

The Piccirilli Brothers

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Know anything about Italy, and you'll know that sculpture is high on every visitor's "must see" list, from the student of art to the most casual tourist. But we should not forget that the U.S. also has impressive and well-known sculptures which tourists line up to admire. Many of them, including the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., were carved right here in the Bronx by the famed Italian immigrants, the Piccirilli brothers.



There is not much known about this family of stone-carvers who have left their mark not only in New York, but all over the United States with well known sculptures. The colossal central figure of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial is one of the best known examples of the Piccirilli brothers' work.

To the surprise of many, it turns out that the Library Lions, the Maine Monument at Columbus Circle, and even Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. were all carved in the Bronx, in a studio at 142nd Street by an Italian family of stone-carvers and sculptors, the Piccirilli brothers.

The Piccirillis immigrated to the United States in 1887 and as Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, former curator of American Sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art said, "The arrival of this family may well have marked an epoch in the history of

American Art."

Giuseppe Piccirilli was already a well known stone-carver and sculptor in Massa Carrara in Tuscany. His six sons had been trained as sculptors, but Atilio proved to be the most talented, and he studied sculpture at the Academia di San Luca in Rome for five years.

Giuseppe, his wife and daughter (whose names have not been found in any records) and their six sons, Atilio, Ferruccio, Furio, Getulio, Masaniello, and Orazio, arrived in New York and settled in Manhattan. There, Giuseppe and his older sons began working almost immediately at Samuel Adler's Monuments and Granite Works on East 57th Street.

A bit later, they were able to open their own studio on West 39th Street, where the Piccirillis began to make their art known and recognized.

However, in 1890, the Piccirillis were forced to relocate when Mrs. Piccirilli fell seriously ill. The family purchased property on 142nd Street in the Bronx, and built the house and two large studios, where they

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would work hard enough to become "America's first family of carver-sculptors."

After struggling financially for about ten years, the Piccirillis finally earned national visibility in 1901, when—with one of Atilio's works—they defeated 40 other competitors for the sculpture portion of the Maine Monument at Columbus Circle. After that, they renovated their studio, and the brothers decorated the brick façade with reliefs and medallions.

Also in that same studio at 142nd Street in the Bronx, the Piccirilli brothers carved, among other works, the pediment of the New York Stock Exchange, Four Continents, which is at the entrance of the United States Custom House in Bowling Green, the pediment of the façade of the Brooklyn Museum and all its 30 statues, the Washington Arch in Greenwich Village, the Milmore Memorial, the Melvin Memorial, and Memory, the last three of which can be seen in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum. Most of those figures were designed by other artists, such as Daniel Chester French, but they were all carved by the brothers.

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