

Evelyn Raymond

A Sculptor's Own Story

An oral history, edited and introduced by Thomas O'Sullivan

In February 1997 sculptor Evelyn Raymond reflected on her career in a series of tape-recorded interviews for the Minnesota Historical Society's oral history collection. Surrounded by sculptures in bronze, copper, concrete, and steel in her St. Louis Park home, Raymond recalled artists and anecdotes from a 70-year time span. The interviews portray a private, often solitary person who has also been one of Minnesota's most public sculptors: "A bold artist but a shy woman," as a Minneapolis journalist once described her.¹

Raymond was born in Duluth in 1908 of French, Canadian, and Swedish heritage. She spent her childhood summers in Minnesota's north woods, where her father headed road-building crews and her mother managed their camps. She grew up admiring the handiwork of her father and uncles, who built wooden launches to race on the St. Croix River. Her grandfather was a builder, whose

¹ Anne Brataas, "The Bigger the Better: Minnesota Sculptor Still 'Chipping' After 45 Years," *Minneapolis Star*, Jan. 29, 1981, Community/West sec., 4. Unless otherwise cited, all quotations are from Evelyn Raymond, interview by Thomas O'Sullivan, tape recordings, St. Louis Park, Minn., Feb. 27, 1997, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). A transcript of the interview is also available in the MHS library.

Thomas O'Sullivan is curator of art at the Minnesota Historical Society.

LEFT: Evelyn Raymond at work in the WPA's Walker Art Center, modeling a bas relief of football players for the International Falls stadium, 1941.

OF FIGURES FOR SOOLO
STADIUM IN
INTERNATIONAL FALLS...
EVELYN RAYMOND INSTRUCTOR
THE WALKER ART CENTER
WORKSHOP CLASS

homes in Duluth stand as a substantial backdrop to family photos. The family provided Raymond with models of self-sufficiency, craftsmanship, and tenacity, elements of a “pioneer spirit” that she found evident in her own work.

A lively art program in the Duluth schools, plus her own passion for reading, confirmed Raymond’s love of art and her desire to become an artist. In 1928 she entered the Minneapolis School of Art (today the Minneapolis College of Art and Design) on a scholarship. There her teachers introduced her to both traditional and modern art, though the latter was suspect at the school. Its director, Edmund Kopietz, warned her that “modern art wasn’t going to go anywhere and I’d be wise not to continue that particular bent,” she recalled.

But Raymond showed her independence early—first by making abstract sculpture in school and then by quitting in protest over faculty appointments in 1930. She and two dozen fellow students left to form the Minneapolis Art Students League with her mentor, sculptor Charles S. Wells. Raymond studied and taught at their upstart academy in downtown Minneapolis for two years. Her mother’s illness brought the young sculptor back to Duluth. Taking over her mother’s job, Raymond cooked for the workers of a 600-acre dairy farm. She recounted the episode with surprisingly little bitterness, noting that “I didn’t live in the world I was in, because I was constantly reading stuff.” Her routine of kitchen work and self-instruction lasted for eight years.

Leaving the dairy farm in the middle of the Great Depression, Raymond at first found no opportunities in the arts. A call in 1938 from Clement Haupers, a fellow artist who headed the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) in the upper Midwest, brought her an invitation to return to the Twin Cities and to sculpture. At Haupers’s request, Raymond modeled a machinelike, streamlined figure she titled *ERG* as a demonstration of her skills. She joined the FAP as an artist and teacher and created designs for wall carvings, busts, and monumental architectural sculptures. Her giant bas-relief composition of football players for a WPA stadium in International Falls was typical of the FAP’s sturdy realism as well as

Raymond’s willingness to work in the public eye. She made the full-size clay model before an interested audience in the lobby of the Walker Art Center: “If you’ve been a hermit for eight years, you get pretty shy. And look around and see all those people staring at you, and then you’re doing your first big job, it’s not all easy.”²

Raymond’s public accessibility, teaching, and big jobs continued for decades after the FAP ended in 1943. She taught at the Walker Art Center until midcentury. She gave lessons in her home and studio well into her eighties. A vocal advocate for Minnesota artists, Raymond founded the Minnesota Sculpture Society and participated in regional exhibitions including solo shows at the Walker Art Center and the Minnesota State Fair. Her commitment to bringing art to the people took ingenious forms: in 1949 she converted a YWCA tennis court into a sculpture garden during the Minneapolis Aquatennial festival, for example. Her own work continued at a prolific rate throughout the 1950s and ’60s with large-scale commissions for churches and corporations. And as Minnesota planned to observe its statehood centennial in 1958, Raymond won a major commission that was a high point of her career.

In the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C., each state honors two of its citizens in bronze statues. Minnesota’s first statue represented Henry M. Rice, an early senator; the subject chosen for the second was University of Minnesota educator Maria L. Sanford. Funded by a state appropriation in 1957, the Sanford commission came to Raymond as the result of a competition for which she sculpted both a portrait head and a full figure. She spent six months on the job, modeling the full-sized statue in clay on a metal armature. She worked in a rented automobile showroom that had sufficiently high ceilings for the figure, which stood twice the height of the five-foot-tall Sanford. The statue was cast in bronze and dedicated in the Capitol rotunda in 1958. Raymond offered a few words on her work: “I strove to depict to the best of my ability the intelligence and beauty in the face of Maria Sanford and to give the figure the strength and vigor she had to possess in order for her to have given so much to her students and to her community.”³

² On the WPA/FAP in Minnesota, see Kenneth Hendrickson Jr., “The WPA Federal Art Projects in Minnesota, 1935–1943,” and Thomas O’Sullivan, “A Job and a Movement: The WPA Federal Art Project in Minnesota,” both in *Minnesota History* 53 (Spring 1993): 170–83 and 184–95, respectively.

³ Evelyn Raymond, “Sculpture Study of Maria L. Sanford,” in *Acceptance of the Statue of Maria L. Sanford Presented by the State of Minnesota* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), 69.

A Raymond Sculpture Tour

The following sculptures by Evelyn Raymond represent more than 50 years of her public commissions in Minnesota:

Bronco Stadium, U.S. Highway 71, International Falls: bas relief of athletes, poured concrete, 1942

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 4801 France Avenue South, Minneapolis: *The Good Shepherd*, Kasota stone, 1949

University of St. Thomas, T. Merritt and Katherine Coughlan Field House, 2115 Summit Avenue, St. Paul: *The Family*, hammered copper, 1959 (originally commissioned for 1919 University Avenue, St. Paul)

Fairview-University Medical Center, 2450 Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis: *Legacy*, bronze, 1982

St. Louis Park Recreation Center, 3700 Monterey Drive, St. Louis Park: *Celebration of Peace*, stainless steel, 1997

The Sanford statue drew out Raymond's best efforts in conceiving and modeling the figure and in marshaling the skills of plaster casters, bronze founders, and movers. She recalled, "There's pictures of me that were taken. This was well over half a year's job, and I look like I've got great huge circles under my eyes. It was really a rough time, and I wanted to do the best I could to honor Maria." This commission not only demonstrated Raymond's obligation to her art but revealed a kinship between artist and subject.

Like Maria Sanford, Raymond devoted herself single-mindedly to her life's work. Two generations of students looked to Raymond for guidance; when Minnesota women artists established their own collective programs in the 1970s, the Women's Art Registry of Minnesota, they honored Raymond as a key "foremother."⁴

While identifying herself as "strictly a femi-

nist as far as joining women's organizations," Raymond expressed ambiguity about the effect of her gender on her career. She recalled being unable to join a stone-workers' union that was closed to women, yet she felt "I don't think I ever lost a job because I was a woman." She found her mother's example relevant to her own career. Girlhood lessons in dressmaking proved useful for the pattern-making skills Raymond later needed for welded steel sculpture. The memory of her mother, "a lovely Swedish lady," wearing riding skirts and pistols for work in the woods was a powerful image for a woman artist. But in her philosophy and her experience, Raymond resisted gender-based categorizations: "I don't think men or women have a corner on sensitivity or strength—and all art should have both."⁵

A few months after she recounted her memories for the Minnesota Historical Society's tape recorder at age 89, Evelyn Raymond attended the dedication of a new sculpture just a few blocks from her home. *Celebration of Peace*, a stainless steel abstraction that evokes the image of doves wheeling through the sky atop a tall pillar, was built for the city of St. Louis Park's new recreation and cultural center. Nature itself unveiled the sculpture when a fierce windstorm tore off the draperies before Raymond accepted the applause of her neighbors. "I don't really need the publicity but, hell, I think I've contributed a lot," she told a reporter, "and at 89 you need to give yourself a little credit." Raymond died on April 25, 1998, a month after her ninetieth birthday.⁶

Most of Raymond's works present a distinctive blend of recognizable subject with stylized, even abstract form. While the commissioned nature of her many public sculptures demanded that Raymond give sculptural life to easily recognized subjects, she conceived them in formal rather than narrative or symbolic terms. "Content is sort of secondary—it gets me going," she told an interviewer in 1993. "I studied with a Beaux Arts man as well as with somebody who studied at the Bauhaus. Basically even in the realistic pieces, the form is the important thing. It has to be right."⁷

The following excerpts from tapes in the Minnesota Historical Society's oral history col-

⁴ Susan McDonald, "Minnesota Women Artists: Finding Our Foremothers," *WARM Journal*, Autumn 1982, p. 3.

⁵ Brataas, "The Bigger the Better," 5.

⁶ Mary Abbe, "At 89, Evelyn Raymond Sculpts a New Niche," *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, June 22, 1997, p. F8; *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, Apr. 28, 1998, p. B7.

⁷ Vince Leo, "An Interview with Evelyn Raymond: It Has to be Right," *Artpaper*, June 1993, p. 16, 17.



The Pierson family, about 1900: Raymond's grandfather Gustav Wilhelm is seated at center; her mother Nellie is the girl at left in the back row.

lection give the flavor of the artist's thought and expression in her own words. The tapes are available for listening in the library at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul.

I was born in Duluth in 1908, from French and Canadian stock. . . . I think those particular people have a lot to do with Minnesota, and I like being a Minnesotan. I think artists should have roots.

My father used to build roads in northern Minnesota, and we would go with him in the summertime, my family. It would be like camping out all summer, and they would hire as many as 200 people. . . . My dad would build a shack, a tarpaper shack for us, and we'd have an army blanket for a door. We went light, we traveled light, and I think that's where I began to start creating things, because we didn't take toys or anything. We made things out of twigs and our imagination. I learned how to make a whistle out of a willow.

Nellie Pierson, my mother's name was, and she was a lovely Swedish lady. When we were building roads with my dad, she would be the only woman . . . and she dressed in riding skirts, corduroy riding skirts. She was so pretty. And then she wore a holster with revolvers in it. . . . When my dad would go ahead to build the next addition, so that they could move the crew and us, she would be all by herself. I mean, the lone woman in this camp. She was pretty much of a pioneer herself. . . .

I've stayed in Minnesota. I love Minnesota. I love being a part of it, and I don't think of

Minnesota as being a prairie state, because we always lived in Duluth, amongst the rocks and the lake. As children, we used to go on picnics with our parents and climb the rocks and the hills in West Duluth, and then later on we lived up near the other end of town, where you could go down by the lake and crawl around all the big craggy rocks. I just feel that it's more sculptural where I come from than if you were in a prairie area. . . .

When I was in Central [High School, Duluth], I always wanted to be a sculptor. Ever since I was a kid, when I even looked at books, I didn't want things to be flat. I could look at them and hope that they'd get so I could feel them, so that I could feel something, rather than just have pictures. Color has never been one of my important things in my life. I like texture. I like the natural quality of wood and stone, and I just kind of come through that naturally through my life as a pioneer, I guess. . . .

We used to have an old book from the St. Louis World's Fair that we got from some place, and there were a lot of pictures in that. I remember kind of wearing that out looking at it. But I know I didn't come from any kind of typical family with art, but I do . . . feel that they were craftsmen and they were sensitive. I mean, the houses my grandfather built. . . . And seeing my dad make those lovely boats. . . .

The last year I was in high school, she [my teacher] entered a drawing I made [in a national competition], a charcoal drawing I made of the kids going up and down the stairs in the high school, and I won first prize in drawing.

And then I tried for a scholarship, because my mother really had a pretty tough time to support kids at what she was doing. And somehow I managed to scrape up \$200, I think is what the tuition cost a year at the art school in Minneapolis. It used to be called the Minneapolis School of Art.

Mr. Charles Wells had been head of the sculpture department for 20-some years at the art school. He was a Beaux Arts fellow and his main thrust was academic art. But John Haley had just been to Europe on a Van Derlip scholarship, a young man. He stretched his two years to three years and studied in Paris. He studied at the Bauhaus, and he brought back with him these marvelous things of the modern art that were so fascinating. . . . And because I was so enamored of this modern stuff that John Haley had brought, and Mr. Wells was so very interested in helping me go my own way, so I was doing, I think, the first abstract sculpture ever done at

the art school. Mr. [Edmund] Kopietz [MSA director] called me in, and because I was a scholarship student, he thought he ought to tell me that modern art wasn't going to go anyplace and I'd be wise not to continue that particular bent.

Then the end of that term, after two years, they decided to let Mr. Wells go, and John Haley, also. . . . and being a kind of basically a shy kid, but if I wanted something, I seemed to have enough wherewithal to go after it. . . . Two of us got up a petition, and we tried to get as many students as we could to sign the petition that we'd leave the art school if these two men weren't kept on as instructors. . . . Twenty-five of us did leave, and . . . Mr. Wells got a place for us down at the Sexton Building [in downtown Minneapolis]. . . .

He [painter LeRoy Turner] came in this little school that we called the Minneapolis Art Students League. . . . It being Depression, we could just toss in what little money we could get, and we bought the lumber, and under

Mr. Wells's direction, we made the modeling stands and set up our studio in the old Sexton Building. And actually it was a school that seemed to do rather well, and a studio, considering that it was Depression. I was the business manager, and . . . if you put an ad in the paper for a model, there'd be people lined up for two blocks because there was a need of work. . . .

We were all mostly from out of town, kind of small-town kids, and . . . we always traveled kind of in gangs so that we could share whatever we had, and the end of the day we'd maybe have a tea bag that we'd get awful high on, just sharing a tea bag. They were lovely, simple days as compared to nowadays. . . .

After I went for not quite two years to our new school, this Art Students League, my mother became ill. . . . She had a heart condition, and I had to go home, back to Duluth. I took her place, and I was up at five o'clock, cooking for the milk men. We had a big dairy, 160 cows, and we had 600 acres. . . .

Raymond at work in her studio, about 1950. ERG, the figure she sculpted in 1938 for her application to the WPA's Federal Art Project, stands on the mantel immediately to her left, along with the bronze bust of Dmitri Mitropoulos, music director of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.



I used to get ten dollars a month, do anything I wanted with it, which I did. I mostly bought magazines, art magazines, which there was, during the Depression . . . wonderful little magazines that were started, of philosophy, psychology, art. I read every art book I think I could find in the public library, and I read all night. . . . When I ran out of books on art, then I would take each country and find out who their best authors were. I'd take a country at a time and try to find out. I would read.

We were . . . about eight miles out of town, and I never did drive. And so if you're cooking for that many people, you're pretty steady in the kitchen. I remember three hours of washing dishes. But I didn't live in the world I was in, because I was constantly reading stuff. . . .

I was out there eight years. When I left in 1938, my mother died. I took care of her eight months. She had cancer. . . . I tried to get a job then, and there was nothing to be had, naturally, doing art work. . . . I could have gotten a job cooking anyplace, but I wasn't interested at that point.

It happened at that time one of the people that I was interviewed by knew Clem Haupers and knew about WPA. Of course, I knew Clem from way back. . . . He was the director of the WPA art project for seven states, seven or eight states, and he told me he knew I had been cooking for eight years, and he wanted to know if I could still do sculpture. So he asked me to do some sculpture to prove that I could do sculpture, and that piece that you people have [in the Minnesota Historical Society collection] is the first piece I did after eight years. That piece has been in national magazines and . . . I have a feeling that's my most famous piece. . . . I named it *ERG*. I guess that means a unit of power.

Well, Clem did give me a job. . . . There were a lot of different people on the WPA besides artists . . . which was so exciting for a sculptor. In our department, there would be a master plaster caster, woodcarvers, and just people who needed jobs. . . . It was a wonderful education for me, because in our school you never got stone carving and you didn't get much in the way of plaster casting. . . .

I don't know how many of us were on the project then, but it was quite a few of us. I remember Miriam Ibling, who I still think is one of Minnesota's better woman artists, that she taught dressmaking, and she was a fine mural painter. . . .

There was a big department that was run by Stan Fenelle, and he was a fine painter, was a

good friend of Cameron Booth, and Stan was in charge of a department. They must have had thirty people in that department, whose only business was to copy artifacts from pioneers and Indians and whatnot. They were building a big book of some kind [the *Index of American Design*] . . . drawing pictures of early pioneer tools and quilts and all that kind of stuff. . . .

We all had to teach, and I can remember we'd have people standing on their necks. I mean, there were so many people. They only had to pay 25 cents a class. And I remember having a gentleman that collected old fabrics, kind of like a junk collector, and I had a woman that her husband was the head of Munsingwear. It was a wide collection of different people and executives. Your classes were just filled with people at night, and everybody had to teach something that came to Walker. . . .

Those of us who were sculptors in the sculpture department . . . did public projects . . . and we were all given a problem, and whoever was in charge of the building could take pick of whatever design they wanted. . . .

About six months after I landed there, they picked mine for International Falls. It was a stadium, a high-school stadium. . . . They got the bright idea I should do it as a piece to interest the crowd at Walker. . . . So this piece of sculpture I was going to do was a bas relief. It was 12 feet [high] and 18 feet long. I had to do it in three sections, and they set up scaffolding and stuff for me. . . .

Women didn't wear slacks, as a general rule, then . . . [and] sometimes there'd be maybe 100 or so people watching you. It would be, probably, a good idea to have slacks on, I figured, and I had to make my own slacks, because I couldn't buy any. I was a pretty good dressmaker. I had been in the habit of making clothes myself for my family, my mother and sister and stuff, so I was a pretty good dressmaker, which helped me in my sculpture, actually. The sculpture I do in metal is basically making patterns. So there again, something I did in my youth was helpful for me when I grew up. . . .

Anyway, after coming from a farm and working by yourself and washing dishes and then [you] find yourself in the center of the Walker Art Center with several—I don't know if there were 100 people, but it seemed to me there was such a crowd all the time. And I'm a basically shy person. After all, if you've been a hermit for eight years, you get pretty shy. And look around and see all those people staring at you, and then you're doing your first big job, it's not all easy. . . .



Raymond's concrete relief of football players, cast in place at International Falls's Bronco Stadium by WPA workers in 1942



After doing two panels and getting up hundreds of pounds of clay, the building began to sag. It was right in the lobby, and it was such a wonderful place to work, glass all overhead. You couldn't ask for a more wonderful studio. . . . Anyway, they made me go downstairs in one of the small studios that . . . just had a basement window. The light was terrible, the space was small, and I did the third panel downstairs, and I keep saying "in the closet." But I never like to look at it, because the third panel was just not right, but what could I do? . . .

The plaster casters made a mold over it. . . . In January of 1942 we took those molds up to International Falls. I had 17 fellows with me, and they were some of the casters and some of the people who just needed jobs that were with us to do the work. . . .

The contractor of the building wanted me to stay with the board, somebody on the school board, because he thought it would be better than having me stay in this crummy old hotel. But nobody would take me in because they were afraid they were taking in a WPA worker. So once in a while he'd come over in the afternoon and take me over to a neighboring town for a short cocktail or something.

Anyway, the only thing I could do at night was go with these 17 fellows, and I used to kid myself that I was Snow White and the 17 dwarves. . . .

But then I got kind of bored. We were up there for 21 days, and it was well below zero all the time we were up there, and the sculpture had to be cast in one fell swoop. You couldn't start casting it. It was an experiment. It was going to be done in cement in one piece, and it was 12 inches thick, and you don't pour cement below zero weather. And International Falls gets cold, so they had to work when they had to build a big tarp over the front of the building to kind of cover it up, and then they had a little stove down below to keep it warm.

During that time, while they were getting scaffolding and all this stuff built up, I wasn't doing very much, and so I went to the library to see if they'd give me some books and give me a card, and I decided to read Thomas Wolfe. You don't read Thomas Wolfe in International Falls. His words just fly off the page, and you get so excited. . . .

And right after [the sculpture was poured], of course, the money was withdrawn from WPA because of the war, and so I don't know who decided they'd start a school [at the Walker Art Center]. . . . But Mac LeSueur was director of the school. It was all down in the basement . . . and there was Leon Sorkin, who taught early, first-year drawing, and there was Bert Old, who taught painting. . . . And Bill Norman taught . . . commercial art. And Mac's wife [Lorraine] taught children, on Saturday, painting. I taught the sculpture department. I taught drawing. . . .

I did a lot of extra work when I was at the Walker. I became a lecturer. I wasn't paid for what I did, but since the first month I came to Walker, I got involved, under WPA even, in giving lectures to advertise Walker, and I would go to any group that wanted to hear me—little women's groups, men's luncheon groups, church groups, library groups—and I'd take a bucket of clay, and maybe a student, and do a head and talk about sculpture. . . . I talked to a women's group that had met for 22 years, retired schoolteachers. . . . When I got through doing my demonstration, one of the little ladies paddled up to me and said, "You know, we had a quartet last week, but you were a lot more fun." And I've always held that as one of the nicer compliments. . . .

I couldn't talk unless I had a bucket of clay in my hand, to work with clay. I was not a professional lecturer, and I pretty much changed from the farm, where I was a loner for eight years, and to be suddenly put in the midst. My life has always been either I'm quite a bit alone, and then suddenly I have more people around me. People used to say about me that I knew everybody in Minneapolis. . . . That's why I say I have touched more people with sculpture than any other sculptor. Somehow I seem to have an ability to get known by people who are not especially into art, and I think that's fine, and the fact that my sculpture's out on the streets where everybody can see it. . . .

During the war, at my night class one night, a gentleman came. . . . He was an architect, and his name was Mr. [James B.] Hills from the architectural firm of Hills, Gilbert[son], and Hayes. They mostly built churches. Anyway, he asked me, he said he had a customer that collected horse's heads. Did I have a student that would be willing to make a horse's head for him?

And so with my usual charm, I said, "How would you like it if somebody came into your office and asked one of your draftsmen to design a building?"

He said, "Well, would you do it?"

And I said I would, and I did, and I got \$75 for it. . . . When the war was over, he asked me to do the Good Shepherd [at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Minneapolis], and that was pretty big stuff. . . . That was my first big piece that was a private commission, and I made the big sum of \$3,000 on that. I don't know how much that was worth in those days. But it's a very beloved piece, and they still ask me out there for every doing they have, and those old people come up with tears in their eyes and tell me how much they love it. . . .

I did a half-scale model. I did an eight-foot model. . . . And because you don't really get enough money for carving and not being a professional carver to use power tools or anything, I made it as simple as I could so the design couldn't be ruined by other people. I did want to carve on some of the more delicate parts, but the stone carvers wouldn't let me in the stone yard because I would have to become a member of the union, and they wouldn't let women become members of the union. So I didn't do

Raymond modeling a bust of Minnesota novelist Frederick Manfred, about 1940. The finished bust was cast in concrete and ultimately destroyed. "I offered to give it to him, but he said it was so strong. He had a feeling it would make him feel weak He changed his mind after I broke it up, because I didn't have any place to put it. It was too late then."



any carving on it myself, but . . . I checked it as often as I could, and I did make the design very simple and strong, so they really couldn't go too far wrong with it. . . .

That was my first private commission, big private commission. . . . But the largest piece is 20 foot by 20 foot over on [the St. Paul campus of the University of] St. Thomas. That originally was done for the Mutual Service Casualty Company at 1919 University Avenue [in St. Paul]. . . . in hammered copper. It took me about two years to do. I did a lot on that, but I did work in the sheet metal shop. . . . At that time, they had a lot of good Scandinavian craftsmen, and it was fun working with them. I did the smaller things in my studio, and the bigger things I oversaw the shop. . . . That was done in 1959.

There's a [church in a] quonset hut in St. Louis Park [St. George's Episcopal Church], an Episcopalian quonset hut, and I was contacted by the pastor to do something for them. They had nothing, including money. I was asked to do a victory cross, a crucifix, a font, and sconces, even mix the paint for them. Anyway, I think I got \$1,500 for six months' work on that. . . .

I did a victory cross, and I had part of it cast and part of it fabricated. And I did a crucifix that I had spring up from the prayer rail. It didn't really have a cross behind it, but the figure made a cross and it kind of sprung up in front of the victory cross, which was on the back wall of the quonset hut. And then I did a font, and then these wonderful sconces. I thought they were so fun. They were over three feet tall, and I thought they were really very nice. . . .

When I finished that job, I ended up having one of my first cancer surgeries, and I was in the hospital directly after we put that up. They have a newspaper, Episcopalian national newspaper, and they ran pictures of it on the cover. . . . But there was so much controversy over it. It was the first Episcopalian to do anything sort of modern, and I remember reading one article said it must have been done by a drunken sculptor. There were some people liked it. . . .

The sad part of it is, after a few years, when they got enough money to build a traditional church, they sold the victory cross to a little church in the Dominican Republic. They cut off my crucifix and hung it on a wall in the lobby, and I don't know what happened to the rest. It was very sad. You know, you have a feeling that everything you do will eventually be torn down for progress. . . .

As a kid, I've been to Sunday school in just about every church except the Catholic church.



The Good Shepherd, Raymond's Kasota stone figure on the Lutheran church of the same name in Minneapolis. "I took one of my students and we went over to the university farm campus, and he picked up a lamb and posed for me."

Anyway, I think I have a certain sense, a feeling that what I do, I do with a lot of help from whatever you want to call it, a higher power or whatever, and I think I am, in my own way, a person who recognizes that there is something besides just what's here. I don't know, I suppose one should really belong to a church, but I don't. But I've worked for so many churches. In my own way, I think I have a sense of religion, or whatever the word would do better than that.

Oh, the Maria Sanford, that's kind of interesting, because after I left Walker, I didn't have any place to go. Any money we had coming to us, Walker kept back because they felt maybe they had overpaid us during the years we had been there.

So I rented an apartment on 31st and Hennepin [in Minneapolis], and there again, the loyalty I get from people has been one of the amazements of my life. About at least 20 or 30 people came with me from my night classes. . . . so I opened up classes in what was the living room of this big old apartment. . . . Where did we go from there? There was an old duplex across the street. It was a hundred years old,



Raymond working on the crucifix for St. George's Episcopal Church, temporarily housed in a quonset hut in St. Louis Park, 1953

and I decided that that would be a better place for me to have my little school. . . . I was there for eight and a half years. I had classes. I had day classes, and I always had three night classes. I had about 40 kids every Saturday. . . .

It was a very hot day, and the doorbell rang. There was a little elderly lady came to the door, and I thought she wanted a drink of water. I asked her to come in. She said she'd just come back from Stillwater, and she had heard two women talking on the bus [about commissioning the Maria Sanford sculpture for the U.S. Capitol] and several names were mentioned, and they mentioned my name.

This little lady was a china painter that was in my block, who kind of felt that we were kindred souls because she was a china painter. She said, "I think it's a big commission. You better try for it. You better contact somebody." . . .

I contacted [state Representative] Sally Luther. . . . She gave me the name of the chair-

man of the committee. For four years, the women's federation groups tried to get a woman in the [United States] Capitol. Every state is allowed to honor two pioneers, and Minnesota, I think, was either the first or second to honor a woman, and the Federation of Women's Clubs had worked for years to accomplish this fact. . . . Everybody I met, I think, I asked them to write letters. And then I made a model of Maria. I got hold of a couple pictures. Pictures were hard to come by. I really didn't have a profile. . . .

So I did enter a competition, and I did another model beside the one I sent already. I did a head then. I had done a full figure before. Maybe I'm not one of these very aggressive females, but if I make up my mind, I really work on something. And then I was fortunate enough to win the competition. . . .

Maria was one of the first women professors at the university, and she taught all kinds of politicians and she sold more war bonds than any other person. She got sewers for Minneapolis. She was less than five feet tall, but just a little ball of fire, I guess, and she did so many things. She was a very admirable little figure. . . .

Anyway, it was a \$25,000 commission, and \$6,000 was taken out for expenses for the committee to go to Washington. And out of that \$19,000, I had to pay for the casting in bronze. . . . I had people from St. Paul Statuary help me cast that. You have to pay for insurance. You have to pay for delivery. I had to pay for a granite block with a bronze plaque on it, and I had to rent a space because my studio wasn't tall enough. You don't end up with a lot of money. I think I ended up with \$7,000 for that.

I was at one of these [women's club] luncheons I had to attend, and there was a Mrs. Goode. I thought she looked a little bit like Maria and asked her to come over and pose for me. And then when I got through doing it, it looked like Mrs. Goode, all right, but it didn't seem to look like Maria. So I had to do it all over again.

There's pictures of me that were taken. This was well over half a year's job, and I look like I've got great huge circles under my eyes. It was really a rough time, and I wanted to do the best I could to honor Maria.

Oh, there was this huge dedication. They said there were more people came to the dedication of that sculpture than any other piece that they had and could remember since sculpture had been up. There were people, because of their connection with the university. There were past governors. It was a huge crowd. I was

nervous. I was really nervous. Governor [Elmer] Andersen, bless his heart, he was running for governor the next year. Governor [Orville] Freeman was there. . . .

I was scared to get up. They had a special dais of whatever you call it for the principals, and Governor Andersen, bless his heart, he talked, and it made it sound like I was Michelangelo. Michelangelo would have been nothing compared to me. I am basically kind of shy, and I didn't know how I was going to get off the dais and walk across the rotunda and take the flag off Maria. And Governor Freeman escorted me across, and when I got off the dais, he winked at me and somehow broke the tension. He could probably see that I was so scared that I couldn't walk.

There was an elderly gentleman that was in the invited guests, and he came up to me and he said he had studied with Maria, and he had tears in his eyes. He said, "I don't know how you did it. Exactly like her, exactly the way she'd come into the classroom". . . . I really felt that I had done well. I mean, I felt that I had done that one fine. I don't know if any art people ever wrote it up, but I didn't care, because I felt it was good.

I will say that I'm strictly a feminist as far as joining women's organizations. I don't think I've ever lost a job because I was a woman. When I first started being a sculptor, I thought I'd just put my initials down when I'd show sculpture, because I would probably be not taken as seriously. . . . But I never had to do that.

I really can't ever complain that I was discriminated against because of my sex. I've been extremely lucky. Anyway, it seemed to me that they seemed to think I could do the job. . . .

I'm the last of the Roosevelt Democrats. I think the WPA project was one of the more important things, I think, done for art in this whole country at any time. I think so many artists, of every kind of art, were given a chance. I could not have accomplished what I've done without that help. It was only three years, and I don't think they spent too much money on me for \$76 a month, but I'm ever so grateful. . . .

When you do big sculpture, especially as a local artist, you don't get a lot of money. . . . You just have to have a great love for doing big stuff, which I do. I don't know, I think in the past, somewhere in my past life I lived on Easter

Island or something, where they made those heads; or I lived in Egypt. . . . I gave this design [*Celebration of Peace*] for St. Louis Park recently. It's 27 feet tall, and I gave them the design. I had tried to sell it to them a few years ago, but I gave them the design because I just feel a need to have another big sculpture up. . . .

It's so hard to make a living as an artist in Minnesota, and for years I think I was the only one that was really making a living at sculpture. . . . I mean, it was difficult, and I at least made my living. My classes supported my big jobs, and my big jobs kind of supported my classes. So I think if anything, one of my claims to fame, if there is any, is that I made my living actually as a sculptor in Minnesota.

Dedication of Raymond's bronze statue of educator Maria L. Sanford in the U.S. Capitol, 1958. Minnesota Governor Orville L. Freeman is at far left, next to University of Minnesota president James L. Morrill; Raymond, in the black dress, stands next to future governor Elmer L. Andersen.



All photographs are in MHS collections; the one on p. 92 is from the Minneapolis Star-Journal, p. 94 is from the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, and p. 95 is by Del Ankers Photographers, Washington, D.C.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).