

***Lorado Taft: The Chicago Years***

Allen Stuart Weller

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To be published by  
The University of Illinois Press  
in collaboration with  
Krannert Art Museum  
The University of Illinois Library  
& Spurlock Museum

**Fall 2014**

The sculptor, writer, University of Illinois alumnus, and self-proclaimed art missionary Lorado Zadok Taft (1860-1936) led the field of American sculpture for half a century. From the late 1880s through the 1930s he erected major public monuments across America from Seattle to Denver and Washington, DC; his articles and lectures shaped the public understanding of art; his instruction at the Art Institute of Chicago molded the careers of Midwestern artists; and his academic textbook, *The History of American Sculpture*, remains a foundational text of American art history.

Taft's impact was profound in, but not limited to, his home state of Illinois and particularly in Chicago, where the sculptor rose to prominence during the World's Columbian Exposition, installed his greatest masterpieces (the *Fountain of the Great Lakes* and *Fountain of Time*), and established the legendary Midway Studios (now part of the University of Chicago). As a University of Illinois alumnus, Taft designed the bronze sculptural group that embodies the university's beloved symbol, the *Alma Mater*, whose outstretched arms have welcomed generations of students, faculty, and alumni. And his four stone sculptures from a projected *Fountain of Creation*, now radically decontextualized and mislabeled, adorn the university's Main Library entrance and the south side of Foellinger Auditorium. Yet it remains little known that Taft's monuments appear as far north as Jackson, Michigan, and as far south as Chickamauga, Georgia, and include battlefield memorials at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and Vicksburg, Mississippi. Similarly, few have heard of Taft's promotion of women, immigrant, and African-American sculptors in Chicago; his connections to reformers and suffragettes such as Frances E. Willard, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony; or his stint as an art

educator for the University of the American Expeditionary Forces in France in 1919.

Despite Taft's formidable reputation during his lifetime, the only comprehensive monographic study of this artist's achievements slated for publication, *Lorado Taft: The Chicago Years*, was left incomplete upon the death of its author, Allen S. Weller (February 1, 1907 – November 16, 1997). Weller, a former University of Illinois professor, dean of its College of Fine and Applied Arts, and director of Krannert Art Museum, dedicated decades of study to the artist dubbed "the dean of Chicago sculptors." This volume completes and revises Weller's manuscript, propagates art historical research produced in the College of Fine and Applied Arts, promotes the University Archives as a hub for the study of American art, secures Krannert Art Museum's reputation as the legitimate storehouse for Taft's sculpture, and honors the legacy of the sculptor Lorado Taft, the scholar Allen Weller, and the cultural heritage of the University of Illinois.

Robert G. La France

Lorado Taft (1860-1936): University of Illinois Alumnus (BA 1879, MA 1880)

Allen S. Weller (1906-1997): University of Illinois Professor (1948-54), Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts (1954-71), and director of Krannert Art Museum (1964-75).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations

Acknowledgments

Introduction by Robert G. La France

Chapter 1: Paris to Chicago

Chapter 2: Before the Fair

Chapter 3: The World's Columbian Exposition

Chapter 4: After the Exposition

Chapter 5: Taft's Students

Chapter 6: Taft as an Author

Chapter 7: From *The Solitude of the Soul* to *The Blind*

Chapter 8: The Development of the Midway Plaisance

Chapter 9: Taft's Roaring Twenties

Chapter 10: The Final Period

Appendix I: Lorado in Paris by Henry Adams (analytical summary of Allen Weller,

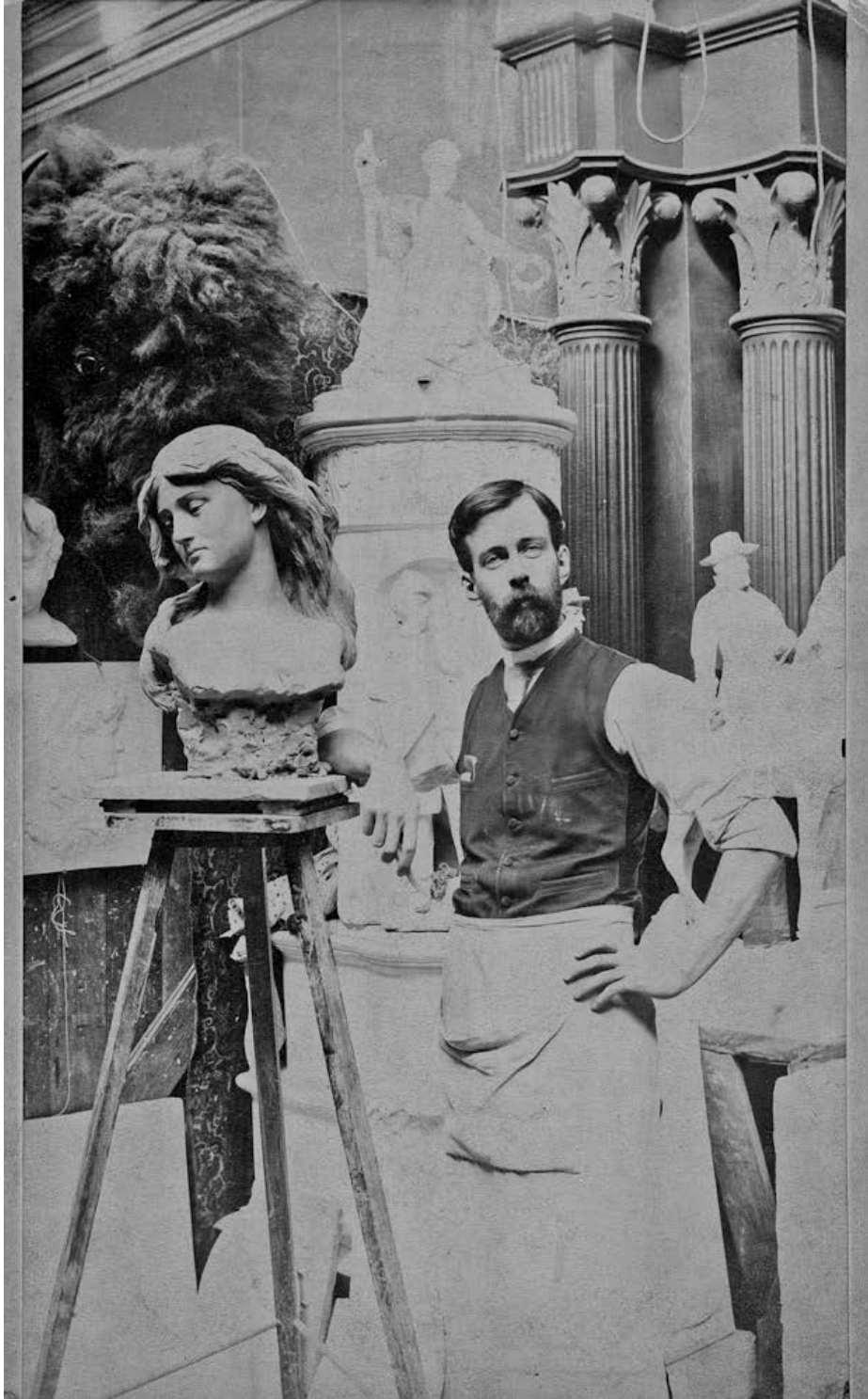
*Lorado in Paris: The Letters of Lorado Taft 1880-1886*, Urbana, 1985).

Appendix II: Allen Weller: from Francesco di Giorgio to Lorado Taft by Henry Adams

(intellectual biography of the author).

Bibliography

Index



Lorado Taft in His Early Studio, photograph March 1887 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the University of Illinois Archives).



Lorado Taft Sculpting a Clay Portrait of Colonel Briggs (upper right), with His Sisters  
Turbia Drawing a Portrait of Charles Francis Brown (front center) and Zulime Sculpting  
a Woman's Portrait (left), photograph, ca. 1896 (artwork in the public domain;  
photograph provided by the University of Illinois Archives).



Lorado Taft in His State Street Studio (with the full-scale clay model for the *Standard Bearer of the Fourth Michigan Infantry Regiment* for Gettysburg), photograph 1888 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the University of Illinois Archives).



*Standard Bearer of the Fourth Michigan Infantry Regiment*, granite relief, 1888-9, Gettysburg, PA (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Lynn Allyn Young).





*Despair*, plaster, 1899, Rockford Art Museum, Rockford (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Robert G. La France).



Luncheon at the Midway Studios (before a plaster cast of the *Recording Angel*), photograph ca. 1923-30 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the University of Illinois Archives).

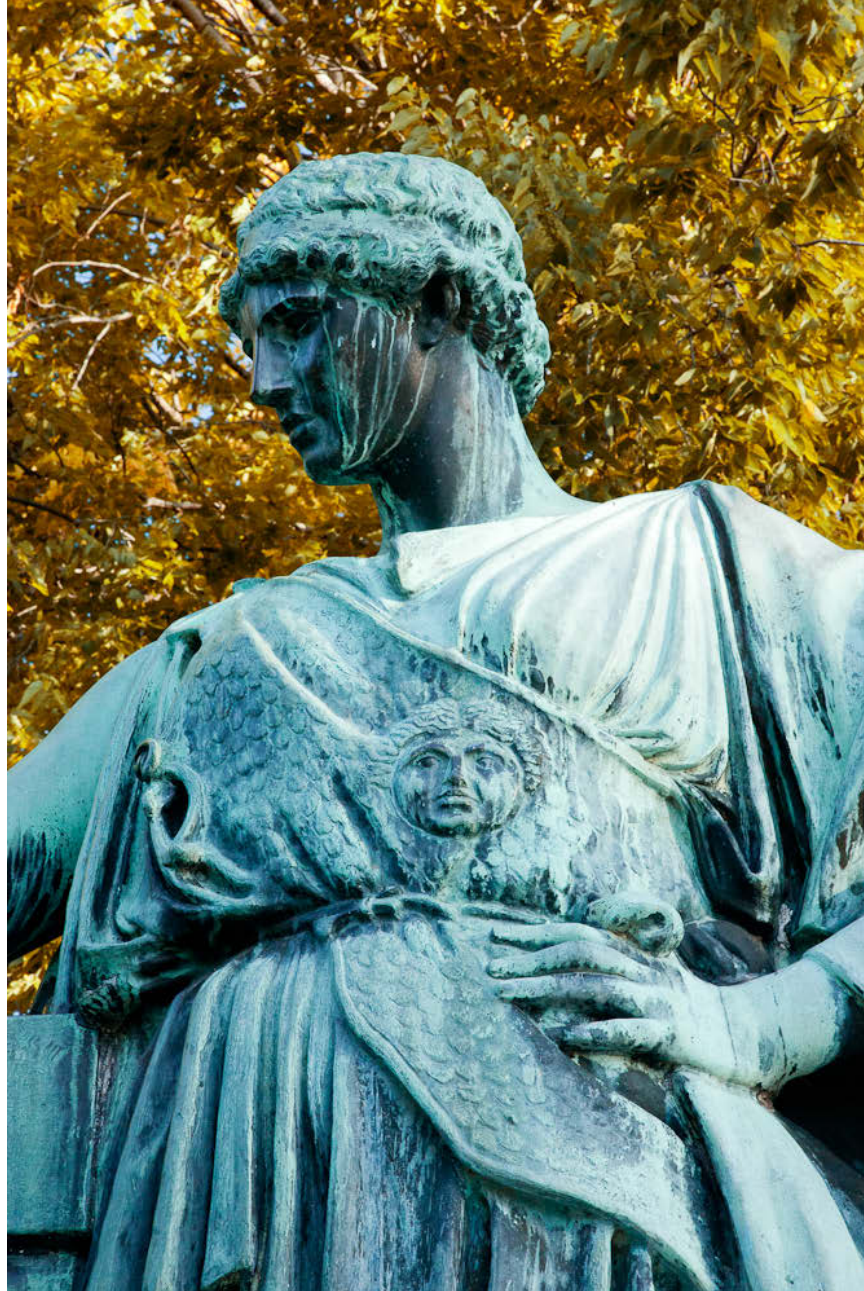


*Fountain of the Great Lakes*, bronze, 1913, current location in the Stanley McCormick Memorial Court Garden, Art Institute of Chicago (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Lynn Allyn Young).





*Lincoln as a Young Lawyer*, bronze, 1927, Carle Park, Urbana (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Robert G. La France).



*Alma Mater* (detail of Learning, before restoration), bronze, 1929, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by University of Illinois Public Affairs: photo by L. Brian Stauffer).