



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Robert Merrell Gage (1892-1981)

Robert Merrell Gage is the artist behind one of the most recognized pieces of art in Topeka, Kan., the Abraham Lincoln statue near the Capitol. Gage studied art with notable sculptors and teachers and became known as “the American sculptor” due to the unwavering all-American theme depicted throughout his works.

Robert Merrell Gage was born in Topeka, Kan., in 1892. He grew up in Topeka and attended school there, graduating from Washburn University. To pursue his passion for art, Gage left Kansas to attend the Art Students League in New York City in 1911. He proceeded to attend L'Ecole des Beaux Arts while studying abroad in France. Gage met Gutzom Borglum and Robert Henri, from which he learned a great deal about sculpture and artistic creation.

Both Henri and Borglum were advocates of the American Theme in art, with Borglum having sculpted the Mount Rushmore figures and Henri having painted notable portraits in American Impressionism. With an amazing new knowledge, Gage returned to Topeka in 1916 and set up shop in a barn behind his home. Gage was commissioned to sculpt the statue of Abraham Lincoln that, even today, rests on the Kansas State Capitol grounds.

After serving briefly in World War I, Gage returned home to teach art at Washburn and the Kansas City Art Institute. In 1924, he moved to Los Angeles for a position at the University of Southern California. In L.A., Gage worked with Burt Johnson to create a sculpture for the Fine Arts Building. Later, Gage was commissioned to execute the bas reliefs, representing hydro-electric power, over the entrances of the Edison Building, which is now One Bunker Hill. Gage later sculpted bas reliefs on the façade of the Los Angeles Times Building, representing Father Time, Spirit of the Time and Gutenberg.

Gage continued to actively sculpt throughout his life, and retired from teaching art in 1958 after serving as chair of the Fine Arts department at USC. He left behind a large body of work sculpted in a variety of mediums, including stone, wood, metal and clay. Despite the differences in material, Gage was consistent with his American Theme, as seen in everything from portraiture to architecture.

Some of Gage's most notable works, in addition to the Lincoln statue in Topeka, include “Pioneer Mother Memorial” located near the Lincoln statue, busts of Walt Whitman and John Brown housed at the Mulvane Art Museum at Washburn University, his “Police Memorial” and “Veterans’ Fountain” in Kansas City, and the “History of California” frieze located in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Gage passed away in 1981, but his artistic contributions can be seen throughout the nation. He continues to be remembered for his dignified interpretations of American history, American heroes and American values.

