

WHO POSED FOR THE STATUE OF PROMETHEUS?

Martha Deal

Editors' Note: Ray Van Cleef was a central figure in the iron game from the 1930s until his untimely death in 1964. He was an early student of Sig Klein, a widely used artists' model, a fine handbalancer, an avid collector, a managing editor of *Strength & Health* magazine, a gym owner, and a tireless correspondent with a worldwide circle of friends. We asked his daughter, Martha Deal, to explain a recent controversy in the often-interrelated fields of art and physical culture.

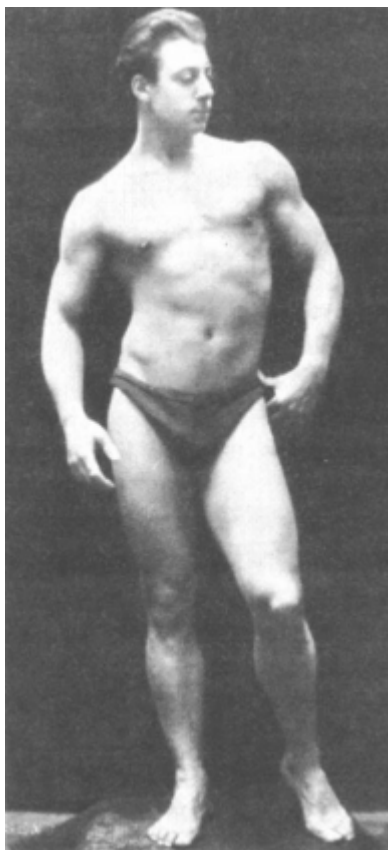
As one of physical culturist Ray Van Cleef's two daughters, I grew up being told that part of my family history was that my father had been the artist's model who had posed for the famous statue of Prometheus in Rockefeller Center in New York City. Imagine my surprise on March 2, 1998 as I watched the "Today" show on NBC and saw a tribute to Leonardo Nole, who had just passed away, and was being given credit for having been the model for Prometheus! On that day, I began an interesting and challenging journey into the past.

As you may know, my father, Raymond Van Cleef, played an instrumental role in the history of physical culture and led a unique life. He died suddenly of a heart attack on May 26, 1964, in San Jose, CA, just before his 54th birthday. While my father was still alive, our family made several trips from San Jose, CA to New York City and, while there, we always visited

Rockefeller Center and took photos of the Prometheus statue, being told our father had been the model. In a 1933 booklet by David P. Willoughby, "The Truth About Physical Training," the statement was made that Raymond Van Cleef was the model for the central figure in the huge fountain design by Paul Manship then being erected in Radio City. Other articles also said something similar, such as the article in *Health and Strength* magazine, dated Feb. 22, 1936, titled "Strength Superb!" in which one of Ray's accomplishments was given as being the model for Prometheus.

What's more, the July-August, 1948 issue of *The Body Builder* magazine included the following in an article entitled "Ray Van Cleef, Ambassador of Good-Will": "Thousands of words have been written about Ray's success as an athlete, an artists' model, physical therapist and physical educator, but none of the stories of Ray's career seemed to touch upon his innate qualities of character, his adherence to fair play and acts of friendship and help to those in need of assistance." The article also includes the following statement: "Ray had been one of America's foremost models. He posed for the famous statue of Prometheus in the center of the fountain at Radio City, New York."

As I attempted to do research into the past, I learned that there were few people still living who knew my father in the early 1930's and had personal knowledge of his work as a model. I was privileged to enjoy several phone conversations with John



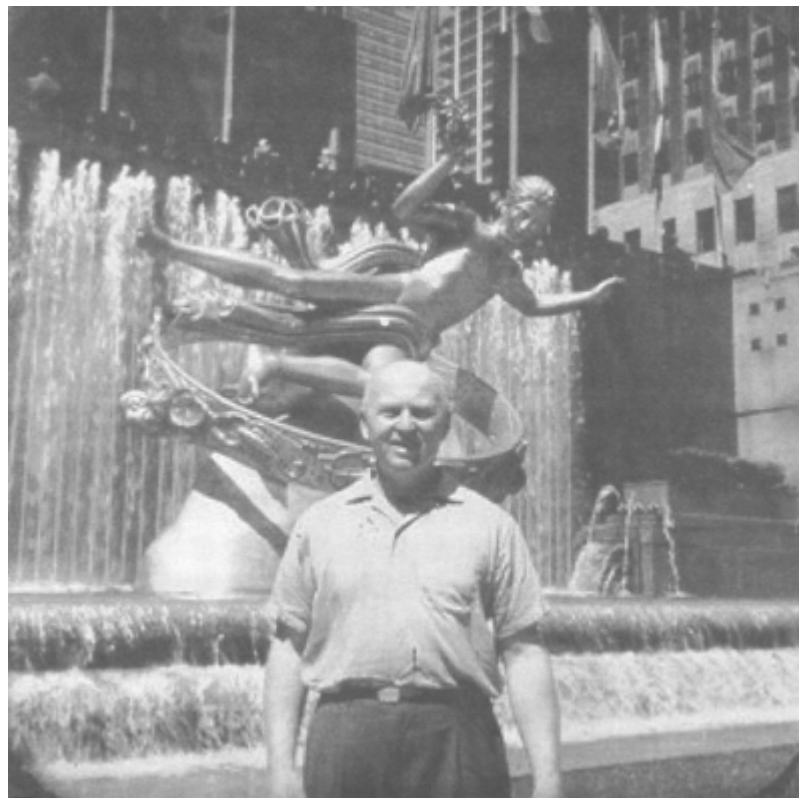
Leon Nole in 1931, from the cover of Klein's Bell.

Grimek in York, PA in the twilight of his life, since he died later that year, 1998. John Grimek and my father were close friends at the time my father was an artists' model. John sent me a letter dated April 6, 1998 in which he said, "I remember your dad telling me many times how the work (Prometheus) was coming along and that he was getting the big share of the work."

I also learned from John Grimek that my father and Leonardo (Leon) Nole knew each other and both worked out at Sigmund Klein's gym in New York City. In my pursuit of additional information, I contacted Leonardo Nole's nephew, Leonard Nole, and learned more about his uncle. I learned that, like my father, Leonardo had been active in the physical culture field as a young man and had worked as an artists' model. Later in life Leonardo worked for the United States Postal Service in Sacramento, CA before he retired. He died at the age of 91 on February 22, 1998. His nephew and I had several phone conversations and exchanged letters and information. From everything I learned, it seems clear that Leonardo Nole did indeed have a part in posing for the statue of Prometheus.

My detective work led me to a book in the library titled *Paul Manship*, which was written by his son, John Manship and published in 1989 by Abbeyville Press Publishers, NY. The elaborate 216-page book on the work of sculptor Paul Manship gives much detail about the story behind Prometheus and the process used in the creation of the sculpture. Apparently, after the work was commissioned in 1933, Mr. Manship initially prepared a twenty-four-inch-long model of the statue. The finished work was to be two-and-a-half times life-size. He and his assistants used a pantograph to make the full-size plaster copy directly from this model. Apparently, the assistants, Henry Kreis and Angelo Columbo, completed the finishing detail work on the sculpture.

I talked by phone with John Manship, who is also an artist, at his home in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and learned that his father, Paul Manship, never kept records of the names of the models who posed for him. At the library, I was able to get copies of articles from the *New York Times* newspaper about the commissioning



Ray Van Cleef poses in front of the Prometheus statue at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

Photo Courtesy Martha Deal

of the statue and, later, the dedication. Neither of these articles gave the names of the models.

There does not seem to be a way to definitively establish the precise history as to who posed for the statue of Prometheus. My educated guess, however, is that my father, Ray Van Cleef, was the artist's model who posed for the original small scale rendering of Prometheus, and then Leonardo Nole was the model who posed for the finishing detail work. Paul Manship's son, John Manship, agreed with me that this was a likely scenario. It is my conclusion that both Ray Van Cleef and Leonardo Nole deserve credit for their part in posing for one of the most famous statues in the world!

I've enjoyed the process of doing research and trying to put together the pieces of the puzzle. Even so, I wish I had asked my father more questions about his days as an artists' model. My father was never one to boast about his accomplishments. Even though I grew up knowing he had been the model for the statue of Prometheus, I never knew much about that period of my father's life. This research project has helped me to appreciate my father's life and accomplishments even more.