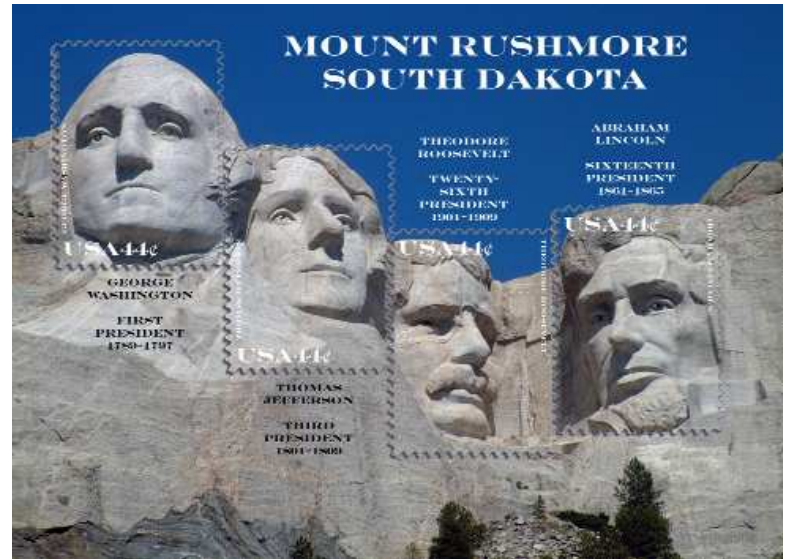


# MOUNT RUSHMORE – BEHIND THE SCENE

MSCNY ARTICLE No. 36

The remarkable stone carvings on Mount Rushmore by Gutzon Borglum and his son, Lincoln (both Freemasons) form one of the greatest “gigantic” artworks in the world. Just how the two men, their assistant sculptors (two of whom were Masons) and indeed all the workers, could execute such perfect sculptures in stone is as amazing as the work itself. In addition to the work’s Masonic sculptors and the fact that two of the heads are of Freemasons, there is considerably more “Masonic content” connected with the famous memorial.

Brother Michael G. Rodman provides us with great insights “behind the scene” of the Rushmore Memorial in his intriguing article published in *The Short Talk Bulletin*, Masonic Service Association of North America (Vol. 93, No. 3, March 2015), which is presented here. Stamps depicting Mount Rushmore have long been a part of Masonic collections, and I have taken the liberty of showing them, plus additional photographs, along with Brother Rodman’s article. CLM



## Mt. Rushmore

By Michael G. Rodman  
Senior Grand Warden  
Grand Lodge of South Dakota

*“...let us place there, carved high, as close to heaven as we can, the words of our leaders, their faces, to show posterity what manner of men they were. Then breathe a prayer that these records will endure until the wind and rain alone shall wear them away.”*

-- Gutzon Borglum

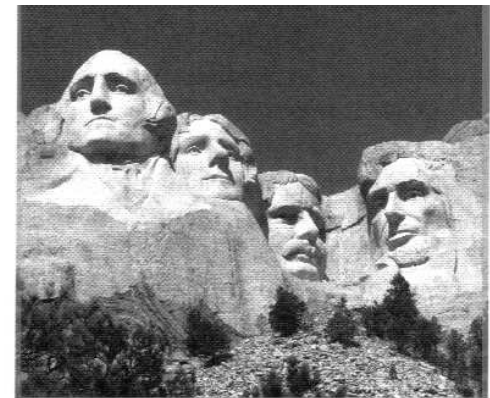
We all know that two of the four faces on Mt. Rushmore are of our Masonic brothers. George Washington, the father of our country and perhaps the foremost figure in Masonry in America, was a member of the Fredericksburg Lodge in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Teddy Roosevelt, well known in the Dakotas, was a member of Matinecock Lodge in Oyster Bay, New York.

Most of us also know the story of Abraham Lincoln, who was not a Freemason. He did apply for membership in Tyrian Lodge, Springfield, Illinois, shortly after his nomination for the presidency in 1860, but withdrew the application because he felt that his applying for membership at that time might be construed as a political ruse to obtain votes. He advised the lodge that he would resubmit

his application again when he returned from the presidency. Lincoln never returned. On the death of the president, Tyrian Lodge on April 17, 1865 adopted a resolution to say “that the decision of President Lincoln to postpone his application for the honors of Freemasonry, lest his motives be misconstrued, is the highest degree honorable to his memory.”

Gutzon Borglum, who was Master of Howard Lodge in New York City, accepted an invitation to come to the Black Hills to explore a proposal to carve a sculpture at the Needles. Borglum quickly rejected that proposal as too small for his grand vision and scoured the Black Hills until selecting Mt. Rushmore as the perfect site. Why these four presidents? In Borglum’s day, Washington and Lincoln were considered the two greatest presidents, Jefferson a close third and Teddy Roosevelt was a man Borglum personally admired and supported in his bids for the presidency. In March 1925, both the United States Congress and the South Dakota Legislature passed legislation allowing the project to occur.

Getting permission for the project was one thing, finding the money to finance it, quite another. This is where Congressman William Williamson, member of Chamberlain Lodge in Chamberlain, South Dakota, and Senator Peter Norbeck, member of Redfield Lodge, in Redfield, South Dakota, stepped up by introducing funding bills and becoming the driving forces in getting construction



dollars for Mt. Rushmore. Senator Norbeck wired South Dakota Governor Carl Gunderson, member of Incense Lodge, in Vermillion, South Dakota, saying, “I think this might be an opportunity to secure one of the national attractions in this country of the highest artistic quality. It is an opportunity we should not miss.”

Brother Williamson is credited for persuading President Coolidge to take his summer vacation in the Black Hills in 1927. While the President was vacationing at the State Game Lodge, Borglum hired a relatively new invention, the airplane, to fly over and drop a wreath with an invitation to visit Mt. Rushmore, which of course he did. President Coolidge signed a bill, guided through Congress by Brother Norbeck, authorizing \$250,000 in matching funds and the creation of the Mt. Rushmore National Memorial Commission. Coolidge also announced that summer he would not seek reelection.

When President Hoover took office,

Congressman Williamson again had to push to get funding approved. Williamson finally got an appointment scheduled to see the new President, however it was not soon enough for the headstrong Borglum who went to Washington and demanded the President's staff allow him to see the President. He was ultimately escorted out of the White House and the President, angry at how his staff was treated, canceled Williamson's appointment. But through good Masonic perseverance, Williamson and Norbeck were able to finally get the meeting rescheduled. Finally, Williamson and the head of the Mt. Rushmore National Memorial Commission, John Boland, member of Rapid City Lodge, Rapid City, South Dakota, picked up the initial funding check in the amount of \$54,670.56 from Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon.

On a cold morning during construction of the memorial, the morning crew was huddled in one of the shacks at the top of the carving, warming up with some coffee when Borglum burst through the door and bellowed, "What the hell is going on around here? When one of the workers mumbled they were just having some coffee, Borglum turned to one of his assistants and said, "See to it that at about 10 o'clock every morning we get some donuts and hot coffee up here for these bums!" Local legend insists that this was how the coffee break was born.

During the construction of the project, Boland and Borglum's relationship became strained, putting the project in jeopardy. Borglum, frustrated by the financial oversight of Boland and the Mt. Rushmore Memorial Commission, attempted to have the Commission replaced by a board that he could appoint and control. He appeared before Congress, testifying for an appropriations bill that called for a new commission. As things came to a head, Boland agreed to resign his place on the commission IF the appropriations bill passed. He did and the bill passed. The very next year, the government reorganized its budget and Boland was once again, along with the National Park Service, supervising Mt. Rushmore.

As Masonic disagreements are often settled, Boland's and Borglum's wives arranged a dinner for the four of them.



Bro. William Williamson



Bro. Peter Norbeck



Bro. John Boland

That is all it took for Boland and Borglum to make up. Soon after, they were seen socializing at each other's homes again.

Gutzon was joined in managing the construction of the sculpture by his son Lincoln, member of Battle River Lodge in Hermosa, South Dakota, along with assistant sculptors Ivan Houser and Bill Tallman, both members of Mt. Aetna Lodge in Keystone, South Dakota.

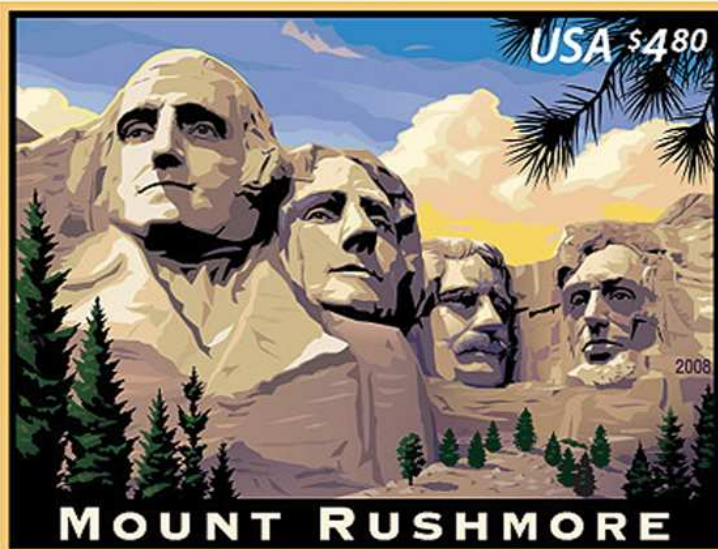
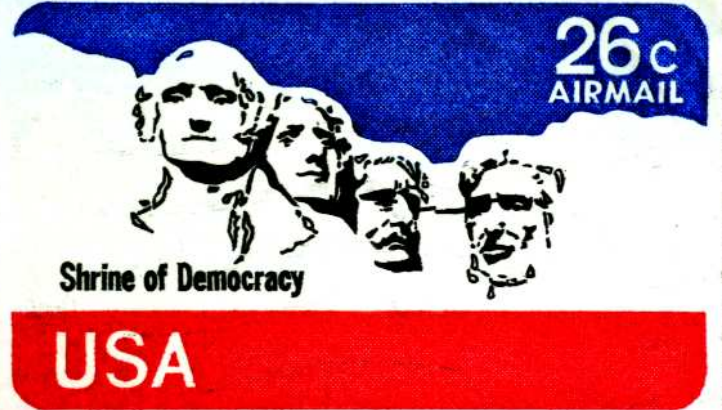
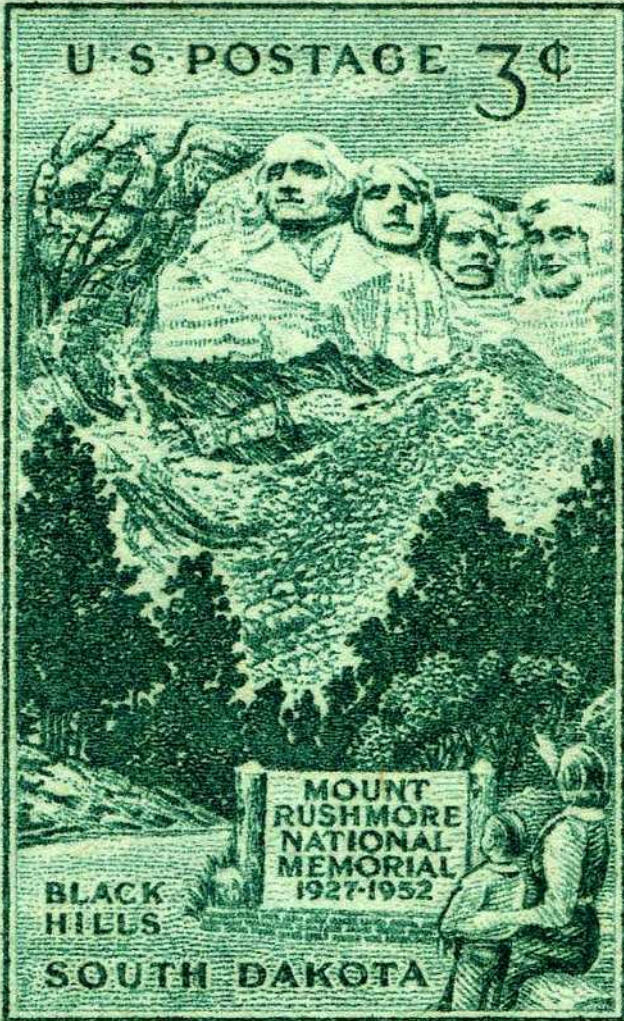
The second dedication of the monument in 1936 by President Franklin Roosevelt, personal friend of Senator Norbeck and member of Holland Lodge in New York City, was for the unveiling of the Thomas Jefferson head. Unfortunately, Senator Norbeck, who attended the dedication was suffering from the effects of cancer of the tongue and jaw and was unable to make a statement. When asked to take a seat on the Mt. Rushmore Memorial Commission, Brother Norbeck said he would rather the seat go to another worthy South Dakotan, Brother Williamson, who served on the Commission from 1928 until his death in 1972.

After Gutzon's death in 1941, Lincoln Borglum announced, "The sculpture work on the faces was completed before Father's death and features of the four presidents will not be touched. We've got to work on Lincoln's collar and his head." Even though Gutzon's models were sculpted to the torsos, Lincoln proclaimed, "I do not think any more should be done on figures of the Memorial. It looks very well as is." The nation, focused on funding the war effort, agreed. Lincoln's daughter quoted him as saying "I've climbed every inch of that damn mountain and I still get a lump in my throat every time I see it."

The Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of South Dakota is involved in discussions with the Mt. Rushmore Society and the National Park Service to showcase the Masonic involvement in Mt. Rushmore's creation for the 75th Anniversary of the "Shrine of Democracy" in 2016.

*Continued*

# Mount Rushmore on Stamps



In addition to the stamp sheet featured on page 1, the stamps shown here are those depicting Mount Rushmore that were issued by the United States. Two of the sculptured heads (first and third from left) are of Freemasons—George Washington and Theodore Roosevelt.

Because the carvings were created by Freemasons, enabled by Freemasons, and show two Freemasons, the stamps are highly Masonic in nature.

The creation of the sculptures was an amazing feat, and their “Masonic content” is a significant tribute to the Masonic Order

*(USA #1011, C88, 2523, 4268; sheet on page 1 is new)*