

A PORTRAIT BUST OF MARY BAKER EDDY

In the Main Gallery at Longyear Museum there sits a striking and classically sculpted marble portrait bust of the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy. Over the years much interest has been expressed in its unique history and provenance within the overall record of Christian Science. Its significance among the many likenesses of Mrs. Eddy makes it of major importance to our collection. The following articles are based upon documentation in the Longyear files and additional research provided by Ms. Winkel.



Luella Varney Serrao's portrait bust of Mary Baker Eddy, Longyear Collection

The only portrait bust for which Mary Baker Eddy ever sat was sculpted by Luella Varney (married name Serrao) in 1889.

According to information in the Longyear collection, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Collins, prominent citizens of Denver, Colorado, first met the young American artist Luella Varney in 1885 in Rome, Italy. While on an extended visit there, and being greatly impressed with an exhibition of her work, they

commissioned her to sculpt busts of themselves.¹

Soon after their sittings with Miss Varney, Mr. Collins' illness with tuberculosis forced their return to Denver. There they learned of Christian Science through a friend who had been healed of blindness. Placing himself under Christian Science treatment, Mr. Collins' health began to improve immediately; and within three weeks he and his wife became pupils of Bradford Sherman in the first Christian Science class ever taught in Denver.² This was December 1885.

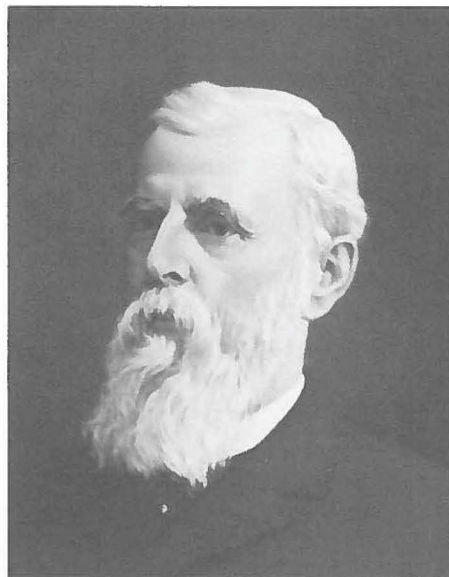
In February of 1887, Mr. and Mrs. Collins were pupils in Mary Baker Eddy's Normal Class. In early 1888, Mrs. Mary Collins wrote Mrs. Eddy

asking for her consent to have a portrait bust done of her in Carrara marble. Permission obtained, Mr. and Mrs. Collins met Miss Varney in Cleveland and arranged for the work while the young sculptress was visiting her father. Miss Varney then went directly to Boston to make the clay model of Mrs. Eddy.³ The following are excerpts from a statement made by Luella Varney Serrao, dated September 20, 1919:

"Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Collins of Denver, Colorado, asked Mrs. Eddy if she would give sittings for a portrait bust, which they wished to have of her in marble. ...She was then living in her home on Commonwealth Avenue, and I was fortunate enough to procure



Mr. and Mrs. Edward H. Collins



permission of the people next door who were just moving in, Mr. and Mrs. Spitzer, to do the bust in their billiard room. So she could come in, without her hat, at whatever hour suited her best. Her sittings were usually about an hour long, and I believe that I was about two weeks in doing it.

"She was a handsome woman, ...very agreeable, chatting freely upon many subjects, but of course mainly upon the Truth that she had discovered. She was filled with wonder that she had been the medium to give it to the world. She was always enthusiastic and eager when she spoke of this, her Mission. She told me of cures performed and of the spreading of the belief that she thought would quickly reach all the world. ...

"Dr. Foster Eddy nearly always accompanied her to the sittings, and she often dictated to him while she posed. ...Sometimes he would read the Scriptures to her, and she would give her interpretation, which he would take down in shorthand. At times she would have him read over what she had been dictating and I remember she turned to me and said, 'That must be inspiration.'

"When the bust was completed, and she and her friends were quite satisfied, she gave me an order for one for herself, giving me the half payment; and soon after, by letter, she gave me an order for another copy, which she intended for the [Church] in Boston, also she ordered me to make a figure to represent 'Christian Science,' also for the [Church].⁴ For this latter I was to make sketches and send her photographs for her approval, before mak-

ing the large figure. But after I had sent her a photograph, and when I had both busts well towards completion in marble, in my studio in Rome, she wrote cancelling (sic) the latter two orders, only retaining the one bust and a pedistal (sic) for her home.⁵ ...

"She told me that she had enjoyed the sittings, and she hoped that the bust would be of benefit to me in getting other orders, and she said that she thought that other students would order copies when they had seen this one. Of course my first marble was for Mr. and Mrs. Collins, the next hers, and the other one she had ordered I finished up, and it was afterwards bought by Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Merritt. The next I made is owned by Mrs. Longyear."⁶

Later in a document dated December 2, 1935, Mrs. Serrao writes of the experience, "She [Mrs. Eddy] was ... accompanied by Dr. Foster Eddy. She asked me if I would mind if she dictated to him during the sittings. I was glad to have her do this to keep her face animated and also because it saved her time in her work. ...She was interested in the progress of the modeling and said that I would no doubt, make many replicas of this bust, especially as she would never sit for any other, either bust or painting, so it would be unique. She stated this on several occasions. She invited several people to see it. I had always made it a rule never to consider a bust finished until it satisfied [not] only myself but my sitter and the sitter's friends. So it was in this case."⁷

The Newport County Sentinel of July 4, 1935 in an article on Mrs. Ser-

rao stated that Mrs. Eddy had been "more pleased with the original clay, and considered that it was as perfect as possible. In some way, however, the true likeness was lost in being transferred to marble by the marble cutter in Rome."⁸ Mrs. Serrao explains, "Later, during one of my brief visits to America, she [Mrs. Eddy] wrote me, asking me to visit her in her home in Concord, for a two weeks stay. She said she wanted me to see if I did not think that the mouth could be improved — otherwise the bust was perfect."⁹

This same difficulty was experienced in the final cutting of another of Serrao's more well known works, the bust of Susan B. Anthony. She accounts for it by the fact that this was a very busy time in her career, and that she was completing at least a dozen busts at that period.¹⁰ Comments Serrao, "I intended to visit Concord on my return to America, which was to have been soon after that. But other things interfered, and my marriage cut off my work until after I became a widow. I am very sorry I did not go to Concord at that time."¹¹ In her 1919 statement she says of this missed opportunity, "It is one of the regrets of my life that I could not arrange to accept."¹²

In a letter to William R. Rathvon (a member of The Christian Science Board of Directors at the time),



Courtesy of New Hampshire Historical Society

Bust of Mrs. Eddy at New Hampshire Historical Society

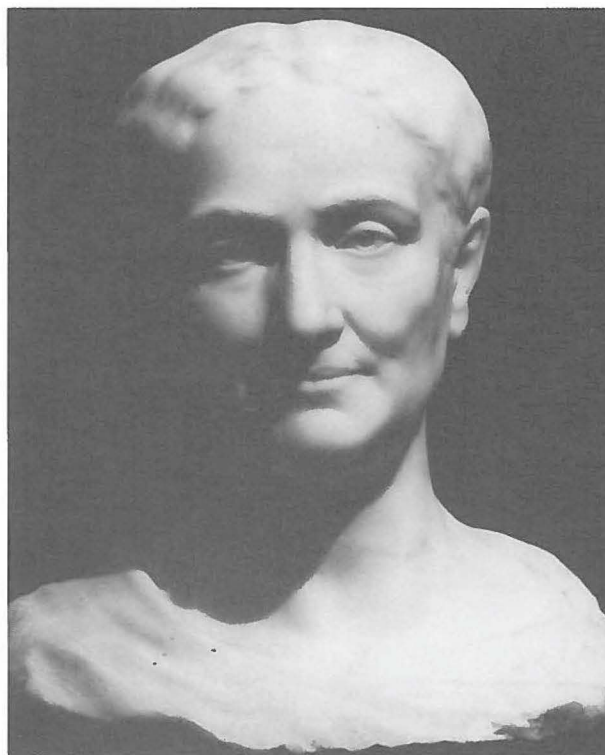
Thomas M. Burton writes of an interview he had with Mrs. Serrao in Newport, R.I. on July 26, 1935. "She spoke in detail about her making the clay model of Mrs. Eddy's face. She said that she did not take any face mask or cast of Mrs. Eddy in any way whatsoever."¹³ Apparently there had been misunderstandings leading to rumors over the years regarding a "mask" that may have been made of Mrs. Eddy's face either while living or after she had passed on, and clarification of the facts was needed. In actuality, and as a necessary step toward the finished marble bust, a plaster mold was made from the sculpted clay model that Mrs. Eddy sat for. This provided a clean, reverse image from which a plaster replica of the original clay was made; and from this plaster replica the finished marble was hewn. Thomas Burton continues, "Mme. Serrao has never taken a face mask from any person alive, in all her work. [In that type of process, the] likeness [does] not express life in its features, and for that reason she always makes a clay model of her client. She impressed the impossibility of her ever even thinking of taking a mask of any kind to obtain her model of Mrs. Eddy's face."¹⁴

As mentioned in a previous *Longyear Quarterly News* article there is evidence of at least five busts being done.¹⁵ Mrs. Serrao, in correspondence with Mrs. Longyear, verified the authenticity and historical importance of the bust she had purchased stating that it was done from the same clay model for which Mrs. Eddy had sat for the artist in 1889, as was the very first bust that had been made.¹⁶

That first bust, done for Mr. and Mrs. Collins, was later donated by them to the Colorado State Museum in Denver. In fact, in 1927 Mrs. Serrao traveled to Denver, Colorado to attend an exhibit of her work from the collection of Mrs. Mary Collins. The portrait bust of Mrs. Eddy was one of those on display.¹⁷ Sadly, that bust was later defaced by vandals and subsequently obtained by the Christian Science Committee on Publication for Colorado and destroyed in 1951.

The second bust was done for Mary Baker Eddy at her request, and is now in the custody of The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston.

The bust that was nearing completion when Mrs. Eddy canceled the order for a second was obtained by Edward A. Merritt (member of the



Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

National Portrait Gallery's bust of Mrs. Eddy

Christian Science Board of Directors 1917–33) and his wife. It was given to the New Hampshire Historical Society in 1922 and is presently displayed in their Library.¹⁸

A fourth bust is on exhibit in the Main Gallery at Longyear Museum and was acquired by Mrs. Longyear around 1911.

Calvin C. and Frances T. Hill purchased still another. Mrs. Hill gave it to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. in 1966. At the time *The Christian Science Monitor* reported, "In accepting a privately donated gift of a marble bust of Mrs. Eddy, spokesmen for the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution referred to Mrs. Eddy as among those who have 'made a most significant contribution to the lives of their fellow citizens.' The bust was presented by Mrs. Frances Thompson Hill who, together with her late husband, Calvin C. Hill, has looked forward to the day when the bust could be presented to the American people."¹⁹ Although still in the National Portrait Gallery's collection, it is not currently on exhibit.

Gabrielle Winkel

1. Longyear Museum and Historical Society. *Autobiography of Mary H. Collins, C.S.D.*
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

4. It is important to note that at this point property for the Original Church had been obtained, but construction had not yet begun.

5. In a separate statement dated December 2, 1935, Mrs. Serrao mentions Mrs. Eddy's cancellation of her order for a second bust and allegorical figure symbolizing Christian Science for the Church in Boston, expressing her recollection that Mrs. Eddy was concerned with "idol worship." Because the correspondence from Mrs. Eddy to Mrs. Serrao was in a trunk that was lost on one of Serrao's trans-Atlantic crossings, there is no existing evidence of Mrs. Eddy's actual words in cancellation of the order.

6. Longyear. Statement of Luella Varney Serrao, September 20, 1919.

7. Longyear. Statement of Luella Varney Serrao, December 2, 1935.

8. *Newport County Sentinel*, "Noted Sculptress Arrives At Newport," July 4, 1935.

9. Longyear. Serrao, December 2, 1935.

10. *Newport County Sentinel*, July 4, 1935.

11. Longyear. Serrao, December 2, 1935.

12. Longyear. Serrao, September 20, 1919.

13. Longyear. Thomas M. Burton letter to William R. Rathvon, July 28, 1935.

14. Ibid.

15. *Longyear Quarterly News*, Vol. 9, No. 1, "Pioneers in the West" p. 130.

16. Longyear. Luella Varney Serrao letter to Mrs. Longyear, August 11, 1919.

17. *Denver Post*, "Marble Hand of Woman Links Denver Art and Rome Sculpture" by Cecelia Kelley, October 23, 1927.

18. Longyear. Collection of Molitar research, New Hampshire Historical Society letter to R. F. Molitar, October 16, 1963.

19. *The Christian Science Monitor*, "Smithsonian gets bust of Mrs. Eddy," May 28, 1966.

LUELLA VARNEY SERRAO: ARTIST/SCULPTRESS



Luella Varney as a young sculptress in Rome

It was the spring of 1889 when Mrs. Eddy was living at 385 Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, when the soon-to-be married Luella Varney set up her studio in an adjoining building. Mrs. Eddy sat daily for about an hour (except Sundays) for approximately two weeks. Miss Varney was the only sculptor for whom Mary Baker Eddy ever did a live sitting; and she was, like her famous subject, clearly ahead of her time. One must remember that sculpture today is an art form dominated by men, and in Mrs. Eddy's time was even more so.

Luella Varney was born in 1865 in Angola, New York. Her father was Joshua Davis Varney, a civil engineer who moved the family to Cleveland in the early 1870's. Miss Varney studied drawing under Prof. Aborn and crayon under Lewis Adams, and was one of the first graduates of the Cleveland School of Art. From 1882-83, Varney studied sculpture under a visiting Italian master artist, N. Cantalamessa Poppoti, with whom she would later study in Europe. She soon did a bas-relief of Goethe which was exhibited and critically acclaimed.¹ This brought her two more commissions. Serrao later recalled, "And at that I lost my head completely, and with the money I made on those two commissions for portraits (sic) busts I went abroad to study."²

Varney left for Paris with Alena J. Royer, another American girl who was studying painting, and then went on to Rome where she eventually obtained a degree in art from the University of Rome and opened a studio of her own. Her first exhibition there was a piece titled "Inclination to Art."

It was that exhibition that brought Miss Varney and her talents to the notice of Mr. and Mrs. Edward H. Collins, who had her sculpt portrait busts of themselves while they were visiting Rome. She later had Christian Science class instruction with Mr. Collins, and also did the portrait bust of Mary Baker Eddy at their request.³

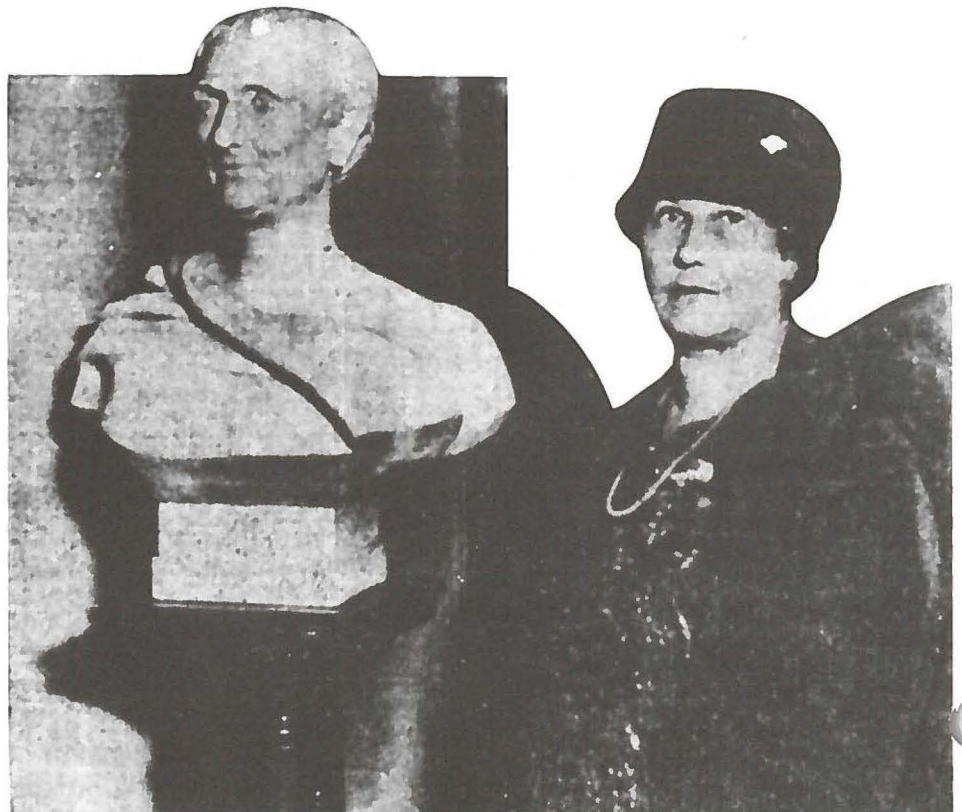
Also attending Varney's exhibition was Teodoro Serrao (known occasionally as Andrea Serrao), an art critic for the leading Italian paper of the time, and the son of the Roman governor. Having graduated from law school at the age of eighteen, he was not yet allowed to practice until he was of age; so Mr. Serrao put in the intervening years as an art critic, writer and lecturer on art subjects. He reviewed Miss Varney's exhibit, but was under the misconception that Varney was a

man. Six months later they were introduced by a mutual friend.

Irene Osgood reported in *The Art Chronicle*, February 1911, in the poetic tone of the time, "It was in the kindly irony of things that the sculptor of the beautiful group was not only a woman, but, to Andrea [Teodoro] Serrao, the woman."⁴ He fell in love with her practically on the spot but their courtship was to last eight years.

Mrs. Serrao herself commented on the eight year wait before marriage much later, when she said, "If it is just a question of happiness, I believe one is perhaps happier marrying than pursuing art. I knew my husband eight years before I married him. I waited because of my work. Perhaps I should have been happier if I had married him right away."⁵

After their marriage in 1889, Mr. Serrao became a successful lawyer — an authority on international law — and a legal advisor to the American and British Embassies. The Serraos and their young son Amerigo (later to be named Baron of Castel-Monardo), spent most of their time as a family living in Italy.



Sculptress with Collins' bust of Mrs. Eddy in 1927

Courtesy of The Denver Post

Mrs. Serrao did very little with her sculpting career while she focused on her role as wife and mother. Her life was full of interest, with her summers spent in travel or at their villa on the Riviera, and the winters at home in Rome. "And, of course," she later said, "one's interest slackens when one isn't competing directly, and without the stimulus of being on my own, so to speak, I didn't work as hard at sculpture during those years as I should have done."⁶ "My marriage checked my career for eighteen years. Marriage must necessarily stop a woman in any work she is doing outside of that. She cannot be conscientious in her duties as a wife and mother and succeed in advancing her talent, too. I would not like to say that I think a woman with some particular talent should remain unmarried for the sake of it, though. Neither would I say that it would be worth her while to lay it aside and marry. It depends on how much she cares. Each girl must decide a thing of that kind for herself. It does influence people to hear opinions expressed, and so I think it shouldn't be done."⁷

As reported in *Cleveland Town Topics*, "Madame Varney Serrao was an ideal wife, and her personality has that pure, gracious charm that attracts and holds all who have the good fortune to know her."⁸ The last few years of her marriage was a difficult time for Mrs. Serrao though, as her husband was suffering from blindness, and she was his constant companion. After



Sculptress in her studio

her husband's passing in 1907, Mrs. Serrao returned to her home town of Cleveland.

The unsettling political situation of the world prior to World War I and her own personal experience gradually turned her once again to her work at sculpture. She then conducted a career between continents, having studios in Cleveland, New York and Rome. An *Art Chronicle* article of 1911 mentions her many well-known friends and colleagues of the art world that frequently gathered at her studio in Rome.⁹ On March 26, 1915 the *Cleveland Press* reported that she was living in that city. "Her work" wrote D. Undine Baker in *Cleveland Town Topics*, "is strong, beautiful, and in its variant character shows the sculptress possessed of creative versatility."¹⁰

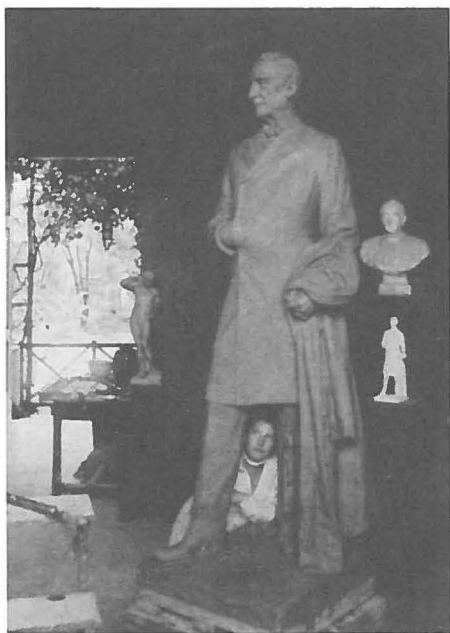
After the war, Luella Varney Serrao became an outspoken advocate for women artists and suggested that they be commissioned to create veterans' memorials. She said, "There is a touch about the work of women, delicate, tense, poignant and sympathetic, which would help them to put into their memorial designs a depth of emotion and tenderness of appeal that would make our war monuments really worthy of the magnificent sacrifices of the men who fell and truly representative of the high ideals for which they fought."¹¹ Serrao herself did several busts of soldiers for war memorials.

Serrao's main subjects, however, consisted of public figures, politicians, and society women and children. A sampling of some of her more famous works not previously mentioned are those of Presidents Theo-

dore Roosevelt, Wilson, and Garfield; Senator Henry M. Rice (now in the State Capitol of Minnesota), and Senator and Mrs. H. B. Payne; four Supreme Court justices; Julia Ward Howe, Edith Van Buren, and the Italian military hero Garibaldi. And according to D. Undine Baker in 1915, "The monument of Archbishop Rappe, first bishop of Cleveland, which stands in the cathedral yard... is her work, and to her belongs the distinction of having done the bust of every bishop of Cleveland, except the present bishop; while her splendid monument to the Russian Archbishop of Odessa stands in the cathedral of Odessa."¹²

She also spent a great deal of time traveling, attending exhibitions of her work and lecturing, sharing her impressions of some of her well-known subjects, including Susan B. Anthony, whose portrait she sculpted in 1887. Serrao said the woman suffragist, a longtime friend and also a relative by marriage, had a "strong face, beautiful in the sense of character, refinement and intelligence."¹³

Another of her well-known subjects was Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain). He was a friend of her husband, Teodoro, who brought him to her studio. She was the last artist to have the opportunity of a live sitting from him. The bust, which she sculpted solely for her own pleasure, is now in the Cleveland Library. According to *The Art Chronicle* in 1911: "The kind eyes, humorous expression and splendid head are life-like — they live. She caught Mark Twain in one of his twinkling moods, and it shines forth from the sculptured marble to greet



Sculptress in her studio



Luella Varney Serrao with portrait bust she sculpted of Susan B. Anthony (inset)

his countless admirers."¹⁴ Serrao was to say of him in 1927, "He was not the tart-tongued person he is reputed to be. He was a quiet-spoken, gentle man, and his wit in conversation was droll, never caustic."¹⁵

According to the *Dictionary of Women Artists*, Serrao passed away sometime after 1935.

Gabrielle Winkel

1. A later article in *Cleveland Press*, March 26, 1915, entitled "War Keeps Woman Sculptor, Former Clevelander, At Work in New Form of Society Portraiture" elucidates Serrao's success with the bas-relief form of portraiture. It had been revived as a fad with society women in the second decade of the twentieth century.
2. *Cleveland Topics*, article on Luella Varney Serrao, March 27, 1920.
3. There is a Statement dated October 19, 1935 by Luella Varney Serrao in the Longyear collection in which she says of her experience in Christian Science: "I recall how radiant the Collins were at the great thing that had come to them. I think that Mr. Collins had had a great healing in science, and they taught it to me. I used to go to their

office, or home, every day for a certain number of hours, to study with them. I did a little healing work after that, always with almost instantaneous success. But, when I went back to Rome where, so far as I know, there was no Christian Science at the time I did not follow up with studying nor healing work."

4. *The Art Chronicle*, "A Sculptress in Rome" by Irene Osgood, February 15, 1911.
5. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, "Bust of Hamilton Ready for Place" by Annabel Sharpe, 1911.
6. *Cleveland Topics*, 1920.
7. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Sharpe, 1911.
8. *Cleveland Town Topics*, "Art & Artists" by D. Undine Baker, October 23, 1915.
9. *The Art Chronicle*, Osgood, 1911.
10. *Cleveland Town Topics*, Baker, 1915.
11. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, "Artist Says Women Design The Best War Memorials," 1914.
12. *Cleveland Town Topics*, Baker, 1915.
13. Longyear. Luella Varney Serrao biographical files, a Rochester, New York newspaper clipping, "Sculptress Recalls Striking Qualities of Susan B. Anthony" by Carolyn Reichard, no date.
14. *The Art Chronicle*, Osgood, 1911.
15. *Denver Post*, "Marble Hand of Woman Links Denver Art and Rome Sculpture" by Cecelia Kelley, October 23, 1927.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES AT LONGYEAR...

For some time our two able Associate Directors, Alan Lester and Loetta Lewis, have been heavily engaged in handling the day to day affairs of Longyear and would have been benefitted by the support and vision of an overall coordinator, long range planner, and fund raiser that is much needed by all such organizations if they are to maintain and increase their usefulness.

We are happy to announce that Robert A. Conrads was appointed Director of Longyear Museum and Historical Society effective November 1, 1991.

Mr. Conrads is a graduate of The Principia College and has pursued advance studies at several other colleges and universities. He is a seasoned professional manager with strong experience in planning and administrative support. Following many years of service with the Inter-American Development Bank, Mr. Conrads worked with The First Church of Christ, Scientist on several significant projects.

We feel it is a privilege to introduce Mr. Conrads.

AND A RETIREMENT...

After almost 21 years of service to Longyear, Mrs. Loetta L. Lewis has decided to retire effective December 31, 1991. During those twenty-one years she has served in various capacities — as a Guide, as Administrative Assistant, and most recently as Associate Director. We wish her well as she pursues some of those special activities that she loves so much, especially the Square Dancing!

LONGYEAR FOUNDATION: *Board of Trustees*: June A. Austin; Robert C. Dale; Graves D. Hewitt, *Chairman*; Marian H. Holbrook; Charles B. Hosmer, Jr.; and Marylou Madigan. *Director*: Robert A. Conrads. *Associate Directors*: Alan K. Lester and Loetta L. Lewis. *QUARTERLY NEWS* is published four times annually by Longyear Museum and Historical Society, 120 Seaver Street, Brookline, Massachusetts 02146. U.S.A. (617) 277-8943. Inquiries about membership and activities are welcome.