

## Special Feature: Additional Research on the Isabella Statue

By Bill White

The recent article on the **Christopher Columbus / Queen Isabella statue** by longtime volunteer Bob Chan peaked my curiosity and set me on a mission of discovery.....

Most of us are aware that the statue is the work of Larkin Goldsmith Mead, and that it was carved over a 6 year period between 1868 and 1874, so I started researching him. It turns out that Mead was a fairly famous artist in his day. In addition to our statue, he is responsible for numerous works of art, some adorning the cupolas of state capitols and gracing the gardens of parks and museums, as well as Lincoln's tomb. He worked not only in stone but bronze as well. If you look him up on the internet, you will be amazed at the volume of his work. But back to "Chris." I had been told that the statue was commissioned by an east coast financier by the name of LeGrand Lockwood but later was purchased by our own D. O. Mills. The Lockwood estate is located in Connecticut and is now a museum. I contacted the Chair of the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum Curatorial Commission, Mary Findlay, to see if she could shed any light on the circumstances surrounding the statue. Sure enough she was a wealth of information. Apparently the Lockwoods traveled to Florence Italy in 1867 and commissioned Mead to create the statue. However, Lockwood died two years before the statue was completed, and Mrs. Lockwood apparently still owed Mead payment. At the same time the Lockwood estate was in deep financial trouble and eventually went into bankruptcy. It is at that this point that D.O. Mills stepped in and purchased the statue from the widow. Mary is sure that the statue never reached the Lockwood estate and thought if anything it may have stayed in New York after Mills acquired it. However, according to the 1907 California Blue Book, page 221, the statue was shipped directly to Sacramento from Florence after Mills secured assurances from state representatives that the statue would be accepted as a gift. The statue was formally presented to the State by Edgar Mills, representing his brother D.O. Mills. D. O. Mills was living in New York at the time and did not attend the ceremony. On December 22, 1883 the statue was accepted on behalf of the State by Governor George Stoneman. I was not able to find any reference that the statue was ever at the Mills estate on the east coast; all indications are that it stayed in Italy until Mills was able to arrange for it to be shipped to Sacramento.



Queen Isabella Statue

While digging into the statue's history, I also uncovered some very interesting information about its life here in the Capitol. Eric Thomsen who is one of our State Parks guides has done extensive research of his own and uncovered much of the information I relied on for this article. It turns out that the statue has taken quite a beating over the years. In 1899 someone broke off two fingers from the hand of the page. In 1950 someone stole a section of the Queen's beads, one of her fingers and another finger from the page. The statue was repaired, but then in 1952 another finger was stolen from the page. Repairs were again made. Apparently in the 1950/60's it was the practice of the legislature to celebrate the end of session by lighting off firecrackers in the trash cans in the chambers as well as dropping firecrackers from the second floor onto the first floor rotunda. One year Assemblyman Jack Schrade was engaging in this practice when one of the firecrackers landed in the Queen's hand blowing off . of her baby finger. That too was repaired. Once again in 1969 a finger from the Queen's hand was stolen and later repaired. Since the statue's return to the Capitol, no further damage has been reported.

Erik also located several articles dealing with the cleaning of the statue. It seems our recent controversy was nothing new. Apparently the statue would go years without cleaning and would discolor and be covered with cobwebs. At times it was cleaned with water and bleach; other times with Ivory soap and scrub brushes. One time it was done by a professional who took 8 days to complete the cleaning.

In researching this article I also came upon several other bits of information on the statue. I found four sources listing the weight of the statue anywhere from 5, 6, 6 . or 9 tons, and its cost from \$30,000 to \$33,000 to \$35,000, depending on which source you believe. As to the identity of the page, despite Dick Getz insisting that it's him as a child, I was able to find one article that indicated that the page would have been the child of "some grand high up in the Spanish peerage roll."

Also of interest is the controversy surrounding the return of the statue upon completion of the Capitol restoration. In 1976 editorials were published urging that the statue not be returned to the restored Capitol making the case that there was no connection to California. When it was time to return the statue, the Assembly was set against its return, but the Senate was in favor of bringing it back. As we know the Senate won out....

As you might guess, researching subjects such as our statue are made difficult by the passage of time and with different period sources you obtain different information. Nevertheless, it was a fun project. I used files that Erik compiled, and they are available for anyone to review. They are located in the grey four drawer file cabinet behind the "I" desk in the basement along with other information on the building. Feel free to review the files, but Erik requests that the files not be removed and that they be kept in chronological order.