wanted to give full chapter treatment to *Lincoln the Lawyer* by Lorado Taft in Urbana, Illinois and *Captain Lincoln* in Dixon, Illinois. Each reveals another dimension of Lincoln's life – the circuit lawyer and his role as a Captain in the militia from New Salem during the 1832 Black Hawk War; it's the only statue of Lincoln in uniform and wearing a sword. Unfortunately the paper trail was limited on these two statues and I could not flesh out much of a story either behind the statue or about the sculptural process.

Battlefield Journal: You seemed to have an exceptional group of students that traveled with you. Overall, do you find that students, especially of middle and high school age, are that enamored with history? What are the chances that future generations might not even understand why those Lincoln monuments were placed where they were?

Jim Percoco: Most young people gravitate towards history when it is made relevant. The key for me has been showing students that I find monuments to be very relevant to my life and that transfers over to them in the way I approach and teach history. I actually find all of human history relevant and have always taught it as such; we can't understand how we got to where we are today without having some sense of what transpired before we lived.

I think given Lincoln's role in U.S. and World History future generations are going to understand why Lincoln statues permeate our public spaces. Many foreign nations have public statues to Lincoln, as well, such as Mexico, Great Britain, and Russia. The Chinese, in Beijing, are very open about the design of Chairman Mao's mausoleum and that it is based on that of Henry Bacon's Lincoln Memorial.

Battlefield Journal: What is your favorite Lincoln monument? Why?

Jim Percoco: My top three are *The Standing Lincoln* in Chicago by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Lincoln of Gethsemane* by Gutzon Borglum in Newark, NJ, and *Lincoln* by Daniel Chester French. I like each of these equally for different reasons. With *The Standing Lincoln* you can actually feel the energy pulsate out from the bronze. That was the mastery of Saint-Gaudens he could make bronze actually seem like flesh and blood. When you stand there, in Chicago, and look at Lincoln he literally seems to be caught in a “moment of time” and that moment is very transcendent. Sculptor and art historian Lorado Taft said that “standing before it you feel as if you are in the very presence of the soul of America,” and I concur.

With the Borglum in Newark you still have President Lincoln, but he is an accessible Lincoln, while still being President. In some ways this is a very real Lincoln in a different sense than the Saint-Gaudens. Here is the war torn Lincoln bearing the great grief that I think he really felt at times. Borglum’s genius was to put Lincoln down at our level so we could connect with him.

The Lincoln Memorial by Henry Bacon (architect) and Daniel Chester French is clearly the greatest public space in the United States where the collaboration between sculptor and architect bears the highest fruit. The Lincoln Memorial is also, now, a place of history, which places it in its own singular category. French got the figure right demonstrating Lincoln’s greatest qualities resolve measured with compassion.

Battlefield Journal: With what other genres of American history have you done this monument pilgrimage?

Jim Percoco: Because I live and teach in the Washington, D.C. area I have created for students what I call IFT’s (Individualized Field Trips). Several times during the year I send them into the District to study monuments related to our on going course of study – for example during the 4th Quarter I have an assignment called “Echoes from the Mall” where they visit in order the National WW II Memorial, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. They answer worksheet questions I have developed, take photographs at each of the monuments, and then complete a reflective journal entry.

Battlefield Journal: What future projects do you have coming up that you would like to share with Battlefield Journal readers?

Jim Percoco: What works for me as a teacher and a writer are trips; going to places, I think I teach best at sites and monuments. I very much enjoy writing about these kinds of experiences. In this manner I get to reveal my personality and what makes me tick as an educator. I am tinkering with perhaps doing a similar book about Underground Railroad sites and monuments. But for now I am just enjoying *Summers with Lincoln* being out. If I may, please let me share with you and readers the ultimate post-publication experience. A month after my book was released I traveled to Connecticut to give a copy to my high school mentor Neal Adams, with whom I have remained close since graduating high school in 1975. Seated in his living room, he lovingly cradled my book in his hands and said softly to me, “Oh Jim... I am so proud of you!” As far as I am concerned that was the ultimate book review.