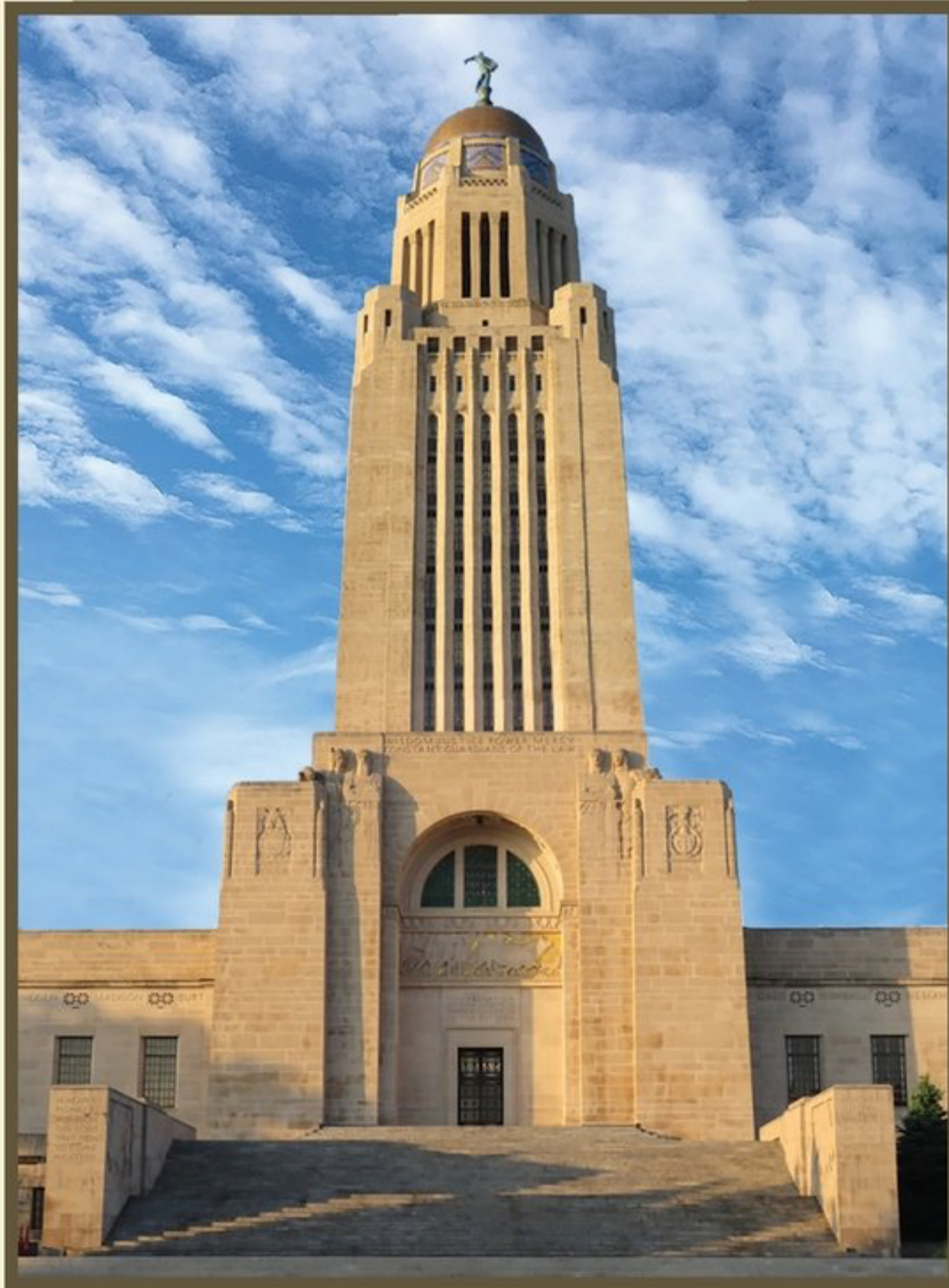


4th
Edition

HISTORY IN STONE AT THE NEBRASKA STATE CAPITOL

LEE LAWRIE'S PRAIRIE DECO

Nebraska Statehood
150th
Anniversary
Edition

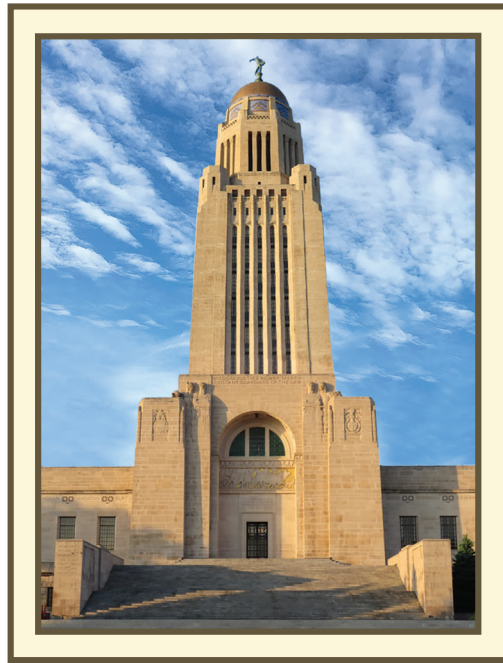


GREGORY PAUL HARM, M.A.

4th
Edition

HISTORY IN STONE AT THE NEBRASKA STATE CAPITOL

LEE LAWRIE'S PRAIRIE DECO



GREGORY PAUL HARM, M.A.



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This book is dedicated to all admirers of Art Deco, but primarily to Mrs. Jean Ely, Chris, Bill, and Peter Lawrie—Lee Lawrie's grandchildren, who have each personally contributed their memories, photos, assistance, and goodwill to this project each and every time I reached out to them.

I'd also like to dedicate this to the people of Nebraska, and especially to its students of all ages. I sincerely hope *Prairie Deco* fosters their interest in the Nebraska State Capitol and reiterates the themes that Goodhue, Alexander, and Lawrie had carved into its walls—to educate about the Native American Heritage of the state and the development of the American democracy, which governs their state and our nation.

CONTENTS

Prologue	1
Introduction: Little House (of State) on the Prairie.....	19

PART 1: LEE LAWRIE WAS NEVER BORN

1. Who Was Hugo?.....	25	2. The Philosophy of Lawrie.....	41
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PART 2: THE CREATORS OF STONE STORYBOOKS

3. A Master of Logistics	47	5. Professor Dale Gibbs, Dick Hill, and the Rescue of Lawrie's Maquettes	79
4. Goodhue and His Team of Dreamers	59	6. Lawrie's Largest Commission and How It Came to Be.....	93

PART 3: PRAIRIE DECO: REGIONALISM MARRIES ART DECO

7. Architecture is Frozen Music.....	115	13. Nebraska's Halls of Justice	179
8. Symbols and Inscriptions: What Does It All Mean?	129	14. Details, Details.....	185
9. The Red Man's Heritage—Harmony with Nature.....	133	15. Civilization's Great Lawgivers and Nobility	189
10. Pioneers and Sodbusters	147	16. Alexander's History of Law	203
11. Moving Inside.....	155	17. <i>The Sower</i>	229
12. The Birth of the Unicameral.....	165	18. Alexander's Unrealized Dreams... ..	235
		19. The Most Poignant Discovery....	247

Conclusion: Lessons Learned	251
Appendix	255
Index	257
Acknowledgments	265
About the Author	267
Bibliography	269



ON OCTOBER 16, 1877, A DECADE AFTER NEBRASKA became a state, and a little more than a decade after America's Civil War ended, in a small village a few miles south and west of Berlin called Rixdorf, in the land then known as Prussia, a boy was born who would later shape the face of American art and architecture. The boy's name was Hugo Belling, but he is slightly better known to the world as Lee Oskar Lawrie, (1877-1963). And because no one else has bothered to do so yet, I will call him America's Machine-Age Michelangelo. He created literally hundreds of works over a career that lasted nearly seventy years, yet history has all but forgotten about him.

It's easy to overlook the obvious. Many Nebraskans who grew up in the capital city of Lincoln, like I did, come from families who have lived there for generations, and may have never taken the time to set foot in the State Capitol—just like lifelong New Yorkers who've never visited the Empire State Building. Often times, we fail to notice things that are right in front of us.

The Nebraska State Capitol is one of my favorite places in the city, and I have always felt some hazy, perhaps mystical connection with the building. Maybe it's because I love Art Deco. Or maybe it's because I've always had a fascination with all things Native American, and the building meets those needs. I've always felt a reverence for it.

Despite the fact that it's the tallest building in town and can be seen from nearly twenty miles away, many people know very little about this magnificent structure. Sure, like many other kids in town, I toured the Capitol as a Cub Scout and always thought it was a pretty neat place, but even as a kid I had assumed that most cities of comparable size around the country must surely contain comparable buildings.

However, as an adult, I have learned that no other city in the U.S. has anything quite like the Nebraska State Capitol. While New York City has the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building, and Rockefeller Center—all of which are monuments to Modernism and the Art Deco period, and all of which were completed only *after* Nebraska’s Capitol was well under construction—none of them can match the complexity of the Capitol in ground-breaking innovation, thematic content, architectural sculpture, and frankly, the importance of heritage and history on the American character. More importantly, it’s a public building, built and paid for by the people.

What most Nebraskans don’t realize is that not only does their Capitol hold the largest collection of Lawrie’s work in the world, but also how this nearly anonymous man’s work has created an undiscovered national network that, once recognized, could serve as a link between the other cities, churches, and communities throughout the U.S. in the variety of states in which his work is found.



While most Nebraskans immediately recognize the *Sower* as an icon representing all things Nebraskan, very few of them have ever even heard of Lawrie. Fewer still are aware of the impact Lawrie had on architectural sculpture nationwide, nor the scope of his contribution to Modernism or the art form that we now commonly and retroactively refer to as Art Deco. He’s just not a household name in Nebraska—or anywhere else for that matter.

This photo by E. Quigley shows a model of the *Sower* at a 1933 public sculpture exhibition in Philadelphia.

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

For example, in February 2007, the American Institute of Architects and Harris Interactive conducted a poll of nearly 2,000 people to identify the public’s 150 favorite works of architecture in America. The Nebraska State Capitol Building placed at number sixty-seven on this list. Seven out of these 150 works have a uniquely common thread: the U.S. Capitol, the White House, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Rockefeller Center in New York City, the Nebraska State Capitol Building, the Los Angeles Central Public Library, and the freestanding statue of George Washington at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, all contain architectural sculpture created by the hands and mind of Lee Lawrie. Although Lawrie is not even mentioned, his presence at so many of these buildings ranks second only to Frank Lloyd Wright, who created nine works that placed on the list.

Like many other Lincolmites, I grew up virtually in the shadow of the Capitol, living in South Lincoln, attending Lincoln High, just about a mile down the hill east of the Capitol and the University

of Nebraska at Lincoln. In the late 1930s, my Mom worked for the State of Nebraska in the still newly finished Capitol for the Nebraska Surplus Commodities Division, which distributed surplus crops to schools during the waning years of the Depression. In 1939, she met my father who had grown up in Lincoln, witnessing the Capitol being built.

My Dad once told me that while he was in college, either on a dare or a bet, he had driven a Model T up to the top of the north stairway of the Capitol. So, there is a little more of my family history connected with the building. My father passed away several years ago, so now this dark family secret can at last be revealed.

Ever since I was a kid, I'd held some special feeling, perhaps a reverence, for the Capitol. Its cathedral-like interior evokes a feeling of sanctity—perhaps because of the overwhelming beauty and grace of the whole structure. When you're inside it, you feel that perhaps a hushed tone is in order; it simply invokes feelings of serenity. I toured it as a child, dined in its cafeteria, ran amok in its halls as a rowdy junior high school kid, and worked two internships there as a middle-aged college student. To me it was a place of majesty, dignity, and awe. It was like a prestigious and cosmopolitan art museum; except, unlike a museum, its art is on display year-round, twenty-four hours a day.

It wasn't until nearly a decade after I had graduated from the university and moved away that I began to realize the unique significance of this building, and more specifically, the importance of just who Lee Lawrie was.

In 2000, while accompanying my wife on a business trip to New York City, I was free to wander the metropolis, admiring and photographing many Art Deco buildings in the city while she was attending seminars. Having always been an admirer of Art Deco art and architecture, there are few places on the planet that hold so many brilliant examples of the style as New York City, and so I was as happy as a clam.

As I toured Rockefeller Center and saw the beautiful bas-relief sculpture of *Wisdom* on the 30 Rockefeller Plaza and the great statue of *Atlas*, I realized that a great deal of this beautiful work was done by the same artist that did the sculpture on the Capitol, way out west in Nebraska. No two works of art anywhere seem to evoke a stronger sense of the spirit of Art Deco than the dynamic duo of *Wisdom* and the *Atlas*. Upon viewing his Moses- or God-like figure of *Wisdom* on the front of "30 Rock," I was immediately awestruck. I fell in love with this new discovery of his—new to me anyway. Everything about Rockefeller Center intrigued me.

Incidentally, originally, the design of *Wisdom* was supposed to represent God. But at Rockefeller's direction, the image was de-deified, making him more secular, even though the biblical verse, "*Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times,*" was retained.



Wisdom—A Voice Descending from the Clouds was the original title of the piece, but it is better known simply as *Wisdom*.

Scholars have suggested that Lawrie may have ripped off William Blake's 1794 painting, *Ancient of Days*, which pictures Blake's mythical figure, Urizen, known as the embodiment of conventional wisdom and law, in the clouds, leaning forward with giant calipers in his hands as he measures out his creation. But while Lawrie may have stolen the concept of the image, he truly made it his own. Many books about Art Deco have identified Lawrie's *Wisdom* as being among the most emblematic images of the genre. While I had seen pictures of the *Atlas* for many years, I had never seen a picture of *Wisdom*, surrounded by *Sound and Light*. I was helplessly overpowered by it.

Not only are these three polychrome works overwhelming, but Lawrie also worked with the Corning Glass Company to create the band of 240 individually-sculpted, amber-colored glass blocks that create the seventy-foot long window that stretches nearly the width of the facade.



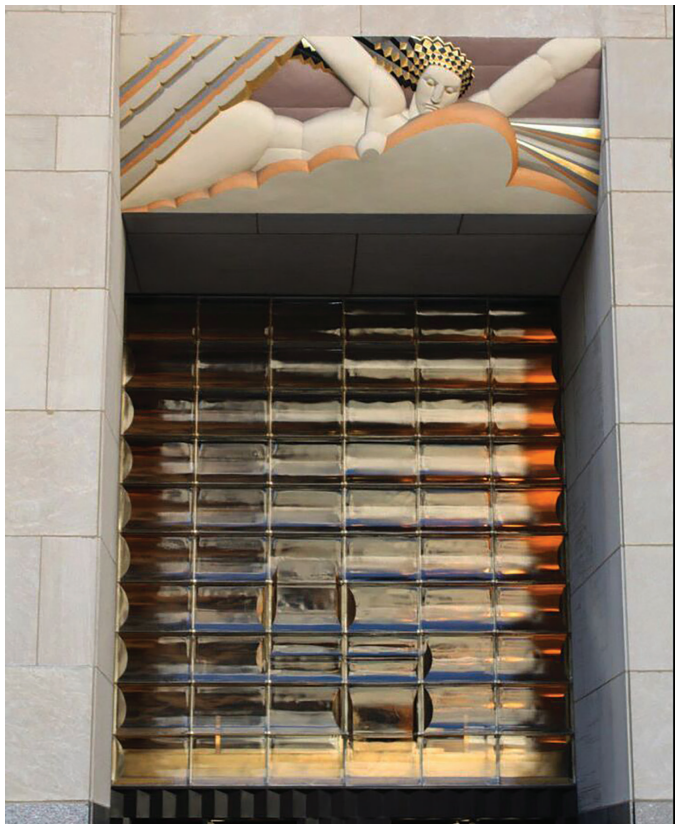
Sample image of *Ancient of Days* by William Blake.



Even more interesting is the fact that the assembly of glass blocks contains no duplicate shapes—each is unique. They display the geometric pattern that lets their soft amber morning light filter into the lobby of this magnificent building. Immediately below *Wisdom*, the blocks form a compass over the sun in the background.

The crown-like pattern for the texture of his head; the angular sweep of his beard—suggesting a strong wind, the absence of which would have let his beard drape down to his waist; the lines of his powerful hands—both of which appear to be abnormally long, with his index finger as long as his middle finger; and the whole pattern of his compass, calibrating out an arc, each of these elements screams Art Deco!

Flanking *Wisdom* are two futuristic, at least by 1930s' standards, murals—*Light* and *Sound*. *Light* represents the fledgling motion picture industry and television, while *Sound* represents radio during its golden age.



These icons were chosen to communicate the fact that this was, after all, the home of the Radio Corporation of America, better known simply as RCA. Although radio was then in its heyday, television was barely out of its embryonic state—when words like cable and plasma had entirely different meanings than they do today.

When I first learned that Lawrie had created these, I was flabbergasted. My first thought was, “Wait a minute—so the same guy who created these *also* did the sculpture on the Nebraska State Capitol?”

And then I thought, “How on earth did Nebraska of all places get the same sculptor who created this amazing art for its state capitol?”



The *Atlas* at Rockefeller Center. Most people recognize it, but can't name the artist who created it. Rene Chambellan assisted Lawrie on this famous New York icon.

And at that very moment, armed with this new curiosity, this book was conceived.

The magnitude of distinct designs Lawrie created in his lifetime is astounding. How could just one person come up with so many different distinct designs? And ones that advanced the world of design so dramatically?

To me, it was truly astounding that one of the five most significant buildings in the Art Deco era was illustrated by Lawrie. Not only was I amazed at the power suggested by this imagery, what really struck me was the significance of how important Lawrie must have been in his day and age. And finally, how fortunate Nebraska was to have landed him for the work on the most important building in the state.


Most people recognize the image of the *Atlas* and thousands of people walk by it every day, but the average passerby can't name its creator. It was Lawrie—the same sculptor who created the *Sower* statue in Nebraska, but who also remains practically anonymous nearly everywhere that his works are found.

In Greek mythology, Iapetus was the father of Atlas. But at Rockefeller Center, his father was Lawrie. Standing over forty-two feet tall, the bronze statue of *Atlas*, with his sphere of rings depicting the twelve signs of the zodiac, is one of the trademarks associated with Rockefeller Center. Since I first published this book, I've learned that Rene Chambellan assisted with the design as well as the casting.

But because Rockefeller Center was completed several years after the Nebraska Capitol was done, naturally, none of the information or buzz around the 1932 completion of the Capitol could have predicted that he would go on to do this spectacular work at Rockefeller Center. That connectivity flowed only toward the future, and not to the past.

Deeper and Deeper...

The more I studied Lawrie, the more I learned just how ubiquitous his work was and what national treasures his works truly are. During the first year or two of my research, the deeper I dug, the more dots there were nationwide that needed connecting.



In New York City, Lawrie's sculptures grace at least a half-dozen remarkable Gothic churches, but his work lies in communities scattered all over the nation. His major works can also be found at the National Academy of Sciences building in Washington, DC, the Los Angeles Public Library, Yale, Rockefeller Chapel in Chicago, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point; these works were all accomplished during his association with Goodhue, who incidentally died in 1924—barely three years after construction of the Nebraska Capitol began. They even collaborated on projects in Hawaii and Cuba. In the nearly thirty years Lawrie and Goodhue spent working together, they collaborated on over a hundred buildings nationwide.

Over the years, several scholars have undertaken research into various themes associated with Lawrie's work, examined his work at Nebraska, and perhaps a couple have recognized that he created works in several other areas in the country. But no one has ever taken the time to connect the dots to illustrate his significance to Art History in America—until now.

As I began my study of Lawrie, one of the first discoveries I made was how little information there was published about him. For example, when you search Amazon.com, the last book published solely about Lawrie's work was a monograph from 1955 by the University of Georgia Press—and it has long been out of print. The last publication before that was J.H. Jansen's folio of some of his works, *Sculpture: Lee Lawrie*, published in 1936. Moreover, take a walk in any bookstore, commercial booksellers, or even academic bookstores, and look through books on sculpture or American art history; his name is conspicuously absent from the indexes in these works.

Nebraska was still a young frontier state in the 1920s; thus, probably more concerned with building its first roads and bringing electricity to farms than caring about the world of art. So, it begged the question, "How in the world did Nebraska (of all places) manage to land one of the top sculptors of the twentieth century to decorate its Capitol?" As we will learn later, he was part of a package deal.

I suppose it would be safe to call it a quest for more knowledge, which allows me to seek out, and to venture to document some of the most remarkable art of the twentieth century that remains not merely forgotten; but also—almost completely unknown.

Back in grad school, the late attorney, Dale Hardin, my legal theory professor (who LBJ twice directly appointed to head the former Interstate Commerce Commission, and was twice confirmed by the Senate), began his class by pointing out that when you look at the history of law, and especially that of lawsuits, the events recorded in the legal case reporter books all actually happened to real people who were aggrieved in a host of ways.

In recent years, some marketing genius in Hollywood came up with the perfect idea of how to wring a little more of the studios' box-office-hits' goodness out of its older material by dreaming up the concept of the back-story, and christening this new cinematic genre "the prequel."

Finally, I wish to stress that this is not a revisionist history, but rather a retelling of events as recounted in newspaper articles, architectural trade journals, and a wealth of information provided by Lawrie's archives and even personal family letters given me to by some of his descendants themselves.

Therefore, this book is a look back at the events that set the stage for the development of the Capitol. But it's also a recounting of a good deal of long buried history to help us better understand how the events of the past relate to our present-day culture, government, law, politics and society.

Over the past seventeen years spent travelling around the country retracing some of Lawrie's steps, one of the most interesting connections between Lawrie and the Nebraska State Capitol building appears in a church in Morningside Heights in New York City where Lawrie created a tomb for Goodhue.

Goodhue's Church of the Intercession is located at 155th and Broadway, a block away from the subway on Sugar Hill. In 1924, just a few weeks before he turned fifty-five years of age, Goodhue died of heart failure. Lawrie was shattered by the premature demise of his dear friend and colleague of nearly three decades.

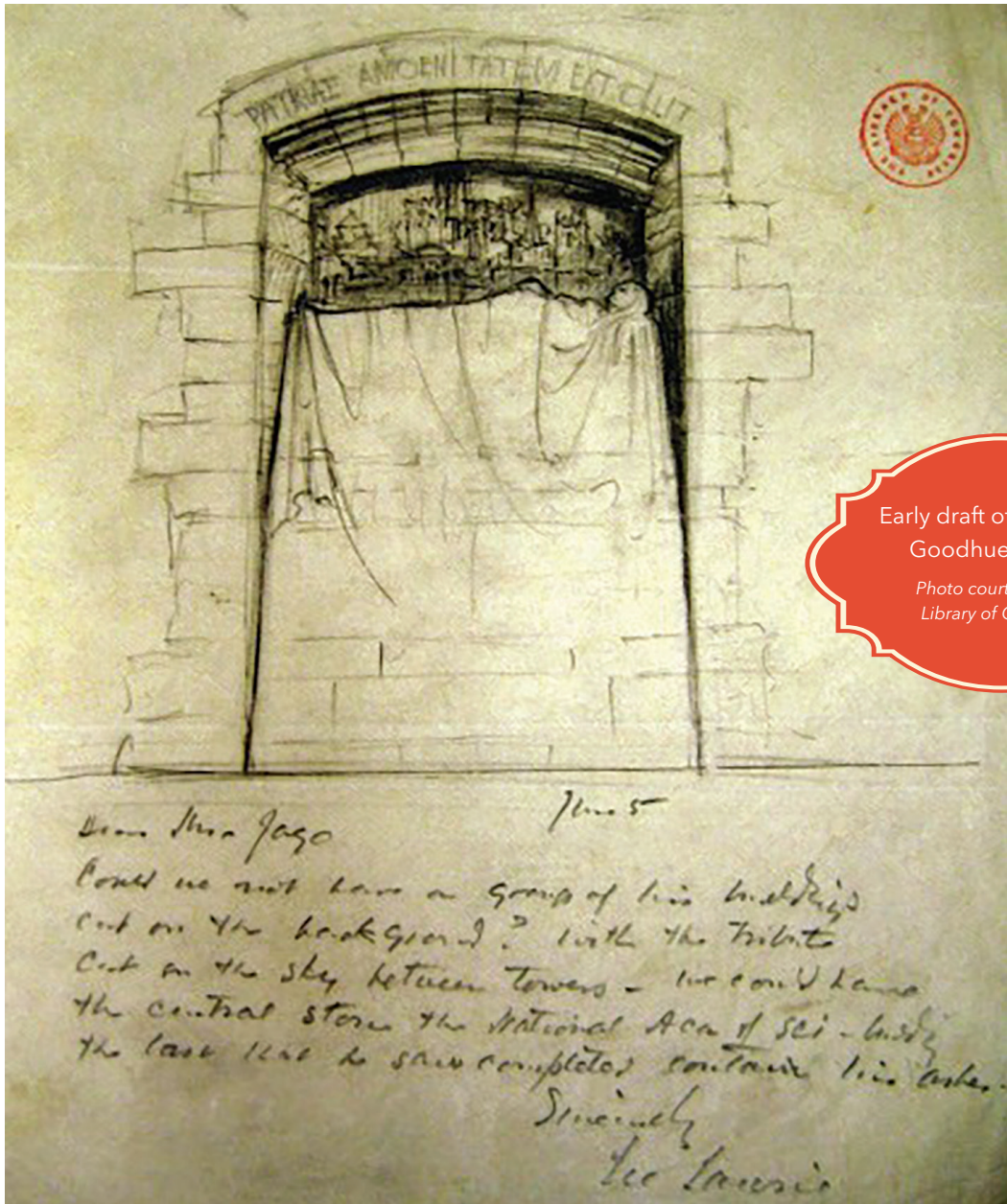
In the church that Goodhue himself designed—and that is said to have been his favorite, according to Bob Ripley, an architect from Lincoln who possesses a deep personal knowledge of the architecture of the Capitol, gained in over twenty-five years' service as one of the Capitol's, historians, protectors, and restorers—Lawrie carved this

Inasmuch as Hollywood can crank out prequels whenever they want to invent a fictional back-story to sell more tickets, in many ways, this book can serve as a prequel that will help to explain how buildings such as Rockefeller Center came to use the same unique cadre of artists that were used on the Nebraska State Capitol.

The chief distinction here is that unlike the worlds of young *Indiana Jones* or any of the *Star Wars* prequels, these lessons are drawn from the actual events that shape American government, law, politics, and art history. However, this isn't a screenplay—this is history.

memorial tomb to him, featuring his life-sized figure. It was dedicated in 1929 and contains his ashes. Lawrie used Goodhue's actual death mask and a post mortem casting of his left hand to ensure the accuracy of the posthumous portrait.

In the center of this arc at the top is the image of Goodhue's largest completed commission, the Nebraska State Capitol. When the tomb was created, the building was nowhere near completion; and as time passed, the actual building was markedly different from Lawrie's rendering shown in this photograph.



Early draft of design for Goodhue's Tomb.
Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Goodhue's crypt, sculpted by Lee Lawrie reads,
"BERTRAM GROSVENOR GOODHUE MDCCCLXIX MCMXXIV. THIS
TOMB IS A TOKEN OF THE AFFECTION OF HIS FRIENDS. HIS GREAT
ARCHITECTURAL CREATIONS THAT BEAUTIFY THE LAND AND
ENRICH CIVILIZATION ARE HIS MONUMENTS."





Above Goodhue's effigy appears a semicircle displaying many of his most famous buildings. The tomb of architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue is adorned across the top with relief carvings of buildings designed by Goodhue. The bas-relief depicts the Chapel at West Point, Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago, Rice University, Caltech, the National Academy of Science Building, the Los Angeles Public Library, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Sterling Memorial Library at Yale, St. Vincent Ferrer, the Convocation Center designed for Madison Square Garden (never built), St. Thomas Church, and St. Bartholomew's. Below the sarcophagus bearing a reclining figure of Goodhue is a relief carving of his family crest.

It should also be noted that while Lawrie was designing the tomb, he was still working on the Nebraska Capitol, the Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Building in Philadelphia, Bok Tower in Florida and several other projects, all simultaneously.



Where else would you go to see an image of the Nebraska State Capitol, but to the Church of the Intercession, in Uptown (Morningside Heights) New York City?



A detail of a proposed memorial to Goodhue from Caltech, never built.
Photo courtesy of the Archives, California Institute of Technology.



Dance



Drama



After learning of Lawrie's work on Rockefeller Center, imagine my surprise to learn that Hildreth Meière, who created the Guastavino Ceilings in the Rotunda, the Great Hall, the Warner Chamber and more at the Nebraska State Capitol, also worked on Rockefeller Center. Years later, I also learned that Nebraskan Hartley Burr Alexander, the thematic consultant for the Nebraska State Capitol, was also involved with creating some of the original themes about the New Frontier that were incorporated into Rockefeller Center's artistic programs.

The fact that these two nationally significant Art Deco artists worked together on the Capitol suggested to me that there was something special in the connection between this most remarkable skyscraper in Manhattan and the Nebraska State Capitol. This is what set me off on this course of research: to find out just who Lawrie was, and more significantly, what else he had created.

Hildreth Meière's *Dance, Drama, and Music Rondels* on the Fiftieth Street Facade of the south side of Radio City Music Hall. They are constructed of aluminum, brass, chrome nickel steel, and vitreous enamel, and they represent the Theater Arts.



Music

More Discoveries

Since 2011, when I published the previous edition of this book, I have visited a number of sites and made some discoveries that were previously unknown or unassociated with his legacy.

Among the places containing Lawrie's work that I have explored and photographed are the Los Angeles Public Library—which was also designed by Goodhue, and features Alexander's program of sculpture as created by Lawrie, and which is the subject of my next book, currently in production—and the *Memorial Flagstaff* in Pasadena, honoring those killed and maimed in the First World War.



WWI Memorial Flagstaff in Pasadena, CA, created by Lawrie and Goodhue, dated 1923-1926.

In working on the multitude of buildings he did, the majority of them were such that he had multiple *individual* sculptures in a *cascade*. For example, on a single building—like a church or a library, where a flat plane existed for a wall—he might install ten different carvings of people. On a stairway, he might put sculpture on the walls or abutments on either side of the stairs. In other words, on nearly every building where Lawrie carved a single bas-relief there would likely be dozens more, and even the occasional freestanding statue, so each building would have a true *bouquet* of individual carvings that made up the whole commission. More than a hundred buildings across the nation may hold an exponential volume of individual pieces that no one has ever counted before.

The details of these pieces—and how they fit together—can only be fully comprehended when visiting a site like the Nebraska Capitol, where he created literally scores of individual sculptures.

The following chapters document some of the latest discoveries I've made, introduce the reader to some additional Nebraska-based examples of Lawrie's work, and hold the most poignant discovery I've made since last publishing the third edition of *Prairie Deco*!

Carving a Legacy



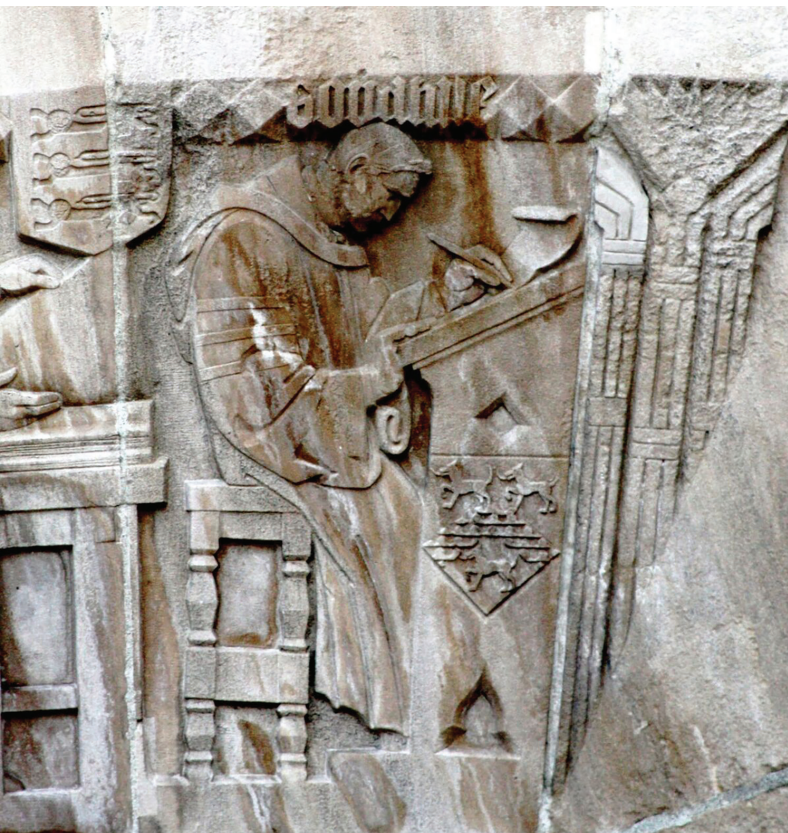
New York Times article showing Cheltenham font designed by Goodhue.

While Goodhue is best known for his architecture, he was also referred to as a “master of many arts,” posthumously in the subtitle of the 1925 AIA tribute book dedicated to him, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue: Architect and Master of Many Arts. Specifically, he drew remarkably well and designed typographic fonts as well. This book is printed in his Cheltenham font, but he also designed the Merrymount typeface.

Cheltenham is used to this day as the default font for the New York Times newspaper. In his 1983 biography, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, Richard Oliver set the book in Cheltenham Wide font, which was designed in 1904 by Goodhue himself. The above article, set in Cheltenham, documents the 2008 restoration of Lawrie and Chambellan’s Atlas.



Goodhue began designing the Los Angeles Public Library at the same time he was building the Nebraska State Capitol, and in its planning, Hartley Burr Alexander was selected as the thematic consultant, choosing themes related to the light of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. Once again, Lawrie was chosen to collaborate with him and to illustrate the themes creating architectural sculpture for the building.

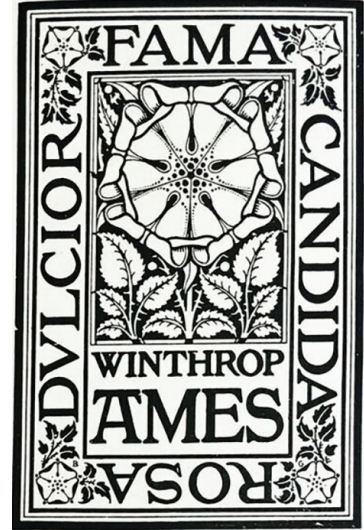
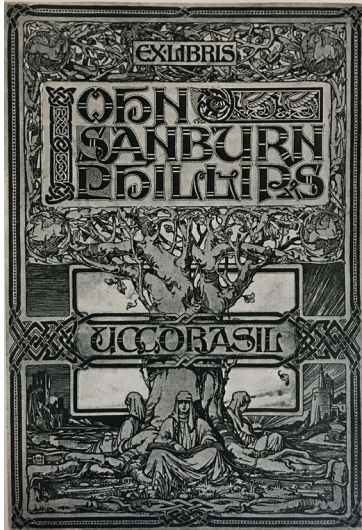


From left to right in the arch are Gutenberg, Elzevir, Aldus, Caxton, Morris and Goodhue.

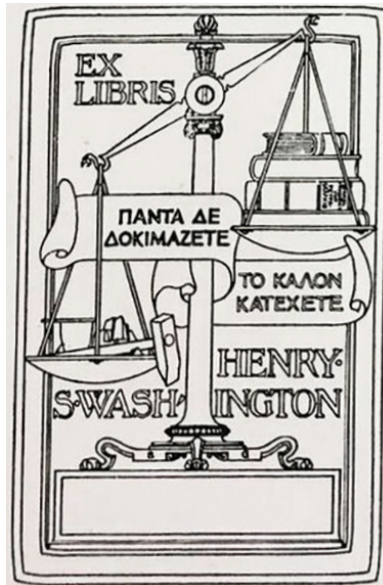
Alexander created a special theme, after Goodhue's death, at the south, street level entrance to the Library called the Printers' Tunnel. On it, he selected a set of both Old World and New World designers and producers of both book and the typefaces that would fill them with print.

Lawrie was selected to illustrate this series of six portraits, and the final person Alexander chose was Goodhue himself because of his skills in both typography and illustrating books.

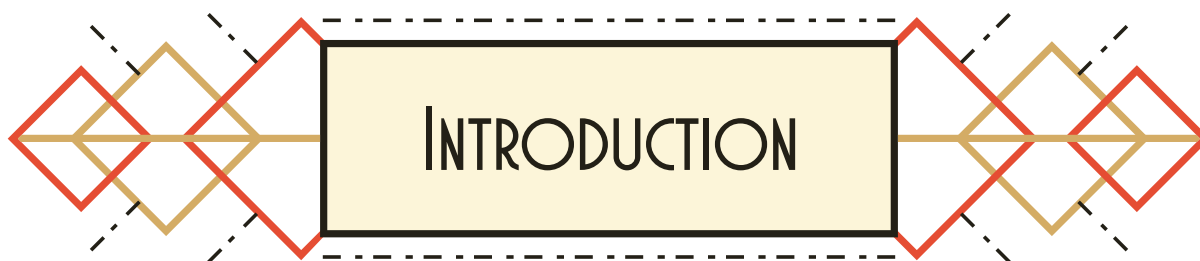
Herewith are some examples of why Alexander ranked Goodhue among these historic giants who collectively transformed the written word, to the print and books.



Bookplate images drawn by Goodhue and featured in *Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue: Architect and Master of Many Arts*, edited by Charles Harris Whitaker, AIA Press, 1925, New York.







Little House (of State) on the Prairie

MOST AMERICANS ONLY VIEW THE CAPITOL FROM ABOUT 35,000 feet up in the air. Travelers flying coast-to-coast might blink and miss it altogether. For many Americans, Nebraska is written off as being “flyover country.”

But in the nation’s midsection, there is a little-known historical treasure.

If people are asked about where to go to see Art Deco buildings or sculptures, many would mention the usual tourist attractions—Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles, or Miami—but one huge treasure trove rarely springs to mind: Lincoln, Nebraska.

Situated on a 720-square foot plat on high ground in the middle of town, the Nebraska State Capitol’s construction was completed in 1932, which made 2017 its 85th anniversary—and the 150th anniversary of Nebraska becoming a state.

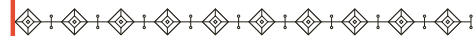
The building—and the art that decorates it—was bought and paid for by the citizens of Nebraska, and they are happy to share it with the world. The interior of the building is open during normal business hours, and, fortunately for fans of Art Deco, the exterior never closes.

The land that the Capitol sits on is 720 square feet. It is situated between K and H Streets and 14th and 16th Streets.

Thousands of people may drive by or visit the Capitol every year, and most Nebraskans will immediately recognize the statue of the *Sower* perched atop the Capitol dome; but very few can tell you *whose* sculptures decorate the interior and exterior of the building.

This book is about the historic and symbolic sculptures of the Nebraska State Capitol and, especially, the nearly forgotten twentieth-century American sculptor who created them. The multitude of images carved in Indiana limestone that grace the Capitol all started in the mind and imagination of Lee Lawrie.

Before my father died - two or three months as I remember, he told me an unknown fact from his professional background of significant interest and importance. We had been talking in general about the past and were alone for a full half-day - a rarity, that added to the occasion. At mention of the Capitol at Lincoln he said - suddenly with vigor, "Annie, I'm going to tell you something!" Leaning toward me over our coffee things and looking at me, he began, "It is not known what part I had in the design of the building"! I understood at once what he meant and the full meaning of it and his modesty in it, too, and said "I'm not surprised at that Pa, but thank you for telling me." Goodhue had, I knew, returned a gold medal awarded to him with the request that my father's name be inscribed on it together with his, which I, and no doubt others had assumed was for the sculptures being an integral part of his building. But Pa told me that aside from collaborating with sketches for his sculptures on Goodhue's competition drawing his (Pa's) idea for a change in the design of the building was used. I felt honored in his entrusting me with so personal a reality selflessly held in memory of his colleague but I was saddened, too. His life was ending; and I thought that it was for that reason he had told me. What moved me deeply was that, in its telling he meant it to be private and between us and his sweetness in that touched me deeply.



A page from the memoirs of Lawrie's daughter, Anne Lawrie Wolcott. Did he deserve more credit in the design of the Nebraska Capitol itself?

It has been extensively noted that Lawrie and Goodhue worked very closely for nearly three decades, so it would be reasonable to expect that these two friends could nearly finish each other's sentences. But also, as it has been stated, Lawrie was extremely shy.

Curiously, shortly before his death, Lawrie revealed a secret to his daughter, Anne. In it, he implies that he had played a greater role in the design of the Capitol than just contributing the sculpture.

When Goodhue won the AIA's gold medal for design for the Capitol, he sent it back to them, insisting that Lawrie's name be added to the medal, so this could lend some credence to the notion that Lawrie may have helped to influence the building's design.

Read it and draw your own conclusions, because the only other party that could confirm or deny this anecdote was Goodhue, who died in 1924.

Again, this would not be the first time in history that someone took a critical secret with them to the grave.

The Nebraska State Capitol has often been recognized as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. As important as the architecture itself is, it's the illustration that makes this building so distinctive. Lawrie's abundantly fertile imagination produced each design of the more than one hundred distinct works in the building.

The chief purpose of this book is to inventory and identify his works at the Nebraska State Capitol and to rediscover and relate the story of what each of the sculptures signifies. These magnificent stories of Native American and Western Heritage, silently told using pictures and symbolism, have largely lost their historical importance over the decades.

It's kind of like remembering the lyrics to an old song; we may remember or recognize the melody, but can't recall the words. People may have passed by the Capitol for years. They know what the building looks like, but don't recall what all the words or pictures on it actually mean. Call it sensory overload, but a principle purpose of the sculpture is to educate us.

While a picture may be worth a thousand words, to cite singer/song-writer Elvis Costello's lyric about pictures, he once posed the musical question, "But what's the use of looking when you don't know what they mean?"

This book is meant to generate recognition of the importance of Lawrie's place in American art history by providing a common element whereby communities all across the country can recognize, appreciate, and claim as their own the colossal contribution that Lawrie made through his work: to honor both God and his adopted country. Art and history buffs worldwide are encouraged to learn of this magnificent work and make the pilgrimage to Lincoln to experience it in its original space.

Lawrie's work is best viewed firsthand where it is found, and where its scale and scope can be appreciated more fully than from the images in this book. Just as when viewing a Van Gogh, one simply can't grasp its magnificence until standing a foot and a half from it and seeing each element that went into its creation, with daubs of paint in layers and blobs almost a half-inch-thick. Each stroke of pigment builds part of an effort at illustrating in two dimensions, yet constructing a thickened three-dimensional texture in the process.

When this book was first written, the Smithsonian Institute's website listed just over eighty various works of sculpture that Lawrie designed around the country. But these are just a few of Lawrie's creations.

The significance of a Van Gogh painting can't be conveyed through photographs alone. You really have to see one up close to realize the significance of its creation.



Only four or five were mentioned from the Nebraska Capitol, yet it is the largest commissioned project he worked on in his life. There are over one hundred works and details, representing more of his work in a single place than anywhere else in the world.

Over the winter and spring of 2010-2011, I added more than a score of Lawrie's unlisted works to the Smithsonian's Catalog of American Paintings and Sculpture; yet still scores remain out there undocumented.

Although 2017 was the 85th anniversary of the building's dedication, Lawrie's work on the Capitol actually continued until 1934 when he completed the last piece of sculpture, *The Establishment of the Tribune of the People*. A *New York Times* clipping dated November 22, 1934, marked the occasion of the completion of the carving, but attributed the "greatest job of carving" to the people of Nebraska, who carved down the Legislature to just a single house—now famous as the nation's only Unicameral.

In November 2009, I was able to help promote an effort supported by Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman to proclaim November 22, 2009 as Lee Lawrie Day to commemorate the occasion.

This may be as close as most coast-to-coast travelers ever get to the Sower.

