

Local Legacies

Celebrating Community Roots

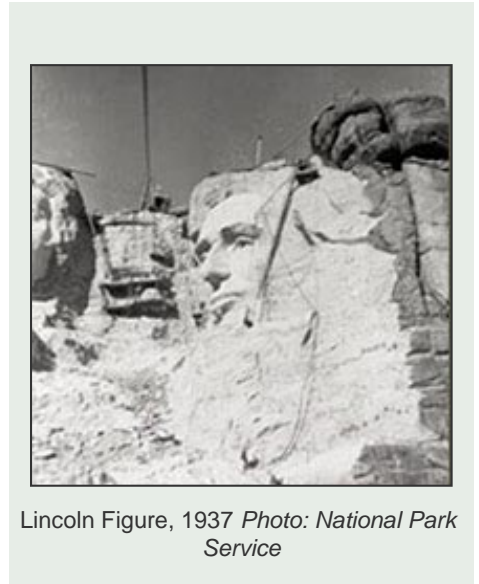


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Mt. Rushmore National Memorial

The inspiration for the carving on Mt. Rushmore came from Doane Robinson, State Historian for South Dakota. Mr. Robinson originally favored a carving representing western heroes such as John Fremont, Lewis & Clark, Sacagawea, Buffalo Bill Cody. To do the carving, Robinson wanted the eminent sculptor Lorado Taft, but he declined the commission because of poor health. Thus, at Robinson's invitation, sculptor Gutzon Borglum came to South Dakota in 1924 to survey the Black Hills for a suitable site for the carving. Borglum was opposed to the idea of carving western figures, saying that it should be "a national monument commemorating America's founders and builders."

Borglum selected the Mt. Rushmore site in the Black Hills, believing that its dimensions of 1000 feet long and 400 feet wide well suited his purpose. On March 3, 1925, Federal legislation was passed by Congress authorizing the carving and setting forth the purpose for Mt. Rushmore State Park: "the establishment of a memorial commemorative of our national history and progress." Subsequently the Mount Harney Memorial Association was established (later called the Mount Rushmore National Commission), whose task it was to raise money for the project. It was decided that the individuals who best exemplified the foundation, expansion and preservation of the Republic-- Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt--should be the subjects of the memorial. By Executive Order of June 10, 1933, President Roosevelt placed Mt. Rushmore under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. All responsibilities were transferred to the National Park Service in 1941.



Lincoln Figure, 1937 Photo: National Park Service

The carving of these faces had begun with a formal dedication by President Coolidge on August 10, 1927. During the course of the next 14 years, more than 350 people were employed in the carving process. Borglum devised a system known as "pointing" to remove very exact amounts of rock; thus 90 percent of the mountain was carved by dynamite. The remaining fine finishing was accomplished with air hammers. Workers became so skilled that, using dynamite, rock could be removed to within a few inches of its finished surface. One by one the faces were uncovered and dedicated: Washington in 1930; Jefferson in 1936; Lincoln in 1937; and Roosevelt in 1939.

Borglum wanted also to establish a Hall of Records to capture the important documents describing the history of the memorial, its purpose and the philosophy of our government as contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, but Congress approved funds solely for the carving of the presidential figures. It was only in 1998 that Borglum's dream was fulfilled, on a much less grand scale, with the placing of 16 explanatory panels in the vault in the unfinished Hall. Today, more than 2.7 million visit Mt. Rushmore each year, making it one of the most recognizable monuments in the United States.

The project is documented by a 6-page report on the history of the monument, short reports on Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Gutzon Borglum, his son James Lincoln Borglum, who became the first Mt. Rushmore National Park Superintendent in 1941, and others who made a difference in making the dream of a monument on Mt. Rushmore become a reality. There are additional reports on the Hall of Records and sculpture maintenance. The reports are accompanied by eight 8 x 10 photos showing Mt. Rushmore in the making and a National Park Service videotape entitled: *Mount Rushmore: The Shrine*.

Originally submitted by: John R. Thune, Representative (At Large).