

This Day in History... April 20, 1850

Birth of Daniel Chester French

Daniel Chester French was born on April 20, 1850, in Exeter, New Hampshire.

French was the son Henry Flagg French, a lawyer, judge, and assistant US Treasury secretary. Though he showed a talent for drawing as a child, French didn't discover sculpture until his late teens.

After the family moved to Concord, Massachusetts, in 1867, French met artist Abigail May Alcott (sister of author Louisa May Alcott and the inspiration for Amy in *Little Women*). Having studied fine arts in Boston, Alcott gave French an introduction to working with clay and encouraged him to pursue a career. He went on to study with the same teachers she had – William Rimmer (anatomy) and William Morris Hunt (drawing). French then spent a year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and several years in Florence, Italy, under the instruction of Thomas Ball.



This stamp was issued less than 10 years after French's death.



French's Concord Minute Man earned him his first brush with fame.



French sculpted this bust of John Adams in 1889.



French had previously done the standing Lincoln statue for the Nebraska State Capitol, providing him with much of the research he needed for the seated Lincoln.

In 1873, family friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson helped French get one of the most important commissions of his career. The city of Concord was preparing for the Centennial of the Revolutionary War Battles of Lexington and Concord and wanted to erect a statue at the North Bridge to commemorate them. Emerson recommended French for the job, and he got it. The people of Concord gave French their family's militia uniforms so the statue could be as accurate as possible. Several locals also posed to provide models for the head, while the body was based on a famous classical sculpture. Ten Civil War Cannons were melted to provide the bronze for the seven-foot tall statue. It was unveiled on April 19, 1875, with President Ulysses S. Grant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Ralph Waldo Emerson in attendance.

French was just 25 at the time, and had only a few years of education in sculpture. The *Minute Man* was his first full-sized sculpture and it earned him immediate acclaim. He then established his own studio in Washington, DC, and began receiving commissions for portrait busts as well as tall figures for public buildings. His renown began to spread and soon, he was hired to sculpt three massive figures for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Among them was the 65-foot tall *Statue of the Republic*, a personification of the ideal of the Republic covered in gold leaf. The statue towered over the expo, which was attended by some 27 million people. The recognition he received from that statue made him even more famous, and soon French had more commissions than he could handle. In fact, he often had to book them two to three years in advance.

In the coming years, French helped found the National Sculpture Society, became a member of a number of art groups, and received honorary degrees from four universities. He also designed one side of the Pulitzer Prize gold medal (picturing Benjamin Franklin). In 1914, French was hired for perhaps his most famous sculpture, the seated Abraham Lincoln that sits in Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. He made three plaster casts (which are on display at his Chesterwood Studio in Massachusetts) before the final sculpture, which took a year to make, could be completed.

Over the course of his career, French made over 100 statues, memorials, sculptures and reliefs, many of which are on display in public places. He died on October 7, 1931. Several years before he'd claimed, "I'd like to live to be two thousand years old and just sculpt all the time."



French's sculpture of John Harvard appeared on this 1986 Great Americans stamp.



Stamp pictures a statue French was working on at the time of his death. The stamp's issue was delayed until his daughter could complete the statue.

This Day in History... April 20, 1850

Birth of Daniel Chester French

Daniel Chester French was born on April 20, 1850, in Exeter, New Hampshire.

French was the son Henry Flagg French, a lawyer, judge, and assistant US Treasury secretary. Though he showed a talent for drawing as a child, French didn't discover sculpture until his late teens.

After the family moved to Concord, Massachusetts, in 1867, French met artist Abigail May Alcott (sister of author Louisa May Alcott and the inspiration for Amy in *Little Women*). Having studied fine arts in Boston, Alcott gave French an introduction to working with clay and encouraged him to pursue a career. He went on to study with the same teachers she had – William Rimmer (anatomy) and William Morris Hunt (drawing). French then spent a year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and several years in Florence, Italy, under the instruction of Thomas Ball.



This stamp was issued less than 10 years after French's death.



French's Concord Minute Man earned him his first brush with fame.



French sculpted this bust of John Adams in 1889.



French had previously done the standing Lincoln statue for the Nebraska State Capitol, providing him with much of the research he needed for the seated Lincoln.

In 1873, family friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson helped French get one of the most important commissions of his career. The city of Concord was preparing for the Centennial of the Revolutionary War Battles of Lexington and Concord and wanted to erect a statue at the North Bridge to commemorate them. Emerson recommended French for the job, and he got it. The people of Concord gave French their family's militia uniforms so the statue could be as accurate as possible. Several locals also posed to provide models for the head, while the body was based on a famous classical sculpture. Ten Civil War Cannons were melted to provide the bronze for the seven-foot tall statue. It was unveiled on April 19, 1875, with President Ulysses S. Grant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Ralph Waldo Emerson in attendance.

French was just 25 at the time, and had only a few years of education in sculpture. The *Minute Man* was his first full-sized sculpture and it earned him immediate acclaim. He then established his own studio in Washington, DC, and began receiving commissions for portrait busts as well as tall figures for public buildings. His renown began to spread and soon, he was hired to sculpt three massive figures for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Among them was the 65-foot tall *Statue of the Republic*, a personification of the ideal of the Republic covered in gold leaf. The statue towered over the expo, which was attended by some 27 million people. The recognition he received from that statue made him even more famous, and soon French had more commissions than he could handle. In fact, he often had to book them two to three years in advance.

In the coming years, French helped found the National Sculpture Society, became a member of a number of art groups, and received honorary degrees from four universities. He also designed one side of the Pulitzer Prize gold medal (picturing Benjamin Franklin). In 1914, French was hired for perhaps his most famous sculpture, the seated Abraham Lincoln that sits in Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. He made three plaster casts (which are on display at his Chesterwood Studio in Massachusetts) before the final sculpture, which took a year to make, could be completed.

Over the course of his career, French made over 100 statues, memorials, sculptures and reliefs, many of which are on display in public places. He died on October 7, 1931. Several years before he'd claimed, "I'd like to live to be two thousand years old and just sculpt all the time."



French's sculpture of John Harvard appeared on this 1986 Great Americans stamp.



Stamp pictures a statue French was working on at the time of his death. The stamp's issue was delayed until his daughter could complete the statue.