

Slow Times
The Sorry Saga¹ of The Statue of Cincinnatus
(Paper by David Black, for the Cincinnati Literary Club, read 2/15/99)

The simple idea of a statue of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was based on the need, perceived by two civic activists, that our fair City needed a large chunk of art to teach schoolchildren about the mythical Roman general. His military prowess was followed by his return to simple civilian life, instead of holding the offered title of Emperor. I say the statue was a "simple idea" because the City was really named, as members of this Club know, for the revolutionary war officer's Society of the Cincinnati. The Society took its name from the Roman general. It is fortunate that the intermediate step was ignored, as a statue of the full Society, including one Geo. Washington, would have confused not only the kids, but also the Cincinnatus Association Statue Committee. Let me explain.

In 1970, one Bob Acomb, an advertising executive by trade, and a civic activist by inclination, was asked by his daughter, Jill, where the City got its name. With an ad man's inclination for things graphic, Bob could find only a stained glass window on a stairway landing at City Hall. It depicted L.Q.C. being offered a sword of generalship with which to defend Rome from the invading Aequians. It totally missed the point of the pure altruism of Cincinnatus.

What was needed "to tell the story," he thought, was an heroic statue, bigger than life, planted in Sawyer Point, then in the planning stages. Ewart "Sink" Simpkinson, a kindred spirit of civic activism and dogged persistence, had relieved the wealthy Charles Sawyer of \$1 million, to purchase the land for such a park; but there was nothing much on the land at the time inspiration struck these two worthies. And so they cajoled and collected other members of the Cincinnatus Association, including our Bob Allen, into a committee which neither of them would chair. With their age and experience came wisdom.

Meetings at the Queen City Club began in December, 1979. One Poor Soul was declared Chairman, despite his reluctance. At the same time the search began for 1) a sculptor, and 2) a money raiser.

Many prominent citizens were approached to lead the fund raising. The goal was \$215,000. After about a year of prominent refusals, the Poor Soul turned to Sink and said, "You have to take it." He did. And he did it. A marvelous achievement, helped considerably by the high interest rates of the '80s.

Several sculptors submitted clay models, dragged into the Lady's dining room of the QCC. The Committee liked the 31 inch model done by Eleftherios Karkadoulis, the Greek who was brought to town to unplug, polish, and reactivate the Tyler-Davidson Fountain. His concept had L.Q.C. with one hand re-grasping his plow, and the other returning to the City a face, an ax whose handle is surrounded by sticks - an ancient symbol of authority - you can find it on some dimes. To the Committee it seemed to represent the very spirit of volunteerism and civic duty that they wanted to inspire the kids of this area.

On the other hand, as they say, Mr. K had a reputation of being difficult to work with. Like his aversion to deadlines and getting things done on time. Undaunted, Acomb said he could handle Mr. K; and a system of progress payments was written into the contract with a finish date of December, 1982 [p.1]². The contract price was \$125,000, although Mr. K's first quote was \$85,000. This price escalation was a warning of future events, a fiscal foreshadowing, which the Committee, being as altruistic as Lucius Quintcius Cincinnatus, ignored.

Meanwhile, the Central Riverfront Committee warned the Statue Committee folks that of the \$10 million needed to bring Sawyer Point into being, only \$3 million was predictable. "Not to worry," was the Statue group's brave response. Acomb and Sink said, "We'll make the Statue the spark for the park." You will note that the combination of an ad man with an insurance peddler who is unable to hear the word NO, can provide momentum to civic endeavors.

In April '82 a 12 foot high clay model was finished. Some thought the head was too big, another thought it bore a strange resemblance to Mr. K. Nevertheless, the Committee coughed up a progress payment of \$37,500, bringing the total paid to half the contract commitment.

At about this time, Sink began to push for alternative locations, on the Skywalk, or West of the Suspension Bridge in a proposed park area, which was barely on a sheet of paper. The Committee voted NO. But NO never stopped Sink from proposing changes.

Then in January '83 there arose a major flap about who would own the rights to sell 31" models of the statue: the Committee, or Mr. K. Angry voices were raised, above levels ever before heard in the Lady's dining room of the QCC. The Poor Soul, trying as Chairman to make peace and move the project along, gave in and forked over the design rights to Mr. K. Thus encouraged, Mr. K asked for an advance of the next progress payment of \$37,500. The Poor Soul agreed, provided Mr. K would promise delivery on June 24, 1983[p.2].

Acomb was so encouraged that he invited the Mayor of Rome to the dedication ceremony on June 24, '83.

In April Mr. K advised that he might be ready in September [p.3]. And, oh yes, the landscape architects, hired to design the surrounding area, had planned a large base, whose granite alone would cost \$65,000. Mr. K complained that his quote had figured on only \$6,000. However, he could get the granite for \$22,000; and his being a small business, and having underquoted his costs, please remit. The Committee did.

Mr. K missed the September delivery; but by October, he had the large granite base in place in Sawyer Point. However, it did not conform to the landscape architect's design in several particulars. First, Mr. K had sculpted, in 12" letters, the word "Cincinnati" on the front of the granite base, which the Committee had wanted left plain. Second, the whole thing could not be supported by the landscape architect's foundation, which had already been committed to concrete.

Another angry meeting in the Frost & Jacobs law offices in November forced Mr. K to remove the unwanted name in the granite base. The Committee had agreed to the wording for a bronze plaque that would explain that the Statue was of the mythical Cincinnati, for whom the City was named; that it showed him returning his symbol of power, the *faces*, to the City fathers, and regaining his hold on the plow and the simple life of a Roman citizen and farmer. It was to be a tribute to volunteerism, a concept Mr. K failed to grasp. However, he did promise that the Statue would be finished no later than 6/1/84 [p.4].

Then Bob Acomb, the Karkadoulis-handler, died in January of '84. That left the Poor Soul and other Committee members as handlers. Good luck.

The next delivery promise, repeated twice, was 6/20/84 [p.5]. Thus reassured, the Committee prevailed on the Mayor of Cincinnati, Arn Bortz, to invite the Mayor of Rome, a second time, to a July 14, '84 dedication. In an effort to insure that Mayor Bortz would not be embarrassed, Committee members³ started to visit Mr. K's investment casting foundry, to see first hand how work was progressing. After several visits, they had been so discouraged that the 2nd dedication date was scrapped. And further thoughts about the Mayor of Rome were abandoned.

More foundry visits to check on progress, or more accurately the absence thereof, yielded promises of 12/31/84 [p.6], and then 5/15/85 [p.7]. With the latter came Mr. K's request for the final payment of \$25,000, because he had "lost money on the project". This was confirmed by his wife, Mercene. Her name was pronounced by their lawyer, MER-sa-nee. It figures.

For those who are counting, that is 7 delivery promises broken — and still counting, 3 years after the original due date. Mr. K's request for final payment was denied by the Poor Soul, who was beginning to wise up.

In December '85 Mr. K promised completion by the end of March '86 [p.8], and repeated it on a foundry visit in January. In April that slid to "by summer" [p.9]; and it slipped again in June to July 31 [p.10] with Mr. K's gratuitous advice that "the time to have the dedication

would be Labor Day '86". Thanks a lot, Mr. K! However, in October, on Channel 9, Mr. K promised mid-November [p.11]. Visits to the foundry continued, and so did exasperation.

In April '87 Committee members visiting the foundry were told that only 10 days of work remained to complete the project; so the statue dedication could be just before the dedication of Sawyer Point on 8/20/87 [p.12]. That would have marked the completion of contract phase #3. The Poor Soul bitterly calculated that \$14,473 had been lost in interest by the advance payment of \$37,500 in early '83. \$14 thousand of spilled milk.

In September '87 the Committee decided to make the dedication at a regular Cincinnatus Association meeting 5/10/88 [p.13], come hell or high water. In January '88 the Poor Soul warned Mr. K that the Mayor of Cincinnati would preside over the dedication, and the media, including TV reporters and their cameras would be there, at the Statue Committee's explicit invitation; and so Mr. K would be mightily embarrassed if there were no Statue to unveil.

That worked. The Statue was finished and given to the City — almost 18 years after Bob Acomb hatched the idea, and some 8 years after the Committee started trying to implement it. Lesson learned: Beware of Greeks bearing contracts.

But the Poor Soul's torture was not quite over. There appeared one day, about a year after the dedication, firmly affixed to the granite base, a bronze plaque bearing the words "The Spirit of Cincinnatus". The Park Department, which then owned the Statue, had not authorized any such addition, and knew nothing about it. The Poor Soul had a clear memory of an episode several years earlier, when Sink had come to the Committee with his notion that those words ought to be on the base. He had gone to the trouble of getting statements from Committee members, one at a time, endorsing his idea. Yet when the Committee met at the QCC, his idea was voted down 8:1. As suggested earlier, insurance peddlers can't hear the word NO.

What to do? The head of the Park Department and the Poor Soul figured -

1. The "Spirit of Cincinnatus" plaque should not be there;
2. If Sink were behind this unauthorized "addition" to public property, it would be too much of a slap in the chops for the old boy to rip his plaque off; and
3. Father Time would soon take the civic minded insurance peddler to his reward, and then the bronze graffiti could be yanked.

So after Sink's death, his plaque was discarded. And the authorized explanation of the story of Cincinnatus was dug out of the surrounding brick walk and put on the granite base.

The Cincinnatus Statue has never reached the prominence in City life that the Poor Soul had hoped for. If you hunt, you might find a picture post card with a small picture of L.Q.C. In 1992 the Cincinnati Bar Association put his head on its Legal Directory.

The Poor Soul, now older and wiser and chairman of no committees whatsoever, last saw a picture of the Statue in the March 16, 1997 *Enquirer*. Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was up to his knees in the flooded Ohio River. The authorized plaque, then properly affixed to the granite base, was under water.

¹ A more sober and fuller story of this saga appears in the Summer 1983 issue of Queen City Heritage [Vol 41, No 2].

² Here starts a count of delivery promises - not to be read.

³ Doug Hoge and Dick Glaser were faithful visitors.