
Henry Agard Wallace

(1888–1965)

Henry Agard Wallace, the 33rd vice president of the United States, was born in Adair County, Iowa. A leading agricultural economist, Wallace edited the influential farm journal *Wallace's Farmer & Iowa Homestead*. (A precursor, *Wallace's Farmer*, was founded by his grandfather.) In 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Wallace secretary of agriculture and assigned him the task of developing New Deal farm relief programs. Roosevelt was subsequently responsible for the selection of Wallace as the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1940. As vice president during Roosevelt's third term, Wallace moved away from his role as president of the Senate and instead embraced his executive duties, such as chairing the Board of Economic Warfare and leading several diplomatic missions to Latin America and Asia.

Unable to adapt to Washington politics, Wallace lost his bid for renomination as vice president in 1944 to Harry Truman, and instead was appointed secretary of commerce. When Truman subsequently became president following Roosevelt's death, Wallace was forced to resign his cabinet post in September 1946 after he openly criticized Truman's foreign policy.

Between 1946 and 1948, Wallace edited the *New Republic* magazine. Known for visionary social liberalism, he helped organize a new Progressive Party in 1948 and ran unsuccessfully as its presidential candidate that year. He wrote a number of books on agricultural problems and politics, including *New Frontiers* and *The Long Look Ahead*. A proponent of world peace, Wallace worked for social justice in Latin America and became an unofficial emissary for developing nations there. He also maintained his lifelong interest in farming, continuing agricultural experimentation on corn and other crops. Wallace died in 1965 in Danbury, Connecticut.

In 1944 Henry Wallace personally selected renowned sculptor Jo Davidson to create his bust for the Senate's Vice Presidential Bust Collection. The sittings for the bust began at Davidson's New Jersey studio. The artist noted in his memoirs that Wallace was patient as a sitter, but would sometimes disappear—only to be found later, digging in Davidson's garden. From work on an earlier bust of the vice president, Davidson had already formed a strong impression of the man: "Wallace was shy, almost gauche. At first, he did not give of himself easily. But he looked up at me from time to time. He gave you the feeling of wide open spaces, a clean beauty, and of strong healthy optimism. He didn't seem to waste his energies in useless words or gestures. As I worked, we got closer and more friendly. The clay seemed to model itself, and I completed the bust in two sittings."¹

Initially, the sculptor was very enthusiastic about the Senate's bust of Wallace. In October 1945 he wrote, "The bust . . . promises to be, on its completion, one of my very best." But later progress was slow. Although pressed by other work and able to obtain little of Wallace's time, Davidson insisted on completing the marble version from life. In answer to queries from the architect of the Capitol, the sculptor dashed off a note from New York City in May 1947. In it he wrote, "Artists are funny people but we are fussy and that being my chief vice and having had to sail for France I took the marble with me to finish it there since I could not finish it here." Seven months later the completed bust was finally delivered to the Capitol and placed on display in the Senate wing.

Davidson was one of the best-known American portrait sculptors of the first half of the 20th century. He was born in New York City and studied art there and in Paris. He swiftly gained a reputation for his ebullient personal style and adventurous thinking—for example, he helped to organize the controversial Armory Show (the first large scale exhibition of modern art in America) in New York in 1913. Throughout a career that spanned five decades, Davidson modeled many world leaders and literary luminaries. Although he moved in avant-garde circles, Davidson remained traditional in his artistic style. Passionate about portraiture, he often took the unusual step of searching out subjects rather than waiting for leading figures to commission him.

The artist also completed a bust of Charles Dawes (p. 94) for the Senate's Vice Presidential Bust Collection.

Henry A. Wallace

Jo Davidson (1883-1952)

Marble, 1947

22¼ x 23¼ x 12¾ inches (56.5 x 59.1 x 32.4 cm)

Signed and dated (on subject's truncated left arm): JO' DAVIDSON—N.Y. 1947

Commissioned by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1946

Accepted by the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, 1947

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