Carving Out a Place in History

Daughter brought dad lunch atop Mt. Rushmore
as he shaped the Presidents.

By Maxine Evans, Manteca, California

In 1935, my father became a carver of granite Presidents in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

The Bell Telephone Company in Rapid City had just laid off my dad, George Rumple, when a miner friend asked him if he'd be interested in working on the Mt. Rushmore monument. Since my father had a wife and three kids to support, he jumped at the chance.

Gutzon Borglum, the great man of the mountain and the chief sculptor, asked my father if he had any experience with such a project. He was hired to do some work on the road leading up to the mountain. He did well, and Borglum promoted him to work on the grand project.

My dad's records show that he made anywhere from 50¢ an hour as a laborer, in 1936, to $1.25 an hour as a foreman and then a carver, from '36 to '41.

In '36, when I was a little over 4 years old, I remember my parents talking about the more than 750 stairs the workers would climb. I recall my mother, Gladys, and me taking lunch to my dad on the top of Mt. Rushmore. We'd sometimes walk up the many steps or ride up in a hoist "bucket."

I also met the two Native Americans who smoked a peace pipe at the top of the mountain so no harm would come to the workers, who numbered almost 400. They let me try the peace pipe, although I didn't actually smoke it. No one died during the 14-year

project, which ran from 1927 to 1941.

My dad told me he worked on the eyes of Thomas Jefferson and on the face of Abraham Lincoln. He even gave George Washington a haircut.

After dynamiting strategic spots, the workers used drills and jack-hammers to make holes in the granite for easier carving. I recall hearing the explosions and seeing the white clouds of dust from the blasts.

I remember President Franklin D. Roosevelt coming to see the mountain, in 1936, for the dedication of the Thomas Jefferson head.

Nearby Keystone is where my two brothers, Glen and Lyle, and I attended school. When work ended on the project, in ’41, we moved to the state of Washington and then on to California.

Standing on the top of Mt. Rushmore is still an awesome memory for me, and my father always referred to the Mt. Rushmore memorial as the “No. 1 wonder of the world.”

Rock-Solid Jobs

During the Depression, any job was a good job. While on Mt. Rushmore, the author’s father worked as a…

Senior driller, 1935; 75¢/hour
Assistant carver, 1935; $1/hour
Lineman,1936; $3.50/day
Laborer,1936; 50¢/hour
Foreman, 1936 to ’38; $1.25/hour
Carver, 1938 to ’41; $1.25/hour

MT. RUSHMORE TIME LINE

1924—South Dakota state historian Doane Robinson contacts noted sculptor Gutzon Borglum about carving a famous

Western figure from one of the Needles—spiky rock formations in the Black Hills. Borglum suggests George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to gain more national prominence.

1925—Borglum declares he will carve a mountain instead of a Needle, and the likenesses of Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt are added to the project.

Federal legislation is passed to allow the carving of Mt. Rushmore, but the procurement of private funding proves difficult.

1927—President Calvin Coolidge, vacationing in the Black Hills, pledges federal support for the Mt. Rushmore project after attending the formal dedication ceremonies.
After the August 10 ceremonies, the 60-year-old Borglum climbs to Rushmore's craggy summit and drills six ceremonial holes to commence the carving, although actual carving doesn't begin until October 4.

1930—The Washington head is dedicated.

1933—Borglum's son, Lincoln, begins full-time work at Rushmore. A new site to Washington's left is found for the Jefferson head; rock on the other side of Washington was found to be too weak.

1935—The surface for the Roosevelt and Lincoln faces is determined.

1936—The Jefferson head is dedicated.

1937—The Lincoln head is dedicated.

1939—The Roosevelt head is dedicated with special lighting.

1941—Gutzon Borglum dies during surgery; his son is asked to finish the heads.

October 31 is the last day of carving. Due to the artist's death and America's impending involvement in World War II affecting funding, the monument is declared complete, despite Lincoln's head not being finished. The total cost was $989,992.32.