1942

Amos Alonza Stagg in wood

Richard Henry Reynolds
University of the Pacific

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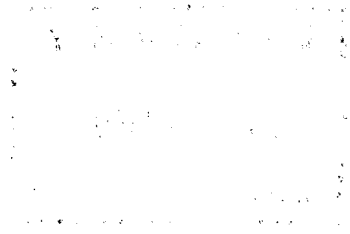

by

Richard Henry Reynolds

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Art

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in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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This paper is dedicated to those students of the future who wish to do creative work in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters Degree.

R. H. R.

5-16-42

PREFACE

"The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance: for this, and not the external mannerism and detail, is their reality."

-ARISTOTLE[1]

I should like to set down some of the matters pertaining to the psychological and philosophical development of this project. In the main text of this paper I have listed the processes, technical problems and tools of the art of wood sculpture. Filtering in among these considerations are some of the mental tangles as I encountered them. Wherever necessary, these problems of the mind are exposed in relation to the actual carving process. It is here in the preface that I prefer to take the reader farther back into the recesses of the mind to investigate the intricate patterns of thought that somehow guide the eyes and hands in the manipulation of the material.

Let us consider Mr. Stagg, the man, as I see him. In physical makeup his figure is an ideal model for sculpture so far as my opinion is concerned. His proportions are unique in that he stands six and a half heads tall, whereas the average man is between seven and eight heads in height. In addition, his is a physique that at one time displayed a well developed musculature. His present build is sufficient testimony. The arms are heavily muscled, the shoulders are well padded, and following the analysis to its logical conclusion, it is safe to say his entire anatomical makeup still preserves much of the development

[1] Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy, p. 84.

that helped him blaze a path of fame in athletics. His waistline is full, creating in profile an out-curved line from shoulders to feet. Looking at his figure from front or back view, the proportions resemble a rectangle. A vertical line could be dropped from either shoulder to the corresponding foot with but little swelling at the hip-line. These considerations deal with line and volume. It is necessary to deal with sculpture as a space problem in which the finished product is seen in the mind as a specific form displacing a certain amount of air. In other words, the subject must be visualized as sculpture. How do the volume, the subordinate forms, the textures, and surface planes feel to the hands? This tactile problem can be visualized in the mind just as surely as one can tell how rough a gravelled road or a piece of velvet will feel without actually touching either one. We can "see" texture as well as feel it.

All too many people are space-blind. They are sufficiently aware of ordinary distances and volumes to meet their practical needs, but they have not taken the trouble to go beyond this first step of development. Athletes develop a finer sense of spatial awareness, as do dancers, actors, engineers, and architects. This lack of sensitivity to space relationships on the part of the average man and woman helps to account for the poor response given to sculpture by the public. Of course, it is also true that story-telling, in the graphic sense, is poorly portrayed in sculpture. A painting can illustrate the details of an episode much more clearly. Sculpture must be symbolic to a greater extent and consequently demands of its audience some knowledge of the thing symbolized.

Highest maturation of the senses in connection with space problems is developed by the sculptor who does abstractions. He is working

entirely with space relationships. He is continually trying to reveal some significant aspect of a form by means of integrating areas in space. Examples of such abstractions might include attempts to put into sculpture the growth pattern of a plant, the flight of a bird (Brancusi), the spirit of anger or any other mood--all divorced from realistic representation of physical characteristics. This process narrows the effort to one of seeking the essential feature that creates the vitality of the form. Naturalistic representation must also consider this aspect of the spirit. It is not possible to separate realism from abstraction, for is not abstraction another method of arriving at the real quality in any subject? Is not the spirit that permeates any form as much a part of realism as the surface detail?

Perhaps I should make my stand on this question. Those outside characteristics belonging to Mr. Stagg that help to tell him from Mr. Johnson or Mr. Freeman are only part of the realism connected with the man. There is something over and above these details that helps our recognition. That something else is what I choose to call his spirit--spirit in a larger sense than cheerfulness or sadness, though there is something of each involved. To be successful in this portraiture I must achieve the spiritual quality that belongs to the subject. This intangible is far more important than any photographic similarity that could be shown in facial description.

I should like to make an attempt to get at that spiritual essence possessed by Mr. Stagg. We all have our own particular qualities in this respect, but Mr. Stagg is truly one of our great men today, and to discover what lies behind his greatness is to make the problem of registering his strength that much clearer.

Mr. Stagg stands for something conceded to be a great force in American athletics. His code of living, playing, and fighting, and his lifetime spent in guiding young men according to his standards for these activities, have stamped him as a veritable monument in the eyes of our youth. There is strength in the name Stagg, strength in the man, and in the eyes that watch so keenly as boys continue to pass under his tutelage. This strength is moral, a kind of pillar lacking in the structure of many so-called successful men who grew into power during Mr. Stagg's years. He has never compromised his position when opportunities for doing so were plentiful. His teams could have had the winning side of many a 70-0 tally had he wished to sacrifice a belief. Other men did fall victims to that tarnished word success, they sold themselves short to make balances in the temple long, but their names will long since have been forgotten when the name Stagg will stand as a symbol for the good American. All of this is back of the man. He is finishing his fifty-second year of working with boys in team sports. His shoulders are bent, his step is slower, and his words are hesitant at times, but these are things of the flesh, not the soul. Mr. Stagg is as strong today as ever before. He is as rugged as the early pioneer who had a belief too: a belief that he could make of this land a home for his family and his dreams. The pioneer accomplished his task and the land breathes of his conquest. Mr. Stagg is a pioneer too. He is a straightforward, honest citizen who has his feet resting on the soil of his faith. A sculpture of him must register this simple power. In the face of the combined physical-spiritual pattern of Mr. Stagg's personality I often felt hopelessly lost. There were days when I could not force myself to tackle the job. Fortunately, there were other days, nights, and mornings when my vision was clear enough to see what I was

trying to do.

Another important factor is that of the audience. The message, once seen, now has to be brought home to the observer. And who is this observer? Is he a sophisticated critic whose basis for judgment rests on art principles? No. This piece of sculpture is not intended for a museum where competitive works bid for honors. Is this audience made up of everyday men and women who know of the man? Shall I appeal to them? It would seem so. How about my own feelings? How would I execute this composition if I were doing it for myself alone? Critics are certain to enter the audience at one time or another. Average men and women will be the major group concerned. My own feelings have to be considered. The finished product must have some of the qualities the critic wants to see, it must satisfy those observers who look for surface detail, and it has to meet my own standards. That is the nucleus of the problems concerning the audience. Not a simple goal for a novice who has yet to win applause for any one of the three kinds of observers!

My preference in the matter would lead me to create a more impressionistic representation--blood-brother to abstraction. No doubt my wish to do the composition in this way would meet with approval by art critics (providing I was successful). After all, in this case I am not my own voice in the matter. I am taking on the job of representing the voice of the people: saying about this man what they would want said. In accepting this responsibility I will find ample opportunity for exercising my imagination as well as what skill I can bring into play.

The combat between ideas and creative impulse rages continually during the carving and planning. It may very well be that this failure to have a definite end in mind and pursuing it to its logical conclusion

accounts for cross criticism of results. It also has a great deal to do with the fact that masterpieces are sometimes produced. Following rigid channels of thought, inflexible rules and inhibitions, and heeding only popular demand have devastating results on art expression.

I should like to make one further point. This is in relation to the material. The medium used is Jarrah wood. It is hard enough to suggest strength, red enough to imply warmth, and yet soft enough to be in sympathy with the generosity of the man portrayed. Stone is cold. It would be more suitable to a portraiture of a Rockefeller, certainly not a Stagg. Wood is a material that comes from a growing life-form, rooted in the ground. It takes its strength gradually as the years roll by. What better choice of medium could be made?

At this point the reader may or may not agree with me when I say that the diverse pattern of mental gymnastics undergone by the artist demands more understanding than the observer of his work can fathom. Aside from the psychological and philosophical relationships there are the technical aspects of the creative effort. These latter considerations will be found in the text of the paper.

It must be remembered that the durability of the expression itself is not alone dependent upon the artist's ability to incorporate all the factors I have mentioned. If the piece of art work cannot stand by itself, in the eyes of all, then the artist has failed. If he has managed to reach into the inexplicable depths of feeling, bringing out a form of expression that touches a majority of the appreciative audience as well as the less sensitive members of that group, he has succeeded. Time is the ultimate mediator.

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INTRODUCTION

Inasmuch as it has been agreed that a work of art is to take the place of the usual written thesis in meeting the requirement for the degree Master of Arts, this paper is submitted as an auxiliary factor--not as the thesis itself. It is understood that the sole basis for judgment shall rest upon the acceptability of the art work; in this case, a wood sculpture of Mr. Amos Alonzo Stagg. With this information in mind I decided that a positive value would be developed if some of the problems, aesthetic and otherwise, which arose during the process of evolving the sculpture, were exposed.

Many artists, writers, and musicians have attempted to put into words some of the feelings they had during their creative periods. However, there is a danger in such exposition. If the written material is divorced from the creative work itself, reader and writer are left without a basis of reference. There is also the possibility that in re-creating, so to speak, either the problems have been enlarged in the mind and consequently dramatized, or they have taken on less meaning since their solution. It is not possible for the reader to grasp fully the gamut of psychological reactions and impulses that overtake the artist at work. However, it is possible to lay before the reader the expression itself, accompanied by an analysis of the problems and a review of remembered highlights and depressing events. Such is the purpose of this paper.

R. H. R.

Stockton, California

January 23, 1942

CHAPTER I

BEGINNINGS ARE MADE

Wishing to avoid the kind of research that leads to endless browsing through books and magazines for source material, and which leads to a compilation of facts, figures and opinions, I chose this project as more fitting in the field of art. The first mentioned process of study fails to impress me as an appropriate technique for the working artist. In a great many branches of study such a procedure would undoubtedly be suitable. Research of so exacting and mechanical a nature would be profitable for the art-minded student if he were intending to become a museum curator or a lecturer in art. These are scholarly professions and require a great deal of knowledge concerning the past, but the artist who wishes to express himself will avoid cluttering his mind with too dusty antiquity; he will attempt to portray life from the vantage point of his own observations and feelings. Of course, there is much to be gained from study of previous ages, much that will help in the interpretation of our own times. But again this method of background development can be overdone. One who lives in a world of words and mental impressions gathered second-hand has little reserve power for dynamic expression of his own. Feeling, the creative impulse, and the tools of the artist are difficult to integrate if the artist splits his attention. Expressing the same idea in reverse, one may say it is also unwise for the working artist to put into words his personality approach to any creative problem. If he does so he usually bogs down under pressure of dull and empty phraseology which poorly represents his feelings. There is reason to agree with Henry Moore, contemporary English sculptor, who says, "It is a mistake for a sculptor or a

painter to speak or write very often about his job. It releases tension needed for his work. By trying to express his aims with rounded off logical exactness, he can easily become a theorist whose actual work is only a caged-in exposition of conceptions evolved in terms of logic and words."[1] However, in this case, the creative work is done and the writing of this paper interferes in no way with the art activity.

Another approach to the question of artists and their efforts relates to the teaching of art. Dr. Stephen Pepper of the University of California, writing for the October, 1941, issue of Parnassus, says, "...the only competent teacher for the creation of aesthetic values is a man who himself creates them--the creative artist himself." This statement scratches most deeply when it touches the minds of public school administrators who expect to get a "walking encyclopedia" plus a creative artist when hiring an art teacher. A man prepares either to teach creative art or to lecture on its cultural values--to do both is out of the realm of possibility. Occasionally a person is found who can teach on one side of this picture better than on the other, but who can do both well enough to "get by". Unfortunately, the "getting by" standard is only too prevalent. The working members of its union are doing great injustice to children--though it is amazing how well students thrive in spite of the teachers. It is regrettable that opportunities for stimulating growth in the students have been stifled by teachers better fit for clerical duties; that in the end, instructors of this ilk have succeeded in killing any interest that may have been ready for development.

With these and other thoughts in mind, Miss Ward, Chairman of the

[1] R. Faulkner, E. Ziegfeld, G. Hill, Art Today, p. 152.

Art Department, and her associates developed this project in sculpture for me. I have regarded it as an opportunity for new experience, personal growth, and in the end, a research value greater than at first imagined.

CHAPTER II

THE CHOICE OF MATERIALS

Sculpture is accomplished in one of two ways. In the first, the process is one of cutting away the material until the desired form is revealed. In the second, form is evolved through the building up of material. The first method is called carving, or chiseling, and the second is termed modeling. Modeling is done in soft media such as clay. The harder materials, ranging from wood to stone, call for the cutting technique. Hence it can be seen that chiseling, or carving, is the more delicate and at the same time bolder approach. The chiseling method allows no patching of mistakes by the addition of new material where excess carving has taken place. That which is taken away loses its place as a part of the finished product, and consequently one must be fairly sure in his cutting.

There is a great difference in sculptural materials. Just what can be done in stone, in metal, in wood? Stone, because of its nature, demands a close composition. Any extended forms must have support or the weight of the medium will promote fracture. Metal is the ideal material for lacy, extended areas because of its tensile strength. This explains, in part, why many of the statues done in metal are of animals in action poses, winged Mercurys, and other delicately balanced designs. No such result can be had in stone. Wood is the least permanent of these three media, and is somewhat a compromise, insofar as strength is concerned. It can support some extensions that would not be appropriate in stone, but it will not go to the limits of metal. Further qualities of wood are its endless variety of surface beauty (grain), its long range of hardness and

coloring, and its workability.

Carving directly in wood is of great interest because no two pieces are exactly alike and each reacts to the tools differently. Furthermore, this range of differences makes selection of the proper wood for a specific purpose an important preliminary step in sculpture work.

It was my first idea to do the carving in stone, but that proved inadvisable upon investigation. Of all the kinds of stone that could be used Italian marble was suggested by stone-cutters as the best to be employed by a beginner. This stone is of a white, salt-like texture in its natural state and upon seeing it in other sculpture I decided it was too cold and formal for my purposes. Then red sandstone was suggested by the stone dealers. It carves beautifully and is a most satisfactory material for technical tooling of the surface. Red sandstone describes itself by its name, though it is more rust-color than red. It, too, proved out of the question. It is unavailable without considerable expense for shipping, since it weighs approximately one hundred pounds per cubic foot. As a matter of fact, any stone would have been a problem because of the mobility factor. I wanted to do a figure composition requiring about four cubic feet of material, though in the end the amount used was less.

Wood seemed to be the ideal material. It met all of the requirements. Nearby lumber companies could provide information about sources for unusual woods. The weight of this material was not so great that it could not be transported by automobile. There are so many kinds of wood that searching for the type suitable for this project became an interesting task.

All the lumber companies I visited in Stockton were pessimistic about my chances of getting one piece of wood a foot square by three or four feet in length. Each concern advised the laminating together of smaller

sections to get the desired dimensions. I rejected this idea. Assembling bits of material for sculpture so small is not necessary and has several disadvantages. The word small is used because the proposed dimensions are relatively small in comparison with life-sized statuary where such putting together of sectionalized portions is often done. A block of wood made from joined sections all too often possesses areas of various grain directions as well as a wide range in scale of workability. The end product can be successful or unsuccessful depending upon the quality of the block and the skill of the artist. Regarding the skill as constant, there is too much likelihood for variation in wood quality for such a product as this one. Personally, I like to avoid unnecessary risks in any job so important.

Remembering a woodcarver's display I had seen in Berkeley some time ago, I set out to see if the owner could be located. Fortunately, after many delays and blind leads, I found his studio. Mr. Alexander G. Weygars operates the Berkeley Art Center and sells rare woods and wood sculpture of his own. His was the sculpture I had seen in a showcase several years earlier and which somehow found a place in my memory. Mr. Weygars proved most helpful when questioned concerning kinds of wood to be used for portrait-sculpture. I found that such an undertaking was considered hazardous at best. The most skillful of sculptors may work in blond woods to test and display their virtuosity, but chances of failure are many, since light often glares over undercuts, destroying form in strategic places. This is not a negligible matter as the successful evasion of this circumstance requires keen foresight and study. To a great extent, sculptural form depends upon the distribution of light and shadow. Obviously, I could not chance my luck with a blond wood since my experience in portrait-

sculpture had not yet begun. I decided to do the project in a dark wood.

There are many varieties of wood in the range of color ruming from medium blond to black. Choosing from this selection must take into consideration other elements than color. Any highly grained wood possesses too much interest in itself to be used. In explanation of that statement let us suppose the object to be carved is to be an abstraction; a form to be judged on its beauty as three-dimensional shape, line and movement. In such an exercise any natural beauty of the material must be allowed to have its place in the final form--it adds to the line, the shape, and the movement very much as the meandering quality of a restless stream adds to its attractiveness as it winds its way to the sea. This same quality seen in wood graining helps to decide the form to be developed. However, in dealing with portraiture, likeness is a prime consideration for the sculptor as well as for the audience. Any undue emphasis on graining merely serves to distract the eye. My problem narrowed to one of four aspects. The dark wood ought to be warm in color, it should have a minor degree of graining, there should be a fairly consistent texture for cutting purposes, and it should be of a hardness compatible with durability.

A further factor in choosing a wood is the attitude of the sculptor toward his material. Interest in a problem as stimulating as this one would be jeopardized if the material to be used were of a common type--one that could be easily obtained by anyone. To work in an unknown medium on a new subject is of great value to the artist, even though the element of potential mistakes in handling is always present. New material awakens the curiosity, stimulates interest, and excites the imagination.

Though teak wood was considered, my decision was to take a block of Australian wood called Jarrah, which is dark red-rust in color, close

grained like Philippine mahogany, and nearly as hard as maple. Mr. Weygars reduced the cost from a dollar a pound to fifty cents per pound when he discovered that I wanted to get about three cubic feet. He lowers his charge by half whenever anyone wishes to purchase over one cubic foot. This procedure has two purposes. Cutting a small piece of wood from another block reduces the scale of any work that can be done in the remaining block, consequently affecting its salability. Then, too, if someone wants to do a large piece of work he is often frustrated by the initial cost of material unless a volume purchase can reduce over-all charges.

All rare imported woods are sold by Mr. Weygars at one dollar a pound, and at this writing are no longer being imported. It is logical to suppose prices will advance wherever the woods can be located. Lumber companies do not deal in these woods because they are unprofitable to handle. They are scarce, in limited demand, and when demand is made the specifications are for irregular shapes. As a result, odds and ends were all that were ever shipped to this country except for advance orders. Marketing the woods is difficult because the clientele is select and scattered. This lack of a centered buying public accounts for the difficulty encountered by the novice attempting to procure such rare woods in specific proportions. In other words, the dealers are not easily located.

Jarrah wood is nearly as heavy per unit as teak and for this reason any sizable block becomes quite expensive at a dollar a pound. The piece obtained was eight inches square by twenty-four inches in length. Weighing approximately thirty-two pounds, the block would have cost as many dollars had not Mr. Weygars made his reduction in price.

Means of protecting wood until it is to be carved are of first im-

portance to the wood sculptor. Being responsive to climatic changes, wood actually expands and contracts as the weather becomes cold-wet or hot-dry. The pores of the wood are subject to the penetration of air and if the air is wet the wood swells. Rapid temperature and humidity changes stimulate equally quick expansion or contraction in the wood. Such action invariably produces cracks, or splits, in the wood. These openings are termed checks when they are not seriously large. A check is not dangerous in its first stage if caught at that time; generally it will go about one-half to one and a half inches into the block. A depth of this degree might be serious if the desired sculpture demanded such a close proximity to the outer surface of the block at that point, but usually, on a fairly large work, several inches of the outer section are removed. However, if the check is left untreated it will slowly advance inward, resulting in a bad split in a vital area. To defend against such a danger, one of several procedures can be followed. If the block is undamaged and whole at the time of acquisition, and has been shaped into a rectangular form by a mill, one can bathe it in shellac until the wood refuses to absorb any more, leaving the excess on the surface. This surface shellac should then be wiped off and the block left to stand in a place where temperature changes are not radical. Shellac acts as a filler of the pores, hardening and creating a barrier against the air's invasion. Should some of the pores prove to be unfilled and showing evidence of checking, more shellac should be applied at those points. Liquid paraffin can also be used. The wood will then close, forcing the hardening shellac, or paraffin, to the surface where it stands out in relief as though squeezed out--which has actually happened! These small checks do not disappear. They merely go no

farther into the block to endanger the central core where the cutting is to be done. Paraffin can be used as the first protective coating where shellac was mentioned. The wax-like quality of paraffin effectively covers the wood and keeps out the air, but it is more apt to be chipped away, allowing exposure if the block is handled to any extent before cutting is undertaken. Many other kinds of wood-fillers with various trade names are on the market, but their cost is high and they are no more effective. It must be stated that a well seasoned block of wood can stand untreated for perhaps six months, or longer, without fear of serious checking if the weather is sufficiently even in nature. Too, it should be understood that such precautions as have been listed are intended particularly for wood saved for sculptural purposes rather than for construction. Otherwise, ordinary care is adequate for protection of the wood when small checks are not of great consequence. Both shellac and paraffin were used on the Jarrah wood since several checks appeared in the block early in the sketch-period of the project.

Many carvings are made in wood having large cracks along its grain. Usually this material has been taken directly from some fallen tree and has split while exposed to the whims of nature. Such splits always occur along the path of the grain, and if they are flowing or dynamic in line they may enhance the appearance of the resultant form--admitting the raw material as found and adding interest to the form arrived at through the combined hands of the elements and man.

CHAPTER III

ESTABLISHING THE COMPOSITION

Mr. Amos Alonzo Stagg was the model chosen for the sculpture. The choice was prompted by Dr. Tully C. Knoles who was to have been the subject for the study. Dr. Knoles preferred that his close friend and fellow worker, Mr. Stagg, be selected. At this point it became necessary to develop the preliminary sketches for the purpose of deciding upon a composition suitable to the dimensions of the wood.

Because Mr. Stagg is a busy man, and probably would have had to inconvenience himself in order to act as model for long sessions of sketching, I chose to use photographs. Mr. Robert Bastian did the excellent photography required for source material. Seven views were taken; four full-length and three of the head in close range for facial characteristics. These pictures were printed seven by twelve inches. Using the photographs as guides I made many sketches, simplifying the volumes wherever possible and reducing detail to what I considered a minimum for such a sculpture. Michelangelo is credited with having made the statement that any good statue should be so composed that it could be rolled down a hillside without suffering loss of any of its essential parts. Somehow that thought embodies the simple core of truth that many contemporary sculptors could heed, though it must be admitted that Michelangelo was referring to stone sculpture. However, a work that has portions of itself extended beyond the principal form has little appeal for one who favors strong sculpture because such laciness suggests nervousness, seems to possess a lack of solidarity, and in general loses power. Delicacy, as a dominant characteristic of a sculpture, seems out

of place, though such a feeling is entirely personal. Again, the material used and the subject studied have a lot to do with the composition attempted.

Opinions of many of Mr. Stagg's admirers contributed in the final selection of a desirable composition for the sculpture. The most satisfactory attitude of the figure would be the one that stimulated a spark of recognition for the greatest number of people. It is certain that there are many thousands of men and women who would be able to identify Mr. Stagg in any crowd. He has appeared before audiences all his professional life and is known well from distant points of observation just as surely as he is known in person-to-person relationships. It is no unusual phenomenon that accounts for such recognizable traits of distinction in the case of Mr. Stagg--it is true in every situation where people are well known to one another. How do you recognize your friend down the block when you cannot see his face or any of the minutiae that stamp him as so-and-so? There is something about his stance, his build, his very movements that set him apart from all others. This amazing "something" that we all recognize but cannot exactly define because of the complex details that make up the whole, is the exact spirit of an individual that must be captured above all else in a portrait sculpture. Without it no amount of accuracy in registering facial detail would avail. "Every part is disposed to unite with the whole," wrote Leonardo da Vinci, "that it may thereby escape from its own incompleteness."[1] In other words, the whole precedes the part and must be envisioned before proceeding to the part. This view emanates from those psychologists who hold to organismic

[1] W. D. Teague, Design This Day, 1940, p. 98. (used as chapter sub-heading)

ideas concerning the structure of human behavior, and for that matter, life itself. As a principle for the artist there could be no better basic assumption before beginning any form of expression. A whole cannot be built from random parts out of relation and be an integrated whole--any part out of harmony in such an attempted construction will nullify any possibility of success for that potential whole to accomplish its ends. This, then, is the sculptor's first task in attacking any problem: he must first consider the whole and proceed to the parts as their relationships are clarified, even though the prime purpose of his expression is to achieve likeness. How could likeness evolve successfully without the intangible spirit of the recognizable whole? The sculptor, like all artists, must train himself to look beyond the surface impressions as would be gathered by a camera. Great photographers are the first to admit that the movement of snapping the shutters is the least of the considerations given their art, the greater part of their study being focused on what the camera will register in total effect when the action of the shutters takes place.

The photograph of the finished sculpture should testify as to the general impression of the whole figure--whether one glance identifies the man portrayed or whether secondary investigations are necessary.

CHAPTER IV

CONSIDERATION OF SOME ART ELEMENTS RELATED TO SCULPTURE

Now that the requirements for the composition to be undertaken for the study had been satisfied, the next series of considerations began when cutting was well under way. It is fitting that the sculptor heed basic art elements regardless of his materials. He knows that, in dealing with form in three-dimensional space, there are additional fundamentals to be recognized besides those connected with two-dimensional arts.

No discussion of sculpture could be well on its way until the art elements have been included. Sculpture concerns itself with volumes; variations of the cube, cylinder, and cone, while the structural elements may be said to be line, texture, and movement. The first group of these elements deals with kinds of volume, while the last three have to do with surface aspects--though there is invariably an intermingling of the two groups in producing satisfactory results. It must also be borne in mind that, while these elements are of importance, the accomplishment of pleasing relationships between them does not necessarily imply the best in art expression. An artist may succeed in producing a lasting value in his efforts and yet have apparently ignored many of these art elements. Following a book of rules may end in the solution of a problem for the mathematician but in the field of expression rules are but the flexible framework within which the artist exercises his imagination and ability. The successful artist is one who captures a mood, or a strong feeling, or sends out a message that has a deeper core than does an act of reporting or story-telling.

Be that as it may, it behooves the artist at least to survey his tools, whether they be axioms or implements of his trade. Just to chisel the form of a clothed leg-form from a block of material involves thought about each of the elements listed. The line formed by the back of the leg, from hip to heel, must not be impeded by too many detailed descriptions of folds and creases that, in the end, would serve only to break down the feeling of the whole by centering attention on the part. Rotate the sculpture just a fraction, or move your own point of view around the form. What is happening to that down-sweep of the trouser-leg now? Is it broken too much? Is the feeling of the total movement of contour stopped or are the few folds ascending the trouser-leg sufficiently simple to describe the form and allow the movement of the line to function? Multiply that brief deliberation by the number of various positions from which a sculpture may be observed and you have a beginning toward understanding line and movement in space.

Now think of the roundness of the form--that feeling received when the hands grip a baseball bat. Does the sculpture seem to convey that quality of rotundity despite endless variety of surface treatment? You are giving thought to that basic element of form called the cylinder.

Look at the surface. You know it to be wood, but in receiving a quick impression of the whole does the leg-form seem to have the quality of cloth? Of trousers? You are now thinking about texture. The artist must keep the total quality of wood, be forceful in his tool-handling and still manage to give a feeling of the material he is portraying. Balancing rough textures with smooth ones is a task of no mean proportions and the sculptor often creates his variations with the various shaped chisels at his command, allowing some cuts to remain just as the tool bit them

out and sanding others down where smooth areas are desired.

What about the cube? As a form by which proportions may be seen readily the cube has no equal. The first stages of the sculpture stay close to the cubic shapes because relationships between areas can be maintained easily through comparison of the flat planes on the sides of the cubes. As a matter of fact, there is one group of artists who work entirely in cubic relationships, preferring to leave the finished form in a composition of planes. They enjoy the suggestive qualities of the geometric inter-dependency. These artists are grouped under the classification of Cubists, and their contributions to the field of expression are valuable. To get back to the subject at hand, when the preliminary cubic shapes are definitely established the artist proceeds to round off the parts. An unusual goal is kept in mind at this point--seemingly contradictory in nature. While the attempt to achieve proper cylindrical forms is being made, effort is also directed toward keeping the feeling of the rectangular block from which the sculpture is being carved. This is done because the sculptor wishes to convey a relation between his sculpture and the block of material from which he shaped it. This is particularly true when the subject is to be carved from a prescribed block of material. Sometimes, however, a work of sculpture is planned to fit a certain area in relation to a building or a parkway, and in this case the material may be chosen to fit the desired sculpture.

In looking at the sculpture of Mr. Stagg one will observe that some areas are greatly simplified and that the whole form still suggests a long rectangular block. This happened partly by plan and partly by accident. No work of art evolves without the exigencies of accidental events that go into the result with evident harmony. These occurrences cannot be

foreseen or counted upon as bound to enhance anything begun. More often than not they are tragic or just don't add up to much in the end. Sometimes a quality begins to show itself that was not planned in the beginning, but which is immediately capitalized upon as it becomes evident. Such was the case when the squareness of the sculpture under consideration began to show its possibility as a value.

One other factor remains to be discussed. It will be seen at once that the sculpture has an effect of over-sized treatment; that the quality of chunkiness has been emphasized. When the form arrived at this point I decided to stop cutting rather than proceed to actual scale reproduction. The observer will ask why. What value accrues from putting something there that is not present in the model? But the aspect of over-sized proportions <u>is</u> present in the model. To gain that spirit of which mention was made earlier, this one property must be emphasized. To have gone on reducing the figure to approximate scale reproduction would have served to diminish the importance of the sculpture; it would have caused the figure to appear smaller than it was and consequently lessen its significance. Monumentalizing of the sculpture produces a meaningful quality which is augmented by the simplification of the smaller shapes within the whole. It is also true that in good sculpture, enlarging of the features causes them to function as form or design. Stripping details from the total form aids the eye in taking in the whole sculpture without becoming fixed on any minor part. It must be remembered that the purpose of all sculpture is to express the <u>essential</u> character of the subject-matter. In art it is distinctly out of keeping with any goal save story-telling to go into tangent descriptions. Such irrelevant expositions are intimacies reserved for close associates whose individuation of their friend's

personality goes much further than is necessary for the purposes of the sculptor.

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF THE SCULPTURE

In this chapter I shall set forth my method of procedure in developing the sculpture of Mr. Stagg. Many sculptors begin their work by preparing a model in clay. Advantages of such an approach are evident. Nearly all problems can be ironed out in this easily worked material and once a satisfactory result is obtained it is only necessary to reproduce the model in the more permanent material. Personally, I favor the more direct method of beginning immediately in the final material and developing the form as I go along. When this method is used the artist is working continually toward arriving at a solution that is in harmony with the material as well as avoiding a sort of dual execution, which in itself is lacking in direct vitality. A disadvantage of the model-to-actual-reproduction technique is found in the danger of forgetting the material in which the sculpture is finally to be carved while concentrating on the play of the clay. Experienced sculptors seldom fall prey to this pitfall since they know their materials so well that it is possible for them to keep in mind the qualities of one material while working out the design in another. In such cases these sculptors feel they are saving time in placing the composition more firmly in mind before proceeding to the final carving. Painters often use the small model device as a means of visualizing the three-dimensional relationships in their subject-matter. Some painters will use this method in preference to working from nature, feeling that nature offers too many distractions. Thomas Benton claims his paintings are built upon such foundational study. I feel that the direct method stimulates more interest and excitement because the form develops

before the eyes and changes as mood and inclination dictate—all at a time when the artist is in a creative state of mind and when working in the permanent material. In this way the permanent medium houses all of the tangents of dynamic expression as well as the evidences of moments of delicate decisions. The final work is therefore the one and only example of an unleashed tension that has become resolved. If the work of art is good then it need not be reproduced mechanically in order to get it into a more permanent state.

Of course, one cannot attack the problem of portrait-sculpture without first working out a few ideas before beginning in the wood or stone. My first steps involved the development of sketches which would aid in establishing boundaries for the cutting. These sketches are most helpful when the block of material has lost its rectangularity following the initial rough-out work. In dark wood, such as walnut or redwood, a white pencil is excellent for drawing the general outlines directly on the block. I used such a pencil on the Jarrah wood. From time to time it is necessary to redraw the lines on the block, since continual carving removes the earlier tracings.

Following the rough-out stage, which is pictured in the illustrations, all carving is done in the cubic shapes. An arm appears as a long, box-like form with flat planes on all sides. When each area has been checked and is found to be in proper relationship with its neighbor, rounding of the forms is begun. In this sculpture the head was the last volume to be rounded out, since the block must be handled so much during cutting. Any jolt on a finished form such as the head might break some vital part. All the small blocks taken from the original piece of wood are saved for smaller carvings.

When rounding of all the volumes has been accomplished, it is time to put finishing touches on the various portions. Decisions are made concerning choices of surfaces, lines of movement, and shapes of volumes. These choices are arbitrary and are never dictated by the sketches. Some artists faithfully follow their working models, but this is too mechanical a procedure to be of use in every case. It is necessary only when the working model is serving as the key for a casting or a huge monument. The wood often exhibits interesting potentialities after having been cut into, and while the large general forms of the original plans are maintained, much can be done within them to enhance the sculptural effectiveness of the finished form. For this reason a sketch should not be so intricate in its details that it brings up troublesome doubts as the carving proceeds. The sculptor must feel free to express any impulse that overtakes him during his work. If he is limited, his expression is apt to have a quality of tightness, a lack of fluid interpretation, and a weakness characteristic of the rule-followed method. Consequently, during the process of carving many little changes appear in the sculpture that do not show in the plans.

Tools used in carving can run into a vast assortment of scrapers, veiners, gouges, and a variety of wood files. In my collection the range included about three sizes of gouges, or semi-circular shaped biting edges; the same number of flat chisels from narrow quarter-inch edges to half-inch types, and two or three veiners of various widths. Veiners are V-shaped chisels. I also used a small stencil-knife and a sloyd knife, which looks like a kitchen paring-knife on a little larger scale. Many of the chisels have curved shafts leading to the cutting edge. These changes in shaft-design give the tool a greater degree of maneuverability for getting

around extended forms. I had one small set of Miller's Falls woodcarving tools, shaped like the larger tools, and useful in doing detailed carving. For greater effectiveness in cutting a mallet is used to drive the chisels into the wood. A croquet mallet, with a sawed-off handle, is good for this purpose though many professional carpenter's and woodcarver's mallets are to be had at nearly any hardware store. Wooden mallets are superior to rubber or metal hammers. A metal hammer should rarely be used on wood-carving chisels because the metal damages the wooden handles of the chisels. Rubber bands cut from old inner tubes can be stretched over the head of a metal hammer to render it less harmful to the chisels. Rubber mallets are not satisfactory because the rubber has too much resiliency, bouncing back almost as energetically as it is driven at the chisel and carrying little power to drive the chisel into the wood. In place of the prescribed mallet I used a small section of a limb of Paradise wood. It was shaped just right for the hand to grip and had enough weight to give the chisels a quick drive when tapped. It was an unusual mallet to be sure, but a functional tool at any rate. A vise with a jaw extension of at least eight to ten inches is advisable when doing wood-carving. The vise should be bolted to a heavy table or bench that is strong and well based to a floor. There are also many types of clamps that can be employed for holding the wood. In working on the sculpture of Mr. Stagg I didn't find it necessary to use a vise or clamps because the wood was large and heavy enough to allow working freely without having the wood move with each blow of the mallet.

There is a right and wrong direction of wood grains insofar as carving is concerned. If the chiseling is done against the grain (not across it) some unpleasant results will follow. It is wise to establish this

grain direction at once. When this is done there are few chances of running afoul because of the wood, providing the carving proceeds along the grain--not against it. However, grain can become fickle, deciding to change directions at some point along the length of the patterning. This is probably due to a growth peculiarity. When such a spot is located in a block of wood it is usually discovered by accident. From that time on the carver must remember at what points grain directions change. Otherwise a large chip of wood may split away in place of the usual curled shaving.

A number of means are available for creating a textured surface when desired. For the small cuts on the shirt, the hair, and the base, I used a small hand-gouge. Final shaping of the forms within the shirt and head volumes was actually done with this small gouge. The texture was not added to an already smoothed out surface. Smooth areas are worked down with chisels followed by various kinds of wood files and sandpapers. Some woodcarvers object to the use of sandpaper because it deposits particles of glass in the pores of the wood, thus destroying the quality of pure wood as well as scratching the surface. In place of the sandpaper a carborundum paper may be used, or emery paper, which is an abrasive of silicon carbide having less injurious action when used on wood. Since Jarrah is so hard I chose to use several degrees of sandpaper in the shaping of the smooth areas. Roughest paper was used to work off the chisel marks. Medium rough paper was employed to remove the deep scratches left by the previous sanding. Finest sandpaper worked the surface to its present state--wherever smooth areas occur. This treatment was followed by brushing, executed with a small shoe brush.

Finishing the wood requires nearly as much time and patient perse-

verance as the carving. The sculptor should try to keep the natural appearance of the wood surface while putting on a protective coating of wood filler. To do this he must destroy the idea of a"coating"because there should be nothing between the wood and the observer. Wax is not an artificial covering like lacquer or paint, but is rubbed into the wood, allowing the grain to appear on the surface. Waxing, however, is the last step.

The Jarrah wood was a deep rust-red when cut into and exposed. It could not be left in this state because of the danger of moisture absorption and the effect of temperature changes which would eventually cause splitting. Rot is also a circumstance to be guarded against in long range protection plans. I rubbed raw linseed oil and turpentine in the wood to bring out the rich coloring. Denatured alcohol was next applied. This was necessary because the oil had gone on a little too thickly in places and needed to be pulled out. The alcohol helped in leveling out the coloring. A soft, lintless cloth soaked up any excess liquid on the surface. The block was then set aside to absorb the oil and to dry.

Shellac is a good filler, but if used full strength will turn the wood dark. Even though I thinned the shellac to some extent, it still turned the Jarrah wood darker than I was prepared to expect. When dry, shellac and all other clear wood protectors have a shine that appears a little too much like a thin glass covering over the wood. This kind of finish cheapens a wood sculpture, obliterating the real beauty of the wood. If the shellac seems to be equally spread all over the surface and is dry, it should next be rubbed down with some abrasive. I used fine sandpaper and steel-wool. This removes all shine and brings the wood back to the surface. Pores of the wood are all filled, and this is the real purpose

for using any covering, or filler, at all. I also soaked the under side of the base in shellac to prevent that area from becoming the gateway to the interior.

The application of paste wax is the last step in the finishing. This serves to fill any of the pores that may have been missed by the shellac. Wax also gives a pleasant, dull sheen to the wood that enhances the natural beauty.

The copper name-plate was engraved by a commercial engraver. The shaping, polishing, hole-drilling, darkening, text, and lettering style were all planned and executed before I gave the copper to the engraver. Copper is darkened by ammonium-sulphate or liver of sulphur, both of which act so rapidly that a mere brushing over the metal with a soaked cloth will darken the copper immediately. To lighten it again steel wool is employed. When the desired value of darkness or lightness is obtained a coat of shellac, lacquer, or varnish will fix the color at that point. Without such treatment the copper would continue to darken until virtually black. Darkening of the metal was deemed proper because shiny copper would have been too demanding an area of color at the base of the sculpture. The color chosen seems to be more in harmony with the wood.

And now that a summary of the problems has been made concerning this project I feel it is time to ask the reader to turn to the sculpture itself. Approximately three-hundred hours of working time has resulted in this study which I have had the effrontery to label "Amos Alonzo Stagg".

EPILOGUE

For granting your silent permission
Allowing my mallet and chisel
To intrude on your virgin beauty
And exposing that to which I aspired,
My thanks to you,
O block of impassive wood!

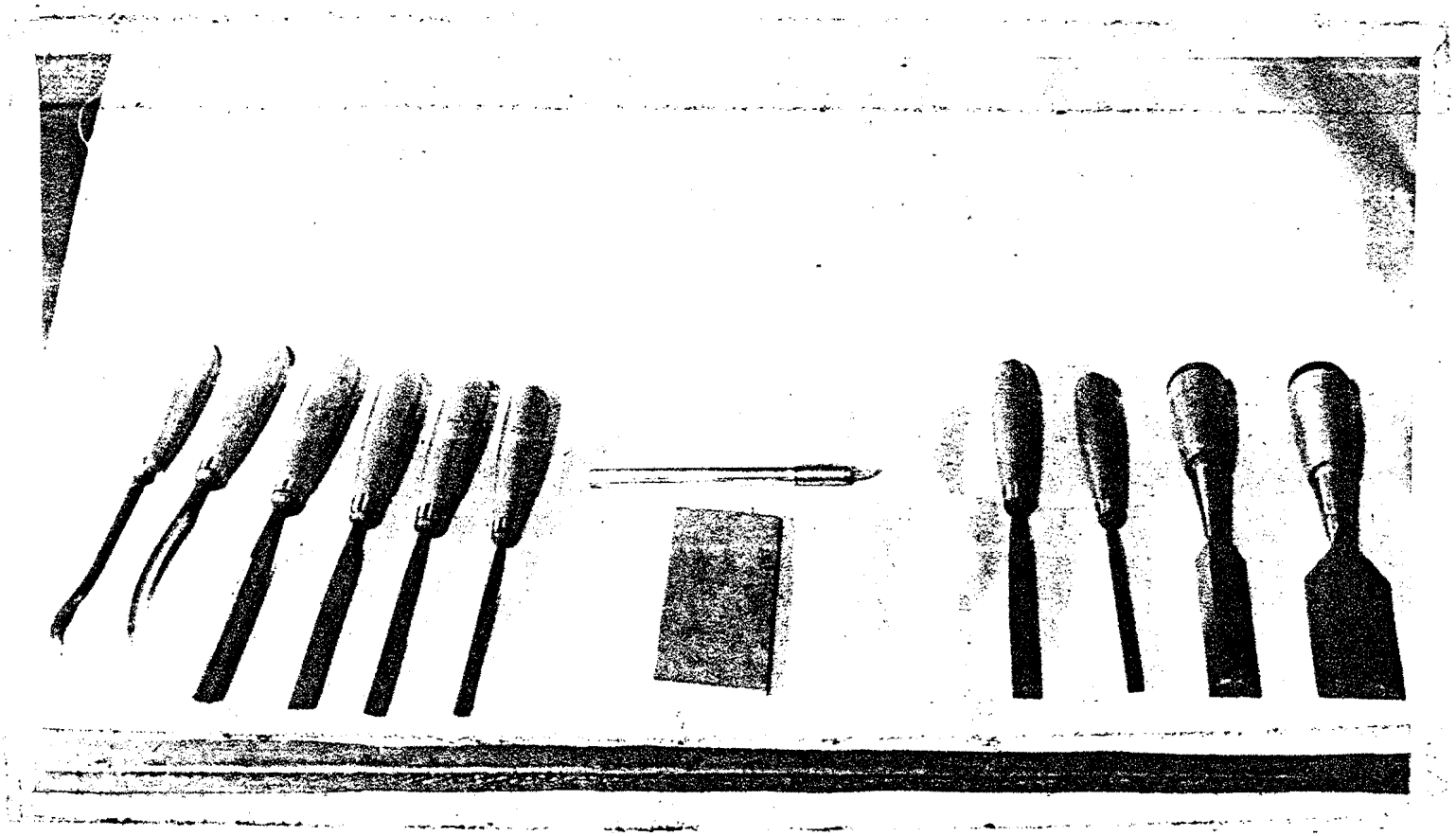
R. H. R. 1-10-42

APPENDIX

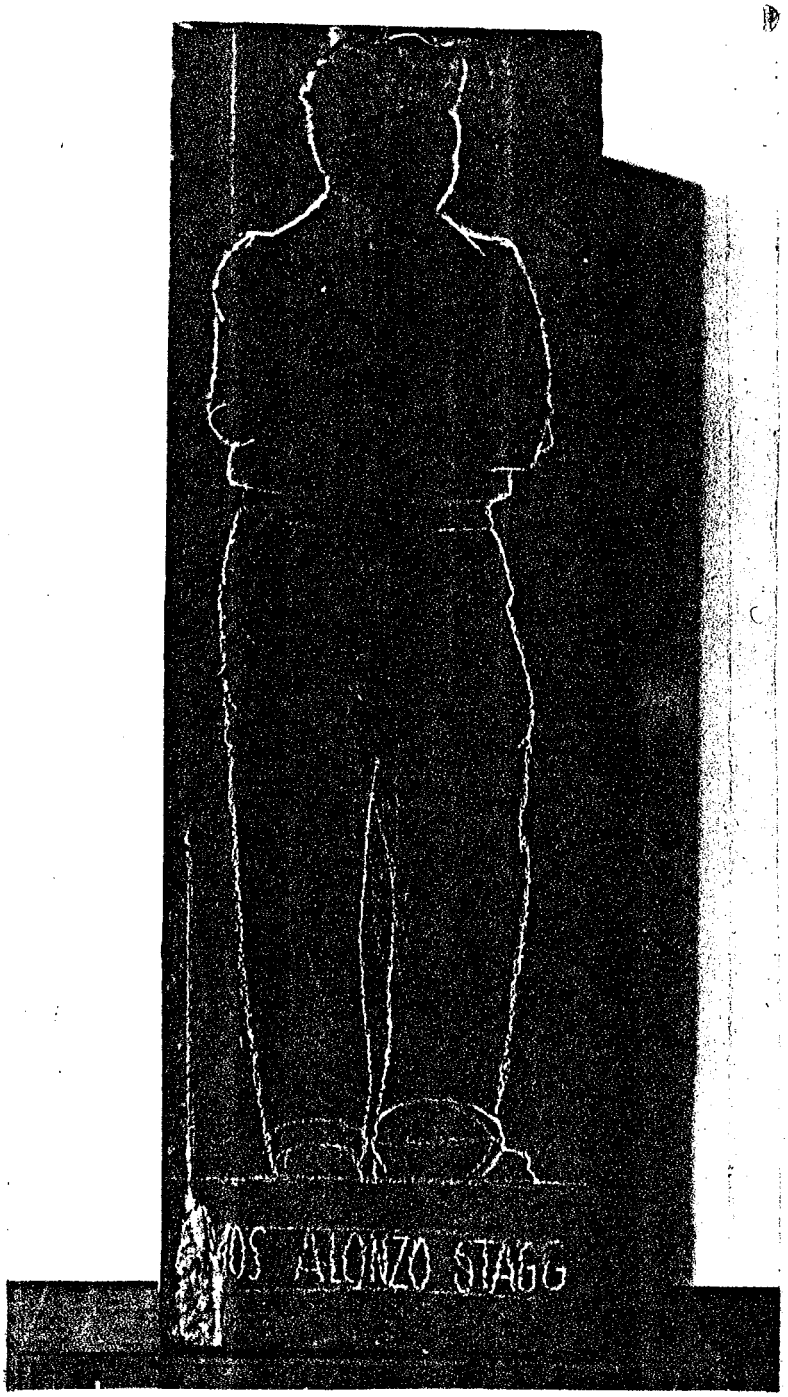
The following illustrations will help to clarify some of the text material related to stages of the carving.

It is regretted that more photographs were not taken. To have done so would have been impractical because of the many interruptions of work such a procedure would entail, not to mention the inconveniences of packing, transporting, and getting together of required paraphernalia in the photography studio at the College of the Pacific.

If possible, it is advisable that the sculpture itself be at hand during the reading of this little personalized paper.

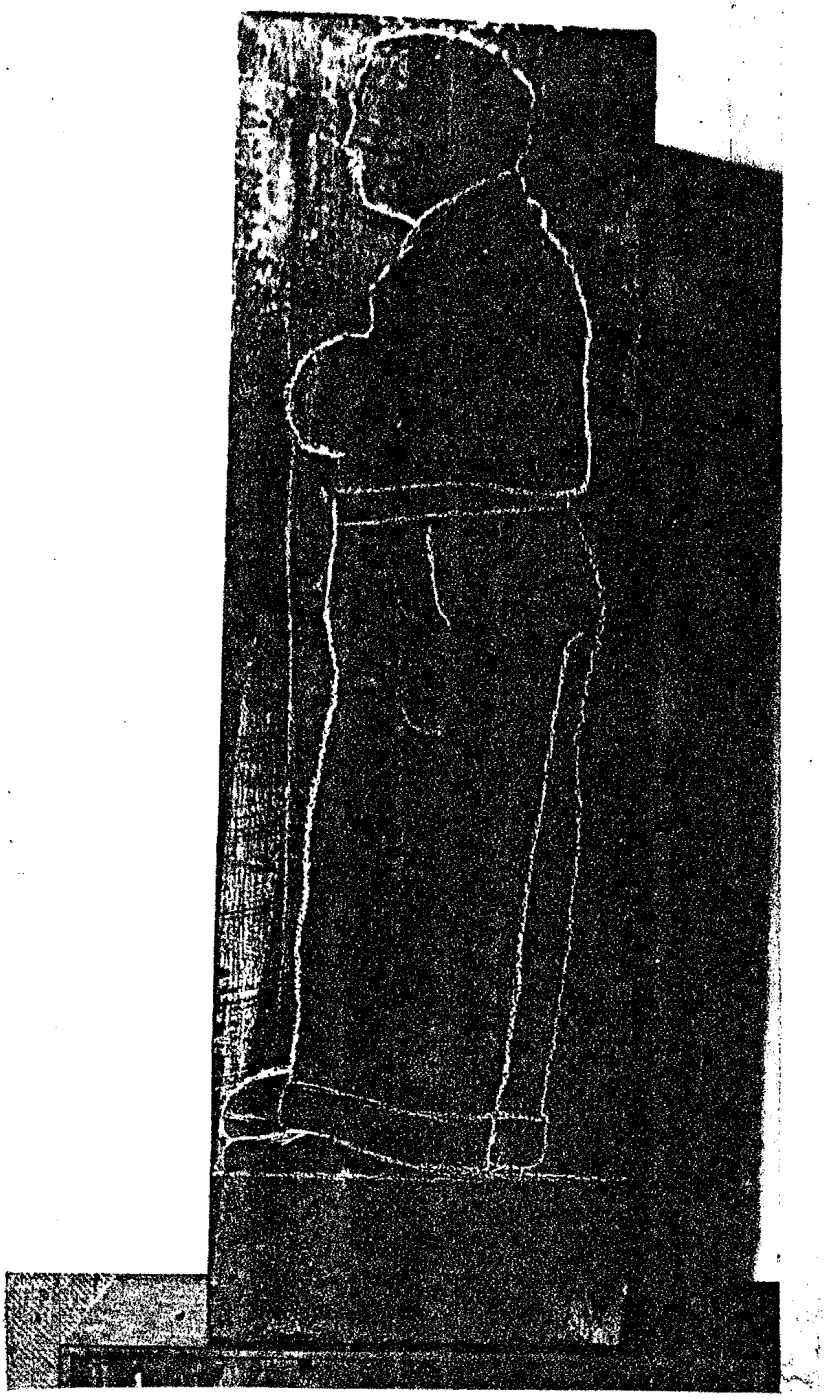


The set of Buck's woodcarving tools used in executing the wood sculpture of Amos Alonzo Stagg. Those on the left are gouges. The little metal knife in the back-center is a stencil knife. The stone (India mount) is a sharpening stone with one edge thicker and rounder, tapering to a thin edge for getting between the sides of a veiner, or V-shaped tool--not shown. Chisels at right are flat-edged tools.



Original block of Jarrah wood with rough line drawing on front face. Note indicated football which was later eliminated. The block measures two feet in height by eight inches square.

Front view of first rough-out stage, splotch on left side of base is paraffin, as is the running strip on the right. Note first saw-cuts across legs. These were left after preliminary chipping away of outside material. White lines have been redrawn on the rough surface.



Left side of original block--showing simplicity of working drawing. All wood outside the lines will be cut away on each face of the block. Note long strip of paraffin down left side of the block. This indicates the beginnings of a check which threatens to lengthen into a split if not sealed.

Left side roughed out. Observe that roughing out does not go down to the precise lines. Extra material allows for variation of ideas and treatment.

Nearing the finish. Note that right leg (of sculpture) has passed into the final step of smoothing and shaping, while left leg remains in semi-finished stage. The face is also nearing final development.

The finished sculpture. Compare with initial stages. Notice treatment of the base--which still retains original eight by eight inch dimensions. Final height of sculpture measures two feet, as did the block before carving.

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