

Hancock's Statue Is a Work Made for Hire

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Walker Kirtland Hancock, one of the foremost sculptors of his era, signed a contract on July 17, 1972, to create and deliver to the front door of the Madison Building a monumental sculpture of James Madison, fourth president of the United States, for whom the building is named. The contract was signed when the 1909 Copyright Act was in effect, and the sculpture is a work made for hire. The legal author is the United States.

The four-ton statue on exhibit today in Memorial Hall represents a seated young man who, should he stand, would be nine feet tall. The stage in Madison's career at which he would be portrayed caused much discussion. In a July 22, 1972, letter to Architect of the Capitol George White that is preserved in the records of the Architect of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., Hancock expressed his desire to show Madison as "the brilliant, zealous, and scholarly younger man whose counsel was sought by Washington and Jefferson, and whose powerful influence at the Federal Convention earned him the title Father of the Constitution. I remembered, too, that at the age of about 32 he was appointed by Congress to draw up a list of books that might be useful in its deliberations, that is, to establish a library of Congress, and his vainly urging the purchase of these works." And so we see Madison today, holding the first volume on his list—volume 83 of Diderot's *Encyclopédie Méthodique*.

Another concern was the statue's lighting. Hancock adhered to the views of Daniel Chester French, sculptor of the Lincoln Memorial statue, that statues should be lit from above. Although there was a plan to construct a glass floor panel with lights in front of the Madison statue, Hancock's desire for lighting from above prevailed.

In 1974, Hancock shipped a cast of a full-sized model to Pietrasanta, Italy, where the work was

carved by the firm of Ditta Cav. Ferdinando Palla. The senior member of the Palla family, Spartaco Palla, who was in his 90s, supervised every detail and died shortly after the statue was completed. As Hancock said in a May 4, 1975, letter to Alfred Poor, building architect, "The sad thing is that the art of the master carver is nearing the end. I believe this is the last generation that would be capable of executing a statue like ours."

Hancock, a gentle and gracious man, volunteered for service in World War II as a Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives officer tasked with saving art in western Europe. He was head of the Department of Sculpture and the Pennsylvania



Walker Hancock inspects the statue of James Madison upon its delivery to the front of the unfinished Madison Building.

Academy of the Fine Arts from 1929 to 1968.

While his most beloved work may be the Pennsylvania Railroad War Memorial in Penn Station, Philadelphia, that honors employees who died in World War II, a number of Hancock's works are in the District, including three vice presidential busts and a bust of Chief Justice Warren Burger. The Library owns a bust of notables Stephen Foster, and the National Cathedral displays statues of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther.

Hancock died December 30, 1998, at age 97. ©