

Engraved In Our Memories



When researching genealogies, you never know who'll you'll find hiding out within the branches of your family tree. I recently became aware of an ancestor who made quite a mark for himself in the mid 19th century practicing an artwork that dates back to around 4000 BC.

Ottavio Negri, the 2nd great-grandfather of my niece's husband, was a world-renowned glyptic artist, specializing in the creation of intaglios, which are carved images within gemstones. Born in Rome, Negri studied with the celebrated sculptor Augustus St Gaudens, and was soon recognized for his skill in recreating the classic Roman and Greek style of portraiture in stones.

He spent most of his later years at his studio in New York, where he mentored Beth Benton Sutherland, a young woman who had campaigned to be allowed to work in his studio as an

unpaid apprentice. After studying with him for four years, she went to Europe to further her education. She was told to return to New York because “no one in the entire world knew more about glyptic art than Ottavio Negri.” Upon Negri’s death, Sutherland inherited his workshop and stones (both cut and uncut.) She vowed to keep his legacy of individual artistry and craftsmanship alive in a world that was quickly transitioning to commercialized mass production.

Negri’s list of honors includes medals from the Paris Exposition (1879), London Crystal Palace (1888) and Chicago World’s Fair (1889). His engravings can be found in collections around the world including the National Museum in Krakow Poland.

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