

TORLEIF S. KNAPHUS

Norwegian Artist and Sculptor

The Norwegian people have a great appreciation for beauty and art. As early as the Viking Age 800 AD to 1050 AD, we see intricate wood carvings of animal figures to adorn ships and sleighs. Many Norwegian women spend the harsh, cold winters sewing needle point wall hangings and making colorful wool sweaters, that are artistic masterpieces. They fill their homes (almost to the point of clutter) with carvings, rosemaling and paintings of all kinds. Art is interwoven into their everyday lives.

Torleif Knaphas was born December 14, 1881 at a small farm near *Vats* Stavanger, Western Norway. Art skills came to him early in life. At age five, while tending his family's sheep on the verdent hillsides, he passed the time by carving bird and human heads out of wood. Later his mother gave him a bound book with blank pages so he could sketch Norway's nature. He found great joy in expressing himself in those elementary drawings.

At age fourteen Torleif took out an apprenticeship in a paint and decorating shop in Haugesund. He continued his artistic training, except for a few years when he sailed the northern seas between Norway and Iceland on Norwegian fishing boats. He soon found he needed advanced training not locally available. He went to Oslo. He was accepted to study under Harriet Backer at her famous art school. Then, at the Royal Art School he learned sculpturing from Lars Utne and decided to make it his life's work.

One night when a roommate pinned him and his other roommate to the floor and demanded them to buy tickets to a concert, his life came to an important turning point. All three enjoyed the production, an LDS affair, which introduced Torleif to Mormonism. Within three months he requested baptism.

For three years he studied at Oslo. His talent earned him a prestigious scholarship to study in Rome. But love for the Gospel forced him to forsake the scholarship and instead he emigrated to Utah to be among the Saints, despite protests from his Lutheran family.

He married Emilia Christensen Thanksgiving Day 1909. Realizing he needed more training to succeed as a sculptor, he went to Paris and studied for a year at the Julian Academy. Then, before going home, he spent six months in New York studying at the Art Students' League. When he returned to Utah he planned to devote his painting and sculpturing talents to the Church.

During his lifetime Torleif's skilled hand touched and beautified many temples. He fashioned the oxen and font for the Idaho Falls Temple, crafted busts of Church presidents and other interior decorations for the Salt Lake Temple, did touch up painting inside the Hawaiian Temple. He crafted the model for the baptismal oxen for the Cardston Temple, and sculptured a large base relief, "Christ the Fountainhead", for the temples exterior. For the Mesa Temple he

produced two impressive sculptures, the twelve terra cotta oxen beneath the baptismal font, and the eight detailed friezes forming an ornamental band around the tops of the north and south outside walls. He helped M.F. Malin do sculpture work for the Los Angeles Temple and grounds, and helped with the Oakland Temple baptismal font.

Torleif's best known statue is the Handcart Monument, now one of Mormonism's most recognized symbols. This monument was designed to appear like a symbolic pillar of light, the granite shaft's upward leading lines so placed as to draw the thought of man towards heaven and God. He wished that "whoever sees this monument will investigate and accept the Gospel message as I have done." (Lighted at night, it can be seen from miles around.)

Throughout Salt Lake Valley his works bring beauty to the community: busts of famous Utahns, decorations for office buildings, mortuary and chapel friezes. His best-loved secular monument is the 1937 "School Children's Monument", near the west entrance to the Salt Lake City and County Building.

An artist's career can be hard on his family life. But despite long absences and sometimes subsistence income, Torleif was a successful and loved husband and father. In 1931 his wife died, leaving him with six living children at home, the youngest just sixteen months old. He remained single for eight years, taking the youngest child to work with him and trying his best to be both father and mother to the children. Then in 1940, he married Rebecca Jacobsen. She helped raise his children and in time bore him six more. Having a first and second family meant that for fifty years Torleif sat around a dinner table at home with his own young children. He was father of eight boys and six girls.

His love for family extended backwards through time. He was a devoted genealogist. After his Oslo and his Paris studies he made trips through N Norway collecting hundreds of family names. Reporting on fifty-six years of genealogy labor in 1961 he said his notebooks contained records on over 10,000 relatives. At one time his mammoth pedigree chart was displayed at the Church Office Building as an example of one of the most complete genealogy records assembled.

After a hard, productive life Torleif passed away June 14, 1965 at age eighty-three. To the end he was never boastful of his accomplishments but remained very modest about publicity given his efforts. Near the close of his life, he expressed a humble assessment of his life's work:

"As I in misery recall the days of faith that onward I strived to do right and provide the daily needs, then in gratitude I recognize that there has been a light greater than mine to guide me, and a hand stronger and richer than mine to provide and protect me. Amid richer and greater to plan this, my life, to see through these many years."