



GUTZON BORGLUM

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Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor, was born March 25, 1867, near Bear Lake, Idaho. Although no record of the exact place is available, several early residents of St. Charles remembered the Borglum family as living in a cabin on a site which residents there still can point out. A contrary suggestion that he was born in Ovid has been made, and no reliable contemporary evidence now is available to verify or to discredit either of these possibilities of his birthplace. Information preserved in the records of the LDS Church Historian's office in Salt Lake, while not providing a conclusive answer to the exact spot of Gutzon Borglum's birth, does cast considerable light upon the subject. Gutzon Borglum's father--Jens Moller Haugaard Borglum (April 18, 1839-August 29, 1909), a native of Wansted, Hjorring, Denmark--became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, August 27, 1856, and was prominent in the Danish Mormon Church before coming to Salt Lake. On the way to this country, he married Ida Michelsen of the Mormon immigrant party he was accompanying in Liverpool, April 27, 1864, before sailing April 28. He arrived in Salt Lake in William B. Preston's party, September 15, 1864; and some time before 1867, he entered into plural marriage. His second wife Christina Michelsen, was the sister of the first. Then in about 1866, he moved to Bear Lake, and in 1867 or 1868 he moved to Ogden. Finally in 1869 (according to an obituary in a Danish Mormon periodical) he moved to Omaha. Altogether, he had nine children in the two families. (The last four are not included in the following table, since they were all born in Nebraska.)

1. IDA

1. J. H. M., Jr., March 10, 1865
2. August M., April 27, 1867
3. Arnold, June 2, 1869

2. CHRISTINA

1. Gutzon, March 25, 1867
2. Solon, December 22, 1868

Of these children, J. H. M., Jr., was born in Salt Lake City; August and Gutzon were born somewhere in the Bear Lake settlements, and Arnold and Solon were born in Ogden. Most of this genealogical information comes from a letter that Gutzon's half-brother, Dr. Frank L. Borglum of Fort Bayard, New Mexico, wrote to the Church Historian's office February 10, 1936. (Frank was one of the four Nebraska children of Ida Borglum.) Frank Borglum also noted that his own brother August and his half-brother Gutzon were born in Ovid, Idaho--and his spelling "Avid" suggests that it came from some oral family tradition. Since Frank was interested in genealogy, he may have had good reason to have known in which town his brother August was born--and perhaps where Gutzon was born also. On the other hand, Roy A. Welker (978 East Seventh South, Salt Lake), long a resident of St. Charles and long interested in this matter, has investigated the St. Charles tradition with some care. He reports that between 1915 and 1930, Edward Pugmire (a leading citizen of St. Charles) told him that the Pugmires who lived in St.

Charles in 1867 (Edward's parents) and other early residents had often spoken of knowing Dr. Borglum. More than that, they knew the Borglum cabin (which has been moved to another location north of St. Charles where it still stands) and remembered Dr. Borglum as an unusually dignified, courteous man. Roy Welker has had no success in finding anyone in Ovid aware of a Borglum tradition there. An additional confusion concerning the location of Gutzon Borglum's birthplace arises from a change he made in the date of his birth: information which Borglum provided to early editions of Who's Who in America listed the date as March 25, 1867; then in 1932, he gave the date as four years later. If he had been born at the later date, the place would have had to have been Nebraska, where the family then was living. Many biographical statements still use the later date, which would have made Gutzon younger than his younger brother, Solon. Such a discrepancy does not seem to have bothered the famous sculptor at all. Gutzon Borglum also seems to have been but little interested in the exact place of his birth. A letter he wrote to Miss Douglas Hilts, February 21, 1921, shows his lack of information--or else his reticence--concerning the matter. "I wish I could tell you with certainty. My father and mother were apparently on their way to California or Nevada, at least toward the Pacific, in 1865 or 1866. Both of them have left me, so I cannot check up my records; and I left home when I was quite young; I spent some time in school and then went to Europe, so I saw little of my parents until their later years and then I did not think to ask them. But they told me definitely that I was born West of Bear Lake, up in the mountains. My memory is that it was about 7,000 feet above sea level; and that they were caught there by winter weather and spent the winter in a log or sod cabin They also stated that the place was some kind of a Government outpost; that soldiers had been or were there. I know that it was in Idaho; of course that much is determined by the fact that Bear Lake is in Idaho." But since Gutzon Borglum's parents were not on their way to the Pacific in 1865 or 1866, and since the military outpost which he mentions was at Soda Springs, some 40 miles from Bear Lake, his letter serves mainly to show how little he was able to provide in the way of accurate information about his birthplace.

Statement prepared in October of 1962 by Dr. Merle W. Wells.

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