

THE LITTLE GIANT

A NEWSLETTER of the STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS ASSOCIATION

Volume X, Number 1, May 1998

SAURDAY, JUNE 6, 1998

Commemoration of the
137th Anniversary of the
Death of Stephen A. Douglas

11:00 a.m.

Ceremonies at the Douglas Tomb
636 East 35th Street

Wreath-laying and comments by
C. Robert Douglas,
President of the Stephen A. Douglas
Association

12 noon

Cocktails and Luncheon
Hyatt on Printers Row
500 South Dearborn Street
Public parking is available nearby.

**ADDRESS BY
PROFESSOR ROBERT W.
JOHANNSEN**

**"STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS
AND THE
MEXICAN WAR"**

\$30 per person, Cash bar

Your guests are welcome!

Please return the enclosed
reservation form, with remittance,
by Wednesday, June 3.

ROBERT W. JOHANNSEN TO ADDRESS THE ANNUAL LUNCHEON OF THE STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS ASSOCIATION, COMMEMORATING THE 137TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF SENATOR DOUGLAS

by Barbara Hughett

THE MOST eminent living authority on the life of Stephen Arnold Douglas will be the featured speaker at the annual Stephen A. Douglas Association event, which this year commemorates the 137th anniversary of his death, in the Tremont Hotel, here in Chicago. Robert W. Johannsen is the author of *Stephen A. Douglas* (1973), the definitive biography of the Illinois senator, as well as other books and numerous articles relating to his life as a leading American politician and statesman.

We are so honored to have Professor Johannsen with us this year. He last addressed us ten years ago, at our annual gathering, on June 4, 1988. His topic this year will be "Stephen A. Douglas and the Mexican War."

Stephen Arnold Douglas entered national political life as a member of the United States of Representatives in 1843—at a time when this country was on the threshold of its greatest period of territorial expansion. Thirty years of age, vigorous, talented, and ambitious, Douglas quickly identified himself with what John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, would term the

"Manifest Destiny" of the American republic.

By 1846, Douglas—with his quick mind and remarkable gift for oratory—had become one of the most prominent members of the lower house of Congress, and one of the most aggressive and enthusiastic supporters of territorial expansion. He was the leader of the movement to annex Texas to the United States; indeed, he was the author of one of the earliest annex resolutions. In this draft, he insisted that the United States acquire all of Oregon—as far north as 54 degrees, 40 minutes latitude.



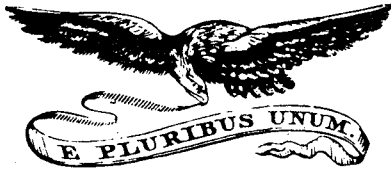
Robert W. Johannsen

A possible war with Great Britain over the Oregon boundary held no terrors for him, for Douglas denied Britain's right to even a foot of land in North America. "I would make this an ocean-bound republic," he told the House of Representatives. It was not, though, a war with England that provided the opportunity for him to objectify his dream for America; it was, instead, his fellow Americans' war with Mexico—developing from the annexation of Texas—which accomplished this for him.

Douglas, with tremendous enthusiasm, supported the Mexican War (un-

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THE STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS ASSOCIATION

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ROBERT W. JOHANNSEN

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like his political adversary and fellow Illinoisan Abraham Lincoln, who vigorously opposed this war as being unfair to Mexicans, and lost a lot of political capital because of this view). Douglas described the Mexican conflict in terms of his own real beliefs on the subject—and thus justified American involvement in it as a “fervent, glorious, patriotic zeal to advance the great cause of freedom.”

Stephen Douglas was one of the early supporters of the United States’ acquisition of California and New Mexico as a result of the conflict with Mexico, and he remained opposed to a treaty of peace because he felt it could make difficult any further acquisition of land from Mexico.

In defense of this position, he cried out, “You cannot fix bounds to the onward march of this great and growing country. You cannot fetter the limbs of the young giant. He will burst all your chains. He will expand, and grow, and increase, and extend civilization, Christianity, and liberal principles.”

In Stephen A. Douglas’s view, territorial expansion carried out God’s plan for the United States of America. Douglas, at this time young and vigorous himself, became the personification of mid-1800’s ideal “Young America.”

Professor Johannsen, in his address to us, will enhance our awareness of the political options faced by our cohorts of nearly a century-and-a-half ago. As we are privileged to have Dr. Johannsen help us observe the 150th anniversary of the Mexican War, it only seems fitting that we—especially as members of the Stephen A. Douglas Association—ac-

knowledge the Little Giant’s role in what many thousands of his generation regarded as America’s “Coming Of Age.”

Dr. Johannsen is currently the J. G. Randall Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he has taught for the past 39 years. Prior to this, he taught at the University of Washington and the University of Kansas. He received a B.A. degree from Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Washington. He also received an honorary doctorate from Lincoln College in Lincoln, Illinois, in 1983.



Among the fellowships and awards he has been granted are the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship (1967-68) and the Francis Parkman Prize for Literary Distinction in the Writing of History (1974). He was a University Scholar from 1990 through 1993. Dr. Johannsen has served as a consultant for several televised historical productions, including Ken Burns’s “The Civil War” for the Public Broadcasting System. He is an honorary director of the Stephen A. Douglas Association, and he is a member of the board of directors of the Abraham Lincoln Association.

In addition to Stephen A. Douglas, books Dr. Johannsen has written include: *Frontier Politics and the Sectional Conflict* (1955), *To the Halls of Montezuma: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (1985), *The Frontier, The Union, and Stephen A. Douglas* (1989), and *Lincoln, The South, and Slavery: The Political Dimension* (1991).

RALPH NEWMAN RECUPERATING

As many of you know, Douglas Association Founder and Chairman of the Board Ralph G. Newman suffered a massive heart attack last October, and has since suffered from some additional complications. He is recuperating at his home, and would like to hear from you. Send cards and letters to 175 East Delaware Place, Chicago, Illinois 60611. Thank you.

“I trust the time will never come when I shall not be willing to make any needful sacrifice of personal feeling and party policy for the honor and integrity of my country.”

May 10, 1861

LEONARD WELLS VOLK: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

by Jerry Warshaw

STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS was five feet, five inches tall; the height of his statue, sculpted by Leonard Wells Volk and placed above Douglas's tomb, is nine feet, nine inches. It stands atop a Romanesque pillar, one hundred feet above land that was once part of Douglas's beloved estate, Oakenwald. This is the image we get of "The Little Giant" when we visit the Douglas Tomb State Historic Site on the south side of Chicago.

How to immortalize Stephen A. Douglas—one of the nation's most influential men and one of the finest legislators in Illinois history—was the task facing Leonard Wells Volk, sculptor and civic leader, in 1866, when he was commissioned by the Douglas Monument Association to build this memorial. A gifted sculptor and a friend of the Senator, Volk was singularly qualified for the job entrusted to him.

A cousin by marriage to Douglas, the sculptor was beholden to him for his support and encouragement at the beginning of his career. Born on November 7, 1828, in Wells, New York, Leonard Volk was one of a family of thirteen children. The son of a master stone-cutter, he started out as an apprentice stone-cutter in his father's marble factory.

Volk's talent and ambition soon led him to seek work elsewhere. While working as a journeyman stone-cutter in Bethany, New York, he met Clarissa Barlow, daughter of a prominent local physician. Seven years later she became his wife.

When the Barlow family moved to St. Louis in 1848, Volk followed—encouraged by a job offer from a St. Louis firm at the princely salary of \$50.00 per month. Spurred on by his love of Miss Barlow and his desire to become something more than a "skillful carver," he plunged into vigorous activity.

In 1849, he began a strenuous year of self-study in drawing and modeling. Volk's ambition by this time was "to enjoy the success and reputation of a sculptor in the fullest and broadest sense of that work."

With an artist's sense of the romantic, he chose as one of his first projects a bust of Dr. J.K. Barlow, the father of his fiancée, "in the fond hope that Miss Barlow might see it and admire it." It must have worked; on April 22, 1852, he and Clarissa were wed.

Developing a reputation for conscientious study and good artistic taste, he began to produce a number of impressive works, such as a copy of Joel T. Hart's famous bust of Henry Clay in marble—the first of its kind west of the Mississippi. However, he was not satisfied with the progress of his career and returned for awhile to his old trade of stone-cutting, hoping to lay aside money with the intention of going to Italy to



Autographed photo of Leonard W. Volk
(Lloyd Ostendorf Collection)

study the Old Masters and "seek inspiration from them."

He and Clarissa settled in Galena, Illinois, where a daughter was born and where he began his lifelong friendship with Stephen A. Douglas. Believing in the young sculptor's talent, Douglas became a devoted mentor to Volk. He was generous in using his personal influence to obtain commissions for Volk.

In 1855, Douglas made him an "offer he couldn't refuse"—the financial means to fulfill his dream of going to Italy to study. Before departing, he set up residence in Chicago. Leaving his wife and child in the care of his brother in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, for the duration of his stay abroad, the twenty-seven-year-old Volk sailed to the "Eter-

nal City." For eighteen months he studied his art and enjoyed the stimulating cultural atmosphere in the company of a number of young American sculptors; included among them was John Rogers. These young talents would be major influences on modern American sculpture for the rest of the century and beyond.

The many Romanesque columns on American monuments attest to the influence of the "Roman students." The Douglas tomb is a prime example of this style.

While in Rome, Volk was informed of the death of his daughter. In 1857, he returned to Chicago with \$5.00 in his pockets. With generous assistance from Douglas, he soon established himself as a major sculptor. He did a bust and life-sized statue of Douglas and, in 1860, produced a statuette of the Senator for his upcoming run for the presidency. In 1859, he organized the first fine arts exhibition in the American Northwest.

Holding the Republican presidential candidate to a previous promise, Volk persuaded Abraham Lincoln to sit for him in his studio in Chicago. From this sitting came the famous casts of Lincoln's face and hands, which would be models for countless paintings, sculptures, and monuments all over the world. Lincoln's comment on Volk's bust of him was, "There's the animal himself."

After Fort Sumter was fired upon, Volk enlisted in a local Chicago regiment, but his company was never called to action and was soon disbanded. He then continued his successful career.

After the war, Volk became secretary of the Douglas Monument Association. Despite many setbacks, including fund-raising problems and the loss of the original design in the Chicago fire, the monument was finally completed on May 5, 1881.

Volk became a "mover and shaker" in the cultural life of Chicago. He founded the Chicago Academy of Design and became its first president. The Academy would later become the Art Institute of Chicago.

He enjoyed a very productive career, designing monuments for military memorials, parks, and cemeteries. He designed his own marble-front art building on Washington Street, between Wells and Franklin Streets, in downtown Chicago.

Leonard Volk died on August 19, 1895, at his summer home in Oseola,
(continued on page 4)

LEONARD W. VOLK (from page 3)

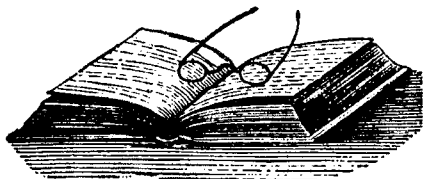
Wisconsin, only months after the death of his beloved Clarissa. He is buried in Rosehill Cemetery on the north side of Chicago. He sculpted his own monument, which shows him resting a moment while walking in the countryside—one of his favorite pastimes.



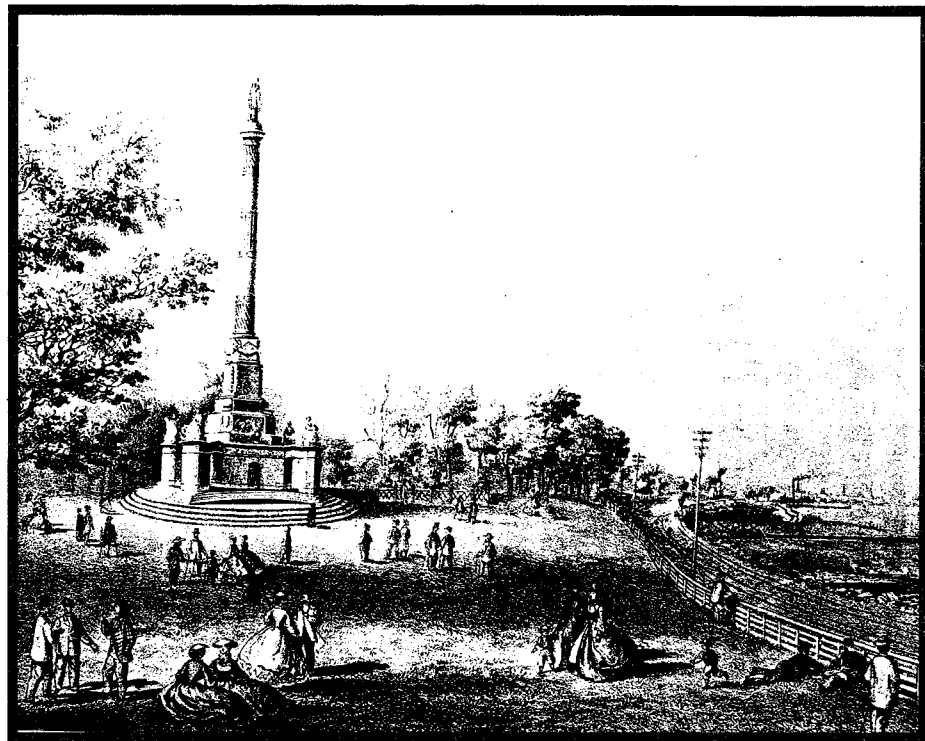
Jerry Warshaw, a well-known humorous illustrator and author of several children's books, serves as an interpreter at the Chicago Historical Society and the Museum of Broadcast Communications. He also is a sculptor and is on the board of directors of the Palette and Chisel Academy of Fine Arts.

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This article appeared in the May 1991 issue of *The Little Giant*.



"Douglas Monument," reproduction of a colored lithograph published by Jevne and Almini, 1866-67, in James W. Sheahan, *Chicago Illustrated*, (Chicago, Church, Goodman, and Donnelley, 1868) Rare Book Collection, University of Chicago Library.



ILLINOIS' FIRST STATE MEMORIAL: THE TOMB OF STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS

by Barbara Hughett

THE practice of state-owned historic sites began in 1865 when the state of Illinois purchased the grave of Stephen A. Douglas. Senator Douglas had been buried on his Chicago estate, Oakenwald, after his death on June 3, 1861; the following October a group of his friends and associates organized the Douglas Monument Association. Sculptor Leonard W. Volk, a relative of Douglas by marriage, presented a plan for an eighteen-member board of trustees and served as the Association's secretary.

Fundraising proceeded slowly. As this was occurring in the midst of the Civil War, many potential donors felt their charitable contributions should go for the care and relief of Union soldiers.

Although some donations were received, most of the money collected in the Association's early days came from membership subscriptions. For one dollar, each donor received a "diploma of membership," which featured a "fine portrait" of Douglas and a "bird's eye view" of his grave.

The Douglas Monument Association

requested state assistance in a letter to legislators in May 1863. The Association needed \$25,000 to buy the grave site and \$50,000 to construct a monument. The state ultimately granted the financial assistance and approved a design for the monument submitted by Leonard Volk. The first phase of the work was begun in October 1865.

The Association invited President Andrew Johnson to participate in the corner-stone laying ceremony. He accepted and stopped in Chicago, as part of his "swing around the circle" political tour of the eastern half of the country. Accompanying Johnson were several members of his cabinet, as well as Generals Grant, Rawlings, Dix, Meade, and Custer, and Admiral Farragut.

The ceremony took place on September 6, 1866. Shops, businesses, and banks were closed. The Illinois Central Railroad ran trains to the grave every ten minutes. Over one hundred thousand people lined the parade route. The Association capitalized on the event by selling seats in the front of the speakers stand for three dollars each. Tin boxes

for donations to the Douglas Monument Association were placed in public places, and five thousand medals were sold for one and two dollars apiece.

Even though this event was a success, the Association soon ran out of money again. Attempts to secure additional funding from the legislature in 1868, 1873, and 1878 failed. But in 1877, the legislature appropriated \$50,000 for the completion of the monument and appointed a three-member commission to oversee its construction. Commission members were Robert Lincoln, Potter Palmer, and Melville Fuller.

By July 1878 the column was completed and Volk's newly finished statue of Douglas was hoisted into place. But it was not until the summer of 1881 that the last of the four life-size statues at the base of the monument was lifted to its place. The memorial to "The Little Giant" had taken twenty years to become a reality.

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This article first appeared in *The Little Giant* in December 1990.