

Albert McIlveen was a master stone carver

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If a mill was making a bid on a job that included carving, he would make a separate bid on it. Contracting in the stone industry was an iffy business. If he lost money on one job, he lacked that amount on the next one and hoped he got the bid.

In the peak years sometimes Albert would have jobs going at three mills at once. He continued to carve, but hired other men, too. If it took 20 carvers to get the job done, he would make a run to Bedford or Ellettsville to find them. He also started training apprentices to have enough men to do the work.

Even though carvers worked in the mills, they might as well have been working outdoors. Inside it was sweltering in the summer and too cold in the winter. The potbellied stove in the carvers' corner of the Bloomington Limestone Company barely took the edge off the cold air.

ALBERT HAD WHAT he called "carver's complaint." In the winter his knuckles cracked open and bled, and he had to keep putting corn husker's lotion on them so they'd bend.

Because the mills were a closed union shop, Albert had a journeyman's card. Independent contracting was against the union rules, but their officials overlooked it. Even during bitter strikes they let him cross the picket line to get to the mill drafting room.

Thinking back on it, "Doc" Szatkowski of Bloomington, who was trained as an apprentice by Albert, said he could cross the picket line because the union men respected him.

As a contractor his art training gave him an extra dimension. If the architect of a building wanted him to submit drawings or a clay model, Albert made them. However, sometimes the architect would merely send a plaster model and want it copied.

WHEN THE DEPRESSION nearly shut down the limestone business and there wasn't much work, Albert found other things to do. He made models and carved in

his basement and took up golf. Remembering how he was teased for dating the granddaughter of the owner of the mill, he refused to take any of her money, and the family tightened its belt to ride out the depression. During World War II, when the Bloomington Limestone Company converted to war work to assemble tank treads, Albert worked as a foreman.

During his working years he and his employees turned out carvings for 132 churches, 70 schools, 25 city halls, 20 banks, 10 libraries, 82 college buildings, 20 private homes, 70 mausoleums, 5 synagogues, 25 hospitals, 25 post offices, a bridge, a theater, a civic auditorium, a court house, a telephone building, a Salvation Army building, a National Guard armory, a life insurance building, a Scottish Rite cathedral, and a fire station. They are located in 37 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico.

THREE OF HIS carvings are in Bloomington. The most prominent one is the Alexander monument on the southeast corner of the square. Albert carved the modernistic owl over the south entrance of the bookstore in the Union Building. On the west side of Memorial Hall there is a funny little Donald Duck with a mortar board on his head.

Albert quit carving at the age of 78, the year before he died. He was the youngest of 11 children in a immigrant family and lost his father when he was three years old. He put himself through college on a baseball scholarship and ended up in Monroe County because he happened to read an ad in an Iowa newspaper.

He chewed White Owl cigars and drank beer in spite of the fact that his wife belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union. When he came home from work, he came in the house by the front door, thank you, and tracked stone dust all over the oriental rugs.

HE PLAYED THE mandolin and could dance an Irish jig. I was fortunate enough to know him. He was my father.