

THE PICCIRILLI FAMILY

IN THIS TEMPLE
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE
FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION
THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
IS ENSHRINED FOREVER



The seated figure of *Abraham Lincoln* by Daniel Chester French in the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.
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A STONE CARVING DYNASTY

BY JOHN BELARDO, FNSS

Giuseppe Piccirilli (1844-1910) was a reputable stone sculptor in Massa, Carrara, in Tuscany, Italy. There he had six talented sons: Ferruccio (1864-1945), Attilio (1866-1945), Furio (1868-1949), Masaniello (1870-1951), Orazio (1872-1954), and Getulio (1874-1945), all of whom worked alongside him in his studio. Even with his reputation, he found little business in Carrara, and so made the decision to move to America. Like many who immigrated from Italy at the turn of the last century, Giuseppe Piccirilli and his family had great dreams of success. Little did they know their journey would become one of the most inspiring stories of the American dream to come out of the 20th Century.

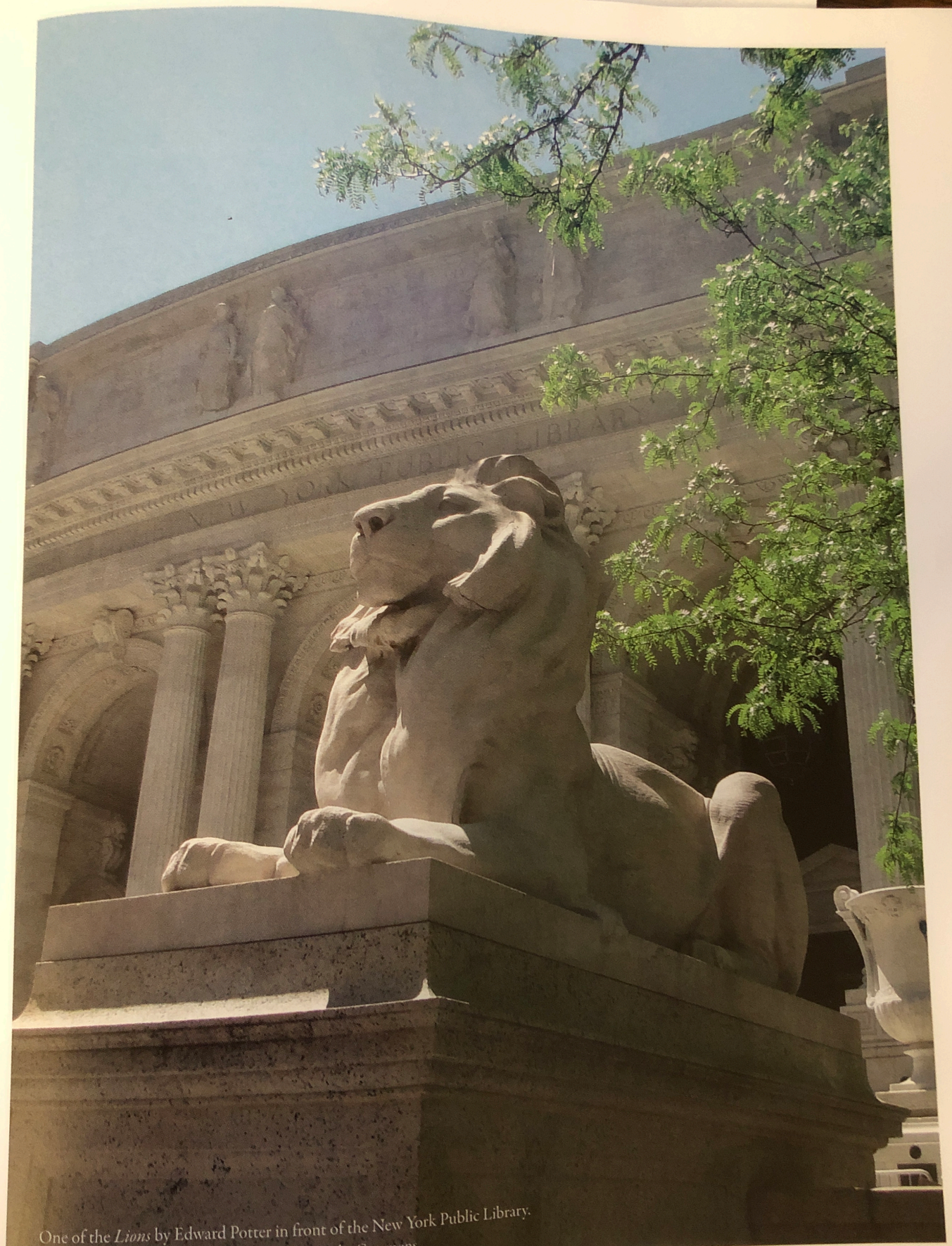
The family arrived in New York City in 1888 and immediately applied for citizenship in their new home. Within 18 months, they opened their first studio in an old horse stable on 39th Street. A "Piccirilli Brothers Sculptors" sign hung on the door. Getulio became the business head, with Attilio as the artistic head. Their reputation for quality stone carving spread quickly. The City Beautiful Movement created much demand for their expertise and their reputation grew even more when the famous sculptor, Daniel Chester French, recognized their value and introduced them to the rest of the sculpture world.

In 1892, the family purchased farmland in the Bronx where they built their home and studio in the Florentine Bottega style. The studio was on 142nd Street and Brook Avenue, now named Piccirilli Place. The studio eventually became the largest in America, and over the next 50 years some of the most important public sculptures in New York City, Washington, D.C., and around the United States would be carved there.

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The USS Maine Monument by Attilio Piccirilli on Columbus Circle in New York City. Credit: Peterjr 1961, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



One of the *Lions* by Edward Potter in front of the New York Public Library.
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CARVING FOR OTHER SCULPTORS

The main branch of the New York Public Library features six figures by Paul Wayland Bartlett and two iconic *Lions* by Edward Potter, all carved by the Piccirilli brothers. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, a close friend of the Piccirillis, named the lions “Patience” and “Fortitude.”

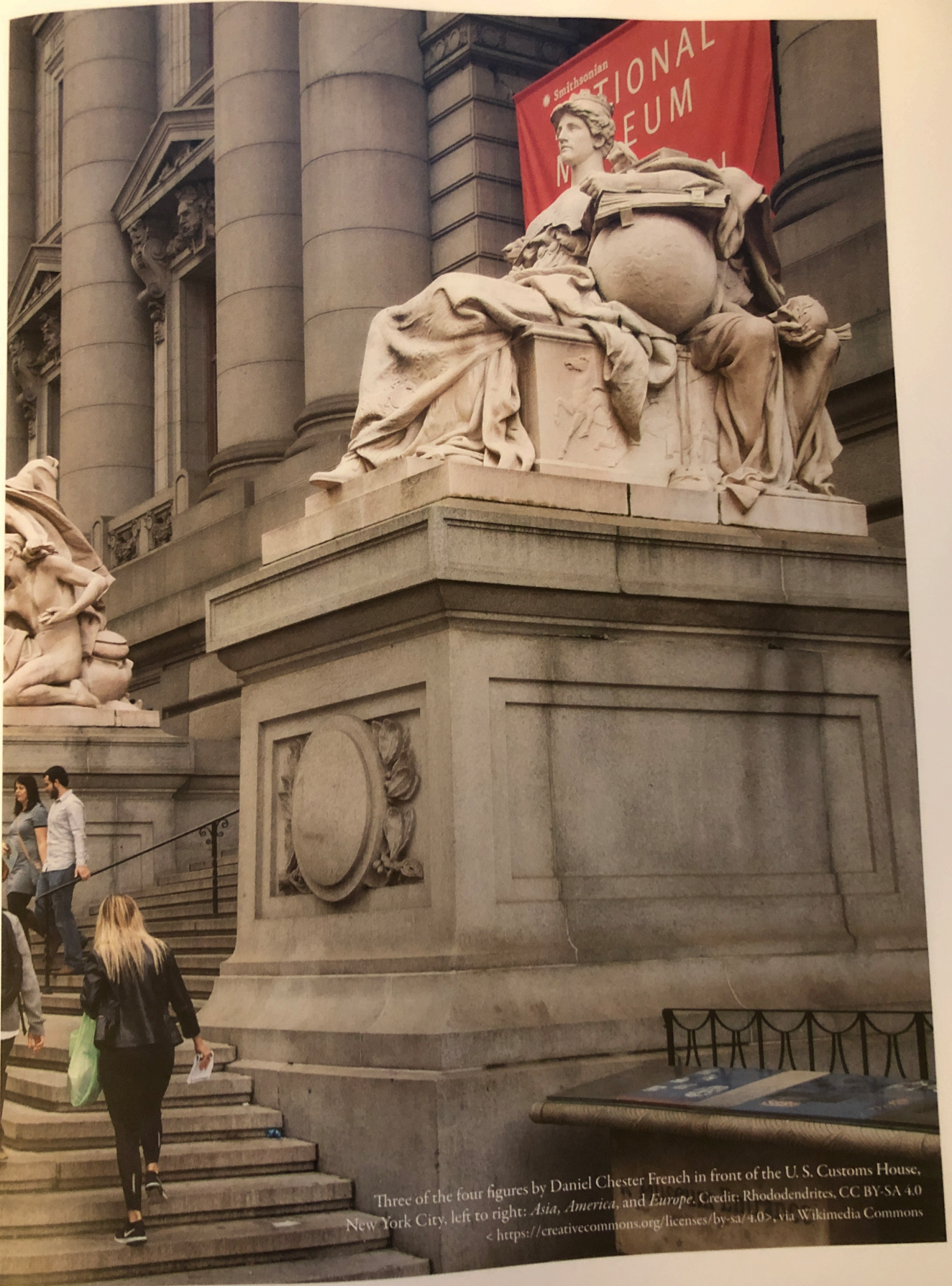
Throughout their career, the brothers carved several well-known architectural pediments including those of the New York Stock Exchange in 1904 for John Quincy Adams Ward, and of the House of Representatives for Paul Wayland Bartlett in 1916. The brothers carved all four of the pediments of the Wisconsin State Capitol, with Attilio Piccirilli as the sculptor for the north pediment, and Karl Bitter and Adolph Weinman working on the remaining cardinal directions.

The Piccirilli brothers were tasked with carving both *George Washington* and most of the ornamentation for the Washington Arch as designed by architect Stanford White in 1918. They carved the eagles that were designed by Philip Martiny and the spandrel panels by Frederick MacMonnies. Hermon Atkins MacNeil sculpted *Washington as Commander-in-Chief* and Alexander Stirling Calder sculpted *Washington as President* with *Wisdom* and *Justice* as the bas-reliefs behind him, and the Piccirillis were commissioned for both sculpture groups.

The facade of the Brooklyn Museum is arrayed with 30 figures, each carved in the Piccirilli Studio in 1909. Daniel Chester French was the supervising artist, but only sculpted one of the figures, while another was sculpted by Attilio himself. French’s allegorical figures, *Brooklyn* and *Manhattan*, are currently elevated above the renovated entry at the Brooklyn Museum. Originally, they were placed at the entrance of the Manhattan Bridge but were removed in the 1960s during a redesign and were relocated to the museum.

Some of the most complex carved works by Daniel Chester French can be found on the north side of the Museum of the American Indian in lower Manhattan. The building was originally the U.S. Customs House designed by architect Cass Gilbert. The four allegorical compositions representing the four continents—*America*, *Asia*, *Africa*, and *Europe*—contain a layering of

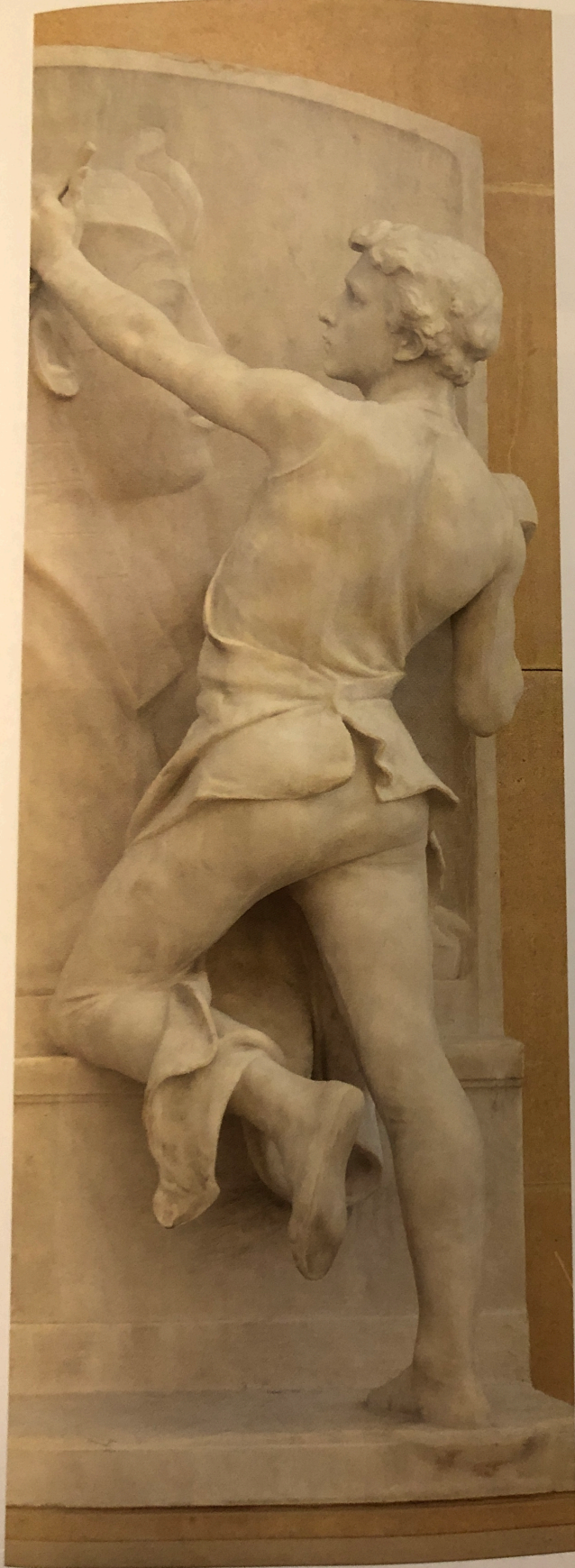




Three of the four figures by Daniel Chester French in front of the U. S. Customs House, New York City, left to right: *Asia*, *America*, and *Europe*. Credit: Rhododendrites, CC BY-SA 4.0 < <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



The Angel of Death and the Sculptor from the Milmore Memorial by Daniel Chester French in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Credit: Daniel Chester French, <<https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



figures, animals, symbols, and natural elements. French entrusted these works to the Piccirilli brothers to carve in 1916 during World War I.

Undoubtedly, the most famous sculpture carved at the Piccirilli bottega was Daniel Chester French's seated figure of *Abraham Lincoln* in the Lincoln Memorial (1922) in Washington, D.C. It was also the largest, carved from 28 five-ton blocks of Georgia marble.

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Other notable sculptors who hired the brothers to carve their works were Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907), J. Massey Rhind (1860–1936), Karl T. Bitter (1867–1915), Adolph A. Weinman (1870–1952), and Robert I. Aitken (1878–1949).

ATTILIO PICCIRILLI

Attilio Piccirilli was the second-born of the Piccirillis and became the artistic leader in the studio. He showed extraordinary artistic talent at an early age and would follow in his father's footsteps to study in Rome at the Accademia de San Luca in 1880. His younger brother, Furio, would also attend San Luca in time.

In his own right, Attilio Piccirilli should be considered one of the most important sculptors of his era; his most prominent work is the *Maine Memorial*. Erected in 1913 at Columbus Circle at the Southwest entrance to Central Park, the monument commemorates the sinking of the battleship *U.S.S. Maine* in 1898. This was Attilio's largest

original sculpture. Standing at 64 feet tall, eleven allegorical figures depict symbols of *Columbia*, the *Pacific Ocean* and *Atlantic Ocean*, *Justice Receiving Back the Sword Entrusted to War*, *Courage Awaiting the Flight of Peace*, *Fortitude Supporting the Feeble*, and a new era in America.

Just a few months after the dedication of the *Maine Memorial*, Attilio unveiled the *Fireman's Memorial* at 100th Street and Riverside Drive, located only a few blocks north. This work in the sarcophagus style shows in relief a scene of firemen in action. The relief was originally in marble, but was replaced in the 1930s with bronze after deterioration occurred. On either side are two allegorical sculptures by Attilio. On the north side stands *Sacrifice*, a pieta composition. On the south side stands a composition of a mother and child, *Duty*.

In 1932, Attilio was commissioned to sculpt two reliefs for Rockefeller Center to be cast in glass. The one re-

maining relief is located over the entrance to 636 Fifth Avenue across from Saint Patrick's Cathedral. At the time, glass casting was an innovative technical challenge and an integral part of this important public art project.

AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

In the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in the main atrium, sculptures on display tell the story of this era in art—one that could not be told without the Piccirilli family. Among the works the brothers carved here are the *Milmore Memorial* and the *Melvin Memorial*, both for Daniel Chester French. *Memory*, one of French's masterpieces, was also carved by the brothers. One of Attilio Piccirilli's own masterpieces, *Fragilina*, and Furio Piccirilli's *Seal*, winner of a Gold Medal from the National Academy of Design, are also on display in the American Wing. ●

Michael Keropian demonstrates the use of a device to enlarge sculpture during the NSS Sculpture Conference at Chesterwood in Stockbridge, MA. Credit: Andy Lay

